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Editorial

Ahimsa or non-injury

Ahimsa means non-injury or non-killing. Non-injury means abstinence from causing any pain or harm whatsoever to any living creature, either by thought, word, or deed.

Swami Vivekananda says: "Never producing pain by thought, word, and deed, in any living being, is what is called Ahimsa, non-injury. There is no virtue higher than non-injury. There is no happiness higher than what a man obtains by this attitude of non-offensiveness, to all creation."

He further says, "The test of Ahimsa is absence of jealousy." This would come as a surprise to most of us. We think of Ahimsa as hurting others by word or deed. But jealousy is the subtlest and the most insidious form of causing injury. For what is jealousy but wishing none but me should have all the best for all time! Measured by this definition there would be few who can be said to have the virtue of Ahimsa. Often we are not even aware of how much jealousy we cherish in the depths of our unconscious. Even advanced spiritual aspirants fall easy victims to this evil.

Ahimsa is not merely a negative virtue. It is positive, universal love; it is a spiritual attitude in which evil qualities like jealousy, cruelty, and hatred are replaced by pure love and service. Ahimsa is not merely abstaining from doing injury but actively doing all

we can for the welfare of others. Only those who consider the whole universe as their own Self can truly be said to be established in Ahimsa. The one constant thought of those saints who are established in Ahimsa would be: 'May all beings be happy. May all be free from disease. May all realise what is good. May none be subject to misery.'

The practice of Ahimsa needs tremendous strength and is not for weaklings. Neither is it for those who are intellectually weak and irrational. There are vegetarians who consider themselves superior and are apt to look down upon non-vegetarians. For these Swami Brahmananda gives a fitting response:

Q: "Should we avoid eating meat, since it entails killing?"

A: "Nonsense! The Buddhists say: "Harmlessness is the highest virtue." What does this mean? You can understand the significance of this only when you have attained samadhi, when you have reached enlightenment and have seen God in all creatures. Until then mere talk is useless. When you can see the same God in the ant as in yourself, then you can practise this virtue. You may talk of not killing, but can you possibly avoid killing? What would you eat? Potatoes? Plant a potato underground, it shoots forth young sprouts. Has the potato no life? Would you eat rice? Plant the paddy grain in the earth, it grows into a rice plant. You want to drink water? Examine a drop of water under a microscope and see how many millions of tiny lives are there. You must breathe to live. Yet with every breath you kill millions of creatures. Do you see any harm in that? You think you lose your religion if you take a little fish. Such arguments are foolish. The ancient Hindus held no such ideas. These are later Buddhist and Vaishnavite interpolations."

In the practice of Ahimsa motive is more important than mere action. If we think a bit deeper we will be faced with surprising questions:

Would a soldier be committing a sin when he kills enemy troops who are invading his country? Would a teacher be cruel when he may need to discipline a student? Would a mother be heartless when she binds her child's hands so that it cannot scratch itself to the point of bleeding? What about a recluse who does not bathe for fear of killing invisible creatures but thereby may cause an epidemic? What about the brute who goes on breeding children year after year but lives only on boiled vegetables? Can we consider a man evil who is ever ready to give up his life for the sake of others but lives on fish and meat? What about the goody-goody citizen who has knowledge of evil doers but does not inform the authorities either because of fear, or in the name of religion, or in the name of goodness?

Let us hear Swami Vivekananda:

".....this one idea that deserves special notice is Ahimsa, non-injury to others. This duty of non-injury is, so to speak, obligatory on us in relation to all beings. As with some, it does not simply mean the non-injuring of human beings and mercilessness towards the lower animals; nor, as with some others, does it mean the protecting of cats and dogs and feeding ants with sugar - with liberty to injure brother-man in every horrible way! A good practice carried to an extreme and worked in accordance with the letter of the law becomes a positive evil.

"The test of Ahimsa is absence of jealousy. Any man may do a good deed or make a good gift on the spur of the moment or under the pressure of some superstition or priestcraft; but the real lover of mankind is he who is jealous of none. The so-called great men of the world may all be seen to become jealous of each other for a small name, for a little fame, and for a few bits of gold. So long as this jealousy exists in a heart, it is far away from the perfection of Ahimsa.

"The cow does not eat meat, nor does the sheep. Are they great Yogis, great non-injurers? Any fool may abstain from eating this or that; surely that gives him no more distinction than to herbivorous animals. The man who will mercilessly cheat widows and orphans and do the vilest deed for money is worse than any brute even if he lives entirely on grass.

"The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to any one, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the Bhakta, he is the Yogi, he is the Guru of all, even though he lives every day of his life on the flesh of swine."

Ahimsa is a positive spiritual quality which helps us see the Self everywhere.

Swami Dayatmananda

The Action of the Wise

Swami Bhavyananda

"One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is intelligent among human beings, he or she is a yogi and a doer of all action."

The wording of verse 18 of Chapter IV of the Gita looks like a riddle. We must understand it intelligently. To do one's duty perfectly, and to harmonize work and wisdom, achievement and renunciation, is a task which a man of spiritual understanding alone can perform. I feel that all those unselfish benefactors of mankind who live in the world like ordinary citizens, have through their love, unselfishness and sacrifice worthily exemplified the synthesis of spiritual wisdom and intense unselfish activity. The famous historical figures of this class include Buddha, Shankara, Jesus and Mohammed. These we easily recognize as God-men, and we might therefore expect them to have lived a most unworldly way in pursuit of the life of the spirit. Yet they spent themselves wholly in working for the welfare of others. From their divine heights they saw no difference between secular and spiritual. They seem to have seen God everywhere and served Him. 'Give me to recognize in other men, Lord God, the radiance of Your own face,' prays P 7 re Teilhard de Chardin. The life of renunciation and the life of action alike are hallowed by the chastening power of selfless service. The benign light consisting of this service to mankind makes a life of duty bright and joyous. No one who intends to tread the spiritual path can possibly ignore the mandatoriness of selfless service. Hence the nature of a wise man is thus defined: 'He whose activities are not impelled by selfish desires, whose undertakings are purified by the fire of wisdom, him the wise call a sage' (Gita IV.19).

It is difficult for us, dominated by selfishness as we are, to imagine a person whose mind is free from the shackles of selfish desire. We, as 'normal' people, nourish various desires in our hearts. These desires inspire the thoughts which determine our activity, for, by and large, it is desire which is the motive power behind a man. To judge the actions of a person one must know the underlying motives. Common man takes it for granted that there must be some hidden motive behind the actions of even a good soul; so much so, that today the lives of saints and sages have been very nearly ruined as examples for modern man, by the constant bombardment of psycho-analysis. We grant it may be true in a majority of cases that hidden motives play their part, but there are lives of exceptional selflessness where this exposition does not apply. Because of the rarity of such noble characters, we are prone to come to the dismal conclusion that disinterested action is altogether unnatural and impossible.

Unless we eliminate our self-centred unethical and unspiritual tendencies, we cannot live a wholesome life of selfless work. It is difficult, but not impossible, to accomplish this elimination, with the help of wise understanding, deep faith in God and self-surrender to Him. A strong sense of duty and high moral responsibility also help in

overcoming the common weaknesses of mankind. A man free from selfishness is free from all bondage of action; there is no desire with which he can be bound. He lives and works in absolute freedom. As the Katha Upanishad tells us,

'When all the desires that dwell in his heart are given up, then this very mortal becomes immortal even here.'

Thus does work become no-work, when selfish motive force is abandoned. The wisdom mentioned in verse 19 consists of the practical realization of this truth, and it is the man endowed with this wisdom and unselfishness who can understand and appreciate people like himself. In the next verse an emphatic declaration is made that the intense activity of an unselfish person cannot in any way disturb him.

'Giving up attachment to the fruits of action, ever content and dependent on none, though engaged in work, he does no work at all.'

A person can be free from selfish desires in relation to the fruits of action when he takes a larger interest into consideration. Most of our troubles come from our having too narrow a perspective, too close an end in view; this damages our spiritual freedom. It goes without saying that an unselfish man is the most contented of men. His contentment relieves him of all the troubles attendant on keeping his wants supplied, for it is the feeling of want that is our greatest enemy, disturbing our mind. This man is therefore free from tensions. 'If the mind is contented,' asks Shankara, 'who is rich and who is poor in the world?' Our happiness does not depend on what we possess. In fact, possession limits our freedom. Things hold us, we do not hold them.

Contentment should not, however, lead a man to inactivity; it should not prevent him from work and achievement. It is totally wrong to hold that contentment cripples action and initiative. A truly contented man looks upon life as an opportunity to do his duties and to serve humanity. He is as ready to take up a task where the need arises as he is ready to relinquish one when the occasion for it has passed. Looking on the world in this way he is not disturbed by success or failure. Shri Krishna continues in the next two verses,

'Free from desire, with body and mind controlled, and all possessions surrendered, he incurs no sin through mere bodily activity.'

'Contented with what comes to him without effort, rising above the pairs of opposites, free from envy, and even-minded in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound.'

To understand these verses we have to bear in mind that to be completely inactive is impossible for a human being. Nature compels all to work. A life of work is the most natural thing in the world. Even the wise recluse does some work to keep the body free

from disease, but his mind is under wise control, healthy and wholesome, and free from all cupidity. With such a mind he cannot be adversely affected by any activities whatever. Even in the case of ordinary individuals, appropriate work done with a spirit of unselfishness can never taint the mind. The old objection that self-interest alone can give powerful incentive for work may seem a truth all too obvious in societies like ours. It is also true that such societies offer the least opportunities for spiritual values to be practised, and if a man cherishes these he must go against the spirit of the time to build himself up. He may have to work hard, but he will be amply rewarded. I am sure that even in the most selfishly-oriented societies there will be some who will be interested in spiritual pursuits. However small a group these may be, they will ever be appreciated, even if their example cannot be followed, by the thoughtful people of the society. It is they who are the salt of the earth, and who will be a source of solace and inspiration to those who seek to follow some ideal in life. It is they who will contribute most to the inner stability of the society. Whatever work is done by them will be for the greater good of the people amongst whom they live. Such a spirit alone can create the noble brotherhood which humanity needs today. The next verse tells us:

'The actions of a man free from all attachment and emancipated, whose mind is established in knowledge, utterly dissolve when performed as yajna, sacrifice.'

Here the word 'actions' conveys the meaning 'effects of action' - the internal impression on the mind. It is this impressed influence which causes the bondage of action. The Gita has taught us earlier that work done for a noble purpose and free from selfish interest is incapable of giving rise to bondage. The normal human being is involved incessantly in work, and the awakening of his soul and his salvation have also to take place through work. Work, then, although the cause of bondage, can likewise destroy that bondage and bring liberation. The unselfish discharge of one's duties has a preventive and curative efficacy in relation to the common spiritual ailment of man. This verse deals with the curative aspect. This is what happens when all the action of our life is aimed at the service of humanity and the worship of God.

What is the nature of the man to whom work becomes worship? His attachments have all broken; his mind is firmly fixed in true wisdom; he is free from the slavery of the senses. No power or wealth can allure him. He is peaceful and loving. Such a noble soul lives an active life of loving service and meaningful study. He adores God in all His creation, and serves Him with selflessness and philosophic wisdom. He is able to transmute normal daily work into divine worship. All cannot equally practise this, for it depends upon one's earnestness. As one progresses one actually perceives the indwelling divinity in all

beings and serves Him, full of joy at being able to do so. As Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'Don't seek Him, just see Him.' This is the highest, and ultimately the only achievement of human life.

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Christ, the God Man

Swami Vishwananda

If we study the history of mankind very carefully, the rise, growth and development of different nations who have played a part in the world-drama, we come across a few men very extraordinary and uncommon, whom I shall call supermen. The number is very, very limited - you can count on your fingertips those who have played the most important part in the conduct of human life and the growth of civilization.

It is to these men that Carlyle, one of the master minds of the 19th century, pays tribute in his essay, "Hero as Prophet." There are different kinds of heroes - we may think of Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington, George Washington, men who are makers of history, and there are heroes on the plane of thought and ideas. Whereas the ordinary man is chiefly the creation of his environment and heredity, hero prophets create their own environment and they create epochs of civilization.

Now these hero prophets or God-men are a mysterious combination of the human and the divine - you will find that this is true of Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Ramakrishna. As the poet says of Christ,

"Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood thou."

They appear like any one of us physically; physiologically the same; subject to hunger and thirst, the elements and the flesh; but they reveal certain qualities and virtues which it is not possible to have within the reach of any one of us. The phrase has been used, "When a dwarf wants to catch the moon," and we feel ourselves in the position of

the dwarf in relation to these God-men. Try as we may, strive as we can, at the end there is still an unbridgeable difference. So we say in agony of heart, "No, we cannot reach you, we cannot touch you."

The Gita, the scripture of the Hindus, speaking in clear language of the doctrine of Divine Incarnation, maintains that at the moment when virtue subsides and immorality flourishes, the Almighty, the all-merciful Father comes down to the plane of earth as a human being. Whether or not you accept this doctrine of divine incarnation, you must know that these few men have exerted such a paramount influence upon civilization that you are constrained to say that they are a family, a species of their own, and are far, far above us.

The great hero, teacher and God-man, about whom I am speaking today, was one of these messengers of light. At a time when the Roman Empire was in the zenith of its power and earthly possessions, in a lowly stable was born the child who, for the last nineteen hundred years has played the most extensive and intensive part in the thought of Europe and America.

Though Jesus was born of a humble family, he was pitted against the material power of Rome, as if to indicate that it is the spirit that survives in the long run. The Roman Empire of the Caesars, has long since passed away, but this carpenter's son is still worshipped.

Even today kings and emperors are anointed in his name. Can you explain why? You know what a part Napoleon played in Europe in the 18th and early 19th century. During the last days of his life, whether fortunately for him or not, he lived in exile as a prisoner on the island of St. Helena. Then after he had time to compare his own lot with that of others, his memorable words were, "Alexander and Caesar, Charlemagne and myself built empires only to crumble to dust, but the empire which the Son of the carpenter has built is extending as time is rolling on. Today on the throne of France, tomorrow food for worms; such is the man whom the world calls Napoleon the great." That is the difference between material power and spiritual power; that is the difference between earthly kingdoms and the Kingdom of Heaven; that is the difference between matter and spirit. Jesus Christ is illuminating the hearts of many even today. He was certainly a God-man or a man-God.

Will you allow me to explain this mystery as a Hindu would explain it? The highest conception of God of which man is capable is, "He is infinite. He is the absolute. He is the opposite of all that we are." The most intellectual man is constrained to feel his limitations in comparison with the One who is the negation of all limitations. A German

philosopher once said that that is how man conceived the idea of God. We all feel that there is infinite energy behind the universe. It is through this force that the sun rises, the moon sheds her beams, flowers bloom, the seasons come in their unchanging order. We are filled with wonder and admiration for the tremendous power ruling the universe, but man is not all thinking, philosophy, intellect - man is also a creature of emotions, sentiments and feelings and he needs an object, a personality, on whom these feelings can be centred and focussed. In the home and family we know the part that emotion plays. Then death comes and snatches away the object of our love - we come to grief, we lament and from the depths of our being comes the cry:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace
Believing where we cannot prove."

He the absolute, the infinite, the unknown and unknowable, comes within the limitations of our earth so that we may look up to Him for guidance and protection. That is the genesis of divine incarnations, so that there is an element of truth in the saying, "Nobody has seen God, except through the Son of man."

It is remarkable that all of these heroes as prophets have come from Asia. It is the hand of Asia that has rocked the cradle of prophets. Perhaps the background was helpful and conducive to the growth of divine life.

As early as the Vedas it was said, "What shall we do with property which will not give us immortality?"

There was a prince in India who turned his back on his beautiful palace, his beloved wife and his little baby and went into the forest to find a way out of this labyrinth of the world. By dint of superhuman efforts he attained supreme beatitude. That man was Buddha. Like him, Christ was a true son of the Orient. Only such a man could say, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" There you will find in one sentence, one idea, the key to the life of Jesus Christ. Earthly power, possessions, had no meaning for him. He speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven - "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is baptism with fire, not water, that Christ means.

Do you remember the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus? He said to him, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" and Jesus replied, "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me." These words have been ringing through the

world for hundreds of years. How many of us are willing to take up the cross? Comfort and luxury everybody seeks, but there is a higher life, a life everlasting. As Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Through all of his sayings, all of his parables, one sees wonderful power of expression. For instance the words, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" - these are marvellous words even in translation; because there is the spiritual force and power of the God-man behind every word. Jesus was talking to a group of people and a wayfarer, caught in the current of his words, was overwhelmed, was spellbound, and said. "Never man spake like this man." That is the power of the God-man, of God himself, the inexhaustible reservoir of power and energy. Think again of that moving saying of Jesus, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Here he speaks of the ideal of burning renunciation. And the twelve men who were his followers - what tremendous power he exercised through his apostles as these simple fishermen, fortified with the power of God, changed the thought current of the whole world.

It has been said that religion has been the cause of much trouble in the world. I say that it is not religion - it is the misuse, the misapplication of religion which is responsible. It is a perplexing fact that in the name of religion hospitals and institutions for the poor and needy have been founded and that in the name of religion men have behaved like ferocious animals. Those who have understood the true spirit of religion have become dynamos of love, sympathy and good will. Those who cling to the form, without understanding the spirit, become fanatics.

In our Sanskrit books are many stories of birds and beasts. There is the story of a monkey who was employed by a king and who was very faithful and obedient to his master. On one occasion his master was sleeping and a mosquito was flying around him. The monkey in trying to drive the mosquito away took up his master's sword to kill it, but the mosquito flew away and the sword fell on the king and killed him. When I think of the attempts to do away with religion I think of that story, I remember that they will kill what they want to save.

When you think of the works of great masters of art like Raphael and Michaelangelo, when you look at their work, you are struck by the idealism of these masters. The beautiful music of great musicians flourished under the inspiration of this man of

Palestine and Nazareth. It was Goethe who gave us the picture of a scholar-philosopher in 'Faustus'. He was the greatest intellectual of his time and yet there was no joy in his life. He was miserable and unhappy and found no meaning in life. Once at midnight he thought he did not know anything and cried out, "Light, more light," and he was going to make away with himself with poison. It happened to be Christmas Eve when a group of boys was passing by singing "Good news - great joy". That struck him and he found the meaning and purpose of life in Jesus. Thus it is that the intellectual life finds its culmination in devotion and the joy of God, and Jesus Christ was par excellence one of those who have shed imperishable lustre on spiritual life.

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Before You Sit in Meditation

Swami Ashokananda

I believe that through meditation, which is the uninterrupted flow of the same thought of God, one can easily attain the Highest, for the mind eventually succumbs to a thought to which it is subjected uninterruptedly for a long time. If we continue to imbue the mind with a certain kind of consciousness - whatever may be the condition of the mind in the beginning, whether spiritual or not, whether filled with love for God or with restless desires - in course of time the desired change will take place.

Sri Ramakrishna laid much stress on this fact. It took me a long time to comprehend one of his teachings on this subject, but when I understood it - and I hope I have understood it - I found great promise and assurance therein. He used to say that the mind is like a laundered cloth which takes the colour of the dye in which it is dipped. At first I thought he meant that the mind must be made absolutely pure before it is plunged into the thought of God to take His colour. There was nothing particularly encouraging in this, because the great problem of almost all spiritual aspirants is the attainment of purity of

mind. Such purification is three-fourths of the battle; for when it is fully accomplished, spiritual realization comes spontaneously. But as I pondered over Sri Ramakrishna's simile, I began to understand it differently. In likening the mind to a laundered cloth, he spoke of the average mind, the mind which is so crowded with worldly and contradictory thoughts and feelings, and which is so averse to the thought of God. It was not the purified mind that he likened to a laundered cloth, but the mind in whatever condition it may be. I saw he meant that even this average mind, if dipped in the thought of God, would take on spiritual colour.

Here is a psychological truth, wonderfully encouraging and helpful but often forgotten by spiritual aspirants. Once a man came to Sri Ramakrishna, saying, "I cannot control my mind - I don't know how." The Master, astonished, said, "Why do you not practise abhyasa-yoga?" Bringing the mind back again and again to the thought of God - that is what abhyasa-yoga means. This practice is particularly commended in the Bhagavad-Gita. Does it matter very much if the mind wanders in the beginning, so long as you bring it back to Him? If we could remember this, half the battle would be already won, but unfortunately we often do not, and then we think of other things and completely forget the spiritual quest. Such being the case, I may profitably discuss certain points concerned with the means of self-control and meditation.

What is the condition of mind suitable for meditation? It is known to all of you, as quietness. This is not a forced calmness, but a calmness resulting from the cessation of most of the strong desires. The things which disturb the mind, whether rising from within or coming from without, are connected with our secret, basic desires. We are always trying to realize certain ends. Though we strive desperately, we often fail, and failure exasperates the mind. Even when success is ours, there are strange results. Because the objects of our desires sometimes elude us while we are enjoying them, we feel disappointed and cheated; and when we are not thus frustrated, we become attached to the objects of enjoyment, in which case, since enjoyment cannot be continually intensified, satiety follows. All these reactions keep the mind continually restless, whether pleasantly or unpleasantly. Thus we find that the thoughts which do not allow our mind to dwell on the Presence of God are connected with the objects of our desires; and that only when we succeed in ridding ourselves of our predominant desires does the mind become comparatively quiet.

We call this state of relative calmness the beginning of pratyahara (withdrawal of the mind), a condition in which the mind, though sometimes restless, is at other times quiet - restless when it comes in contact with the objects of desire, but fairly quiet when it

does not do so. This is a very favourable state. If you find that your mind is naturally quiet when you are not in actual contact with disturbing things, that you like to be alone and that you have a feeling of serenity, recognize this condition as most desirable. In this condition you should try your best to practise meditation; you should never neglect it.

I should like to add that the mind is a very changeable entity. Do not think that any desired condition will continue to exist simply because you have once reached it. Something may arise from within or come from without to distract you, and it may sometimes take five or even ten years for the mind to quiet down again, just as the sea takes days to regain calmness after a storm. I do not mean that we shall never be absolutely safe. Undoubtedly there is a mental condition in which one need have no fear at all, but that is a very high state. When a person has reached that one-pointed state he has burned his bridges behind him: he has reached a condition in which the things of this world can no longer attract him; his mind will never hark back to the world he has left behind. He is secure.

Suppose we have reached the state in which the mind, though at times restless, is at other times quiet. What shall we do then, if we want to succeed in meditation?

We must at the beginning make a firm resolution to be very regular in our practice.

Whatever may be going on, we always manage to attend to our urgent bodily needs; we should be equally faithful to the practice of meditation. Meditation should be as much part of life as breathing. In my country, when a person is very busy he says, "I have no time to breathe." Actually, however, he does breathe. So it should be with meditation, though at first the desire to practise it may appear artificial. Make up your mind; say to yourself, "I must meditate."

Sri Ramakrishna often praised the Mohammedans for their punctuality in prayer. There are not many Mohammedans in this country [USA, before 1963] but there are multitudes of them in India. Wherever a Mohammedan may be, when the time for prayer comes he stops everything, washes his hands and face, and then, spreading his rug even by a roadside if necessary, prays for at least fifteen minutes. Never does he fail to do this. There is no justification for anyone to say that he has no time to meditate.

Extraordinary occasions may arise when one actually has not the time; but to say, "I am too busy to find time for it," or "I am so tired in the evening that it is impossible to meditate," is mere evasion. Nothing prevents the one who thus rationalizes from saving some of his energy for the evening. But he spends it all in the daytime doing other things - sometimes actually harmful things - and when evening comes, he gives himself false

justification for failing to meditate. Ask him about it and he will say, "I need more sleep; I am tired. When I get up I must hurry to the office - where is the time?"

We have a song about a man who, after spending all his life foolishly, finally realized his mistake and said, "I had time for everything else, O Lord, but I did not have time to think of Thee!" Notice this peculiarity of the human mind: there is a time and a place for everything else in our life, but we do not have even fifteen minutes daily for meditation! If you tell me you have not time or energy, do you think I shall believe you? I shall say you are deceiving yourself. Where there's a will there's a way. If you are determined, you can always find time to meditate.

Here I should like to make a suggestion, for I know that discouragement comes.

Sometimes in meditation the mind behaves wonderfully; it becomes calm and concentrated easily, and you are encouraged. But if at other times it behaves badly, refuses to quiet down, and is restless with all kinds of thoughts, you may be tempted to say, "No use for me to meditate. I try, but reach nowhere." I want to tell you this: unless you are born with wonderful qualities of mind and in a very advanced state of spiritual development, you are subject, like every other man who has tried to become spiritual to these fluctuations of consciousness. Do not let them discourage you, and do not think you are not fit to meditate when your mind is not sufficiently spiritual. Some have asked, "How can I approach God with a low state of mind?" If you were cold, would you say, "I am cold, so let me get warm before approaching the fire"? Or would you say, "I am cold and therefore the first thing to do is to go to the fire and warm myself"? If you feel yourself lacking in spirituality, that is the time of all times to think of God.

Do not let your mind mislead you. The mind can trick you in many different ways: sometimes it will tempt directly, and again it will mislead in the very name of religion. This reluctance to meditate because you are "not spiritual enough" is a trick the mind plays on you. Whatever your mental condition, even if your mind be filled with low thoughts, try to think about God. Of course, you may not be able to think about Him or meditate on Him as you would wish, but what does it matter? Keep trying. A vicious horse kicks, rears and attempts to throw the rider, but if the rider manages to stay firmly in the saddle, the horse quietens down, knowing it has found its master. The mind behaves in the same way. It will try to dislodge you, but upon finding that you cannot be shaken off, it will become your slave. That is the secret of the mind, so do not bother about its condition. Make the determination to ride it, and this determination, which implies concentration, is itself a victory.

Next, you must have a fixed time for meditation. In my opinion a person should meditate

not less than twice a day. If you cannot meditate twice, meditate at least once, either in the morning or in the evening.

In India we think there are four auspicious hours for meditation: early morning - at least an hour before sunrise, while it is still dark - is a very good time. Of this, more later.

The second auspicious hour is noon. I do not know whether any special advantage can be derived from it in the city, but undoubtedly in villages, especially in a tropical country, all is hushed at this time and nature seems to stand still. It is so hot that even birds are silent and hide themselves among the leaves of the trees. People are quiet - often they rest at that time - and there is a definite lull; at least I used to feel it in my country, where many use the noon hour for meditation and worship.

The third auspicious time for meditation is early evening. In this country it is unfortunately difficult to meditate then, because it is usually the dinner hour. Yet evening is certainly one of the best times in which to meditate. If you can, you may practise meditation shortly before dinner, but it is not advisable to meditate immediately thereafter, as digestion may be impaired and your health affected.

The fourth hour is midnight. In this part of the world it is not very quiet even at twelve o'clock; yet I think one does feel a certain stillness. Where it is fairly quiet, midnight is wonderfully suitable. As a matter of fact, many believe that midnight is the best of all hours for meditation.

Morning meditation has a certain advantage over evening meditation, in that the mind is quiet when you waken from the night's rest. All the impressions of the preceding day are erased, as if someone had come after school and wiped the blackboard clean. Then too, nature is quiet in the early morning and the city is not yet fully awake and stirring.

Consequently, you find it easier to quiet the mind. There is another advantage: by meditating before the day has begun you give a spiritual impetus and direction to your mind. Though it may tend to lose some of the spiritual strength and enthusiasm as the day progresses, these will nevertheless remain for many hours and sustain you through most of the day.

I should mention here that some may find meditation more successful in the evening than in the morning. There are those who 'wake up' gradually as the day advances. In the morning they are only half-awake, but towards evening wide awake with clear, sharp minds behaving wonderfully. Such persons undoubtedly will find evening or night meditation more successful. If you cannot avail yourself of any of these hours which are especially suitable for meditation, you should choose the one most convenient to you and make every effort to stick to it. The observation of regular hours of meditation is

very important, because the mind functions according to habit. If it is made to think and feel in a certain way at a given time for many days consecutively, it will spontaneously think and feel in the same way whenever that time arrives. If we meditate on God at a specified hour, whenever that hour approaches, our mind, without any effort on our part, will be filled with the consciousness of God. This is no mean advantage to derive from regularity of practice.

Just as you should have regular hours of meditation, so should you have a fixed place in which to meditate. That is one great advantage of temples and churches. Since such places are used for thinking of God, the very air in them becomes charged with His presence and the feeling of purity. You are uplifted by merely going there. An atmosphere similar to that of a temple or church can be created even in a corner of your own room, for wherever an intense thought is held uninterruptedly, the place becomes charged with the quality of it, probably because the material atmosphere and surroundings are connected with the body, which vibrates in accordance with the thoughts of the mind. If our thoughts are pure, our bodies likewise attain to a purity which may be called a spiritual vibration; and naturally, with such a change in the body, the outside atmosphere is also changed.

Thus the fixed place where you meditate will become charged with energy; it will be so permeated with a spiritual quality that your mind will be filled with the thought of meditation as soon as you come to that place. It will be quieted as if by a magic touch, and you will be conscious of a palpable presence. What a great advantage! You can indeed perform this seeming miracle through the one practice of keeping apart a certain place consecrated to thoughts of God.

When we measure the strength of the subtle enemies which hide in our minds - the passions, impulses, greeds and desires - these devices that I have prescribed seem to provide a very frail protection. I admit this. When I say 'hide', I mean that even the best of us have not completely escaped their influence. It is said that one is not wholly free of them until one has actually touched the feet of God. Just as in winter the garden is cleared of weeds and old growth but with the first rain of spring the tiny seeds left lying in the earth sprout to cover it with green, even so, many subtle thoughts, impressions and desires lie hidden in our minds, waiting to spring up at the first opportunity.

Therefore we must be very careful. We know that all these wrong impulses are in our minds and that they would easily cover our whole consciousness if we did not restrain them. Our problem is to keep a great part of our mind - and by degrees a greater and yet greater part of it - free from the domination of wrong impulses and desires, so that

with the mind thus freed we can think about God. In the meantime, what should we do to conquer our desires and adverse impulses? Sometimes they succumb to direct attack, but a flank attack is usually better. Fighting a state of mind directly in order to conquer it can do more harm than good, for thereby the mind often becomes more and more entangled. The wiser course is not to allow oneself to dwell on the condition of mind to be eradicated. Remember this psychological fact: the more you dwell on a mental condition, the more it is strengthened.

There is a story of a monk who used to sit under a roadside tree to pray and meditate. A woman of ill repute often passed by, and he would say to her, "You should give up your evil ways and try to be good. If you do not, terrible things will happen to you after death." Every time the monk saw the woman, he admonished her similarly. In course of time they both died, and the messengers of death came to claim their spirits. It is said that a bright messenger brings a golden chariot to carry a good person to heaven, whereas a dark messenger comes when an evil person dies. It happened that the dark messenger came for the monk and the celestial messenger for the woman.

The monk was astonished. "I think there has been a mistake," he said. "No," answered the messenger, "there has been no mistake. All is quite right." "How can that be?" asked the monk. The messenger replied gravely, "Though seeming to meditate, you were all the while thinking of the woman and her evil deeds. Did not your mind dwell continually on evil? But the woman asked God for help, saying, 'Lord, I am weak. Save me!' Did not her mind dwell on God more than yours?" The monk could make no answer.

This may be an extreme illustration, but it contains a deep psychological truth. It points to a fundamental fact concerning mental action, a fact that you can utilize in your own struggle for self-conquest. When the mind is allowed to dwell on some undesirable quality, it certainly creates a new impression that is many times stronger than the original one. Further recognition of this quality will only make it stronger and stronger until it may even become a complex. I am not saying that you should not restrain your mind, that you should let it be uncontrolled, or as it is called, 'natural'. Nor do I mean that you should ignore your weaknesses. But truly it is often safer not to grapple with these directly. The better strategy is to train the mind to dwell on a new level. First divert it from the thought of your weakness to some innocent and pleasing subject; then lift it by degrees to a higher consciousness. This method of self-constraint does not repress the mind, but rather lifts it from dangerous associations by substituting desirable for undesirable thoughts.

If at present you have some serious fault that seems almost impossible to eradicate, you

must have lent it strength and support by thinking of it and indulging in it. Take away that support, and the fault will become weak and will finally die through lack of nourishment. I do not say that this is easy to do, but with practise you can form the habit, and it is a sure way of making spiritual progress. After starving your undesirable thoughts for some time, you will probably find that, while many of them have died, some have still remained. Do not be too concerned. Let them remain, so long as they do not gain strength. Keep them cornered, and eventually they also will die.

Bad company is one of the most potent causes of mental conflict and disturbance. It would be very well to mix with all kinds of people if we could remain unaffected by their company, but this rarely happens. I do not know of anyone who can do it. Right contacts and association are therefore very important in spiritual life. If you share the company of impure persons and are in frequent contact with wrong things, you will be unable to keep under control the thoughts you are trying to check; they will grow and will finally overcome your mind completely.

A certain amount of asceticism is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Some of you, not eager to meditate, may say, "We shall leave that for our next life," or "We shall take it up a few years hence." Many think that youth is the time to enjoy life, that it is well enough to practise religion after beginning to grow old. In other words, when the world has turned sour, they will go to church wearing a long face and think they have religion. That is not and cannot be religion. What do we bring to God in such a case? A worn-out body and a worn-out mind, scarred through and through. Do you think He is pleased with these? We do not take worm-eaten fruits or wilted flowers to his Altar, but perfect offerings. In the same way, we should give Him the best of ourselves. The offering of a fresh and pure mind pleases Him most. Those who think religion is exclusively for the old make a profound mistake. The young especially should try to be spiritual, for if religious life begins early and the practices I have mentioned are undertaken while the mind is still fresh and pure, then by keeping a close watch over the mind one can keep it unspoiled. Under no circumstances should we allow the mind to become affected by the world. Youth is the propitious time for setting to work. Sri Ramakrishna once said to a young college student: "When a man makes a brick, he puts his trade mark on it while it is still soft. Then, when the brick is dried in the sun and baked in the kiln, the mark becomes permanent. Even so, if you can put the imprint of God on your mind while it is soft, that imprint can never be effaced, but will remain forever.

Practise asceticism - the more the better -; and this does not mean making a wry face as

if you have bitten a sour apple. Practising asceticism should give a pleasure similar to that of riding a spirited horse. Gain the strength to control the forces of your body and mind so that you are not dominated by them. This asceticism is necessary, for without it meditation is impossible.

All the things I have discussed so far are important preliminaries; they should be practised each day of our lives and not merely at the beginning of our spiritual quest. He who practises them rightly can at will withdraw his mind completely, because he has gained tremendous control over it. But until you have been fully established in these practices, many of you may find that during meditation the mind takes some time to reach a state of quietude. This fact should be given careful consideration. If you rush about doing and thinking many things immediately before meditation, what success can you expect?

For some time prior to meditation you should try to be quiet and to feel that you are unrelated to the world, that you have nothing to do with it. As husband, wife, mother, father, child and so on, you have many duties, and there are a thousand things demanding your attention. When approaching God, do you know what you should do? You should go to Him as though the world had never existed for you, as if you had no husband, wife, parents, friends, country - nothing at all. This would be the right feeling in the hour of meditation.

Approach meditation with the feeling of eternity. Who succeeds best in meditation? He who at the time of meditation can feel absolutely unrelated. Do you understand what that means? Try to imagine what eternity is. It is beyond time and consequently beyond all phenomena; it is a condition - if we may call it so - in which none of these relative things exist. When seeking to think of the eternal Lord, you are making an effort for the time being to go beyond all relationships. You must say, "I have no body, no mind. Time and space have disappeared. The whole universe has vanished. God alone is." Then only will the mind have that subtle perception which will enable it to feel God's gracious presence. Thus, before you enter the place of meditation, you must leave everything relative outside.

In our monasteries the monks who are very strict do not allow visitors to speak of their wives, husbands or children, or about worldly things, however important. It is not that they discountenance a person's doing his duty, but that they know that the mind in order to be spiritual must partake of the character of the eternal. There must indeed be some time during the day when you feel absolutely unrelated - because to be so is your true nature. Though you seem to be related to people, you know these relationships are

impermanent. Your true nature is unrelated, and it is in the unrelated condition that you must enter into meditation.

By fulfilling the conditions which I have specified, real and appreciable spiritual progress can be made. But here I must tell you that all spiritual practices, including meditation, depend upon one thing: a great yearning for Truth. Have you that yearning? You may say, "I do not feel it. What then, is the use of meditation?" But is it impossible to create that feeling? The mind's appetite for God can be stimulated deliberately. When by whatever means the mind is made to yearn for Him, the feeling is no less real than if it had come spontaneously. If you wait for time to bring a natural longing, it may never come. Since this longing is essential, create it. At first your mind will fluctuate. But do not be discouraged by these unstable moods of the mind, and above all do not let yourself be defeated.

Suppose that you are a boy and that another boy in the neighbourhood always tries to browbeat you. He has no right to do it, and you know him to be actually a coward. What is the proper course to take? Will you submit to the bully, thinking that you are naturally weak and that to fight him is useless? No, you will deliberately call up the feeling of manliness within you. You will say to yourself, "I refuse to be bullied by him." The next time you confront him, that feeling may partially decline, but you will nevertheless manage to look him in the eye, and you will eventually be brave enough to challenge him. You will have become manly, and you will say, "This is my true nature; I am really strong!"

We are acting similarly at every moment. In acquiring a skill or gaining knowledge in school or college, we succeed by repeated effort. At first, what we are trying to acquire is not natural to us, but once mastered, it appears an essential part of ourselves. This is even more true in spiritual life, and we must exert ourselves accordingly. At first everything seems difficult, and you say, "What actually is my nature? Maybe I am just not religious. Perhaps I am not destined to be spiritual." There were times when I too thought the same. I would consider a certain obstruction too great for me and its removal an impossibility. Then I would remind myself that I was not really the body and mind, but the spirit; that the realization of my spiritual self was my destiny. I knew that if I did not conquer the obstruction then, I was just postponing the task for the future. Why not act at once and finish it? I can truly say, my good fortune lay in holding to this thought. True, I was sometimes tempted to give up the struggle, but then I would think, "I cannot escape my spiritual destiny. Let me therefore realize it now!"

Great longing and faith are very important in the practice of meditation, for without

intense desire for God and faith in Him meditation proves half-hearted and sterile. Where there is no interest in what you are doing, it becomes a mere formality, and effort is soon abandoned.

If you believe in a personal God, pray to Him. By 'personal God' I do not mean God with a body, but God with self-consciousness, who is our Father, Mother, Friend and Lord, who is the all-pervading Creator of the universe. He listens when we pray to Him; we can approach Him in full confidence, just as children approach their parents. Believing in a personal God and loving Him will make it very easy for you to meditate. Dwell on the thought of Him more and more. Do things for Him. Success in spiritual life lies in concentrating every thought, every feeling, every ounce of energy on God.

How will you do it? When you speak, speak of God. When you walk, go to His temple. When you work with your hands, do something in His service. Every function of body and mind must somehow be directed towards Him. If you have to go to an office instead of a temple, make your office the temple of God! If your work is honest it can be done. If it is dishonest, change that work. If changing means even facing starvation, then face it! Courage - that is always necessary. Do not forget this: he who created the world is still behind it and will never let us starve. If we really want the Truth and hence are willing to discard whatever is wrong and untrue, we shall never lose by following the Truth. It is not that things will happen just as we wish, but they will happen with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of benefit.

If your occupation is honest, you can certainly conceive it as a work for God. Whether you are at a desk or doing housework, whatever the nature of your work, meditate on God. Offer to Him what you have done through the day, though it was apparently done for your employer. Have you typed twenty letters and taken them to him? Let him sign them, but afterwards close your eyes and offer all to the Lord. You will thus give a new turn to your thoughts. Yes, it is a different way of doing things. It may appear a little unusual at first, but undertake it anyhow. Little by little a deeper meaning will be revealed, and you will find that this practice is not what you originally thought it to be; it will become tremendously effective.

In this way, whenever we do anything for others or for ourselves, we may think we are doing it for the Lord. Everything in life can then be converted into spiritual activity. There may be some who are able, consciously and deliberately, to do things directly for God. How fortunate they are! That is why people perform elaborate worship. That is why they grow flowers and offer them on the altar, why they burn incense and light candles. Perhaps you do not like such practices? But how else would you spend the hours

of the day? Don't you see that time and energy are wasted by serving the little self? Would it not be better to offer whatever you do to Him? Out of this feeling has come ritualism. Out of this feeling have been built temples, all over the world, where people bring offerings for worship.

However, I am not insisting that all should practise ritualism. Each must worship according to his spiritual temperament. But in some manner you will have to discover how to bring your own thoughts, emotions and actions to the service of the Lord. The more you do it, the closer you will be to Him. Then, when you sit in meditation, everything else will be forgotten, and God alone will fill your heart.

Perhaps you are accustomed to convince yourself of the reality of spiritual truths by means of reasoning. But until you have experienced these truths yourself, let me say that the greatest blessing would be for you to meet one who has realized them in person. You know, the proof of spiritual truths does not lie in reason, argument or any kind of outward demonstration. Their proof lies in the sincere conviction carried by the words of a man who has realized what he expresses. Though others may disagree, I think that this is the one objective proof on which one can rely.

If such an illumined person were to say to me, "My son, you are not really this body and mind; spirit is your true nature; the immortal and eternal being is the real you. Passing things do not belong to you. Try to penetrate the depths; try to realize your true self," I should be forced to accept and to act upon his words. As he spoke, something in his voice would sink deep into my heart; I should not be able to resist it.

How I wish you could all find someone from whose lips such words would fall! You would not then be able to doubt or ignore them, and conviction of your true nature and glorious goal would grow within you. For a time, failure might cause you to despair, but eventually you would say, "All right, let me try again." And you would win.

I have now told you what should be done preparatory to meditation. Your mind can be drawn ever closer to God by undertaking all the various measures I have enumerated. In conclusion, let me stress a few points: Do whatever work is required of you, but direct it to the Lord; then your mind will not be disturbed. Be unrelated. Identify yourself with eternity; then meditation will be very easy. Do not let your mind wander, or worldly thoughts will enter and cloud it - this should never be permitted. Before you sit in meditation, think of the things I have suggested.

When nothing extraneous enters your mind, it will grow calm. Then, in the temple of your heart, you will begin to see the shining face of the Lord. Meditating upon it, you will find it more and more beautiful, and plunged in its infinite beauty, you will forget

all else. You will at last be wholly absorbed in Him.

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Leaves of an Ashrama: 13

Evaluating the Devil's Domain

Swami Vidyatmananda

A book published recently which is causing considerable stir, argues that current religious education has made a bad mistake in setting aside the idea of hell. The concept of a place of punishment is very useful in encouraging better behaviour, and so should not be abandoned.

To a certain extent I agree, the prospect of retribution can be a deterrent to gross appetites and actions, but as a Vedantist I see the matter a little differently. Inferno does exist and should be recognized as existing, but not as a place so much as a state, and not as a sojourn that comes after death, but as an experience of the current life. Suffering the pains of sulfurous jealousy, for example, or the burning misery of wounded self-love, or the unextinguishable fire of desire - who can deny the reality of hell? The wisest men have seen it in that way: Virgil said: "Each of us bears his own hell." Christopher Marlowe: "Where we are is hell." Sir Thomas Browne: "The heart of man is the place the devils dwell in; I feel sometimes a hell within myself." John Milton: "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell." T.S. Eliot: "What is hell? Hell is oneself." The contemporary American poet Robert Lowell perhaps said it most concisely: "I myself am hell."

Or to put it in Vedantic terms: "Ego is hell; hell is ego."

Vedanta's whole emphasis is on mitigating the ego and so of the inferno the ego's presence evokes. "When the ego dies," said Sri Ramakrishna, "all troubles cease." The torment occurs on earth, and the remedy for it is available here also. This is accomplished by struggling towards realization, that effective snuffer-out of the flames

of ego. The literal meaning of the word nirvana is: act of extinguishing.

In his great book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley deliberates at length on the word deliverance and its wider scope. To be delivered means not only being rescued, but it also implies being conveyed somewhere else. Rescued from hell and conveyed to heaven.

Seen in this light, our religious practices become a means, not of warding off some future punishment, but of emancipating ourselves during our lifetime from the penalty of being ourselves. Just think of the joy resulting from being released from one's diabolical ego! What greater inducement could there be to make a person want to pursue his sadhana vigorously?

A vivid description of the process and the goal is found in the Chandogya Upanishad when Prajapati says to Indra: "Rising above physical consciousness, knowing the Self to be distinct from the senses, knowing it in its true light, one rejoices and is free."

This is how to do away with hell.

If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today

Swami Chetanananda

(Swami Chetanananda is the Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis and is a prolific writer authoring works: 'God Lived with Them,' 'Ramakrishna as We Saw Him,' 'They Lived With God,' etc.

How many times we must have thought wistfully: 'If only I were with Sri Ramakrishna when he was alive!' Swami Chetanananda strikes the right cord with many of us in this beautiful article assuring us that Sri Ramakrishna is still with us at all times in different forms.)

The word if comes from doubt, which generates a lot of problems in human life. There is a fascinating story about Kumarila Bhatta, a teacher of the Vedic ritualistic school (Mimamsa), who used the word if at a very critical moment and saved his life. Kumarila

was a South Indian brahmin and a famous Vedic philosopher. He was defeated in a debate with Dharmakirti, a Buddhist logician. According to their agreement, he had to become a Buddhist, so he went to Nalanda to learn Buddhism from Dharmapala. One day his guru, Dharmapala, was criticizing the Vedas. This saddened Kumarila, and he wept in secret. A Buddhist student saw him and informed Dharmapala. Enraged, the guru told Kumarila: "You still have respect for the Vedas! You are pretending that you are a Buddhist and taking lessons from me. I challenge you to disprove my view, if you are capable enough." A fierce debate ensued between the guru and the disciple. Dharmapala was tormented and defeated by Kumarila's sharp arguments. Then Kumarila said: "Without instruction from one who is omniscient, a jiva cannot become omniscient. Buddha was illumined by the knowledge of the Vedas, yet he discarded the Vedas. Is that not theft?"

The angry Buddhists attacked Kumarila, and Dharmapala ordered them to throw him from the top of the palace and kill him. The mob took Kumarila to the top of a tower and pushed him off. As he fell, Kumarila shouted: "If the Vedas are true, may I remain alive without injury." Kumarila fell to the ground but did not die. The onlookers were dumbfounded. Kumarila told them: "O nonviolent Buddhists, I see that one of my eyes has been slightly injured. That would not have happened if I had not said 'if the Vedas are true.'" The Buddhists recognized the divine power in Kumarila and released him. Kumarila escaped death by the power of his faith, but what about us? Our minds are constantly oscillating between doubt and faith: What if Ramakrishna were alive today? Does he really exist or has he merged into nirvana? But, as if, seems to be - these words are constantly popping up in our minds. To remove this horrible doubt, we read the scriptures, practise japa and meditation, seek out holy company, and perform unselfish actions. Still doubt persists. How can we be rid of it? The human intellect cannot comprehend how a huge banyan tree can exist in a seed. Similarly, one cannot understand how the Cosmic God can inhabit an ordinary human body.

Ramakrishna's nephew Ramlal described his doubt to a devotee:

I used to address the Master as *apani* [a term of respect used for seniors or revered persons] because I did not feel that he was my own uncle. As I could not understand his behaviour, moods, or *samadhi*, a doubt arose in my mind. I thought: "The Master is an unlettered person, but still all great scholars are defeated by him. Is he truly an Incarnation of God?" One day I said to the Master: "A doubt has arisen in my mind about you. I am confused." The Master replied: "Look, Ramlal. One cannot understand this mystery through the intellect. You have seen *jilipis* [a type of sweet]. From the outside

they look dry. How would one know that they are full of sweet syrup inside? If you think of me as an avatar, then you are blessed that you have the opportunity to serve me. In addition, you are my blood relative. What else do you want?"

In those days I did not recognize the Master's greatness. Although we were his blood relatives, we did not realize who he was. But through his grace, I have this much faith: since we were born into his family, we have found refuge at his lotus feet. From his own lips I heard that when a man attains illumination, seven generations of his family before and after him become liberated. And to think that the Lord himself was born in our family as a human being! Through his grace and his holy company we too have had many visions and spiritual experiences. Thus he gave us faith and devotion for him.

When we are separated from our dearest ones, we feel empty. This is a natural law.

When the Master was about to leave Dakshineswar for his cancer treatment, Ramlal told him: "Uncle, you are going to Calcutta for treatment. I shall miss you terribly." The Master consoled him, saying: "Think that I have gone to the pine grove or to Calcutta for a visit, and I shall be back soon. This way you won't feel sad."

Ramlal later said to the devotees:

From then on I have never felt that the Master is absent. I experience his presence here and sometimes see him.

The Master told me: "Whoever comes to Dakshineswar - whether known to you or not - please give that person a little bit of prasad and a glass of Ganges water. You will not have to do anything else. This service will give you the result of japa, austerity, or sacrifice." So I do as he told me, and I get immense joy. Truly, I don't have good concentration in japa and meditation, but I practise according to my routine.

Now the number of the Master's devotees has increased. His message has spread within a few years. I see some people who have come from different countries. I don't even know their languages. They roll on the ground of the Panchavati and take dust from that place; and they also take leaves from the banyan tree and bel tree.

These are the signs of love according to the devotional scriptures: In the eyes of the lover, the beloved's face is beautiful; and sweet are the beloved's lips, face, smile, speech, song, and dance. Even the beloved's home and belongings are sweet.

People experience both pain and joy when they are separated from the one they love.

When the full moon reflects on shallow water, the fish play with it and believe that the moon is their companion. When the moon sets, they feel pain; but they wait patiently, thinking of their beloved's return. The lotuses unfold their petals when the sun rises and

close them at sunset. They pass their nights meditating on their beloved, the sun. There is joy in that meditation. We are gross-minded people, so we understand only the joy of physical union. We are unaware of the everlasting joy that comes from union with the Atman. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his Gitanjali:

O Lord, my eyes always remain open for you;
I may not see you,
But I am always eager to see you.
This makes me happy.

Sometimes we think about the joy we would have experienced if we had lived with the Master in Dakshineswar. Swami Brahmananda said: "As long as I lived with the Master I had spontaneous recollection and contemplation of God. An ecstatic joy filled me all the time. Ah, how joyfully we lived with the Master at Dakshineswar! Sometimes we would be convulsed with side-splitting laughter by his humour and wit. What we now cannot experience by meditation, we then attained automatically."

Swami Turiyananda wrote:

Ah, those days at Dakshineswar were like heaven itself! From morning till one o'clock in the afternoon everyone would be busy picking flowers and making other preparations for worship until the poor were fed. In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna would discuss spiritual subjects, and the devotees would listen to him with rapt attention. Even his fun and jokes were related to God. There was no other topic. Everything culminated in his samadhi.

An hour of congregational singing in the company of the Master filled us with such exuberant joy that we would feel transported, as it were, into an ethereal region. But now even meditation fails to evoke that celestial bliss, or even a semblance of it. That bliss would stay with us continuously for a week. We used to feel intoxicated, though we did not know why or how. Who would believe it? It is difficult to convince anyone.

M. wrote: "One may live with an avatar, but one cannot necessarily know him if he does not want to be known. Hriday was asked to leave the Dakshineswar temple. One day he came to see the Master, and standing outside the gate he cried: 'Uncle, take me back. I am deprived of your company and so I suffer.' The Master replied: 'Why, was it not you who said to me, "You follow your ideal and let me follow mine?"' Hriday: 'Yes, I did say that. But what did I know?' Tears also appeared in the Master's eyes. No one can recognize him if he does not want to be recognized. When Hriday lived with the Master,

he did not know who the Master was. When he was separated from him, he realized the Master's greatness."

(to be concluded)

The Teachings of a Holy Man

Swami Turiyananda

Into his presence came many devotees, struggling aspirants, young and old monks. Let us listen as Swami Turiyananda speaks on these several themes.

On the Mind:

It is you who must govern your own mind. Other folks, your teacher, no one can do that for you. Again and again the Master has said, 'You must try a little. Not until then will the Guru reveal the Truth.' From experience I can tell you that if you advance one step towards God, He advances ten steps towards you. If you do not make the exertion, no one can be of any help to you. If in your exertion you meet difficulties we can help you for we also have travelled the same path. Do not let the mental disease styana (idleness) control your mind for with it the mind refuses to do anything.

It is well to analyze one's mind very carefully. Once the Master requested me to increase infinitely my lust, which caused me to be greatly amazed. He then explained his meaning of lust as being the desire to get, secure, have. Then He said, 'Desire to get Him and increase this desire greatly'.

On Devotion:

You question, 'Will not the Lord do anything for His devotee?' Oh yes, he will, but you must first become a devotee, feeling devotion and loving Him. Bhakti, devotion, is no trifling thing. To obtain it the surrender and gift of your mind, life, everything is necessary. If that is not possible, then let tears flow for not having attained love for Him. If you feel miserable because you lack Him know that He is very near you and that the vision of Him and infinite bliss is not far away. Become miserable if you have not

realized God, and the more this mood grows the more you will earn His grace. Intensify it still more and yet more.

There are two forms of Bhakti. First, the ritualistic or obligatory devotion entailing the practice of prescribed amounts of Japa or the performance of Puja in such and such a way. Second, there is loving devotion. At this stage the devotee thinks ardently of God and finds no pleasure in things unrelated to God. For either of these, perseverance is absolutely necessary. To discontinue practice if a little effort does not produce the desired result is folly. Let it be said of you as was said of another that he practised so intensely that an ant-hill grew around him.

On Meditation:

Meditation begins with the unification of the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditation. When there is no longer a separation between these three one may be said to be meditating. Japa becomes functional when a portion of the mind continually repeats the sacred Name automatically. When this becomes experienced then it may be said one has advanced a little in Japa.

The Jnanis meditate in the head, the Bhaktas in the heart. Spiritual consciousness expands as a result of heart meditation, and with the expansion of consciousness there no longer remains any fixed location of meditation.

Japa means that one should utter the sacred Name, at the same time meditating on His form, thinking of Him and loving Him. The mere repetition of God's Name while the mind is attached to worldly things will avail nothing. What is essentially necessary is that we somehow in all ways make Him our own while performing all actions and duties.

On Divine Forms:

The Master possessed and exhibited two moods. Sometimes he did not like Divine forms, not even his beloved Kali. At such times his mind was immersed in the Absolute. At other times he declared that he could not exist without Divine forms declaring to Divine Mother that he did not desire to see Her formless aspect or have Brahmajnana. He who rejects everything and becomes lost in the formless Brahman is as one-sided as the one who realizes only the forms of God and not the formless absolute aspect. There must be a balance sought.

On Yoga:

'The first door of Yoga is the control of speech, non-acceptance of gifts, non-

expectation, desirelessness and love of solitude.' This verse had a profound influence on me for I used to indulge in much talk. When I read it, I thought, 'What! I have not entered even the first door of Yoga!' I then resolved to control my speech. I lived by myself, acted as I thought best and spoke to no one.

On Parigraha (Acceptance of Gifts):

Sankara moulded my life, for before I came to the Master a single verse of Sankara used to lift me a step up and give me a flood of light. Much new meaning to words and thoughts was revealed in those days. Even though you do not accept any gift, Parigraha may still be present for it means to think of the future, thinking of ways and means for the future. Where your mind is, there you also are. Birth and rebirth proceed from Parigraha. If you have no Parigraha where would your mind be? Naturally on the Atman itself. Therefore the practice of Aparigraha (non-acceptance) can take you to the highest.

On Attaining God:

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'A man can be sincere only by virtue of merits acquired in many past lives.' Swamiji has nicely said 'God is not a commodity like fish or vegetable to be had for a certain price.' The sages have stated in the Shastras the several paths by which they attained God. One has stated that one should perform Puja in such and such a way. Another says that one should practice Japa. Narada says, 'Just as the river flows intently towards the sea in order to meet it, not changing its course, even so he who seeks God should move towards Him and Him alone giving up all other concerns.' It is said in the Gita, 'Persons who worship Me alone without being attached to anything else, to them thus ever zealously engaged, I carry what they lack and preserve what they already have.'

On Progressing Towards God:

One will surely know within oneself if one is progressing towards God. Others also know of the progress. All passions, lust, anger and greed wane; attachment to and for objects of the senses becomes less and less, and with detachment peace of heart grows. The real peace is far off however. But when you see that a man's desire for sense enjoyments is growing less and less and his love is extending over all beings, then you may know that he is progressing towards God. Simply repeating the holy name will not do. If a hole of attachment is in the mind the result of all Japa runs through it even as a

man irrigating his field the whole day finds that his field is waterless because of a hole in the wall.

On Stealing, Dependence, Slander:

'He who constantly steals others' property may perform great charities, still he does none. He who always depends on others, may live long, yet he lives not. He who always slanders others may repeat the holy name, yet he does it not,' so said Kabir.

What will it avail if one makes charity with money stolen from others? To live long on the charity of others is as good as death. It is useless for a slanderer to repeat the name of God. This is why Jesus said: 'Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift'.

On Love and Lust:

Love and lust are two things very closely allied. Hence Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Lust is blind, but love is pure and resplendent.' It is lust if you have the idea of man, and love if you have the idea of God in your beloved.

On Control of the Senses:

All trouble is over if the palate and the sex impulse are conquered. When Sri Chaitanya went to Kesava Bharati for initiation into Sannyasa, the latter remarked, 'You are in the bloom of youth and so surprisingly handsome. Who will be bold enough to initiate you into Sannyasa?' Sri Chaitanya replied, 'Sir, you usually examine an aspirant before conferring Sannyasa on him. If you find me qualified, you will naturally be inclined to initiate me also. So please examine me and see if I am fit for it.' Bharati said to Sri Chaitanya, 'Put out your tongue.' The Guru placed some sugar on the tongue. It remained dry and scattered in the air when blown out. There was no need for further examination.

A man who has controlled all other senses except the palate cannot be considered a master of his senses. When the hankering of the palate is controlled, everything else is controlled.

When the palate is controlled the sex impulse is also controlled. Unless the senses are brought under control there cannot be any spiritual progress. Throughout the Gita there is repeated mention of this: 'Therefore, O best of the Bharatas, control thou the senses first, and thereby kill this sinful propensity of lust, which destroys one's Knowledge and

Realization.'

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Editorial

Straightforwardness

Swami Dayatmananda