

1. Editorial
2. Plotinus - The Last of the Great Pagan Philosophers
Swami Puragra Parampanthi
3. The Practicality of Sri Sarada Devi - Swami Dayatmananda
4. The Human Christ - Dr. Donald Szantho Harrington
5. Leaves of an Ashrama: 8 The More Desirable Alternative
Swami Vidyatmananda
6. Narada's Temptation - Mimi Frazer
7. St. Teresa, Bride of the Sun (continued)
Swami Atmarupananda
8. Book Review

Editorial

Swami Dayatmananda

Sense Control

Dama is sense-control. One who aspires to Self-knowledge cannot be too careful about control of the senses. Unless the senses are controlled it is impossible to control the mind.

What does sense-control mean? Does it mean that we close our eyes, ears etc. Obviously this cannot be the meaning, for besides being impossible to stop them functioning, it is unwise to do so. Sense-control means:

1. Using all the senses to discharge one's duties with proper care and attention. This improves our concentration and will-power. Besides it gives a sense of fulfilment.
2. Using the senses in a way that does not agitate the mind but on the contrary

promotes spiritual progress. For example, let the eyes enjoy divine forms, let the ears hear devotional music or let one talk and hear about spiritual things as far as possible.

3. Let all the senses be directed towards God. If we can remember God and try to do actions to please Him then the senses will gradually turn towards Him. Karma-Yoga is of great help here.

The control of the senses is a difficult task, but through constant practice and through the grace of God it is possible. "A man becomes a saint by conquering the senses. Is there anything impossible for a man who has subdued his passions? He can even realize God, through His grace."

(Sri Ramakrishna)

Plotinus - The Last of the Great Pagan Philosophers

Swami Puragra Parampanthi

Plotinus flourished during the third century A.D. in Alexandria (A.D. 203 - 270). He was a Coptic Egyptian by birth (a Christian descendant of the ancient Egyptians) with a Roman name and a Greek education. In his early youth he was deeply attracted to philosophy but passed, restless and dissatisfied, from teacher to teacher until at last he met his worthy preceptor - Ammonius Saccas. Plotinus studied under him philosophy, mysticism, theology, Platonism etc., and then finally settled in Rome and remained there till his death. He established in Rome a school of philosophy which became famous afterwards, Emperor Gallienus being his helper and well-wisher.

In personal life Plotinus was the very embodiment of saintliness amid the wealth and luxury of Rome. He did not care for his body; ate only bread and fruits and practised complete continence. He was kindly in his behaviour and simple in his habits. He was fully absorbed in the study and contemplation of God. A mystic of the highest order he was often seen absorbed in communion with the One. His equally famous disciple, Porphyry, saw him on four occasions rapt in ecstatic union with the Unseen. During the declining years of his life, Plotinus reluctantly put into disorderly writing his philosophical and mystical conclusions. His works are called the Enneads which are very difficult and strange writings on philosophy and mysticism.

The philosophy of Plotinus is peculiarly original and his works never mention the Christian religion. Yet his concepts anticipate the best of the Christian ideals and represent the continuity of Platonic vision. His philosophy also exhibits the influences of the Oriental cults and the mysteries of the deeper paganism of the day. The predominant note of his transcendental philosophy is the overpowering passion for the Absolute Godhead - the One amid the many. His influence on Christianity has been profound and of far-reaching significance. Speaking about him Dr. Will Durant observes in his great work *Caesar And Christ*: 'Plotinus is the last of the great pagan philosophers; and like Epictetus and Aurelius, he is a Christian without Christ. Christianity accepted nearly every line of him, and many a page of Augustin echoes the ecstasy of the supreme mystic.' (p.611)

Plotinus recognizes the relative reality of the external universe. But matter, according to him, is the potential possibility of form. That is, matter assumes form by its propulsive, inner energy or soul which he calls 'psyche'. Therefore, Nature represents the sum total of energy or soul and this soul in all things produces all the forms of matter. Matter, the lower order of existence, is subservient to the will and expression of the higher being, the soul. In other words, the soul produces the embodied forms. Hence, the biological man is nothing but the gradual unfolding of the vital principle within him. The physical body is shaped and determined by the desires and dictates of the soul which is also called by Plotinus the vital principle. Everything in this universe has an inner soul which is constantly shaping the outer forms. Therefore, any material outward form is baneful, if it is not guided and moulded by the creative soul within. Evil represents the arrested development of a thing; the full development of a thing according to the directives of the soul means the annihilation of evil.

Man perceives matter through the medium of idea which consists of sensation, perception and thought on the empirical plane. Yet idea is not a spatial extension - it is not material in the sense a table is material. Every being is endowed with ideas but the benefit from those ideas is only possible if the ideas are practically received and used. Plotinus maintains that the capacity for the utilization of ideas is reason. But if reason depends upon and is determined by empirical sensations alone - then it is conditioned and bound. Man can be free if his reason finds its highest form of creative activity of soul. In other words, reason, in its true sense, should represent the moulding workings of man's soul. Man's soul should be the master of the body and senses.

Plotinus observes that the soul instinctively realizes that the physical body is at once its organ and prison. It realizes that it, in reality, belongs to the higher, vaster and transcendental Reality beyond, which is the perpetual source of all creative power. The feeling of this inherent unity makes the soul restless and it begins to aspire to gain its basic unity with the Supreme One from which the soul seems to have been dissociated due to some forgotten disgrace. Here, the philosophy of Plotinus becomes completely Vedantic in tone and trend. He believes that each soul moves backwards or forwards through the process of transmigration, according to its virtues and vices. The true, aspiring soul persistently seeks its divine original source through the cycles of births, and in the end climbs to its God, or true Being. Then birth and death cease and the soul has forever found its identity with God.

In order to regain the basic identity with God, every soul must detach itself from the fetters of senses and desires. He writes: 'Therefore, it is necessary to hasten our departure from hence, and detach ourselves insofar as we may from the body to which we are fettered, in order that with the whole of our selves, we may fold ourselves about the Divinity and have no part void of contact with Him.' (Enneads, vi, 9)

Therefore, it is the imperative need of every soul to purify itself, to rouse in it the intense longing to attain the unseen One. Slowly through meditation and detachment, renunciation of sensual trammels and material bondages, the soul can regain its lost divinity and merge itself in the ocean of ultimate spiritual Reality. When this unity is achieved, says Plotinus - 'The soul will see divinity as far as it is lawful... and she will see herself illuminated, full of intellectual light; or, rather, she will perceive herself to be a pure light, unburdened, agile and becoming God.' (Enneads, vi, 9)

The decisive factor in the process of salvation is the overpowering love for the divine Unseen. Without love no unity is possible and he is quite emphatic on this point. He writes: 'Some there are that for all their effort have not attained the Vision - the soul in them has come to no sense of the splendour there - it has not felt burning within itself the flame of love for what is there to know.' (Enneads, vi, 9)

Mere intellectual effort or philosophical enquiry about God will not lead us towards our goal because God is beyond earthly reason and intellect. One can realize Him through intuitive visions and spiritual Samadhi - through Yogic aspirations and urges. In salvation or unity of soul with God there is no seer or seen - all the differences of the empirical

plane are lost in unity. The state of unity or visions, as Plotinus calls it, is beyond the sphere of the human faculty of understanding. He expresses the grand idea in his inimitable way: 'To see and to have seen that vision is reason no longer. It is more than reason, before reason, and after reason, as also is the vision which is seen... And perhaps we should not speak of sight: for that which is seen is not discerned by the seer.' (Enneads, vi, 9, 10)

But what is the nature of ultimate Reality or God? He is the unity of reason (nous) and soul (psyche). The multiplicity is there, but through the variform fluctuation of forms of nature a binding, unifying Reality is existing. Beyond the appearance of the many the One exists. Yet God's real essence cannot be fully realized through senses and intellect; we can only be sure that He exists. The use of any positive adjective or attribute will only tend to qualify and confine Him. Plotinus maintains that at the best we can call Him the One or First or Object of supreme desire. He also calls God - the Supplier of true Life.

God is also the source of reason which manifests itself through form and order, rationality and uniformity of creation; in other words, the creative, manifesting aspect of God is reason. Reason gives the stamp of enduring reality to matter which is in itself, merely an appearance. Thus, Plotinus' reason corresponds to Plato's concept of ideas. But reason does not create matter - matter is the manifestation of a third aspect of God which he calls the vital force. This vital force, according to him, creates physically all things and gives them their pre-determined forms. That is, the material cause of things is the vital force while the efficient cause of them is reason. Reason is the unifying principle which runs through the forms which have been created by the vitalizing element of God. In the language of Vedanta the vital force is Maya or Prakriti and the reason is Iswara. In the process of creation reason's rule is decisive and most important. It is the main pivot on which the entire creation turns.

Each thing - from atoms to great planets - has the soul which is the inseparable part of the Supreme soul; in the language of Vedanta: Atman is Brahman. The individual soul is not a personality or an embodied existence. Soul is real and immortal insofar as it is part of the Supreme One. The soul eternally survives not in the sense of the survival of a distinct, physical personality but in the sense of its final and irrevocable absorption in Brahman or God. It is quite evident that Plotinus accepts the dynamic aspect of soul but he denies its plurality because to him God is only One. In the final analysis, vital force,

reason or anything are nothing but different aspects of the one and same supreme Godhead. Speaking figuratively of the unity of soul and God he writes: 'What other fire could be a better image of the fire which is there, than the fire which is here?' (soul) (Enneads, ii, 9.4)

Plotinus thinks that the basic virtue of man symbolizes the journey of aspiring soul towards God and beauty is nothing but the living emblem of divinity which is inherent in all. Beauty is the expression of the Supreme One within - in all things that comprise the entire universe. Above all beauty consists in the victory of soul over flesh, in the triumph of reason over things in general. In the final analysis beauty and virtue are one because both ultimately symbolize the supreme harmony of God. The soul attains the greatest virtue and beauty in its unity with God. Thus, Plotinus does not believe like Plato and Aristotle that beauty is merely harmony and proportion. It is the living soul or the hidden godliness of things. I may close this article with a memorable quotation from his immortal writings: 'Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful, yet act as does the creator of a statue... he cuts away here, smoothens there, he makes this line lighter, the other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked... and never cease chiselling your statue until... you see the perfect goodness established in the stainless shrine.'

Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, Feb 1956

The Practicality of Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Dayatmananda

The lives of great people serve as beacon-lights to humanity. Every great life helps us in three ways: first, it reveals the meaning and goal of life; it also shows us the right path; second, the life of a great person, whatever be the field, always brings inspiration; third, the incidents, small or big, in the lives of the great serve as guidelines for others.

The life of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, also serves these three purposes for all of us. We can learn many lessons such as love of God, love of man, modesty, simplicity, gentleness, forbearance, chastity, rationality, practicality etc., from her life. Unlike Sri Ramakrishna, we do not find many striking events, but as Swami Vivekananda says: 'As I grow older I look more and more for greatness in little things. I want to know what a

great man eats and wears, and how he speaks to his servants...' When we read her life we do find extra-ordinary greatness even in small day-to-day events.

I intend to discuss one such useful lesson we can all profit from. It is her robust common sense and practicality.

Every scripture teaches us that the purpose of life is to love God and realize him. When we are discussing Sri Sarada Devi's life we must not forget this. Hers was a God-centred life. God was the very breath of her life and the love of God manifested in her in the form of love for all beings including humans, animals, plants etc. She saw God in everything.

Japa and prayer were constantly going on in her mind. The phrase 'love of God' has been repeated so often and been so often confused with mere sentimental emotionalism, that for most people the words have lost their meaning. If we want to know what love of God really means, we shall find the answer in Holy Mother. From her we learn that real love is not something spectacular or passionate, but rather a calm, unswerving, and profound direction of the whole soul towards God.

Love of God is vividly present in every stage of Holy Mother's life. When she was still with her parents as an unmarried girl, she was already in the habit of praying to God with great fervour; after her marriage to Sri Ramakrishna, that yearning for God increased a thousandfold. At Dakshineswar, in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, it had risen to such an intensity that she was uniquely fitted to become the first disciple of the greatest of religious teachers. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, that love, now perfectly mature, poured itself forth in an unceasing torrent to the innumerable monastic and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, whom she now regarded as her own children.

Sri Sarada Devi was very rational and practical. She was imbued with plenty of common sense coupled with humour. Though her mind was always fixed on God, yet she never let common sense go. In this respect she resembles St. Teresa of Avila.

Sarada Devi did not regard Sri Ramakrishna merely as a husband. He was her revered Guru, God, intimate companion and protector. Yet when needed she did not hesitate to oppose, criticise, and differ from him.

Here is a story Mother told a disciple about herself and Sri Ramakrishna. With Hriday they were passing through Kamarpukur. The Master went to his old home and inspected the premises, as he always did when visiting his village. He was displeased to find that the kitchen was in a state of dilapidation, and scolded Hriday for allowing the place to run to rack and ruin, ordering him to get it repaired at once. Mother, distressed by this scene, turned to Sri Ramakrishna and said: 'You only come to Kamarpukur to complain and then go away again. You're very selfish.' 'Yes,' the Master retorted, 'I am selfish, but it is not love of the little self, but of the universal Self.' 'And then,' Mother added in a tone of mild amusement, 'Master stood there and gave me half an hour's lecture on Vedanta!'

Here is another story. Sister Nivedita had a small pet dog of which she was very fond. One day she brought the dog with her to visit Mother. Nivedita wanted Mother to take the dog on her lap and fondle it. But Mother, like most orthodox brahmin ladies, though she could feel compassion for animals, was nevertheless reluctant to touch them. So she declined to stroke Nivedita's dog. Nivedita said to her: 'Mother, in the West we have a saying "Love me, love my dog." So if you really love me, you must love this animal too.' 'Oh, but I do love you, Nivedita,' protested Mother vehemently, 'Believe me, I do love you!'

Sri Sarada Devi loved Nivedita as her own daughter. Once Nivedita expressed a desire to visit Jayrambati. At once Holy Mother objected explaining that the superstitious, caste-ridden villagers would not only disrespect her but would even create difficulties for herself as well.

Another story: When Mother was staying at Jayrambati there was a particularly troublesome cat who sneaked into the kitchen repeatedly and stole food. One day a disciple (who disliked cats, particularly) picked up the cat and threw it bodily out of the compound. Mother was in tears at seeing the harsh treatment the cat received. She was worried that it might starve to death. 'After all,' Mother said, 'why should we condemn the cat for stealing food? It's in his nature to steal - and now that we've driven him away how will he survive? He cannot work for his living.' When finally the cat returned Mother was not only relieved to see him, but actually glad!

There is an instance of Mother taking the young wife of one of her householder disciples, on to the roof of the house and secretly feeding her with sweets, begging the girl to

keep the incident a secret from the other ladies so that they would not be jealous!

Like every great teacher Holy Mother was realistic. She did not attempt the impossible by going against nature. She recognized the fact that spiritual seekers are not all equally endowed or even capable of equal development. Whatever she said to those who sought her advice flowed from a complete understanding of the individual seeker. To each she spoke directly and convincingly, suiting her words to the capacity of the hearer. To a monk who questioned her about the efficacy of *pranayama* and *asana*, she once said: 'The practice of these brings one occult powers and occult powers lead one astray.' But to another, in answer to his question as to whether he should continue the practice of *pranayama* which he had begun some time before, she could say: 'Yes, you may practise a little, but not too much, for it may heat the brain. But if the mind becomes calm of itself, what is the use of *pranayama*?'

Again, to one of her devotees she declared, when asked about whether to count when performing *japa*: 'No, do it without counting, for counting often diverts the attention from the *japa*.' But to another she said: 'One must repeat the *mantra* at least fifteen to twenty thousand times a day. Only then will one get some results.'

There are devotees who profess faith and devotion to God. They do not try hard enough to remember Him. Yet they find enough excuses to justify why they are unable to practise prayer, meditation etc. for such here is what Holy Mother says:

"If you don't call upon God - indeed many people never even remember Him - what does it matter to Him? It is your own misfortune. Such is the Maya of God, He keeps them ignorant of Him saying, 'They are happy enough, let them be so!'"

What might at first sight seem to be contradictions in Holy Mother's teaching are to be explained simply by her ingrained habit of suiting the words to the hearer. To her simple women devotees she spoke simple, homely truths. To her monastic disciples she could give authoritative instruction on abstruse points of Vedanta.

Holy Mother loved her disciples. Once she blessed one by saying 'May happiness and sorrow pass under your feet as water under a bridge.' Yet she could not herself remain indifferent to or unmoved by their sorrows.

A householder devotee came to her and said that his young wife had died suddenly.

Mother burst into tears, and turning to Yogin-Ma said 'Oh, Yogin, my daughter-in-law is dead.' Then Mother sat in front of Sri Ramakrishna's photograph and prayed thus through her tears: 'Master, don't let my daughter-in-law be born again - give her a place at your feet forever. Don't let her take another body.'

What could be more practical than praying for liberation?

i

The Human Christ

Dr. Donald Szanthy Harrington

The return of the Passover and Easter each year brings back to our minds many old paradoxes and questions. What is the relationship, if any, between the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter? Which is the real Jesus, the human, historical Jewish Rabbi, or the metaphysical, mythological divine Christ? And why was the Christian festival of Jesus' resurrection named after a pagan goddess of Spring, the Norse Goddess Eostre?

The answer to the last of these three questions is easiest. When the Anglo-Saxons and other northern peoples were converted to Christianity, they found that their nature festival at the time of the Spring equinox coincided with the Christian resurrection festival both in season and in sentiment and spirit. What could be easier or more effective in winning the common people over to the new religion than to retain the ancient pagan name for the new festival, but add Christian substance to its existent content. This is what is known in theological circles as 'syncretism', the borrowing between religious faiths whose adherents are mingling and merging with one another to make something new and richer than before. Here the Christian Resurrection celebration, the most important holy day in the Christian calendar, took the name of the Norsemen's pagan Goddess of Spring and the rebirth of nature, Eostre, or Easter.

Even more interesting are the steps by which the Jewish Passover became transformed into the holiest rite of the Christian Church, the solemn, high mass.

The Passover, of course, began, and got its name from the days of the Exodus when, to make the Egyptian Pharaoh free his Jewish slaves, the avenging angel of the Lord is supposed to have swept over the land of Egypt killing all the first born, but 'passed over'

the houses of the Jews whose lintels were marked with the blood of the Lamb.

Thereafter, the Lord's Passover was celebrated each year by faithful Jews, symbolic of their passing over from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

The Rabbi Jesus' last meal on this earth was when he celebrated Passover with his disciples the evening before his crucifixion. The meal was properly prepared with the killing of the Paschal (Passover) lamb, but in the ritual Jesus added a thought. As he broke the unleavened bread and poured out the wine he said to his disciples: 'This bread is my body, which is to be broken for you, and this wine is my blood which shall be shed for you and all mankind. When you celebrate your Passover in the future, remember me.' Thereafter, for his disciples, the Passover was a time of remembrance of his having given his life for their redemption.

Paul, the greatest of the Christian missionaries said, 'Christ is our Passover,' our guarantor of salvation, our guide to goodness, our redeemer from sin. Finally the Catholic Church designed the Mass, the symbolic breaking of unleavened bread and drinking of paschal wine, the pass over from sin to salvation and from earth to heaven.

This is another illustration of the syncretic process by which the rituals and forms, and even the phrases - like the Evangelical 'saved by the Blood of the Lamb' - have been adapted, reworked and reinterpreted from one religion to another, in this case from Judaism to Christianity. Truly, dear friends, we are all one people, bound together by countless invisible ties, and there is nothing new under the sun, though particulars are always new.

But let us turn to the third question that comes to our minds each year at this Passover-Easter time: which is the real Jesus, the true Jesus - the human, historical, gentle, Jewish teacher who walked the hills and valleys by the Lake of Galilee, who knew intimately, the streets of Jerusalem; or the metaphysical, mystical, mythological Christ of the Fourth Gospel and the Christian creeds, the holy one of God, who having sacrificed himself for us saves us miraculously by having atoned for our sins.

It is not an easy question to answer, partly because the human, historical, Jesus is very hard to find. He left no books or writings of his own at all, no letters like those of his missionary, Paul of Tarsus, who was a younger contemporary, but who never met or knew him personally. The earliest gospel, the Gospel of Mark, appeared some forty years

after Jesus had died; it appeared in Alexandria in Egypt in the small, struggling Christian Community there. Forty years is a long time for accurate memory. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke came later still, and the Gospel of John a generation later than these.

None of the Gospels is a historical study, or makes any pretence of objectivity. They are 'Gospels', proclaimers of 'good news', a missionary message. They are propaganda tracts for the then new Christian Church. They are interpretations of events that had happened long before, designed to sell the new movement to different groups. Perhaps that is why Mark, the earliest gospel writer, tells no story of Jesus' birth. Not that it wasn't important. He just didn't know any. Matthew and Luke tell vivid, but wholly different birth stories. By the time the Gospel of John was written, the birth stories must have been deemed unimportant, for they were known but omitted.

The Gospels, also, undoubtedly were coloured, perhaps even prompted, by the cataclysmic events that immediately preceded their appearance. In 70 A.D. the holy city of Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Romans. The Temple was levelled to the ground, with nothing remaining but the huge foundation stones (which today are the famous 'Wailing Wall'). The people were driven into exile and scattered out to the far ends of the Roman World. It is by no means a coincidence that precisely then the gospels appeared. One can imagine that much of the anti-Jewish tone of the Gospels is derived from a not altogether heroic effort on the part of the young Jewish-Christian sect to distinguish and separate itself from the savage 70 A.D. Roman attack upon Judaism.

In any case the gospels are not reliable histories, and if we want to get close to the historical Jesus, we must employ other methods than historical research.

The great authority in this area was Albert Schweitzer, who wrote the story of his research in a definitive book which appeared at the turn of the century, some seventy-five years ago, entitled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In this great work, he tells us, in essence, that the historical Jesus is discoverable only in mystical imagination, and then only by our putting ourselves first back into the mind-set of his time, so as to commune with him mystically. Jesus, he reminds us, was not the simple, social-justice-advocate liberals tried to make him. He believed, along with John the Baptist and the Essenes, that the End of Days was imminent. At any moment, God Almighty would come bringing the Kingdom of Heaven, and would superimpose that holy, supernatural world

upon this sinful, natural world of ours. Men were to repent and return to righteousness, not so much because it would make them happier in this world as because they were about to stand face to face with Almighty God, who would judge them all, the quick (living) and the dead, by His Standards of Perfect Righteousness. What man or woman in his right mind would want to face God immersed in every day's small selfishness and petty sins! But where there was repentance, God would forgive, just as the father of the Prodigal Son welcomed back his repentant, wayward boy. There was this hope. Well, the End of Days did not come after Jesus' death. The early church pushed it into the future. Christ would return some day bringing the End of Days. When that day did not come, the Medieval Church pushed it into the next world, heaven and hell in a life after death. The mythological, metaphysical Christ took over, the Christ of the creeds, who sits in Heaven at the right hand of the Father in judgement upon the natural world. But today that Christ too seems distant and unreachable, beyond any meaningful contemporary belief. So once again man is desperately engaged in the search for this strange, hypnotic being who pursues him across the centuries.

Let me share with you some of Albert Schweitzer's thinking on this, as culled from *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* :

"It is only at first sight that the absolute indifference of early Christianity towards the life of the historical Jesus is disconcerting. When Paul, representing those who recognized the signs of the times, did not desire to know Christ after the flesh, that was the first expression of the impulse of self preservation by which Christianity continued to be guided for centuries. It felt that with the introduction of the historic Jesus into its faith, there would arise something new, something which had not been foreseen in the thoughts of the Master Himself, and that thereby a contradiction would be brought to light, the solution of which would constitute one of the great problems of the world.

"Primitive Christianity was therefore right to live wholly in the future with the Christ who was to come, and to preserve of the historic Jesus only detached sayings, a few miracles, His death and resurrection.....

"The problem of the life of Jesus has no analogue in the field of history. No historical school has ever laid down canons for the investigation of this problem, no professional historian has ever lent his aid to theology in dealing with it. Every ordinary method of historical investigation proves inadequate to the complexity of the conditions. The

standards of ordinary historical science are here inadequate, its method is not immediately applicable. The historical study of the life of Jesus has had to create its own methods for itself.....

"The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb.

"The study of the Life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it had found Him it could bring Him straight into our time as a Preacher and Saviour. It loosed the bands by which He had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more, and a historical Jesus advancing, as it seemed, to meet it. But He does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last forty years was that, despite all forced and arbitrary interpretations it could not keep Him in our time; but had to let Him go. He returned to His own time, not owing to the application of any historical ingenuity, but by the same inevitable necessity by which the liberated pendulum returns to its original position.....

"We are experiencing what Paul experienced. In the very moment when we were coming nearer to the historical Jesus than man had ever come before, and were already stretching out our hands to draw Him into our own time, we have been obliged to give up the attempt and acknowledge our failure in that paradoxical saying: 'If we have known Christ after the flesh yet henceforth know we Him no more.' And further we must be prepared to find that the historical knowledge of the personality and life of Jesus will not be a help, but perhaps even an offence to religion.

"But the truth is it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen in men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world.

"World - and life - negation is found in the thought of Jesus insofar as He did not assume

that the Kingdom of God would be realized in this natural world. He expected that this natural world would very speedily come to an end and be superseded by a natural world in which all that is imperfect and evil would be overcome by the power of God.....

"Jesus as a concrete historical personality remains a stranger to our time, but His spirit which lies hidden in His words, is known in simplicity, and its influence is direct. Every saying contains in its own way the whole Jesus. The very strangeness and unconditionness in which He stands before us makes it easier for individuals to find their own personal standpoint in regard to Him.....

"In reality that which is eternal in the words of Jesus is due to the very fact that they are based on an eschatological world-view, and contain the expression of a mind for which the contemporary world, with its historical and social circumstances, no longer had any existence. They are appropriate, therefore, to any world, for in every world they raise the man who dares to meet their challenge, and does not turn and twist them into meaninglessness, above his own world and in his own time, a simple channel of the power of Jesus.....

"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words. 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."

It seems to me that what we really need today is a combination of the two concepts of Jesus, the man and the saviour. Despite the lack of adequate historical sources, we need to go back and try to recapture and recreate the Jesus of his history out of what we know about that Jewish world, and its ideas and beliefs that existed two thousand years ago. We Unitarian Universalists are bound neither to the historical Jesus nor the theological Jesus. We are free to acknowledge what he meant to that milieu, and then ask how we can translate that meaning into our time and our milieu and raise ourselves to meet its contemporary challenge. We are free to try to find the *Human Christ* - the Human-Divine Messenger who is as capable of speaking to us in terms of our time as it was of speaking to him in the terms of his and to all times in between and who can still come through with the innate authority and moral power capable of commanding our

minds and transforming our hearts.

This is a human Christ, the son of Joseph and Mary, convert of John the Baptist, rabbi and minister, missionary and teacher of righteousness who moved among a lost and distracted, oppressed and preyed-upon people with words of comfort and compassion, of counsel and command, a man who spoke out of a tremendous, inner spiritual authority, and apocalyptic urgency: Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is about to break in upon this natural world, and you must be ready. No supernatural incursion was about to, or did, take place. The church has been puzzled and confused and dismayed at this inconsistency, and has, as a result, totally distorted his Teaching, centring its attention on his nature and the nature of his witness as a salvatory miracle, rather than upon the miracle of truth within his teaching and its power to transform and redeem our human lives and history. The miracle is there, but not where the Christian Church thought it to be, in the deity of his person, and the miracle of his resurrection, but rather in the divine power of his truth, teaching and example. It is to that which we must now return, looking upon it, as a divine command - not something that might be pleasant and nice, but something that is absolutely necessary for our salvation from selfishness, violence and unending cruelty and war.

Long ago, the Jewish philosopher, Spinoza, stumbled upon this. He wrote:

'It is not in the least needful for salvation to know Christ according to the flesh; but concerning that so-called eternal Son of God (de aeterno illo Dei filio), that is, God's eternal wisdom, which is manifested in all things, and chiefly in the mind of man, and most particularly in Christ Jesus, the case is far otherwise. For without this no man can arrive at a state of blessedness, inasmuch as nothing else can teach him what is true or false, what is good or evil.'

You see, Spinoza, too, saw the need for a mystical, spiritual encounter with the eternal truth in Christ.

So it is the eternal Son of God in the historical Jesus that speaks to us mystically with such transforming authority, telling us what is true and false, good and evil. He tells us to love until we can love like him, and to do justly and love mercy, and forgive seventy times seven times, and if, at the very altar of God, we should remember that we have wronged any brother or sister, we must first go and make it right with him, and then

come and offer our gift. This is how things were to be in the Kingdom of God, and therefore, these are commands from the Father through the Son which sooner or later all must obey.

Jesus believed that we should do these things because the end of the world was at hand, and at any moment we must be ready to meet our God, face to face, and to live in His Kingdom of Heaven, supernaturally and miraculously given us.

Though the end of that world did not happen as he expected and prophesied (the End of Days did not come in his time, nor has he returned to earth bringing it with him) nevertheless, there is a sense in which each one of us, and every human being who has ever lived, is confronted by an imminent end of the world, of his world, of the world for him - Death, omnipresent, universal death, which comes to all, and can come at any moment.

Because of the uncertainties of our human existence, we should live each day as if it were to be our last. We should ask ourselves each morning if we have thus far made of our lives all we wished and dreamed, so that if we are this day called to account we would not die ashamed. We should reckon up our debts, count over those we may have wronged and not repented, seek out those with whom we remain unreconciled, and try again to renew the bonds of love and mutual forgiveness. For this day, this hour each one of us could die.

My beloved teacher and predecessor John Haynes Holmes used to say that we should never take anyone or anything for granted, that each morning, when we go to the day's work and kiss our loved ones goodbye, we should say all the nice things we feel about them, for one such morning's kiss may be, will be, the last - forever.

Do you see how the existential psychology which Jesus invoked in his expectation of God's intervention to miraculously superimpose His Kingdom of Heaven upon this world is sound. The psychology is sound in a wholly different, and perfectly natural sense, in the sense that Death stands always at our elbow, and any great creative gift we have to give, or any good we have to do for any fellow creature, we had better do it now - - for we shall not pass this way again. And this is why his ancient cry: "Repent, repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" has retained its authenticity and its power across twenty centuries. For individual human beings the Kingdom of Heaven is always at our

elbow.

There is another sense in which this is true. The very qualities of human life and behaviour that Jesus invoked because he thought God would give His Kingdom supernaturally - that is, loving God with all one's being, striving to be perfect as our father in heaven is perfect, and loving our neighbours and caring for them as if they were ourselves, our own - these are the qualities which, spreading by contagion from one human being to another, would create the kingdom of heaven, of love and forgiveness, of caring and reconciliation, naturally, right here upon this earth, with no need for anyone to wait around for any supernatural End of Days. You can start living in God's Kingdom of Heaven, my friends, right now. You can start realizing it in society and our social institutions today. Jesus himself seemed to suggest this when someone asked him once where he should look to see the Kingdom coming. Jesus replied, 'Don't look for the Kingdom of Heaven saying, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" The Kingdom of Heaven is within you and will rise up around and among you.'

This is more than just a very great truth. It is the central truth of life. It is the source of all salvation. It is the love of God come down to earth to lead us into love and thus into God. This was Jesus' greatest gift, infinitely dramatized for us in his gift of himself upon the cross, and his being lifted up thereby into an immortal light and beacon unto men across all centuries and millennia.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata Dec.1983)

Leaves of an Ashrama: 8 The More Desirable Alternative

Swami Vidyatmananda

Sometimes I get thoroughly tired of religion and everything connected with it. I feel just nothing but boredom and dejection. Meditation is a grind; progress appears nonexistent; the reputed delights of the spirit are conspicuous by their absence. Why keep on with the effort? What hope is there of ever getting anywhere, anyway?

I suppose that such feelings come to everyone. They certainly sweep over me often enough. But now they don't upset me so much. I have developed a trick for combating them. When I feel like giving up the struggle, I simply take the time to consider carefully the alternatives. True, the spiritual quest may be uneventful, but what else is there

which I'd rather be giving my time to? True, I may be a very long way this side of God-vision; but is there anything I'd prefer to be doing other than trying to carry on those disciplines which experts say are necessary to attaining it?

Back to that old wild goose chase? Back to the drive for possessions and power? But I had possessions and power - if not in this life, then assuredly in a previous life. They could not have brought security or even very much fun, else I should not have had such a desire to find something better. Back to romance? But I experienced romance, and I can observe those whose lives are given over to it; and what stability, what real bliss can one gain in that? Back to anything at all? What is there back there? I thoroughly explored that territory, and turned to religion only when I had exhausted its possibilities. Is there the slightest hope that I shall uncover anything worthy now - now that I am older, more discriminating, less suggestible?

One may be sure that bread will bake promptly and perfectly once the right combination of ingredients and conditions are achieved. The big job is to get these assembled. This requires time and effort, but that is not the fault of the finished product. Experienced persons tell us that in religion the result is sure once the conditions are met. But even if a happy outcome were not guaranteed, even if a life of spiritual practice were to be carried on without any hope of God-realization, I think I should prefer it to trying to picnic in the Wasteland. There is a sweetness that you feel in time, a comfort, a current of quiet satisfaction.

Swami Brahmananda¹, they say, used to issue a challenge to those contemplating regular spiritual practice. "Try something systematically for some time," he would say, "and if you do not feel benefited, you may come and strike me." I am sure no one ever struck Maharaj or even seriously felt like doing so, for his proposition was sure-fire. Routine as it can be, spiritual observance is so much more satisfying than preoccupation with maya, that once you try it you wouldn't want to return to the other.

So I just go along and try at least to be regular in my devotions. I start and close them with this: "Well, Lord, I know I'm not much of a meditator, and I'm certainly not naturally spiritual. But here I am as usual. If you should be gracious enough to give me the sight of you, I should be grateful. If not, here I am anyway, and here I'll continue to be." I have tried it both ways, and I can say truly that a seat on the ground outside the tent of my Beloved is more to be desired than a high station in that place where He is

not to be found.

Narada's Temptation

Mimi Frazer

One day the great sage, Narada, was wandering through the Himalayas when he came upon a sacred cave of most unusual beauty. In this pure and holy place, Narada vowed to end his wanderings forever that he might worship day and night at the feet of his beloved Rama.

Thus the days passed one upon the other, in a sweet serenity which even the gentle forest seemed to share. But the gods were jealous and Indra, who was their king, was the most jealous of them all, for well he knew the power acquired through such renunciation - power to command the earth and all the seven heavens, should the saint so choose! Was it God alone he wanted, or the countless pleasures of earth prolonged in subtler heavens? Infinitely more desirable to Indra seemed the latter, so day by day his uneasiness grew, lest so great a one as Narada should covet his own enjoyment and claim his place as king.

So, summoning Madan, the god of love, he spoke to him endearingly, as to an old friend, explaining his apprehension and the simple means by which it could be cured.

"Madan," concluded Indra, "it is you who must help me, as you have helped me in the past. Please go at once with your associates to Narada's retreat."

"I know," replied Madan, with sudden mischief in his eyes. "You do not have to tell me more, and time is short. For I shall weave so exquisite an illusion that even I shall find it irresistible!"

Thus it was that Narada, arising early the next morning in his cold and wintry retreat, looked about himself in great astonishment, for, overnight, winter had become spring. Yesterday's fir trees, so stiff and burdened with snow, today sighed softly and swayed in the light warm breeze. Yonder in the meadows the daffodils and daisies danced, while violets pushed up from underfoot. The sweet songs of birds filled the fragrant air, and now and then a flash of sunlight caught a bluebird's wing. Everywhere the sleeping forest had awakened to exuberant new life, teasing the senses.

As the saint stood mutely in wonderment, a sudden hush fell over the forest, as slowly the sound of a lute filled the air. As the sound drew nearer, it was joined by other lutes, until at last the whole forest seemed to vibrate with their rippling, liquid tones. As Narada turned to look around, a merry peal of laughter caught his ears, and from behind the shadows of the trees emerged seven lovely maidens. On catching sight of Narada, they feigned demure surprise but continued with their games more gaily than before. Softly they sang, and sweetly, glancing at Narada, at first with shy delight, and then with increasing ardour. But soon they saw that Narada, as calmly as a king, had seated himself in meditation posture, and they were considerably annoyed to find that he had also closed his eyes. Whispering among themselves, they drew still closer and began to dance, a dance so utterly beguiling that Madan himself, as he had prophesied, was spellbound as he watched.

As the sun sank low, and the fingers of the moon explored the forest, Narada still sat motionless. Long since, the maidens had grown tired of their enticements and lay resting at his feet. "A sight for the gods, indeed!" thought Madan in amazement, as he looked from the maidens to the saint's impassive face. In sudden fear lest he had trespassed much too far on such purity, he threw himself at Narada's feet and begged forgiveness.

Narada emerged from meditation to answer Madan sweetly. "Madan," he said, "Go now in peace, and take these maidens with you. Rest assured that my anger will not follow you, nor has Indra any cause to be disturbed, for, as you have surely seen, the pleasures of heaven have as little effect on me as the threats of hell. By the grace of my beloved Rama, I neither desire the one nor fear the other, for my heart is free." So, with a serene smile, he sent Madan and his associates upon their way.

Indra received Madan's description of the episode with great relief, and praised the saint before the other gods for his purity and clemency, but, as for Narada himself, there grew within his heart, as time went on, a certain self-complacency. He recalled the success of the forest test a great deal more often than memory demanded, and eventually the day arrived when he desired to share the story. Such a tale of Rama's grace would surely interest the great Lord Shiva, he reasoned, unaware that in his reasoning lay the seed of pride. So, at last, calling upon Shiva, he told the age-old story of temptation in its newest guise. Strange indeed was Shiva's reception of the tale of victory. "Oh, Narada," said Shiva gently, as though pleading with a child, "I pray you again and again never to repeat this story to anyone, and least of all to Rama himself.

Forget now, both temptation and victory, and surrender yourself to Rama with no thought of past or future."

Narada was puzzled by Shiva's words, puzzled, and not a little disappointed. For surely, in recounting the tale, he had only glorified the Lord! Surely Rama himself - he who had made such victory possible - would be delighted with the story. So, deaf to Shiva's kind advice, Narada called on Rama and described the forest test in greater detail than before.

Rama listened patiently, and said at last with an impassive face: "Wonderful, oh, Narada, are your wisdom and dispassion! Steadfast in your vow of celibacy and resolute in mind - surely so pure a heart could never be deluded by lust!"

Narada, delighted with the answer, concurred in silence, and added, "Of course it is all due to your grace."

But the compassionate Lord was no longer looking at Narada, or listening to his words. He was thinking of the huge tree of pride which had grown in Narada's heart - a tree so recently sprouted, and already grown so large; a tree which must be thoroughly uprooted by the very source from which it sprang. Dear to Rama's heart was his beloved servant, and quickly he determined to pit the power of maya against his swelling pride.

Thus it was that Narada, on taking leave of Rama, found himself in a great unknown city, beautiful beyond description. A gay and festive air hung over all, and Narada inquired what great occasion merited such splendour. The people stared at him in wonderment. Had he not heard? Did he not know that the only daughter of the king was on this very day to choose among her royal suitors? Had he not seen for himself the lovely princess? But as Narada continued to protest his ignorance, the people said to him kindly, "Come then, we will present you to the king, for he is famous for his hospitality to strangers and would feel sad at heart to know you had visited our city without calling at the court."

As the people had predicted, the king received Narada with the affection of a father, and insisted that he bathe and rest and partake of some refreshment. As soon as these polite amenities were over, he said to Narada: "It is indeed auspicious that you have come at such a time as this! Surely you have heard about my daughter's beauty from the people, but now you must see it for yourself. Perhaps, as her father, I am merely

prejudiced. Give me, then, a more unbiased opinion. Tell me what is good or bad about her."

Too eager to wait his guest's polite consent, the king summoned his daughter promptly and bade her come and stand beside the throne. Shyly the princess came forward, but with such delicate grace of movement that her tiny anklet bells rang out a faint sweet rhythm of their own. And the beauty of her smile, as she turned to greet her father's visitor, lighted up the darkened courtroom with the brilliance of the sun.

Narada stood before her silent and transfixed, and in that very moment his dispassion and austerity vanished into nothingness. By all the gods, to cherish and possess such a one as this! "Narada," the king insisted gently, "you have not answered me. Is she not beautiful? And wise? And gentle? Surely, then, you understand that my anxiety for her future matches only her perfection!"

Narada roused himself from reverie long enough to answer as courtesy demanded, for further than that he dared not go. With carefully selected phrases, he praised the princess in what was, indeed, a masterpiece of understatement, but when he mentioned the good fortune of the future bridegroom, the words felt suddenly dry in his mouth, and a twist of pain knotted his heart. It was unbearable to think of some mere mortal possessing so heavenly a creature! Ah, if only he himself... but no, it was impossible.

Yet the power of *maya* smiles at reason and, as Narada left the court, his restless heart already longed for the impossible. Gone was his zeal for *japam* and austerities, leaving in their place an unfamiliar emptiness, haunted by a memory. If only by some miracle... and through Narada's sadness flashed sudden inspiration.

"Is anything," mused Narada, "impossible to Rama? Surely he who has been my friend through all eternity, surely he will understand and help me now!" Closing his eyes in fervent prayer, he pleaded, "Oh Rama, thou knowest well that I have given away my heart. Unless she to whom it belongs, belongs also to me, I shall be an empty and wretched thing forever, a man divided against himself, dwelling neither in one body nor another. Therefore, be gracious and bestow on me thine own pure beauty - for in that way only shall I win my heart's desire."

The blessed Lord smiled gently and replied, "Narada, listen to me. Have I not always helped you? And shall I cease to help you now? I shall do that alone which is good for

you, and nothing else. Nor shall my words ever prove themselves untrue. If a patient, delirious with his malady, asks for something harmful, the physician will not give it. In like manner, I shall help you as is best for you, and in no other way."

So great was Narada's infatuation that he failed to grasp the full significance of Rama's words. Believing his request granted in the way that he had asked, he was filled with exultation at the thought of coming victory and quickly made his way to the arena.

It was fortunate indeed, for Rama's purpose, that no mirror was available - for Narada's looks had greatly altered. As he calmly took his place among the other suitors, two brahmins standing near winked at one another and said tauntingly, "Ah look! So handsome is this royal visitor that the princess will surely take him for the Lord himself!" But Narada heard only the spoken words, and not the mockery behind them.

Suddenly the crowd fell silent as the princess herself stepped into the arena, holding the wreath of victory in her hands. Thoughtfully she surveyed the royal suitors, judging each one by his own particular merits: this one was surely much too old, old enough to be her father; and that one lacked the marks of manliness. Suddenly she stopped, and a bright flame of anger flashed in her eyes, for here, upon so serious an occasion, among those who dared the right to claim her as their own, stood a creature so hideous that she shrank back trembling, in sudden and outraged fright. Quickly she put her hands over her eyes, struggled for self-possession, and then moved on. Not for a single moment did she glance back again in Narada's direction.

One by one the suitors were rejected, until at last the princess stood before the remaining one. Raising her eyes, she beheld no ordinary prince, but a king, for the Lord himself had chosen to appear, disguised among the suitors, and so radiant was his beauty that the princess cried out joyfully as she placed the wreath of victory around his neck.

Narada stood, incredulous and stunned, as the crowd rose up to laud the victor - for in the bitter moment of defeat he knew, with sudden intuition, that none but Rama could have vanquished him. The expression on his holy face so much amused the brahmins who had taunted him that suddenly they laughed outright. "Fool," they asked, "when did you last see yourself in a mirror?"

Too sick at heart to answer, Narada stumbled out of the arena. Finding a nearby brook,

he stared down into the water. The face of a monkey stared back at him, mocking with its very ugliness every vain desire. Quickly the image faded into normality again, but memory remained - memory and shame. From the lonely depths of suffering, Narada cried out: "Oh, Rama! Thou whom I called my friend! Thou whom I trusted and adored, what whim is this to seal my only hope of happiness and ridicule me thus before the world? For thou hast truly stripped me naked of all love, human or divine, and I taste at last the empty dregs of thy sublime indifference."

Rama smiled, for great had been the trials that he had given Narada, and the anger of his words were all of maya's making. As he gently withdrew the great illusion he had woven, Narada awoke as from a dream to find desire and grief had fled together from his newly humbled heart. Weeping, he threw himself at Rama's feet and pleaded, "Oh, Lord! How many abuses have I poured on thee! And yet thou knowest well my whole heart loves thee! How, then, shall my sins be expiated?"

The compassionate Rama said gently, "Chant the holy name with a tranquil heart, and with the eye of the spirit learn to behold me everywhere. Lay down all duties in me, your refuge, and fear no longer. Thus will I save you from sin and bondage, oh, my beloved Narada, and my maya shall haunt you no more." (Reprinted from Vedanta & The West, 1952)

St. Teresa, Bride of the Sun (continued)

Swami Atmarupananda

The twelve years after her father's death were years of terrible conflict, confusion and waste for Teresa. But though she had been grossly misguided by her spiritual directors, it was not that she had received no warnings to mend her life. Even before the death of Don Alonso she was once talking to a visitor when Christ appeared before her in an attitude of great sternness, showing her that this friendship was very harmful. Because she couldn't understand how the vision had happened, however, and also because it displeased her, she hesitantly convinced herself that it had been imagination, and ignored the warning, though deep within she knew that the vision had been real. On another occasion when she was with this same person, they both saw a huge toad-like reptile crawling towards them. It was such a bizarre sight that Teresa felt intuitively that it was a warning sent by God. Though this experience also made a deep impression

on her, like the other it went unheeded. One of the nuns, too, warned Teresa occasionally about her friendships. 'Oh, you take scandal over nothing, Sister,' Teresa would reply curtly. For Teresa's intentions were innocent; and seeing so many other nuns receiving visitors, she didn't realize it caused as much distraction as in fact it did.

Besides the warnings from Christ and the nun, Teresa's own conscience constantly urged her to give up all that distracted her from the love of God. All these factors caused the inner conflict to intensify.

Then, one day in 1553 as she was passing through the oratory, she noticed a statue which had just been installed for a festival. It showed the wounds of Christ so vividly that Teresa's eyes remained fixed on it. It seemed to her that the wounds had been caused by her own unfaithfulness: so many times she had failed Christ, still He continued to shower her with blessings; she had ignored His warnings, still He protected her from the dangers of her own carelessness. Then the tremendous tension which had been building up for years within her burst, and she fell on her knees before the image, weeping. She implored Christ's blessings that she might mend her life and remain true to Him. 'I won't rise from this spot until you grant me this, O my Lord and God,' she cried.

And from that moment onward the thirty-eight-year-old nun began to record spiritual progress. Once again she was the little child, *la ni-a*, who had sought so eagerly that which lasts 'for ever'. No more was there to be any backsliding, no more satisfaction with mediocrity, no more sacrificing the spiritual ideal to the desire to please others.

Until this time, prayer had usually been for her an effort of the will, something limited to certain set periods of the day. As a rule, since joining the convent she had had to take the help of a book for recollection when praying. She had also discovered that looking at beautiful natural objects - flowers, water, a field - helped remind her of the Creator.

Now after her second conversion, however, prayer was no longer a struggle, no longer a practice limited to set times of the day; it no longer needed so much external stimulation. Prayer became part of her very being, and even if she wanted to think of outward things she couldn't. 'The more I tried to think of other things, the more completely the Lord enveloped me in that sweetness and glory until I felt so completely surrounded by it that I couldn't flee from it in any direction.' She began to experience

the prayer of quiet frequently, and often the prayer of union or spiritual betrothal (so called because in it the soul gets acquainted with her Lover in a brief tryst).

But there was agony associated with this ecstasy: 'So great were the delights and sweetness which I experienced in spite of my resistance, that I was scared.' She thought that perhaps she was suffering from illusions. While at prayer, the experience of God's presence was undeniably real. But at other times of the day, when only the memory remained, she wondered: God or illusion?

Whom could she talk to? Her spiritual directors had never understood her; and the other nuns were quite ignorant of mystical experience. First she approached two very respected and pious men of Avila - one a layman trained in theology and the other a priest. After listening to a detailed account of her spiritual experiences, they gave her their diagnosis: 'the working of the devil', and their prescription: 'Be careful!' Teresa had been frightened by her experiences before; now she was terrified.

She was advised to consult the Society of Jesus, the order recently founded by St. Ignatius Loyola. They had a new foundation in Avila, and were famed for their spirituality and ability to guide souls. Surely they could help her escape these diabolical illusions. But the young Jesuit who reviewed her case gave the diagnosis: 'God', and his prescription: not to give up mental prayer for any reason, for God was giving her many graces through it; she must work hard, for she would be much to blame if she ignored His call; and perhaps He would use her to help others someday. 'He directed me so well that it seems I am no longer the same,' she exclaimed afterwards.

This contact with the Society of Jesus opened a whole new life for her, and for the rest of her life she held the Jesuits in very high esteem. Though all of them were not men of spiritual experience, they were learned; and through their learning they had gained a breadth of insight which allowed them to understand and appreciate Teresa's spiritual condition, even if they themselves had not experienced the same. For the rest of her life Teresa warned nuns against timid and easily frightened spiritual directors who, though pious and holy, are only half-learned and hence narrow-minded.

One day Teresa's director asked her to cut off certain friendships which, though not evil, were not helpful to her. At this request she was afraid, for she always disliked offending anyone. When she voiced her doubt, her director advised her to ask God in prayer. After

praying for the greater part of a day, she began reciting a hymn, when 'there came to me a transport so sudden that it almost carried me away; I could make no mistake about this, so clear was it. This was the first time that the Lord had granted me the favour of any kind of rapture. I heard these words: "I will have thee converse now, not with men, but with angels.'" And, she says, 'the words have come true: never since then have I been able to maintain firm friendship save with people who I believe love God and try to serve Him.'

After this experience, Teresa had to pass through another difficult period at the hands of stupid confessors. There were five or six such men who were still convinced that her experiences came from the devil. They told her to stop mental prayer, to shun solitude, to communicate (partake of the Eucharist) less frequently, to cultivate distractions. Even the Jesuit who was her spiritual director joined hands with them for a time, though later she discovered that he did it just to test her. She herself no longer doubted the reality and divine source of her experiences, but she was greatly unsettled by these superstitious men; so upset, in fact, that for two long years she avoided solitude and prayed that God lead her by some other, safer path than contemplation. (Yet the deep transformation which had taken place in her is evident from the fact that she prayed to God to lead her by some other path: she didn't shun Him together with prayer as she had done so often before. And God in turn rewarded her faithful love: during these two years, though she avoided solitary prayer, she remained recollected even in the midst of conversation.)

One day during this period she had spent four or five hours in terrible agitation: there was none she could speak with, nor could she relax enough to read or pray. Suddenly, through the midst of her affliction she heard the words born in on her consciousness: 'Be not afraid, daughter, for it is I, and I will not forsake thee: fear not.' Just the moment before, her mind had been so agitated that no one could have calmed her, even after hours of trying. 'Yet here I was,' she wrote, 'Calmed by nothing but these words, and given fortitude and courage and conviction and tranquillity and light, so that in a moment I found my soul transformed... Oh, what a good God! Oh, what a good Lord! What a powerful Lord!'

Such assurances became more and more frequent. She would be given an order by her spiritual director which was beyond her strength; in prayer the Lord would tell her to obey the director, and immediately she would feel the requisite courage. Her director

would forbid her to read certain books which she was very fond of; God would assure her: 'Be not distressed, for I will give you a living book' - the book of mystical experience. She would be afraid of some situation, and God would ask her, 'What do you fear?' - thus filling her with courage.

Then at the end of this two-year period, she had her first intellectual vision.² When she met her spiritual director again she had to tell him of this latest experience. So often had she suffered from misunderstandings with advisors that she went to him with great trepidation. 'I had a vision of Christ,' she told him. 'Or rather, I'm continually seeing Him at my side; even now.'

'In what form do you see Him?' he asked.

'I don't see Him at all.' Somehow she got the words out before breaking into tears of apprehension.

Her advisor started, cleared his throat and asked, 'Uh, how do you know it is Christ?' 'I don't know how, Father, but I can't help realizing He is beside me. I see and feel this clearly...'

'Well, who told you it is Jesus Christ?'

'He often tells me so Himself,' she replied with greater confidence as the vision's reality impressed itself on her. 'But before ever He told me so, the fact was impressed upon my understanding...' She went on to give analogies, the only way she could begin to describe this inexpressible experience. 'He presents Himself to the soul by a knowledge brighter than the sun. I don't mean that any sun is seen, or any brightness is perceived, but that there is a light which, though not seen, illumines the understanding...'

Needless to say, this episode didn't help her credibility with the director. But God was ever leading His bride on through His spiritual mansions, showing her His riches on the way to the bridal chamber. He left Teresa's earthly advisors, to try to follow them as well as they could, for what were their approval to Him? 'Those with whom the soul has to do', said Teresa, 'Keep thinking it has reached its summit, but soon afterwards they find it higher still, for God is always giving it new favours.' Her spiritual director had to read volumes and volumes of mystical and ascetic theology to understand the simple

Carmelite nun. Still he couldn't keep up with her progress.

Another day Teresa had a vision of Christ in His resurrection body, which "even in its whiteness and radiance alone... exceeds all that we can imagine... It is not a radiance which dazzles, but a soft whiteness and an infused radiance which, without wearying the eyes, causes them the greatest delight... So different from any earthly light is the brightness and light now revealed to the eyes that, by comparison with it, the brightness of our sun seems dim... It is of such a kind, indeed, that no one, however powerful his intellect, could, in the whole course of his life, imagine it as it is."

Such visions of Christ in His glorified body became frequent. Only rarely did she have visions of Christ crucified: she found them unbearably painful. But the beauty of the glorified Christ was so enchanting that, once having seen it, she could never again be attracted by earthly beauty.

Once when she was holding the wooden cross of her rosary, Christ took it in His own hand and "when He gave it back to me, it had become four large stones, much more precious than diamonds... On the cross, with exquisite workmanship, were portrayed the five wounds. He told me that henceforward it would always look to me like that, and so it did: I could never see the wood of which it was made, but only these stones. To nobody, however, did it look like this except to myself."

Now her love for God became so intense that even sleep was passed in continual prayer. And during the day she was moved by such vehement impulses of love that she seemed to be dying with the desire to see God. Then she began to receive the most well-known of her visions, known as the transverberation of her heart. She would see to her left an angel, short in stature and very beautiful, 'his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire'. In his hands he held a long golden spear with an iron tip, on the end of which was a point of fire. "With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it, and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God."

This vision was repeated several times over a period of days. During the whole of this

time she walked about as though in a stupor, not wishing to see or speak with anyone, 'but only to hug my pain, which caused me greater bliss than any that can come from the whole of creation.'

The terrible trials she had undergone for so long with ignorant advisors, together with the spiritual experiences she had been receiving, worked to bring out a new virility, a new strength and fortitude and determination which have been seen in very few women throughout history. Her sufferings had served as the fire which tests the gold, and now she shone with an untarnished brilliance. But perhaps it was not a completely new virility. It was actually the same which had been seen in la ni-a, the little girl who had persuaded Rodrigo to seek martyrdom with her in the land of the moors. It was the re-emergence of her native Castilian temperament of determination and heroic fortitude which years of self-doubt, false humility, and confusion had drained away from her.

The woman who just a short time before had been terrified when told that her experiences were diabolical illusions, was now able to say when faced with temptations: "'Well, now,' I said to myself, 'if this Lord is so powerful, as I see He is, and know He is, and if the devils are His slaves..., what harm can they do me, who am a servant of this Lord and King? How can I fail to have fortitude enough to fight against all hell?' So I took a cross in my hand and it really seemed that God was giving me courage: in a short time I found I was another person and I should not have been afraid to wrestle with devils, for with the aid of that cross I believed I could easily vanquish them all... 'Come on, now, all of you,' I said. 'I am a servant of the Lord and I want to see what you can do to me!'

"It certainly seemed as if I had frightened all these devils, for I became quite calm and had no more fear of them... They are no more trouble to me now than flies. They seem to me such cowards - as soon as they see that anyone despises them they have no strength left...

"... Not a fig shall I care for all the devils in hell: it is they who will fear me... 'Oh, the devil, the devil' we say when we might be saying 'God! God!...'"

And she went on to say, 'I am more afraid of men who themselves fear the devil than I am of the devil himself!'

In the process of this transformation, however, Teresa never lost the wonderful charm which had always characterized her. She had ever been too anxious to please others, a

fault which had caused many of her problems; but now that vice was converted into the corresponding virtue. She sought now only to please God; yet she retained an attractiveness of character which won over all hearts. A man who knew her said some years later that he spent "all day long with her without noticing the time, and all night long in the hope of seeing her again next day, for her way of speaking was delightful... she was so much on fire with the love of God! The warmth radiating from her words was so gently persuasive, that it melted the hearts of all who came in contact with her without causing them pain... It might have been said that she held in her hand the helm that steers all hearts."

Around 1559 Teresa met St. Pedro de Alcantara, an elderly Franciscan friar who at the age of sixteen had joined his order's Discalced Reform ('discalced' means that the members wore no shoes, as a mark of renunciation). For forty years he had slept for only an hour and a half nightly, and that while sitting up. In the hot sun, pouring rain or chilling snow he never wore shoes nor a covering for his head; his body was covered only by sack cloth. And it was common for him to eat a little food but once in three days. Extreme austerity, however, was not his sole qualification for sanctity: he was also a contemplative with deep mystical experience. He gave Teresa great encouragement in her life of prayer. And such was the respect he commanded in Castile among both religious and laity, that his strong approval of Teresa's mystical experiences silenced the increasingly vocal criticism directed towards her in Avila (for word of her 'diabolical illusions' had got around).

St. Pedro never lost the original zeal for poverty, simplicity and contemplation which had led him in his youth to join the Discalced Franciscans. Teresa was fired with his enthusiasm and opened her heart to him, telling of the terrible trials through which she had passed at the lax Convent of the Incarnation. She told him how, had she been a man, she too would have liked to attempt a reform of the Carmelite Order. But in the course of their talks, her womanhood seemed less and less sufficient an excuse for resignation to the evils prevailing in her Order. Thus was conceived the inspiration which was soon to bear fruit in the Discalced Carmelite Reform. (to be continued)

Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, July 1980

Book Review

John Phillips

Aditya Hridayam by Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati

Rediscovering Indian Literary Classics No. 11

Published by D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi

In many ancient religions the Sun has been accorded a supreme place in the order of divinities. In this connection one only has to recall the Sol Invictus worshipped by the Roman emperors. The ancient Indian tradition also revered the sun as the life-giving force and the symbol of the highest Reality. The commentary by Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati in this volume comes as an attempt to unravel the power and mystique of the Sun as explained in the Aditya Hridayam, a small canto chapter offering obeisance to the Sun God in Valmiki's Ramayana. The Aditya Hridayam was conveyed by the sage Agastya to Rama after the latter's victory over Ravana.

Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati is a Sanskrit scholar and a noted teacher of the Vedas and Vedantic literature. He has written several works on Hindu religion and philosophy.

This book presents the original Sanskrit mantras of the Aditya Hridayam along with their transliteration and translation into English. The verses are accompanied by detailed notes explaining each concept. The commentary makes many references to other Upanishads, linking the Aditya Hridayam with many other ancient Indian scriptures.