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### Divine Wisdom

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

August 13 / October 22, 1882

Question:

"Sir, what is the way to realize God?"

Answer:

"Bhakti is the one essential thing. To be sure, God exists in all beings. Who, then is a devotee? He whose mind dwells on God. But this is not possible as long as one has egotism and vanity. The water of God's Grace cannot collect on the high mound of egotism. It runs down. I am a mere machine.

"God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up a bamboo pole.

"You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him. Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as 'Baba' or 'Papa', but the babies can at best call him 'Ba' or 'Pa'. Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many."

Question: (asked by 'M.')

"What does one feel while thinking of God without form? Isn't it possible to describe it?"

Answer:

"You see, one must practise spiritual discipline to understand this correctly. Suppose there are treasures in a room. If you want to see them and lay hold of them, you must take the trouble to get the key and unlock the door. After that you must take the treasure out. But suppose the room is locked, and standing outside the door you say to yourself: 'Here I have opened the door. Now I have broken the lock of the chest. Now I have taken out the treasure.' Such brooding near the door will not enable you to achieve anything."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

August 13 / October 22, 1882

**Controlling Anger (Editorial)**

**Swami Dayatmananda**

Aspirant should have absolute control over anger. Controlling and expressing anger in a right way is a divine quality. Though extremely difficult it is possible to control anger.

Some people consider our generation as a 'generation of anger', and this age as an 'age of rage'. There is road-rage, plane-rage, domestic-rage; and there is even an internet-rage! Hardly do we come across a person who has not felt anger at some time or other in life, not excepting saints. Then we find some people who are less prone to be angry than others. There are some who do not express any anger outside but go on simmering inside all the time. If a person does not appear to be angry but is grouchy all the time we can be pretty sure he is angry.

Anger is a normal emotion. It helps us to defend ourselves in dangerous situations and has its uses in life when controlled properly. But when it goes out of control it can lead to problems to oneself and others. If it is not dealt with properly it can lead to depression, high blood pressure, stroke, or to heart attack. Extreme anger can even cause death.

Is there a thing called righteous anger? Most of us think there is and use it to justify some of our actions. But from the spiritual point of view there is no such thing. Here is what Swami Vivekananda has to say: "Our religion teaches that anger is a great sin, even if it is 'righteous'. I could not for my soul distinguish ever the distinction between 'religious anger' and 'commonplace anger', 'religious killing' and 'commonplace killing,' 'religious slandering and irreligious', and so forth."

What is anger? It is a negative emotion, a concentrated outburst of energy in the form of annoyance, rage, dislike, coldness etc. According to some psychologists anger is 'a temporary state of madness, an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury, rage etc.' Swami Turiyananda regarded anger as concentrated desire. Anger is called a demon by Sri Ramakrishna, for like a demon it keeps us bound to this world.

Without doubt anger is one of the deadliest enemies in spiritual life. According to Vedanta it is one of the six inner passions that block progress in every field of life. If it is not controlled one courts ruin even in this world and can never progress in spiritual life. Anger can manifest in myriad forms. Often it is difficult to recognize; for it can hide its nature under different guises such as cynicism, pessimism, looking down with coldness and indifference upon others, constant grumbling, dissatisfaction with one's life etc. Whatever the expression the underlying cause is the same - anger.

## Causes of anger

Anger, of course, is a symptom and not the disease itself. The root cause of anger is egotism. The ego, when ignorant of its true nature, identifies itself with body and mind. This ignorance leads to passions like lust, anger, greed etc. The Bhagavad Gita gives a graphic description of the cause of desire: "When a man dwells constantly on sense-objects, he feels an attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire (when thwarted) breeds anger. From anger comes delusion; from delusion, failure of memory; from the failure of memory, discrimination is lost; and from the loss of discrimination man perishes." Now we can see that anger, in a way, is thwarted desire and expectation.

## Expressions of anger

Anger can be expressed mainly in three ways - suppression, irrational outburst and sublimation. In some it bursts forth in the form of instantaneous and aggressive behaviour often leading to tragic consequences. Other people, specially those who are timid, try to suppress and internalise this emotion bringing harm to themselves. However it cannot be suppressed for long but will be out some time or other and with greater violence. These two ways of expressing anger are counter-productive and lead to great damage.

But spiritual aspirants have a better and productive way of expressing their anger. They control, sublimate and direct it towards a higher goal. Sometimes it may even be their duty to express righteous anger. Sri Ramakrishna used to say "It is sometimes very necessary to hiss but never to bite!"

Here is a quotation from Aristotle: "Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy." Perhaps only a saint can express anger in this way!

## Ways to control anger

Those who wish to control anger must have a firm determination and a higher spiritual goal. Even a noble but worldly goal may not be enough. Since egotism is the root of all passions we must realise that the only way to control anger is to uproot egotism. Naturally this involves controlling other passions too. It is a hard task but not an impossible one.

Here are some ways of controlling anger:

1. One way is to look upon all persons and objects as divine.
2. Another way is to consider that whatever happens in life is the result of our past Karma. This is easy for those who believe in the law of Karma and its corollary rebirth.
3. Regular meditation, japa, prayer, study of scriptures, keeping company of holy people and places - all these spiritual disciplines are of great help. Marcus Aurelius writes in his Meditation: "When you are angry above measure, think within yourself, how momentary is man's life. Let us think how much more grievous are the consequences of our anger than the acts which arouse it. Let this truth be present to you in the excitement of anger, that to be moved by passion is not manly, but that mildness and gentleness, as they are more human, so also are they more manly."
4. Passions by themselves are neutral. They become good or evil according to the way we use them. In any case they cannot be eradicated. Sri Ramakrishna advises: "Since you cannot get rid of your passions - your lust, your anger, and so on - give them a new direction. Instead of desiring worldly pleasures, desire God. Have intercourse with Brahman. If you cannot get rid of anger, then change its direction. Assume the tamasic attitude of bhakti, and say: 'What? I have repeated the hallowed name of Durga, and shall I not be liberated? How can I be a sinner any more? How can I be bound any more?' If you cannot get rid of temptation, direct it towards God. Be infatuated with God's beauty. If you cannot get rid of pride, then be proud to say that you are the servant of God, you are the child of God. Thus turn the six passions towards God."
5. Having a definite goal and a daily routine helps immensely. Otherwise we are likely to brood over unhappy experiences and increase our anger.
6. Patanjali advocates the eradication of negative emotions by meditating on their opposite, positive qualities. The positive quality opposed to anger is love. Constantly thinking of love gradually erodes anger.
7. Ignorance makes us unrealistic. We expect everything to go according to plan - our plan. This world, unfortunately, does not come up to our expectations many times. So we must be prepared to expect the unexpected and graciously accept life as it comes.
8. Ours also is an age of impatience. We become annoyed if things do not go according to plan and quickly. Deep breathing and relaxation can help us curb undue impatience to some extent.
9. A bit of humour is very helpful. As a wag said, "If one can learn to laugh at oneself one will never again lack entertainment." Humour helps us by making light of things which we take too seriously and makes us see the funny side of life.
10. Above all, prayer for the welfare of all, specially those who injure or annoy us, is of

immense help.

Anger is a passion that every spiritual aspirant needs to address. We come across many interesting incidents in the lives of holy men and women. They show us definite ways and means of controlling it giving us courage and inspiration.

Swami Dayatmananda

### **If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today (continued)**

**Swami Chetanananda**

After the Master's passing away, people flocked to see the Holy Mother and the disciples and devotees of the Master. They wanted to touch those people who had touched Ramakrishna. On 1 September 1986 I went to Rameswaram with Swami Sarvajnananda, a disciple of Swami Shivananda. I tape-recorded his reminiscences, and I include one of them here:

I knew a devotee named Narayanaswamy Iyer, who lived about 75 miles from Madras. He subscribed to the Brahmavadin and knew much about Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and the direct disciples of the Master. He was a bachelor and looked after his mother. He worked in a garden for eight rupees a month. He had a great desire to touch someone who had touched Sri Ramakrishna. When he heard that the Holy Mother was coming to Madras [in 1910], he made arrangements to visit her. Unfortunately someone in his family died, and he was unable to make the trip.

In 1921, when Swami Brahmananda was in Madras, Narayanaswamy was again hopeful of fulfilling his desire. He went to see Maharaj at the Madras Math. Finding that Maharaj was at the Students' Home, Narayanaswamy went there. Narayanaswamy, who was the embodiment of humility, arrived at 1:30 in the afternoon. Maharaj usually rested after lunch, and his attendant scolded Narayanaswamy for coming to visit at that hour. But Maharaj overheard the conversation and told the attendant to send the devotee to his room. I later asked Narayanaswamy about his meeting with Maharaj. He said: "I went inside the room and put flowers and fruit near his feet. Then I held his feet and touched them with my head. Tears were flowing from my eyes. I don't know how long I was there. I was overwhelmed with joy. I felt that my desire had been fulfilled; I had

touched Maharaj, who had been touched by Sri Ramakrishna. Maharaj put his hand on my head and blessed me and then asked me to stand up. I saw his serene face. Then, facing him, I walked backward out of the room, as a sign of respect. Meeting the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest moment of my life."

Nowadays some devotees lament that we have not seen the Master, the Holy Mother, and the direct disciples. Is it possible to establish a relationship with the Master by merely seeing his picture and reading books?

Once a devotee said to M.: "You are very fortunate. You have seen and heard Sri Ramakrishna. You have even touched him and served him."

M. replied: "Don't think in that way. The Master said that all his wealth and power will go to his children. Discrimination, renunciation, knowledge, devotion, and love are his wealth. These good qualities will come to the soul who thinks of him. It is God's grace that a devotee calls on God. It is God who attracts the devotees. It is not to the devotees' credit. He has become everything. Even now if people meditate on the form and qualities of the Master, they will feel his living presence in their hearts and will get the same result as we did while living with the Master."

On another occasion, M. told a devotee: "Do you know what we received from the Master? Burning faith."

#### Inquiry on Ramakrishna

The first aphorism of the Brahma-sutra is: Athato Brahma jijnasa (Hence, hereafter, an inquiry on Brahman). One should inquire about Brahman after becoming a qualified student of Vedanta. Now one asks: Is Brahman known or unknown? If It is a known entity, we all know It; if not, then it is useless to try to know It. The unknown cannot be known. There are long discussions on this subject.

Who is Ramakrishna? Many people have raised this question in the past, many are questioning at present, and many will do so in the future. Ramakrishna's personality is subtle, inscrutable, and full of mystery. In the future, the Ramakrishna-sutra will be written as was the Brahma-sutra. Scholars and philosophers will write books, philosophies, commentaries, and so on, based on the Master's teachings. Here are some Ramakrishna-sutras:

"As many faiths, so many paths."

"Lust and gold are maya."

"Tie the nondual knowledge in the corner of your cloth, and then do as you please."

"When the 'I' dies, all problems are cleared."

"Where there is jiva there is Shiva."

The Master said that some people have seen Varanasi and some have heard about Varanasi. People believe those who have seen Varanasi: there is a power in the words of eyewitnesses. So if we want to learn about Ramakrishna, we must proceed by following the words and writings of those who saw him with their own eyes. These people were not ordinary human beings; they were companions of the avatar Ramakrishna. Later, others went to the Master's companions and asked questions about him.

Ram Chandra Datta, an ardent devotee of the Master, believed that whoever saw Ramakrishna only once became pure and blessed. He even believed that with a mere touch, the Master had purified carriages, coachmen, and even their horses. Upon hearing this, a man remarked: "Well, then there is nothing to worry about. Many people have seen Ramakrishna on the street, and so have the carriage drivers and temple employees. Will all of them be liberated?" Enraged, Ram retorted: "You go and take the dust of the feet of those drivers who drove the Master. Go - go! You take the dust of that sweeper's feet who has seen the Master. That will make your life pure." On another occasion, a young man inquired, "What happened to those boatmen who saw Ramakrishna?" Ram angrily replied: "You rascal, you are asking what happened to those boatmen who saw the Master? Know for certain that they saw the Master through their good karma and that they are more fortunate than you." The young man apologized to Ram and later wrote: "I understood afterwards that a person who saw the Master even once, unknowingly, is blessed and fortunate. I am not fit to touch his feet."

Vijaynath Majumdar wrote in his diary: "Kankurgachi Yogodyana, 1898. The Master's devotees - Ram Datta, Girish Ghosh, Akshay Sen, Haramohan Mitra, Kalipada Ghosh, and Manomohan Mitra - were present. We three or four devotees were also present on that occasion. Someone said, 'Those who had an opportunity to come to the Master were all spiritual aspirants and very pure.' Manomohan commented: 'I don't agree with what you have said. If that were true, what would happen to us? When we went to the Master, we were like these young people [pointing to us]. At that time we had neither any faith, nor devotion, nor goal, nor any enthusiasm to reach the goal. We didn't have any self-control. I tell you from my experience that those qualities did not come to me beforehand. They came to me later by the Master's grace. It is his grace that he accepted us and then faith, devotion, longing, and so on came to us. We did not achieve those by our own effort. We got them by his grace.'"

On 15 August 1897, during the weekly meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission, this question was put to Girish Chandra Ghosh: "What is your opinion about Ramakrishna as an avatar?"



Girish replied: "It annoys me even to consider any other man as possessing his divinity! When I went to see him once, I had just left a house of ill-repute -- and yet he offered me a seat. Once he came to see me at that profane theatre of mine, bearing sweets! And just for me!

"I have never received such love from anyone. To me, Sri Ramakrishna is the Lord; he is God incarnate. A single utterance of his removed the doubts of a lifetime from my mind. Even now, if I find doubts begin to stir, I think of him. Immediately they vanish and do not rise again. I find that it is not difficult to obey him, love him, and worship him. But, indeed, it is difficult to forget him."

In later days, Ramakrishna's disciples faced many questions from the new monks and devotees about the Master. A young monk asked Swami Brahmananda: "Maharaj, does Sri Ramakrishna exist even now?"

Maharaj: "I see you have lost your mind. Why would we have renounced hearth and home to lead such a life? He exists always. Pray to him day and night for a vision of him. He will dispel all your doubts and will make you understand his true nature."

Monk: "Do you see the Master nowadays?"

Maharaj: "Yes, I see him whenever he shows himself out of his mercy. Anybody who has his grace can see him. But how many people have the love and longing to see him?"

Once a devotee asked Swami Saradananda: "Does Ramakrishna have any real existence other than his ideal existence?"

Saradananda: "Yes, he does. Many people have seen him and even talked to him."

Devotee: "Do you have any proof of your own?"

Saradananda: "Yes, I have had some experiences. Why else would I stay here?"

Devotee: "If the Master did exist, why was it that Swami Vivekananda could not talk to him at will?"

Saradananda: "Of course Swamiji talked to the Master. We know that Swamiji talked to the Master as I am talking to you. But it did not happen all the time at Swamiji's wish. For example, you live in Sankharitola; if you want to talk to me you have to come here. Swamiji was not always on the same plane as the Master. Moreover, when you are engaged in action, your mind remains on a lower plane. So if you want to talk to the Master, you will have to control your mind and lift it up to a higher plane."

On one occasion a student asked Swami Premananda: "We hear many stories concerning Ramakrishna, but they are hard to believe if we have not seen him with our own eyes. And without that belief or conviction, everything becomes unreal."

Swami Premananda: "In a legal case the judge trusts the evidence of a good witness, a

well-respected person. Suppose you are the judge and I am the witness. I am telling you that I have seen the Master's wonderful ecstasy, intense renunciation, incomparable knowledge, and unique activities. Can everyone see everything? Some believe by seeing, some by hearing, and some by reading. One needs faith -- firm, unflinching faith. In spiritual life one needs simple, guileless faith."

#### If I Had Been Born in Ramakrishna's Day

There is no limit to the human imagination. But some people disregard imagination, considering it to be mere daydreaming. They do not know that imagination turns into realization. For example, seldom will one find a person in America who does not recognize Mickey Mouse and Disneyland, a famous amusement park. Walt Disney was the founder of this beautiful institution. Once he visited England and found that the government was demolishing old and dilapidated castles. He said to them: "Look, there are some ghosts living in those castles. Why are you making them refugees? If you don't build homes for them, I shall take them to America." With this idea in mind, Walt built the Haunted House in Disneyland. It is an interesting show. One can see those British ghosts singing, dancing, weeping, laughing, and reading the Bible. Thus Walt's imagination became manifest. Ordinary people cannot hold on to anything they imagine firmly enough for it to take form in reality.

In his poem In the Days of Yore, Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

If I had been born in the days of Kalidasa,<sup>2</sup>

I would have become the tenth jewel in the garland of nine jewels.

I would give up all tension and anxiety,

I would move at a slow pace, as if there were no disease or death.

My lifeboat would pass rhythmically over the gentle waves,

If I had been born in the days of Kalidasa.

If I had been born at the time of Ramakrishna, what would have happened? Once I put a question to some Americans: "Suppose you are sleeping in your bed alone in a dark room. If Jesus were to appear before you at that time, what would you do? Think about it deeply." Observing their silence, I said: "I know what you would do: You would dial 911.<sup>3</sup> We are timid. We are not yet ready to see Jesus. Some would say, 'O Lord, please stay in the picture on my wall. I am afraid to see you.'"

It was not easy to live with Ramakrishna. He would call for his niece Lakshmi and the Holy Mother to get up at 4:00 in the morning and practise meditation. If he got no response, he would pour water under the door of the nahabat to awaken them. Since

the Holy Mother and Lakshmi slept on the floor, sometimes their beds would get wet. Sometimes I tease American women: If you had Ramakrishna as your husband, what would you do? I am sure you would file for divorce.

Rani Rasmani once sat inside the Kali temple, thinking of a lawsuit. Ramakrishna slapped her. The Master also slapped Jay Mukhopadhyay of Baranagore, who had been repeating the mantra absent-mindedly as he sat on the bank of the Ganges. Those who were admonished by the Master in this way were truly blessed. From then on, whenever they became distracted during their spiritual practices, they would think of the Master. Thus he turned their minds towards God forever. Sometimes devotees think that their meditation would be deeper if they received a few slaps from the Master.

Mathur was very grateful to the Master, who protected him and his family from many calamities. For his part, Mathur took care of the Master's needs for fourteen years. They had a wonderful relationship. Mathur wanted to plan for the Master's welfare during his absence. He consulted with Hriday and planned to transfer a large property to Ramakrishna's name. When the Master heard about it, he became angry and tried to hit Mathur, saying, "You rascal, you want me to be a worldly person!" Mathur ran out of the room, closing the door behind him.

When the Master saw Latu sleeping one evening, he scolded the boy and told him his service was no longer needed. The evening was meant for meditation. Latu apologized and vowed that he would no longer sleep at night; he followed this vow until his death. The Master asked the Holy Mother to give Baburam four chapatis for his supper. When he heard that Baburam had eaten more than four chapatis, he told the Holy Mother not to give extra food to the disciples: if they ate too much, it would make them drowsy and they would not be able to meditate at night. The Holy Mother said: "Why are you so worried because he ate two more chapatis? I shall watch the boys in the future. Please don't scold them for eating their food."

The great writer Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod decided to visit Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar. He went to Alambazar, which is very close to Dakshineswar, but returned home. He heard that Ramakrishna could read others' minds; he would be terribly embarrassed if the Master should mention what was in his mind in front of others. It was for this reason that he did not visit Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna was the embodiment of purity and renunciation. He came to the world to show people how to love God, teaching each person according to his or her aptitude and capability. Sometimes he was as strong as a thunderbolt, and sometimes as soft as a flower.

We often wish that we could have lived with the Master. This reminds us of the Holy Mother's situation. She recalled: "Sometimes it happened that I could not see the Master even once in two months. I would console my mind by saying: 'O mind, what good karma have you done to see him every day?' I would stand behind the split bamboo fence to listen to his kirtan. Thus I developed rheumatism in my feet." This brings tears to our eyes. She served her husband and sacrificed her personal happiness for the good of humanity.

(to be continued)

## **Religion and Science - Conflicting or Complementary**

**Umesh Gulati**

Are science and religion or faith and reason contradictory or complementary? Most people think that the answer is quite obvious; religion is based on faith, while science is based on reason. The dictionary meaning of faith is: a belief in something which is not based on a proof, or subject to verification. So all religious dogmas and doctrines, including the existence of God are a matter of faith. Scientific laws, on the other hand, are based on observation of outside nature; gathering and classifying facts; formulating theories and deducing their consequences; finding tentative inter-relationships; and finally, verifying the results.

However, this conflict between science and religion is based purely on experience in the West. It is well known that before the Enlightenment and Renaissance the Church of Rome wielded so much political power that no rational person could dare indulge himself by saying anything contrary to the accepted position of the Church. Fortunately, science ultimately triumphed over religion, in the sense that scientists could speak and publish freely and became cultural heroes. By the end of the 19th and throughout the 20th century, thanks to many technological applications that followed from discoveries made in the physical sciences, lives of millions of people throughout the world have improved in terms of an increase in life expectancy, reduction of infant mortality, elimination or control of many diseases, and above all, overall increase in the standard of living. The revolutionary changes in transportation and communication, including

Internet communication and also space technology, have reinforced this trend. As a result the prestige of science has soared while most people are indifferent about religion.

Swami Vivekananda who had come to America in 1893 to attend the first World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and stayed in the West for nearly four years, laid his finger on the right spot by pointing to the reason for the decline of religion. He said that religion is a science or a study of humanity's struggle to grasp the infinite; but it was seldom taught so. He explained this scientific approach to Vedanta in one of his lectures - "Religion and Science":

"Experience is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of experience [or realization]. This should not be so. There is always, however, a small group of men who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics in every religion speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion. Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world, just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with truths of the physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is the book of nature. The book from which to learn religion is your own mind and heart."<sup>1</sup>

What the learned Swami meant was that experience provides a direct insight, which lies outside the realm of the intellect and is obtained by transcending intellectual reasoning rather than thinking. He would often stress the point that "religion does not consist in talk, or doctrines, or books, but in realization; it is not learning, but being." (V. 4, p. 35) Nearly one hundred years later, Karen Armstrong, a very well known writer and former Catholic nun, echoing his point argues that we "no longer have the sense that we are surrounded by the unseen."<sup>2</sup> According to her, since our scientific culture educates us to focus our attention on the physical world, we have come to believe that God too is a Reality 'out there,' a projection of our own fears and desires. Since very few, if any, claim to have seen the Reality that we call God, traditional religions want their followers to accept the existence of God on faith.

Armstrong has rightly pointed out that God in Hinduism is not seen as a Being added on to the world as we know it, and there is no way that we could fathom its existence by reason, but we can feel its existence by an experience (anubhava) that cannot be expressed in words. She goes on to say: "It is impossible to speak to a God that is immanent as this or to think about it, making it a mere object of thought. It is a Reality that can only be discerned in ecstasy in the original sense of going beyond the self. Like

the gods, reason is not denied but transcended."3

There are many thinking people in the West who believe that with the decline in the prestige of religion something of great value has been lost. Therefore, these people are trying to revive religion, which is free from dogma and superstition, but is allied with reason. It is here that the Indian religious tradition can provide some guidance based upon its own experience. Three thousand years old Upanishads, collectively called Vedanta, didn't present Vedanta as finished creeds, dogmas, or doctrines to be accepted without questioning, but, like any science - biology, physics, etc. - as a subject for discussion, experiment, and especially, experience, thereby making Vedanta a dynamic and living organism. Swami Vivekananda said it well:

Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. (Volume 2, p.374)

The Upanishads say that Reality is one and can be studied in its two fields of external nature and internal nature; we need to have both faith and reason to investigate these two dimensions of reality. But by "faith", we mean the Sanskrit 'Shradha', not faith as mere static belief, believing everything that is said by any authority without subjecting it to evidential tests. Vedanta scholar Shankaracharya, and one of India's great philosophers of the eighth century, defines Shradha thus: "a firm conviction, based upon intellectual understanding, that the teachings of the scriptures and of one's own guru are true - this is called by the sages the faith that leads to realization of the Reality." So, shradha here means much more than what is indicated by its English word "faith". It implies a faith with a view to investigating, understanding and realizing the truth of what has been taught.

In fact Vedanta does not stop there; like any other science it also provides a spiritual discipline or method to realize the ultimate Reality. Three steps are necessary to learn the truth of the ultimate Reality. First, it must be heard from the scriptures and one's guru. Then it must be reflected upon and tested, and the teacher should be questioned to get its meaning clearly understood. Finally, it must be meditated upon and realized. So, it is not enough to believe in the words of scriptures and guru; our faith must lead us to the realization of the ultimate Reality, called Brahman in Vedanta. So, faith in Vedanta is dynamic, which means that if one believes in God, one must do all that is necessary to "see" and realize God.

Here we would like to pose a question to scientists. Does shradha as it has been

explained above have any place in science? We believe it does. If a scientist wants to find the cause of an occurrence, of say, the bird flu, he must have faith in the fact that there indeed is some unknown virus causing the disease in question. He must also have faith in the worthiness of his cause. Without that faith the scientist will not make the necessary effort to look for the virus, and no funding institution would be willing to underwrite the project. Viewing faith from the point of view of scientific reason, physicist Sir Arthur Eddington says: "In the age of reason, faith yet remains supreme for reason is one of the articles of faith."<sup>4</sup>

So, faith and reason are complementary, not contradictory, in Vedanta, and there is no conflict between science and religion here. Having said that, one must also recognize, which modern science also has begun to recognize, that science deals only with the things of the outside nature, things that change and perish. The German philosopher Kant once said that by knowing an object the thing-in-itself remains unknown.

Eddington, a Mathematical physicist, said that science gives us knowledge of structural form and not of its content. (Cf. Science and Religion, 74.) At the same time many even among scientists like Eddington and others feel that all through the physical universe runs that unknown content, which their method is not built to discover.

It is here that the science of religion, based on the ancient Upanishads, has made a unique contribution. As was pointed out before, according to Vedanta literature, the end and aim of religion is experience of God (anubhava in Sanskrit), through the steady growth in man's spiritual awareness. According to this tradition each soul is divine; the goal is to realize this divinity through discipline of the mind and discipline of the sense organs - through sama and dama. The Upanishads proclaim that when one's mind is able to still the clamour of the sense organs and becomes pure itself, one will be in a state of yoga, and will be able to directly comprehend the Reality, or Professor Eddington's "unknown content," as it is.

So, not only does Vedanta see no conflict between science and religion, it sees great possibility of a happy synthesis of both of these disciplines, which can very well make the lives of millions of people more joyful and meaningful. Besides, while Vedanta does not shy away from subjecting its conclusions to rational scrutiny, it expects science also to recognize the limitations of rationalism and logical reason. From Vedanta's perspective the chief limitation of scientific reason is in its sole reliance on the observed data of the external world derived from the senses and its neglect of the inner world experienced by the observer. The Bhagavad-Gita calls the 'without' of nature as the aspect of ordinary nature (apara vidya in Sanskrit) and the 'within' of nature as the

aspect of higher divine nature (para vidya). The combination of these two constitute the complete education for fulfilment for all men and women today.

Science has made tremendous strides in unravelling the wonders and truth of outside nature, and using resulting technology for the welfare of all humanity. But scientific knowledge has very little to do with the para vidya. This latter is experiential and transcends reason. Since science has, until recently, regarded matter as the primary or only reality, it has left out many subtle aspects of reality. Recognizing this limitation, the late quantum physicist Heisenberg said:

"The progress of science was pictured as a crusade of conquest into the material world. Utility was the watchword of the time. This frame was so narrow and rigid that it was difficult to find a place in it for many concepts of our language that had always belonged to its very substance, for instance, the concepts of mind, of the human soul, or of life."<sup>5</sup>

The limitation of classical physics became all the more apparent with the discovery of a mass of new facts regarding the physical world, especially of the subatomic world. Both the relativity and quantum theories have repudiated the exclusively 'objective' character of the so-called objective world studied by science, and the consequent change of reality, because modern science has discovered that the subject or the observer enters into its knowledge of the objective world, and may be seeing the same reality differently at different times and in different attitudes. Therefore, it is but logical that it must first inquire into the unique datum of the observer, or the self, with a view to investigating the reality underlying all phenomena. This can be done, according to Vedanta, by controlling our sensate nature and achieving moral purity.

By thus purifying our mind, we develop a rare insight or fuller knowledge of finding a changeless Reality, Brahman, in the depth of experience, which, in the words of Sri Ramakrishna, is beyond causality. He called this fuller knowledge vijñana: "Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has seen it is a jñani. But he who has drunk it has vijñana, that is to say, a fuller knowledge of it."<sup>6</sup> Equipped with this insight or vijñana, one ceases to see the outside nature and the inside nature as divorced from each other, but looks at them as forming one integral Reality of Pure Consciousness, the Atman or Brahman. The Atman is thus the unity of all experiences. "And that what seems to be plurality, is a series of different aspects of this one thing, produced by a deception (the Indian Maya)."<sup>7</sup> Or, as Swami Vivekananda once said: "Art, Science, and Religion are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this, we



must have the theory of advaita [non-duality school of Vedanta]"<sup>8</sup>

In the Bhagavad-Gita (IV. 10) Sri Krishna puts it very clearly: "Freed from attachment, fear, and anger, many people, purified by the discipline of spiritual knowledge, have attained to oneness with Me." In this transcendental state one discovers unity in diversity; that One and the many are the same Reality. Without such realization of underlying oneness it would be difficult to shed selfishness, the feeling of 'I' and 'mine,' hatred and separateness. The realization of oneness, however, will foster a democratic spirit, universal brotherhood, and inter-connectedness; also aesthetic, moral and ethical values in society. Echoing this vision of Vedanta and all mystical thought that the fundamental search for reality has taken twentieth-century scientists, Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg and others, beyond the senses and the sensory world of objects, Berkeley University Physics professor, Dr. Fritjof Capra says:

"On this journey to the world of the infinitely small, the most important step was the step into the world of atoms. Probing inside the atom and investigating its structure, science transcended the limits of our sensory imagination. Atomic physics provided the scientists with the first glimpses of the essential nature of things. Like the mystics, physicists were now dealing with a non-sensory experience of reality, and like the mystics, they had to face the paradoxical aspects of this experience. From then on, therefore, the models and images of modern physics become akin to those of Eastern philosophy."<sup>9</sup>

Ironically, we began this essay by defending religion and asserting that it is not in conflict with science; in fact, it complements it. Now as we approach the end of this piece, it is the turn of scientists to point out, as the above quotation indicates, parallels between modern science (relativity and quantum theories) and religion. One of the parallels that emerged in the twentieth century between science and the Eastern religions - Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism - is sharing their language problem. For example, Heisenberg said that when a modern physicist wants to speak in some way of the structure of the atoms, he cannot "speak about atoms in ordinary language." This state of affairs is not new among the Eastern religions, because these religions subscribe to what Erich Fromm calls, a paradoxical logic, under which reality can be perceived only in contradictions<sup>10</sup>: "It is and it is not." "It is neither this nor that." Or as the Bhagavad-Gita puts it, "It is without and within all beings, it is far and it is also near." (13.15) The Isha Upanishad also puts it beautifully: "It moves; it moves not. It is far, and It is near. It is within all this, and It is outside of all this."

Since according to Vedanta, Reality can be perceived in contradictions, any attempt to

express it in words will be to limit it; for it is beyond speech, thought and ideation, and a finite mind cannot capture the infinite. Sri Ramakrishna once said that our tongue has defiled everything, Vedas, Puranas, etc., except Brahman. For no one has been able to say what it is.<sup>11</sup>

Modern physics is also discovering that at the subatomic level deterministic laws of classical physics are no longer valid. At the subatomic level, the solid material objects dissolve into wave-like patterns of probabilities, and these patterns are not probabilities of separate objects, but of interconnections. According to Professor Capra: "Quantum theory thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe. It shows that we cannot decompose world into independently existing smallest units. " (Ibid. p. 68) Indeed the most famous case of a paradoxical nature of reality is that of the concepts of particles and waves in modern physics. Says Professor Capra (Ibid. 152):

"This dual aspect of matter and radiation is indeed most startling and gave rise to many of the 'quantum koans' [Zen puzzles], which led to the formulation of quantum theory. It has taken physicists a long time to accept the fact that matter manifests itself in ways which seem to be mutually exclusive; that particles are also waves, waves also particles."

So what we see in modern physics today is nothing but an echo of what Vedanta has said all along. As recently as about the end of the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna expressed it very eloquently. He once asked M., the chronicler of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?" M., replied: "Sir, I like to think of God as formless." Then Sri Ramakrishna said:

"Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction." (80)

Before we conclude, there is one more parallel worth mentioning. The sages of the Upanishads have always maintained that Brahman as Consciousness pervades everything. The whole universe has come from Brahman, lives in Brahman, and finally dissolves in it. Modern science is now saying the same thing: " virtual particles can come into being spontaneously out of the void, and vanish into the void Like the Eastern Void, the 'physical vacuum' - as it is called in field theory - is not a state of mere nothingness, but contains the potentiality for all form of the particle world." (Capra: 222) So, it is now amply clear that science and religion, when unbounded by creed or dogma, are complementary. Both these disciplines have the identical aim of discovering the truth

and helping humanity to grow physically, mentally and spirituality, and achieve fulfilment. Together they have a great potential of producing integrated human beings. Such a vision has found a very lucid expression in the words of Swami Vivekananda (Complete Works, vol. 1, 124): "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal [of life] is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external [through physical sciences] and internal [through ethics, art and religion]."

## **A Holy Man Speaks**

### **Swami Saradananda**

A door of instruction, inspiration and experience swings open to the seeker who pauses to hear and reflect upon the words spoken by the holy soul, Swami Saradananda. Let us have ears to hear, and hearts to understand and do. Come draw near his spirit while he speaks.

On the repetition of the Lord's name:

"The Master (Sri Ramakrishna) came to make religion easy, for earnest seekers were being burdened unnecessarily with the weight of so many rules and regulations. It is his teaching that no special times or places are necessary for the repeating of the name of the Lord and the worship of Him in the heart. Regardless of circumstances or surroundings the name of the Lord can be chanted audibly or within secretly. The Master did not stress or give much importance to external observances. With regard to the means of worship he allowed much freedom. Choose for yourself that which suits you best. If you like to think of God with form, you will reach the goal; if you like better to think of God without form, that is well also, for you will attain the same goal. Whichever is your choice, be steady, unwavering, persistent. Progress will be yours without fail.

"Concerning the changing of clothes, the taking of baths, and other external observances before chanting the name of the Lord and worshipping Him in the heart, do so if it is

possible; if you are unable to observe these externalities, mere observances of tradition, go on calling on Him unmindful of ought else save Him. The Master once sang a song to me and told me, 'Assimilate any one of these ideas and you will reach the goal.' The song which He sang went thus:

'O Lord, Thou art my everything, the sole support of my life, the quintessence of reality. There is none else beside Thee in this world whom I can call my own.

'Thou art happiness, peace, help, wealth, knowledge, intellect, and strength; Thou art the dwelling house and the pleasure garden; Thou art the friend and relative.

'Thou art this present life, the sole refuge; Thou art the life hereafter and heaven; Thou art the injunction of the scriptures and the Guru full of blessings.

'Thou art the way and the goal; Thou art the creator and preserver and the worshipped; Thou art the father that punishest Thy child, the loving mother and the storehouse of infinite bliss art Thou.'"

On doubting the existence of God:

"If there is doubt in your mind concerning the existence of God, then question Him thus: 'I do not know whether Thou existeth or not, whether Thou art formless or with form. Do Thou make known to me Thy real nature.' You will not remain long in wonderment."

On the way of selfless work, or Karma Yoga:

"Through selfless work one's mind becomes purified, then arises Knowledge and true devotion. Knowledge is the true nature of the Self which, being covered with ignorance, remains unmanifest. By the performance of selfless work, the covering of ignorance is removed. As the mind becomes increasingly pure true Knowledge begins to unfold; in purity Knowledge and the knower become one. There is a story in the Mahabharata of a chaste lady who attained Knowledge through service to her husband and through performing other household duties. In the Gita there is the teaching, 'By work alone Janaka and others attained perfection'."

On spiritual practices which sometimes seem mechanical, and lifeless:

"If one follows the same routine every day it is quite natural that sometimes spiritual practices seem to be automatic. If there seems to be any particular portion of the Sadhana on such days which appeals more than another, devote yourself to that specific portion with earnestness. Several days may follow in which certain other practices may be neglected. It matters little, for when the practices are again resumed you will find

new delight in their performance.

"Before you meditate think of the Master. In so doing good results will be assured. Sometimes think that He is in everything and everywhere; that you are, as it were, immersed in Him even as a pot is immersed in the ocean. Let your thoughts be centred on that Supreme State of the all-pervading Deity whom the sages realize for all time like the sky extending farther than sight can reach. He knows everything about you. From Him there can be no hiding for He knows even your inmost thoughts.

"Benefit and progress can only be known through regular practice, therefore it becomes part of the necessary discipline to have and keep regular periods of time for the practice of spiritual exercises. These practices if performed regularly each day give to the practicer inner strength and inner joy in peace. Practice, and you will begin to feel, to experience for yourself. Why engage in idle talk, speculation, and pointless discussion? It is fruitless and leads to waste. Everyone talks, but no one does anything. Go to Japa and meditation. Labour hard and you will know everything in time. Exertion brings its own reward. Why not practice as you have been instructed? See for yourself."

On the finding of pleasure in thinking of the Master's life:

"To find pleasure in anything both the brain and the heart must unite. Through mere intellectualism one does not obtain pleasure. Intellectualism alone leads to lifelessness. If what you have read about the Master appeals also to your heart then alone you will obtain delight by thinking on His life and He then will seem to be alive, truly living."

On outward circumstances and adjustment:

"The scriptures say that one can attain Knowledge by practising spiritual exercises while being engaged in work. It is not necessary then to refrain from work. If the mind is drawn towards Him then where is the need for change of environment? When nothing is possible without His will, then what is the use of planning? Is it not better to depend on Him and do as He wills. Moreover, if one changes one's environment it requires great effort to make adjustments to the new conditions. Therefore let the environment remain as it is and continue calling on the Lord. Overcome all circumstances and environment through Him. When His will bids circumstances and environment to change, then accept the change, not before."

On the question: "Does renouncing every undertaking" (Gita) mean the renunciation of all work or the performance of work without the idea of Ego?

"Do the work in hand to the best of your abilities. It is necessary for you to plan and use various means for the fulfilment of your work. Plan well and choose the best means. That work which is assigned or which becomes your share, do it excellently, do it supremely well, not for honour or praise, or notice, but because it is your offering to the Lord. It is not good to take up work aggressively, to take on more tasks. One soon finds that one cannot perform any of them well and the result is a disturbed mind clouded by worry and anxiety. This hinders spiritual progress."

On realizing God:

"After one realizes God, the world seems to be a mere appearance like a mirage. One knows well that there is no water in a mirage. Even so though there seems to appear a world with names and forms it is but an illusion, it is Maya and remains a nothing. One must first attain Knowledge, then one returns to this world of diversity seeing everything as before surely, but no longer being attached or attracted to anything in it. Prior to realizing that a mirage is an illusion, one expects water, but when one has the knowledge of its nature one no longer expects to find water in it. So it is also with the one who has attained Knowledge. Though the world of diversity is experienced after Knowledge, one no longer understands that diversity to be real and therefore ceases to have any attachment to it seeing only the unity and oneness.

"Science has reduced our attachment for many things. Take for instance, the phenomenon of colour. In reality no object has any colour of its own. Solar light is composed of seven different colours. Every object absorbs different colours of light and reflects the rest of the spectral colours. The reflected colours become the colour of the objects we see. We are attracted by the beauty of coloured objects, when in reality the beauty is dependent upon the light of the sun. That which is beautiful to us now, may, due to a change of conditions, lose its beauty, even becoming ugly. To remember these things will aid one to become less attracted to things and objects."

On making the thought tally with speech:

"Be sincere. Your inner life must tally with the outer. We utter the name of the Lord superficially, too superficially so much of the time. We say, 'I am Thy servant; Thou art my Master; Thou art my Lord; I have renounced all for Thee; I call Thee, Lord, come unto me.' But we harbour withal all sorts of evil thoughts in the mind. This must not be so. As you speak, so you must think. This means that while you take the name of the Lord think of Him alone. Sri Chaitanya used to say, 'That is verily That,' which is to say,

Name is verily God Himself. They are inseparable."

On the difference between a Jiva and an Isvara:

An ordinary Jiva has to attain everything through tremendous exertion. When he reaches the highest state of Knowledge he can no longer return to the ordinary plane of existence. But Isvaras are born as Incarnations for the good of the world, having Maya's veil outside but perfect Knowledge within. They can return to normal consciousness from the Supreme State of consciousness. An Incarnation is always established in perfect Knowledge. But according to His sweet will, He occasionally puts on the veil of Maya. In thus choosing to put on Maya He feels wants like ordinary mortals do. Their difference lies in power (Sakti). The Master used to tell this story: Three men took a walk. Suddenly they heard sweet sounds of music coming from an enclosure nearby. Finding no door, one of them found a ladder and with great difficulty climbed to the top of the wall. To his amazement he saw a wonderful performance of dance, music, and the like. Overwhelmed with delight, he at once jumped inside saying nothing to his companions concerning what he saw. The second man also climbed to the top, and in his joy likewise jumped in. But the third behaved differently. Standing on the wall, he also saw what was going on inside. But he considered, 'Should I be so selfish as to enjoy this alone? No. Let me call others. Let them come and see and enjoy.' Thinking thus he descended, called many people together and told them what he had seen within the walls. Incarnations are like this last man. Their difference lies in the manifestation of Sakti. It is a great heart alone which can share with others what it acquires after great struggle. What renunciation! What patience!"

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**Freedom in Vedanta**

**Stuart Rose**

Entrance to the spiritual path can be in any number of ways: sometimes the passage is smooth, often it is haphazard. But at some point, if we so decide, we start to take our spiritual practice more seriously, and work out precisely what it is that we are doing, where we want to get to, and what, ultimately, we wish to achieve. Then we might decide to make a shift in our practice and begin making it more ardent. This can happen in stages: becoming more sincere or determined each time a shift occurs. However, the original nature of the ultimate achievement we desire need not change. As we get nearer, this goal becomes more clear, more feasible, more desirable. Spiritual practice now becomes much more important, more all-inclusive, more engrossing. The conclusion of this path, and I suggest all spiritual paths, is freedom - complete and absolute freedom. What this entails is the subject to explore here.

The text which has influenced this article to a large degree is one of the most important in the writings of Vedanta. It is Bhagavatpada's Viveka-Cudamani, translated as The Crest Jewel of Discrimination. Bhagavatpada Sankaracharya wrote commentaries on all of the principal Vedantic srutis - the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahma Sutras - but he also wrote original works, and these allowed him license to express the teachings of Vedanta in an illustrative and poetic - as well as explanatory - manner. Viveka-Cudamani is considered to be the 'crest-jewel' of these.<sup>1</sup>

Several inter-related questions are now asked about the subject of freedom, and answers - or at least responses - are given to them. There are five main questions, all of which are basic - or, rather, fundamental - in Vedanta. This article is an overview, not a detailed exposition; which means that there is much more to the subject than can be said here.

What is freedom?

The word 'freedom' implies its opposite, that something is restrained, something is in bondage (bandha), held in check in some way. So, to attain freedom is to overcome these restraints: it means that action is required, otherwise bondage remains, remaining as the norm.

We know a little about what freedom can mean in the mundane sense. When we are free of something - for example, leaving school or work for the day (or more so if it is left for good) - there can be a sense of relief, a throwing off of constriction and limitation, and a feeling of elation. It's a great, happy feeling, although there is still limitation.

However, the freedom which is being talked about here is much more all-encompassing



than this. It is the highest sense of freedom that a person can have, the greatest happiness and joy it is possible to experience, it is without limitations. This freedom is so great that it is beyond verbal description. Even the word 'experience' used here is inappropriate, as will be made clear.

This total freedom can be described as an absorption or merging of the individual into the Absolute. But what does this mean? It is the experience of complete Oneness - a transition from duality (dvaita) to non-duality (advaita) - eternal and infinite. It is uncompromising freedom from everything which is dualistic; and that includes everything; nothing is left out.

The idea of a complete Oneness is the *raison d'être* of Vedanta. It is a fundamental fact, not a belief: it is provable through any person's experiences, a point we will return to. The Sanskrit words for 'freedom' are *moksha* (liberation), and *mukti* (release), which can be a living release (*jivan mukti*), or one at death (*videha mukti*). Other religions have different words to describe freedom, although whether they exactly equate with the Vedanta understanding is not the concern of this article.

An important difference between Advaita Vedanta and other ideas is that gaining freedom can be achieved in this life (*jivan mukti*), not at some other point in time or place. All of Vedanta is based on what can be experienced - in this regard it is scientific - and the fact of finding freedom in its fullness while alive is proven in that there are many instances where it is known to have occurred: Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi being two famous examples.

It has already been suggested that freedom is the conclusion of the path to which all spiritual people aspire. However, if I do not aspire to it, then it means that such freedom is unwanted. This in turn means that unless I change my mind, I will be forever bound to return to the suffering of life (*samsara*), again and again.<sup>2</sup>

It may be thought that this statement is too black and white, that there is a middle ground, a something or degrees in between bondage and freedom. I might know that I want freedom, but I also might know that it will not be achieved because I cannot, for whatever reason, earnestly follow a spiritual path. Yet if something (anything) is truly desired, then it can be attained. So, too, with freedom; there is no difference, as will be made plain.

To this end, the importance of coming to a firm knowledge and understanding (*jnana*) about what the Absolute is (although not necessarily a complete knowledge) as soon as possible on the spiritual path, cannot be stressed enough. We need to know where we are headed, otherwise we will just go round and round in circles, always lost. This

knowledge is the foundation of the spiritual path, and the strength of our practice depends on its sureness. If it is not solid then in turn what is built on it will be insecure, shaky, and liable to fail.

We can come to know more about what the Absolute is by reading the descriptions given by sages over the centuries, by attending satsangas, and by close attention to our thoughts about it. These activities will bring us to a clear and definite understanding of the Absolute. 'Seeing' the goal makes it easier to build a straight path to it.

The Absolute has been given many names: Brahman, Paramatman, Atman the Self, God, Freedom, That, and more - these words all refer to that state of absoluteness and perfection, which seems so subtle and yet all-encompassing that no words can describe it.

What is more, a description of the happiness of this freedom also cannot be given in words, although the 'taste' of it can be felt or intuited. It is simply the most happy state in existence: in fact, it is described as pure existence (sat), and pure consciousness (chit), the effect or nature of which is sublime bliss (ananda). It is the point or consummation of all spiritual aim, where all such paths converge.

This bliss is nothing whatsoever to do with the hedonistic 'pleasures' of life: eating, sleeping, having sex, being comfortable - they all have their opposites, their downsides, which are often greater, and sometimes longer lasting. This state of freedom has no downside. It has only one aspect, and this is total blissful peace.

We can experience love, and this is the highest experience that we can have for something, some 'object' - most notably a person (for example, a partner, child, or parent), but also for what we consider to be beautiful (for example, nature, music, a person's smile, and so on). This is known fact, and is the experience of all. It is duality (dvaita); it always requires the other for the experience to come about. Spiritual freedom is a much greater experience than this because it is completely without the shackles or restrictions of external influence; it is completely subjective, non-dual (advaita). Bliss (ananda) is different from love because it is without the object of love - for example, for the husband or wife, mother or father. It is completely free of all such limitations (upadhis).

It is also, and most importantly, freedom from me, and my thoughts. I cause all of my happinesses, and all of the pains in my life: I cause all of my sadnesses, all of my anger, all of my fears, all of my dislikes and hates. These are in my mind: in my mental attitudes, desires, greed, pride, arrogance, envy, jealousy - the list is long indeed. If I look closely at what this I-ness is, it becomes oddly transparent. The more I study

me, the more difficult it is to get a clear picture of it. This is so much so that I have to come to the conclusion that, in reality, this sense of I-ness is without foundation. It is a mental 'trick' that I play on myself. The mind is needed for my survival, but this sense of I-ness, which creates a separate identity, is not needed; the two are not irrevocably joined. The question can be asked: who is it that is reading these words? It is the body (eyes) and mind (senses and intelligence). Who is it that wants to eat, to sleep, to have sex, to ponder, to take a photograph, to dance? Does the I do any of these activities? I use the word 'I' repeatedly as shorthand for what actually occurs in my life. Such ceaseless use has made the I become an entity in its own right, and I have tied myself to it. In turn, this I has created the bondage which has to be removed if this person wants freedom.

Attaining the perfect levelness of freedom is achieved by the dissolution of all the ups and downs that human life - I-ness - brings. That is why freedom is described as the most glorious state, the most desirable, and is why it is the ultimate objective of all spiritual paths.

Perhaps the objective we have set ourselves in our spiritual lives is a lesser achievement than this culmination; yet it is certain that when the lesser achievements have been accomplished one by one, the higher objective of freedom will be the natural conclusion: the ending of spiritual yearning, and the beginning of endless liberation.

Which is why, to say again, it is vital to come to a firm understanding of what freedom is, right from when we start to embrace the spiritual path more fully.

(to be continued)

## **The Mouse and the Camel**

**John Phillips**

The following story is based on the "Masnavi" of the Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273)

By chance a little mouse came near a camel and happened to catch the camel's head-  
rope in its paws. Thinking itself to be the camel's master, it went off with the rope, the  
camel following behind and holding up the mouse on the rope. Because of the  
nimbleness with which the camel set off along with him, the mouse began to think  
himself a fine fellow. Though he was riding on the camel's head-rope, he imagined that  
he, though so small, was leading the great beast by the rope. The camel, however,  
guessed what was going through the mouse's mind.

"Go on, enjoy yourself," he grunted, "I'll show you!"

Presently they came to the bank of a great river, such as would have daunted a wolf or  
even a lion. The mouse gazed at the river in bewilderment.

"You have been my companion over hill and plain", said the camel. "Why are you now  
aghast? Why are you dismayed? Go on like a man! Into the river with you! You are my  
guide and leader. Do not be faint-hearted. Do not give up half-way!"

"But this is a vast and deep river," answered the mouse. "I am afraid of being drowned,  
my friend."

"Let me see how deep the water is," said the camel and quickly set foot in it.

"The water only comes up to my knee," he went on. "Can't you see how shallow it is, you  
blind mouse? Why are you dismayed? Why have you lost your head?"

"To you it is an ant, but to me it is a dragon," said the mouse. "There is a great  
difference between one knee and another. If it only reaches your knee, you clever  
camel, it passes a hundred cubits over my head."

"Then do not be so arrogant another time," said the camel, "lest you may be consumed  
body and soul by the sparks of my wrath. Emulate mice like yourself; a mouse has no  
business meddling with camels."

"I repent," said the mouse. "For heaven's sake get me across this frightful river!"

"Listen," said the camel, taking compassion on the mouse, "Jump up and sit on my hump.  
Passing over this river is a task I can accomplish without difficulty; I could take hundreds  
of thousands like you across."

Since you are not the ruler, be a simple subject; since you are not the captain, do not  
steer the ship. This is just as true in spiritual life, as it is in worldly life.

## Leaves of an Ashrama: 15

### The Practice of Association

#### Swami Vidyatmananda

I got the idea from the book of Swami Atulananda's (conversations: Atman Alone Abides). It seems that near the Ramakrishna monastery at Kankhal where the Swami lived there was a college adorned with a clock tower which struck the hours loudly. The periodic booming annoyed some, but not Swami Atulananda. He used the striking to remind him of the Lord. For example, the single boom of 1:00 p.m. would recall Om, while the striking of, say, 4:00 p.m. would call out for him Ram-a-krish-na. Through the association, thus, of sounds with ideas, a pattern of automatic recall was set up.

I have tested the process, and it works. I am gratified, for it helped me achieve something I had been trying to do. Swami Brahmananda preached what he called sahaja yoga - easy yoga - as practical for the man of today. This is the spiritual practice of constant remembrance - or recollection, as Brother Lawrence<sup>2</sup> called it - which helps greatly in one's spiritual unfoldment. Constant remembrance is an efficient method of purification. Being lazy, I was glad to know that there is an easy yoga. But how to remember to remember? That was the problem. It was there that the new technique helped.

I do it with watches and clocks, through the principle of mental association, following Swami Atulananda. It works like this. On the wall above my desk I hung a kitchen clock having easily readable ciphers, visible from every part of the room. Just beside it I placed a picture of the Lord. Now I cannot glance at the time without seeing the Lord. Gradually the two have become associated. God may be beyond time, but in my mind the two are now firmly connected. I cannot look at a watch or clock anywhere without seeing His face and thinking of Him - which means: many times a day. Thus I have made progress towards achieving constant recollection.

The process works equally well at night. The clock is invisible in the dark but is audible by its loud ticking. Far from being an annoyance, the sound made by its second hand sixty times every minute does not say "tick, tick" but "thine, thine".

Guru Nanak<sup>3</sup>, it will be remembered, was aided by the word "thine". It is recounted that

when young he was a storekeeper. One day, counting out some merchandise, he reached the number thirteen - which in his language was a word also meaning "thine". That's as far as he got, for the spiritual implications of the idea swept over him, and for him commerce stopped, while he thought about being not his own but God's, and his spiritual life began in earnest.

So in the stillness of the night I reinforce the association. "Tick, tick, tick" becomes "thine, thine, thine".

The principle, of course, may be applied in connection with any number of sights and sounds with which we are in contact during the day or night. The routine morning task of opening the shutters to a new day may come to symbolize opening the heart to God's light and love. Even disagreeable sounds like traffic noises and the whine of aeroplanes can, through the principle of association, be turned into incitements to remembrance. Thus by day and by night one can arrange mental processes so that all life reminds us to remember, and practice sahaja yoga with the ease its name announces.

## **Book Reviews**

### **John Phillips**

Mapping the Cosmos: An Introduction to God

By Jael & Sandy Bharat

Published by William Sessions Limited, York

This book begins by attempting to answer such basic questions as: "Does God exist?" and "What, who and where is God?" It then discusses incarnation and re-incarnation. Then, by means of four images, it makes an effort to map and explain the working of the cosmos, postulating a small area in the endless cosmos called "Dreamland", where spirits, attracted to dreaming about creation, come together. It is from this "Dreamland" that creation emerges, with ourselves in the role of creator. There is also a discussion of the place of religions and sects in society and the part we may play.

The authors of this little book (46 pages) are Jael, who was a farmer and teacher of

economics in the Netherlands and Sandy, who was a co-ordinator of the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford from 1994 to 2004.

It is always interesting to read about God. Everyone seems to have their own ideas about Him. While no two religions seem to agree in every detail, the approach here would be accessible to people of all religions or no religion. Quoting from spiritual teachers of all ages, the writers encourage us to think about these fundamental questions of life, death and possible rebirth, and a place in the cosmic scheme of things.

On the whole this book is a stimulating read, providing much food for thought, both for the newcomer to the reading of spiritual literature and even for the jaded pallet of one who has read many books on spiritual life.

The Spiritual Quest and the Way of Yoga: The Goal,  
the Journey and the Milestones

By Swami Adiswarananda, Minister and Spiritual Leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda  
Centre of New York

Published by Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock,  
Vermont, USA

Swami Adiswarananda has written a number of books explaining Vedanta to people in the West. This latest one is a book for spiritual seekers. It explores various aspects of the quest for spiritual fulfilment. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 discusses theories of creation and the meaning of the spiritual quest. Part 2 describes the nature of the journey to the goal of Self-awareness. Part 3 outlines the milestones of progress, presents a number of vital spiritual questions and their answers, discusses the lessons of history and summarizes the essential teachings of yoga. The word yoga is used broadly to include both the yoga philosophy of Patanjali and the Vedanta interpretation of yoga, in which yoga means union with the Divine.

Writing about the problem of suffering in the world, the Swami explains that all the pain and suffering we go through are merely symptoms of a deep-rooted malady that is spiritual. We suffer because of loss of contact with the centre of our being, our true Self. This true Self is also known as Atman, the divine Self, or God.

One chapter is devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and the thinkers of his time, another to Swami Vivekananda and the impact of Vedanta in the West. In another chapter the unity and harmony of religions is also discussed.

This is altogether a very thought-provoking and enlightening book and well worth acquiring and reading. A good guide for everyone who is concerned with the acquisition of an understanding of the spiritual wisdom of Yoga-Vedanta.