

Vedanta

349 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2009

Alone but not Lonely
Editorial

Sin Against Oneself
Swami Bhajananda



Divine Wisdom

VAIKUNTHA: "Is the world unreal?"

MASTER: "Yes, it is unreal as long as one has not realized God. Through ignorance man forgets God and speaks always of 'I' and 'mine'. He sinks down and down, entangled in maya, deluded by 'woman and gold.' Maya robs him of his knowledge to such an extent that he cannot find the way of escape, though such a way exists.

"You all know from your experience how impermanent the world is. Look at it this way. How many people have come into the world and again passed away! People are born and they die. This moment the world is and the next it is not. It is impermanent. Those you think to be your very own will not exist for you when you close your eyes in death. Again, you see people who have no immediate relatives, and yet for the sake of a grandson they will not go to Benares to lead a holy life. 'Oh, what will become of my Haru then?' they argue."

DEVOTEE: "Now, sir, what is the way?"

MASTER: "It is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline and at the same time lead a householder's life. There are many handicaps: disease, grief, poverty, misunderstanding with one's wife, and disobedient, stupid, and stubborn children. I don't have to give you a list of them.

"But still there is a way out. One should pray to God, going now and then into solitude, and make efforts to realize Him."

NEIGHBOUR: "Must one leave home then?"

MASTER: "No, not altogether. Whenever you have

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Alone but not Lonely

Loneliness is an existential and inescapable human condition feared by all. Wherever we look we find loneliness amidst crowds. It is hard to come by a person who has not experienced loneliness.

Nothing comes with us, nothing goes with us; we are born alone, we travel alone and we die alone. We cannot eat, sleep or share our experience, our joys or sorrows with anyone else. We can only share information, but not understanding.

Such is our human condition and this state of affairs will continue until the individual merges into the divine. This is what Plotinus calls "*the flight of the alone to the Alone*"

There could be no poverty greater than loneliness, no fear greater than the feeling of being isolated, not being wanted, not loved, not appreciated. Some existential philosophers even consider loneliness as the essential condition of humanness. *Vedanta*, naturally, denies this view. All our struggle from birth to death is to accept, cope and overcome this dreaded loneliness through family, society, work, prayer, meditation, etc.

So what is loneliness?

Loneliness is a mental state where a person experiences an intense feeling of emptiness and isolation, of not being wanted, of being cut off from everything. It is a state in which life appears to be meaningless and purposeless. It is a state where a person is incapable of deriving any joy from life and, often, feels like committing suicide.

It is normal to feel lonely at times. But when loneliness becomes intense, constant and brings on depression and pessimism, it turns into a dreadful disease.

Loneliness should not, however, be equated with being alone. One can be alone and feel joyful and fulfilled. And one can be intensely lonely in the midst of crowds.

“Language... has created the word ‘loneliness’ to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word ‘solitude’ to express the glory of being alone.”

Paul Tillich (Theologian and Philosopher)

Types of loneliness

Loneliness is of many types.

1. There is a simple and temporary type of loneliness. Often when one is removed from one’s surroundings one feels lonely. When people lose their loved ones or partners they can be overwhelmed with loneliness. Or when a person fails to pass an examination or fails to secure a job, he may feel lonely. This state does not last long and can easily be remedied.

2. One may feel lonely when one feels misunderstood and not appreciated. This is especially applicable to creative people like artists, scientists, great writers, and also patriots and statesmen; these people often feel lonely, because there are few with whom they can talk meaningfully.

Spiritual giants can experience loneliness sometimes. Swamis like Shivananda and Brahmananda used to feel sad, because there was nobody with whom they can joyfully share their experiences. (Even Sri Ramakrishna felt it sometimes! A joyful person, often, wishes to share his joy with all!)

3. Another type of loneliness is the feeling that one has no friends and relatives, and that no one loves me,

and I have no one to relate to. Such people feel forlorn and depressed, and often entertain thoughts of suicide.

4. Old age and chronic diseases can and do often bring on the feelings of loneliness. In fact these days the aged and elderly suffer intensely from feelings of loneliness in spite of all the facilities provided for them.

5. Then there is a special type of loneliness. It is the intense longing of the soul to become united with the divine within. *Vedanta* tells us each soul is potentially divine. This potential divinity will not allow any individual to rest until the soul is merged in the Universal. This spiritual longing may not manifest for a long time. But it is bound to come in every person's life at some point of time and make them lead a spiritual life. Sincere spiritual aspirants feel that in this whole world they are alone, no one belongs to them and they belong to no one. Though this feeling is categorised as loneliness, this is not a disease, nor a cause for distress. On the contrary this is a most necessary and desirable condition for spiritual growth. Without this feeling of loneliness none can advance in spiritual life. As May Sarton put it so beautifully: "*Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self.*"

Loneliness is a dreadful disease. Its causes, effects, and cure will be discussed in future editorials. □

Swami Dayatmananda

Conversations with Swami Turiyananda (cont.)

"One must rise even above spiritual emotion; one must go beyond the personal aspect of God and reach the impersonal. You have not reached the end until you have attained the Absolute. Those who worship Ramakrishna, however, easily pass from the personal to the Impersonal.

"Everyone is doing the Lord's work, even the ant. What is ignorance? It is not to be aware of this. This ignorance does not leave us because our sense of ego is so strong. Rid yourself of the ego, and He comes to dwell. You cannot serve both at the same time.

"In the *Chandi*, the Divine Mother says: 'I abide in all mothers as mother-love. That is why mothers feed their hungry children. And it is I who feed them.' Do you remember what Swamiji wrote to us in one of his letters? 'Brothers, fear not. It is all His work. Who are we but His servants?'"

Disciple: "Of what value is it to hear the sound *Om* in meditation?"

Swami Turiyananda: "The mind becomes absorbed. That is all. And if you keep your mind absorbed in that sound, it becomes steady and concentrated."

November 12

Swami Turiyananda: "In deep sleep as well as in *samadhi* the objective world is not experienced. But in *samadhi* there is full consciousness.

"The wish to retaliate is a very worldly desire. Look at Sri Ramakrishna; how people criticized him ! Yet he bore

it ungrudgingly. Forbearance must be our ideal. How long do we live in this world? Only a few days. So, why bother to avenge ourselves?

"While we were in Meerut with Swamiji, a number of devotees came to visit us. Swamiji asked me to speak to them. Although they were householders, I stressed the ideal of renunciation and dispassion. After they left, Swamiji said to me: 'Brother Hari, do you think everybody is like you? Can everyone let the Divine Mother dwell constantly within the lotus of his heart? Let these people keep forgetful a little while longer and enjoy life.'

"Ignorance is to identify the Self with the individual self. Knowledge is to identify the Self with the *Atman*; this is absolute truth. To identify the Self with body, mind, and senses is a relative truth. And to identify the Self with wife, children, house, etc. is complete delusion.

"The ripe ego, the ego which considers itself to be a child of God, ultimately becomes merged in God. It becomes 'Thou.' The unripe ego is the great obstacle to Knowledge. Practice incessantly to keep the mind fixed in God."

Date Unknown

Swami Turiyananda: "Swamiji used to say: 'The mind has to be made malleable like clay. Just as clay sticks wherever you throw it, so the mind must be made to dwell upon whatever object you concentrate it.'

"While I was in the Jagannath temple at Puri I suddenly heard a strange sound, and an ecstatic feeling filled my heart. I felt like walking on air. The noise was like thunder, and from within it came a sweet sound, and something more which I cannot describe. I felt another power drawing my mind, and I became absorbed. Then

I realized that I had heard what is known as *Anahata*, the unstruck sound.

"Sri Ramakrishna used to appear like a drunkard when he talked to the Divine Mother: 'Do not give me the knowledge of *Brahman*, Mother! I don't want it! I spit on it!' I was an extreme *Vedantist* at that time and his words shocked me profoundly. I thought to myself: 'My goodness! What can be greater than the knowledge of *Brahman*?'

"The causal bliss is our wine. Drinking wine in the ordinary sense is a bad habit. Man will do anything under its spell.

"There are two creators: one is God, the other is man. God creates this world. This is the universal creation, and man is recreating it with his individual attitude. For instance, God has created woman, and man looks upon woman with different attitudes - as mother, or wife, or daughter. It is not possible to live in this creation without a particular attitude toward it. You may say, 'Why, I can remain indifferent to any object in this creation.' But is not indifference also a particular attitude?

"There are two viewpoints regarding injury that may be done to us by others. If somebody harms us, the right attitude is to think that this is the effect of our own past *karma*. Why create new *karma* by reacting to it? The other attitude is that of the worldly man: 'I must retaliate, otherwise you will do me greater harm in the future.'

"The nature of the illumined soul becomes like that of a child. There is no ulterior motive behind his actions. He is content to remain wherever he is, but again, if somebody invites him to go somewhere, he goes. His bondage to the world is broken. But worldly men are stubborn. They must have their own way.

"At one time I travelled toward the river Narmada alone. I did not keep any money with me. Wherever I got tired, I used to stay and rest. But on my travels I always had some particular place of pilgrimage as my destination. I was very happy and peaceful at that time; completely forgetful of the world. I had no other aim but to realize God. I used to pass my time in study or meditation. Then Swamiji called me back to Meerut where he was staying. Again we met in Delhi - about seven of us. Maharaj asked me to go to Jwalaji, so I went there with him. Then I went to Bombay via Karachi, where I met Swamiji again.

"I have had great blessings: I have had good health; the Lord purified my mind; and I had great forbearance.

"Rama was recognised as a divine incarnation only by a few seers like Vasishtha. There is a story that Rama once approached several sages, who were knowers of *Brahman*. They said: 'Who is Rama? We only know the Rama who delights the heart - the *Atman* - and that is what we meditate upon.' Rama simply smiled and went away.

"Know that all forms of God are the forms of your Chosen Ideal.

"Swamiji surely has not merged himself in eternal union with *Brahman*. He is an ever-free soul. He will be born again and again to do the work of the Lord.

"Those who have attained illumination or are highly advanced spiritually in what state do they exist after death? Endowed with knowledge and devotion they live in the company of God and enjoy his bliss. In the world, for instance, a powerful man has his associates with him. In the same way, the devotees live in the company of the Lord. Wherever the Lord is, there are also his devotees.

"But then, what about union with *Brahman*? There is

the eternal union with *Brahman*, and there is also the divine play of the personal God. It is just like the ocean: underneath a few feet of water the ocean is one, calm, deep, and without ripples; while the waves are playing on the surface.

"Shiva, Shiva, Shiva! By worship of Shiva one can attain to lofty spiritual heights. But if it is not done properly, one may lose one's mind.

"A man in Benares used to worship Kala Bhairava, an attendant of Shiva. He was about to lose his sanity when Swami Shivananda advised him to worship *Shakti* (the Mother aspect of God) along with Kala Bhairava. And thus he became well. One should worship *Shakti* along with Shiva.

"There was a blind man in Etwah. He was a great devotee of Shiva and the Divine Mother. His one desire was to go to Benares and see Shiva in the Vishwanath temple. At that time there was no train or other transportation to Benares. And since the man was blind, how could he make the pilgrimage on foot? He used to sing songs to Shiva and express his great sorrow at not being able to go to Benares. One day he did regain his eyesight. With great joy in his heart he went to Benares and saw the Lord of the Universe in his temple.

"Once a singer came to Sri Ramakrishna. He sang one song about Shiva after another. The Master went into *samadhi* at the very first song and remained in that state of consciousness for a long time. Seeing him absorbed like this, we thought we should ask the singer to stop. Suddenly the Master woke up from his *samadhi*, and said to the singer: 'Oh, I can't stand any more! Sing songs of the Divine Mother!' As the Master listened to the songs about the Mother, his mind returned to the relative plane. Later he remarked that he had

been in a very high state of consciousness.

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'When I see a man and his wife seated together, sometimes I feel, "Ah, how deluded they are!" At other times I think, "There is Lord Shiva with Mother Parvati."'

"I like the rainy season very much. I like to walk in the rain all by myself. Also, I like to meditate while it is raining. Rain is conducive to yoga."

One day we were looking at the sunset. Swami Turiyananda remarked: "Blessed are our mind and intellect that they see in this sunset the glory of the Lord.

"When I first met Sri Ramakrishna and saw his spiritual moods, his devotion and his *samadhi*, I knew I had found someone who lived the ideal. I felt as if I had come home at last, and I thought, 'If there is anything to be attained in life, it is God.' We must attain to such love for the Lord that there is not even any consciousness of one's body left.

"The truth that you hear about is to be assimilated. Be pure as snow, and let your faith be as firm as a rock!

"One day I saw Sri Ramakrishna wave a fan before Mother Kali in her temple. He was singing:

Awake, O Mother!
Long hast Thou been sleeping
In Thy primal abode
In the lotus of the *muladhara*.
Awake, O Mother!
Perform Thy own true function:
Pierce the six centers of spirit
And unite Thyself with the great Lord Shiva
In the thousand-petalled lotus

In the center of the brain.
Thus, Mother, wipe out my sorrow,
Thou who art purest consciousness.

"The Master told Swamiji: 'Whenever you begin to sing, the Mother wakes up and listens to your song.'

"Weak-minded people cannot control their spiritual emotions; their nerves become overstimulated. But those who have a strong body and strong nerves control their emotions. When Swamiji's spiritual emotions were aroused, outwardly he would be calm.

"One day, in Madras at the Castle Karnan, Swamiji was singing a hymn to Sri Rama. After a while his gaze became fixed, he went into ecstasy, and tears of joy began to flow."

When I first arrived at the Advaita Ashrama in Benares, I saw Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda), and Swami Turiyananda seated together. At noon I went to visit Hari Maharaj (Turiyananda). It was a Saturday.

Swami Turiyananda: "When one attains the vision of God one grows neither horns nor a tail. The inner nature becomes transformed, the inner vision changes; outwardly everything remains the same.

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'I am not asking these boys to renounce the world, but let them live in the world with divine knowledge. First let them discriminate between truth and untruth, between the eternal and the non-eternal; then let them live in the world.' "

Swami Turiyananda mentioned Swami X and remarked: "He has some desire to do the work of the Lord. But Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'First earn something, let it

accrue in value, and then spend.' "

Another day we went to visit the Kedarnath temple. After the worship we sat for meditation in the portico.

Swami Turiyananda: "One can become absorbed in meditation easily here because many have meditated in this place.

"As long as we can keep our gaze fixed on the Lord, we shall be walking on air, as it were. No thorn can prick our feet.

"When a man like Swamiji says, 'I am *Brahman*,' he is immediately freed from physical consciousness, and when we say, 'I am *Brahman*,' we immediately feel weighed down by two hundred pounds of flesh.

"When I was ready to do the Lord's work, there came the call from Swamiji.

"One has to be as deep as the ocean, and calm - neither elated nor depressed.

"In one form the Lord hurts me and in another form that same Lord nurses me.' One must learn to see His hand in happiness and in misery. But this is possible only for him who has travelled the whole path and reached the goal. You must walk the whole path. Do not fall by the wayside.

"Occult powers belong to the realm of *Prakriti* (Primordial Nature). They have nothing to do with the *Atman*. Through the practice of austerities and concentration, powers are gained. They have nothing to do with the knowledge of God. There are two opinions in the matter: One is that with knowledge powers arise. The other opinion is that they may or may not arise. A knower of God understands that all actions are performed by *Prakriti*. I (the *Atman*) am unconcerned. Happiness and misery are experienced in the body. I am beyond. The *gunas* (attributes

of Nature) are working on the *gunas*. The *Atman* is beyond action. The knower of God sees inaction in action. In his case inaction is not laziness. Laziness is *tamas* (lethargy). These truths are taught in the *Gita*.

"Swamiji was not only a knower of *Brahman* but he was a great yogi. His spiritual powers were obtained through yoga. Was anyone more perfect than he in meditation?

"There are evil tendencies in the mind, but we have to rise above them. We must keep our minds fixed in God. Struggle, struggle! Realize something! See Him, attain Him! Then do as you please. If a monk thinks he has to be somebody and becomes self-centered, he is in great spiritual danger. Renounce the ego! Fix your gaze on the Lord!

"Sri Ramakrishna used to scold anybody who was careless. Carelessness is a defect of character. The Master was never slow in anything, but at the same time he did not like to hurry or bustle.

"Once I got a thorn in my leg, and the leg became infected. I suffered unbearable pain, became angry at the Lord, and chided him. Then I repented, thinking that I had no forbearance. At Ujjain, where I was practicing austerities alone, I fell very sick and became delirious. But never in my life did I feel that I was helpless.

"When I was your age I had a very strong will. I was detached; suffering, misery, and disease could not approach me. How many days I passed lying under a tree, and the mind never craved pleasure or comfort! Freedom, freedom - that was my watchword! My ideal was to delight in the Self, to be desireless, to be free from possession, free from the law of *karma*. When your body is young and your mind is strong, it is then that you have to struggle. When you are old you cannot accomplish anything.

"I used to be opposed to reading books or newspapers; then Swamiji told me to be up-to-date.

"It is fanaticism to think that we have nothing to learn from the West. We must stand firm in our own culture and at the same time learn from others. Read the *Mahabharata* and you will find that in India, in ancient times, people had the same virtues that they presently have in the West; now they are forgotten. We have to learn these same virtues again. The feeling that we have nothing to learn from others and can isolate ourselves has arisen from weakness. Swamiji used to say: 'Our downfall is due to isolation.'

"How Socrates drank the hemlock with a calm, peaceful mind! There is no death to the soul! How can one overcome the fear of death? Only when one has some sort of spiritual realization. Then he knows that he is not the body, and that the body is subject to birth, growth, and death. Life can be compared to the burning wick of an oil lamp: it dies every moment. Life is another name for death. You lose one body and get another, as it is taught in the Gita:

Worn-out garments
Are shed by the body:
Worn-out bodies
Are shed by the dweller
Within the body.
New bodies are donned
By the dweller, like garments.

"A network of words is like a dense forest which causes the mind to wander hither and thither. Therefore, those who know this truth should struggle hard to experience *Brahman*' (Shankara). But does this mean that there is no need

for study? Surely study helps to clear the understanding and to keep the mind engaged in good thoughts. Otherwise the world will be a lazy people's club! He who has realized God does not have to study any longer. But he who has not yet had the vision of God, he must study.

"Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a parable about a man who had received a letter from his village home asking him to send certain things to his kinsmen. 'How long does one care for such a letter? So long as one does not know the contents. Once he knows the contents, the next step is to put forth the necessary effort to procure the articles. Then the letter can be thrown away. Similarly, the sacred books tell us only the way to God, the means for the realization of God. That being known, the next step is to work one's way to the goal. Realization is the goal.' How the Master, in the deepest way, solved the problems of spiritual life!" □

(concluded)

I tell you the essence of it all - the one thing that we feel in the inmost recesses of our heart. Nothing can be achieved without renunciation... It is through renunciation alone that one can become immortal. Yoga and *bhoga*, union with God and sense-enjoyment, cannot go together. One cannot get any taste of the bliss of *Brahman* unless one gives up the happiness of this world.

Swami Shivananda

Pathways of Realization (cont.)

Purusha
The entity that is holding our different kinds of feeling together is the Self. In *Raja Yoga* it is called *Purusha*. The *Purusha* is the spirit or that which feels. It is residing in the lotus of the heart in the *Anahata chakra* (corresponding to the cardiac plexus in the chest), It is the watcher and the witness of the thoughts, feelings and actions of the individual self, *Jivatman*. It stands apart from *Jivatman* but it is always connected with it. The mind with its accretions and modifications becomes the instrument of the spirit or *Purusha*. Our feelings manifest through the heart and are realized through the mind. In meditation one can focus on these flows between the heart and the mind. For this purpose, it is necessary to distinguish spontaneous feelings of present events from memories of feelings that are impressions of the past.

The Agnya

The *Agnya* is the *chakra* that holds in place our main centres of consciousness. It is the centre of integration of the vital constituents of our beingness; the physical, mental and feeling bodies, through the senses, the feelings and the subtle body. Hence it has the innate capability of co-ordinating one's thoughts, feelings and actions in a spiritual framework. *Agnya* is also connected with the centre point of balance of the physical body where the spinal column supports the skull. The senses which together govern balance and physical equilibrium, namely the eyesight, the ears and

touch (through the hands and feet) are co-ordinated through the nerve plexus of this centre. Without this co-ordination of the senses, conscious movement would be impossible.

The ultimate realization of the mind is achieved when the lotus of the *Agnya* has been fully opened by *Kundalini*, and the free mind manifests the latent qualities and attributes flowing from Source, the one true Spirit. The realized mind is released from the bonds of the self-created ego and is free to reflect on the nature of reality in the superconscious state.

Thoughtless Awareness and Observation

This is the capability of being fully here in present time, perceiving the inner world and the outer world through the senses: Perceiving each thought and feeling, each being and every thing in it's own place and in it's own space, without any reaction or response, and with the feeling of being in relationship with them. This is the individual self becoming conscious that he is part of the greater self and that ultimately he *is* the divine Self. It is a spiritual realization that, "I am here."

The state of thoughtless awareness can increase acuity of the awareness of the senses, especially if the thinking part of the mind has become partially detached from the perceiving part of the mind. This is sometimes the result of devoting too much attention to mentation and too little to observing the movements of one's own senses and feelings. To rebalance the perception of the senses, one can choose which sense one wishes to give precedence to. By focussing full awareness on that of taste, touch, vision or whichever, one can simply be the perceptions that arise, without any thought or reaction. By earnest practice one can rebalance the continuing connection between the thinking mind and the

senses. This is a necessary preliminary to rehabilitating the feeling body.

Love and Forgiveness

Love is aroused in the heart and is realized through the mind and through action. Love is realized when it is total and unconditional submission to the beingness and the soul of the beloved; when it is complete immersion in the consciousness and the spirituality of another and with the readiness to be subsumed into the "one-beingness" of the greater Self: Two hearts joining together as one spirit in a mutual submission to the beloved and to the chosen form of the Divine. This is the unity of being, which is created on the personal level before it expands into the mutual level in a desireless unity, when the greatest desires have been realized.

The need for spiritual love and compassion is fundamental. The seeker of truth is seeking an ideal that he has known in the distant past and has lost. In a degraded society he has become isolated from the source of the continuing creation of which he is a part. He is left with an innate desire for the restoration of the power of his connection with the divine Source. It is a reminder of the primal desire for mystic union with the divine Supreme which supersedes all desires of a divisive, dualistic nature.

We are seeking, through the unifying power of the one true Spirit that is pervading all created beings, creatures and objects, the restoration of that great lost love by means of the abandonment of the limitations of the ego-self and the ego-body and complete submission of our will to the will of the greater Self. It is embedded in our consciousness as a reminder of past ideals, attainments and achievements in our

quest for the divine Life.

The love of one seeker of truth for another must be unconditional for it to endure. It should be free of any fault-finding, criticism, blaming and any other negative thoughts or attitudes. It may be expressed as, "I could forgive him (or her) anything." Personal love is realized when it is a supplementary aspect of the adoration of the chosen form of God. The divine aspect of love is always supreme whether we recognize it or not. The love of the lover for the beloved, however overwhelming and compelling it may feel, is always secondary to the effulgent glory of the true love emanating from the divine, which is the unifying power that ultimately draws all beings into the oneness of the great cosmic Self.

Love is both freedom and bondage: It is free from the shackles of the self-created ego-self and the limitations of the worldly ego-body, and it is sublime bondage with the greater Self as one is subsumed into the pure consciousness of the divine Supreme.

Forgiveness of others is not forgiveness of the person himself, but it is forgiveness of any previously unacceptable acts or spoken thoughts of that person. So, in order to cease feeling any anger or resentment towards that individual, it is necessary to differentiate our feelings for the person from our reactions to what he may have done or said. We can forgive any acts, spoken thoughts or attitudes that may have harmed us or disturbed our equanimity whilst at the same time we can continue loving the other person as a being, with whom we have much in common.

Hatred and rejection feed on the differences, real or imagined, between ourselves and those who have been close to us in the past. We should seek out all those things and blessings that we have held in common with the other person in the past and bring them into the present time, putting all

the past difficulties and differences into abeyance. This can clear away the imagined obstacles that we have been creating and holding onto and will give us the freedom to forgive and forget. If we neglect forgiveness, it can become a barrier to realization.

To send thought waves of love and forgiveness to someone, it is necessary to name the other person. It is not necessary to specify every item being forgiven, but only typical ones. Waves of love sincerely sent to others, especially those to whom we have felt closest in the past, are eventually returned to oneself.

Discernment of the Real and the Unreal

As *Kundalini* ascends, clearing the *chakras*, one's awareness of realities changes. One becomes more aware that our worldly realities are merely temporary appearances. It is only pure spiritual truth that is unchanging and unending. The realized adept manifests this in his life, accepting only the real as part of his being. He knows, thinks, feels and does only that which expresses the spiritual truth, because he can do no other. This is the gift of Truth.

The gift of Truth is an inner sense of spiritual truth. The ideal of the mystic is devotion to this inner source as a manifestation of the pure consciousness of the divine Supreme. It is heuristic in its nature. Truth begets truth just as untruth begets untruth. If one becomes blessed with this gift, then it is incumbent upon us to devote ourselves unconditionally to it, to the benefit of others and to ourselves, through what we speak, feel and do. It leads us into the superconscious beyond our worldly concepts and our material limitations. If spiritual truth and the need for it is a dominant element in our beingness, and it has been

truly manifested in our mode of life, then it is drawn into seed form in the causal body to be continued onward to sublimation through transmigration of the soul. The latent capability of the spiritual potential that we are born with cannot decay. It is real.

Why should we devote all this effort to attaining realization of the mind? Because it is ignorance and falsehood, in whatever form that bind us to this worldly life. It is untruth and unreality that stick us to this materialistic wheel of existence, and bind us to *karma*. We have, here and now, the opportunity to release ourselves from it by means of achieving Yoga with the pure consciousness of the one true Spirit and through attainment of the ideal of the divine Life.

The realized mind has an immutable sense of Truth. The ineffable feelings that it brings with it are certainty, freedom and wholeness. The truth feels right because it is real. Untruth does not feel right because it is unreal. We always have a choice as to which pathway we will follow, day by day.

The Sahasrara Chakra

The realization of the mind is the ultimate step before attaining the *Sahasrara chakra* located at the crown of the head and known as "the lotus of a thousand petals." When the lotus is opened by *Kundalini* and realization of the *chakra* is achieved, the consciousness of the yogi becomes detached from gross consciousness of material existence and he enters the realm of the superconscious. Thus he achieves his reconnection with the divine cosmic being from which he has been isolated for so long.

The state of being of a community usually reflects the state of being of those who are exercising authority in it in

actuality, whether overtly or covertly. Every individual who raises himself to a higher level of beingness is thereby playing his part in raising the consciousness of his community. This manifests eventually as collective consciousness when a significant number of individuals will know what is the best course of action to rehabilitate their community.

Realizing the Spirit

The static aspect of the cosmic being is in essence the unifying power that draws all created beings into the one Self, *Brahman*, through manifestation of the will as the divine Supreme. This has been traditionally interpreted as the male aspect of the cosmic Self. He is by nature formless but also chooses to manifest through human forms. The formless one is the God that is flowing through all of us, whether we recognize it or not.

The active aspect of the divine is manifested in the *pranic* energies through the creation of myriad living forms and by energising them to fulfil their life purposes. This has been traditionally interpreted as *Kundalini*, the female power of all spiritual energies, who manifests in various forms as the Goddess.

These two aspects of the divine wisdom may seem to be contrary in some respects when viewed from the miasma of modern materialism. On the spiritual level they are actually complimentary. Each fulfils the other, making one great desireless unity of being.

As human beings, we are all endowed with both of these fundamental aspects of beingness in varying degrees in the individual self, *Atman*. We do not have any exclusively male spirit nor any exclusively female spirit. There is only one true Spirit. Customary gender divisions do not hold

any longer when one becomes committed to the quest for the divine Life. Differentiation of the sexes has been imposed in various religions in the historic past to comply with overriding social mores and political compulsions. Gender differentiation, in imposed dogmas and doctrines has sometimes been a consequence of the limitations of the language or the motivations of the translators. Some languages are more expressive of spiritual thought and contemplation than others.

The flows of consciousness and subconsciousness that are characterised as human love are intangible and unmeasurable. When two or more questors of the divine truth come together in the spirit, their complementary energies become unified, making them each more powerful as free spiritual beings. To them, human love tends to recede and its place is superseded by divine joy and by compassion for all people and creatures. They can enter into the field of the superconscious where earthly cares and worldly limitations fall away and they are free to contemplate the sublime beauty of the divine Life, beyond meeting, beyond parting, and beyond loving as we humans have known it. □

(concluded)

Erratum: In issue 348, para 3, pg 160 should read:

"The *nadis* are channels through which the *pranic* energy flows, rising through the central spinal channel, *sushumna*. On either side of it are two other *nadis*, *ida* and *pingala*...

Sin Against Oneself

A tman-centred ethics

One evening Ralph Waldo Emerson was trying to take a call to the cowshed. But the young animal planted its four feet on the ground and refused to budge. The more Emerson pulled, the more stubborn the calf became. Then the maid came, gave the calf a mild whacking, and it frisked away to the cowshed. This incident taught the great American philosopher that every person he met was superior to him in some respect or other.

When we look at people we seldom see the wholeness that is in them. We usually notice only certain aspects of their personality, mostly their defects, rarely their virtues. And yet, every person has in him or her an unrepeatable uniqueness. Everyone has grown up by passing through countless experiences and overcoming innumerable obstacles. In every bosom is a heart that beats to the rhythms of desires, hopes, love and fear. Everyone has a future filled with infinite possibilities. Every person has in him or her a life principle trying to express itself in myriad ways.

What is this life principle? The *Upanisadic* sages called it the *Atman*, the true Self. It is the centre of consciousness in man. The body and mind appear to be conscious only because of their association with the *Atman*. It is through the Self that we know. The Self reveals itself through every experience, and the ultimate purpose of all experiences is to know the Knower. Consciously or unconsciously, all beings are struggling for Self-realization.

Furthermore, the *Upanisadic* sages discovered that this individual *Atman* is a part of the Supreme Self, *Paramatman*,

of the universe known as *Brahman*. This means that every man has in him a centre of divinity though he may not be always conscious of it. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Each soul is potentially divine and the goal is to manifest this divinity within."

It is the divine Self within that gives dignity to the individual and sacredness to life. Every person is to be treated with respect because he is potentially divine. Every person you meet is superior to you because he manifests his inner divinity in some different, and better way than you do. The artist who paints the sunset, the farmer who raises rice for your food or cotton for your clothes, the bus driver who takes hundreds of passengers every day safely to their places of work, a research worker who discovers new truths - every one is superior to you in some little or big way.

Every life is sacred because of the divine centre within. A person has no right to take another's life, not even his own. Should he attempt to commit suicide, he would be arrested by the police. He did not create his life, nor anybody else's. His life is not his; it belongs to the universal Self. Once the divine centre is withdrawn from a body, it loses all value: it was dust and unto dust it now returns.

The whole of Indian ethics is centred on this doctrine of the potential divinity of the human soul. Man as he is may not be divine; but he holds in himself the potentiality to attain divinity. The purpose of ethical and religious life is to enable him to actualize, unfold, manifest this potentiality. That is why Swami Vivekananda has defined religion as "the manifestation of the divinity already in man." Religion in India means a way of life that favours Self-realization. It does not necessarily involve faith in a personal God; the *Samkhya* philosophers do not accept a personal God and

the *Mimamsakas* regard all gods and goddesses as mere verbal symbols, still they are *pukka* Hindus. Everything that helps spiritual unfolding is religion, *dharma*; everything that obstructs it is irreligion, *adharma*. Virtue fosters spiritual unfolding and so it is *dharma*, whereas vice hinders spiritual unfolding and so it is *adharma*.

This intimate connection between virtue and spirituality was the foundation of ethical life in India during the *Vedic* period. Everywhere in the *Upanisads*, and even in the *Gita*, virtue is praised chiefly as an indispensable help to Self-realization. The practice of virtue produces purity of mind, calmness of the senses and clarity of the intellect, and the clear and calm mind reflects the light of the *Atman* without distortion, resulting in Self-realization.

Gradually, as the Law of *Karma* gained in importance, a more mundane and pragmatic view of ethics developed. According to this view the present is determined by the past, and virtuous actions done in the past produce favourable circumstances in the present life, whereas evil actions produce unfavourable circumstances. Manu says: "The preponderance of vice brings suffering to embodied beings, and the preponderance of virtue brings unbroken happiness." Man has no control over the past but he can create a happier future through his virtuous actions of the present. So the goal of virtuous actions is future happiness - the 'future' here meaning both life after death in heaven and rebirth on the earth.

These two views - that the goal of ethical life is purification of mind for Self-realization, and that it is one's own future happiness - represent the two great divisions of the Hindu way of life known respectively as *niivrtti-marga* (way of withdrawal) and *pravrtti-marga* (way of

involvement). These two ways were traditionally regarded as distinct and meant for two different classes of people. This division was given legitimacy by the *Advaita* system with its theory of two levels of reality and of the self: the *para-marthika* (absolute) and the *vyavaharika* (relative). This view may be metaphysically valid but, translated into common life, it became a justification for perpetuating all kinds of social inequities. One of the efforts of Swami Vivekananda was to provide a unitary view of reality which would integrate the two ways of life into one. Regarding this Swamiji said, "And what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this is that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes." As Sister Nivedita has pointed out, the practical significance of Swamiji's integral view is that it removes the distinction between the sacred and the secular. Every action becomes a means to Self-realization.

All this may give the impression that Indian ethics is self-centred, being concerned only with the individual and not with the society. But such an impression would be wrong, for the true self of man is not the limited, body-bound ego but the transcendent *Atman*.

The great law-giver Manu lays down the rule, "One should consciously endeavour to perform that action by which one's inmost Self is satisfied; its opposite (i.e., that action which dissatisfies the Self) should be given up." This transcendental Self being an inseparable part of the infinite Supreme Self, all actions prompted by or done for it would be for the welfare of all. It is the lower self or ego that tries to hold back things from universal life; and every school and teacher of Indian ethics has insisted upon giving up this lower self. Hindu ethics is *Atman*-centred and *Brahman*-oriented.

The disadvantages of this system of ethics are clear enough. For one thing, it calls for the realization of the Supreme Self which is too high an ideal for ordinary people. The stratification of social and individual life on the basis of *varna* (caste) and *asrama* (stage in life), was originally meant to remedy this defect by providing a graded series of working ideals for all people who are incapable of realizing the highest ideal. But owing to various reasons, this scheme was never worked out to its logical conclusion. It was not the ethical theory that went wrong but its practical application. India does not need a new ethical theory, either in the form of a political ideology or in the form of a new religion. All that it needs is the reorganization of society on a humanistic basis, and the revitalization of the ennobling principles of its ancient religion in the hearts of the people.

On the other hand, the *Atman*-centred *Brahman*-oriented ethics has several superior features which outweighs its drawbacks. Three of these deserve our special attention here. These are:

- 1) It makes one take upon oneself the moral responsibility of one's actions;
- 2) It is based not on fear and compulsion but on existential freedom;
- 3) It provides a transcendental common ground for love of oneself, love for fellow-men and love for God.

Atmaparadha

Judeo-Christian ethics is based on the two major covenants that God made with man. Morality is obeying the divine Commandments; whereas sin is the violation of the Covenant and disobedience to God. The sinner is punished by God here or hereafter. The Indian concept of morality is

that to be moral is to live in harmony with the natural moral order (*ritam* or *dharma*) of the universe and to discharge the duties of one's station in life. *Papa* or *adharma* is not sin in the sense of disobedience; it is simply wrong action that violates universal harmony, and the suffering that results from it is not God's punishment but the effect of the operation of the law of *Karma*. God is the impartial dispenser of the fruits of man's actions and remains unaffected by the good and evil done by man.

There is a well-known verse which states, "People want the fruit of virtue but do not do virtuous actions; they do not want the fruit of sin and yet commit sin with great effort. Everyday life provides us plenty of opportunities to be good and to do good, yet we seldom make use of these golden opportunities. Everyone knows that evil actions will bring him nothing but sorrow today or someday in future, still he does wrong things."

There are several reasons for this. One is our lack of faith in the power of goodness and our faith in the power of evil. Everyone has faith; the only question is, in what? Many people have greater faith in the power of evil than in God Himself. And, as the *Gita* says: "Man is conditioned by faith; as a man's faith is, so he is." Another reason is that the *samskaras*, or impressions left in the mind by our past actions, prompt us to repeat those actions, even against our faith and wish. This tendency is popularly known as *vasana*. The *Yoga-vasistha* defines it as follows: "*Vasana* is the sudden grasping of an object, forgetting the past and the future, owing to a strong fancy." A person may know that a certain habit is bad for him, that it brought him suffering in the past and will bring only sorrow again and yet, at the critical moment, he yields to it. The ultimate cause of all wrong tendencies is

ignorance. That is why Swami Vivekananda wanted to see the word 'sin' replaced by the word 'ignorance.'

Whatever be the reason for our wrong actions, through them we harm only ourselves. *Papa* or *adharma* is a sin against oneself, *atmaparadha*. Few people realize how much harm they are doing to themselves through their impure thoughts, words and actions. There are several ways by which *atmaparadha* may be committed.

One is the gross and direct way. This includes all forms of overindulgence, self-abuse, and neglect of health and hygiene. The result of those in the form of suffering is immediate. There are other kinds of *atmaparadha* which are more subtle and insidious and the effects of which are neither obvious nor immediate.

Karma affects us in two subtle ways. One is the cosmic effect known as *apurva* or *adrsta* which returns to us may be in the next birth, as *karmaphala*. According to the Indian belief all our present sufferings are the *karmaphala* of our past actions. As a popular verse states, "Disease, sorrow, suffering, bondage, alienation - all these are the fruits of the tree of *atmaparadha* reaped by embodied souls." Blinded by the passions of lust, greed, hatred and envy, we live an impulsive life seldom pausing to think how much harm we are doing to ourselves by our own thoughtless actions.

Karma includes not only physical action but also thoughts. About the power of thoughts to do harm to ourselves, Swami Vivekananda says in his commentary on the Aphorisms of Patanjali, "Every vicious thought will rebound, every thought of hatred which you may have thought, in a cave even, is stored up, and will one day come back to you with the tremendous power in the form of some misery here. If you project hatred and jealousy, they will

rebound on you with compound interest. No power can avert them; when once you have put them in motion, you will have to bear them."

Our actions and thoughts affect us in another unseen way. Each of them leaves behind in the mind a trace or impression called *samskara*. As already stated, these *samskaras* create in us the tendency to repeat the same action or thought. This is how habits and thinking patterns are formed. Some of these habits are good and necessary inasmuch as they free the mind from routine life and allow it to think about higher things. But there are bad habits and thinking patterns which bind the soul and curtail its freedom. Every soul is endowed with great possibilities. Every person has in him the inherent capacity to attain excellence in some field or other. To neglect the development of the soul's potential powers is a sin against oneself. What prevents most people from attaining excellence and self-development is not lack of talent or wealth or opportunities, but lack of faith, discipline and diligence.

Since all individual selves are parts of the Supreme Self, the *Paramatman*, to be insensitive to the sufferings of others, to be unresponsive to love, to be jealous of others, to speak ill of others, to try to prevent others from going up - all these are sins against the Self. It is of course true that in the society we live there may be people who feel jealous of us, speak ill of us or even try to harm us without any apparent benefit to themselves. But cherishing ideas of revenge and hatred towards them obstructs the expansion of the Self and reduces our share of universal life. According to an old verse, "Virtuous men who are always bent on doing good to others never allow their souls to be contorted even when harm is done to them. The sandalwood tree only imparts fragrance to

the edge of the axe that cuts it down."

To remain sunk in depression and helplessness is to surrender the glory and power of the *Atman* to the dark forces of *tamas*, and is therefore a sin against the Self. Sorrow, disappointment and loss are unavoidable in life. But one should not live in a habitual state of dejection. Worse still is to condemn oneself relentlessly. In a depressed mind creative energy gets dammed up and the soul, unable to express itself at higher planes, may seek expression at lower planes. The *Upanisads* teach: "Through the *Atman* one attains strength and zeal." Swami Vivekananda based his whole philosophy of life on this *virya-mantra*. According to him all misery and depression come from our dependence on matter. By arousing faith in the power and glory of the *Atman* we should overcome dejection and face the problems of life with confidence. To rouse this faith in the Spirit was Swamiji's most important mission in life. His message of strength is condensed in a verse which he wrote "What makes you weep, my friend? In you is all power. Summon up your all-powerful nature, O mighty one, and this whole universe will be at your feet. It is the Self alone that predominates, and not matter."

Blindly imitating the mannerisms, ways of life and ideals of other people, daydreaming and other similar habits which lower the dignity of the Self are also a kind of *atmaparadha*. It is the three aspects of the Self, *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, that appear in the phenomenal world as the higher values of Goodness, Truth and Beauty. This means that the ideals we are seeking outside are really within us. Every man has his own unique way of realizing these ideals. Hence, as Swami Vivekananda said, "Your Self is your own highest ideal." Following the ideals and ways of others retards the

course of one's own spiritual evolution. That is why the *Gita* says, "The *dharma* of others is fraught with danger."

However, the greatest sin against oneself is to remain in ignorance about the *Atman* without struggling to realize it. What do we get from the external world? As far as experience is concerned, we get nothing more than knowledge and happiness. And *Atman* is the source of both. All that we find outside are only shadows cast by the inner Light, little joys mixed with greater amounts of sorrow and suffering. To pursue constantly these shadows, which can never bring us lasting fulfilment, without struggling to realize the *Atman*, the source of all human glory, happiness, knowledge and strength - what could be a greater sin than this! Those who commit this sin have been described as killers of the Self, in the *Upanisads*.

Moral life is not considered an end in itself in India; it has a higher purpose - the realization of the *Atman*. This leads us to the next section.

Prajnaparadha

The *Atman* is the only thing that is absolutely free - free from ignorance, from sorrow, from bondage to instincts and the senses, from change, from the laws of the universe. Everything else, body, mind, objects of the universe, is governed by laws. By realizing the Self one attains total freedom and goes beyond ignorance and sorrow. All the *Upanisads* testify to this truth. This transcendental freedom has remained the ultimate goal of ethics. Ethics as such binds a person with rules and customs but it also teaches him how to break his bonds and become free.

However, only a few people in any age succeed in breaking their bonds. The rest of the people were expected

to accommodate themselves to the rigid social and religious codes of conduct. This converted Hindu society into a closed structure with little internal and external mobility. It was unable to move with the changing times until it encountered the highly dynamic and powerful Western society. This encounter made it clear that unless the social and ethical attitudes of the people underwent a drastic change, it wouldn't be possible for the Indian society to survive in a rapidly advancing competitive world. What India needed was a system of ethics rooted in its own culture but giving full freedom to the individual. Swami Vivekananda found that such a system could be developed on the basis of the doctrine of the *Atman*. He found a pragmatic social application for the transcendental truths of the *Upanisads*. He preached to the common people about the *Atman*, not as something to be realized by a few sages in a remote forest at some future time, but as a fundamental category of experience in everybody's life everywhere.

It is possible to understand the presence of the *Atman* within us and attune our lives to it, even without realizing its transcendental nature. Sri Samkara gives an apt illustration of this fact. In a royal procession the king, surrounded as he is by his retinue, ceremonial umbrellas and flags, may not be visible, yet the spectators cry out, "There goes the king." Likewise, the *Atman*, though encased in the successive sheaths of the intellect, mind, *prana*, etc. can be felt as the centre of one's consciousness. Everyone feels himself as the I, as a distinct entity entirely different from the external objects and even from his thoughts. This means everyone experiences existential freedom in a limited way. Somewhere deep down or behind this I there is a reservoir of power, knowledge and bliss. By the practice of one of the four yogas

- that is, through self-analysis, selfless work, devotion or meditation - it is possible to draw from the inner reservoir and gradually increase one's freedom from ignorance and suffering. The freer a person is, the more moral he is. The whole of human life is a struggle for existential freedom. Let everyone try to be as free as possible by taking his stand on the *Atman*. This, in essence, was what Swami Vivekananda propounded through his system of Practical *Vedanta*.

The *Upanisadic* sages made the *Atman* doctrine the rationale of spiritual striving. Swami Vivekananda made it the basis of social and moral life. It has found application even in other spheres of human life including that of physical and mental health.

When we study our lives we find that almost all our sufferings come from our wrong actions; we act wrongly because we are unable to take correct decisions; and we are unable to decide correctly because we are not free. We are constantly driven by our thoughts, emotions and instincts. The only real freedom we have got is to remain as the witness of our thoughts and actions, a freedom which we owe to the *Atman*. This witnessing consciousness in us is known as *prajna*. The *Aitareya upanisad*, through its famous dictum *prajnanam brahma*, identifies the witnessing consciousness with the infinite known as *Brahman*. Normally, in the rush and hurry of day-to-day life, we seldom succeed in retaining this *prajna*. We hardly ever remain free as the witnessing agent and guide our thoughts and actions consciously. Most of the time our lives are dominated by the unconscious. Our true consciousness, *prajna*, gets almost always drowned in the surging waves of the unconscious. This loss of self-awareness is known as *prajnaparadha*, "fault of *prajna*."

This *prajnaparadha* is the main cause of our physical

and mental sufferings. Freud is generally credited with the discovery of the unconscious and the psychosomatic nature of several human diseases. But more than two thousand years ago these facts had been very clearly recognized by Indian sages. It is sufficiently well known that Yoga embodies the principles of the unconscious and the techniques of controlling it. But it is not so widely known that the Indian system of medicine, known as Ayurveda, too does it. Physicians in ancient India traced the cause of most of the human diseases to the dominance of the unconscious and the consequent eclipse of self-awareness - *prajnaparadha*.

Susruta (6th century B.C.), one of the three founders of Ayurveda, defined disease as "union with suffering" thereby including all physical and mental illnesses under a single category. How does this union take place? Caraka, another ancient authority, in his *Caraka-samhita* states three causes for this:

- 1) *Prajnaparadha* (caused by the failure of *dhi*, *dhrti* or *smrti*),
- 2) Maturation of time (*kala*) and *Karma*,
- 3) *Asatmya* or disharmony between the senses and their objects. Of these the most important is the "fault of *prajna*."

The primary cause of disease is the wrong way the various organs are brought into contact with the objects of the world. For instance, in the case of the stomach this imbalance may take the form of overeating, starvation, inadequate nourishment, eating harmful food etc. This *asatmya* is in turn caused by what Caraka calls *prajnaparadha*. By *prajna* he means all the faculties connected with self-awareness, namely, the intellect (*dhi* or *buddhi*), will (*dhrti*) and memory (*smrti*). Almost all our sufferings are caused

by the faulty use of these faculties. Instead of remaining as the witness, we identify ourselves with our thoughts, emotions and sense objects. This delusion is the first mistake we commit. The deluded mind is drawn away by the objects of enjoyment. Though this tendency can be checked by an exercise of the will, we fail to do it. This failure of the will is caused by the failure of memory. Owing to restlessness or inertia, the mind does not remember its past sufferings or the instructions of wise men. All these three types of failures together constitute what Caraka calls the "fault of *prajna*."

The nature and course of our entire life depend upon the way we maintain our *prajna*. Physical and mental troubles and sufferings are mostly caused by *prajnaparadha*. In other words, they are the results of the sin against oneself. □

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It is very difficult to truly understand the intricacies of the mind without being an advanced aspirant. How many are the ways in which the mind is deluding us! If anyone points out the delusions, we find excuses for them! We do not understand how many kinds of self-love are in us. It is no joke to submit to anyone - not outwardly, but in spirit. Swami Vivekananda was once reading the *Bible*. He was in those days a vegetarian. When he read of Jesus' meat-eating, he did not like it. But at once he thought, "Oh, how proud I have become because I am living on vegetables!"

Swami Turiyananda

Leaves of an Ashrama 31: Winter Flowers

This morning it read zero on the ashrama's thermometer. My daily walk took me along the hedge of Aucuba bushes whose leaves, usually alert and lustrous even in winter, hung huddled as though dead. Trees stood out like black sticks, and the earth was as hard as iron. No life anywhere, except for the crows making, as they do in winter, an airport of the ashrama park, with their continual landings and takeoffs. When on the ground the birds busied themselves in extracting food somehow from the icy grass.

Then I noticed the border of Hellebore, or Christmas rose. It was all in bloom, with flowers of pale white flourishing in their nests of varnished leaves. What a contrast on that uninviting morning! Incredible that any plant should, quite contrary to accepted norms, send out flowers in winter. Well, that's why Hellebore is planted and admired.

Which reminded me of Swami Vivekananda's letter to Leon Landsberg, written from Zermatt, Switzerland, in August of 1896. To this problem disciple who had got himself into some difficulty in New York, Swamiji wrote: "I went to the glacier of Monte Rosa yesterday and gathered a few hardy flowers growing almost in the midst of eternal snow. I send you one in this letter, hoping that you will attain to a similar spiritual hardihood amidst all the snow and ice of this earthly life."

What species of flower did Swamiji send? I had often wondered. One thinks immediately of the Idelweiss. But I rejected that choice as being a flower too bulky to be pressed between folds of paper and fitted easily into an envelope. I decided that it must have been the *Renunculous glacialis*, or

Ranunculous of the Glaciers. This is a low-growing plant whose flowers of five petals resemble the old-fashioned single rose, some three centimeters (a good inch) in diameter, pale pink in color, with numerous stamens of gold. The Ranunculous of the Glaciers blooms in the Alps as high as 4,000 metres or about 13,000 feet.

In consulting the guidebook's description of the characteristics of the Ranunculous of the Glaciers, I could see the fitness of Swamiji's gesture in recommending this as a model to be followed by a devotee. The plants do not fear the cold (they are found in Greenland and the Arctic, as well as in the high Alps). They require so little earth that the mountaineer, coming upon them in his ascent, is almost led to believe that they spring forth from pure rock. And they cannot be tamed to grow at lower levels in cultivated gardens.

Is any interpretation necessary?

Returning to take up my occupations of the day, I think of that flower's bright face, just at the glacier's edge, and find myself refreshed. The frigid airs which blow from routine duty, uncompensated sacrifice, and all those chores associated with human relations, will not faze me this day. My needs are small, my asceticism a joy; I flourish on self-denial. Nor will I be tempted to seek a place in any garden of delights of ease or compromise. I am a being of the high mountains. It is of my nature to bloom there, cheerful amidst the snow, and this I shall do all through whatever brief summer may be allowed me. □

Indian Thought and Carmelite Spirituality
The Raja Yoga of Saint John of the Cross (continued)

In the supernatural state, there is a complete disengagement and estrangement from all intelligible forms which are the proper objects of understanding, which the understanding does not feel nor see... Sometimes even, when this knowledge is more pure, it blinds the understanding, because it deprives it of its natural light, its representations or images, and then it becomes aware of the shadows in which it finds itself.

From the point of view of understanding, the obscurity is complete, whereas from the point of view of knowledge all is light. For a study of the Raja Yoga of St. John of the Cross, the following passages are of the greatest importance:

"But when this light does not communicate to the soul with enough power, she perceives neither darkness nor light; she apprehends nothing of knowledge below nor on high; thus she finds herself sometimes, as it were, in an oblivion so profound that she knows neither where she is nor what she is doing; she is no longer aware of time passing ... And since this knowledge is pure and limpid, it makes the soul to whom it is communicating simple, pure, limpid, detached from all conceptions and memories of the senses or mind. This knowledge will leave the soul behind, forgotten, outside any notion of time. Such is the prayer which is said to penetrate heaven [Eccles. 35:21]; it does not take place in time. It penetrates heaven because then the soul is united to God by its celestial intelligence; and when the soul awakens, she finds that this knowledge has left behind effects which she was not aware of, namely, the elevation of the mind

to the intelligence of the things of God, detachment and estrangement from all terrestrial forms and shapes, and even the memory of them." (AMC, BK II, Ch 14, 10, 11)

The description of this prayer corresponds, for a yogi, to a certain type of *savikalpa-samadhi* (state of union where duality still subsists).

In the same chapter, St. John of the Cross cites the sleep of the bride of the Song of Songs; one of the effects produced in her by sleep is oblivion, that is to say that state of absence due to Knowledge. She says then "I do not know whence came that favour..." Doubtless the harmony of the powers of the soul is suspended, but her intelligence is in the state we described. That is why the Bride of the Song of Songs replies herself to resolve this difficulty: "Although I sleep according to my natural state (by ceasing to act) my heart is awake." Because it has been elevated supernaturally to a supernatural knowledge.

The proof by which one can know that the soul is occupied by this consists in the fact that she experiences no pleasure in created objects, inferior or superior. We do not wish to miss an occasion to establish the comparison between the state of the soul which sleeps while the heart is awake and these few lines from the *Vivekacudamani*:

"He whose mind is absorbed in *Brahman*, who is nevertheless always vigilant, who, at the same time, has shaken off all the characteristics of the waking state, we consider such a one a *jivanmukta*.

We cite an *Advaitic* text, and the substance of the faith which it teaches is, certainly, different from that taught by the dualist systems; however we have ascertained that all descriptions of realised souls have certain affinities. When the beginner notices that, according to those descriptions, the soul is not peacefully occupied in that knowledge, one will

profit from discursive meditation.

When we say that the soul receives the light which is communicated supernaturally, we mean that she understands passively; when we say that she does not act, we do not mean that she does not understand; but she understands that which has cost no effort of personal diligence. When the moment has arrived and the soul leaves behind her personal diligence, if former tendencies return and urge her to take interest again in meditating on particular objects, that will be completely profitless and an obstacle to that general light of the spirit.

In this work, St. John of the Cross states a spiritual truth of the greatest importance for everyone: "The man who has given himself to spiritual life, when he finds it difficult to meditate, must keep a firm and loving attention on God, and maintain tranquillity of mind, so that he meditates even when it seems to him that he is doing nothing." CAMC, BK II, Ch. 15, 5)

St. John of the Cross gives valuable advice for that stage where discursive meditation leaves the soul: "Let him be careful not to bring in thoughts about motives or images or reasoning, in order not to disturb the soul and deprive it of the contentment and peace which she enjoys and throw her into repugnance and distaste."

To conclude Chapter XV of Book II, the saint quotes these words of David: "Learn to be empty of all things - inwardly and outwardly - and you will see that I am God." [Ps. 45: 11]

The Dark Night operates in three ways: Faith places understanding in the Night; Hope places memory in the Night; and Charity (or love) places will in the Night. St. John of the Cross can justly be considered one of the greatest

Raja Yogins, for he discovered the way of immersing the three powers of the soul (Faith, Hope and Charity). We have already stressed the importance of Christian Faith in the overall plan of St. John's Dark Night. As he understands it, Faith and the doctrine of Holy Church are one and the same thing. We have identified Holy Church with the Guru.

Let us now try to go more deeply into what Faith means in his work. St. John of the Cross cites these words of St. Paul: "Faith is a firm assurance of things we hope for, a demonstration of things we do not see." (Heb. 11:1)

"Faith is the substance of things we hope for, and a certitude, they are not in the realm of things the understanding can discover; if they were, it would not be Faith. For, although Faith gives the understanding certitude, it does not give it clarity; on the contrary, Faith obscures understanding." (AMC, Bk II, Ch. 6, 2)

Faith cannot be revealed by understanding; its light does not shine in the soul before the understanding has been enshrouded by the Night. We have already seen that, for the yogi, this is the state where the mind is purged of its modifications (*vrittis*). Here is what St. John of the Cross understands by firmly established faith: "The intellect must, in order to be prepared for the divine union, be freed and purified of everything that pertains to the senses, stripped of all it can apprehend clearly, located in a deep calm, far from all natural activity - in a word, established in Faith. Faith alone is the proximate and proportionate means for the union of the soul with God; for the resemblance between the soul and God is so great that no other difference exists save that between seeing God and believing in God." (AMC, Bk. II. Ch. 9. 1)

Thus faith is also a vision, found in the Indian

tradition when it speaks of the opening of the third eye. The understanding counts for nothing in this vision, which is awakened in the heart of the disciple by the grace of the Guru. According to St. John of the Cross, Holy Church, and it alone, grants this vision. The disciple must completely renounce any personal way of seeing. The Indian tradition is equally intransigent: obedience to the Guru is absolutely essential. The words of Sri Ramakrishna, according to which one must test the Guru, apply only before he is accepted; the choice once made, submission is unconditional. The Catholic tradition does not have to deal with the difficulties which beset the Hindus in choosing a Guru, since the Church is the unique Guru, charged with the interpretation of the faith.

Faith is heard by the ear, St. John of the Cross tells us that: "'Faith comes from hearing, and hearing is of the Word of Christ.' (Romans 10:17) This is as though Paul were saying: Faith is not knowledge which is acquired through any of the senses; it enters through the ear... Other kinds of knowledge are acquired by the light of the understanding; the knowledge of faith is acquired without that light; that light must even be sacrificed in order to keep the light of faith. 'If you do not believe, you will not understand.'" (Isaiah 6:3) (AMC, Bk. II. Ch 3,3 & 4)

So Faith springs from hearing. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* teaches that the truth must first be heard, then reflected upon, and finally realised. The meditation recommended in the *Upanishad* is very similar to that taught by St. John of the Cross: for in neither of the two traditions can the Absolute become the object of thought. This meditation opens the way towards realisation. St. John of the Cross often cites the biblical affirmation of man's impossible situation with respect to seeing God. "Man cannot

see and live." Let us recall the words of St. John of the Cross in which he identifies vision and faith: "that vision, which has no connection with ordinary vision, consists in a super-intellectual apprehension of the substance of Faith; it remains completely independent of the working of the intellect."

We have already seen that Faith and knowledge are one and the same thing; hence that order of vision does not belong in any way to sensible experience. Let us cite once more these lines of St. John of the Cross. "Faith is the consent of the soul to what comes by hearing." The revelation of Scripture is given to the disciple through the mouth of the Guru (Church); the disciple must be prepared to submit completely to the words he receives. The writings of Christian teachings - the substance of Faith as St. John of the Cross formulates it - is intuitive knowledge transmitted by words and received by the ear. Ears are superior to eyes. Eyes perceive forms; whoever lets himself be captured by forms falls into idolatry, whereas hearing provides knowledge. Only the speech of Scripture contains Knowledge that superior knowledge has a universal character, is never polluted by idolatry, and is not within reach of just anyone.

One of the specific traits of our *Kali-Yuga* is the attempt to democratise that Knowledge - an ineffectual attempt, for that Knowledge can never be obtained by the right to vote or universal suffrage. A certain maturity of comprehension is the first quality required; it is the fruit of the *via purgativa*. Purification of the mind transforms Faith into knowledge; then, according to St. John of the Cross, knowledge operates on the mind; it destroys the power of imagination and fantasy and thereby devitalises the mind; in other words, the purification of the mind in the course of discursive meditation destroys the faculty of projecting and

imagining. If this process is handled correctly by an informed director of conscience, the power of the mind diminishes progressively; its field of action is reduced until it disappears altogether. To support his thesis, St. John of the Cross cites numerous biblical texts, for instance David: "He set darkness under His feet and He rose above the cherubim and flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness and the dark water His hiding place." (Ps. 18: 10-12)

All that indicates the obscurity of faith. Then he cites Solomon: "The Lord promised to dwell in the dark cloud... Whenever God made solemn appearances. He showed Himself in a cloud..." There follows this citation from the book of Job: "God spoke to him from the heart of the whirlwind." (38:1)

This darkness symbolizes the obscurity of faith with which the divinity is clothed when communicating with the soul. God and faith are darkness and obscurity for our understanding.

(to be continued)

Reprinted from *Vedanta for East and West*, Mar-Apr 1991

That Primordial Energy, the power of *Brahman*, is beyond the reach of this mind and intellect of ours. She manifests Herself in a pure mind. Man cannot reach or understand Her through spiritual practice alone. She is self-luminous; it is Her consciousness that makes this world conscious... Hold on to that Mother! She is within yourself. It is She who will open the way to the light.

Swami Shivananda

Book Reviews

Journey from Many to One

Essentials of Advaita Vedanta

By *Swami Bhaskarananda*

Published by *Viveka Press, Seattle*

Price: US\$15.95

In this short book of only 202 pages Swami Bhaskarananda has managed to cover all aspects of *Advaita Vedanta* and also the development of the various systems of Hindu Philosophy. In two appendices he also sets out some *Advaita* thoughts as expressed by Sri Ramakrishna, as well as Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on Unity in Diversity.

Mastering such a profound philosophy would of course require a long course of study, but a careful reading of this useful handbook will give the reader a comprehensive view of this miracle of Indian thought, on which he can if he wishes build further on the basis of the recommended reading list appended by Swami Bhaskarananda.

This book is not only a theoretical guide to *Advaita Vedanta*, but also contains practical advice on pursuing the goal of finding the source of consciousness and attaining Self-knowledge. It will prove itself to be of benefit to all who wish to pursue this path to realisation. □

John Phillips

Programme for Sept and Oct 2009

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4.30 p.m.

Tel: 01628 526464

Sept 6	What is Hinduism? 25	Swami Dayatmananda
Sept 13	Katha Upanishad 3	Swami Shivarupananda
Sept 20	What is Hinduism? 26	Swami Dayatmananda
Sept 27	Durga Puja	
Oct 4	Day Retreat	
Oct 11	Katha Upanishad 4	Swami Shivarupananda
Oct 18	What is Hinduism? 27	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 25	Katha Upanishad 5	Swami Shivarupananda

Durga Puja

Sunday, 27 September at Bourne End at 4.00 pm

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 4 October
from 10 am until 7 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area

Sept 20 at 11 am

Essence of Vivekachudamani 1 Swami Shivarupananda

Oct 18 at 11 am

Essence of Vivekachudamani 2 Swami Shivarupananda

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)
between 9.30 pm - 10.30 pm

leisure, go into solitude for a day or two. At that time don't have any relations with the outside world and don't hold any conversation with worldly people on worldly affairs. You must live either in solitude or in the company of holy men."

NEIGHBOUR: "How can one recognize a holy man?"

MASTER: "He who has surrendered his body, mind, and innermost self to God is surely a holy man. He who has renounced 'woman and gold' is surely a holy man. He is a holy man who does not regard woman with the eyes of a worldly person. He never forgets to look upon a woman as his mother, and to offer her his worship if he happens to be near her. The holy man constantly thinks of God and does not indulge in any talk except about spiritual things. Furthermore, he serves all beings, knowing that God resides in everybody's heart. These, in general, are the signs of a holy man."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, November 28, 1883

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The omnipresent *Atman* which depends on nothing else to support It, is the only refuge. At first man does not find that. When discrimination and dispassion arise in the course of meditation and spiritual practices, he comes to know it. But in whatever way he may progress on the path of spirituality, everyone is unconsciously awakening *Brahman* within him. But the means may be different in different cases. Those who have faith in the Personal God have to undergo spiritual practices holding on to that idea. If there is sincerity, through that will come the awakening of the lion of *Brahman* within. The knowledge of *Brahman* is the one goal of all beings but the various ideas are the various paths to it.

Swami Vivekananda

