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### Divine Wisdom

Question: “Why don't we feel dispassion towards worldly objects?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Because of Maya. Through Maya one feels the Real to be the unreal and the unreal to be Real. The Real means That which is eternal, the Supreme Brahman; and the unreal means that which is non-eternal, that is to say, the world.”

Question: “We read the scriptures. Why is it that we can't assimilate them?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What will one accomplish by mere reading? One needs spiritual practice - austerity. Call on God. What is the use of merely repeating the word 'Siddhi'? One must eat a little of it.

“The hand bleeds when it touches a thorny plant. Suppose you bring such a plant and repeat, sitting near it: 'There! The plant is burning.' Will that burn the plant? This world is like the thorny plant. Light the fire of Knowledge and with it set the plant ablaze. Only then will it be burnt up.

“One must labour a little while at the stage of Sadhana. Then the path becomes easy. Steer the boat around the curves of the river and then let it go with the favourable wind. As long as you live inside the house of Maya, as long as there exists the cloud of Maya, you do not see the effect of the Sun of Knowledge. Come outside the house of Maya, give up 'woman' and 'gold', and then the Sun of Knowledge will destroy ignorance. A lens cannot burn paper inside the house. If you stand outside, then the rays of the sun fall on the lens and the paper burns.

Again, the lens cannot burn the paper if there is a cloud. The paper burns when the cloud disappears.

The darkness of the mind is destroyed only when a man stands a little apart from 'woman' and 'gold' and, thus standing apart, practises a little austerity and spiritual discipline. Then only does the cloud of his ego and ignorance vanish. Then only does he attain the Knowledge of God. This 'woman' and 'gold' is the only cloud that hides the Sun of knowledge.

Question: “Sir, is a man liberated only when he dies on the bank of the Ganges?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It is the Knowledge of God alone that gives liberation. The Jnani will certainly attain liberation wherever he may die, whether in the charnel-house or on the bank of the Ganges. But the bank of the Ganges is prescribed for a bound soul.”

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, October 2, 1884*

## Editorial

### The Practice of Humility

#### Humility is the foundation of all virtues.

“Do you know my attitude? As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows. Indeed, there are three words that prick my flesh: 'guru,' 'master,' and 'father.' There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidananda. He alone is the Teacher. My attitude toward God is that of a child toward its mother. One can get human gurus by the million. All want to be teachers. But who cares to be a disciple?” (Sri Ramakrishna)

Girish Ghosh used to say that Sri Ramakrishna conquered the world by his humility. He was a personification of humility. In order to destroy the vanity born of noble descent and to acquire true humility thereby, he cleaned very carefully with his hands places which are absolutely shunned as unclean by others. All saints, by nature, are humble.

Humility is the greatest of all spiritual qualities. Without humility no one can advance in any field of life. The moment a man feels that he knows everything, that he has nothing to learn, then he is done for. Pride is an excessive belief in one's own abilities, a high regard for oneself and one's abilities. Pride begets vanity and leads to destruction.

Humility is the very opposite of pride, vanity and egotism; it is the only virtue which can destroy egotism, the root of all evil. And until one gets rid of pride and egotism there is no chance of peace and happiness. If we do not consciously try to get rid of egotism, life will do that for us in a painful way.

Humility is the greatest destroyer of egotism. Quoting Tulasidas, a great saint of India, Swami Brahmananda says: “Tulasidas is a liar, if God be not realized by truthfulness, obedience, and

motherly attitude towards women.” Commenting on the above saying the Swami says: “Do you know what obedience is? It is humility. When the right kind of humility comes, egoism is destroyed and God is realized.”

Speaking of humility Christ says: “Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.” (Matt. xi. 29) “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man came to serve.” (Matt.10:27)

In our arrogance we look down upon others. In our ignorance, we imagine that the whole world has been created for us, for our enjoyment. Very often our ego gets identified with the objects of worldly prosperity. Then we develop pride like, “I am wealthy, I am a high-born person, I am a great scholar, great singer, speaker etc.” But death can destroy all these in a trice. If only we are able to dwell on the evanescence of wealth, erudition and the like, and immerse our mind in the constant contemplation of God, then all this pride disappears. When people praised him, Newton used to say: “I have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than the ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.” Following Newton, Sri 'M,' the chronicler of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna also used to say the same thing.

Humility is a great aid in the building of character. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “Water accumulates on low ground; when the ground is high, it runs off.” In a humble man sweetness of character and other good qualities develop effortlessly and naturally.

Sri Ramakrishna, again, used to say that one cannot realise God until the ego is destroyed. He used to illustrate this beautifully, citing the example of a bullock: “Egotism is so injurious to man that as long as it is not eradicated there is no salvation for him. Look at the young calf and the troubles that come upon it through egotism. As soon as it is born, it cries, 'Ham hai-'I am,' 'I am.' The result of its egotism is that, when it grows up it is yoked to the plough, to drag heavily loaded carts. But still, in spite of all this punishment, the animal does not lose its egotism; for drums that are made of its hide produce the same sound of 'Ham,' 'I.' The creature does not learn humility until the cotton-carder makes bow-strings out of its entrails: for it is then that the animal's intestines sing out 'Tu hai'- 'Thou art.' The 'I' must go and give place to the 'Thou:' and this is not achieved until man becomes spiritually awakened.”

When a man becomes perfect he becomes truly humble and tender. As Sri Ramakrishna says: “What is the state which a Siddha (perfect man) attains? As a potato or brinjal becomes soft and pulpy, when it gets Siddha (boiled), so a man, when he becomes a Siddha, is seen to be all humility and tenderness.”

Humility or humbleness is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and vanity. Rather than, “Me first,” humility allows us to say, “No, you first, my friend.” Humility is the quality that lets us go more than halfway to meet the needs and demands of others.

Humility as a virtue is praised and emphasised in all religions. Qualities such as humility, courtesy, patience, forbearance etc., have to be acquired patiently through diligent spiritual practice. Humility is needed to live in peace and harmony with all. Humility dissipates hatred, anger and heals all wounds. Humility allows us to see the innate dignity and worth of all people.

Being humble, however, does not mean feeling worthless or having a low opinion of oneself; it does not mean one should have an inferiority complex. It certainly does not mean one should compare oneself unfavourably with others. There is a beautiful saying: “No pride is pride that expresses the glory of the soul. No humility is humility that humiliates the self.”

Sri Ramakrishna says: “Many a man with a show of humility says: 'I am like an earth-worm

grovelling in the dust.' In this way, thinking themselves always to be worms, in time they become like worms. Let not despondency ever enter into your heart. Despair is the greatest enemy in the path of progress. As a man thinks, so he becomes.”

Humility is a quality by which a man has a modest estimate of his own worth, and submits himself to God and others. A humble person respects himself and others because he recognises the innate divinity, the latent potentialities of all beings. A humble person recognises that God has given different qualities to different people. So he does not entertain a superiority complex. He respects all people, all creatures.

Humility is a quality achieved with great effort and spiritual practice. Prayer and the repetition of the holy name of God are of help in the acquisition of humility. According to Sri Chaitanya, japa or the repetition of the name of God is one of the best forms of spiritual practice. Interestingly he says that God's name should be repeated with great humility. Commenting on this Swami Ashokananda, in his *Spiritual Practice*, says:

“Mere outward humility and patience are not meant. Inner purification is essential. True humility comes only when we have risen high above worldly considerations, so that the standard of worldly judgement no longer affects us, and we feel in our inmost heart, every moment of our life, the presence of the Infinite, Omnipotent and Omniscient. Without at least a partial perception of spiritual immensity, real humility is impossible; it will be only mock humility. We must also distinguish between humility and timidity. In most cases our humility is only another form of timidity and ineffectuality: we are cowed by the immensity of powers playing around us, and feel that we cannot play up to such greatness. But the aspirant of God must not be cowed by worldly powers. He must rise above them. But is it easy to defy the world? We can then very well guess what a tremendous training the mind must pass through before the conditions as laid down by Shri Chaitanya can be properly fulfilled.”

True prayer always makes one humble. Holy Mother used to say: “As you pray and meditate you will find the Master actually speaking to you, fulfilling all your desires immediately, and your mind will be filled with such deep peace. ... You will realize that He who is in me, is in you too and in the humblest of men; only then will humility be born in your mind. In the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He who resides in one's heart, resides in the heart of others as well: the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the out-caste. This realization makes one truly humble.”

The practice of humility involves:

1. One should never have a base or inferior opinion of oneself. One should have a healthy self-respect.
2. One should respect all creation as the manifestation of God. The Indian custom of greeting others with Namaste i.e., 'Salutation to the Lord within you,' is a great custom.
3. One should never criticise or find fault with anyone.

One should never try to exalt oneself above others or try to deprive others of their due. Humility means putting God and others ahead of our own interests. Humility comes with the knowledge that God's creation transcends all our narrow interests.

4. One should never feel jealous of others. However humble may be our outward behaviour, entertaining jealousy indicates we are inwardly conceited.
5. One should be open-minded to receive truth from whatever source or from whomsoever it comes.

6. One should strive to unfold one's latent talents and use them in the service of the Lord. Not to do so is unspiritual.

7. Finally, one should never forget that humility means seeing God in everything.

Humility has great power; a humble man can never be destroyed. Before the power of humility, all people - kings, scholars, wealthy people - all bow down their heads in reverence; because humility is Godliness.

**Swami Dayatmananda**

## **What Is God?**

**Swami Atmananda**

If any question has been repeated to a teacher of religion more than any other, if any question has puzzled the head of a philosopher to explain and that of a student to understand, it is this: "What is God?" And again if any question is more simple, at the same time difficult to answer, it is this and this alone. As every phenomenon in this world becomes more and more simple as we proceed towards generalisation while its diversities and manifold nature increase as we move away from it; as when we try to approach the centre of a circle, the distance between the radii decreases till they converge to one point, while going away from it in the direction of the circumference the distance also increase, so in this "unity in variety," which is the plan of creation, "unity" being the simplest, and 'variety' the most complicated having no end. The case is the same with the question above mentioned.

If we can leave off all the sectarian squabbles which give a particular sect the sole right of knowing and defining God, if we can give up all individual prejudices which we have imbibed from all our surroundings or which arise from self-interest; and if we boil down all the philosophical technicalities, some of which are sometimes "fifty syllables long" to their last residue, the answer to this grave question becomes as simple as God is God; and it is as rational, natural and logical.

There is nothing in this world or any other with which we can compare Him; neither can any body see or know Him, because both of these actions bring the idea of limitation. Besides, there is another point which we should study along with it. Here I am looking at a thing and trying to know it. In this process the thing to be known or looked at must be different or separate from the seer or knower; and hence it follows logically that there must be something in the middle which separates or stands between the knower and the thing known, the seer and the thing seen.

So when we look at a thing we must have to do so through this medium. Hence every object of perception appears to us as the medium is and not as the thing in itself. What the thing in reality is, we do not know. We can know only as it appears to us through what stands in the middle. In the case of human knowledge, every man knows or perceives through his own mind.

Since the mental attitude is different in different individuals, the same thing will appear in a different light according to the mental constitution of the man.

Here is a poet looking at a rose and is so enamoured with its beauty that he has forgotten altogether to eat, drink and be merry which are the most important things in human life. But to a man who has not been so disposed the very flower will appear to be disgusting and he will turn his head thinking the poet a fool or half crazed, who, instead of enjoying the world like himself, is immersed in the poetry of an ordinary flower which can be crushed between the fingers.

How can this be accounted for? Certainly both of them are looking at the same flower at the same time; still it appears to be beautiful to one while it is disgusting to the other. This can be explained by stating that each is viewing the flower through his own mind; hence it appears to him according to his mental constitution.

This is the reason why there is so much quarrel and dissension in this world. Everyone tries to assert that his view of things is alone correct, forgetting, in his enthusiasm, that he is as much looking through his own glass as others, and that he has as much right to stick to his own opinion as everyone else. If we can keep these facts in our mind, I think we can better tolerate one another and thereby smoothen our journey through this world of turmoil by greasing the wheels with love and sympathy.

After studying these facts the conclusion is that whenever we want to see something which must necessarily be separate from the seer himself, this mind is unavailable because it is that which separates the object from the subject. Hence everything will appear to the observer as his mind is. Besides, so long as there is difference between man and man, that is, in men's mental attitude, their view of the same thing will differ. As in ordinary things so the same process will hold in relation to God also. As long as we want to see God or know Him as the object, as something separate from us, we must have to do so through our mind. Hence, He will appear to us as our mind is; and as long as creation will last the different ideas of men about God will also be different because creation means differentiation.

People generally ask, even if there be a God, where does He live, why do we not see Him? It is not that we do not see Him. We are surrounded by Him on all sides, everywhere, in Him we live, love and have our being; at the same time we cannot safely say we know Him, because we are looking at Him through our own mind and so our visions are different. There is a full sun-shine in which we are bathing every moment of our life, only everyone of us has got our own spectacles, blue, red, yellow or white, hence the very sunshine, which has none of the colours of the spectacles, appears to us according to the colour of the spectacles we put on.

This is the reason why a saint, though a mortal man like us, sees the pure and perfect God everywhere because his mind is so. To a wicked man the same God will appear as wicked because his mind is full of such thought. So those who have stuffed their minds with worldly ideas see God as this world. Hence, if anyone wants to see the pure and perfect God it is absolutely necessary for him, first, to make his mind so, to purify it. There is another point which will be useful to mention here. In the example of the spectacles each pair may be different from the others. Naturally therefore, no amount of rubbing will change them into pure transparent ones, but in the case of the mind it is different. It is not that one man's mind is naturally coloured or different from that of others, only some dirt has been allowed to be deposited on it, and by assiduous struggle we can remove it.

So, mental difference between man and man is not one of kind but of degree and hence everyone, through his own exertion, can regulate his mind.

The pure saint's mind vibrates with purity, the wicked man's with wickedness. And unless we change it there is no hope of seeing God in the light in which godly men do, at whose feet the

whole world sits to learn a drop of what they know. Therefore, my friends, if we have any desire to see a loving, merciful God we must be loving and merciful ourselves. If we want to see a just God we shall have to become so, and if we want to see a worldly God, it is very easy because we are seeing Him in that light already and no further exertion is necessary.

So God is God, He cannot be called either this or that. He cannot but come under the expression He is He. There is nothing like him anywhere, and He appears to us as our mind is.

*(Reprinted from Brahmavadin, Volume 1)*

## The Sufi and the Disobedient Servant

John Phillips

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

A Sufi pilgrim, who was wandering from one holy shrine to another, spent a night in a wayside hostel. He took his donkey to the stables and then came to the dining-room. After eating, he spent some time in religious discourse with the other guests. He valued the amicable fellowship of the others, since a Sufi's book is not made up of paper, ink and words, but is a pure heart open to the love of his fellows.

When the discussion closed, the Sufi remembered his donkey. He called a servant "Go to the stable," he told him. "Get some straw and barley for my donkey."

"Good heavens," exclaimed the servant. "Why such a delay in giving your order? I have been attending to this for a long time already." "But first moisten the barley," the Sufi continued. "He is an old donkey and his teeth are not strong."

"Heavens above," the servant retorted. "Why do you tell me this, master? I am teaching others to do this very thing."

"But before anything else, take off the saddle and spread some ointment on his sore back."

"You are telling me?" said the servant. "I have hundreds of guests like you and all have gone their way satisfied. We value our guests like our own kith and kin."

"Give him some water and make sure it is not too cold."

"Really, sir," replied the servant, "I am quite ashamed that you should tell me all this." "Put a little straw in his barley."

“Good God!” exclaimed the servant. “Please be brief.”

“Sweep his stall thoroughly and if it is wet sprinkle dry earth on it.”

The servant began to get impatient: “A few words are enough for a man who knows his job.”

“Take the comb and curry the donkey’s back.”

“That is enough, sir,” sighed the servant and, so saying, went off to fetch the straw and barley.

When he had departed, however, he soon forgot all about the stable and went off to join his merry friends, laughing at the Sufi’s admonitions.

The Sufi, tired after his long journey, stretched himself out and dropped off to sleep. In a little while he began to dream and saw that his donkey was being held in the clutches of a wolf, who in the process of devouring him.

He awoke and chided himself for dreaming such nonsense. Then he again slept and dreamed that his donkey was falling down on the road. He again awoke and began to have doubts about the servant. But then he reasoned that the servant had been nothing but civility and gentleness. So why would he treat him spitefully? He also thought, however, of Adam. He was a kind and generous fellow. What injury had he done to the Devil? But then what did man ever do to a snake or a scorpion that they should always be wanting to hurt him? But then he said to himself: “No, to think evil is a sin; why do I entertain such dark thoughts about my brother? On the other hand, dark thoughts are common prudence; how can a man who never thinks of evil remain unharmed?”

While the Sufi was absorbed in these anxious thoughts, his donkey was in a terrible state. There he was, with only earth and stones for company, his saddle awry, his halter in ribbons, all night long without any fodder and now at his last gasp. All through the night till morning he rolled on his side, racked by consuming hunger.

In the morning the servant hurriedly arrived, looked at the saddle, adjusted it on the donkey’s back, then struck him with the goad. The sharp pain from the goad made the donkey jump, but what tongue has a donkey to express his feelings? The Sufi mounted and set off. In a short while the monkey fell, got up and fell again. Each time people came and picked him up. One looked for an ulcer under his bit, another searched for a stone in his shoe and a third poked at the puss in his eye.

“Good master,” they said, “what is the reason for all this? Did you not say that your donkey was strong?”

“The poor animal had nothing to eat but heaven all night,” the Sufi replied, “and now he is thanking heaven on his knees.”

So be on your guard and heed not the blandishments of an evil “friend;” see the snare, do not stride confidently upon the earth. Look at the hundred thousand devils all crying “Good Heavens.” Adam, see in the serpent the Devil himself! The attention of base men is like the servant in the story; better to have nobody as a friend than the fawning of nobodies.



## Pathways of Realization (continued)

Clement James Knott

Fortunately for us all, the human mind has the innate capability of becoming a self-monitoring system. The human mind has associated with it a faculty of selectivity. It can determine what we already know, how much we need to know and how much more we are capable of knowing in the future, depending on our current level of awareness and comprehension. This selective faculty functions unknown to us since it is not part of one's conscious mind, but it is always there, determining what we can know and what we do not need to know, in order to safeguard the existence of each individual. It is a manifestation of the Self (Atman) and self-awareness of it becomes by nature heuristic, serving to aid further discovery. This protective function determines the amount of knowledge that the mind can accept to sustain and enhance beingness. If we are at present unaware of higher levels of knowledge than those that we have been accustomed to, it is for our own benefit so that our self-awareness is not overwhelmed. Thus the self-aware mind of the individual receives as much as it can cope with.

It is the self, the Atman that determines what is right for the self-aware individual and decides what is to be occluded into maya or assigned to the subconscious pending attainment of a higher level of awareness. Without this faculty of selectivity of knowledge and understanding, concentration and meditation would be impossible.

Whereas knowledge of a spiritual nature is subject to maya, knowledge of a material origin which has rejected or denied the spiritual element (including maya) is not so directed. Thus, materialistic intelligence is prone to considering itself free of any intuitive limits on its expansion or its uses, and it has no code of accepted morality except, 'What is possible is acceptable.' This means that much materialist knowledge is not subject to the selectivity of the self and to the occlusions of Maya that determine the amount of knowledge that is beneficial to the individual and to mankind.

The godless ego-mind cannot communicate with the spirit. Only spirit can perceive spirit. The selective faculty of the self can produce order out of any chaos in our minds. Self-conscious realization of the mind is a sequence of continuous transformation to an enhanced state. The realized mind can actualize and effect what it perceives, and can effect what it thinks.

### **Realization of Love: The Song of Songs.**

One of the main sources for Christian contemplatives wishing to express the love of the soul for God has been the Song of Songs, a book of love poems in the old testament of the Bible which were attributed or dedicated to King Solomon. There has been some disagreement among theologians as to whether the songs should be taken literally or allegorically as a kind of parable with a divine spiritual message in a mundane garb. Parables such as this are a means of communicating spiritual truths through the feeling body since they connect with feelings in similar incidents in the lives of the listeners, or with their imagination.

Christian mystics have interpreted the songs as an expression of the feelings of the soul (as the female), the betrothed bride of God awaiting her lover, the promised bridegroom. Becoming the bride of God in a figurative sense represents the preparation of the beloved for

eventual spiritual transformation.

This collection of songs is a paean of adoration, partly in dialogue with the listeners or readers. There is no mention of God or of the names of the loved ones, and the poems are mostly devoted by the loved ones to one another. It is not a narrative or a hymn, but it is a moving expression in earthy, sensuous terms of the yearning for the absent lover who is still awaited by the bride-to-be with implacable feelings of adoration. She tells herself, "His left hand should be under my head and his right hand should embrace me." This desire for the embrace can be interpreted as the desire for being subsumed into the ineffable bliss of the divine Supreme. The spiritual embrace is an act of blessing. It is an embrace of the spirit by the spirit, flowing together as one, in perfect unison.

The Song of Songs has had various interpretations through the ages by differing churches. The Roman Church of the mediaeval period came to believe that the Church was the bride of Christ and some biblical commentaries of the period illustrated Christ embracing the Church personified as his bride.

The underlying message of the songs seems to be that God, as the divine lover, will not always come to the beloved (the soul) when she calls. The betrothed must always be ready for his coming. We need to spend what little time we have in preparing ourselves and living in a state of readiness for his gift of spiritual transformation. He comes unexpectedly and without forewarning when the time is right and needful. If we need God enough and we are ready to submit ourselves to the divine will, then he will come for us.

### **The Stages of Mysticism in Christianity**

Some of the most respected of Christian mystics, who practised contemplation in the ambit of monasticism, have described their experiences in detail. They generally indicate four stages of attainment to the highest stages of mystic union, within the context of their religious belief and practice. Meditation is a preparatory stage between thought and contemplation. It is a preparation for attaining experience of the divine life: It is not the experience itself. The four stages are as follows:

1) The practice of contemplation leading to a progressive submission of the individual will to the divine. This is a realization of the mind.

2) Spontaneous ecstasy experiencing temporary release from the worldly self and receiving knowledge of the Divine will. This is a realization of the feeling body.

One of the fascinations for the devotee in the experience of ecstasy is the release from the limitations of time, but only for a brief period. The sense of the passing of time is suspended. This feeling of timelessness is a foretaste of the higher levels of spirituality.

3) The Betrothal is the preparation of the soul for becoming a bride of God, being the preparation for spiritual transformation into the divine. This becomes a realization of love.

4) The Spiritual Marriage is the highest stage described by the mystics. It is transformation for divine life. Saint Teresa of Avila described this as the highest stage of mystic union. It is marked by a sense of transformation and permanence.

Saint John of the Cross wrote: "...the soul becomes immediately enlightened and transformed in God... it is a complete transformation into the beloved."

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: "(the soul)... in an admirable and ineffable way she lifts and is

lifted up ...she clasps and is closely embraced and by the bond of love she unites herself to God, one with one, alone with Him.”

The Spiritual marriage as described is a realization of the spiritual body of the individual and it is comparable with Savikalpa Samadhi.

The ideal of the Christian mystics through achievement of the gift of the spiritual marriage of the soul with God is not the ultimate in the quest for the divine. The ultimate stage is beyond the comprehension of our human faculties and our worldly realities. It culminates in the abandonment of the ego-self and the ego-body, and its complete submission to the divine will. It is the surrender of the human senses, all feelings and all love back to God. The mind of the adept reverts to being part of the Universal Intelligence. This is the release from the worldly self passing beyond our human realities and beyond any concepts of human or divine love. It is the ultimate realization of the nature of the Self through spiritual transformation into mystic union with the pure consciousness of the divine Supreme; into God; into Brahman; into the divine Life.

## Conversations With Swami Turiyananda

### Swami Raghavananda

Swami Turiyananda: “The wise man does not teach spiritual precepts unless he is asked to do so; he hides his wisdom. He imparts knowledge only when there is genuine earnestness in the seeker. He does not enter into arguments. The teacher is like a physician: first, he has to diagnose the disease of the patient, then he administers the medicine.

“You think it is enough to understand intellectually that the world is unreal. That is not right. Once you have accepted this truth mentally, you must actually apply it in your life. Then only will you get immediate results.

“You feel that living on alms is not important for a monk. But remember, it is great training to free a man from pride or egotism.

“Remember how Sri Ramakrishna took a rupee in one hand and mud in the other, and then threw both away! Isn't that a unique example? Think of the effect! The action immediately created a permanent impression in his mind. He was not satisfied with practicing discrimination only mentally. In the Upanishads we read: 'Perform austerity only after formal initiation.' The commentator explains that spiritual disciplines are not effective unless formal vows are taken by the religious aspirant.

“Therefore I say: First detach yourselves completely from all worldly things. A piece of gold remains gold, whether it lies in mud or anywhere else. Similarly, once you have realized God, it does not matter where you live. But if anybody claims that one can be transformed without total renunciation, he is a liar. 'By renunciation alone one attains immortality.' Know this: 'You cannot find the All unless you give up all.' With firm determination, like Nachiketa, you have to face death itself.

“Keep watch over yourselves! Struggle to improve yourselves and do not try to reform others. Stick to your own ideal!

“At one time I felt so near to realization of the Absolute that with a little more struggle, perhaps for a year or so, I would have attained that Reality. But then a great desire arose in me to cultivate the devotee's attitude toward the personal aspect of God, so I went to Brindaban. I used to ask the religious aspirants in that city about their visions and spiritual experiences. Only Gangamata satisfied me. She taught me this truth: 'Associate with holy people, and never give expression to your own spiritual mood.'

“When I was your age, I was an extreme Vedantist. My one ideal at that time was to attain nirvana. I used to consider that the supreme goal. But Sri Ramakrishna scolded me again and again, and gave me another ideal. He pointed out that the path of knowledge was not my way. He made me a devotee instead. But if I wish I can reach the Absolute. I still remember the occasion when the Master disciplined me.”

November 20

The conversation turned to Nag Mahasay (a great householder-disciple of Ramakrishna, whom Swami Saradananda had visited on his deathbed).

Swami Turiyananda: “Swami Saradananda wrote to me: 'Nag Mahasay was greater than any of us monks. I saw him go into nirvikalpa samadhi again and again. Signs of ecstasy were visible on his body. He came back from nirvikalpa to normal consciousness, and then finally gave up his body in samadhi.'

“Mr. X has a very suspicious mind. He never sees good in anyone.

“Give up the idea that you are a man or a woman. Think of yourself as the Atman (Spirit). While I was in the West, the idea of sex was completely erased from my mind. I did not see any difference between men and women.

“Nothing matters as long as your conscience is clear. We know that there is a Being above us who knows the truth from the untruth.

“I spit on name and fame! What good are they? In a few days you are dead and gone!”

November 22

Swami Turiyananda: “I don't think I ever slept longer than three or four hours a night. The first part of the night I used to pass in meditation. Then I decided that sleep was a great obstacle. So I used to sit up and watch my train of thought. As a result, my mind began to discriminate continuously between the Eternal and the non-eternal.

“And then I could not sleep any more. I thought to myself: Am I losing my mind? I began to pray that I might sleep. But within me there was a current of joy as if someone was saying. But didn't you want to discriminate like this? Then, for about a year, I regularly sang the following song: 'O Mother, make me mad with love for Thee. What shall I do with reasoning or knowledge?' This soothed my mind and brought me back from the realm of the Absolute to the personal aspect of God.

“If I had had a little more patience, I would have been merged in the Absolute.

“You see, I took a vow that I would not lie down on my bed. Whenever I felt very sleepy, I used to keep on sitting and doze a little. Others thought I went to bed and slept all night, but I sat up and meditated.

“From my early boyhood days I never could stay in bed when there was a little light in the sky. There is no doubt that I was a yogi in my past birth.

“When I was a boy I believed only in self-effort. My attitude was: It is I who have created this world. By my own will I was born, and by my own will I shall go beyond birth and death. This was my firm belief. In those days I would not have listened even if Brahma and Vishnu had told me otherwise.”

November 23

Swami Turiyananda: “I have meditated much on the teachings of the Gita, which contains the essence of all scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna said about me that I was a monk according to the precepts of the Gita.

“This world is a slippery place. Unless one is careful one is apt to fall.

“If you control the tongue and the sexual instinct, you will live happily wherever you may be. How often one sees that people cannot live together in peace! They speak ill of one another or quarrel. And how many control the sex instinct?”

November 24

His life in the Shanti Ashrama, near San Francisco

Swami Turiyananda : “While I was in the West, the Lord made me do his work. I felt that I was but an instrument in his hands. Whenever an inquirer came and asked a question, I used to see the face of the Lord, and the answer seemed to come directly from him through my lips. And the seeker would leave satisfied.

“I taught a class on the Gita there with great enthusiasm. At the Belur Math I also used to teach the Gita. I would explain one verse and remain absorbed in its meaning for a long time. Once a well-known scholar came and asked me many difficult questions about Vedanta, and through the Lord's grace he received simple solutions to his problems.

“At the Shanti Ashrama, people with strong individualities and different natures lived together harmoniously. I had to look after them for almost twenty-four hours a day. They had regular work to do, study class twice each day, four times meditation, and the rest of the time I used to converse with them on God. Early in the morning I would go to each cottage and wake everyone by chanting OM, OM. I gave impartial love to all.

“Have confidence in yourself! The mind must be made steady. Analyze it and find out if it wants what is right or if it is only trying to deceive you. As you continue to analyze in this manner, you will gain confidence in yourself. But remember, you cannot really do the Lord's work unless you control your senses.”

November 27

Swami Turiayananda: “During meditation some try to make their minds blank. But how is that possible? The mind is teeming with desires and cravings. As soon as you drive one thought out, many other thoughts crowd in. Only people who are inclined toward atheism follow such a course. The best way is to develop love for God is by meditating on Him constantly. In this way the mind is purified of all cravings.”

*(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, Mar-Apr 1958)*

## Bondage and Freedom (continued)

### Swami Bhajananda

Next we have to consider the means for the attainment of salvation. What are the conditions under which salvation is obtained? Here again the position of Hinduism is unique, for it alone insists on direct, immediate experience of the transcendental Self or Atman as the only means of obtaining freedom. Even those schools which hold divine grace as essential for liberation concede that the salvific function of grace is to reveal to man his true nature, and freedom follows as a consequence of this experience.

No other religious tradition insists on direct experience as the only condition of salvation. In all other religions moral life and faith in God are enough to achieve salvation. Christianity holds membership in a Church as an additional condition for salvation. In Theravada Buddhism strict observance of moral principles is regarded as almost wholly sufficient for the attainment of salvation. Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, emphasizes meditation and some kind of transcendent experience. Of course, every religion either dogmatically asserts or tacitly implies that salvation is possible only for its own followers.

So then, the three distinctive features of the Hindu conception of salvation are:

1. Its nature as freedom from bondage.
2. Its experience as pure being.
3. Its insistence on direct transcendental experience as the ultimate means of salvation.

### **Mukti** in comparison with other forms of salvation

Direct realization of the higher Self requires not only the strict observance of moral virtues as a precondition but also the transformation and transcendence of ordinary consciousness. Does this not, then, imply that mukti, or moksha (freedom) refers to a higher state of existence than the other forms of salvation? Indeed it does.

Even in Hinduism all schools do not hold the same view on liberation. The highest view is that

held by Advaita Vedanta. According to this school, freedom is the restoration of the individual to its true state of non-differentiation from Brahman, the Supreme Self. In this state of non-duality there is no difference between the subject and the object or between qualities and the qualified. It is not a state to be acquired but to be discovered. The same self endures all through the process of discovery and so the final experience is not different from that of the Self. Hence it is stated in Advaita treatises: "The unknown Brahman is the object of enquiry, and the known Brahman is the result." The effort to realize the Supreme Self is nothing more than the removal of the obstacles to that realization and, as soon as the obstacles are removed, the Supreme Self reveals itself. That is why Shankara has repeatedly insisted in his commentaries that freedom is not the result of a process but an ever-attained fact of experience. It is a state of absoluteness unconditioned by anything. He argues that even a higher experience produced by meditation, which is only a special kind of mental activity, is a subjective experience and has no absolute validity. Non-dual experience is independent of everything.

The direct realization of this absolute state is known as sadyomukti; it is the highest state of existence ever conceivable. Advaitins, however, admit of the possibility of another kind of liberation. Brahman conditioned by Maya appears as the Cosmic Soul. Through meditation on and devotion to the Deity it is possible to attain cosmic consciousness and to reach the world of personal God after death. This in itself is a liberated state; according to Advaitins this is the type of liberation promised by Ramanuja, Madhva and other teachers of dualism. However, according to Advaitins, this is not the final state of liberation. After aeons of time the personal God, along with all those souls who have attained unity with Him, will merge in the absolute Brahman. This indirect or 'gradual' liberation is called Kramamukti.

Since freedom is a form of knowledge, the majority of Advaitins believe that it is possible to have it even during earthly existence; this is known as jivanmukti, liberation-while-living. A few others, however, maintain that true liberation takes place only after death. Buddhism makes a similar distinction between nirvana and parinirvana. In all other religious traditions (including the devotional schools in Hinduism) salvation is strictly an 'eschatological affair.'

Only the great Christian mystics who gained unitive experience may be said to have attained the world of the personal God and to have escaped from the cosmic wheel.

The exact nature of Buddhist Nirvana is in dispute. The Theravada conception of it, as a state attainable chiefly through moral discipline is not very high. The Mahayana conception is higher but, from the stand-point of Advaita, since the Buddhists do not believe in the existence of a transcendent Self, Nirvana is devoid of true Self-knowledge and is nothing but the experience of the dissolution of the constituent elements of the personality.

The Yoga books speak of the possibility of remaining absorbed in Prakriti, the unmanifested, causal base of the universe. It is a kind of samadhi without full knowledge of the Atman, lasting millions of years, and attained through intense renunciation and disgust for worldly life. From the Vedantic view-point this is what Nirvana amounts to. According to Vedanta, this is not the final state of liberation, for those who attain it will be reborn when a new creation begins after cosmic dissolution.

Two important aspects of the Advaita view of salvation deserve attention. First it admits the validity of all other conception of salvation; only it regards them as lower. Second, the Advaitic view alone permits a state of existence which is completely free from the influence of time.

The Advaitic view may be the highest, but this does not necessarily mean that it is the best for all people. Let everyone follow the path of salvation that he thinks is the best for him.

## Experience of freedom

What is really important is to introduce an element of freedom into our day-to-day life. How long will we live as slaves to lust and greed, hate and fear? Some day we must become free. If so, why not now? We are so much accustomed to living in bondage that we do not really desire or strive for freedom. This tendency is illustrated by the story of the Chinese prisoner who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. After sixty years when he was released on the coronation of a new emperor, the man found the prospect of living free in the world intolerable. He therefore begged the jail authorities to let him spend the remaining part of his life also in imprisonment.

The story of the enlightened queen Madalasa narrated in the Puranas offers a striking contrast. She was as wise as she was beautiful and was married to a king named Ritadhvaja who had earlier rescued her from the clutches of a demon. Owing to her past merits, Madalasa was blessed with divine knowledge and knew of the illusoriness of the world and the immortality and glory of the Atman. While rocking her babies in the cradle, she would sing Vedantic hymns as a lullaby the burden of which was: "Thou art the pure, awakened, stainless Self, free of the Maya of transmigratory existence." She taught her children Vedantic truths and trained them in how to live free of all entanglements. One after the other the first three sons when they grew up renounced the world, practised spiritual disciplines in hermitages and attained spiritual illumination. At the king's request, the fourth son, Alarka, was brought up differently. When he came of age he was crowned king, and Ritadhvaja and Madalasa repaired to the Ashrama of Dattatreya. After ruling the country wisely for several years Alarka too renounced the kingdom and sought spiritual enlightenment, for so powerful was the ambiance of freedom in which he had grown up that he couldn't stand the bondage of kingly duties for too long.

The truth is this: in order to seek true freedom we must have an experience of true freedom. It is only when we experience great peace and strength through inner freedom that we seek the highest spiritual freedom. Only then will we understand the true nature of bondage.

## Sources of bondage

It is a rather paradoxical fact that for the attainment of true spiritual freedom, a certain degree of restriction is necessary as a precondition. Just as a person who seeks too much pleasure will miss true happiness (this is known as the 'hedonistic paradox') so also a person who seeks too much freedom at the lower level will miss true liberation. First of all, a fixed external point is necessary to give leverage to inner freedom. This fixed point may be the cloister in the case of a monk or the hearth in the case of a housewife. Those who condemn household chores or work in a factory or office as drudgery would do well to remember the life of Hui-neng (638-713) the Sixth Patriarch of Zen (Cha'n in Chinese). When as an uneducated peddler of firewood he joined the Tung Monastery in northern China, he was assigned the task of grinding corn in a neglected corner. This humble work in which he was engaged for many years transformed his consciousness and he became the greatest teacher of Zen.

Still more important is the need for a stable inner milieu. A restless mind which is constantly assailed by instinctual drives, feelings, images, ideas, plans and opinions is a great obstacle to the attainment of inner freedom. So one of the first steps to achieving inner freedom is to establish order, integration and stability in the mind. Goal-orientation, a clear-cut philosophy of life, a definite routine, study of scriptures, meditation, japa and ego-encountering at fixed times are very helpful aids. When the mind is stable and calm, it becomes easier to understand and deal with the sources of bondage which are hidden in the depths of consciousness.



All schools of Vedanta hold that in its real nature the Self of man is ever-free, self-luminous and blissful and that the original, primordial cause of bondage is ignorance. In Advaita Vedanta ignorance is conceived as a veil covering the light of the Self. In other schools of Vedanta ignorance is conceived as a restriction of the powers inherent in the soul caused by wrong karma. According to the former, ignorance can be removed only through knowledge; according to the latter, the restrictions can be removed through good karma, meditation and divine grace.

The chief bonds of the soul are two: egoism and samskaras (past impressions). Egoism is the identification of the Self with instinctual drives and images which are produced by samskaras, the latent impressions in the mind of past experiences and actions. The first step in the attainment of inner freedom is to prevent bad impressions from producing bad impulses like lust, greed and hate. This can be achieved by acquiring good impressions through virtuous actions. Good impressions keep bad ones under control and, when this happens, a person attains what is called 'moral freedom'. Higher than this is 'spiritual freedom' in which one transcends both virtue and vice and realizes himself as the pure, self-luminous Atman. Spiritual freedom can be obtained only by deactivating the impressions and by eliminating ignorance, the primordial tendency of the Self to identify itself with its limiting adjuncts; both these processes require a radical transformation of consciousness.

### **Two types of freedom**

We have spoken of two types of freedom. Moral freedom is freedom from feelings of guilt, regret and evil tendencies - that is, from the hold of the past. It is liberation from the wheel of Ixion which we discussed earlier. Spiritual freedom is liberation from the past, the present and the future. It is liberation from the 'six-spoked wheel of transmigratory existence.' When ignorance, which forms the hub of this wheel, is destroyed, the whole wheel breaks up liberating the Self.

It cannot be denied that Indian culture has, right from the period of the Upanishads, overemphasized spiritual freedom and this has resulted in a noticeable loss of moral vigour in social life. On the other hand, western culture has focused its attention on morality. This has given to western society greater moral vigour and social justice.

What is the cause of this? The answer is to be sought in the inadequacies of Christian theology. Christian ethics does not allow real moral freedom. It makes every human choice or act a moral confrontation between man and God. These endless human-divine conflicts only intensify the individual and social conflicts which already exist. The present growing popularity of Buddhism in the West may be seen partly as a reaction to such outdated Christian trends as 'crisis theology' developed by Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr.

According to Buddha, moral problems are purely psychological problems and through self-knowledge man can attain moral freedom. In Vedantic life too, morality (dharma) is dealt with at individual social levels, and man's quest for God has the liberation of the spirit as its chief aim. The prayer of the Upanishadic sage is: "Seeking liberation, I take refuge in the Supreme Spirit whose light illumines the intellect and who imparts supreme knowledge to the Creator (Brahma) after projecting him."

Moral freedom gives peace of mind. By freeing their minds from lust and greed and hate and jealousy and fear and pride, let people attain peace of mind first. The question of spiritual freedom will become meaningful only then.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, Sept. 1986)

## The Inner Meaning of the Beatitudes

Swami Prabhavananda

As the Bhagavad-Gita represents the essence of the Hindu scriptures, so the Sermon on the Mount represents the essence of the teachings of Christ. These two great scriptures proclaim the universal principles of spiritual life and the methods by which they may be practiced.

In the Beatitudes we find the central note of the Sermon on the Mount. To enable us better to understand their inner meaning, we should consider the verse in the Gospel according to St. Matthew just preceding them: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set his disciples came unto him."

Every spiritual teacher, whether he is a divine incarnation, or an illumined soul, or a prophet, has two sets of teachings: one for the multitude, the other for his disciples. The elephant has two sets of teeth: the tusks with which he defends himself from external difficulties and the teeth with which he eats. The spiritual teacher prepares the way for his message with his tusks, as it were. The inner truth of religion he reveals only to his intimate disciples.

A man may be a great scholar. He may have studied many scriptures and philosophies. But that does not make him spiritual. Religion is essentially a transformation of mind and character. It is an inner unfoldment of the divine consciousness latent in every individual. And the spiritual power to awaken that consciousness is transmitted by the teacher to the disciple. But the field must be fertile and the soil ready before the seed can be planted. In the Katha Upanishad we read, "To many it is not given to hear of the Self. Many, though they hear of it, do not understand it. Wonderful is he who speaks of it. Intelligent is he who learns of it. Blessed is he who taught by a good teacher is able to understand it."

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find that when crowds used to visit him on Sundays, he would speak to them in a general way which benefited them. And when his intimate disciples gathered around him, as I was told by one of them, he would take every precaution that nobody could overhear them. He would carefully lock all doors and windows before he gave them the sacred truths of religion. It is not that the truths themselves are secret. They are recorded, and anyone can read them. But what he gave his disciples was something more than words. In a divine mood he would uplift the consciousness of those around him. Christ taught in the same way. Therefore he did not give the Sermon on the Mount to the multitudes, but to his disciples whose hearts were prepared to receive it. The multitudes are not yet fit to understand the truth of God. They do not really want it. My master used to say: "How many are ready? Yes, many people come to us. We have the treasure to give. But they only ask for potatoes, onions, and eggplants!"

In the Crest-Jewel of Discrimination, the seer-philosopher Shankara mentions four qualifications which must be met before a man can attain the knowledge of God. They are: discrimination, renunciation of ephemeral enjoyments, the six treasures of virtue, and the

longing for liberation.

First of all, we must learn to discriminate between the eternal and the non-eternal. Why do we seek knowledge of God? Because our experiences in the world teach us that everything we perceive and enjoy through the senses is transitory. And something within us refuses to be satisfied with the ephemeral. Everyone is seeking abiding happiness. Yet this search is bound to end in frustration as long as we look for lasting fulfillment in the external world, whose very nature is non-eternal. One who discriminates analyzes himself: are his thoughts and actions leading him toward God, in whom alone is found eternal peace and happiness, or away from him?

As his discrimination ripens, man's desires for objects and pleasures in the sense world diminish. This is renunciation. But renunciation of worldly desires is only possible for the man who desires something higher. Therefore he must cultivate those qualities in himself which will help him move toward his chosen ideal of God. These qualities are known as the six treasures of virtue in the Hindu scriptures. The first is tranquility. Then come self-control and mental poise, which consist in not letting the mind react to external stimuli. The fourth treasure is forbearance, the virtue of patiently enduring all kinds of afflictions without rebellion or complaint. Then comes faith. There must be a firm conviction, based upon intellectual understanding, that the scriptural teachings and those of one's master are true. Moreover, the heart of the aspirant must be enthusiastically inclined toward its ideal. Just to say: "I believe in God," is not faith. One whose faith is firm will be moved to action. The sixth treasure is self-surrender.

Last, and most important, is the longing for liberation from the bondage of life, that longing for God and desire for freedom from things that hinder our approach to him. In his Sermon on the Mount Christ speaks of these same conditions that must be fulfilled before the truth of God is revealed. But before we continue with this subject and take up the Beatitudes one by one, let us consider the central note of the Sermon, which contains the ideal of man's life: "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The means to attain this ideal is expressed in the Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," which we shall discuss in its proper place,

Swami Turiyananda once told me that when he was a young boy he studied scriptures and philosophy, but nothing could satisfy him: he could not understand the purpose of life. One day he found the following passage in the writings of Shankara: "A man is born, not to desire life in the world of senses, but to realize the bliss of an illumined soul who has attained his liberation." This discovery took away a burden from his heart. Later he met Sri Ramakrishna and attained the bliss of liberation while living.

"Be ye therefore perfect." In every scripture we find the same theme: See God! Seek perfection! But what is meant by perfection? None of us living in the relative plane bound by time, space and causation can have a definite conception of what this perfection is, because perfection is absolute. All we know about it is that it means a state where there is no lack, but abiding peace and fulfillment. In a way, every one of us is seeking perfection, whether we are religious or not. If we are sick, we hope to attain perfection by gaining health. If we are poor, we think wealth will give us perfection. The artist seeks perfection in his painting, the scientist in his discoveries. So in every field of life. But when we have health or wealth or beauty or secular knowledge, we are still not satisfied. A continuing sense of lack and imperfection drives us on to seek fulfillment only to end in frustration. Is this pessimism?

It is perfectly true that our cravings can be satisfied in this world. We can have some measure of success or pleasure. But we always seem to forget that they do not last. We cannot have success without failure, pleasure without pain. They are like two sides of the same coin.

All our struggles for fulfillment can be reduced to three desires: the desire for immortal life,

Sat; the desire for infinite knowledge, Chit; and the desire for infinite love and bliss, Ananda. Sat-Chit-Ananda is a Sanskrit name of God. The sinner just as the holy man, in the last analysis, has Sat-Chit-Ananda as his goal. By sense-gratification, by every kind of self-delusion, even by violence and fraud man searches for abiding fulfillment. The trouble is that he seeks it in the transient phenomena of the external world instead of in God, the eternal Reality, dwelling in his own heart. We are like the musk deer of the Indian fable, which looks all over the earth for that haunting fragrance which is really exuded from within itself.

In one of the most important of his yoga sutras, Patanjali sums up the reason for the existence of this universe. He says: "The universe exists in order that the experiencer may experience it, and thus become liberated." The world of sense-experience is a great book. Every page of that book can teach us something, but most of us never pass on. We read the same page over and over again, repeating the same enjoyments and sufferings. If we kept turning the pages, we would regard life as a perpetual search for meaning and an exercise in the discrimination between the real and the unreal. But only after countless hardships does it dawn on us that nothing in the external world can give us lasting satisfaction and that our search for perfection and abiding happiness can only be realized in the eternal truth of God.

In Vedanta as in Christ's teachings it is pointed out that this perfection is not alien to us, because we always carry within us the kingdom of God. Swami Vivekananda defined religion as the manifestation of the divinity already in man. It exists in a latent state; we must unfold it. The difficulty is that we are not aware of this divinity. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." The light is shining, but ignorance of our true nature covers that light. This ignorance must be dispelled before we can see the light of God. Eternal life, infinite wisdom, and abiding love are within us. To understand this truth and to seek it within ourselves is the beginning of religion.

Of course, perfection in God is not achieved immediately. But if the aspirant struggles even for a little while, he will see certain signs which show him that he is progressing. He becomes less selfish and assertive. His mind is increasingly able to grasp subtle spiritual truths, and his heart becomes filled with sympathy and love for others. But he is still in the relative plane. The perfection, which is absolute, cannot be experienced in our normal consciousness. That is why Sri Krishna in the Gita tells his disciple Arjuna that he cannot see God with his human eyes, and he gives him divine sight. This divine sight opens in the transcendental state of consciousness; beyond our normal experiences of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

It is hard for us to believe that God can be known and realized in this very life. Yet in every age, among the followers of all religions, there are examples of those who have attained that perfection in their lifetime. Christ, Buddha, Moses, and many others not only reached that state but insisted that everyone must reach it. Christ stated that unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. The German mystic Angelus Silesius explained these words as follows: "Christ may be born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but if he be not born anew within your own heart, you remain eternally forlorn." What does it mean to have Christ born in our hearts? It is to come face to face with God, to be awakened to that transcendental consciousness. That is the one purpose of religion.

In our present age, Swami Vivekananda as a young boy was searching for the truth of God. He went to every teacher and asked: "You say you believe in God. Have you seen him?" Finally he came to Sri Ramakrishna and received this reply: "Yes, I have seen him; more clearly than I see you."

"Can I also see him?"

"Yes, you can."

And Sri Ramakrishna gave Vivekananda a touch which opened his divine sight and transformed

his life.

Why do we not see many realized souls? First of all, few really long for that perfection. Of those who do, very few are willing to struggle for it. Secondly, not many believe that religion means “to be perfect even as the Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Most people are satisfied with living a more or less ethical life on earth and being rewarded in an after-life for any good deeds they may have done. Christ’s ideal of perfection is generally either forgotten or not understood. True, many people read the Sermon on the Mount. But the teachings do not sink deep into the consciousness. Few try to live them. But although theologians may argue today whether perfection can be achieved in this life or not, as we have pointed out, Christ taught that man should be as perfect as God himself, by realizing his oneness with him. His disciples were not concerned with doctrines, creeds, theology, or philosophy. Many of them were simple fishermen. They followed Christ because they hungered for the truth of God and knew that Christ could teach them how to satisfy that hunger.

One thing I learned from my association with the disciples of Ramakrishna is that in the presence of such illumined souls one becomes convinced that God is and can be realized. They do not have to lecture to persuade you. When you sit at their feet, you feel that the perfection Christ speaks of is within your reach, that the treasure of God is just like a fruit in the palm of your hand.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” In the opening sentence of the Beatitudes Christ speaks of the chief characteristic the disciple must have before he can understand the teaching. He must be poor in spirit, he must be humble. If a man has pride in learning, in wealth, in beauty, or in lineage, or has preconceived ideas of what spiritual life is and how he should be taught; his mind is not receptive to higher teachings. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: “Those illumined souls who have realized the Truth will instruct you in the knowledge of Brahman if you will prostrate yourself before them, question them, and serve them as a disciple.”

A man came to a teacher and asked to be made a disciple. The teacher had spiritual insight and, realizing that the man was not ready to be taught, inquired: “Do you know what you have to do in order to be a disciple?” The man shook his head and asked the teacher to tell him. “Well, said the teacher, “you have to fetch water, gather fuel, cook, and do many hours of heavy work. You also have to study. Are you willing to do all that?” The man asked: “Now tell me please, what does the teacher do?”

“Oh, the teacher sits and gives spiritual instructions in his quiet way.”

“Ah, I see! Why not make me a teacher then?”

Everyone wants to be a teacher. But before we become teachers we must learn to be disciples. We must acquire humility.

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” As long as we think we are rich in worldly goods or knowledge, we cannot make spiritual progress. When we feel that we are poor in spirit and that everything is in vain, then only will we be comforted. We must grieve that we have not realized the Truth of God. No doubt we all mourn for the loss of worldly pleasures and possessions, but that is not the kind of mourning that Christ speaks of. The mourning which Christ calls “blessed” is very rare, because few people feel this loneliness, this spiritual loss which we must have before we are comforted. Most of us are quite satisfied with the surface life in this world. In the back of our minds perhaps we feel the sense of something incomplete, but still we hope that this lack can be filled by the sense-objects of this world.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “People shed rivers of tears because a son is not born or because

they cannot get riches. But who sheds even one teardrop because he has not seen God?" It is our ignorance which gives us this false sense of values. Shankara, in explaining the nature of this ignorance, says that the true Self, the spirit, is opposed to matter as light is opposed to darkness. Yet such is the inexplicable power of ignorance that even the wisest among us habitually identify the spirit with the ego. It is very easy to understand intellectually that we are different from the body; just as we are different from the dress we wear. Yet when the body is diseased, we say: "I am sick." Intellectually we can understand that we are different from our minds. Yet when a wave of happiness or suffering arises in the mind, we say: "I am happy. I am miserable." Also, we identify ourselves with our families and friends: anything happening to them seems to be happening to us. We identify ourselves with our possessions. If we lose our wealth, we feel as if we had lost ourselves, there is nothing left to live for.

But when we begin to feel that spiritual lack within ourselves, when we begin to mourn as Christ wished us to mourn, when we shed even one teardrop for God; then that comfort comes, then we know that God can be realized. Sri Ramakrishna showed us how to mourn by the example of his life. During the period of his intense spiritual practices, he passed many days longing for the moment when he would realize God in the form of the Divine Mother. Every evening when the temple bells rang for vespers, he would weep: "Another day is gone, and still I have not seen you!" We must come to this stage when we feel that nothing can give us peace except the vision of God.

Sri Ramakrishna used to tell those who asked him how to realize God: "Yearn for Him with a longing heart." Let us analyze ourselves. We will find that we yearn for all kinds of worldly objects much more than we yearn for God. But even a slight desire to know God is a beginning that can lead us to the highest realization. We must begin with self-effort. We must struggle to develop love for the Lord by practicing recollectedness of Him, by prayer, worship, and meditation. As we practice these spiritual disciplines, that slight desire to know God will be intensified and we will feel closer to him. Eventually, our whole life must be centered in Him. Then arises that mourning that Christ speaks of, and we come to a stage where God draws man's mind to Him as the magnet draws the needle. Then we will find comfort.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." What is the cause of our delusion? Our sense of ego. This egotism in us must be overcome. Therefore, "blessed are the meek." But why does Christ say that they shall inherit the earth? At first sight this seems difficult to understand. In Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms there is a corresponding passage: "The man who is confirmed in non-stealing becomes the master of all riches." What is meant by "non-stealing?" It means that we must give up the egotistic delusion that we can possess things, that anything can belong exclusively to us as individuals. We may think: "But we are good people. We don't steal anything! Whatever we have, we have worked for and earned. It belongs to us by right." But the truth is that nothing at all belongs to us. Everything belongs to God. When we regard anything in this universe as ours, we are appropriating God's possession. Then how shall we live? Without the sense of "me" and "mine," free from the sense of attachment, not as slaves to what we consider our possessions. It does not mean that we must get rid of wealth, family, and friends, but we must get rid of the idea that they belong to us. We must look on ourselves as trustees. As soon as we understand this truth and give up our deluded individual claims, we find that in the truest sense everything belongs to us after all. We inherit the earth.

Conquerors who try to become masters of the world by force of arms never inherit anything except worry, trouble, and headaches. Misers who accumulate huge wealth are only chained to their gold, they never really possess it. But the man who has given up his sense of attachment experiences fulfillment without the misery of possession.

Many people dislike this saying of Christ because they think that the meek can never achieve anything. They think that no happiness is to be had from life unless one is aggressive. My

master used to say; “People who live in the senses think they are enjoying life. But what do they know about enjoyment? Only those who are filled with divine bliss really enjoy life.”

What reference does this meekness have to our human relationships? As a general rule, the worldly man asserts his ego; he forces his opinions on others; he feels that he has a monopoly on knowledge. If anyone does not give him the credit he thinks is due him, he becomes angry or feels insulted. On the other hand, the illumined soul's heart is filled with love of God. In the Upanishads the nature of such an enlightened man is defined as being “humble and not asserting himself.” If a spiritual aspirant will practice Christ's teaching of meekness, he will find it very practical. Anger and hatred can be conquered by gentleness and love. The Chinese mystic Lao Tzu has expressed this beautiful truth as follows: “Of the soft and weak things in the world, none is weaker than water. But in overcoming that which is firm and strong, nothing can equal it. That which is soft conquers the hard. Rigidity and hardness are companions of death. Softness and tenderness are companions of life.” By giving up his ego to God, by being meek, man will gain everything; he will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” When someone once asked Sri Ramakrishna, “Where is God?” he held up a piece of cloth in front of him and said, “Look, here I am, but you can't see me.” God is very close to us. Only the veil of ignorance hides him from our vision. This veil must be removed by a raging hunger and burning thirst for him. Swami Brahmananda used to say: “Pray to God. He is not a stranger; He is your very own. Ask him to reveal himself to you.”

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## **Book Review**

### **Sublime Love: Essay and Anthology**

#### **A Religious and Philosophical Illumination of Spiritual Love**

**by Stuart Rose**

**Published by Indica Books, D 40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi**

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**Price: 395 Rupees**

Stuart Rose, the author of this interesting book, has a Ph.D. in Religious Studies, and has lived, travelled and worked in many countries and organisations. He now lives simply, away from the world. In this book he has set himself the formidable task of analysing spiritual love without recourse to mysticism or poetic metaphor. In this endeavour I think he has succeeded in covering the whole field of thought in this area, quoting from numerous authorities ranging from Plato to Sigmund Freud.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of a discussion ranging over all the

various aspects of spiritual love. In the course of this discussion the writer deals interestingly with various kinds of love, including love between the sexes, a subject which is often avoided or briefly dismissed by writers on religious matters. He does however indicate that renunciation of sexual love occurs when the person is drawn exclusively towards divine love. In conclusion he even goes so far as to say that spiritual love itself exists only as long as one considers oneself to be separate from God: after all, who is left to love if all is one in God?

The second part of the book contains an anthology of extracts from the writings of thirty-six great thinkers about spiritual love, ranging from Thomas Aquinas to Sri Aurobindo. Among these extracts is one from the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, taken from *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom*.

Stuart Rose's presentation of all these viewpoints taken from so many religious and spiritual thinkers is quite objective and unpartisan. I have not been able to detect any kind of bias towards one particular religion or school of thought. He in fact invites the reader to form his own judgement.

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Heaven should never be our ideal, not only because it is too small a goal to strive for but also because it holds no promise of further attainment. The constant pursuit of celestial pleasures crowds out all spiritual effort. In heaven there is no leisure; in hell there is no leisure; only here in this middle plane where the two meet is there leisure in which the soul can try to realize God. If a God (Deva) wishes to attain salvation, he must come down and be born as a man. Heaven is only a place of continual festivities and enjoyment, but the Scriptures tell us that we must be absolutely detached from enjoyments of this world and from enjoyments of the next world.

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