

Magazine Articles January / February 2007

1. **Divine Wisdom**
2. **Editorial - Swami Dayatmananda**
3. **Vital Questions on Religion Answered - Swami Prabhavananda**
4. **How Free Is Our Will? - Swami Nikhilananda**
5. **Two Meetings with Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) -Srish Chandra Matilal**
6. **The Mind in All Its Modes - Clement James Knott**
7. **Seeds - Swami Yatiswarananda**
8. **Leaves of an Ashrama: 19 - Swami Vidyatmananda**
9. **Book Review - Elsie Mack**

Divine Wisdom

Question : (asked by a neighbour of Jaygopal Sen)

"Then why should one call the world Maya?"

Answer : (Sri Ramakrishna)

"As long as one has not realized God, one should renounce the world, following the process of 'Neti, neti'. But he who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, Maya, living beings, and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings. Suppose you separated the shell, flesh and seeds of a bel-fruit and someone asks you the weight of the fruit. Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds, and weigh only the flesh? Not at all. To know the real weight of the fruit, you must weigh the whole of it - the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. Only then can you tell its real weight. The shell may be likened to the universe, and the seeds to the living beings. While one is engaged in discrimination one says to oneself that the universe and the living beings are non-self and insubstantial. At that time one thinks of the flesh alone as the substance, and the shell and seeds as insubstantial. But

after discrimination is over, one feels that all three parts of the fruit together form a unity. Then one further realises that the stuff that has produced the flesh of the fruit has also produced the shell and seeds. To know the real nature of the bel-fruit one must know all the three.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; November 28, 1883

Editorial Compassion

"Compassion, love of God and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge"

Sri Krishna tells us that compassion towards all beings is an important spiritual quality. As we progress in spiritual life the capacity to feel sympathy, mercy, tenderness, compassion etc grows. This feeling is the outcome of true knowledge and not any moribund emotion. Often Maya (attachment)and Daya (compassion) look alike, but they are diametrically opposed.

It is very natural to feel compassion for one's own family, relatives, friends, country, religion etc. More often than not this feeling is not compassion but attachment. True compassion transcends national, religious, cultural and gender barriers.

Sri Ramakrishna clarifies: "Remember that daya, compassion, and maya, attachment, are two different things. Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' toward one's relatives. It is the love one feels for one's parents, one's brother, one's sister, one's wife and children. Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality. If you see anywhere an instance of compassion, as in Vidyasagar, know that it is due to the grace of God. Through compassion one serves all beings." Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering. The important point to be noted is, if compassion does not lead to concrete action, it is worse than useless.

Even animals are known to be kind, compassionate and caring, not to speak of human beings. As the Chandi tells us 'The Divine Mother is present in every being in the form of daya or compassion.' Because of this love and compassion animals too tend their young, sometimes at the cost of their own lives. Without this care existence becomes precarious. It is God who has kept this tender emotion in the heart of all beings. Sri Ramakrishna says: "The love that you see in parents is God's love: He has given it to them to preserve His creation. The compassion that you see in the kind-hearted is God's compassion: He has given it to them to protect the helpless. It is not for man to show compassion, but for God. One feels compassion as long as one has the 'ego of Knowledge.' And it is God Himself who has become the 'ego of Knowledge.'"

Qualities like compassion spring from Sattva guna. With the practice of spiritual disciplines one gradually develops sattva and sattva brings a great longing for God realisation. This longing in its turn brings spiritual qualities which take us near to God. Sri Ramakrishna says: "What are the glories of that longing? They are discrimination, dispassion, compassion for living beings, serving holy men, loving their company, chanting the name and glories of God, telling the truth, and the like. When you see those signs of longing in an aspirant, you can rightly say that for him the vision of God is

not far to seek." Therefore one who is merciless and devoid of compassion can never hope to be spiritual.

However, the practice of compassion needs deep understanding, rationality, and self-control. The quality of compassion is nearer to truth, love and knowledge than to a mere emotional outburst. Expressions of compassion like shedding tears, rushing into unthinking actions, etc sometimes lead to undesirable results.

Though most of us do not like it, certain acts like punishing criminals, or disciplining children, can well be expressions of love and compassion. Spiritual teachers are frequently seen to be stern and harsh towards their students. It is because they would like to help their students get rid of their defects and progress in spiritual life. Holy Mother goes so far as to say that 'misery is a gift of God:' "People complain about their griefs and sorrows and how they pray to God but find no relief from pain. But grief itself is a gift from God. It is the symbol of His compassion."

True compassion springs from the knowledge that we are all part of God. Compassion is not mere pity; it is to feel our oneness with the other, with the whole universe, because all that exists is God. The man of realisation sees only God everywhere. It is this which prompts him to feel compassion towards all beings. Hence some great souls retain their bodies even after samadhi and feel compassion for the suffering of others.

Compassion leads to service of God in man. One of the important tenets of Sri Vaishnavism is to show compassion to bound souls. Many misunderstand the deeper import of this tenet. The feeling of compassion often makes us take pity and look down upon others. It may produce a feeling of superiority in us thus causing our spiritual downfall. Sri Ramakrishna advises us not to show compassion but to serve man as God. This was the basis of the Karma-Yoga preached by Swami Vivekananda. He says: "As Jiva (individual soul) and Ishvara (God) are in essence the same, serving the Jivas and loving God must mean one and the same thing. For us, Advaitists (non-dualists), this notion of Jiva as distinct from God is the cause of bondage. Our principle, therefore, should be love, and not compassion. Ours is not the feeling of compassion but of love, and the feeling of Self in all. The application of the word compassion even to Jiva seems to me to be rash and vain. For us, it is not to pity but to serve. Doing good to others out of compassion is good, but the Seva (service) of all beings in the spirit of the Lord is better."

The practice of compassion, however, has its own peculiar problems. Though we are prepared to sacrifice much if it is for our own nation, religion etc we find it is hindered by our hatred for other nations, religions, and cultures.

Added to this our emotional wounds, hurts, jealousy, feelings of ill will towards others stop us from showing them compassion. The only remedy for this seems to be to spiritualise our life, to see God in all.

Finally we must not forget that the good Lord is within us also! We need to be compassionate towards ourselves too. Failure to understand this simple truth can bring much misery. Merciful towards others but stern towards oneself is a self-defeating attitude. To be compassionate towards oneself means to admit that we are also weak and can make mistakes.

The practice of compassion makes life joyful and creative. Undoubtedly it brings us to God.

Swami Dayatmananda

Vital Questions on Religion Answered

Swami Prabhavananda

Q. Is it true that if you long for God for twenty-four hours you can see him?

A. Yes, it's true.

Q. Well, should that be so difficult to do just for a day?

A. Try it! You see, there is a catch to it. You have to be completely consumed by your longing for God. Sri Chaitanya prayed: "Ah, how I long for the day when an instant's separation from thee, O Govinda, will be as a thousand years, when my heart burns away with its desire, and the world, without thee, is a heartless void." But we don't have that kind of earnestness even for five seconds! Is it so easy to sustain such earnestness, such an intense desire for the love of God? That's what all your spiritual disciplines and struggles are for, to bring you to the stage where you feel you can't live without God. When you come to the point where your longing for God is continual, then the vision opens up. Yes, it's very true, if you can yearn for God for twenty-four hours, you will see him. But let us think of him even for five seconds!

Before we can have the vision of God, body and mind must be made ready, otherwise the brain can't stand that tremendous experience. The whole nervous system must be purified. Therefore spiritual progress is gradual, and we must proceed with patience and perseverance.

Q. What is grace?

A. It is the divine power which operates in man to transform him, to make him attuned to God so that he can feel his unbounded love. Divine grace can be tangibly felt at a certain stage of spiritual unfoldment. Of course you have to struggle before you can feel it.

These two ideas of grace and of self-effort are not contradictory. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The breeze of grace is always blowing, but you have to set your sail to catch that breeze of grace." "Setting sail" means that you have to put forth some effort. What effort? To keep your mind in God, to struggle to meditate, to pray earnestly for divine love. Then what happens. Suddenly, one day, you will feel a power striking you and drawing your mind to itself, as the magnet draws the needle. Then the vision of God will open before you. This experience cannot really be expressed in words. All I can say about it is that you will feel God's love overwhelming you and lifting you up.

Q. We are taught that Divine Incarnations understand us and through their compassion aid us. But being ever-perfect, how can they know what an ordinary man feels and suffers?

A. Whenever God assumes the human form he also assumes the human frailties. Thus the Divine Incarnations are subject to hunger and thirst, illness, and other limitations. Then they show man by their example how to rise above these frailties. Although the Incarnations are born with divine knowledge, this knowledge is apparently hidden from them by a thin veil so that they do practise spiritual disciplines and seemingly struggle and suffer like ordinary human beings. In this way they learn every inch of the path along which the spiritual aspirant travels, and thus they are able to help him.

Q. Swami, can an ordinary aspirant help someone through his prayers when that someone is either unable or unwilling to help himself?

A. Yes, surely. Prayers are always a great help - anyone's prayers. Please understand this: in God's eye all are equal, whether they are sinners or saints. So it doesn't make any difference who prays, God will listen. Sri Ramakrishna used to quote the Bengali saying, "'Uncle' Moon is the uncle of everybody." His meaning was that anyone can

approach the Lord, anyone can talk to him and pray to him; the Lord will listen. There is only one condition: the prayer must be earnest and sincere.

But there is this difference between the prayer of an ordinary aspirant and that of a saint or a Divine Incarnation. A saint or an Incarnation is so truthful that when he speaks, facts follow his words. Such is his spiritual power. For instance, when Christ said, "Be thou whole," that wholeness had to come. Because people recognize this power of the holy, they want their blessings.

Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, March-April 1963

How Free Is Our Will? Swami Nikhilananda

(It is God alone who does everything. You may say that in that case man cannot sin. But that is not true. If a man is firmly convinced that God alone is the Doer and that he himself is nothing, then he will never make a false step.)

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)

All of us are faced with the problem of free will. This problem has been discussed by all the major religions and philosophical systems. Is our free will to do whatever we like or are we controlled by an unseen factor, which may be called God or fate? According to Christianity the soul when created was made in the image of God; it was perfect and it was endowed with freedom to choose between good and evil. The first man could choose between good and evil, but man now chooses evil because of original sin caused by Satan. So man is conditioned by original sin and he cannot be saved except through God's grace.

This point has been carried further by the Calvinists, who believe in predestination. According to them, before the soul was even created God predetermined whether it would be saved or damned. No matter what that man did after his birth, if he was predestined to be saved, he would be saved, and if he was predestined to be damned he would be damned. So according to them man has no free will. But Calvin himself made an important remark. He said those who have been elected by God to be saved will show by their life they have been chosen for liberation.

Buddha denied the existence of God, or deities, or any outside factor which determines man's destiny or controls his fate. Buddha always emphasized personal effort. In his last words Buddha said to his favourite disciple, 'O Ananda, in this world everything is transitory. Strive for liberation by your own effort.' Buddha believed in karma, however. He believed we reap as we sow but that the bad karma could be nullified by good karma.

In Chinese philosophy we find the word 'Ming' which is the equivalent of fate. They believe in the appointment of heaven, the unalterable decree which determines a man's lot, especially as it applies to the span of life. The hour of death is fixed.

The old Greek philosophers used two words, fortune and fate. According to them fortune is indeterminate. We can change our fortune by our action. But fate is determined. So these Greek philosophers believed in the predetermined order of destiny in the affairs of

men. This concept was fostered by their belief in oracles. In critical times and in times of war, oracles were consulted by both individuals and the nation.

According to the Jewish belief, man remains the master of his religious and moral destiny. Good and evil are the issues of man's actions. He possesses the power to defile himself and to keep himself clean. God is not involved.

In Islam, fatalism or kismet is found in the Koran. Mohammed speaks of books that are kept in heaven, in which the deeds of men are written down and which will be used as the basis of the last judgement. There are passages in the Koran which indicate that God forces certain men to do evil and that he predestines certain men to do good culminating for them in hell or heaven.

According to the Hindu belief, we find the play of both the unseen factors of the law of karma and self effort. In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna asks Sri Krishna by what compulsion a man indulges in sinful actions against his will. A man does not want to do evil but it seems as if some unseen force compels him to do so. What is this unseen force? Sri Krishna answers that the cause of man's sinful action does not lie outside himself. The cause is his own lust and anger. Lust and anger are not the inherent qualities of the soul. They belong to the realm of man's thinking; they are inherent in his karma.

Hinduism holds that a man is born with a blueprint of life created by his past actions. Our past life determines our present life and our present determines our future life. The question may here be asked: What happened to the first man? In his case was there a blueprint? The Hindu philosophers say there was no first man, that the series of births and deaths is without beginning. They give the example of the hen and the egg. You cannot get a hen without an egg, and you cannot get an egg without a hen. Which came first no one knows. In the same manner there cannot be a birth without previous action and there cannot be previous action without a previous birth.

The Hindu philosophers say that it is very hard to completely overcome the influence of past actions, but they believe in man's self effort. So you read in the Bhagavad Gita the injunction to 'lift up yourself with help of the self, and never depress yourself.' Sri Krishna was addressing everyone. Then he continued, 'You are your greatest friend and you are your greatest enemy.' We also read in the Bible that Christ said, 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' The implication is that everyone can attain to perfection. Liberation is everyone's birthright.

According to the Hindu view, although the effect of past karma, or its influence, is very strong, yet by right action in this life it can be nullified to a great extent. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if you are destined to get the blow of an axe, through self effort you may get the prick of a thorn. So Hinduism acknowledges both the unseen factor and self effort.

We read in the Bhagavad Gita that five factors are involved in the accomplishment of any undertaking. First there is the body, which must be in good physical condition. Then there is the agent, which also must be in good condition. Then the sense-organs. Then the various functions of the pranas or vital breaths. Last there is the factor called the unseen factor, which can mean past karma or God's will. God's will is emphasized in the Bhagavad Gita as the ultimate factor. We read: 'God dwelling in our heart moves us in our activities as if we are mounted on a wheel.' If God dwelling in our heart makes us move as though we were mounted on a machine, how can we get rid of evil thoughts? Then the Gita says, 'Take refuge in the Lord in every possible way.' So you see the whole problem of free will or fate is a great mystery. It is almost insoluble by our finite reason. I shall here discuss the problem according to Hindu philosophy, but before so doing I shall make a few general remarks on the subject.

In the Kena Upanishad there is the story that Brahman obtained a victory for the gods over the demons, and by that victory the gods became very proud and told themselves that it was by their own efforts that they were victorious. Brahman, understanding it,

suddenly appeared before them in the form of a Spirit. They were curious to know who it was and so first deputed the god of fire to find out. When he approached, the Spirit asked him who he was and he said, 'I am the god of fire.' 'What can you do?' the Spirit further asked. 'Ah, I can burn up anything,' was his answer. The Spirit placed before him a wisp of straw and told him to burn it. He tried with all his power to burn the straw but he could not, and humiliated he went back to the gods. Then they sent the god of wind and the same thing happened. Try as he would he could not blow away the wisp of straw. So one by one the different gods came before the Spirit and failed and went away humiliated. At last, when the king of the gods went forward, the Spirit disappeared and in its place appeared a woman highly adorned. It was Uma, the daughter of the Himalayas, the Cosmic Force. He approached her and said, 'Who is this great Spirit?' And she replied, 'It is indeed Brahman. Through the victory of Brahman alone have you attained glory.' The various gods are only its instruments. We read in the Upanishads, 'By its force fire burns, the wind blows, water soaks, and death performs its function.' There is a story about the problem of free will told me by Swami Saradananda, who was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was a medical student. In those days, at the end of the nineteenth century, scientists were atheistic. Doctors dissected the human body and could not find a soul. The scientists looked into the sky through a telescope and could not see God. Therefore, according to them, the soul and God did not exist. One day this young man, who later became Swami Saradananda, came to Sri Ramakrishna and spoke about free will. He said, 'Where does God's will come in? I can do anything I want. I have been making experiments and whatever I want to do, that I accomplish.' Then Sri Ramakrishna told him to follow that same line of thinking for some time and see what would happen. After a month or so he returned to Sri Ramakrishna and said, 'I have discovered something. I have been watching myself and now I cannot do anything of my own volition. Even the most insignificant thing is beyond my power. Formerly I could do great things but now I cannot do even the smallest thing. I am confused.' Then Sri Ramakrishna said he would sing him a song and told him to listen to it and memorize it and then meditate on its meaning every day. Sri Ramakrishna sang:
'Thou art my All in All, O Lord! - The Life of my life, my inmost being;
I have none else in the three worlds but Thee to call my own.
Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope; Thou my support, my wealth, my glory;
Thou art my wisdom and my strength.
Thou art my home, my place of rest; my dearest friend, my nearest of kin;
My present and my future, Thou; my heaven and my salvation.
Thou art my scriptures, my commandments; Thou art my ever gracious Guru;
Thou art the spring of my boundless bliss.
Thou art the way, and Thou the goal; Thou the Adorable One, O Lord!
Thou art the Mother tender-hearted; Thou the chastising Father;
Thou the Creator and Protector; Thou the Helmsman who dost steer my craft across the sea of life.'

Swami Saradananda memorized this song and meditated upon its meaning and all his doubts were dissolved.

Man is free within certain limits. Take the case of a cow tied to a post with a rope. Suppose the rope is twenty feet long; the cow can move freely within the length of that rope but if it wants to go two inches beyond the twenty feet it cannot. So the movement within the length of the rope may be called our free will. The post which limits our movement can be called God's will, or our past actions, or what science calls heredity, or environment, or education, or the unseen factor over which we have no control. Sri Ramakrishna says God's will alone is free. What we call the free will of man is an appearance, and this apparent free will, as I read from the text, is an illusion planted in our heart by God himself; otherwise sins would have multiplied. If we all believe we are

helpless and that God completely determines our will, then we are not responsible for our actions. But when we believe we have some volition then the notion of free will shifts the responsibility to us. Of my own free will I have committed sin. Of my own free will I can also be virtuous.

It seems in some respects we are free and in other respects we are bound by law. We shall now discuss on a philosophical basis what the meaning of the word is and also whether will is really free. We shall also discuss the meaning of man's freedom and bondage.

What is will? According to Vedanta the Ultimate Reality is Brahman or Cosmic Intelligence. It is Pure Spirit, non-dual, one without a second. It is ever free. The soul of man in its essential nature is one with this Supreme Spirit. From the standpoint of Brahman what we call the physical man or the phenomenal universe does not exist. What is this tangible universe where we see time, space and causality, which are bound by law? Time, space and causality play an important part in limiting our free will. What is this physical universe? According to Vedanta philosophy and mystical experience this universe is also Pure Spirit. But on account of maya a part of Brahman appears as the universe. What does this mean? A part of the Pure Spirit, through its inscrutable power, is thrown into a mould composed of time, space, and causation. The Infinite Brahman is beyond law. It is ever free. But the universe follows the law of time, the law of space, and the law of causation; and where there is law there is no freedom. Law limits freedom. So you see limitation in our will. This limitation is not inherent in our true Self, which is Pure Spirit. It is caused by the limitations of time, space, and causality. At this moment I am here. I was not here one hundred years ago and I will not be here fifty years from now. So time limits freedom. One cannot be associated with past, present, and future at the same time. So it is with space also. I am now in New York. I cannot be in London at this moment. So space also limits my freedom. The cause produces an appropriate effect. As you sow, so you reap; good, good; bad, bad. Fire burns. Water wets. All laws are associated with causation. So the part of the Infinite which we see, which we hear, which we feel, which we touch, which we think about, that part of the Infinite is under law.

Kant, the great German philosopher, spoke of two categories, the noumenon, or thing-in-itself, and the phenomenon, the universe. The thing-in-itself is beyond time, space, and the law of causation but when the human mind tries to understand the thing-in-itself it immediately uses the concept of time, space, and causation. Otherwise, we cannot see, hear, touch, or think about anything. Time, space, and causation are governed by law but the Pure Spirit or thing-in-itself is one without a second and infinite. Therefore it is beyond the laws of time, space, and causation and so it is ever free.

Do we have a free will when we deal with the universe? When we see it and touch it? Again, what is will? How is it created? I move the chair. What is the cause of the movement? My will. So all actions we perform, great and small, are manifestations of will. Take the case of machines, fine instruments used in a laboratory, a space ship, or nuclear bomb, or writing a book, or painting a picture, or making a sculpture. All these are manifestations of man's will. But it is the will always associated with ego or I-consciousness. We feel free to do or not to do. I can paint a picture or I need not. I can do such things but I don't have to do them. This ego functions only in the relative world. When we realize God or Pure Spirit our ego disappears. What we call will is manufactured in the physical world and this will is part of the cosmic ignorance called maya. Will is associated with desire. There cannot be desire or will without a physical object. I desire to eat food, or I desire to move this piece of furniture. Will and desire are always associated with physical objects. There cannot be will or desire without external stimulus. Will is a reaction of the brain to the external world. Where there is no

external world there is no will. Will therefore is a mixture of external and internal. How is that?

We see an object. The will is needed either to accept it or to reject it. We either like it and accept it or are repelled by it and reject it. The motor nerves obey the will. The scientists have made experiments with animals. They found that when they removed the motor nerves the will of the animals could not function.

Now we shall understand if there is any free will. The will operates only in the relative universe which is composed of time, space, and causation. As we have seen, there is no free will in time, space, or the area of causation. Therefore there is no such thing as absolutely free will. I repeat, the will operates in the external physical world and so we have no real freedom there. The will is not absolute. It is a particle of universal intelligence or universal will expressed through our ego. The very words 'free will' contradict themselves because will is associated with desire and physical objects, which are in the universe, and everything in the universe is limited. There can be no freedom in the physical universe. Mind and thought are bound by laws. Will is associated with mind and thought. Therefore it cannot be free. So when we glibly say 'free will' we use a term which contradicts itself.

Notwithstanding everything I have said, we all talk of free will. This freedom of will is apparent. It is a freedom that is reflected. Real freedom, which belongs to the area of Cosmic Intelligence or God, shines through the veil of mind and it becomes the apparent freedom. It is like the reflection of the sun and the moon in water. We are free and we are not free every moment. It depends on how we look upon ourselves. If we look upon ourselves entirely as the body and if we identify ourselves with the world, of course we are not free, because we are bound by the laws of time, space, and causation. But if we emphasize the soul, if we are conscious that we are an aspect of Cosmic Intelligence, to the extent we accept that, to that extent we are free. Man is a mixture of dust and deity, of matter and spirit, body and soul. So he is both free and not free depending upon the area in which he is functioning. If you act from the standpoint of God you are free, and if you act from the standpoint of your body and mind you are not free, because body and mind are under the law of time, space, and causation.

I will go further and state that we are essentially free; otherwise we could not live and breathe. It is said in the Upanishad that from freedom we have come, by freedom we are sustained, and back into freedom we will ultimately return. That is the thinking of the free world today. They think the whole idea of bondage is a delusion. They think they can do whatever they like. Others think the whole idea of freedom is a delusion. They argue if man is really free why can't he banish hatred, friction, and war? It comes to this: the will is bound, but the source of the will is free.

The source is God or Universal Intelligence. Some people, who think of Him as an extra-cosmic God, conceive of Him as a person who manages the whole world by His will from a realm in space. Vedanta says, however, that this God is Universal Intelligence, immanent and all pervasive, with whom we can have intimate contact if we can only remove our veil of ignorance. They say true freedom exists here and now in the midst of delusion, in the world of the senses, body, and mind. We are free, though living in the body, if we can dissociate ourselves from our body consciousness. Although we are not always aware of this freedom we are at times partially aware of it and that partial awareness shows itself in our apparent freedom.

How to discover this true freedom and apply it in our daily life? The whole thing comes to this: give up attachment to this little universe of the senses and mind. Annihilate selfish desires. Look beyond the ego and the apparent will to the very source. Identify yourself with the Cosmic Will. Make yourself a channel for the Universal Intelligence to function through you. Your limited will will then disappear and God's will will work through you. That is how God's will functions through saints and prophets, whose egos

were dissolved, whose desires were suppressed, whose attachment to the body was destroyed.

There are two ways of giving up attachment to the body and the universe. The negative way and the affirmative way. The negative way is the hard and austere way of 'neti, neti,' 'not this, not this.' The affirmative way is the path of 'iti, iti,' 'everything is, everything is.' The negative way is followed by the Vedantic philosophers, who constantly think they are not the body, senses, mind, or ego. They repeat with every breath, 'I am He, I am He.' They uproot all selfish desires and attachments. They deny the reality of the world. It is a most difficult path. It requires exceptional power of discrimination and gigantic power of will. By your own will power you must destroy the apparent, false will and then that will itself disappears into the Cosmic Will. In order to destroy bacteria in impure water you put into it a purifying agent such as alum, and after the alum has purified the water the alum itself is destroyed. When this little will merges into the Universal Intelligence, we are then guided by that Cosmic Intelligence. We do not become inert. We become instruments for the Universal Intelligence and our power to do good to the world then becomes unbelievably great.

The positive or affirmative way is much easier to follow. We all know we are bound. We all know we are attached. But we are to make use of that bondage to get rid of the bondage. We are to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We are in the world. We want to enjoy the world. Then enjoy the world, but remember, this enjoyment is to get experience and as you obtain experience of the world you are to cultivate detachment. The things you enjoyed twenty-five years ago are no longer of interest to you. You have outgrown them. So through that experience you have become detached. There can be no non-attachment without experience. This non-attachment will lead to freedom. This is called the path of action. You are here in the world, the area of activity. Work by all means. Do your duties. Experience the result. Analyze the action and the result and then cultivate non-attachment. Non-attachment is freedom.

Then there is the path of devotion, bhakti. If you have that temperament, obey God's will. Regard yourself as God's instrument. Every time the arrogant ego raises its head, knock it down and say, 'No, God's will be done.' You are God's instrument. Perform all action as God's instrument and give up all attachment to the fruit. So Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, 'Think of me. Be devoted to me. Worship me alone.'

It is the monks who have renounced the world who follow the negative way. The rest follow the positive way, the path of unselfish action, or motiveless love.

To sum it up, freedom is our source. Our root is in freedom. We are moving to freedom. Freedom is our goal. In the middle we are caught in the whirlpool of the world, in the eddies of time, space, and causation, and we experience bondage. It is like this: a current of water flows freely and it falls into a hollow which creates a whirlpool in which it gets caught and seems to circle endlessly, but it finally emerges again as a free current and rushes to the infinite ocean. The movement of life is like the flow of that water. Life comes from the Supreme Spirit, it gets caught in the hollow of time, space, and causation of the physical world and it whirls around speaking of 'my father, my mother, my wife, society, country, name, fame, power,' forgetting its free nature and being deluded all the while by 'I' and 'mine'. Then it emerges again and regains its freedom. This real freedom of will is achieved either in communion with God or through the mergence of the apparent will with the Universal Will. This realization is everybody's birthright.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, May, 1962)

Two Meetings with Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) Srish Chandra Matilal

I did not have the good fortune to see Sri Ramakrishna during his life on earth, nor did I meet Vivekananda. Whatever I have learned of Sri Ramakrishna is what I heard from Girish Chandra Ghosh and felt in the atmosphere created by his life and association with the Master.

Whenever I listened to Girish tell of Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful grace and love, I used to feel that my life had been wasted. Although I could have seen the Lord on earth, I lost that opportunity through my own ignorance. I used to tell Girish how much I regretted this, and he would say: "Look here! You are more blessed than we. Do you know why? You have become a devotee of the Master just by hearing his name. Don't you remember what Jesus said: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'"? For the moment I would find consolation in such words, but some regret continued to lie hidden in a corner of my heart.

Although there is no direct relationship between what I have just said and my memory of the great soul who is the subject of this article, there is an indirect relationship which will become apparent.

My first introduction to Swami Brahmananda was at the house of Girish Chandra. Although I had seen Maharaj before at Belur Math, at Dakshineswar, and at Balaram Mandir, there was no opportunity for closer acquaintance until that day at Girish's home. As far as I can remember, that afternoon Maharaj and Girish Chandra were talking about Sri Ramakrishna. A number of devotees were present. I arrived with a basket of sweets. Girish remarked: "See how the Lord provides for his own." He asked me to offer the sweets to Maharaj. I prostrated and placed the basket before him.

Maharaj wanted to know who I was. Girish introduced me and asked a servant to bring a glass of water. Maharaj closed his eyes, offered the sweets and the water to the Master, and then accepted one or two candies. He said: "Oh, these sweets are wonderful! Distribute them to everybody." They were passed to the devotees. Girish said to me: "Blessed you are!" There was some conversation afterwards. It turned dark, and Maharaj left for Balaram Mandir.

After Maharaj had gone, I asked Girish: "Why do I feel so blessed? Why did I receive his grace even before I asked for it?"

Girish replied: "You see, you cannot explain these things. Sri Ramakrishna attracts a devotee and leads him to the right teacher."

Atul, Girish's brother, was present. He remarked: "Sri Ramakrishna said that Rakhal was his spiritual son. Even a son who is no good inherits some of his father's qualities. And in Rakhal many of Sri Ramakrishna's qualities are manifest. You have not seen the Master, but you can get some idea of him by seeing his son."

Girish added: "Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'You will achieve everything if you come here.' Do you understand what he meant by 'here'? It means to come to him and to his intimate disciples."

Whether I understood everything or not, this I know: when I went home that night, my heart was filled with bliss and with a peace not previously experienced.

A few days later I visited Maharaj for the second time - at Belur Math. Although it was a Sunday, the Math was not crowded. Almost all the monks and devotees, except Maharaj and a few of his attendants, were at a celebration at Salikha. We also watched the celebration, and after prasad was distributed we went by boat to the monastery in the company of Dr. Kanjilal and a few other devotees.

It was afternoon. Maharaj was seated by the tea table on the veranda facing the shrine. As soon as he saw us he welcomed us affectionately. We prostrated and then seated ourselves on a bench facing him. There was some talk about the celebration at Salikha. Maharaj said: "I did not feel very well, so I couldn't go." He began to joke with Pulin Mitra, Dr. Kanjilal, and others.

Within half an hour or so I noticed two Madras devotees with flowers in their hands going upstairs to the shrine room. To my surprise I saw that after a few moments they came downstairs still holding the flowers. I thought to myself: "How strange! The shrine is the Lord's place, and without offering the flowers to him they bring them downstairs again!" The two devotees walked straight towards Maharaj, who glanced at them and suddenly closed his eyes. The next moment he was in samadhi. He looked like the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna. He was motionless, without breath. Those of us who were present had never seen Maharaj like this before. We did not realize that he was in divine communion and became very worried, thinking he must have fallen ill. Dr. Kanjilal was seated near Maharaj and tried to feel his pulse, but he could not find it. Somebody ran to get water. But the devotees from Madras showed no anxiety. Slowly they approached Maharaj and offered the flowers at his blessed feet.

Within a few minutes Maharaj returned to normal consciousness. In our ignorance we asked him what made him go into that peculiar state. I don't remember that he said anything except: "The Master only knows." We gathered the flowers from his feet and took leave of him.

On the way home, in the boat, some of my companions were conversing. But I could not join them. My foolish heart was suddenly filled with the realization: "There is no difference between Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual son, Rakhai, his living image." Once in a mood of wounded vanity Girish had told Holy Mother, who did not associate freely with Sri Ramakrishna's older disciples: "The Master has become a photograph, and you have become a shy daughter-in-law!" Perhaps I would have felt the way Girish did then if I had not met Swami Brahmananda.

I cannot make public the most sacred teachings that Maharaj gave me. Neither do I have the ability to understand him nor to write much about him. Only one thing I can say: what I have received from him I have received, not because I was deserving, but solely because his grace is unconditional.

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, Mar-Apr, 1960)

The Mind in All Its Modes
Clement James Knott

(The first part of this article appeared in issue 328, March-April 2006)

Perhaps it is not unreasonable to expect our mentors to explain to us what the mind is, what the mind can do and how it functions. Yet for many people the mind has been a taboo subject, ever since the cultural turmoil of the 17th and 18th centuries. This attitude was tersely expressed by Dr. Samuel Johnson when he asserted as a guiding rule: "Leave your mind alone". Despite this dictum, the great author and lexicographer compiled by himself the first comprehensive dictionary of English within a period of eight years while at the same time producing and largely writing his own newspaper and numerous other works for a living. This feat, unique at the time, would seem to indicate that it is not possible to leave your mind alone, and that is because your mind will not leave you alone. So some training of the mind is necessary if we do not wish it to be an unruly master.

Fortunately for us all, the mind has the potential capability of discovering its own nature for itself. If this were not so, we would have become extinct long ago as Homo Sapiens. Where can we find the key that will open the door to exploring the marvels of our own minds?

The key is potentially there awaiting our own making. It is the true spirit that is the Self acting through the mind that gives us the gift of perceiving realities, materially and spiritually. If this conjunction of mind and Self does not occur, through lack of knowledge or through other causes, the individual will find that he is hindered in his ability to perceive realities, including the reality of himself. He will have been cut off from his source of personal power, and his consciousness and his understanding of other people and things will become only limited and partial.

Realities

A firm grasp of realities is necessary for pursuing a moral line of conduct which is acceptable and beneficial to society at large. As one's awareness of spiritual realities is enhanced, so one's desire for material realities becomes reduced, and one comes to realise that the material realities of the secular world are largely appearances. But apparent realities in this world are not absolute and eternal; they are merely relative and only short-lived.

Many individuals from an early stage of their lives have been starved of real spiritual contacts. They have had no acknowledgement or explanation that the inner self is of the same nature as the One True Spirit that pervades all life and living things. Thus the individual becomes that much less real to himself as a personality and as a human being. Hence his grasp of other realities, material and non-material, is much diminished. He may also have difficulty in committing himself wholly to a chosen cause. There always seems to be something vital missing. He becomes more vulnerable to other influences that are imposed on him and he is less able to think things through for himself. So the balance of self-awareness and ego is disturbed. As self-awareness declines, so the self-created ego can expand to fill the space, and it assumes an apparent reality of its own. The mind has a tendency to reject automatically anything that is outside its perceived field of reality. If one does not understand something it is only too easy to "rubbish it out of sight" altogether, but everything that exists must have some element of truth in it, otherwise it would be self-destructing. So before one dismisses any idea that one does not understand, one should ask: "What is the element of truth in that?" or "Will this bring more truth or less?" A false idea can only persist by negating a truth.

What is our criterion of reality in the relative material sense? It is something that we recognise and are able to accept as having an agreed existence in relation to ourselves, on the material level. It is the agreement of its existence which accumulates the power to continue the appearance.

The most real aspect of one's own mind for each of us is the predominant mode of functioning that is influencing it at this moment, whether we are aware of it or not.

The internal instrument of perception

The five principal senses depend each on an instrument of perception which receives impressions from the world around us and relays signals to the appropriate part of the brain and thence to the mind, eyes, ears, nose and mouth and to the skin which is the largest organ in the body. The skin is also the instrument for perceiving touch, atmospheric conditions and emanations. There is also an internal instrument of perception which relays and co-ordinates our thoughts, feelings and emotions.

The internal instrument of perception (which has been designated variously in different systems of thought) is that part of the conscious mind that has been illuminated by the true spirit of the Self. Thus the individual becomes aware of the mind and of the self as well as of other aspects of being. Without the internal instrument of perception we could not tell whether we loved or hated anything; we could not recognise our desires, and one's will would be in a continual state of uncertainty. The inner perceptions are our criteria of inner reality, whether mentally, emotionally or spiritually based, just as the outer perceptions of the senses originate our criteria of outer reality in the world around us. It is the internal instrument of perception that makes Homo Sapiens sapient. The self, through the internal instrument of perception can observe the movements and the changes that are taking place in the mind and can recall changes that have taken place in the past. Watching the mind and the body in this way is possible because it is the unchanging spirit of the self that is doing the watching with minimal use of the cognitive part of the ego-mind. No thoughts, no words, and no images, just watching directly through clear consciousness. This self-observation does not necessitate reactions, but self-assessment calls for a purpose, a moral motivation.

The mind can perceive the mind if it is partly enlightened by the Self. This comprises the knowledge (Vidya) that derives from the Universal being and pulls us towards it. The other part of the mind is the rest of one's life experience and knowledge which hinders that movement towards the ideal (Avidya).

What is a mode of the mind?

A mode of the mind is a mental response mechanism created by the individual himself to provide a pattern of response or of attitude to particular events or circumstances which may recur in the future.

The human mind is capable of functioning in any one or more of many different modes. The mode may have been created knowingly and with awareness to providing a means of response to stimuli and events impinging on the being. Or it may have been created on a sub-conscious level if the individual was unable to express his response adequately at the time. The mode is a mechanism waiting to "click in" and respond, influencing thought and action when particular circumstances recur. These modes become overlaid on the basic character of the person as a result of his life experiences and his ability in dealing with them.

As the person grows and develops, mentally and physically, he finds that changing circumstances alter his natural efficiency as a being. His mind will devise and invoke modes of functioning which will ensure his survival when adverse circumstances arise. If it enhances the capabilities of the person, it is a positive mode. If it reduces the functional efficiency of the person, it is a negative mode.

Some modes lie in the sub-conscious for a long time awaiting recall to influence thought and action when particular circumstances arise again, if they do. Some modes may have long been superfluous or redundant but are still potentially active.

The variety of possible modes is endless, but most of them are basically one of three types: either innate, imposed or acquired.

There are three other states of mind that are not modes: for instance self-reflection,

concentration and meditation are not modes.

Innate modes

We are all born with a mind but with differing innate modes in seed form. These are capable of developing in the first ten years or so of life depending on our family and group up-bringing. There are other aspects born with us of an instinctual nature, producing reactions that are necessary for survival but which tend to be automatic or compulsive. Awareness of these tendencies also increases as the mind develops. However, at an early age the infant may become aware that his new life circumstances are not propitious and may even be hostile to his development as a maturing and loving individual. If the innate modes are prevented from flowering, then they may become too overlaid by imposed modes which will retard the development of the individual as a human being and as a personality. Such an unfortunate individual may become a repressed personality and he will be unable to understand why it is, and what he can do about it because no-one has explained to him the trap that he is caught in.

Imposed modes

Imposed modes may be positive or negative in their effect on the development of the individual as a human being and as a person, but the common denominator of the imposed modes is that we accepted them ourselves into our being, knowingly or unknowingly. Either we had no choice or we just preferred them. Perhaps it was an easy way out in the prevailing circumstances or we feared the alternative of loss or deprivation, or we were simply unaware and ignorant of what was happening to us. One of the modes that has been imposed on many people is the fear of annihilation of oneself as a being. This arises from a general belief that Homo Sapiens is essentially a material being and that the soul can be annihilated. The individual who seeks to live his life as a spiritual being knows that fears cannot harm him and that annihilation is impossible.

When thoughts or impressions are relegated to the sub-conscious they tend to assume an equal level of significance, though they are not in fact of equal importance to us on a conscious level. Hence we tend to lose our basic sense of priorities, our perceptions become distorted and our conduct becomes out of balance.

Acquired modes

The acquired modes of the mind are those that we have chosen or created for ourselves, to aid us in directing our life effort towards our ideal.

An acquired mode is a reflection of those circumstances and ideas that gave rise to it. In time, the circumstances may have changed, but though the mode may remain to influence us, our inner ideal should remain constant. It may have seemed beneficial at the time in order to deal with prevailing circumstances, but situations can change frequently and we may be in the habit of invoking such a mode without recognising that it has become inappropriate.

The negative acquired mode is a method of self-protection, created because the mind has come to believe that it needs the protection of modes of the mind. Thus the mind becomes partly concealed under its self-created cloak of mechanisms, habits and compulsions. What the mind has created, the mind can also annul, when it becomes fully aware of what it has created.

Every human being has an inborn desire to enhance his own beingness. When one has attained a basic understanding of what the mind is, how it is structured and how it is functioning, then one can observe it objectively and assess for oneself which modes are superfluous or retardant and which are beneficial. We can then reject those modes that are inappropriate and create and invoke new progressive modes of our choice, to enable

us to move in the direction of our ideal in full consciousness.

Thus we can penetrate the veil of forgetfulness (maya) which we have allowed tragically to obscure our perception and understanding of the nature of life and of humanity. Then we can perceive the truth that is the self and we can see ourselves as we actually are. One comes to realise that the centre of the mind is stillness and tranquillity; an inner state of serenity that can withstand all distractions. When one has become sufficiently detached from the superficial distractions of the things of everyday life in the material world around us, one becomes able to invoke this mode of serenity at will, without objectifying it, thus realising the mind.

The superconscious mode

Why should we worry about the state of one's own mind when it can take up so much time and effort to sort it out? Why not just enjoy life as we find it? You may well ask: "What is the purpose of it all?"

The purpose of our life effort is to attain a higher level of beingness for others and for ourselves. Since the vast majority of people find themselves coping with a mind that functions in a manner less than optimal, it is incumbent on those more fortunate individuals who have access to heuristic knowledge to tell individuals who can assimilate it and who can apply true knowledge of the functioning of the mind to themselves and so enhance their own consciousness.

Self-observation and self-assessment of the modes of one's own mind enable the individual to realise his own various modes so that he can detach himself from the negative ones and he can then create and invoke the positive modes that will draw him towards his ideal. This opens the way to achieving a mode beyond our other modes: the Superconscious mode, where the realised mind is able to reflect on the flows of consciousness and on realities.

(to be continued)

Seeds

Swami Yatiswarananda

Our spiritual life, whatever the worldly-minded may say, should be begun as soon as possible. The cleverness of all worldly people is like that of the crow; the crow thinks itself terribly clever, but it eats filth and dirt all the same. Worldly people always tell you that there is plenty of time to embark upon the religious life; first enjoy your youth and in old age, they say, there will be time enough to do your spiritual practices. But when the years have rolled on you find that the old impressions have become so deep in the mind that there is no possibility of effacing them; you find that you have become the slave of impulses and instincts and can no longer act in the way you would like to; you are unable to take up a higher and purer life, either mentally or physically. Those who are not spiritually minded while they live in the world can never be spiritually minded when they "retire" from the world. Unless we have sown the seed in our soul from an early age, there is no possibility of creating spiritual insight in later life. Our ideal, then, is to make a beginning as soon as possible and to make the best use of the time that is given.

Purity

Purity is the condition for Divine Grace to reach the soul. Without it and real dispassion there can never be any inner life, or even any deep spiritual striving. The grace of the Divine comes to a person in the form of self-effort, in the form of the will to strive for something higher and more permanent than what we perceive through the senses. Some speak of destiny, others speak of self-effort, while again others say: "It is true that everything depends on the will of the Lord, but the Lord desires that I should strive my utmost. Self-effort comes as a manifestation of 'destiny'; it is the will of the Lord that creates in me the desire for striving".

We find that unless we strive our utmost, the Lord's grace will not descend. We must know how to divide the mind. Whatever our occupation is, we must know how to harness its wonderful powers by making part of it cling to the Lord and the Lord alone. This in itself is a great sadhana. What is most essential in all forms of spiritual life, even when we are occupied with some worldly duty is to keep the greater part of the mind thinking of God; thinking of the Ideal and never allowing it to wallow in thoughts of the world or in mundane affections and relationships. Through constant and unflagging practice we develop an attitude of mind that enables us to think and to feel that whatever we do, whether it be physical, intellectual or spiritual work, is a service to the Lord and that we have no right to the fruits of any of our actions.

"Oh Lord, whatever works I do, I look upon them as a form of worship to Thee".

It is quite true that everything is a manifestation of the Divine, but it is better to salute some of these manifestations from a safe distance. There are some forms of the Divine that we should avoid and there are others we should not approach too closely during the time of our sadhana (spiritual practice).

Always be on your guard and wide-awake. Always watch the reactions in your mind brought about by certain people and things, and act accordingly. Avoid everything that is apt to arouse old impressions and thoughts. If you do not you will not attain mental purification.

The Ideal

So long as we allow ourselves to be vague and dreamy, hazy in all our feelings and doings, no progress will be felt, and there will be a continual conflict which will prevent us from advancing even a single step towards the goal. There is too much of shallow, superficial thinking and not enough of any definite, clear-cut spiritual purpose or awareness. When we study our minds dispassionately, we find that the ideal and the path are not at all fixed; different ideals and ideas arise in the mind alternately. There is no steadiness whatsoever. The Ideal must be clear and it must be fixed before beginning spiritual disciplines. That is what is needed. We must have a very definite idea of the path and of the goal to be attained.

We must know for certainty that neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures are our goal; that the only Goal is self-realization. Heavenly enjoyment is not better than earthly enjoyment - it is, after all, a very cheap thing. We cannot lead the worldly life and the higher life at the same time. We cannot allow ourselves to run after worldly desires and simultaneously have higher Divine Love. God and worldly desire; God and worldly passion and pleasure - these cannot live together.

"Where kama (lust) is, there Rama cannot be: where Rama is, there kama cannot be."

Thus, before we actually begin our spiritual life in earnest, we must decide if we are fully prepared to pay the price. If we look into ourselves we shall discover that there are two tendencies: there is the worldly tendency and the spiritual tendency and both are equally strong. The spiritual must be strengthened otherwise there will be no progress and the tug-of-war that is going on inside will continue for an exhaustive, indefinite

period. It is absolutely necessary for us to fix once and for all our ideal, our conduct of life, everything... and then stick to it whatever happens. If we really wish to follow this difficult path, beset with so many pitfalls and dangers, we must also be prepared to overcome all the difficulties. And if we wish to transcend all the unrealities, there must always be a certain amount of the dare-devil in us; a certain amount of fearlessness and true heroism.

The aspirant's path is dangerous. The pitfalls are everywhere and if once trapped, then, for many, there is a long wait before another chance is offered. To realize the higher ideal we must sacrifice all our worldly desires, our sense of I-ness. We should pray unceasingly:

"Lord! Grant me discrimination; grant me renunciation; grant me devotion and knowledge."

Images

As you seek to spiritualize your worldly relationships so you come to have a wider love and sympathy. If one person in particular attracts you, direct the mind into higher channels and create loftier sentiments. You may even, for the time being, create in yourself a dislike for the person in question so that person loses all charm for you. Later, this dislike can be effaced so that you can look at that person with indifference. Why attach yourself to an ephemeral form? If you want to love, love the Ideal or the Divine. When you find something higher, the lower automatically loses its attraction and is put aside. So long as you allow love for the world to dwell in your hearts, Divine Love can never be born.

In the beginning of your spiritual life you have to create your own images, but these are always images of the real, not of the imaginary. Some stress the sense of the Presence more than the form, though they also may seek the aid of a form of the Divine. You need to keep in mind that the same Being permeates both the form and your own eternal being. Just think that your whole heart and head are permeated with Divine Effulgence and that this Light is part of the Infinite Light that pervades everything. Melt away your personality, your body, your mind, your senses, your emotions - into That. Imagine vividly that this Infinite Ocean of Light becomes solidified into the form of your Ishtam, your Chosen Ideal. Never lose sight of the infinite background of which your Ishtam and you yourself, as well as all others, are parts; it permeates all these. The Ocean, the One Eternal Principle lying behind yourself and the universe, must never be lost sight of because it is That which will be realized by you one day. In this form of meditation the One becomes two, as it were. The Infinite Light becomes solidified into the object of worship and the worshipper.

The Fire

We should practise a certain amount of control and discrimination regarding the food we take. As long as we are in the body, the body must be taken care of and nourished to keep it a fit instrument for the realization of the Divine. There is much more body-consciousness in the person who is ill and weak than in those who are perfectly healthy. We have to see that our body-consciousness is reduced to a minimum if we want to make progress in spiritual life.

Unless our mind is to some extent pure and unattached, we can never even think of God-realization. Try to purify your body, heart and mind as much as possible, then the blazing fire of spiritual realization will burn away all desires.

Banish all worldly thoughts with an effort of the will. Consciously and purposefully fix your mind on the Divine. One who does not lead a pure life and is not disciplined ought never to receive this instruction, because meditation becomes dangerous in the case of a person who is not properly prepared and who has not gone through the preliminary

training. Only one who has passed through tremendous training and ethical discipline can have true self-surrender.

You must never associate too freely with people; always use your discrimination. Once Sri Ramakrishna told Swami Vivekananda not to associate too much with Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great Bengali dramatist and actor. The Master said that a cup that had contained garlic for a long time would still retain some of the smell even after it had been washed and cleaned. On hearing about this from another devotee, Girish naturally felt piqued and went to the Master and brokenly asked him about it. "Sir", he pleaded, "what can I do to get rid of this garlic smell? Please bless me so that it goes away." Sir Ramakrishna replied, "You have lighted such a fire of devotion that it will burn away all the smell. No taint of your past life can cling to you."

Only one who has passed through strenuous self-effort, who has gone through his or her spiritual practices with great perseverance and doggedness, can surrender himself wholly and unconditionally at the feet of the Divine. Self-surrender comes when our wings are dead-tired like those of the bird sitting on the ship's mast. (A reference to a story told by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Brahmananda about a little bird who fell asleep on a ship's mast and was carried far out to sea. On discovering its plight, the bird flew endlessly in all directions seeking land - but to no avail. Finally the bird decided to stop searching and to hold on to the mast with all its strength.)

All forms of striving make the mind pure and fit for the Divine touch. But too much activity is dangerous, because it usually becomes the aimless activity of the monkey; a kind of restlessness and nothing more. But there is also a form of so-called self-surrender that is nothing more than inertness, indolence and lethargy. This is just as bad as aimless activity. Most people are active because they are afraid to be left to themselves. They work and work, go to cinemas, parties, theatres, and read volumes of books. What for? Just to keep themselves busy; just to divert their minds from themselves. The true aspirant should always try to combine both activity of the right kind, and self-surrender. Self-realization is the ultimate goal and the ideal.

We must strive for perfect self-control otherwise the mind will be drawn away by the senses and become more and more outgoing and sense-bound. We can have only one centre of consciousness if we wish to progress in spiritual life. You cannot lose your body consciousness without disciplining and subduing the body and its cravings.

The Infinite

Most people cannot begin their spiritual practices with the Formless - not even the Formless with attributes - whatever they may think. But first they must find this out for themselves, then only can proper instructions be given to them, not before. Mere concentration without a strict ethical culture is not enough. We must learn to purify our feelings and so attain a sense of vastness, of the Infinite pervading everything.

Very often we find it impossible to think of the Divine as such. So it is proper to think of the great personalities, the Prophets and Incarnations. To worship God in Spirit and in Truth is all very well, but how to do it? If we cannot, it becomes a meaningless phrase. We possess only our limited, impure, individual consciousness, but the Great Ones possess infinite consciousness. They rise out of the Ocean, but the Ocean never becomes limited by wave form. It is the wave that merges itself into the Ocean; that becomes one with it; that comes to have Ocean Consciousness.

"Lord, when I am one with Thee, it is not Thou that becomest myself, but it is I who am lost in Thee."

The part becomes merged in the whole: never can the whole be identified with the part. Individual consciousness expands itself into Universal Consciousness, but Universal Consciousness can never become individual consciousness. This is the meaning of "Thou art That" or, "I am Brahman" and is the reply to all who say, "How can God become man?"

God is never limited and the Incarnation is only a manifestation, never the whole of God. We are just like small waves and ripples that are merged in the ocean, and it is very difficult for us even to have full wave consciousness. We are like bubbles, or, at the most, a very small wave; but they, the great Incarnations, are mountain-high waves, always conscious of their true nature and consciously in touch with the Ocean. What happens if you try to take a small bubble out of the water? You get wet fingers. The bubble only bursts, for no bubble can exist by itself without this ocean background. The trouble is, we are not conscious of this background. We believe ourselves to be separate entities; separate from the Ocean and separate from each other. So it is that all our other mistakes follow as a matter of course, and cannot be avoided.

Although we take our limited existence to be real, we find, when we go deeply into the matter, that it is not so. The conception of the reality of our limited existence is wholly due to ignorance; to the bubble imagining itself to be independent of the ocean. So we come to cherish many petty, undignified conceptions. When we get rid of these limiting adjuncts we rise above all such illusory, misleading ideas and become dignified, Self-conscious beings (using the term 'Self-conscious' in the highest sense).

The Conductor

Christhood and Buddhahood are states of Absolute Existence. Those who have attained this state always have the Saviour's consciousness - Infinite Consciousness - not the lesser, individualized one which is so limited. As substance, Consciousness is all one and the same. It is indivisible, eternal, unchanging, but it cannot be denied that during the time of our clouded, individualized state, something is there that is not of this Substance. Something other than this one Substance creates all this differentiation. Each of us has raised a thought-world round ourselves, and it is that which individualizes us all. Where does this thought-world come from? What was our condition before this individualized form came into existence? Why does this body and these diverse and manifold thought-forms exist? Why does the Formless assume form? It is all madness. The moment this individualized state is brought about, passions and desires crop up and try to gain control over us. If passions, desires, body-consciousness and all the rest really belonged to our essential nature, we could never get rid of them. Fortunately this is not the case. They are merely our second nature.

The touch of the Great ones brings us also to Universal Consciousness. It bursts the bonds of this limited existence by bringing in new light, a deeper kind of awareness that lies hidden in all of us. By lifting ourselves consciously to the plane of their thoughts, we get rid of these wrong and deep-seated notions of being men and women. Drop the limiting adjuncts and feel a newer and purer sense of existence! Sometimes, through the intensity of our feelings, we can give such a stimulus to the Cosmic Mind that a Divine Form arises out of it.

All the Great Souls rise out of the Cosmic Mind of which our individual minds are but parts. Because we bubbles find it impossible to come in touch with the ocean, we need to come in touch with the mighty wave. By loving the Great Ones with great intensity, with our whole heart, we come to love their ideas. So until we reach realization we should study their lives and have great love for them.

If you connect your light with the electric current from a power station you get plenty of light. The dynamo gives all the necessary current, but you must connect your wires to the dynamo. By coming into touch with the Great Ones, we also are magnetized, as it were; but we must first become attuned. Our attempts at meditation are for polarizing the mind. When the contact is established, the current flows automatically. So you must make yourselves good conductors. We do not give a stimulus to something that is non-existent, but to something that is at all times, and then, as a result of that stimulus, something arises in us to the conscious plane.

If you throw a stone into a pond you see a reaction; but you did not create the water. So, in a way, prayer is like the stone thrown into the water: the water is there, but the stone gives a stimulus to it, and the reaction follows as a matter of course.
(to be continued)

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, Jan-Feb, 1979)

Leaves of an Ashrama: 19 Swami Vidyatmananda

Mere Goodness Proves to be Not Enough

Like many others, at the beginning I was never interested in religion as such, I only wanted to gain a clear conscience and become a "good man". That is, I wished to get rid of the sense of being neurotic and to acquire a feeling of wholesomeness. I wanted to abolish conflicts and be comfortable. So I tried hard to cultivate goodness, following an ethical code as far as possible, performing acts of unselfishness, making attempts at personal restraint.

However, moral dilemmas not covered in the code kept appearing; acts of service seemed to backfire as often as not; the periods of self-control were effective only until a new spasm of indulgence set in. Indeed, it frequently seemed as if I was half a hypocrite. Better to be a downright rascal, it could be argued, than such a creature of ambivalence.

This was confirmed by my guru. When I first went to him and explained that I did not want to become religious - merely good - he took a severe attitude. "The world is full of such goodness," he retorted, "and look at the state it's in! There's no such thing as a simply good man. If you're good - since you're still in relativity - it follows that you are also bad. Finding a workable standard of the good has occupied Western ethics for centuries, without result. Don't you see that any act of wretchedness can be justified on the highest moral grounds if one is clever enough? What you must become is a man of realization, transcending goodness and badness alike." When you think about the problem you can see why it is set up like this. If it were not, ego would triumph over Atman.

The deeply ignorant presume themselves good at all times. They practise self-justification automatically, without a glimmer of self-awareness.

Then, as consciousness expands, you come to the stage where I was when I approached religion, where you endeavour to do good and eschew evil. At this level, at one extreme is the puritan who says that bad is more real than good, but through heavy moral labours it can be overcome. At the other extreme, there is the devotee of "new thought", who claims good to be more real than the reverse. Operations at this level are still centred on your own efforts, hence basically ignorant and egotistic.

You may now move on to become a genuine spiritual aspirant and begin to meditate.

This stirs up the content of the subconscious and you perceive what a seething mixture of relative motives you really are. Now you grow convinced that you are in practically total ignorance from which you may hardly hope to escape. Apparently this conviction is necessary as a part of the process of dealing with the ego. One can never grow virtuous enough to produce one's own illumination. An act of grace must transpire. Every saint who has commented on this has so agreed. Indeed, as spiritual unfoldment is occurring most rapidly the conviction of inadequacy seems to be at its strongest.

What then, is the "good man"? Apparently he is an illusion, for seemingly he does not actually exist. There is ignorance and there is wisdom; but goodness - like its opposite - has no substance, no permanence, no validity. If one would be delivered from his conflicts in any thoroughgoing way at all, it seems clear that one must become a "spiritual man"; for to try to be merely a "good man" is never enough.

Book Review **Elsie Mack**

Swami Vivekananda in England - A Pictorial Guide

Published by The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Blind Lane, Bourne End, Bucks, SL8 5LF, UK

Price £3

First we had Vivekananda - A Biography in Pictures published by Advaita Ashrama in Kolkata; then Vivekananda; East Meets West - A Pictorial Biography published by the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA. Now we have Swami Vivekananda in England - A Pictorial Guide published by the Bourne End Centre. Such a pleasant surprise!

It is only a small book, but a little gem. In full colour, it has an eye-catching cover showing Swamiji's face above a reproduction of the UK Centre building; and it is indeed a guide. It portrays scenes which Swamiji visited, together with general directions on where the places are located and how to get there as well as how things used to be and how they are today, with, of course, Swamiji's activities there - from making a speech to trying out cycling.

After a Publisher's Note and an Introduction, the book travels chronologically through the various places known to have been visited by the Swami, starting with Paddington Station in 1895 through to "The Lymes" in Wimbledon in 1899, covering more than thirty scenes, concluding with an article written by our John Phillips which appeared in Vedanta magazine in 1996 and which briefly goes over the whole history of the present UK Centre.

It is interesting to see the old photographs of places now long gone, together with the present-day views. What is remarkable in many instances is how well-kept some buildings are which were already there in the nineteenth century. Mr. Rathin Das is to be congratulated on his patient research and enthusiasm in travelling to the localities and photographing what he found.

This booklet will be of interest to all Vivekananda lovers, particularly to residents of Great Britain.

