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### Divine Wisdom

Question : (asked by M.)

Sir, what is the nature of divine love transcending the three gunas?

Answer : Attaining that love, the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him 'Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness'. The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love.

But one cannot realize God without renouncing 'woman' and 'gold'.

Question : (asked by M.)

Why? Did not Vasishtha say to Rama, 'O Rama, You may renounce the world if the world is outside God'?

Answer : He said that to Rama so that Rama might destroy Ravana. Rama accepted the life of a householder and married to fulfil that mission.

Question : (asked by M.)

Sir, is there no spiritual discipline leading to realization of the Impersonal God?

Answer : Yes, there is. But the path is extremely difficult. After intense austerities the Rishis of olden times realised God as their innermost Consciousness and experienced the real nature of Brahman. But how hard they had to work! They went out of their dwellings in the early morning and all day practised austerities and meditation. Returning home at nightfall, they took a light supper of fruits and roots. But an aspirant cannot succeed in this form of spiritual discipline if his mind is stained with worldliness even in the slightest degree. The mind must withdraw totally from all objects of form, taste, smell, touch and sound. Only thus does it become pure. The Pure Mind is the same as the Pure Atman. But such a mind must be altogether free from 'woman and gold.' When it becomes pure, one has another experience. One realizes: 'God alone is the Doer, and I am His instrument.' One does not feel oneself to be absolutely necessary to others either in their misery or in their happiness. Once a wicked man beat into unconsciousness a monk who lived in a monastery. On regaining consciousness he was asked by his friends, 'Who is feeding you milk?' The monk said, 'He who beat me is now feeding me.'

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, December 17/19, 1883

## Non-Covetousness (Editorial)

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that lust, anger and greed are the three gateways to hell. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Maya is nothing but lust and greed. These two are the greatest obstructions in spiritual life. One who is caught in the net of Maya is called Jiva, i.e. a bound soul.

"You have the traits of a Jiva, an embodied being. These are his traits: lust, egotism, greed for wealth, and a hankering after name and fame. All embodied beings have these traits."

Spiritual life is impossible without a sound moral basis. The underlying principle of all morality is unselfishness. A man cannot be unselfish unless he is imbued with the spirit of renunciation. To renounce is not easy. The spirit of renunciation manifests in life as purity of character, as devoted service to fellow beings, and as a strong and steady aspiration for the Divine. The vision of God dawns in a heart in which the spirit of renunciation and the intensity of aspiration have reached their maturity.

Renunciation means the giving up of lust and greed. Of these greed is the most difficult to give up.

Greed is also called avarice or covetousness. What is greed? It is an inordinate desire for material possessions, wealth, name or fame. The Bible says: "And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Greed is defined by Shankaracharya as the sense-organs running madly after objects of enjoyment. Intense agitation of the mind in the presence of sense-objects is also another form of greed.

Greed not only binds man but also makes him commit crimes. The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas said of greed: "It is a sin directly against one's neighbour, since one man cannot over-abound in external riches, without another man lacking them... it is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, inasmuch as man rejects things eternal for the sake of temporal things."

Greed would not be so bad if it could make the greedy person happy, for greedy persons are seldom happy. The tragedy of greed is that often the person spends more time and energy in accumulating than in enjoying! The pursuit of greed leaves little time for

anything else.

Though we may not be aware, all of us are greedy, for all bound souls are greedy. If we were not we would have been free. We live in a society which promotes more and more accumulation in the name of happiness, freedom and security. At no time in the history of mankind do we find so much of consumerism. In fact modern economy cannot survive without actively propagating greed and accumulation.

By our very nature we are all greedy. The Imitation of Christ says: "Human nature is greedy and finds receiving more blessed than giving. It enjoys owning private property. But grace is generous to the poor and content with a little. It knows 'there is more happiness in giving than in receiving.'"

The Upanishads identify and condemn three types of greed: for sons, wealth and enjoyment of the sense-objects. To this can be added greed for name and fame, greed for power, and greed for learning. There are many who spend all their life trying to learn more and more, spending little time in actual practice of what they have learnt. Sri Ramakrishna's saying that "lust and greed is Maya" includes all these by implication. Greed is self-perpetuating; for the more one starts accumulating the more one's thirst increases. Greed makes people criminals. Greedy people try to obtain things by hook or by crook. Greed also increases jealousy for greedy people cannot bear to see others having more or better things than themselves.

Unless this monster is destroyed root and branch one can neither enjoy life in the world nor make headway in spiritual life.

How can one overcome greed? Before we tackle the question we must try to understand the psychology behind it.

Why does the mind become so greedy? There are several reasons. One is the natural instinct for security. We mistakenly think that the more we have the more secure will be our life. Then we also feel that our prestige and power increases in proportion to our possessions. Present-day society encourages this view. A third reason is the belief that the more material wealth one has, the more will be our happiness. In this view happiness is equated with abundance of things. The famous social psychologist, Eric Fromm, has conclusively proved in his book, *To Have Or To Be*, that happiness depends upon what we are rather than what we have, and the pursuit of happiness through too many possessions may even prove to be counter-productive.

According to Vedanta the soul becomes greedy because it is infinite. Though the soul has forgotten, it has a vague memory of its real nature. Hence it longs to regain its infinite nature and won't be satisfied until it attains oneness with the Infinite.

How to overcome greed? According to Sri Ramakrishna prayer to God is one of the very best ways of getting over greed. He advises spiritual aspirants to weep and pray to God. He says: "When the impurities of the mind are thus washed away, one realizes God. The mind is like a needle covered with mud, and God is like a magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tears wash away the mud, which is nothing but lust, anger, greed, and other evil tendencies. As soon as the mud is washed away, the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, man realizes God. Only the pure in heart see God."

Another way is to increase greed but direct it towards God. Sri Ramakrishna says: "Direct the six passions to God. The impulse of lust should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel angry at those who stand in your way to God. Feel greedy for Him. If you must have the feeling of I and Mine, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, 'My Rama, my Krishna.'"

Along with sincere prayer there are four other habits which can help us overcome greed.

1. One way to overcome greed is to be generous. Generosity and greed are opposed to each other. Hence practice of generosity helps us overcome greed.

2. The second way is to remember that life is ephemeral and death can take us away at

any time. When we die we cannot carry anything with us. Contemplation of death definitely helps.

3. However much wealth or material goods one has, one's enjoyment is limited by time, energy and capacity. One can sleep in one bed only, one can ride in one car only, one can eat only what one can digest. We often forget this and suffer. If we can remember this fact our greed is sure to become less.

4. Regular daily practice of spiritual disciplines, keeping of holy company, study of uplifting books, and above all, practice of dispassion, can help us overcome the evil of greed.

## Swami Dayatmananda

### Aspects of Bhakti Yoga Swami Parahitananda

Bhakti Yoga is the Yoga of devotion or love. The idea is that we can realize God and attain the highest simply by loving. We are all capable of loving, for we have been doing nothing else since we were born. Our whole life revolves about love. All emotions are really forms of love, or conflicts in love; basically, we are either being attracted or repelled. All activity has its root in love. We desire something: that is love of a certain order. No action is done without some desire. All action, all thought, is interwoven with emotion, and therefore with love.

Our love is really for the infinite Self (atman); but unfortunately, we have a mistaken idea of the Self, and that is where the trouble comes. There is a famous Upanishadic text: "The husband loves the wife not for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of the Self. The wife loves the husband not for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of the Self." The finite self, this personality of ours, is only a distorted view of the real Self; it is not different from the real Self. We do not have two I's, one real, infinite I, and another limited, grasping I. This personal I is just the infinite I limited by our ignorance. So we have to rub away the dirt and distortion, and realize what we are.

Now all this emotion is consuming a great deal of energy. There would be nothing wrong with that if it were based on a true sense of values, but it is not. All the scriptures and seers tell us that unanimously; and what they say on this point is found to be reasonable. We have given a high value to the limited, personal I. That turns out to be a faulty valuation. Not only is there great wastage of energy; the more we go on in this way, the more we get caught in the web of Maya. So Bhakti Yoga is the conservation and right direction of this energy. It does not ask us to suppress emotion, or to transcend it, or to bypass it. It asks us to make use of it, to make use of this thing that we all have - this capacity for loving - to help us along the road to the goal supreme.

The Vedantic teachers are generally agreed that for by far the majority of aspirants - Yoga students - there will be a considerable element of Bhakti Yoga in their path.

However, we tend, especially those of us who are of an intellectual type, to be rather

prejudiced against devotion. Of course, we have reason. We know how it easily becomes sentimentalized. But that is not the fault of devotion, or of Bhakti Yoga. Another thing is that this way of love normally goes with a dualistic type of religion; and most of us are beginning to see that that cannot stand up to reason. However, our Vedanta shows that on the basis of Advaita Vedanta we can combine dualism with non-dualism; we can combine devotion with knowledge. In fact we find in the end that they definitely meet: the highest love and the highest knowledge are indistinguishable.

And then the ideas of some of the modern psychiatrists have also prevailed. If you were to go and tell such a psychiatrist that you were devoted to the Divine Mother, he would tend to think that you did not have a satisfactory relation with your earthly mother; so you found a mother in heaven and created some imaginary situation. Of course there will be, there are, unsound minds, neurotic minds; but to damn such devotion in that way is ridiculous. It is putting the cart before the horse. What is the real situation? This Reality - we need not call it God, but I shall do so - this Reality is the very ground, our very father and mother and sweetheart and all. Every relation we have is just a pale reflection of our relation with God. That is nearer the true situation; not that God is a substitute for our earthly mother, or the one we loved.

Another thing is that, generally, where there is a stress on devotion, and more so when it is not moderated and guided by reason, up come the fanatical sects. It is generally from among those of the devotee-type that the fanatics come; and they, of course, do a lot of harm to good causes.

The conditions under which love for God can be cultivated are known. We can, by taking the proper steps, cultivate it. But how difficult it seems: it is easy enough to love some of our relatives, and the people around us - those whom we can love -; but to love something that is not even an idea, that is beyond thought and beyond feeling - it is not easy. Yet this thing that we are trying to love is the very attraction in all attractive things; this is the beauty in all beauty and the charm, in all charm.

I suppose we could say that one of the fundamental laws of love is that like attracts like. In our loves in the world it is sometimes very difficult to see how this law operates. We see, perhaps, quite unlike people loving each other very much; but that is largely because we do not understand all the factors involved; and because we can only see the mere surface of the personalities of these people. Their personalities are potentially manifold and far-reaching. Also, perhaps we have not a full appreciation of what 'like attracts like' means. Anyway, in the case of loving God it is a certain law. All the scriptures and seers are agreed, we love God according as we are like God.

The problem is, how to become like God? Are we going to do it by frontal attack on all that is not God-like in us? Frontal attack is the way used in Raja Yoga and in Jnana Yoga. People qualified to practise these Yogas have to some extent the capacity to suppress unwanted thoughts. Most of us, however, do not have this control - that is our problem. And another thing about this way of frontal attack is that it rather assumes that we know what is the way for us; and that we know just what the obstacles are. But the more we go into the matter the more difficult it becomes, to know what is going to get us nearer to God in any given situation. It sometimes happens that means which seem quite unsuitable, prove effective. A man of prayer says, "The divine action can, and frequently does, communicate its gifts to simple souls by means of things which appear opposed to the end proposed." It is extremely difficult to read the situation aright.

Not only that; if we occupy ourselves in attacking what we think are our imperfections, it tends to strengthen this very idea we are trying to supplant, this theory we have, that we are the masters of our lives, that we know what's what. Somehow that view has to go, and in place of it some such view as this must come, namely, that we, so far as we consider ourselves persons, are merely tools in the hands of the divine action. "I, yet not I, but Christ in me," says St. Paul. Shri Ramakrishna, speaking to the Divine Mother, says,

"I am the machine, You are the operator; I act as You make me act."

The emphasis in Bhakti Yoga is not so much on wrestling with our problems and imperfections, as on leaving them standing, leaving them out in the cold, by the positive method of fostering a greater attachment to God. We are attached to the world; the method of the Bhakta is to develop a still stronger attachment to God. Shri Ramakrishna gives the illustration, if you go west, you automatically leave the east behind; you don't have to push it away. In the same way, if we move towards God these troubles will gradually drop away. We are sincerely sorry for our mistakes as and when they occur; but once we have felt sorry we forget them. We don't go turning back to them again and again, punishing ourselves for them, and all that; because the more we think of a thing - this is a basic law of Yoga - the more we think of a thing, the more we get involved in it. So we just think of God and get involved in God, or Reality. As for temptations, instead of wrestling with them we try to look over their shoulder to something beyond; or else, by a complete surrender, we make ourselves so small that they can't find us.

We have to keep the mind on the move. Now the mind is going to move anyway, that is its nature. It is on the move the whole of our life, except when we are in deep sleep. It is always moving, so our job is to keep it moving in the right direction. We try to give a Godward turn to all our waking life; to mix it all up with God in some way; to occupy our minds constructively all the time. In meditation we try, of course, but we cannot do that for very long. We repeat the name of God, or the mantra we have been given, but we cannot do that so long. We can read about saints and holy people; we can perform ritual worship, or invent our own kind of worship. We can serve other people in a spirit of unselfishness, thinking we are serving God in them; for so we are. The duties that we have to perform anyway, we do them and then dedicate the results to God. We just do our best and leave the rest to Him. Somehow we try to be busy about God all day.

The more we practise - that is the great consolation - the easier it becomes. The illustration is given of sandal paste. In India there is the sandalwood tree. In Hindu ritual worship they always make sandal paste, which they put on the image and on themselves. If you have a piece of sandalwood and rub it on a stone, with a little water added, you get a paste. As you rub, a pleasant aroma comes. That is the illustration given; as we practise japa (repetition) and meditation, in time we come to relish the thought of God. At first the relish is not noticeable, but gradually it is experienced. Yes, there is joy in thinking about God.

The best-known text concerning Bhakti Yoga is the Narada Bhakti Sutra. On that Swami Vivekananda has based his book Bhakti Yoga. In Sutra 19, Narada gives the essential characteristics of the lover of God: the consecration of all activities through complete self-surrender to God, and extreme anguish should He be forgotten. These are given as the essential characteristics of pure love - self-surrender, to such an extent that everything we do is for God's sake, or for the sake of His world; and very great pain on forgetting God. Yes, we read about it, and we can believe it, that these great lovers feel intense pain when, though they have had the vision of God, that vision has not yet become a permanent attainment. When they lose that vision for a time, they feel extreme pain. You find it in the Christian mystics, too.

We are not to love God, of course, for any benefits. That is not loving God, that is loving the benefits. The true lover of God cannot pray for anything except for His will. Loving God means loving what God wants. One naturally wants what one's loved one wants. I do not know whether it is the correct analysis, but it seems to me that what gives the sting to so many troubles, what makes troubles troublesome, is that our mind is divided. We have always got at the back of the mind the idea that if only we had done something else, then all this could have been avoided. That is the sort of divided state we are in in so many troubles; that is why they are so irritating. 'If only we had done that!' But we must try to see that that 'if only' thinking is sheer waste of time, because it

is based on a wrong appreciation of the situation. We are under the impression that we were in command of the whole show; but that was not the case. So we do get a good deal of peace of mind when we come to feel that what has happened is the working out of a higher will, that things were destined to turn out as they did. Although the trouble may not be materially lessened, yet it is less troublesome because our mind is at peace. When we see that what happened was inevitable, that resignation is helpful.

Those who have had intimate communion with God assure us that the divine will is a will for the best, that God really is love itself. Therefore, if we are praying for God's will, we are praying for the best. Loving God is loving His will. Loving God is praying for the world, whether we know it or not. Meditating on God, contemplating God, is praying for the world; and it is generally a better way of praying than praying for specific results. To make a habit of praying for specific results, at least so far as the beginner is concerned, is not advised. If we do pray for a particular person, instead of constraining the divine action along the channel of our conceptions and desires, let us rather pray that that person has the power to see in circumstances the will of God, and the devotion to love His will. But even this is prayer of a low order. Above this is the brief prayer, 'May You be loved.' In the next stage, only the 'You' is left; that is, there is a loving gaze of the soul at God. Higher than this love of the essence of God, love of Love - the 'love for Love's sake' of the Gopis, to give an example. The partial views that went with the lower forms of prayer have dropped away, and only prayer in its naked essence remains. Hence, a great soul says: "Prayer is simply loving." He does not even say it is loving God; because his idea, and the Vedantic idea, is that the highest is to "leave God for God," as he puts it - to go beyond God to Godhead.

Speaking of the man of intense love, Narada says: 'He crosses Maya; he crosses this sea of ignorance; and carries the whole world across too.' What does the sage mean by saying that the God-mad man carries the whole world to Liberation? To be sure one will have to be mad about God to know. But I shall tell you how a girl who was mad about God looked at the matter. I am thinking of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Complicated prayers, she says, are not for simple souls like her. She does not even pray, 'Please attract all those I love; not just me'. Jesus does not even expect that of her. It is sufficient if she simply prays, 'Draw me.' She says something like this to the Lord: "There is a fragrance about the thought of You. When I allow that fragrance to cast its spell over me, I don't hasten after You alone. All those I love come running at my heels. This happens without effort or constraint. It is the automatic consequence of Your attraction. Your love is like a shoreless ocean. When I plunge in, I carry with me all the possessions I have. You know, Lord, what those possessions are - the souls You have seen fit to link with mine; nothing else."

Shankara has in mind the same truth, only his angle of vision is different, when he says that the sage verily purifies the whole world.

Now this is what Narada says in Sutra 61: "The Bhakta" - the true lover - "does not worry himself over the miseries of the world, for he has surrendered his own self, the world, and the Vedas, to the Lord." That means, he has surrendered everything, all theories about what should happen and what should not happen; so he does not worry. But that he does not worry, does not mean that he does not serve the world, and try to alleviate its troubles. All Narada is saying is, the God-lover is not anxious about the world, because he sees by direct vision that there is a Power which is the real stage-manager. It is said that, to the really advanced man, the whole world is the form of his Beloved. That is very high - seeing God in every man, in even the worst of people.

Narada gives great importance to grace. Here are three Sutras (38-40):

"Primarily supreme love is got only through the grace of great souls, or through a slight measure of divine grace. But it is extremely difficult to come in contact with a great soul and to be benefited by his company." Some people may come into such contact, but

they cannot recognize it for what it is. Many people were acquainted with Christ; but even the disciples, who had so much contact with Him, could not recognize Him. Even they doubted. And so He had to perform those miracles of resurrection and so forth to convince them. Resurrection is not the test of divinity - not at all. The test of divinity is something different. A man is an Avatar or is not, whether or not he is resurrected. We know of no Resurrection in India, and yet we of Vedanta believe that there have been Incarnations like Christ.

Narada continues: "The influence of such a one is subtle, incomprehensible, and unerringly infallible in its effect. Nevertheless, this love, this higher Bhakti, is attainable by the grace of God and God-men alone." Let us not think that it is only the devotees who speak of divine grace. Even Shankara, the prince of monists, speaks of the need for grace. And Shri Ramakrishna, who was monist and dualist, knower and lover, in one, repeatedly said that without the grace of God nothing can be achieved. In fact, to be really and truly convinced of this, is itself no mean grace. One of our most respected monks used to say that spiritual practices are for tiring the wings. One has to do spiritual practice in order to come to the inevitable conclusion that nothing of all these practices is of any consequence without the Lord's grace. That is to say, spiritual disciplines purify the mind, and purity of mind enables one to see the wisdom of self-surrender.

On the other hand, paradoxical though it may be, none of these Vedantic teachers would take exception to Meister Eckhart when he says, somewhere: "Lofty aim is lofty nature. I vow God is omnipotent; but He is powerless to hinder the humble soul of towering aspiration."

How are we to learn spiritual truth? Vedanta, and to some extent Christianity, tell us that truth is within us, only we have to uncover it. Spiritual reading and practice, philosophy and good works, these help in uncovering that truth. But the teaching is that if the fire of spiritual life is to be effectively kindled, it needs to be lit from a fire that is already burning. In Yoga this already lighted fire is called the guru (spiritual teacher). He is also the bellows which fans into a blaze the fire that he lights. Of course, much depends on the wood: you can't have much of a blaze with damp wood.

Or look at it in another way: from our present standpoint we can say that there has to be a communication of spiritual knowledge, so that the potential knowledge in us is made vibrant and actual. There will have to be a tuning-in on the same wave-length, as it were. Now how is really deep truth, that is, spiritual truth, to be conveyed in words? Not that intellectual expression is wrong; only it is not full enough. It cannot convey a full revelation: word or thought can only convey a partial one. So we need the revelation of another man's life to pass on the revelation that he has made his own. Or at least, that is the type of revelation that most of us are able to appreciate - the revelation that the life of a saint or a Maker of saints can give us, and the revelation that our spiritual teacher's life discloses. Through words we get some revelation; through another's life, a greater; but the communication of the deepest and most comprehensive revelation is something else again, and entirely past understanding. It has to do with the spiritual power of the teacher, and the spiritual capacity and development of the taught. The direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna tell us that he, Ramakrishna, was emphatic that spirituality can be given by one person to another as really as a fruit can. And the impression that is left with us is that they observed it happen not once but many times in his life. Of course they directly experienced only what happened to themselves; but they observed the outward signs of such inward phenomena in others. Swami Vivekananda says: "It is a law of spiritual life: that as soon as the field is ready, the seed must come." He means that when we are ready the teacher will come. Shri Ramakrishna is more explicit, but what he says comes to the same in effect: "God alone is the guru. That man who can himself approach God with sincerity, earnest prayer, and deep longing, needs no guru. But such yearning of the soul is very rare: hence the



necessity of a guru. If you are really in earnest, God will send you the right teacher. You need not trouble yourself about finding a guru."

I have touched on only a few aspects of a deep and fascinating subject. Some of the aspects do not concern our practice at the present stage: on the other hand, certain of the elements that do concern us, have not been mentioned at all. If anything, the stress has been on the naturalness and simplicity of Bhakti Yoga. But we must appreciate that there are several ways within Bhakti Yoga itself, or, to put it otherwise, several types of Bhakti Yoga. For instance, in the principal way taught by Ramanuja, an all-round preparation, which includes Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga, is prescribed. True, the Jnana Yoga is not that of the Nondualist; but that he stressed the need to develop the intellectual side also, for the full flowering of love in certain types of soul, is significant. Our idea, following Shri Ramakrishna especially, is that purest love and highest knowledge are indistinguishable. But apart from that, for practical success in Bhakti Yoga, some development of the intellect and will may be necessary for some people, and helpful to many. However attentive one may be to devotional practices, times of dryness come when such devotion as we had seems to have vanished. The cause of this can be that previously we had a wrong idea of what pure love is; so that, as our love becomes purer - that is, as there is less of sensation, selfish emotion, and ideation, in it -, we don't recognize it for what it is.

But leaving this aside, there is no doubt that spiritual fervour, for a long period of our advance at least, does seemingly wax and wane. When it seems to be on the wane, when the soul feels like a wet blanket, then if such qualities as firm resolve, single-mindedness, and discriminating power, have been developed, we stand steady.

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## A Conversation with Swami Turiyananda

### A Devotee

When I met Swami Turiyananda at Benares in 1922, I asked him: "Maharaj, the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) had practised various kinds of Sadhana, and I have heard that he instructed you, his disciples, also in many different way of Sadhana. But from you we have received no other instruction except about Dhyana (meditation) and Japa (repetition of God's name). Please tell me the Sadhanas which the Master prescribed for you as means to proper meditation."

The Swami replied: "It is true that the Master instructed some in different kinds of Sadhana. Me, however, he asked only to practise Dhyana and Japa. But he told me to meditate at midnight being completely naked.

The one speciality of the Master was he would not be satisfied with merely instructing. He would keenly observe how far his instruction was being carried out. A few days after, he asked me: 'Well, do you meditate at midnight being naked?' 'Yes, Sir, I do,' I replied. 'How do you feel?' 'Sir, I feel as if I am free of all bondage.' 'Yes. Go on with the practice, you will be much benefited.'

"On another occasion he told me that Sadhana was nothing but 'making the mind and mouth one'. In those days I used to study very much the Vedanta of Sankara. He said to me: 'Well, what is the use of merely saying that the world is false? Naren can say that. For if he says that the world is unreal, unreal it at once becomes. If he says that there is no thorny plant, the thorny plant vanishes. But if you put your hands on the thorns, you will at once feel their pricks.'"

Myself: "Swami Brahmananda said that we must be Kriya-sila, we must practise. When I asked him what I should practise, he said: 'Go on with what I have prescribed for you now, that is, with Dhyana and Japa. I shall further instruct you later on.' But he is now no more. Please instruct me yourself."

The Swami remained silent for a while. By and by his look became grave. He then said: "You must continue with one mood for a long time, till it has become firmly established in your life. I think that is what Swami Brahmananda meant by being Kriya-sila."

Myself: "Please explain further."

Swami: "In the early days, I used to practise a spiritual mood assiduously for a time. Once I practised hard the mood of being an instrument in the hands of the Lord - 'I am the tool, He is the wielder of the tool.' I used to watch carefully every thought and action of mine and see if they were inspired and filled with that mood. Thus passed some days. Then I practised 'I am Brahman' for some time."

By and by the conversation turned on Mahatma Gandhi. The Swami said: "The mind and mouth of the Mahatma are one. A certain boy known to me once went to a poor woman of Benares to have some wheat ground by her. The woman was very busy. So he waited. There was a bundle of leaves near the place where he sat. The woman asked him to bring it to her. But he hesitated. The woman smiled and said: 'You cry Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jay!, but you do not do what he says. How can you hope to get Swaraj (self-rule) this way? I should work for you and you should work for me. There is no high or low in work.' The boy was ashamed and took the bundle to her. When he returned, he told me of the lesson he had learnt from a poor, illiterate woman."

"Swami Vivekananda was once lecturing on the immortality of soul in America - 'I am the Atman, I have neither birth nor death. Whom shall I fear?' etc. Some cowboys wanted to test him and invited him to their place to speak. As he began to lecture, they fired their guns and some of the shots passed near his head. But he continued with his lecture unafraid and undisturbed. The cowboys were astonished. They ran to him, mounted him on their shoulders and began to dance, shouting 'He is our hero.'

"This is what is meant by making the mind and mouth one."

Myself: "Maharaj, how can one learn the command of God?"

Swami: "One way is to see God and talk with Him. Then He Himself says what you are to do. But of course it is an ultimate realisation."

Myself: "Yes, Sir, I have heard that whatever Swami Brahmananda did, was thus under the direct instruction of Sri Ramakrishna."

Swami: "But there is another way in which many can hear the commands of God."

Suppose you are passing along the road, - the chance words of a boy suddenly fall on your ears and they at once solve all your problems. Thus it happens that through the mouth of a boy or a madman or in other ways, certain words reach your ears, penetrate into your deepest heart and resolve your doubts, and you feel in your heart of hearts that those were verily the words of God.

"There are also Sadhanas for receiving commands from God. You have to repeat again and again this Mantram of the Gita: 'With my nature overpowered by weak commiseration, with a mind in confusion about duty, I supplicate Thee. Say decidedly what is good for me. I am Thy disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in Thee.' (II. 7). Repeat it again and again. Then the Lord will somehow let you know His will."

"While I was wandering in Rajputana, I met with a Sadhu. He was sitting alone repeating: 'Abiding in the body of living beings as (the fire) Vaishvanara, I, associated with the Prana and Apana, digest the fourfold food' (XV, 14). He was repeating it and passing his hand over his stomach. I was told that he was suffering from indigestion and that was his remedy."

As I saluted his feet in farewell, the Swami said: "Give light and more light will come to you. 'The more you will give, the more your fund will increase.'"

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, October, 1930)

## **What To Do With This Troublesome Ego** **Swami Nikhilananda**

What shall we do with this troublesome ego? Ego or I-consciousness is the basis of daily normal life. Our thoughts, our words, and our activities are conditioned by the ego. We say to ourselves: 'I am a man', or 'I am a woman', or 'I am a husband', or 'I am a wife', 'I am a Hindu' or 'I am an American'. Without this I-consciousness no human being can live or work. At the same time all major religions say that the ego is the greatest enemy of spiritual life. All major religions prescribe disciplines to suppress or control the ego. Take the case of dualistic religions which believe in a personal God. The members of such religions purify their ego with love of God and thus get rid of selfishness, jealousy, greed, hatred and anger. According to non-dualism, man is one with the Supreme Spirit. The followers of non-dualistic religion purify their ego by this Knowledge of Oneness with the Supreme Spirit. What we call our ego is nothing but a reflection of the Supreme Spirit, so we should identify our ego with the Supreme Spirit. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Keep this knowledge of Supreme Spirit in your pocket and do your duties." That means one should never forget his identity with the Supreme Spirit.

According to Buddhism, there is no such thing as a permanent ego. This 'I' - 'I am father', 'I am mother', 'I own this house' - is nothing but a bundle of sensations. This moment the sensation of happiness arises and so I am happy, and the next moment the idea of unhappiness arises and I am unhappy. So, what we call the ego is nothing but a bundle of sensations. Buddhism says, remember this ever-changing nature of the ego and in deep meditation get rid of the ego, and the world will disappear. This is called Nirvana or enlightenment.

We learn from all the great prophets of the world that the ego is the begetter of sin and suffering. The ego is the cause of selfishness, attachment, aversion, friction, and quarrelling. The ego alienates man from his fellow human beings and from God. The ego alienates the lower self from the Higher Self. Thus ego creates bondage. The ego is the old Adam of Christianity; it must be suppressed. According to Vedanta the ego is like a crocodile which grabs a man by the neck and drowns him in the ocean of the world. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "All troubles will come to an end when we can get rid of the ego." Holy Mother said, "There are two conditions of liberation or God realization; one is egolessness and the other is God's grace." We can suppress the ego by persistent self-effort and discrimination and we can receive God's grace by self-surrender. This effort of man to get rid of the ego can be called the ascent of the soul and the divine grace can be called the descent of God. When the soul and God meet, then man is liberated.

How is the ego created? The origin of ego is a great mystery which I am afraid cannot be solved by our finite mind. The first man, as we read in the scriptures, was egoless. Thus he was God's intimate companion. Then Satan, or ignorance, tempted him in the garden of Eden and he tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree. This means he came under the influence of worldly knowledge. This estranged him from God and he became egotistic. Man denied God. So man is called the prodigal son, exiled from his father's house. According to Vedanta, our soul is divine. Man is a spark of God. Somehow, but how we do not know, there arises in man this inscrutable ignorance which Christianity calls Satan, which is God's rival, or which Vedanta calls maya. But according to Vedanta this

Satan, or ignorance, is in man himself, and when this veil of maya comes between God and the soul, the soul's true nature is obscured and man's intimate relationship with God becomes concealed and multiplicity arises. It is then that the individual soul or the ego appears. It is then that the individual soul regards itself as different from other souls. This individual ego, which regards itself as different from other human beings and from God, is called the mischievous or troublesome ego, and we shall see how it can be controlled.

Let us understand the functions of this ego, which everyone possesses. It identifies itself with the body, mind and senses, and thus it becomes a part of the phenomenal world. What is the result of this identification? What happens when the ego or the 'I' identifies itself with the body? Then it says, 'I am a white man.' 'I am a black man.' 'I am rich' or 'I am poor.' 'I am ugly' or 'I am beautiful.' Thus man experiences physical pleasure or suffering. When the ego identifies itself with the sense organs one says, 'I am blind' or 'I have good sight.' Or, 'I am deaf' or 'I have good hearing.' Or, 'I am lame' or 'I walk correctly.' So identifying itself with the sense organs the ego feels either pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Then what happens when the ego identifies itself with the mind? Then it thinks, 'I am happy' or 'I am unhappy.' This is the nature of the mind. It thinks, 'I am depressed' or 'I am elated.' 'I am sinful' or 'I am virtuous.'

According to Hinduism sin is in our mind and virtue also is in our mind. If a sinful man, which means a man with sinful thoughts, practises spiritual disciplines, and so gets rid of his sinful propensities, then he becomes righteous.

There are diverse manifestations of the ego: gross, subtle, and spiritual. The gross or the vulgar ego says, 'I am rich. I am richer than all other people.' Or, 'I am strong. I am powerful. I shall lay down rules for society.' Then there is a refined or subtle manifestation of the ego. A man with subtle ego says, 'I am an ethical man. I am a scholar. I am righteous. I am an aristocrat.' Then there is a religious ego. A man with such an ego counts his virtues and he has the 'holier than thou' attitude, as one says. He wants to be a saint overnight and if he fails in his meditation he feels frustrated. This ego is present in all living creatures in some form or other. The ego is present as instinct in plants and trees. They also have an urge to live, but this urge is instinctive. Ego is also present in animals but it is only partly conscious there. An animal also eats, sleeps, propagates, and satisfies its physical demands. Animals also build dwelling places and rear their young. Then the ego functions in man. In man it is fully conscious. In the plant it is instinctive, in the animal it is half conscious, and in man it is wholly conscious. A man reasons, he loves, he hates, he is aware of his present limitations, and also he thinks of his future possibilities. Then the ego, in a certain way, is present in the superman or in the mystic. A mystic can completely suppress the ego in the state of deepest contemplation; when he comes down from samadhi his ego again functions, but that ego is not gross. It is purified either by the direct knowledge of God or by the love of God. When a man's ego is purified by the knowledge of God, although he sees or he hears, or he sleeps or he eats, he knows he is not doing any of these things. He knows it is the body, the sense organs, the mind, the non-self that performs these functions and that he is the ever pure Spirit. When the ego is purified by the love of God he regards himself as a channel in God's hand. As Christ used to say, "My father in heaven..." Sri Ramakrishna said, "I am a child of the Divine Mother." The ego creates desires, and desires are the cause of rebirth in higher or lower bodies. Our birth is controlled by the law of karma, which Emerson called the law of compensation; good produces good, and evil produces evil. So a man with desires, good or evil, goes through endless births and deaths. He goes through suffering, old age, pain, and death. At last he wants to get rid of the ego with all its desires, so he seeks out a teacher and practises spiritual disciplines under his guidance until at last the ego is suppressed or controlled and the man attains to liberation.

All great saints and prophets speak of the inner divinity of man. You read in the Christian scriptures, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." The Bhagavad Gita says, "The Lord dwells in everyone's heart." Sri Ramakrishna says, "A man is none else but Siva or God." He also says, "The treasure chest of God or freedom lies in the heart of man." The treasure chest is the spiritual perfection that is in man himself. But this chest is guarded by three dragons; one is the dragon of sattva; the spiritual quality, the second is the dragon of rajas, the human quality, and the third is the dragon of tamas, the quality of darkness or delusion. All our actions are influenced by these three gunas. If one is under the influence of tamas one is deluded, confused, and one regards right as wrong and wrong as right. If one is under the influence of rajas, then he manifests greed, ambition, anger, and so forth. Such a man says to himself, 'I have gained this much today. Tomorrow I shall gain more. This enemy I have destroyed today, that enemy I shall destroy tomorrow.' These are the characteristics of rajas. Then there are the characteristics of sattva, the spiritual quality. But sattva is really a spiritual vanity. It is the opposite of humility. A man can be truly humble only when he sees God in all living beings. When he sees God in the high and the low, the rich and the poor, then he becomes truly humble. On account of spiritual vanity one says, 'I have controlled anger, I have controlled passion, I have controlled jealousy, I have controlled all my evil qualities. I lead a moral life.' He enjoys a kind of happiness, but he is attached to this happiness and he does not want to give it up. He avoids unpleasant actions. Of course this characteristic, sattva, is much better than rajas and tamas. It gives a glimpse of freedom. It is a road to freedom but it is not freedom itself.

There is an interesting story in our scriptures of a man who came to know of a pot of gold buried in a field under a tree. He went in search of it. When he came near the tree he saw a fierce dragon there to guard the treasure. A fight ensued. It was a life-and-death struggle. At the end the man subdued the dragon and he was so elated with the victory that he began to dance in joy round and round the tree, forgetting all about the pot of gold which he wanted to possess. In the same way when we practise spiritual disciplines we are confronted with many situations and emotions, jealousy, passion, etc., which we try to subdue, and when we succeed we become so happy that we forget altogether the purpose of spiritual disciplines, which is the attainment of God.

We all know the evil effects of ego. There are many. This ego is the source of fear and friction and separation from others. We read in the Upanishads that when you regard another being as different from yourself, whoever that person may be - your husband or wife or friend or your God - there will be fear and friction between you. The Hindu scripture gives instruction in this regard in the form of a parable. A young girl was one day massaging her husband's feet to put him to sleep. She had nine bracelets on her wrist, and as she was massaging her husband, the bracelets, knocking together, made a noise and disturbed her husband. So she broke off one of the bracelets, but still there was a noise as she again massaged. So one by one she broke off the bracelets until there were only two. Still there was friction between the two. Finally she broke another one and then there was one and there was no friction. There was silence.

The Hindu philosophers say when one is free from ego then one no longer has the idea of separation and no longer hides anything from others. One does not lead a secretive life. The Bhagavad Gita says, when you see all beings in yourself and yourself in all beings then you will be beyond delusion, beyond grief, and beyond sorrow. This complete suppression of the ego is Self-Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge is the source of fearlessness, immortality, and bliss.

Another effect of ego is that everyone shuns the company of the egotistic person. Of course flatterers gather around the wealthy and the powerful, but even they abuse such people behind their backs. Wealth and scholarship by themselves, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, are not evil. Through money you can help the poor and through scholarship

you can help the ignorant, but when this wealth and scholarship are heated in the fire of ego, they become unbearable. As Sri Ramakrishna also said, when you put vegetables like peas and carrots or beans in a pot of cold water you can touch them, but after the water is heated you can no longer do so. Likewise, when our scholarship or our wealth or social position is heated by this ego, a man becomes unbearable.

Ego has another evil effect. It prevents one from enjoying his wealth and social position. It is the ego that creates discord and friction, and people shun arrogant persons.

Suppose you have a plate of delicious food before you. Through carelessness you have swallowed a fish bone that becomes stuck in your throat. Every morsel of food that you eat, no matter how delicious, gives unbearable pain. The delicious food is there, but because of the fish bone in your throat it is painful to swallow. Likewise, on account of this ego which creates arrogance, one cannot enjoy wealth or social position.

Then we learn from our scriptures that the ego is a barrier between oneself and divine grace. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that you cannot pass a slender thread through the eye of a needle if the least bit of the fibre sticks out. Likewise a man cannot enjoy communion with God if the tiniest bit of ego sticks out. Again, according to Sri Ramakrishna, God laughs twice. A patient is dying and the physician says to the weeping relatives, 'Don't worry. I am going to save this man.' This is the first time God laughs. He says, 'I am going to kill this person and this fool of a doctor says he will cure him.' Then God laughs again when two brothers come to a field with a measuring rod and place it across the field and one says to the other, 'This side is mine and that side is yours.' God laughs and says, 'The whole world belongs to me and these fools say, this is mine and that is yours.'

Certainly God is now laughing at us when the great powers are trying to divide the world. They say, 'This is East and this is West.' The Eastern power says, 'You Western powers cannot come into our ground,' and the Western power says, 'This is our continent and we won't allow anyone else to come here.' God laughs and says, 'This is my world, and these fools say this is mine and that is yours.' And what will happen if this foolishness goes on? A complete catastrophe. God does not help us while we take our ego too seriously.

Once Lakshmi and Narayana were seated in Vaikuntha, when Narayana suddenly stood up. Lakshmi had been stroking His feet. She said, "Lord, where are You going?" Narayana answered: "One of My devotees is in great danger. I must save him." With these words He went out. But He came back immediately. Lakshmi said, "Lord, why have You returned so soon?" Narayana smiled and said: "The devotee was going along the road overwhelmed with love for Me. Some washermen were drying clothes on the grass and the devotee walked over the clothes. At this the washermen chased him and were going to beat him with their sticks. So I ran out to protect him." "But why have You come back?" asked Lakshmi. Narayana laughed and said: "I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at them. So I came back." The ego is the barrier between divine grace and divine love and ourself. The water of devotion slides down this mountain of ego. God demands self-surrender.

There are two kinds of dependence on God. One is the dependence of a young monkey on its mother, and the other is the dependence of a young kitten on its mother cat. The young monkey holds to the mother monkey and when the mother jumps from tree to tree the baby monkey loses its grip and falls off. But the mother cat picks up the kitten and places it wherever she will, sometimes on the floor and sometimes on the bed, and the kitten is content to stay where the mother puts it. The kitten surrenders itself completely to the mother cat.

There is another kind of ego called the group ego. Some religious groups are very vain, and such group ego is the cause of hatred and misunderstanding. Then there is the international ego of which we are too conscious today, and that is the main cause of

international friction. It is the desire for national aggrandizement at the cost of other nations. Two nations will not make any compromise for fear of losing face. Thus we go on increasing armaments, and the greater the military strength the greater is the insecurity of the nation.

Now the question is how to control this troublesome ego. There are three methods: either deny it, or stretch it, or shrink it. What is the denial or repudiation of the ego? I have already spoken of the Buddhist idea of ego. Buddha taught us that there is no such thing as permanent substance either in the ego or in the world. All that we are aware of are momentary sensations. A physical object is nothing but a bundle of sensations. There is no permanent substance behind any physical object. What is this particular object comprised of? It is hard, it is brown, it has a name. It has other characteristics but where is the substance? If you eliminate all the characteristics we just spoke of there is nothing left. There is a story in Buddhist lore of a king who went to visit a holy man. The monk said to the king, "How did you come here from the palace?" "Why, I came in my chariot." And the monk asked with a smile, "What is this chariot?" "There it is, outside," the king said, "I came in it and I shall return in it." "In that contraption you call a chariot there are wheels. Are the wheels the chariot?" The king answered, "No." "Perhaps the roof is the chariot?" The king again answered, "No." "There is a chair in the chariot. Is the chair the chariot?" Again the king answered, "No." "Perhaps the horses?" "Or the yoke?" "Or the axle?" Each time the king answered, "No." "You are talking of 'my' chariot," the saint said. "What then is your chariot?" The king did not answer and the holy man finally said, "All that you have described are different things." So Buddhism says all that we see in ourselves and outside of ourselves is nothing but a bundle of sensations; there is no permanent substance either in our ego or in the outside world.

They give the example of a flame. We see a steady flame, but what is it? The flame is nothing but a succession of sparks that come through the wick from the oil; each spark explodes and disappears, and then another spark comes, so all you see is a succession of sparks. There is no such thing as a flame. Bergson also says you don't step into the same river twice, because the river constantly changes. Socrates asks, "Where is this 'me' or 'I'?" He says, "Catch me!" Sri Ramakrishna says, "Where is the onion?" It is just a layer of skins. You remove them one by one and there is nothing left. Likewise if you analyze yourself you will find there is no such thing as 'I' or a permanent ego. So if you can suppress these impulses, if you do not connect one with the other impulse, then you will attain to the Buddha mind, which is free from disturbance and is serene. By developing a serene mind you can serve humanity. This is one way of dealing with the troublesome ego - by denying it completely.

The second method is to expand your ego, breaking the limitations of your individuality. What is the barrier between you and me? Where do I end and you begin? Every second there is an exchange between us and even between us and material particles. Every moment particles are going out and new particles are coming in. Break down the barrier and be detached from the finite. If you want to expand the ego always repeat, 'I am He,' 'All that exists is Spirit.' See yourself in all and all in yourself. Then there will be no fear of death. As long as the meanest creature is alive you are alive. As long as any person is eating you are eating. It is difficult, but people have attained to this state.

A saint once told us a story. One day he went out to beg his food, following the mendicants' rule, and for some reason he was late. The householders had finished their meals and so he could not get anything. Being hungry and tired, he entered into a bush and tried to rest, and as he was lying there he remembered certain verses of the Bhagavad Gita and recited to himself, "The heaven is my head, the sun and moon are my eyes, my body covers the whole universe." Suddenly he felt a tremendous expansion of his ego. His hunger and thirst had disappeared. He felt himself expanding into all things. But this is difficult.

Then comes the easier way: to shrink the ego. Sri Ramakrishna had two great disciples. One was Swami Vivekananda, a dynamic man, a heroic person who felt his oneness with all. The other disciple, Nag Mahashaya, was the humblest of the humble. He always shrank himself before others. So it is said this net of maya or cosmic delusion cannot entangle either the great or the small. As maya wanted to entangle Swami Vivekananda, he expanded himself and there was not enough net to catch him. As the Enchantress wanted to catch the humble man, he shrank himself so small he slipped through the mesh and so escaped the net. How does one shrink the ego? We must always feel, 'Not I, but Thou.' We are to say, 'I am the servant of God. I am the instrument of God.' Thus we shall free ourselves from our ego and become channels for the manifestation of God's will, and if we really regard ourselves as the instruments of God, God will do mighty work through us. So Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "I am the house, Thou art the indweller. I am the machine, Thou art the operator. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou speakest through me. Not I but Thou." Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart," "Blessed are the poor in Spirit." Here Christ is not asking us to be cowards. He is asking us to be truly humble. Real humility comes when we see God in all, in the high and in the low, in the poor and in the rich.

Sri Ramakrishna said there are two kinds of ego, the ego of Knowledge and the ego of ignorance. When the ego of Knowledge functions in us, then we know, 'I am the child of God,' or 'I am one with God,' but when we cherish the ego of ignorance then we say to ourselves, 'I am the doer. I am the master. I am the manager,' and so forth. This is the result of ignorance. So the ego of ignorance may be called the green ego and the ego of knowledge the ripe ego. The green fruit, such as a green mango or plum, is sour to the taste, but when it becomes ripe it is delicious. So let us turn the green ego into the ripe ego. As long as we cannot get rid of the ego, let it remain, but let it remain as the servant of God and of all His creatures, of all beings. Such an ego will not injure us. It is a mere appearance. It disappears when we discriminate. It is like a burnt string that has the appearance of string but when you touch it the ash disappears. Or it is like a sword that has been turned into gold by the philosopher's stone. After the sword has been turned into gold it still has the shape of a sword but you cannot hurt anyone with it. Or the ripe ego is like a roasted seed. It has the appearance of a seed but it cannot produce a tree. So when our ego has become ripe or chastened or purified, that ego will not bring us this suffering and pain of endless birth and death, and we can use it in the service of man, in the service of society, and thus we shall be blessed and the world will be blessed and after the fall of the body, when we have developed this ripe ego, then we shall enjoy peace and blessedness in eternal communion with God.

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## **Leaves of an Ashrama 20**

### **Provisional Viewpoint as Precursor of Love**

#### **Swami Vidyatmananda**

At one stage in my life I was a business executive. On the anniversary of each employee's hiring, I used to give him a yearly "personnel evaluation interview". Throughout the previous twelve months I had accumulated impressions concerning the worker's strong and weak points. On the occasion of the annual rendezvous I would inform him of these



judgements, listing his weaknesses in specific detail and telling him to correct them during the coming period. .

Now, having been a spiritual aspirant for some time, I look back on those activities of mine in disbelief. How could I ever have been so sure? What insolence! I feel now as though I would be hesitant about even trying to manage a dog or cat. And does pointing out another's faults ever result in his correcting them?

My years of discipline have taught me, first, that I am less perfect than I should like to be; and, second, that the only workable way to make other people do better is to regard them as the better people they too are aspiring to become.

The principal characteristic of an ignorant man is that he does not know that he is ignorant. He believes that he is wise. This is why ignorance can be so dangerous. It is his false assurance that gives him such unrestrained power to act. Action - even good action - stems from blindness and lack. So we may be sure that the world's great doers are also the world's great fools. The doings of "men of action" are what make the world go on, remaining the messy affair that it is and always has been.

But once you become an aspirant you grow what I would call "provisional". Aware of your own struggles to meet the standard of excellence you would attain, you adopt a cautionary stance. "Who am I to manipulate anybody?" becomes your attitude.

This provisional viewpoint applies to one's relations with others. One is less quick to evaluate them negatively. "In the eye of the lover there is no ugliness." You forbear; you withhold judgement; you try to understand and indeed admire. This is a kind of love, and it is amazing how practising it towards other people helps them to become what you would have them be. They start to grow beautiful just for you.

As you follow these two attitudes - humility towards yourself and positive acceptance of others - a double result occurs: you become better than you think you are; and you make others better too. You rise by evaluating yourself too modestly, and others are lifted up by being evaluated perhaps too highly.

"If love is right, everything is right." And the right love evidences itself in loving myself a good deal less and my neighbour a good deal more.

## **The Mind in All its Modes (continued)** **Clement James Knott**

We all start life with our share of ignorance, but we also arrive with a motivation to live: "the need to know." We each have the means to make our existence a life of discovery and revelation. We are born to discover that there is a basic state of consciousness that in its essence is energised by the pure spirit of the Self and is capable, by means of the mind, of developing the character and personality of the individual. The snag is, we must start with an undeveloped mind. We have to feel our way to find a system of thought and belief that we can live with. We are all involved in the pursuit of knowledge, whether through educational studies or any other means, but we should also seek knowledge of the modes of functioning of our own mind without having to rely on an established dogma or system of thought.

People do not always mean the same thing when they say "I believe". Some may mean "I believe it as a fact" or "I believe it as a possibility", while others may intend to convey, "I believe it as being imaginable". These meanings can all be valid in their different

contexts. Imagination, when self-directed, can be a strong component part of personal belief. This is not the same as visualisation, which tends to be a mental activity.

If the person has become identified with his mind to the point where he cannot think objectively about it, then he may become enslaved by the unaware mind, resulting in a progressive reduction in awareness and a dwindling spiral of consciousness.

Some individuals assume that one's mind is mainly a memory machine, and only works for us when asked or commanded to do so. They regard it as a device for problem solving, to be called into use whenever a problem arises. Such a mind, therefore, is not continuously aware. It has blank periods. The mind, when it realizes its true nature, is with us whatever we are doing and it is alert continually as a central component of our consciousness.

Any conscious thought, feeling, emotion or reaction that we have is a part of one's mind. Even watching and witnessing oneself and being in thoughtless awareness involve the mind. The mind, as it becomes realized, is capable of perceiving itself and its modes of functioning from moment to moment and in so doing it enhances its own capacity for awareness.

If the mind has been developed on a mainly intellectual basis, without awareness of the True Self, then the ego-self comes to believe that it originates from material sources. Thus, awareness of the True Self becomes obscured and may lose itself in the sub-conscious. The spirit of the Self is there but the ego-self does not want to know it. This is a mind in denial.

### Self Assessment

It is not uncommon for children in their early years to come to believe that their father or their mother or perhaps both, are God. When he grows out of this misunderstanding, if there is not a smooth transition to a more mature level of belief and guidance, the child may be left with a vacuum in his spiritual and personal development. This vacuum may persist for a lifetime, waiting to be filled. The person who wishes to resume his path of spiritual and personal development may do so at any time of his own volition. He will need to become aware of how his own mind has been functioning during the interim period of reduced awareness.

The consciousness of the infant is diffuse; it is effulgent, naturally flowing out, with an unformed potential for discrimination and self-control. His basic consciousness is in a near pure state but as the mind develops it gets overlaid by impressions and mechanisms that obscure its true nature. As the ego-self develops, he tends to become more identified with the mind and motivated by feelings. He becomes less able to observe the mind objectively by watching it functioning and by assessing what is influencing its responses and actions.

The nascent spirit starts to develop the mind by means of the senses and through physical growth before the unawakened mind acquires language. The infant thinks in and reacts to images and feelings before he learns language. The mind in a realized state has the capacity to acquire knowledge and to manifest awareness. But why is it that we so often see the mind hindered from its natural process of development and the fulfilment of its inborn potential? This is frequently the result of the modes of the mind that have been imposed on it by others for purposes of restraint and control. These imposed modes can act on a subconscious level and can be persistent enough to prevent the natural development of the individual as a human being and as a personality. They can also influence behaviour in a negative way long into adulthood.

The effect of the imposed but self-created modes that obscure the mind is a state of diminished awareness which prevents the individual from integrating his spiritual, emotional and mental consciousness and hinders him from fulfilling his life potential. But if one can objectify the mind and the feelings through self-observation and self-

assessment, one can view this state of diminished awareness as an interim period, the effects of which can be much reduced by realizing and annulling the unwanted modes that are clouding the mind.

If one wishes to disconnect from superfluous modes that are influencing one's thoughts and actions in the present time, one can re-connect with an earlier phase when one's consciousness was in a purer state than it is now. How is this possible? It is possible because one of the qualities of the True Spirit that empowers the mind is that it is timeless: 'now' becomes 'then' and 'then' becomes 'now'. So an interim period of diminished awareness, however long it has been, need not be an obstacle.

When the individual has matured sufficiently to re-assert himself, he can re-start his spiritual and personal development in the direction of his ideal. This is not a matter of regressing, but rather a continuation. It is a continuation of a period when one was experiencing a purer state of consciousness. This is of the nature of the Self which is a timeless continuity. Hence the Self is able to pass over any less salutary phases of the mind and to continue the state of thoughtless awareness from where it left off. This is a manifestation of the spirit that is the True Self within who is the watcher and the witness, the knower and the knowledge. The one True Spirit has not changed, but we as human beings are changing.

When the seeker has decided that his mind is not functioning as well as it might, and it is in need of an overhaul to improve its performance, then how should he set about it? If one is religious, it is not necessary to cut any religious ties. The search for the truth of the Self is significant for all human beings. It is not contrary to any religion, except those sects that are preoccupied with unproven ideas about death and after-life.

Looking at one's own mind is not a matter of looking back. It is more a matter of looking forward; of creating a matrix for the future. This can be done by applying established prayer and meditation practices to reveal the wonders that are there in one's mind. It is not a substitute for religion, but a preparation for it.

Below, by means of an introduction to this approach to refining one's own mind, is a brief descriptive list of some basic positive modes. This list is an aid for the new adept who is seeking spiritual experience of himself by exploring the marvellous capabilities of his own mind, initially under the guidance of another adept. It is not for the benefit of the expert who is only seeking knowledge.

This is a basic stage in the realization of the mind. It is also an aid to developing ability in one-pointedness and, by means of the practice of detachment from any distractions in the mind within one's area of perception, to enhance the integration of our perceptions. Thus we attain to discernment of the real and the unreal (*viveka*) and dispassion for the things of the world, (*vairagya*).

Regenerating some basic innate modes of the mind

#### 1. Externalising:

Externalising through the senses, mainly seeing, hearing and touching. Perceiving every being and each thing in its own place and with its own space, and having the feeling of self being in relationship with them.

Meditation: "I am not any of these things that I am perceiving." "What am I?"

#### 2. Internalising into body:

Internalising into the body or any part of it; flowing through each part, organ, and instrument of perception from the toes and the fingers to the crown of the head.

"I am not this body or any part of it."

"It is a vehicle of the Self."

#### 3. Internalising into perceiving the mind:

Internalising into ideas, feelings, impressions and mental images in the mind, watching the mind objectively and witnessing its functioning with the minimum input from the ego-self.

"I am not these things passing through my mind."

"I can empty my mind at will."

Creating some basic acquired modes of the mind

4. Directing the mind and the body by means of:

Relaxing all the muscles, articulations and parts of the body in sequence.

Releasing tensions, particularly in the shoulders, neck, head and face.

Resting the body and resting the mind, consciously.

Restoring energy levels and recovering abilities.

The individual will is the desire to act in accordance with one's own thoughts and feelings to the extent of one's own abilities.

Meditation: "I am the will that directs my awareness, and actions."

5. Self-belief:

The mind having faith in itself to resolve the problem of what to do with the mind. The mind is self-intelligent when it is illuminated by the spirit within and as it becomes realized it is capable of perceiving itself. This self-reflective quality enables us to examine its functioning objectively. By objectifying the mind through self-observation, we eventually become able to turn the mind in on itself at will.

"I am not my mind." "Who am I?"

6. Creating order:

Perceiving clearly what now exists and what is needed for progress. Recognising what is required to create order out of chaos and how to bring it about.

Creating order in one's own area to facilitate sensing and perception and communication.

"How much order can I create?" "What is my place in it?"

7. The mode of serenity:

Serenity as a preparation for further spiritual practice. Becoming located in the still centre of the mind and the being, in peace and tranquillity. Perceiving from the centre through the senses, with full recognition, but without personal reactions. Perceiving the flowing of serenity without objectifying the mode. The self becoming detached from distractions in the mind or within one's area of perception. No distracting thoughts, mental images, random memories or feelings.

Meditation: "Integrating the physical, mental, and spiritual centres of living beingness harmoniously into one centre, in perfect balance."

The above modes can be meditated, initially, on the basis of one mode for each day until one has gained sufficient familiarity to integrate them as different facets of one's beingness. The outcome will be different from one person to another. There is no set goal that applies as if "One size fits all." No two individual minds are exactly the same because we each have a different experience of life. Though all our individual minds may be different, the True Spirit that pervades and animates all existence is the One without a second, unchanging and timeless; not "I" but "Thou."

These modes can be realised by means of applied prayer and meditation and by using significant phrases repetitively as mantras. In this context, the mantra is effective if it is true and it induces a positive mode. The seeds of the innate modes are already there in the individual, but unless one has been a very fortunate person hitherto in life, they will be in need of refining and practising. The acquired modes indicated may well be new to

some, but they can be practised by anyone who has the wish and the will to do so on a regular basis.

## Seeds (continued) Swami Yatiswarananda

### Tenacity

Religion, whether we like it or not, is for the chosen few. There can never be any mass-religion, however beautiful this idea may seem.

The Bhagavad-Gita says that out of thousands of people we find but one fortunate soul taking to the spiritual life; and only one among these blessed few knows the Lord in reality. (Chapter 7, verse 3) Success or no success, let us at least strive with all our heart. Let us think that we are among those blessed few that will see God in truth. Those who are strong, those who have the capacity alone succeed - not the others. There is no place for the weakling in spiritual life.

The strong, the tenacious, belong to a kind of religious aristocracy; it is an aristocracy that is always willing to share its riches with others. But we have to use our discrimination and say the right thing to the right person at the right time, otherwise it will be a case of "casting our pearls before swine". Whatever we say or do, there will always be those who will not be able to understand, much less to follow, the advice that we give in good spirit. People have varying capacities for spiritual assimilation. We should consider it a great fortune if, for some reason or other our mind possesses an attraction for things that are eternal.

We should see to it that we proceed steadily, never flagging, until we reach the Goal. Our spiritual fervour is to be maintained at all costs. Very often, after we have trodden the spiritual path for some time we become slack in our disciplines. For many, this is the beginning of the end of spiritual striving. The minds of such aspirants are too restless and too outgoing to enable them to retain for long periods their initial spiritual fervour and intensity. They are unable to pursue their practices, their meditations, daily readings and studies, steadily and doggedly. So we should all be on our guard. Doggedness, tenacity - this is the one thing needed for spiritual growth. We must never allow ourselves to flag or to become lukewarm.

### Slavery

"He is the only One that is stainless, sinless, changeless, unnameable, pure and divine. There is no second. Whoever knows Him, becomes He Himself."

"God is known to him who really knows Him to be unknown; and He is unknown to him who thinks He is known."

The question is, "How to know Him?" This is the point. He cannot be known in a day after a few practices performed in a haphazard and slovenly way. There is an Indian proverb that runs: "It is right and proper to pursue your spiritual disciplines; but you must know how to die!" Let us not die like miserable slaves, never doing anything but blindly obeying the dictates of our senses and impulses until the last day of our life. "Our birth is a sleep and a forgetting," says Wordsworth, and so the one task in life is to assert our potential divinity, to come face to face with Reality.

## Transcendence

"One God hidden in all things, pervades all things, and is the Inner Life of all things. He is the giver of the fruits of karma. He is the Soul of all. There is nothing like Him and He is beyond the gunas being secondless. He is the great wise One. He is the One Doer among the many actionless objects."

Man very easily forgets that his power of comprehension is so limited and, as you say in the West, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Generally speaking, it is not the Truth we love; we just love ourselves in something. We are in love with an idea, not because it represents the Truth at all, but because it is our idea. Only to the true and steady devotee does the Lord reveal His glory. It is the devotee's task, then, to be in tune with the Divine, with the Infinite, for, just as man tries to approach God, God is ever-ready to approach man.

So it is funny, is it not. So often it seems to us that there is no sense in all this manifestation - these bodies, thoughts and all. What is the reason for the Formless to assume form? It is all without rhyme or reason; nothing but madness. There is really no explanation for this diversified and multiform play of Maya in the One. "God's will," says the Christian; "God's lila," says the Vedantist. On the relative plane there is no explanation; it can never be explained. But it can be transcended.

We must learn to transcend not only evil but also the good, for wherever there is good, there, unavoidably, you also find the bad. Happiness and misery, like all the pairs of opposites, always go together. The moment you accept happiness, you must take misery too. The only solution is to transcend them and reach a plane beyond what we call good and evil, i.e. beyond all relative good and evil. There is no such thing as absolute good or absolute evil on this phenomenal plane.

(to be continued)

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