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Dhriti (Steadfastness)

Swami Dayatmananda

Dhriti is an important spiritual quality. The Sandilya Upanishad describes Dhriti as firmness of mind amidst a period of ups and downs. To remain calm, steady and self-possessed even when confronted with the greatest calamity, danger or sorrow, and not to deviate from the path of righteousness or duty under the influence of passions like lust, anger, fear or greed is called Dhriti or fortitude.

The great Shankaracharya defines Dhriti as: "That state of mind which removes the exhaustion of the body and senses when they droop down, and upheld by which the body and senses no longer get dejected." (Gita)

It is said of the Buddha that he performed super-human austerities to obtain illumination but did not succeed. Then he decided that he would not get up from under the Bodhi tree till he attained illumination, even if he were to die in the process. He uttered these words:

Here on this seat my body may dry up.

Let my flesh, skin and bones dissolve.

Not getting Enlightenment, (which is) difficult (to get) after many eons,

Not indeed from this seat will this body move. (Lalitavistara)

With this firm resolve the Buddha sat down under the Bodhi tree and obtained illumination the same night.

Without steadfastness and strong determination one reaches nowhere. Sri Ramakrishna used to say of people who have no grit whatsoever : "There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk - soft and mushy. No inner strength!

"The mind is everything. Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind. A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or in the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me?' By repeating with grit and determination, 'I am not bound, I am free', one really becomes so - one really becomes free. One must have stern determination; then alone is spiritual practice possible.

One must make a firm resolve."

One can be firm and steadfast under favourable circumstances, but none can escape the dualities of life. There will be trying times. It is under these difficult circumstances one needs strength, courage, patience and grit. Swami Turiyananda often used to teach: "Clench your fists and say: I will conquer! Now or never - make that your motto, even in this life I must see God... That is the only way. Never postpone. What you know to be right, do that and do that at once, do not let any chance go by. The way to failure is paved with good intentions. That will not do. Remember, this life is for the strong, the persevering: the weak go to the wall. And always be on your guard. Never give in."

It is natural to be dejected under unfavourable circumstances. Even great souls feel the burden. Swami Turiyanandaji narrated an incident from his life:

"When we were living at the old Math, now many years ago, it happened once that I was very sad. I could not make any progress for some time and everything looked dark to me. I was walking up and down on the flat roof of the Math. It was evening and the moon was hidden by clouds. Sleep was impossible for me, I was so unhappy. Then suddenly from behind the clouds the moon emerged and everything looked bright and beautiful. As soon as I saw that, I thought: 'See, the moon was there all the time but I could not see her. So the Atman is also ever present, shining in its own glory, but I did not see it. The cloud of ignorance stood between the Atman and my intellect overshadowing my mind.' And at once I felt strong again, my doubts all gone.

"Circumstances may or may not be favourable, but who cares? We must strain every nerve to accomplish the thing. If you are determined to do it at any cost, you will find that great obstacles which you thought would overpower you, ultimately turn out to help you. But you must struggle sincerely. Does one find circumstances always propitious? Consider what you have got to do as your duty and go on."

Swami Shivananda used to say: "With firm determination, one has to strive for God-realisation. Make a start from this very day; for life is fleeing every moment. Nobody can say when one will have the call for departure; so don't waste a single day. Those who think that these things can be put off for the future never do anything. They will be tossed in this current of birth and death for infinite ages."

Dhriti is a word rich with many meanings. Dhriti means steadfastness, fortitude, patience, courage, strong will-power etc. Without these qualities no one is going to succeed in anything.

It is also very easy to misunderstand the word Dhriti and confuse it with stubbornness, which is quite the opposite in meaning. We find innumerable examples of wicked and cruel dictators persisting in their wrong views bringing immense harm to millions.

Indeed, Sri Krishna himself, in the Bhagavad Gita classifies Dhriti into three types: Tamasic, Rajasic and Satvic. The resolve by which a person persists in wrong, irrational views and deeds is Tamasic. Tamasic resolve stubbornly holds on to a wrong notion or course of action. We find many spiritual aspirants possess this Tamasic Dhriti. Some are not even aware that they are treading the wrong path. Even after becoming aware of this tendency, many refuse to change their ways, continue to suffer themselves, make others suffer, but still persist in their wrong ways. Such is the power of Mahamaya!

That resolve by which a person regulates his life for the enjoyments of this world is Rajasic. Only that resolve by which one dedicates one's life for the realisation of the Self is Satvic Dhriti. One needs a lot of self-introspection in order to find out one's true motive.

To be steadfast one needs tremendous will-power. It is impossible to be steadfast if we do not have patience, fortitude, cheerfulness, positive thinking and infinite patience. An essential part of steadfastness is overcoming indecision of mind. Constant indecision is a disease of the mind. Steadfastness with flexibility is what is needed.

The spiritual path is a long and arduous process. No speedy result can be expected in this path. One has to go on persevering in the path, day after day, month after month, year after year, with the same determination - one has to make spiritual effort.

It may even take many lives before one can reach the goal. There will be lots of ups and

downs, and challenges. Therefore steadiness and perseverance are absolutely essential on the spiritual path.

No one has become great without steadfast effort. Perhaps many of our readers may remember the story of Robert the Bruce and the spider that fell several times yet finally succeeded. 'Try, try until you succeed' is the secret behind many great achievements. If one is possessed of Satvic Dhriti and sincerely goes on striving with faith and patience one is sure to reach the goal.

Jesus Christ and His Message (continued)

Swami Asaktananda

Perhaps by now we have glimpsed a little of who Jesus was. Then what was his message? I would say his life was his message. If one does not act according to one's own words, who is going to follow him? So what Jesus preached, he himself practised, and his life was that practice. Very practical he was. For we know, as he said, that a tree is known by its fruits. So also is the truth known by its fruits. Then again, for myself, I also judge things by my own understanding and comprehension: hence what I say about his personality and teaching must be coloured by my own thinking. But for me at least, the charm of the life of Jesus lies in three things.

First, he was primarily a man of renunciation, a true sannyasin. Second, he was an embodiment of love and compassion. And third, he was a great exemplar of self-sacrifice. Let us consider first his renunciation. Truly he said, 'The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' No me or mine. No home even - what to speak of family ties or any such bondages of this world. No physical ideas, no sex ideas, nothing to hold him at all to this world. Himself an unfettered spirit, he saw everyone, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, saint or sinner, as the embodiment of this same spirit. Did he not declare, 'The kingdom of God is within you' - within every one of us?

Every man is a form of the Supreme Spirit. In every man there is a heaven. Jesus, at various times and to varying degrees of aspirants, says: 'I and my Father are one. I am in my Father. Ye are in me and I in you.' These are the greatest truths. Here I find no difference between the teachings of Jesus and those of Vedanta. His most profound idea was - renounce the world and realize God.

Once a rich young man came to him and said, 'Good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' And Jesus answered, 'One thing thou lackest. Go thy way and sell whatever thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.' Now if this saying of Jesus were directed to us, what would we do? We would say: I have to wait a bit, I have to do this, I have to do that, and so on. In this world of turmoil there will always be these waves of 'duty' rolling on - sometimes seven feet high, sometimes two feet, that is all the difference. If you think, 'I shall take a dip in the ocean when all the waves are calmed, all the water still', you will never be able to take the dip.

The idea is, we have to give up; we have to surrender all of the body, the mind, and everything to the Lord. As Jesus says, 'Whoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it.'

Again, in Christ's personality, we find him the embodiment of love and compassion. He had unbounded love for humanity, particularly for those suffering the most. He preached nothing but love. When asked for the greatest Commandment he said: "'Love the Lord thy God with all

thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind"... And the second is like unto it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Nay, he goes even further: "It hath been said by them of old time, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." But I say unto you, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you..." "

So, if we really love the Lord our God with all our heart and express love in all our dealings, what then will happen? We shall simply have to see God in all beings - for where is it that He is not? Surely He manifests best in human beings. So how can we help loving our neighbours? And without loving Him, real love for neighbours is impossible, what to speak of enemies! If we love Him with all our heart, we at once begin to love the Lord the neighbour, the Lord the enemy. Because He is all: He is manifested everywhere.

Thirdly in Christ's life we are charmed by his utter self-sacrifice. Of course, it becomes clear that this is inseparably connected with his renunciation and his love and compassion? Where there is no sacrifice there is no love; and what means 'renunciation' without love? Really there is but one idea in morality and that is unselfishness. It is the foundation of all morality and ethics; and spiritual life demands complete self-surrender to God, complete self-giving to fellow-men. Jesus' demands here are stern: if a man is struck on his right cheek he should turn the left also. How many of us can do that? And if one carries away your coat, give him your cloak also. Are we ready for this? Yet these are his clear teachings. Not that he spoke only; you all know that he lived the life. He practised all this himself; he sacrificed himself completely. His life was his message to the world, a living example of self-sacrifice. If we cannot follow him, it is our fault, not that of the ideal man that he was!

But studying further the message of Jesus, we find that, like himself, this message is eternal. It is essentially the message which the great Incarnations have preached to mankind down through the ages. For thousands of years, people have gone down and down spiritually, and for thousands of years God has manifested Himself and brought us the same basic teachings in different languages with different stresses. Jesus of Nazareth says: 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.'

Now, each man is essentially perfect. The spirit, the essence, within man, is always perfect. Perfection is the very nature of the soul, the Atman: this is the Christ in every man, sleeping as it were. What we have to do is to cleanse the spirit: then It is there! The Upanisads say, 'Ye are the children of Immortal Bliss.' The Old Testament says, 'Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.' And Christ himself repeats, as John tells us, 'Ye are gods.' Sri Ramakrishna once said, 'The Lord is dwelling in the heart of all, but not everyone dwells in him.' But every one of us ultimately will have to dwell in Him, and then we shall know that we are free.

It is the Lord who comes to show the human being the way, to lead him towards Himself, and He leads him by giving His whole life. Every drop of His blood is given, in order to bring in peace and tranquillity, and the vision of God to us humans. It is the Lord who comes in the form of an Incarnation. Jesus says: 'Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake.'

Then comes the question, 'How shall we find the Kingdom of God?' Again Jesus' message is crystal-clear: as given by St. Luke, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' And as for the ways and means to reach it: 'Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened...'

But what of his miracles? You know that his glory lies in his spiritual message and teachings, not in healing the sick or blind or lame. Jesus never came just for that: he had a far greater purpose. Tremendous emphasis has of course been placed, even by great souls, on his powers

of healing and curing. But as Swami Vivekananda said, 'If Christianity would avoid preaching... so much of Jesus' miraculous powers, Christianity would have taken over the entire world in no time.' If the Goal is within, all such externals can at best be incidentals.

For us, the teachings of Christ - the way and the means - have been wonderfully summed up in his Sermon on the Mount. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Poor in spirit means, endowed with humility: a seeker of God must be humble, ready to serve all. 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' True meekness is self-surrender to God - to be free entirely from the ego, the sense of me and mine. Family, possessions, everything belongs to God. To be perfectly unselfish, one must practise - practise and practise day in and day out. Every moment something comes up and we at once fill up with egoism. Always surrender self. Always depend on the will of the Lord. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Unselfishness is God.' Why is unselfishness God? Because when a man is perfectly unselfish, his heart becomes so pure that the whole of it is nothing but the Lord Himself - the man within dies and God alone remains. He shines in his own glory. Then comes the highest promise: 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' The pure heart is nothing but the Self, the Atman, the self-effulgent Being always in the heart, but now covered. Purification of the heart is simply the removing of that covering: clearing away its dust and dirt. As soon as this is done the truth flashes of itself - the Lord is seen. All the spiritual disciplines are actually for purifying the heart.

The Lord is to be loved. He makes us His own when we love nothing, possess nothing but Him, who is Purity itself. Jesus says '... her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loveth much.'

All great Incarnations of God, whatever they say or teach, do it from a direct experience of truth. It is not just book learning. They come into the world to show the light - which they always see - to mankind and lead all to the abode of peace and bliss and immortality. As Jesus says, 'The Father who sent me has given me commandment to speak and I know that his commandment is eternal life.' 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

So, Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'Fix your heart on Me, give your love to Me, worship Me, bow down before Me; so shall you come to Me. This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me. Abandon all dharmas and come to Me alone for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins; do not grieve.' In our own times, Sri Ramakrishna beautifully said: 'I am the sanctuary. Take refuge in me.' The same eternal ultimate Godhead speaks to different persons through different Incarnations in different words.

Among these words of Jesus, one often impresses itself on me when I see the Christmas trees being lighted up, the houses all lighted - how often Jesus used this word, 'light'. 'I am the light of the world' he says; 'he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.' Again, 'He who walks in darkness does not know where he goes.' 'While you have the light, believe in the light, that ye may become the sons of Light.' And turning to us: 'Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

You know this story about Krishna? Once he suddenly left Brindavan; and all the Gopis, the milkmaids, friends and beloved of Krishna at once saw nothing but darkness, because Krishna was gone and they could not find him. Some thought he had been drowned in the river Jamuna. One of them was sent to Mathura, ten miles away, to seek him. She did not find him there, and prayed that he come back to Brindavan. But he wouldn't say he would come: all he would say was, 'Keep your light burning.' What is that light? It is nothing but the Lord Himself? And where? In the heart of man. Keep that light burning, keep the thought or recollectedness of God all the time. Thus Krishna implies: 'Do not forget Me, but keep the memory of me all the time. Think of Me.' And so Jesus so often said, 'I have come as a light into this world.' But

that same Light was also Lord Krisna and the other Incarnations of God. Let it not be covered with any cloud, any darkness. For the 'darkness' to which they so often refer is simply ignorance, the evil of 'I and mine', from which inevitably follow our bondages and resulting miseries. The moment we cover the Light - even veil the Light - with any the least thing else, that moment 'I and mine' arise instead of 'Thee and Thine'. Then the Lord must remain far off. Otherwise He is the nearest of the near, our very own, the Soul of our souls.

In Jesus this Light flowed out pre-eminently as compassion. His love and compassion were so great that even a single spark can illumine the entire life of a human being. In order to become sons of light, to dispel all the darkness of ignorance from our heart, to quench its thirst forever, let us pray to that omniscient Lord manifested as Christ: 'Oh Lord, be merciful to us. Make our minds calm and tranquil, make our hearts pure; let them blossom fully in the rays of Thy divine love so that we may be blessed by offering our hearts at Thy lotus feet. Oh Lord, make us Thine by Thine own grace.'

At Christmas time we offer gifts to many people, we receive gifts from many. What is the meaning of this? Does it not symbolize self-sacrifice? All the time through my ignorance, in my darkness, I have constricted myself in my own heart; and when I give anything to anyone, I have not only given a something, but have given a bit of my heart along with that. I begin to open my heart which had been all the while constricted. In other words, by giving we symbolize the beginnings of our self-sacrifice. Give and give! To whom do we give? To the Lord - the Lord in all beings, to the Christ in all persons, to the light always burning in the heart of man. When to that you are giving, out of your own light, you are truly giving. The heart is clearing up of itself. The dark clouds are lifting because the spark of light from your own heart is strengthening the spark, the same light, in the hearts of others.

That is the meaning of this giving: we open out our hearts. The Lord is merciful; there is nothing to fear in this world. Why should we fear when the Lord is our own? He is our most beloved. And we shall have to make Him our own even more intimately than our fathers, mothers, children, our dearest ones. He is the innermost in us all. He is the dearest one of all, and so we have nothing to fear. Try to meditate, to think of that infinite being - Jesus Christ or any other divine form - constantly. Let the heart be wide open, and the light manifest more and more.

As Jesus said, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.'

God is always wanting to give us the Kingdom?. We have nothing to fear. It belongs to us. Are we ready to receive that Kingdom? Ask this of yourself repeatedly on this day, and let us all become fit for that highest blessing.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, Dec. 1975)

The Sufi, the Theologian and the Official

**The following is taken from the poetry of Jalal ad-Din Rumi
John Phillips**

A gardener one day saw three men in his orchard. They had apparently come there to steal fruit. One was a theologian, one an official and one a Sufi, but they were all rogues in their own way.

"I am sure they are up to no good," he thought, "but they are united and in union is strength. I cannot single-handedly overcome all three of them together. So first I must divide them. I will isolate each one from the others and then, when he is alone, send him packing."

First he got the Sufi away from the other two, intending to set his companions against him. "Go into the house," he told him. "Fetch a rug for your companions."

The Sufi went into the house. Then the gardener turned to the other two. "You are a theologian and you are an eminent official. It is by your judgement (he said to the theologian) that we eat bread; it is by the wings of your wisdom that we fly. The other one of you is our leader; he is a descendant of the family of the Prophet. Who then is this gluttonous, ignoble Sufi, that he should be with kings like yourselves? When he returns, you two shake him off and have the freedom of my orchard and villa for a week. What is an orchard after all? My life is in your hands. You have always been as dear to me as my right eye."

His devilish suggestions duped them completely. They drove the Sufi away. When he had gone, the gardener, their common enemy, followed after him with a thick stick.

"You dog!" he cried. "Is it part of your Sufism that you come into my orchard to rob me? From what Sheikh did you get this instruction?"

Having got the Sufi by himself, he gave him a good beating.

"My troubles are over!" exclaimed the Sufi, "but not you, my companions, look out for yourselves! You considered me an outsider; but beware! What I have tasted you will also have to taste."

The gardener, having finished with the Sufi, hit upon the same pretext as before.

"Go to the house", he told the official. "I have baked some delicious wafers for breakfast. Call the servant to fetch the wafers - and the goose as well."

Having got him out of the way, the gardener said to the theologian: "Far-sighted sir, it is obvious that you are a theologian. But is he an official? What a ridiculous claim he makes! Who knows who his father was? Many a fool has attached himself to the Prophet!"

The theologian fell under the spell. Off he went after the official.

"You ass!" he cried. "Who invited you into this orchard? Is thieving all you have inherited from the Prophet? The lion-cub takes after the lion, but tell me, in what way do you take after the Prophet?"

The theologian then dealt with the official as a rebel would deal with the Prophet's family.

The official was devastated by the blows he received.

"That is enough for me!", he said to the theologian. "You carry on there as you like, all on your own. If I am unfit to be your companion, at least I am no worse than that scoundrel of a Sufi."

The gardener, having finished with the official, addressed the theologian.

"What sort of theologian do you call yourself? Is it by your legal judgement that you enter my garden without permission?"

"You are quite right", answered the theologian. "Beat me, for I am in your power. This is the due recompense for one who breaks with his friends."

Whomsoever the Devil cuts off from men of nobility, finding him isolated, he proceeds to devour him. To quit the congregation of the saints for so much as a moment - this offers a chance for Satan's cunning. Know this well.

Swami Sambuddhananda

The time we are speaking of was more than fifty years ago, when a band of devotees used to invite Swami Premananda to different places in Bengal. In 1914 they had decided that, after celebrations of the anniversary of Shri Ramakrishna's birth had been completed at Belur Math, they would celebrate it themselves. Swami Premananda himself had been thinking of this kind of celebration since March of that year, and was wondering if an invitation would be forthcoming from North Bengal. On the day in question he happened to be at the Balaram Mandir - the house of Balaram Bose.

Balaram Bose was one of the foremost householder disciples of Shri Ramakrishna, and one of the suppliers of his wants. He had a large zamindari - his father's property in Orissa - and a large income. His house in Baghbazar section of Calcutta still stands, and since Shri Ramakrishna visited it many times, it has holy associations. Though there were plans at one time to take a road through there to another part of Calcutta, the government has not allowed it to be demolished. Balaram Babu had married the sister of Swami Premananda, and the Swami was there at that time.

Some of my friends at our hostel prevailed upon me to go to Swami Premananda and invite him to their place for the celebrations. It was in the Malda district of North Bengal, famous for its mangoes. When we all arrived at Balaram Bose's house and asked to see the Swami, he came out at once. He was already acquainted with me, and was eager to see some of the young students of the colleges. They extended their invitation to him, to come to their part of the country to grace the occasion of the celebrations of Shri Ramakrishna's birthday. At once he said, 'Well, we too have been thinking that although various parts of Bengal have invited us, North Bengal alone has not been heard from. So you come from North Bengal. It is very good. All right, I shall try. If nothing stands in the way we shall go.' At this the boys became very enthusiastic and said, pointing to me, 'We want to take him with us. He will guide us in organizing the celebrations etc.' Hearing this Swami Premananda said, 'Yes, it will be very nice if you can take him. He will be able to give you all sorts of help in organizing the celebrations in a proper way. Take him.' So, although it was the summer holiday, instead of going home I accompanied them to Malda. They wanted to celebrate the Master's birthday on a very large scale, inviting devotees from various parts of Bengal, and arrangements had to be made for food and lodging for about a week. It is our practice on such an occasion to go from place to place seeking persons likely to contribute their mite to the success of the celebrations. The couple of thousand rupees already collected was not sufficient, although the cost of food in those days was about one-tenth of what it is now. So they formed a committee of about a hundred volunteers, each carrying out the work he was especially qualified to do. It is the custom in India that whenever celebrations are organized in the name of a God or Goddess, one and all, especially persons able to do so, contribute their quota. As all consider the celebrations a great occasion, they contribute either in cash or in kind or in energy by working.

At one point a band of collectors began to visit different villages gathering rice, etc., for the occasion?. They purposely avoided a certain house because they were given to know that that was the house of a poor family, and if they were to go there they might be put in an awkward position in that no one would be able to give them anything. But the head of that poor family came forward, and meeting the leader of the party with folded hands said, 'Well, sir, you have visited all the houses of the village, but I do not know by what fault of mine you didn't care to grace my house with the dust of your feet. Even the dust of your feet I had not the opportunity to get. I don't know what I have done.' They were all much ashamed to hear this, so they went to the house and the poor man contributed beyond their dreams, in cash and in

kind. He had kept it all ready since preparations for the function had started. He said, 'Suppose that I cannot contribute anything, suppose that I give only a handful of rice, and you are going to distribute, say, one hundred maunds of rice, why should my poor one handful not go into it?' They were ashamed of themselves and apologized and took all that he had given.

For two months we worked very hard and completed all arrangements for the celebrations - for feeding and looking after thousands in every possible way. In the morning they would be given tea, at noon their main meal, in the afternoon cake and tea, and at night again their meal. Their stay was arranged for in different houses which had been vacated, cleaned and prepared for them. Sufficient funds had come in during the two months, and in addition some of the Rajas and zamindars promised to give any amount of any article that would be required - milk, clarified butter, banana leaves etc. The date for the celebrations was to be fixed, and I was to write to Swami Premananda informing him about it.

So I wrote, and to our utter disappointment he replied: 'I have received your letter and I am very much pleased that all arrangements have been made for the celebrations of the anniversary of Shri Ramakrishna's birthday, and I am also glad that you have fixed the dates; but I should like to inform you that Swami Saradananda, the Secretary of the Math and Mission, is ill, and I do not feel like going away from him. Please do not worry, you go ahead with your work. Your celebrations will be a success, I tell you and assure you. Don't worry, carry on! Never stop and never be sorry because of our absence on that occasion. Your work will be very successful, I can assure you.' You can easily understand how disappointed we all were, having worked for two months for this one function. So they gathered together and there was a great deliberation. I told them, 'Here is an idea. Let us not be in a hurry to change the date, for that will cause many difficulties. Let us see for a few days what develops. I would ask you to do one thing: each one of you, (and there were more than a hundred workers there) go on performing the japa of Shri Ramakrishna one thousand times every day - whether in the morning or evening or both times does not matter, but make it a point that you perform the japa one thousand times every day.' They all agreed and started doing it. So one lakh of japa was performed daily with prayers that Swami Saradananda might be restored to health. This went on for eight or nine days. Thus instead of writing again and risking a second negative answer, we proceeded to work from the inner side. After ten days I decided to proceed to Belur Math, taking two of the choicest workers to assist me. Thus, taking the name of the Lord and remembering Him, I came to Calcutta.

I decided to go first to M's (Mahendranath Gupta's) house for not only was it near the station, but also M was in the habit of sending some of his followers every day to different places - to Belur Math, Dakshineswar, Baghbazar etc. - and thus I could get news of the health of Swami Saradananda. So, having met M and having paid my respects, I inquired about Swami Saradananda and was told that his fever had left him and he had come round. This was great news! Then I went to the Holy Mother's house in Baghbazar to verify this news, and discovered that Swami Saradananda had taken his bath at the usual time (a sign of health, as in illness the routine is disturbed). So, after doing pranams there we started by boat for Belur Math. Now, seeing that the practice of a thousand japa had borne fruit and that Swami Saradananda's illness - the cause which was preventing Swami Premananda's starting - had been removed, we became very much emboldened. As soon as we came near the Math we began shouting, 'Jai Shri Guru Maharajji ki jai! Jai Mahamayi ki jai! Jai Swamiji Maharajji ki jai!' Swami Premananda was taking his bath at the time, and hearing 'Jai Shri Guru Maharajji!' he became imbued with emotion and asked someone to go and see who was coming. Hearing who it was he said, 'Oh, he has come. That's all right.' We beached the boat and went to pay our respects at the main temple, as was our custom and then went to meet Swami Premananda and took the dust of his feet. He said, 'Hello, have you all come to take us? We thought you had forgotten altogether.' He asked the brahmacharins to make arrangements for

us. 'They have all come from such a distance, perhaps getting up in the night,' he said, and everything necessary was done at once.

I had left all the instructions regarding his reception with the people of Malda. A special song was to be composed, and there were to be band and kirtan parties of musicians. Thousands of people would go and bring the Swamiji. Preparations were made also at the intermediate stations. There is a ghat called Godavari Ghat on the Ganges which has to be crossed by a launch, so food preparations were to be kept for the party. However, now that the Swami's going seemed to be certain, it was necessary to ascertain the exact date, for all activities and preparations depended upon this.

The problem of where the Swami would stay was solved in an interesting way. In the town of Malda there was a new house which had been built on the banks of a river, by a miser. Though he was very unpopular, he happened to have an interest in me, since he found that I was the leader and organizer of the celebrations. So I went to him and said, 'Well, Sachi, if you will lend your house for the use of such a great saint, you will be saved all your expenditure for the inauguration ceremony of the building. Because he is a God-sent man entering your house, further inauguration activities will not be necessary. And don't worry about having to arrange for his meals etc. You will not have to spend a single farthing. Every item of expenditure will be borne and arranged by us. You will simply have to give up the use of your house for the few days that we happen to be there.' Thus a new house could be secured for the Swamiji. It was a good two-storied building.

Now, in order to get from the Swami the date of departure, I went to see him in the old building at Belur Math. He usually came down at about three in the afternoon and sat by the Ganges. I stood at his left side and said, 'Well, it is now necessary that you fix the date of our departure, because that has to be communicated to the people there as well as to many others. Without this we cannot proceed any further. So when can we start?' (The Swami was in a more peaceful and balanced mood than he had been in the morning when he had said, 'You have come!' Mark the beauty and significance of his reply.) 'Does going depend on my will?' he said. I kept silent, for now I found that the whole thing was taking a different turn. Then I asked him, 'Then upon whose will does it depend?' He said, 'Upon the will of Guru Majaraj, Shri Ramakrishna. If he wills I will go.' Then I became very bold and said, 'Well, how is the will of Shri Guru Maharaj to be known? He is not present here.' The Swami became emotionally overwhelmed and said, 'Why, the Mother of the Universe is there at Baghbazar. We can go and see her and find out everything.' I said, 'All right. When shall we see her?' 'Well, we can go early tomorrow morning,' he replied, 'the early morning boats, laden with vegetables, are available for going to Calcutta. If you call any of them it will come to the ghat, and we can go that way, instead of hiring a boat - which may not be available.' Now the whole thing had taken a different turn.

I got up early in the morning, not having slept due to my anxiety. After the aratrika, performed by the Swamiji, I went to call for a boat. The boat came, but when I went to get the Swamiji I found him in deep meditation in the temple. As it is our practice not to disturb anyone when he is meditating on God and, as the boatman would not wait long, I found myself in an awkward position. Soon, however, the Swamiji understood and coming quickly boarded the boat. Two other Swamis joined us and we got down at Holy Mother's ghat. As soon as Baburam Maharaj entered the Baghbazar Math, all came forward to take the dust of his feet, crying out, 'Oh, Baburam Maharaj has come!' He was talking with Swami Saradananda when the call came from above, 'Baburam Maharaj, Mother calls you!' The Swamiji went up and I simply could not remain outside, so I accompanied him to see what happened. He stood in front of the Holy Mother, kneeling with folded palms. Mother with her veil up, holding the two sides of her sari up to her face, was talking with Baburam Maharaj. 'Well, Baburam, how are you?' 'Quite well,' he replied. 'How are the children of the Math?' 'They are all quite well.'

Then he pointed to me and said, 'These people have come to take me to the celebrations in Malda which they have organized.' Mother asked Baburam Maharaj, 'Well, Baburam, I heard that you were unwell some time back.' 'Yes, Mother,' Baburam Maharaj replied, 'about fifteen days ago I had an attack of fever, but now I am quite well.' Then the Mother, who had taken Malda to mean Madras, said, 'Well, Baburam, when you have been recently ill and it is the hot days of the summer, it is better not to go.' Thus everything was finished at one stroke by the will of the Lord! Baburam Maharaj was just like a boy of five - whatever the Mother said, was law, whether for or against didn't matter. Bowing down to the Mother, he went on clapping his hands repeating 'Jai Shri Guru Maharaj' and went downstairs. The dictate of the high court was out, so what could be done? I stayed on with the Mother and bowing down said, 'Mother, it was Swamiji himself who sent me there, and for two months I have been working hard and everything has been arranged. Thousands of people will come and participate in the function. He had given assurance that he would go. Now if he does not go to the celebrations they will be utterly spoiled. Mother, that much I can tell you. So unless you permit him to go, everything will be spoiled and no celebrations will take place.' Mother then asked M, 'Is it not a distant place - Madras?' 'Mother, it is not Madras, it is Malda where all the varieties of mangoes come from!' The man who was fanning the Holy Mother, a brahmacharin, said, 'Yes, Mother, Malda is not Madras - Madras is south. Malda is the place where many mangoes come from.' Then Mother began to say, 'Oh, so it is not so far a distance!' She understood the mistake. So she said, 'All right, my boys, go out.' She sent everyone out of her room. I came down and found that both the brothers, Swamis Premananda and Saradananda were talking and joking a little. But I got annoyed, for I was a boy then and not a sadhu, and had not become accustomed to tolerance, the will of God, etc. So I was pacing from one side of the veranda to the other like a wounded lion. I didn't even go near the Swamis or tell them what I had said to the Holy Mother. All the windows and doors of the Holy Mother's room were closed, so she must have been communing with Shri Guru Maharaj. How much time passed it is difficult to say - probably five or ten minutes. Then the call came, 'Holy Mother is wanting Baburam Maharaj.' So Baburam Maharaj left us at once and entered the Mother's room, and I followed him. I wanted to see what would take place between the Mother and the son. He was standing with folded palms before the Holy Mother who asked one question. What a wonderful reply the Swamiji gave, and what a wonderful atmosphere those words created all round! One cannot explain it, one cannot even conceive it! He alone knows who has experienced it. The Mother asked him, 'Well, Baburam, when these boys are so earnest to take you there, won't you go?' Such an awesome moment it was - only heaven can understand! Baburam Maharaj, flushed with emotion said to her, 'Well, Mother, well, Mother, what do I know, what do I know? Whether I will go or not - I know not - I will do whatever thou sayest.' He said these words loudly and with a great intensity of emotion, with the result that all those who were around, in the house and outside, were thrilled and became silent. The Mother of the Universe was talking with her beloved child and this was going on between the two?. When he spoke these words, Mother was silent. Some time passed in silence and no one could move or say anything, for all were thrilled with a particular sense of Divinity. Then the Mother said, 'Well, then you go. You go, but do not stay there for a long time.' Because the care of sadhus is very difficult, in that they have a special routine of taking bath, meals, and going to bed etc., therefore the Mother did not want him to stay for a long time. Baburam Maharaj then went out of the room and downstairs, and resumed his conversation with Swami Saradananda. At this time I thought that now that my objective had been achieved, it would be better for me to run away smoothly and silently. After a while Baburam Maharaj left and the attendant called, 'Holy Mother is calling you.' I thought to myself, what else is going to happen? So I went and stood up and said to her, 'Mother!' She said, 'You know, all these persons - Baburam and others - do you know how great saints they are - do you know? And why they have come to this world - do you know? The longer they live in this world, the greater is the benefit to it. So you do one thing - please see that no kind of inconvenience, nothing unfavourable and untoward, happens to him during the celebrations. Remember this and take care of him.' Previously I had decided that since I was at the head of the whole affair, it would not be possible for me to look after the Swamis only; but now I had to reassure the Mother. 'Well, Mother, be assured that I shall do my very best and am ready to

lay down my life even on the altar of the welfare of the Swamiji, if required. The arrangements were otherwise, but I will personally look to it, though I have many things to do. I will leave the overall management with special instructions, because everything for the Maharaj is separate.' Then the Mother blessed me and I came down.

And now, hearing that Baburam Maharaj was going to Malda, many of the devotees pressed forward. He asked them, 'Would you like to go?' 'Oh yes, Maharaj, we must!' In this way a number of devotees agreed to join the party. Finally with a party of about thirty we started for Malda at night, and found everything had been made ready. Food was duly brought, but I was more anxious about what was going to happen when we were received at the station in Malda. However, I found that thousands of people were there to receive him at the station platform. At once the band and kirtan party started up their music. We all got off the train and the Swamiji had to sit in the first-class waiting room, but only for a few minutes. We left the station and were passing through the street, and according to the Indian custom people of both sides, as well as from the windows above went on crying. 'Ulu, ulu,' (for ululi, meaning prosperity, goodwill, aloha etc.) and all began to throw flowers and flowered rice and the road was soon covered with them. In this way we proceeded and took Swami Premananda to the house which had been appropriately decorated for him. It seemed to please him very much.

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Conversations with Swami Turiyananda (continued) **Swami Raghavananda**

July 4, 1915. Swami Turiyananda: "One must have the inner conviction that whatever happens in this world happens by His will. Success and failure come by His will. The achievements of so many clever people in this world have come to naught! Everything is His will! Do you think our Mission will last forever? It will degenerate in time, and the Lord will have to incarnate again.

"Sri Ramakrishna did not have much regard for people who were immersed in sex. He used to say that they had lost all substance.

"The Master used to keep everything in his room in perfect order. Every object had its proper place so that even in darkness he could find what he wanted. An orderly mind is as necessary as external order.

"Prejudiced people will listen only to one side of a story. Swamiji had an open mind. He would take every point of view into account. He had a generous and forgiving heart."

July 5, 1915. Swami Turiyananda: "Repression is bad. Let the mind wander wherever it pleases. Let it experience. At long last it will tire and return to God. If you repress it, its cravings will grow stronger. But keep watch over your mind and intellect. Try to unite them with the Lord."

Disciple: "Why doesn't the mind have a natural tendency towards the divine?"

Swami Turiyananda: "Everybody wants this to happen spontaneously. The mind will long for

God in time. But first struggle; be watchful. Later on your mind will become your guru. "That which is good and pure in you is God. That which is evil in you is your ego. The more you think of him, the more he will increase and you will decrease. "Some people are secretive. They raise a wall around themselves. That is bad. Without being sincere and open-hearted nobody can find God."

July 6, 1915. It was morning. A devotee had written a letter asking the following question: "Is it possible for a man in the world to attain samadhi?"

Swami Turiyananda: "The worldly man engages himself in sexual intercourse. That, indeed, is his bliss of samadhi! If he doesn't, his wife thinks she is losing her husband. Such is the world! She will beat the children and go around with a long face. Seeing all this disturbance, what can the poor man do?"

"What a troublesome world this is! How sex creates one bondage after another! But again, there are women who are aids to their husbands' spiritual progress. Such women are born as parts of the Divine Mother.

"There are spiritual families in this world although they are very rare - the family of Balaram, for instance. Every one of his people is conscious that God comes first. What is worldly life? To be attached to the world and its objects. Spiritual life in the world means keeping the mind in God and performing one's duties without attachment.

(to be continued)

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Brahman and Maya **Swami Adbhutananda**

The true being in man is ever free, ever pure, and remains ever untouched by good or evil. Good and evil have no absolute reality. They exist only so long as man identifies himself with the ego, the false self. When the ego is completely annihilated, man is freed of the false knowledge of duality or relativity - of good and evil.

Good and evil exist only so long as man thinks himself to be the doer of actions. If through the grace of the Infinite Being he is freed from this consciousness of ego, then the idea of good or bad no longer exists for him.

Merit and demerit are the effects of karma. Because of the sense of attachment to the false ego, man is subject to this law. As a man sows, so does he reap. The law of karma operates within the realm of Maya. Man, identifying himself with the ego, becomes bound by Maya. In creation and destruction, in happiness and misery, in success and failure, in every domain of duality is Maya's play. Such is her nature, and man, because of ignorance, is caught in the play. But he who is freed from the bondage of Maya is guided by the the Infinite Being, and in His guidance finds everlasting joy, everlasting peace, everlasting blessedness. There no waves of duality can arise. There is only the one Infinite Ocean of peace and joy.

Maya of itself has no independent existence. As Sri Ramakrishna has said: "The wave is of the ocean, not the ocean itself." Similarly Maya is of the Infinite Being, but is not the Infinite Being Itself. Therefore, the bondage and control of Maya cannot be said to be the same as the control and guidance of God. Yet true it is that the ultimate purpose of the play of Maya is to

lead man Godward - to the Infinite Reality. All will ultimately reach God.

Unattached and with perfect balance Maya plays her dual role. On the one hand it is she who lulls man into forgetfulness of his true nature, and again it is she who awakens him to the consciousness of God. Within her domain are all the dual throng. And why? That man may overcome evil with good and finally transcend both. So we see that while Maya appears to bind, yet by this same bondage man is led towards freedom, albeit along a winding and tortuous pathway, for only after many births and much suffering does he finally recognize the inscrutable play of Maya and surrender himself to her liberating power.

One truth is certain. Whether he wills to find God in this present life, or after many more lives of suffering and bondage, sooner or later man must seek to find God with whole-hearted devotion; and as he seeks Him, he finds Him.

God is the Infinite Existence. In Him there is neither East nor West, neither within nor without, neither above nor below. He permeates all space - he is woven warp and woof into all things. He is immanent, all-pervading - unaffected by forms or boundaries. He is all and He transcends all. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Everything but the Truth of Brahman has been defiled through the lips of man." No words can express the glory of God. Sri Ramakrishna would often wish to reveal the truth of Brahman to his disciples but his lips were sealed as it were by the Divine Mother Herself.

Brahman is Truth, and whosoever observes truthfulness and wills to know Truth shall surely attain it. The power to will is the greatest gift bestowed upon man, and nothing can stand against one whose will is awakened. Will and impulse or desire, however, must not be confused. Impulse or desire is a degeneration of the will. What is it that man truly wills? It is the attainment of Ananda, that everlasting peace, and this is attained only by finding the Satchidananda - the Infinite Being, the Infinite Wisdom, and the Infinite Love.

The true purpose of human birth is to fulfil this one, this only will, to realize God - which is truly the motive power behind all other desires. Unhappy is the man who forgets this purpose, and loses himself in the meshes of petty desires and impulses. Desiring first one thing, then another and yet again something else is but impulse, and can be likened unto a man, who, desiring to sink a well, digs first in one place and then in another, never completing one well, and never reaching the water. Not by such impulses and desires can the thirst for God be quenched. Therefore, I say unto you, will to attain the Truth, and Kingdom of Self.

This Kingdom is never lost. It may lie hidden, covered with dirt, but it is forever within. Brahman is ever pure, ever free, self-luminous, and that Brahman is one's very Self. Just as a gold vessel may be covered with dirt, yet lose nothing of its true nature, so the true Self lies hidden within, and remains forever unaffected by the dirt of ignorance covering it.

Man is ever conscious of the existence of this Self. Every time he says "my body," "my mind," "my intelligence," etc., he unconsciously admits the existence of an "I," of a "Self." Because of this ignorance which clouds man's true Self, he is unable to manifest his real nature. Hence the necessity of spiritual disciplines, and the firm will to unfold this latent divinity.

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Democratic Reconstruction of Religions and World Peace

Umesh C. Gulati

"The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated," said Mark Twain. So also, we believe, the reports of the death of God have been greatly exaggerated. Though commercial and strategic interests of nations in general dictate their foreign policies, religion plays a major part in determining social policies and international relations of some theocratic countries of strategic importance. Even in secular democracies, religion determines the attitudes of people on many social issues and thereby indirectly determines the direction of public policies as well.

Broadly speaking, democracy in the West has tended to curb violence and establish the rule of law. Public opinion and government pressure have also created a climate for inter-religious tolerance. But all this remains on the surface as subtle hatred still persists, and the two great monotheistic religions continue to assert their exclusive way to truth and salvation.

Harvard Professor Diana Eck says that in Christianity and Islam, "The singular is the proper number for questions of Truth: there is one God, one Only-Begotten Son of the Father, one Seal of the Prophets, one Holy Book, one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."¹ "Islam also proclaims: there is no God but God and Muhammad is God's messenger." Therefore there is only one path, "the straight path" - Islam - which leads to God. So, there are two powerful "singulars," ready to collide with each other but for our secular democracies which separate them.

War, and for that matter peace, are made in the minds of people. Bigotry and hatred lead ultimately to war while openness and understanding nurture peace. Let us illustrate what an attitude of openness entails by an event in Mumbai (Bombay) in 1964 when Pope Paul VI visited India. Although before the visit, the Pope as usual issued a statement extolling the greatness of Christianity, his remarks had taken a different turn after his return to Rome. He said:

"This country is not Catholic, but what courtesy, what opening of spirit, what an avid desire to get a glance, or a word from this strange traveller from Rome! We do not know what these rejoicing crowds saw in us, but we saw in the crowds a humanity of great nobility, identified with its millennial cultural traditions. These crowds were not all Christians, but they were profoundly spiritual and in so many ways so good and winning."

The sentiments of the Indian people to which the Pope referred may have taken him by surprise, but for a Hindu, saints of all religions are so many windows through which to view God. These holy people and saints seem to transmit holiness by their mere glance. For, as Erich Fromm has said, in Eastern religions, like Hinduism, the ultimate aim of religion is not the right belief, but the right action.² People in India respected Mother Teresa not for her religion but for what she did for the poor and sick.

The ancient scriptures of the Hindus have also proclaimed the ideal of equality in a hymn, Ekam sat vipra bahuda vadanti: 'God is one but sages call Him by various names.' Recently, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna said: "As many faiths, so many paths." He also said that it is the same God to which all of them are directing their worship.³ According to Fromm, throughout its history the Western world has cherished the logical principles of Aristotelian philosophy.⁴ The Islamic world, too, we believe, shared the same logic. According to that logic, for instance, the statement that X is A and also not A is nonsensical. Such a mind-set according to Fromm led to endless arguments about religious dogmas and their formulations, and intolerance of the non-believers or heretics.

The Eastern religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, and also the mystic formulations of the three monotheistic religions, on the other hand, subscribe to what Fromm calls, a paradoxical logic, under which reality can be perceived only in contradictions: "It is and it is not." "It is neither this nor that," or as the Bhagavad-Gita puts it, "It is without and within all beings, ... it is far away and yet it is also near." (13.15) That attitude, according to Fromm, makes these religions more tolerant.

Since our language was meant to describe the phenomena in time and things of this phenomenal world, which is changeful, it cannot truly describe the nature of this Reality, which is experiential and beyond time and space. That is why sages often use paradox to describe it. It is for this reason the Hindus pay respect to holy people of all religions. Being in their midst make them feel spiritually uplifted and feel peace within themselves.

A multi-party system is the hallmark of secular democracies. The differences between the parties are not over who is more patriotic but over whose platform can bring about the greatest good for the greatest number. As the saying goes, all roads lead to Rome, and in the same way different faiths lead devotees to the same Kingdom of God. To say otherwise is plain politics.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who popularized the word "non-violence," but he often used the Sanskrit term Ahimsa which means more than just the absence of physical injury. Ahimsa means absence of malice towards all beings. The test of Ahimsa is the absence of hatred. Since it is impossible to convert other people without denigrating their existing religion, proselytizing is a form of violence. Huxley called it theological imperialism, and it is a menace to world peace.⁵

We have no doubt that both Christianity and Islam have inspired faith, wisdom and compassion among their followers. At the same time, they also have been the source of corruption, war and prejudice. These latter, indeed, are the cause of what we see happening in the world today. As Professor Steven Rockefeller has said:

"The greatest single moral failing of many religious traditions is their inability to teach their followers to respect people of a different tradition the same way (emphasis added) as they respect the people of their own tradition. Some people have tied this to the theistic concept of God. Because if God is a being upon whom your salvation is dependent, and God's will is expressed in a certain set of laws and doctrines, then those people who do not adhere to those laws and doctrines are your enemies."⁶

Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had proposed at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 (and by the way the date was September 11), that tolerance must also include acceptance. He said: "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true."⁷ Mere tolerance is a euphemism for arrogance about the greatness of one's own religion.

We believe that one of the reasons for the existence of theological imperialism in the two great religions, Christianity and Islam, is religious dualism, dualism between God and man, and between God and the universe. Under dualism, God is extra-cosmic, sitting far away in heaven. He is omnipotent and omniscient and expresses his will in a certain set of laws and doctrines as written in different scriptures and expounded to us by our priests.

Furthermore, this God is purely anthropomorphic with human qualities, except that he doesn't have a body. Like a great potentate this Personal God is pleased with some and displeased with others. The followers of each of the monotheistic religions believe that they alone are his favourites or chosen people on whom alone he showers his blessings. Such a theology of election has often caused holy crusades that have scarred the history of monotheism.⁸

Says Rockefeller: "If you give up that monarchical, patriarchal concept of God, and think of your relationship to all kinds of people, then this problem begins to dissolve." Monarchs are

very capricious. They seldom tolerate their subjects getting any new ideas from across their borders. So is the God of dualists who issues his edicts for different religions and demands their obedience on pain of severe punishment. He is indeed a God of fear and vengeance.

To meet the challenge of bigotry and intolerance, Rockefeller has proposed a reconstruction of religions on democratic lines. The ideal of democracy for religions consists of three values: liberty, equality and fraternity. The value of liberty implies that every individual is a sovereign in governing one's own spiritual life as one does in deciding one's economic, social and political choices. The equality principle guarantees to every man and woman the opportunity to realize Truth according to one's own temperament and intellectual capacity. The value of fraternity emphasizes that society is held together by the bond of love and not by the coercive power of either the secular legal system or the rules and regulations of a church.

We believe that to make these three ideals of religious democracy practical there has to be a prior revolutionary change in the underlying paradigm of the monotheistic religions. For instance, the paradigm of the Divine Rights of Kings had to give way to the emergence of the Enlightenment and parliamentary democracy in Europe. In America and later in France, too, the triumph of the rights of man over the rights of kings was responsible for the success of the American and French revolutions. What we need, then, is a religious philosophy that can provide the underlying support necessary to bring about a democratic revolution in religions. That religious philosophy must answer the question: Is man strong enough to make intelligent choices about his religious life as he does about his social and economic life? A common belief among monotheistic religions is that man is essentially a sinner, and unless led by the strong hand of the holy church, will become a victim of the devil's machinations.

It is to allay such fears that Swami Vivekananda said, quoting a verse from Shvetashvatara Upanishad, at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893: "Hear ye, children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again." (CWs., v.2, 11.)

As children of immortality, how can we be sinners? In fact, every Upanishad points to the divinity inherent in everything. The first verse of Isha Upanishad, for example, says: "The ruling force (Brahman, the Ultimate Reality) dwells in all of this, in every bit of it, even in anything that is changing or moving. By that renunciation, enjoy, do not covet the wealth of anyone."⁹ Fearlessness and strength are then the natural consequence of being aware of our divine nature, which alone can overcome the fear of God or the weakness of humans. Brahman, the God of Vedanta, means all, and is of the nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss Absolute. From what we have said above, it follows that Brahman is not only transcendent but also immanent in every being and in everything. In this latter sense Brahman is called Atman or the Self, therefore, Brahman and the Self are identical. Besides, the Self in me is the same Self in one and all, not in only men and women, but also animals and plants, rivers and mountains, and in fact, all objects in the universe.

Sri Ramakrishna once said:

"There are three classes of devotees. The lowest one says, 'God is up there.' That is, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the 'Inner Controller'. But the highest devotee says: 'God alone has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God.'"¹⁰ At another time he said the same thing in a different way: "There are three kinds of devotees: superior, mediocre, and inferior. The inferior devotee says, 'God is out there.' According to him God is different from His creation. The mediocre devotee says: 'God is the Antaryami, the Inner Guide. God dwells in everyone's heart.' ... But the superior devotee sees that God alone has become everything, ..." (The Gospel, 909-910.)

This indeed is the true universal brotherhood, transcending caste, creed, gender, race, and nationality. Thus the religion of Vedanta is Oneness, or Advaita in Sanskrit. Advaita means "not two". The English equivalent of Advaita is non-dualism. Huxley calls non-dualism the Perennial Philosophy (Sanatan Dharma), which "is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds."¹¹ This Reality, called Brahman or the Self, is infinite and immortal, without name or form, and is also beyond time, space and causation. Since Brahman alone is, we all have the same Self. Thus, non-dualism asserts unity in diversity, divinity of the soul, and solidarity of all beings and things.

Though Brahman is quite Impersonal, Vedanta admits a Personal God as well in the world of time, space and causation, called Maya. This Personal God has no resemblance to the one God, Yahweh, of early Judaism who, as Karen Armstrong has shown, came to power after violently eliminating pagan gods.¹² Besides, as Sri Ramakrishna said, the Personal God is nothing but the power of impersonal Brahman, just as heat is the power of the sun. He likened Impersonal Brahman to a coiled snake, and a Personal God to a snake in motion, and affectionately called the latter Divine Mother. However, female names like Durga or Kali, as also male deities, Shiva, Vishnu, etc., are quite popular among the Hindus. This is no polytheism, but a validation of what we said before: Truth is one, though sages call it by various names.

From what we have said above, it follows that the three principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity for democratic reconstruction of religions, are implicit in the Vedanta philosophy that underlies Hinduism. Hinduism being an unorganized religion has no set dogma and rituals; as we have shown elsewhere¹³, everyone is free to practise their religion according to their own way and convenience, thereby making it very democratic.

From this it follows that Vedanta doesn't require that everyone has to follow the same path to realize their divinity immanent in them. As one coat cannot fit all, in the same way, people being of different temperaments, even in a given religion, different must be the paths to follow. Most importantly, Truth has to be realized, not just believed in. Says Swami Vivekananda:

"Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy - by one or more or all of these - and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details." (CWs., v.2, 257)

Thus, both the liberty and equality principles are fulfilled. Since Vedanta accepts unity in diversity, "then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. ..." ¹⁴ Besides, since the Self is without form, there is equality of all beings. The difference between a sage and a sinner is not one of kind, but of degree. Animals and plants, too, are not things created to be exploited by humans, but to be respected for the service they provide us.

The fraternity principle, too, is the natural outcome when people are awakened to their common divinity. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: "I am the thread through which different beings are strung as pearls." Therefore, every violent act or thought would be a sacrilegious rebellion against the divine order. Verse 6 of Isha Upanishad says: "He who clearly sees the Atman (Self) in all beings, and all beings in the very Self, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization)." We need to go beyond our identification with the body-mind complex, and identify with the Self instead. Thus, Self-knowledge is the key to universal brotherhood. In conclusion, we find that the whole world is passing through very difficult times in history. Increasingly we live in fear, insecurity, and turmoil. There is an undeclared and

unconventional war going on in our midst. As we pointed out before, wars begin in the minds of men and women. Therefore, only by awakening to our common divine nature within, can we bring about peace. We should send thoughts of love in every direction, and pray not only for our friends but also our foes, for, Thou Art That.

We suggest that to lay a firm foundation for world peace, major world religions need to make a paradigm shift from the sinfulness of human beings to the divinity of all beings and things, and from religious dualism to non-dualism. This would bring about worldwide spiritual democracy under which all religions are accepted as true. Most importantly, all our religions should extend the ethics of democracy to women and also to the environment.

Leaves of an Ashrama: 24

To Be What One is, Warts and All

Swami Vidyatmananda

When I took up religious life I thought of myself as already well advanced. I saw my behaviour as unusually moral, patient, and controlled. In human relations I believed my reactions to be ideal. It seemed only a matter of time before the goodness I felt I had attained should be crowned by an agreeable saintliness.

Considering how superior I felt myself to be, it was hard to understand why other aspirants were no further advanced than they were. Senior monastics could be short-tempered, sharp-tongued, emotional. Devotees of long standing showed themselves subject to hurt feelings and jealousies. Most of my spiritual colleagues seemed, in fact, astonishingly stunted in their development. I started to write an essay at this time, in which I tried to reason out this curious state of affairs. It was to be called: "Good People - Why are They so Bad?" But, unable to find a satisfactory means of resolving the question the title proposed, I was forced to abandon the article without finishing it.

Now I am a Vedanta veteran. It has been apparent for some time that I am as "bad" as the other good people whose inadequate state of development once surprised me so. Violent moods assail me. I am subject to temperamental outbursts. Patience is often wanting. I am not a beautiful character at all. I am still waiting for the answer to the question of why good people are no better than they are. Now I count myself as one of them.

The reason, of course, is that meditation has begun to make me - as it had already made the others - "authentic". Or perhaps the term is "honest", or "candid". The goodness I once prided myself on was only skin deep. It consisted of an exterior manner cultivated for the purpose of easing my way through life. It sought to disguise, rather than to express, my true nature. It was meant to blind others, as it blinded me. But meditation is bringing me face to face with myself. It is making me frank, even guileless. It is causing me to give up hypocrisy. More and more I feel a necessity to accept, to be, and to express what I really am. The unpleasant elements in me I no longer hide in a dark cellar where they can mildew. They are brought up and taken outside where fresh air can disinfect them.

"Blessed are the pure in heart," Christ said, "for they shall see God." Sri Ramakrishna made a

similar statement: that the essence of spiritual life is to make the heart and the lips the same. The so-called unspiritual actions of the sincere aspirant, thus, are not necessarily unspiritual at all. They may be marks of his progress. They reveal what he must become before he can see God: pure in heart, simple.

New President of the Ramakrishna Order

Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held on 3 December 2007. He is the 15th President of the Order. Swami Atmasthanandaji had been one of the Vice-Presidents of the Math and Mission since 22 May 1997.

Born in 1919 at Sabajpur, near Dhaka, he received mantra diksha from Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj (a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) in 1938 and joined the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math on 3 January 1941 at the age of 22 years. In 1945, Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the sixth President of the Order, gave him Brahmacharya vows, and in 1949, Sannyasa vows and the name Atmasthananda.

After serving the Order at Belur Math and the branches at Deoghar Vidyapith and Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, he got the opportunity to serve Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the then President of the Order, for a long time. He spent several years in his holy company in the solitude of Shyamla Tal in the Himalayas. In 1952, he was posted to Ranchi TB Sanatorium branch as an Assistant Secretary. He worked hard to expand its services in many ways. He was sent to Rangoon (Yangon) Sevashrama as its Secretary in 1958. He developed the Sevashrama hospital and it soon became the best hospital of Burma (Myanmar) at that time. When military rulers took over Rangoon Sevashrama, he returned to India in 1965. He was posted to Rajkot branch as its head in 1966. The beautiful temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Rajkot Ashrama was built on his initiative.

He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1973. In 1975, he was appointed an Assistant Secretary of the twin organizations. He was also appointed Secretary of the relief operations of the Math and Mission. Under his stewardship, the Math and Mission conducted massive relief and rehabilitation operations in various parts of India, Nepal and Bangladesh. He became the General Secretary of the Math and Mission in 1992 and continued to be in that post for five years till 1997 when he became a Vice-President of the Order.

As a Vice-President of the Math and Mission, he travelled extensively in various parts of the country and visited many branches of the Order and some unaffiliated centres. In 1998, he visited various places in US, Canada, Japan and Singapore. He also went to Malaysia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at different times. In all those places, he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta and also gave mantra diksha to many spiritual seekers.