

# Vedanta

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351 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2010

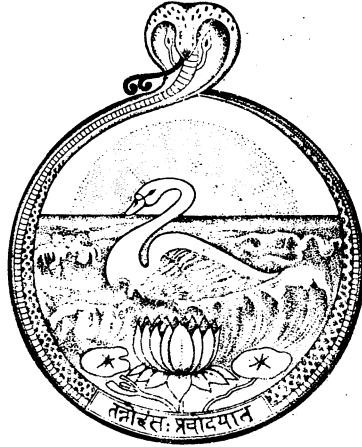
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**How to Become God?**  
*Swami Trigunatitananda*

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**The Mysticism of Sarada Devi**  
*Swami Smaranananda*

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We wish our readers,  
everywhere,  
a Peaceful Christmas  
and  
a Joyous New Year.



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### *Divine Wisdom*

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*BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, can't we realize God without complete renunciation?"*

*MASTER (with a laugh): "Of course you can! Why should you renounce everything? You are all right as you are, following the middle path-like molasses partly solid and partly liquid. Do you know the game of nax? Having scored the maximum number of points, I am out of the game. I can't enjoy it. But you are very clever. Some of you have scored ten points, some six, and some five. You have scored just the right number; so you are not out of the game like me. The game can go on. Why, that's fine! (All laugh.)"*

*"I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind toward*

*continued on the inside back cover*

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ISSN 1355 - 6436

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## Alone but not Lonely (cont.)

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**L**oneliness can wreck our lives. But if we deal with it in the right way, it will yield invaluable fruits: physical, intellectual and spiritual. In this issue we will discuss how we can do it.

Loneliness can be overcome, but it needs strong determination and definite practice of some of the steps outlined below.

### **Accepting loneliness**

The first step in overcoming loneliness is by understanding its inevitability and accepting it. We live and die alone - this is an inescapable fact of existence. When we begin to accept it, a new vision of life opens before us. With this acceptance also dawns a new urge to make creative use of it. It is only then that our true potential begins to manifest. When we accept the existential condition of our loneliness, the first thing we notice is that our fears and anxieties start to diminish slowly.

Sri Ramakrishna used to advise his devotees to go into solitude every now and then. His words have deep significance. Most of us fear solitude, for we fear to be alone. Solitary confinement is considered as one of the worst forms of punishment, for one is forced to confront oneself and few can stand it.

What may be the cause of this fear? Perhaps the ego fears the loss of its identity. The ego, for its support, usually depends heavily on nationality, religion, language, culture, job-status, social position etc. When these seem to be lost in solitude, the ego fears for its very existence. Just as a baby seems to be lost without its mother, so also the ego

experiences terrible fear in the absence of all these. If I am not so and so, then what am I? Part of our fear of loneliness is our fear of losing our self, or our sense of who we are. But by accepting the fact that we are alone we lessen our fear of loneliness.

### **A definite goal in life**

We must have a definite goal in life. The secret of a mature personality is to have a goal and purpose in life. A definite goal makes life meaningful and also defines one's daily activities. A person with a goal in life and a set routine of activities can cope with loneliness better than one who has none.

### **Physical exercise**

Surprisingly those who exercise regularly have less problems with loneliness. Probably this is due to the changes that occur in our bodies as a result of exercising. Swami Vivekananda used to say strong bodied people have more control over their emotions.

### **A good hobby**

An enjoyable hobby is a good antidote to stress and loneliness. Especially hobbies like music and gardening can uplift our minds and make life's journey much more pleasant.

### **Service**

Many rush into feverish activities or cook up other schemes for avoiding loneliness. All these escape tactics will not help us. They are not only counter-productive, but can actually exacerbate our loneliness once the excitement is over!

But true service-oriented activities can help much. Swami Vivekananda was a great advocate of service to God in the form of humanity. The Ramakrishna Order was founded

with the twin motto of one's own salvation and the welfare of the world. His concept of service goes far beyond the spiritual and merely social realm. Genuine service needs a good and loving heart. Love and goodness, as we know, are the greatest purifiers of the ego! They act as antidotes to negative feelings like depression and despair, loneliness included.

True love unites the lover with the object of his love. No one can be loving and selfish at the same time. As such one of the best remedies to loneliness is serving society, looking upon it as the manifestation of God. These days many opportunities exist for those willing to render service. One can join an organisation (and there are many who welcome volunteers) or a voluntary group. Or visit old-age homes, hospices, etc. and spend some time with people who feel lonely and left out. If one is unable to render service, one can help organisations not only financially but in many other ways.

### **Spiritual practice**

As we mentioned earlier, the root cause of loneliness is spiritual. We feel lonely, because we are ignorant of our true nature. No matter how fulfilling our life might be socially, intellectually or morally, our heart yearns for the divine. This yearning we feel is deep, real and it comes from the depths of ourselves. Spiritual loneliness is really a deep void within ourselves, a hollowness that cannot be filled with anything other than spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda put his finger right on the problem when he said: "Each soul is potentially divine." Whether we know it or not all of us are trying to manifest our forgotten divinity. Any halt in this process is what makes us feel lonely. Even a little regular practice of spiritual disciplines like prayer, meditation, etc. goes a long way in coping with loneliness. Sri Krishna says: "Even a little

practice of this Yoga protects one from great fear." (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.40)

Simple prayer can uplift the mind to a higher realm. Whenever we detect feelings of depression or desolation, we can lift ourselves up through simple whole-hearted prayer. Similarly regular readings from the holy scriptures also can help us a great deal. Scriptures are the recordings of saints and sages. There is a great power in them. Even mechanical reading or hearing of scriptures can lift our minds up into a higher state.

There are many types of spiritual practises. One of the most effective of these is the practice of the presence of God. The well-known book *Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence is very reassuring and helpful. One should try to feel the presence of God in all places, at all times and under all circumstances.

*Japa* or constant remembrance of one's *mantram* or a holy word is highly effective. *Japam* should, of course, be done with full awareness and love. Through practice one can do *japam* almost constantly.

*Vipassana* or the meditation taught by many Buddhists is an excellent practice. (Belief in a God is not a necessary condition for this practice. Buddha did not speak of a God.) In *Vipassana* one is taught to pay close attention to all that goes on in the body and mind. One is advised to watch one's breath, postures, thoughts that rush in one's mind etc. Practice of *Vipassana* meditation is an excellent remedy for loneliness.

### **The importance of solitude**

Ours is a busy and extroverted civilisation. Here the cultivation of solitude is discouraged. But cultivation of solitude is most important if we want to have peace, joy and fulfilment.

Sri Ramakrishna often advised his devotees to go into solitude. He said: "It is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practises meditation in solitude. To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest." The *Bhagavad Gita* also advises all aspirants on a number of qualities which a seeker of self-knowledge must cultivate. One such quality is resorting to solitude and turning away from the society of men.

Solitude is an excellent way of cultivating noble thoughts. "They are never alone that are accompanied by noble thoughts." (Sir Philip Sidney)

Some of the greatest creations in literature, art, and music (not to speak of spirituality) that the world has known were only conceived in moments of profound solitude. Kierkegaard speaks of relating to one's own self by willing to be oneself. This is undoubtedly a heroic task.

Solitude is the handmaid of the interior life. In solitude alone we can discover our true Self. Without quiet and aloneness, it is not possible to develop an interior life. And without an interior life there is nothing to speak to us but our own emptiness and loneliness.

Loneliness is an existential fact of life. But we need not be lonely or suffer from it. We have outlined some of the best ways of coping with it. Loneliness is a gift of God. Through proper use of it we can become Blessed and Fulfilled. □

*Swami Dayatmananda*



## How to Become God?

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Our subject is 'How to Become God?' Now, that question really involves one set of preliminary questions and answers. The question How to become God? has another question involved in it, and that is, whether we are satisfied with our present condition. The answer is, no, we are not satisfied with our present condition. If we were so, we would not ask the question, How to become God?; we would ask, How to become man? Now, when we have that preliminary answer that we are not satisfied with our present condition, we seek for a higher state, a higher condition, and that is also a question: What state will be higher than this present stage? We find the answer that if we can become God we can be satisfied. How to become God? is the question and that questioning means two things: literally speaking, that we are men, and that we want to be God.

Now if man becomes God, that means man is one thing and God is another. But really speaking, we do not mean it in that sense. How to become God? means how to realize our real state which is Godhood; and that is the real meaning of the question How to become God?. It is not that we are something and want to be something else, but we are, really speaking, God, and we want to realize that. We have forgotten that we are God, and we want to call back that state. If we did something in some years past, we may forget it now, but if we sit quietly and try to call it back, it comes back to our memory. So, the real state, for some reason or other, has been forgotten and we want to realize that, to call back that state; and that is the meaning of how to become

God. It is not that we are going to transform our state from one to another, but we are to realize the real state, and how to do it is the subject.

In order to deal with this subject, we must consider our progress as divided into, say, four parts: first, the world; second, the body; third, coming nearer, the mind; fourth, still nearer, the ego. These are the four divisions that we make in our progress. First, we see the world. The world is a great thing for us; and in order to realize our proper state we should first understand everything that we see, everything that we come in contact with. The first thing is the world - how to live in the world and what the world is. If we do not understand that, we cannot understand our condition; we cannot realize our proper state. And in order to understand the world, we must study it very closely.

If you ever take your seat in a corner of a park, you will notice that some persons are walking, it may be, with much happiness, with much pleasure in their minds; some are holding picnics, enjoying much, having a good time; some are playing, etc. What do you notice in them? One thing is very conspicuous: forgetfulness. They have forgotten the real thing and they have engaged themselves in something which is quite unreal. They have forgotten their own nature. They think that this world is the best; this world is the place of happiness; this body is the great source of happiness; this mind is the great place of satisfaction; this ego is the great doer, the great enjoyer. All these things are taken into consideration first. They don't think that they do not belong to any of these - neither to this world, nor to this body, nor to this mind, nor to this ego.

Now if we split up everything, if we give up the world, if we give up our own body, if we give up our mind,

if we give up ego, even individuality, what remains? If you can reason that way, if you can analyze everything that you see in that way, then you will come to a finer slate of things - very fine, very subtle. It is not gross as the old material world; it is not as gross as the body - not even like the mind or the ego. It is finer than any of these: finest of the fine. In this state is the beginning of the realization of our proper state. Take, for instance, an onion: if you split it up, if you pare off the skin one layer after another from while to whiter skin, then afterwards you come to nothing, which means to such fine essence that we take it to be nothing.

If you can split up everything that you know of, if you can split up even your mind, then you come to the state where you can realize your real state - not before that. As long as our mind is in this world, as long as our mind is in this body, as long as we identify ourselves with our ego, we cannot be expected to know our own Self. We cannot realize our own Self.

Now, this world, if you have ever studied it closely, is full of bitterness. If you think for a while very closely, if you ponder over the things you do, you will notice the bitterness of the world. If you have ever loved the world with your whole heart, if you have studied the world, if you have entered deeply into the nature of the world, you will notice the bitterness of it, the poison. It has a covering over it, a shining covering; within, it is full of poison. Our divine nature, our Divine Mother, our Divine Father, divine parents, our own divine nature in us is every moment calling us back, "Hurry up! This is a foreign country. The world is not yours; your body is not yours; your mind, your ego even, is not yours. You do not belong to this world - to your body, your mind, your ego - nor do any of these belong to you. You

belong to something else and something else belongs to you."

Every moment if you notice, when you sit quietly, something will dictate to you; something will ring with a sound within you. You will hear some voice calling you back, "Come home, come home!" If we do not pay any heed to our actions, then it is a pity; it will take longer. It will take more time for us to return, and afterwards it may happen that we will notice that it is already too late for us to make further improvement. Unless we check all the progress of our senses towards this world, unless we stop all the channels, we cannot open that main passage - that main channel through which we can get that divine spirit, that divine force. We are spending every moment all that we have; all our property, all our energy. We are never trying to save a little of it for our future prospect, our real prospect. All our heart, mind and soul, all our energy - the most beautiful and most valuable thing that we have - we are spending them in vain in this world; and we are not yet learning even a little lesson through that.

If you have ever loved any person with your whole heart, you will have noticed that you cannot satisfy yourself by loving that person. If you have done much for your country, you will have noticed that neither your country gained anything nor were you able to do much. The result is misery, unhappiness, a waste of time, and waste of energy. Time is most valuable, and energy still more valuable. And if a moment of our life is spent, it is gone forever; it will never come back. So we are losing every moment our most valuable things; and if we do not take care of our energy and of our time, we will afterwards have to repent much and to pay very dearly for our love of the world. If we embrace the world as our own, that little, momentary embrace will cost

us much. Our vital energy will be spent and wasted, and afterwards we shall find that nothing remains in us for the future. We shall be beggars and will have to beg from door to door, and we shall not get even a little help.

Therefore, as long as we have a little energy, we ought to think of our time, of our life, of our doings, of our actions; and if we think of these, then we shall find some higher object, something of a higher nature that we want to perform; and if we notice that want, that spiritual need in us, then we shall find the nothingness, the worthlessness of the world. Of course, some people say that we may take the world as beautiful, and from that idea, from that notion, we can rise higher and higher; but it is a great mistake for ordinary people. Those who do not know how to make the best use of the little property that they have, cannot use the world well. They cannot live in the world well. So, in the beginning we have to give up all our connections with the world.

Now, be not afraid. Giving up the world does not mean absolute giving up, but giving up mentally. If you embrace the world as your own, keep a few inches of space in between, and then embrace it. Do not take it as your own; do not forget your own nature. Otherwise you will have to pay very dearly for it. And you will notice afterwards how foolish it was for you to love the world, to do much with your head and heart for the world. Doing good to the world is not in that way. If you do good to yourself, it will be the real way of doing good to the world. Your position in this world means a great thing. First, mercy begins at home. First do good to yourself. Understand your position first, and then put yourself in the world; then you go to understand others; and then you will understand everything in a right way, not before that. If from the beginning you take the world as

good, as the object, as the source of all pleasure, then you lose everything. You do not gain.

The subject of last Sunday (lecture) was how to become most beautiful, and we said that if we think of the beautiful things, we can become ourselves most beautiful. Our thoughts, our actions, our deeds, everything that we do, and the company that we keep will mould our life. Every thought of ours has something to do towards moulding our life. If we think good thoughts, these thoughts will be expressed on our face. In every event our face will tell the thoughts that are within us. If we do a good deed, that will come out and appear on our face. If we do a wrong deed, our face will indicate that immediately. So, the manner in which we think, the way in which we live has much to do for our progress.

We must consider our thoughts and our deeds. If we think of a bad person, by and by, gradually we become bad ourselves. If we think of good people, we become good. If we think of God, we become God. It is not by hypnotism, but by thought; not by transfer of thought, not by materialization, but by sheer fact, by scientific truth, in a scientific way, we become God.

It is not that something will be transformed, will be changed into another thing - that by thinking of God we will change our features, and our positions, and our actions, and our thought into everything of God. Not that way, but we will realize the truth that is hidden within us. If fire be covered with ashes and you blow off the ashes, then you notice the fire, it is not that there was no fire - that by blowing off the ashes we transformed one thing into another - but we discover the thing that was hidden in the ashes. So, within our *Maya*, or within our own self, within our nature,

is hidden the Divine Spirit. We want to split up one covering after another till we arrive at that essential object. And if we analyze that way, if we can reason that way every day, if we think of the worthlessness of the body and mind and ego and everything, if we think of death every day, of how even our life which we think so very valuable may be over just the next moment - if we can think these thoughts for a while very regularly and very deeply - then we will notice something within us in the way of real truth, and by and by we will come to realize our proper state, our Godhood. □

Reprinted from *The Vedanta Kesari*, February 1989

Because you are able to control your mind and concentrate, success comes to you. In the same manner, if one can call on God with all one's mind and with all one's heart, one will surely realize him. Just as you are giving your entire attention to your work as a physician, give it to God. You will see the results: you will get his vision at once. The Master used to say, One should turn the corner. That is to say, one should canalize the same energy in a different direction. Take your mind from your profession of doctoring, and call on the Lord. That is extreme dispassion ... In your mundane work you enjoy success. If you can turn your mental current to another plane, you will attain success there in the same way. Surely you will reach your goal.

*Swami Turiyananda*

## The Mysticism of Sri Sarada Devi

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A country-side road in Bengal, on the way to Jayrambati. Green fields carpet either side of the road as long as the eye stretches. A saintly woman is seen walking, followed by a boy with a bundle of clothes. Suddenly the boy stops. Not hearing the sound of his footsteps, the serene woman turns back and questions, "Shibu, what's the matter?" The boy Shibu replies, "Mother, tell me who you are." "Who am I? Well, what a question! I am your aunt. What more?" replies the Mother. "If you won't tell me, then move on. The village is near by. I won't move from this spot," Shibu persists. The Mother is perplexed. Finding Shibu still on the same spot, the Mother says, "People say I am Kali." "Kali? Truly so?" Shibu seeks confirmation. The Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, nods assent.

The above scene is only one of the innumerable incidents that have taken place in the life of the Holy Mother. What was it that made people see the divine Mother in her, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna? Persons whose acquaintance with the life of Sri Ramakrishna is shallow think that all the worship and reverence directed to the Holy Mother is purely by virtue of her happening to be the wife of Sri Ramakrishna. People are not wanting who take her to be a rustic woman elevated to the position of a goddess by the over-enthusiastic devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Indeed, her apparently uneventful life, busy with the chores of household, concealed her divinity from the eyes of the common man. But many were those who were blessed by coming to her presence even once; they cherish her memory as the elixir of their lives. Here, we shall try to understand the mystic aspect of



Sri Sarada Devi's life, which lay at the background of her unassuming personality.

Mysticism is a much abused word. Evelyn Underhill, in the preface to her masterly treatise *Mysticism*, says: "It has been used in different and often mutually exclusive senses by religion, poetry, and philosophy; has been claimed as an excuse for every kind of occultism, for dilute transcendentalism, vapid symbolism, religious and aesthetic sentimentality, and bad metaphysics." But with the passage of time, mysticism has gained recognition as a term referring to the spiritual states experienced by saints. In its intensive form, it represents the essential religious experience of man. Underhill calls the greatest of mystics as "our ambassadors to the Absolute." A famous Indian thinker of the present day says: "It is mystic religion that explores, cultivates, and enlists man's fullest potentialities latent in the unconscious. The key notions of mysticism, as those of a true development psychology, are growth, autonomy, self-actualization, and self-transcendence, rather than inhibition, conditioning, and adjustment at the current low level. The adjustment of the mystic is not merely with the self at both the conscious and unconscious levels, with the fellow-man and the visible society, but also with the invisible society and the cosmos, definitely involving self-transcendence."

Mysticism therefore need not create a sense of disgust in the minds of the intellectually religious. For in the greatest geniuses of the world - be they saints, poets, or artists - their innate creative faculties flowered forth into creative activity only as a result of mystic experiences. But mysticism in its highest form is neither the fervently emotional type nor the purely abstract type, but that which combines in itself knowledge and love.

In what did the mystic experiences of Sri Sarada Devi consist? We do not find in her life either the emotional anguish and ecstasies of a St. Teresa or the poetic efflorescence of a Jalalluddin Rumi or Blake. Nor do we see her struggling for the divine vision through innumerable spiritual practices. Her voluntary effort to hide her spiritual states acted as a veil before her devotees. Whatever little has been recorded about her earlier life is too meagre to reveal anything clearly about her mystic tendencies. Despite all these handicaps, a close scrutiny of the available material reveals her as unique in the history of mysticism.

We can find parallels to some incidents in Sri Ramakrishna's life in the life histories of other prophets like Jesus Christ or Sri Caitanya. But amongst the womankind, we do not find a parallel to Sri Sarada Devi. Her assumption of the mantle of universal motherhood; her relationship with Sri Ramakrishna, which was of a transcendental plane; her spiritual ministrations to hundreds of devotees, which is not found in the lives of other women saints, all these mark her out as one who ever dwelt on the acme of spiritual realization. On what did this realization rest? Whence did her universal motherhood blossom? What made hundreds of men and women flock to her and look upon her as the embodiment of the divine Mother?

Many have felt a sense of awe, a sense of blessedness, an inexplicable felicity by coming to her presence even for the first time. If anything, we can consider her lifelong devotion and service to Sri Ramakrishna as the *sadhana* she practised. But here, too, her relationship with the Master is often mystifying. To devotees whose spiritual development was on a higher level, she revealed that she and the Master were not different. Again, when the Master passed away,

she cried out, "O my Mother Kali, where have you gone?" Perhaps the Miltonic phrase "He for God and she for God in him" may be appropriate to describe their relationship. Ever, after the Master's passing away, there were many occasions when she communicated with him directly. She vindicated the age-old Indian tradition in which every woman considers her husband to be the very embodiment of the Divine and derives spiritual progress through service to him.

It may be that the clue to all our questions lies in Sri Ramakrishna's remark that she was his *Shakti*. As if to demonstrate that fact, he worshipped her as the *Sodasi* on the new moon night of June 1872. When all the preparations for the *puja* were ready, he asked her to be seated on the *asana* (seat) meant for the Deity. He then performed the worship in the prescribed manner, and finally dedicated all the fruits of his varied spiritual practices, of twelve long years, at her feet. Thus culminated the spiritual practices of Sri Ramakrishna. On her part, the Mother became completely oblivious of the external world. What took place in the transcendental realm, who can tell? Are we to infer that the Holy mother was commissioned by the Master for her spiritual role, through this act?

On another occasion, while massaging his feet, the Mother queried, out of curiosity, as to how he looked upon her. Pat came the reply, "As the divine Mother in the temple, so do I look upon you." During his last days at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna once questioned the Mother in an aggrieved tone, "Well, my dear, won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) do everything single-handed?" The Mother replied, "I am a woman. What can I do?" The Master at once corrected her, "No, no, you'll have to do a lot."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 120.

One may say that these facts show that her spiritual states were entirely the result of the Master's infusing them into her. But the above-mentioned incident rather proves that he depended on her for the completion of his mission on earth. Besides, her earlier life throws faint streaks of light on her mystic qualities. For instance, her being cured from high fever after a vision of Mother Kali, when the Mother as a maiden of eighteen was proceeding to Dakshineswar from Jayrambati, can be quoted. It may be assumed that, in the mystic way, the Mother was always in what is called the "unitive life" from the very beginning. Underhill tries to explain the term as "the final triumph of the spirit, the flower of mysticism, humanity's top note: the consummation towards which the contemplative life, with its long slow growth and costly training, has moved from the first." Only, we do not find the "long slow growth and costly training" in the Holy Mother's life.

Even while she was only a five year old infant, Sri Ramakrishna understood that she was to share the burden of his spiritual mission and indicated her as his future bride. Her training under Sri Ramakrishna was not the usual oscillation between the godly and earthly realms, as witnessed in the lives of many other mystics. The Mother, as it were, skipped the incipient stages of a mystic's growth and reached the ultimate stage straightway. This ultimate stage is described by Underhill thus: "The spirit of man, having at last come to full consciousness of reality, completes the circle of Being; and returns to fertilize those levels of existence from which it sprang. Hence, the enemies of mysticism, who have easily drawn a congenial moral from the 'morbid and solitary' lives of contemplatives in the earlier and educative stages of the Mystic Way, are here confronted very often

by the disagreeable spectacle of the mystic as a pioneer of humanity, a sharply intuitive and painfully practical person." No sooner had the Master made his exit from this mortal world than the Mother had to step into his shoes and take up the role as the "pioneer of humanity." She had not to face the earlier "morbid and solitary" state. After a few days of his passing away, she was asked by the Master in a vision to initiate Swami Yogananda, though the Mother felt some trepidation at the idea.

But one need not run away with the notion that the Holy Mother had not to face any difficulty in her spiritual mission on earth. Her sufferings on the physical plane are well known. Being fully conscious of her identity with the transcendental Being, the Mother had to exert herself to keep her mind on the mundane level. Her attachment to Radhu, her niece, was primarily for this purpose. This fact is explained in her biography at length. When the time had arrived for her to take leave from this mortal world, she had no more attraction for Radhu. She took away her mind from Radhu, and that signalled that the moment of departure had come. In fact, this mad niece of hers was only the mooring that kept her anchored and prevented her from drifting away into the ocean of the Divine.

Again, the Mother had to hide her ecstasies, for these would have operated as a check on her 'children' to approach her with the greatest freedom. If they were conscious of her spiritual heights, they could not probably have had that intimacy which was deeper than that which one has with one's earthly mother. In spite of all these efforts, her spiritual states overflowed the flood-gates of caution at times. Such was the case when she fell into *samadhi* while witnessing a play in the Minerva theatre during the year 1909. There were

many other occasions when she entered into ecstatic moods, but she "composed herself so quickly that her devotees hardly got any time to fathom them adequately." It is said in her biography: "Many are the devotees who were struck with wonder by the sudden expression of the Mother's transcendental moods in the midst of ordinary human occupations. These emerged so unawares, like flashes of lightning."

Ever since the days of her stay in the *nahabat* (music tower) at Dakshineswar, the Holy Mother's universal motherhood asserted itself. Though her life was one long act of devotion and service to Sri Ramakrishna, he was to her husband, guru, and deity in one. Often, her sense of motherhood got the better of her devotion to the Master. Once, when a woman of disrepute came to her repenting and called her 'Mother,' she took her into her room and consoled her. When Sri Ramakrishna warned the Mother about the doubtful character of the woman, the Mother replied that, when she was called 'Mother,' she could not help acting as she did. On many other occasions, too, her motherly love asserted itself contrary to the wish of the Master. The mystic, in his highest state, renounces the delight of divine absorption for the sake of benefiting those immediately around him. The Holy Mother embraced all in her motherly bosom; her motherly love went forth towards all without any distinction. In her last message, too, where she asks every one not to find fault in others, the sentence "The whole world is your own; no one is a stranger" reflects truly her attitude to the world. For it is well-nigh impossible for ordinary men to consider the whole world as their own. The sentence rather reveals her own inner realization of this truth.

One fact that stands out clear is that the Holy Mother's

consciousness of her identity with the divine Mother of the universe lay at the bottom of her universal love and ability to transform others spiritually. It sometimes alternated with her sense of identity with the Master. Many are the instances when she unwittingly confessed this. A whole chapter in her biography brings together such incidents in bold relief. One such incident may be mentioned here. Once, when the Mother was staying at Koalpara, a village few miles from Jayrambati, one of her disciples was bringing a doctor in a bullock-cart for the treatment of someone at that place. Feeling thirsty on the way, the doctor asked him to fetch some cucumbers, etc. to allay his thirst. But the disciple, finding none of these, plucked a few unripe mangoes from a wayside tree and brought them with the jocular remark. "When nothing was available the memory of *treta-yuga* came to my mind suddenly, and I immediately managed to pluck some of these!" On arrival at Koalpara, they related the incident to the Holy Mother, who smiled broadly and said: "Yes, my boys. 'Each belongs to his own fold, and incarnates as such in every age.' How can I have all these works of mine done unless they are there? Depending on them, I have been living here in the forest amidst dangers, with Radhu in her present condition."

When she awoke to this consciousness in her life cannot be told. Nor is it possible to assess the part played by Sri Ramakrishna in this awakening. But even during her early life, Sri Ramakrishna knew her future role and trained her for that purpose. What is more surprising is that some of the devotees saw Mother Kali in her and addressed her sometimes as such, in spite of her protestations. It was not a mere imagination on their part, but a firm conviction. Day and night, while she stayed at Calcutta or at Jayrambati, rich

and poor alike rushed to her for spiritual solace. When she went on a pilgrimage to South India, hundreds of common people prostrated before her and sat in front of her in mute admiration and reverence, though unable to understand her tongue. The spirituality that radiated from her person was enough to fill their hearts with joy.

Underhill makes the allegation that the oriental mystic "presses on to lose his life upon the heights; but he does not come back and bring to his fellowmen the life-giving news that he has transcended mortality in the interests of the race." But here is a personality to whom the Occident was practically unknown; nevertheless, she had, from her very advent, borne to the spiritually-starved the life-giving knowledge that the real nature of man is divine and by seeking that he can attain immortality; and she had 'transcended mortality' even from her very birth. She spread this message of hers in a very simple way: through the affection of a mother, an emotion which every heart understands.

Though all these indicate her identity with the maternal aspect of the Divine, she on her part remained perfectly human. She respected all the local customs and abided by them, for the greatest of prophets came to fulfil and not to destroy. She had no criticism, not a harsh word for anyone, for she knew fully well that an erring child can be reformed only through love. And when a son or a daughter, gone astray, came to her for solace, she did not hesitate to keep aside the local customs or tradition. The Muslim robber Amzad's case is an instance in point: how, in spite of protests, she cleaned with her own hands the place where he had his meal!

An unostentatious life such as the Holy Mother's



cannot reveal all its depths to us of the work-a-day world. As it is said in her biography: "This ultimate Power defies all attempts at fragmentation; and so our limited intellect cannot grasp this Infinity. Still, through our prismatic mind, we try to understand Saradamani Devi as the mother, the Guru, or the deity." Therefore all our inferences and conclusions are to be based on the evidence of those who had scaled the heights of spiritual life, like the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Their great reverence towards her can be matched only with their reverence to Sri Ramakrishna himself. We may also take the help of those who had the good fortune of the association of the Holy Mother. What Swami Premananda wrote about her in a letter is a glowing revelation about her mystic aspect: "Who has understood the Holy Mother? There is not a trace of grandeur. The Master had at least his power of *vidya* (knowledge) manifested, but the Mother? - her perfection of knowledge is hidden! What a mighty power is this! Glory to the Mother! Glory to the powerful Mother! A poison we can't assimilate we pass on to the Mother. She draws everyone to her lap. An infinite power - an incomparable grace! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us; we haven't seen the Master himself doing this. With how much caution and what testing he accepted any one! And here, what do you see here at the Mother's place? Wonderful, wonderful! She grants shelter to every one, eats food from the hands of almost any one, and all is digested! Mother, Mother, victory unto the Mother!" Swami Vivekananda's devotion to the Mother also defies description. He calls her "the living Durga" and pities the man who is not devoted to her.

To sum up: The Holy Mother's was not the anguish-filled or rapturous mysticism like that of the many saints of all ages and climes; hers was exceptional, it had for its base

a continuous divine consciousness and the spontaneous love of a mother. Where it had its origination, no one can fathom. For who indeed can measure the heights of her divinity, which was not the result of an arduous ascent towards the summit of divine consciousness, but a natural phenomenon all along? Today, when forty quick years have rolled by since her exit from the arena of the world, men and women of all lands become devoted to her, though, very often, they are not well acquainted with the details of her life. Needless to say, they all derive great spiritual benefit and solace through such devotion. □

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, Dec, 1960

You want me to advise you how to get rid of the entanglements of this world, in answer to which let me remind you that what has been brought about by myriads of births cannot be done away with in a day. Yes, you are right. We should escape the snare of *samsara* even from this moment. For, who knows when death will snatch us away from the loving embrace of our family; but that does not mean we should make a sudden resolution in the course of our lives. The best way to success is to remain pleased in whatever state Sri Ramakrishna has been pleased to place you, keeping your mind always turned toward Him, as a boy always turns towards his parent for help. Stay peacefully where the Lord has been pleased to keep you. Read and ponder upon the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

## Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia

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**H**azrat Nizamuddin, whose name was Mohammad and who was called "Beloved of God. King of Saints," was born in Badayun in the year 634 A.H. His forefathers originally came from Bokhara; first they came to Lahore, and then migrated to Badayun. Both his father and mother came from pious and saintly families.

When Mohammad was just five years old, his father passed away. He was brought up under the loving protection of his mother, who was looked upon with great reverence for her piety and austere living.

Nizamuddin received his early education in Badayun. Maulana Alauddin Usuli invited the learned men of the time, and in their presence the 'turban of learning' was put on his head in recognition of the fact that he had completed his education, as it was in vogue in those days.

In order to carry on still more advanced studies in Islamic subjects, he migrated to Delhi with his mother. There he learnt several subjects from Maulana Shamsuddin Wamghani, whose erudition was recognized by King Balban by conferring on him the title of 'Shamsul-Mumalik.'

His spiritual teacher was Baba Ganjshakr, who not only initiated him into the mysteries of spiritual life, but also taught him various religious and mystical subjects in which he was considered an adept. For several years, Nizamuddin lived in the monastery of his teacher and performed severe austerities and completed his spiritual development.

After some time, he was directed by his Murshid (teacher) to go to Delhi and occupy himself in the devotion

of God and in the service of his fellowmen.

At the time of his passing away, Baba Ganjshakr willed that his stuff and robe be given to his devoted disciple Nizamuddin, as his vicegerent (Khalifa). While Sheikh Nizamuddin was taking leave of his Murshid, he gave him a word of admonition :

(1) If ever you borrow anything from anybody, you must see that you return it as soon as possible.

(2) Try to serve and please your enemies under any circumstances.

The last time when Sheikh Nizamuddin went to his Murshid. at the time of leaving, he blessed the Sheikh with these words: "May God keep you regenerated and spiritually elevated at all times. You would be like an evergreen tree, under whose shadow people would find comfort, rest, and inspiration." Further, he added: "Do not relax your efforts in developing more and more spiritual knowledge and insight."

When Sheikh Nizamuddin came to Delhi first at his Murshid's bidding, he did not find there a quiet and secluded place for his prayer and meditation. Therefore, he had to resort to the outskirts of the city to find a lonely place to continue his spiritual practices.

At that time, the city of Delhi was the centre of all sorts of social evils and malpractices. That was one of the main reasons why he took his abode outside the city, in a village called Ghyaspur. For a long time, he spent his days there in great hardship and starvation. Once, he had to go without food for three days on end.

When Sultan Jalaluddin Khilji heard that the Sheikh was passing his days in penury and poverty, he was so much touched by this news that he offered to grant him

some villages as free gifts, so that he may be able to maintain himself from their income, but the Sheikh and his disciples thankfully declined to accept this offer.

There is a touching story about this time of his life. For want of food, he had to starve for days. Once, a pious and kind-hearted lady living in his neighbourhood brought him a handful of flour, which was being cooked in an earthen pot. Just when this flour was ready for use, a dervish visited him and asked him for some food. The Sheikh brought the pot of food and placed it before the dervish, who satisfied his hunger with a few morsels of it and threw the pot on the ground and disappeared after uttering this remark: "Sheikh Faridudclin Ganjshakr endowed you with the wealth of spiritual life, and I broke into pieces the pot which was a symbol of poverty. Now you have been made the king of inner and outer life."

After this incident. Sheikh Nizamuddin's indigent condition was surprisingly changed, and he began to receive gifts in abundance from his devotees and admirers. But the Sheikh was so God-reliant and contented that he used to order that all that he received during the day should be distributed among the poor people, and did not allow anything to be kept overnight for the next day.

It was during this period of his life that Sultan Muazuddin Kaikubal built a palace near the Sheikh's village. It was on this account that the people used to congregate round about his village, and his peace was disturbed. He decided to leave this village, but an unknown person suddenly visited him and asked him not to be disheartened with the presence of the crowd, but to carry on his spiritual mission and remain inwardly undisturbed.

As the Sheikh was living in Ghyaspur village, very

close to the royal palace, the ministers and the state officials used to visit him frequently. Some of them were initiated by the Sheikh, and thus they became recipients of his grace and guidance. Some well-to-do citizens, who were indulging in all sorts of objectionable pleasures, totally abstained from evil ways and led a pious life.

Amir Khusro's father, Amir Saifuddin, had joined the circle of the Sheikh's disciples. In fact, the members of his whole family accepted him as their spiritual leader. At that time, Amir Khusro was only eight years old. His parents placed him at their Murshid's feet. He was an accepted disciple at this tender age. Amir Khusro was utterly devoted to his teacher, and acted up to his instructions most loyally all his life. The Sheikh also was deeply attached to him.

Amir Khusro was not only an outstanding poet and a literary man of his time, but, on account of his close intimacy with the royal family, had built up a fortune. But in the presence of the Sheikh, he behaved like a mere servant.

There is a touching story about his devotion to his spiritual teacher. Once, a dervish visited the Sheikh and wanted some gifts from him. But the Sheikh could not afford to give him anything, except a new pair of shoes which he had at that time. While the dervish was going on his way, he came across Amir Khusro and his royal party. The Amir stopped him and asked if he had got anything from his Murshid. When he learnt that the dervish had a new pair of shoes from his Murshid, the Amir offered to have them back from him by surrendering to him in exchange all the wealth that he was carrying with him from an expedition. He took that pair of shoes, put them on his head, and carried them back to his beloved teacher.

Sheikh Nizamuddin passed away when Amir

Khusro was away on an expedition with Sultan Mohammad Tughlak. As soon as the news of the passing away of the Sheikh was intimated to him, he took the king's permission and returned post-haste to the tomb of his teacher. Whatever wealth he possessed, he ordered it to be distributed to the poor. After six months of deep mourning, he expired, and was buried near the Sheikh's tomb.

During his lifetime, Sheikh Nizamuddin Aulia's influence was so great that even people living at a distance of fourteen miles lived a good and pious life and refrained from evil ways.

The author of Searul Aidia says that the Sheikh subjected himself to intense spiritual practices and austerities in his youth for thirty-years. In his middle and old age, he devoted more and more time to spiritual development. Throughout the day and night, he used to say his prayers (namaz) four hundred times. He used to reside in the upper storey of his monastery. Even at the ripe old age of eighty, he used to climb down from his room to join the congregational prayer. After the morning and noon prayers, he used to engage himself in giving spiritual instructions to his disciples and followers. A large number of Sufis and aspirants on the path of God-realization used to flock round him.

Although he was deeply immersed in divine contemplation and devotion, he never forgot the interest of the general public, whom he treated with utmost consideration and helped them in every way.

His patience and forbearance was so great that, even when he was ill-treated by his adversaries, he invariably returned good for evil. He took special delight in imparting instructions to his disciples and in transforming their moral character.

The day when he was about to quit his body and attain union with God, he peremptorily ordered that whatever was kept in his storeroom should be given away to the poor, and nothing should be kept behind. Just a moment before he breathed his last, he opened his private box and bequeathed the following gifts to his disciple Sheikh Nasiruddin Chiragh: a prayer-carpet, a cloak, a rosary, and a wooden-staff.

Then he said his morning prayer. While the sun was rising, this "glorious sun of religion" disappeared in the realm of eternity.

The date of his passing away, chronicled by the historians, is Wednesday, 18th of the Arabic month Rabiulawal 725 A.M. His mausoleum is in Delhi, where all classes of people congregate every week to pay their homage to him.

### **Epistles Of Nizamuddin Aulia**

The epistles of Nizamuddin Aulia are treated by Muslim scholars as his original works. The following books compiled by his disciples may be mentioned as authoritative: (1) *Fawcclul Fawad*; (2) *Fazlul Fawad*; (3) *Rahtul Fawad*; (4) *Searul Aulia*.

The first one was compiled and edited by Khwaja Hasan Sanjari, who was one of the most beloved disciples of the saint.

There is a story about this disciple. Once, the Sheikh visited the tomb of Sheikh bakhtiar Kaki, where he saw Hasan Sanjari enjoying his life in revelry and drunkenness in the company of his pleasure-loving friends.

As Hasan Sanjari had spent his early days in the company of the Sheikh in Badayun, and was quite familiar with him, he composed a quatrain addressed to the Sheikh,



the purport of which was that he had spent years in his company, but had not derived any benefit from him. "Thy piety has not helped me to renounce my evil ways, which are stronger than thy piety." These words touched the Sheikh's heart, who simply said that "everything has its own time; you will have your better days." These words of the Sheikh kindled a new life in Hasan Sanjari, who fell on his feet, and from that time, he renounced his sinful habits and began to lead a pious life.

The Sheikh accepted him as his disciple. From 707 till 719 A.H., whatever he heard from his Murshid's lips, he committed them to writing, which were compiled in a book form under the caption *Maljuzat*. These letters of the Sheikh were held in high esteem by the mystics of those times, and even up to this day, they are treated as the highest mystical authority.

*Fazlul Fawad* contains another set of epistles collected and chronicled by Amir Khusro.

The epistles of the third one, named *Rahtul Fawad*, were collected by an unknown disciple from 689 to 698 A.H., a rare copy of which is still preserved in the British Museum in London.

Khwaja Syed Mohammad Mubarak was one of the Sheikh's disciples who, in his well-known book *Searul Aulia*, has preserved the Sheikh's instructions along with the biographical notes of the saints of the Chisti order.

### **The Sheikh's Teachings**

I. The true devotee of God is one who at all times bears Him in mind and loves nothing but Him and yearns for union with one's Beloved. Love of God has two aspects: love of God Himself, and love of His attributes. The former

comes from His grace, and the latter is the result of constant practice. What one has to do in this respect is to free one's mind from things other than God, and constantly occupy the mind with the thought of God. There are four obstacles in this path:

- (a) The world and its passing attractions.
- (b) God's creatures.
- (c) Temptations of the lower self.
- (d) Satan and the temptations spread by him.

The methods to remove these obstacles are these:

(1) If you lead a sequestered life, people of the world will not disturb you.

(2) Worldly desires can be overcome by contentment.

(3) To overcome one's lower self and the temptations spread by Satan, one should sincerely pray to God to grant strength enough to overcome them.

II. The dervish is a creature of God's love, and the learned people follow the lead of reason. Sin is possible to commit so long as love of God is superficial, but when it becomes deeper and enters the inner core of the heart, sinful thoughts and acts become impossible.

III. Patience and resignation to the Will of God are the *sine qua non* for any success in the path of God-realization. In the face of affliction and calamity, not to murmur and complain is patience. Not to be disgusted when one is a victim of calamity is contentment and resignation. The best example of complete surrender to God's Will is that of a dead body in the hands of one who bathes it. The bather turns it to any side he likes. So the man who has surrendered himself completely to the Will of God has no will of his own. He has merged his individual will in the Divine Will. Full and abiding faith in God comes only to those who treat this

world, with all its seeming attractions, as worthless, and who do not depend upon anything except God. Those who pretend to love God and at the same time love the world are liars.

According to Sheikh Nizamuddin, devotion to God depends upon six basic requirements:

(i) The aspirant should lead a sequestered life all by himself. This lonely habit will help him to analyse the insidious working of his lower nature and show him the way to overcome it.

(ii) The aspirant should see that he performs ablutions and preserves purity of body and mind. If at any time he is overcome by sleep, when he wakes up, he should perform ablution again.

(iii) He should try to keep 'fast' all the year round. If it is not possible, he should reduce his meal to a minimum.

(iv) He should always try to keep aloof from everything that does not relate to God.

(v) He should have intense love and devotion to his Murshid.

(vi) For the sake of God, he should be ever ready to renounce everything.

There are four things from which an aspirant should abstain:

(i) He should avoid the company of rich people.

(ii) Renouncing everything other than God, he should occupy his mind with constant remembrance of God.

(iii) He should wholly withdraw his attention from things other than God.

(iv) He should not have even the least interest in worldly things. When once an aspirant realizes the futility and harmfulness of any desire, and makes up his mind to

desist from it once for all, he should never turn back and resume his old habits.

The Sheikh has paid equal attention to both outward morality and inner moral sense. He thinks that a man can develop his spiritual faculties if he eats less, speaks less, and sleeps less, and does not mix himself with the people of the world. He is definitely of opinion that, while refraining from the company of worldly people, he should not ignore what he owes to them. He should discharge his duties and responsibilities to the people with whom he comes in contact.

This leads the aspirant on to have sufficient consideration for the welfare of his neighbours, whose defects and shortcomings he should not make public.

The Sheikh has emphasized the need for the observance of the essential tenets of Islam under any circumstance. The aspirant is enjoined to say his prayer five times daily without fail, keep fast for thirty days, and scrupulously keep away from all evil ways. Further, he says that the aspirant on the path of God should not have the least desire to acquire such powers as may enable him to perform miraculous and extraordinary deeds.

The Sheikh has permitted his disciples to hear such select songs as depict or portray the glory and greatness of God. □

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1960

Neither seek nor avoid, take what comes.

*Swami Vivekananda*

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## The Song of the Sannyasin (An interpretation)

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“One afternoon,” Mary Funke wrote in her memoirs, “when he had been telling us of the glory of renunciation, of the joy and freedom of those of the ochre robe, he suddenly left us and in a short time he had written his *Song of the Sannyasin*; a very passion of sacrifice and renunciation.” Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) may have written this now famous poem on the afternoon of July 23 (1895), the day following his giving monastic initiations, for on that afternoon he had said during the course of a short conversation, “Let go the rope, delusions cannot touch the *Atman*. When we lay hold of the rope - identify ourselves with *maya*, she has power over us. Let go of it, be the Witness only, then you can admire the picture of the universe undisturbed.”<sup>1</sup>

Swami Vivekananda wrote the *Song of the Sannyasin* at Thousand Island Park, during a retreat held with twelve of his disciples. Its thirteen verses contain the essence of *Vedanta* and the fundamental nature of monastic life. It is, no doubt, among the greatest poems ever written.

1. Wake up the note! The song that had its birth  
Far off, where worldly taint could never reach;  
In mountain caves, and glades of forest deep,  
Whose calm no sigh for lust, or wealth, or fame,  
Could ever dare to break; where rolled the stream  
Of knowledge, truth, and bliss that follows both.  
Sing high that note, *sannyasin* bold! Say-  
Om Tat Sat, Om!

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<sup>1</sup>*New Discoveries* p. 166.

Swamiji says “wake up the note.” “Wake up” and not “find out” or some other word that may suggest a search or any other external activity; he simply said wake up, and that is because that note is always present within us, but it is asleep, seldom detected. That note is the manifestation of the Self, the awareness of our real nature that can only take place in a state of perfect detachment, of perfect desirelessness. Hence he says that that song “had its birth far off, where worldly taint could never reach.” Obviously that song can be sang wherever we are, for no particular place is a condition for Self-realization, but it is so said because those who search for this experience of the *Atman* usually retire into solitude, away from all disturbances, “where worldly taint could never reach.”

It is imperative to understand that the “worldly taint” that obscures the Self is both external and internal. The external one can easily be got rid off by closing our external senses to the world outside; something that the forest easily provides. But the internal taint is far more subtle and enduring, extremely difficult to perceive in all its endless ramifications, and can only be removed by developing an intense longing for the Divine, just as Sri Ramakrishna said:

“Weep for God with a longing heart. Tears shed for Him will wash away the clay. When you have thus freed yourself from impurity, you will be attracted by the magnet. Only then will you attain yoga.”<sup>1</sup>

Every sincere spiritual aspirant feels, sooner or later, the need for solitude, the urge to break away from society and merge into the silence within. And this is easier to achieve in mountains and in forests; “whose calm no sigh for lust, or wealth, or fame, could ever dare to break.”

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<sup>1</sup>The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna p. 344.

Sri Ramakrishna himself dwelled in this solitude during his period of *sadhana*, and later he insistently urged his disciples to do the same as much as they could:

"To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind."<sup>1</sup>

"By meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world."<sup>2</sup>

"Out of sight is out of mind," they say. And although it is true that merely going away from the objects of desire does not put an end to the craving for them, it is a fact that it helps; provided that the mind has, as its principal moving force, longing for the divine. Unless the mind has reached a certain level of satiety from enjoyment, and unless it has developed a sincere thirst for the infinite and experienced some taste beyond the senses, this isolation will not remain untainted by lust, greed and the desire for fame. Once these conditions are fulfilled, the aspirant will find that his thirst for the infinite will finally be quenched by "the stream of knowledge, truth, and bliss that follows both." A stream that has been always flowing from every seeking heart; fed by the power of renunciation and inspired by the protecting calmness of solitude.

Singing that note is not child's play, only the very bravest can dare take the plunge. A daredevil attitude is needed to give up everything that up to now has given us security and comfort and walk in utter darkness in search

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<sup>1</sup>*Idem*, pg 81.

<sup>2</sup>*Idem*, pg 82.

of Truth, in a new land uninhabited by the senses. It is for this reason, I believe, that Swamiji closes every verse repeating "...*sannyasin* bold! Say - *Om Tat Sat, Om!*"<sup>1</sup> This is indeed a bold *mantra*, "*Om That Infinite Reality.*" Infinite is our nature, and nothing short of the infinite can ever satisfy us. In one of his lectures<sup>2</sup> Swamiji said, "Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him!" This is, of course, everyone's duty; but it is the *sannyasin* who particularly embodies it, abandoning all worldly goals to fearlessly proclaim the God within.

2. Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,  
Of shining gold or darker, baser ore;  
Love, hate; good, bad; and all the dual throng.  
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free;  
For fetters though of gold, are not less strong to bind;  
Then, off with them, *sannyasin* bold! Say-  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

Now, after declaring in verse one the greatness of that song that was born in forests and in caves, Swamiji begins a merciless exhortation to all men and women of renunciation, to sing it in their daily lives, to live it every moment, to be its very picture. From now on Swamiji gives us a clear idea of what notes that song of freedom is made of. And we can rightly call it a song of freedom, for the *sannyasin* stands for total freedom, and the ochre cloth is, as Swamiji called it, the banner of the free. But freedom from what? From everything that we are not. And most of the verses are devoted to exposing and demolishing all bondages, all pseudo expressions of that freedom.

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<sup>1</sup>Om, That Infinite Reality, Om.

<sup>2</sup>The mission of the Vedanta.



“Strike off thy fetters!” Many are the bonds we must remove, and deep are their roots in our life. In fact whatever makes us feel finite, in any way, is a fetter and it must go. Some are relatively easy to remove, and as we have said earlier, retiring into solitude may be enough to eradicate them in time. Others are so deeply engrained in the mind that no herculean effort seems enough to eliminate them, like lust, greed and anger. But none are as insidious as those that give us the subtlest type of pleasure, like human love, fame, position, pride of learning and pride of holiness. They all bind us: some with iron fetters, others with golden grip, “For fetters though of gold, are not less strong to bind.”

Most people get into a quandary when it comes to human love; they fail to understand the power of its hold and the extent of its blinding force. Once a disciple went to his Guru and asked, “Master, please teach me about life and about love.” The Guru thought and thought for three days and nights, and finally said, “I’ve got it! Life is one silly thing after another, and love is two silly things after each other.”

This human emotion is so infatuating that it renders the mind unfit to understand any subtle truth. Hence Swamiji’s insistence, “know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free.” No matter how much it may pain us, human love must be abandoned if we want to realize the Divine. Jesus said to his disciples, “He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that love in itself is bad, but selfish love is. Sri Ramakrishna explains it very clearly: “Remember that *daya*, compassion, and *maya*, attachment, are two different things. Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' toward one's relatives. It is the love one feels for one's parents, one's

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<sup>1</sup>St. Matthew, 10:37.

brother, one's sister, one's wife and children. Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality... *maya* keeps us in ignorance and entangles us in the world, whereas *daya* makes our hearts pure and gradually unties our bonds."<sup>1</sup> That is the big difference! Love for family and friends is attachment, while love for all beings is a liberating force. But of course, even this must ultimately be given up in order to attain Self-realization, for the mind is to be free from even the desire to do good: "all the dual thron'" has to go.

3. Let darkness go; the will-o'-the-wisp that leads  
With blinking light to pile more gloom on gloom.  
This thirst for life, for ever quench; it drags  
From birth to death, and death to birth, the soul.  
He conquers all who conquers self. Know this  
And never yield, *sannyasin* bold! Say-  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

In ancient lore the will-o'-the-wisp or Jack-o'-lantern is sometimes described as a ghost, sometimes as an evil spirit that lures travellers into the mire by showing them a light that disappears when you approach it, to reappear deeper into the swamp, thus leading you to your doom. This is a very accurate simile of what this thirst for life produces. The more we run after happiness in this world, the more it eludes us. It lures us in a million ways to spend our wits and energy, chasing the hope that if we can get this or that we will certainly be happy; only to find, in the bitter end, that our life was wasted and happiness was never round the corner. And often, even in the face of death we are still unable to understand how ridiculous it is to run after something which, even if we get it, we are bound to lose again.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pg 161.

In the *Mahabharata*<sup>1</sup> Vidura tells a story to Dhritarashtra that illustrates this very point. Once a man found himself in a dense forest teeming with wild beasts. Seeing them he ran terrified. But the animals kept a close chase and he could not outrun them. Then he noticed that the forest was surrounded with a net. He also saw five-headed snakes and tall cliffs around him. He then fell into an almost bottomless pit that had been covered with creepers, and got entangled in them, remaining suspended in mid-air hanging from his feet. While he was in that posture he beheld a large snake within the pit and a gigantic elephant near its mouth. Then he saw that some mice were trying to cut the very creepers from which he was hanging! There was a beehive hanging from the branch of a tree, right above the man, and some honey was slowly dripping from the comb. And the man, in spite of his plight, extended his arm to collect that honey with one finger and put it into his mouth, eager to enjoy it!

And this could be anybody's story. Such is the power of desire! Such is our thirst for life that "it drags from birth to death, and death to birth, the soul." Our unsatisfied desires repeatedly bring us to this round of birth and death. The *sannyasin* is he who has understood - and understood it clearly, with every fibre of his being - that this thirst for life cannot be quenched through satisfaction. He has understood the insubstantiality of worldly life. If someone gives us a golden cup full of nectar, and we know with one hundred percent of certainty that it is poisoned, would we drink it just because it is given in a beautiful golden cup and it tastes of nectar? Certainly not; we would immediately throw it and never look at it again, no matter how charming and attractive it may seem. That is the way a monk or a nun feels about the world and its enjoyments. With this unwavering conviction

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<sup>1</sup> Jalapradanika-parva.

## The Song of the Sannyasin (An interpretation)

in his mind he renounces all selfish desires and drags himself away from any future occasion of relapse. Sri Ramakrishna's advice in this regard is very clear: "One succeeds if one develops a strong spirit of renunciation. Give up at once, with determination, what you know to be unreal."<sup>1</sup>

Then Swamiji tells the *sannyasins*, and everyone, that the only permanent way to conquer the world is to conquer self. The miseries that we suffer are not inflicted on us by the world. The world is just a mirror where we only watch the reflection of our own desires and fears. It requires great humility and strength to recognise and accept that we are the only problem; and a greater strength still, to act in our life in accordance with that knowledge. "He conquers all who conquers self, know this and never yield, *sannyasin* bold!"

(to be continued)

The more intensely you analyze yourself the more you will understand the condition of your own mind, and you will be able to eliminate the subtler cravings. When you are able to free yourself from these deep-seated, subtle desires, when the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed in real meditation. The practice of *japam* and meditation brings the aspirant to this stage.

Swami Brahmananda

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pg 246.

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

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The prudence of St. John of the Cross is in perfect accord with the instructions we have received from the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Sarada Devi used to recommend to her spiritual children to keep their heads cool and their digestive system in good condition. If the brain heats up, it becomes easily subject to hallucinations. St. John of the Cross considers that even if the visions come from an authentic supernatural source, it is good to reject them and not accord them any importance. Instead of fortifying evangelical faith, visions remove the mind from the substance of Faith, for the substance of Faith surpasses all means of expression.

Monks of a spiritual order have renounced their families, possessions, and worldly career for a single goal: to realise God. When, under the pretext of spiritual experiences, they become subject to visions or supernatural voices, etc., with a few rare exceptions, the way is opened to schizophrenia or paranoia. Thus the Holy Mother says, with a kind of irony, that precisely those who have devoted their lives to a good cause (and their number is greater than one imagines), those whose prime objective is liberation (*Mukti*), are the ones who get most tightly bound in the meshes of *Maya*. If the disciple finds a suitable spiritual director, those dangers are avoided; but often spiritual life is an evasion from the responsibilities of life, a search for artificial compensations and consolations which ends lamentably in pathological afflictions. St. John of the Cross fought fiercely against this kind of cheap spiritual glory. The saint's whole doctrine is completely oriented towards what Zen calls

"letting go". However, the supernatural forces which awaken in us are powerful claws which reinforce the grip of the ego instead of obliging it to let go.

Let us pause a moment in our comparison of the traditional *Raja yoga* of India and the Master Yogi of the Christian tradition: St. John of the Cross. Let us study the place and importance of an exercise assiduously practised by Hindu *Raja yogins*: *manasapuja*. This exercise consists of the adoration of a mental image accompanied by the repetition of a holy Name. Swami *Brahmananda* and Sri Mahapurushji Maharaj, direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, used to advise us to meditate on a spiritual image or representation and synchronise *dhyana* (concentration) with *japa*, or the repetition of the *mantra* received from the Guru. St. John of the Cross is of the contrary opinion. He recommends removing from the mind all forms and images. How can we reconcile these two attitudes?

The root of this contradiction is in the metaphysical differences which condition the two spiritual viewpoints. Let us try to give an exact statement of the difference. The process of Christian realisation, according to the Faith, is union with the divine, and proceeds by the elimination of all forms; St. John of the Cross gives a minute description of the nature of that union. The soul passes through ten degrees successively, nine of which are accessible on this earth; the tenth, the state of perfect union, is reserved for the soul's celestial glory after death.

*Raja yoga*, as practiced in India, teaches, on the one hand, pure devotion (*bhakti*), which is the knowledge of the relationship between the soul and God, if the disciple belongs to a dualistic school; or if the disciple belongs to the *advaitic* school, *advaitic* knowledge which restores to man

the memory of his identity with "That," "Thou art That." However the teaching of *Raja yoga* also includes a knowledge of the Totality. The Totality is time and space. The compass of all manifestation (time, space, causality) constitutes *maya*. The Christian idea is to strive to attain a state of transcendence, beyond time, or at least a state where time is arrested. The aim of *Raja yoga* in India consists of suppressing all modifications of the mind in order to attain *samadhi* without seed; this process corresponds to the immersion of the mind in the Dark Night. For us, that experience brings knowledge of only half of Reality - if indeed we can use that expression; the other half is *maya*, the manifested world. The disciple now strives to obtain knowledge of *maya*, instead of being satisfied with rejecting it as an obstacle.

Our understanding is limited by our ignorance, which engenders ignorance in turn, and precludes a "synoptic" view of Reality; thus the characteristic of ignorance is a partial vision of *maya*, and, according to the Shakta school, *maya* is assimilated into the *Shakti* (energy) of *Brahman*, which is to say, Reality. (See *The World as Power* by S. J. Woodroffe). This limited vision of ignorance stirs up false identification and makes us take the part for the whole. As soon as we have acknowledged that knowledge of *maya* is *Brahman*, we know that there is no difference between the Absolute and its manifestation. This is the concept of Totality and, since the Totality is identical with the *Shakti* of *Brahman*, that is the same as to say that the Totality is *Brahman*. This is the summit of the *Vedantic* teaching to which *Raja yoga* leads us.

The temporary thesis which *Vedanta* lays down at the beginning of spiritual life is this: "*Brahman* is the Reality, the world is illusion;" and it terminates in the ultimate truth of spiritual life: the totality is *Brahman*.

Now let us take a look at the road which *Vedanta* takes before achieving that result. In order to school the disciple in concentration, he is asked to fix his mind on an image or a fixed object, and to repeat simultaneously a *mantram* (sacred formula).

We are going to explain the profound metaphysical significance of this kind of concentration. The fixed object symbolises the idea of space. The original notion of space is awakened in us by some landmark, some fixed object, for instance, the sun or a whole celestial constellation. That first experience is cognised as the distance between two fixed points, but we quickly note that a single point (the sun) itself consists of space. The bricks with which a wall is constructed appear separated in space; but in fact, they are themselves only a condensation of space. The eminent professor Theodore Karman, an authority on aerodynamics, explained to us that, according to modern science, matter is nothing but a condensation of empty space. We think that it is possible to find a connection between that scientific view and the *Vedantic* cosmology; the *akasha* of *Vedanta* is "empty space" and *prana* (the primordial energy or *Shakti*) is a condensation of *akasha*.

Now we are going to see by what process *Vedantic* thought arrives at the knowledge of *akasha*, the source and origin of all existence, which penetrates everything. The method of meditation in *Raja yoga* uses certain symbols. As concentration intensifies, the object of meditation loses its particular form; it expands in the field of consciousness of the meditator, and by that expansion the meditator penetrates ever more subtle states.

Attachment to a determined form to the exclusion of all others is idolatry. Here we can refer again to the



illustration of clay seen as prime matter; the capacity to conceive an infinity of possible forms in the clay is equivalent to the Cosmic Form, the matrix of all forms, in the essence of which all forms find their mould. Attraction towards fixed Reality in a unique form to the exclusion of all other proceeds from the desire for compensation and results from false identification. Our friend Dr. H. Benoit has written a very interesting page on that question: "Our compensations are necessary to our total realisation since without them we could not accept existence, and we would destroy ourselves at once; they are on the way of our correct evolution towards *satori*. But the obtaining of *satori* assumes that some day we shall pass beyond our compensations. This passing-beyond should be understood not as a loss of the vivifying substance contained in our compensations, but as a bursting of the formal and exclusive circumference which was limiting this substance. The reality seen in the idol is not wiped out but is diffused outside the idol whose restrictive circumference has burst."<sup>1</sup>

Reprinted from *Vedanta for East and West*, Jul-Aug, 1991  
(to be continued)

And it is when his grace descends that infinite knowledge unfolds. Then one no longer cares for the study of the scriptures. Direct knowledge is one thing and 'book' knowledge is another. This, however, does not mean that one should give up the study of the scriptures; for, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The fan is needed until the spring breeze blows."

Swami Premananda

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<sup>1</sup> Hubert Benoit, *The Supreme Doctrine*.

## **Programme for Jan and Feb 2010**

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

**Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm**

Tel: 01628 526464 - [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Jan	1	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Jan	3	No talk	
Jan	10	What is Hinduism? 29	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	17	Katha Upanishad 10	Swami Shivarupananda
Jan	24	What is Hinduism? 30	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	31	What is Hinduism? 31	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	7	What is Hinduism? 32	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	14	Sri Ramakrishna's Puja	
Feb	21	Katha Upanishad 11	Swami Shivarupananda
Feb	28	Day Retreat	

### **Swami Vivekananda's Puja**

**Friday 1 January 2010**

at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

### **Sri Ramakrishna's Puja**

**Sunday 14 February**

at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at  
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 28 February  
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

*continued from the inside front cover*

*God; otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands.*

*Bondage and liberation are of the mind*

*"It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. It is like white clothes just returned from the laundry. If you dip them in red dye, they will be red. If you dip them in blue or green, they will be blue or green. They will take only the colour you dip them in, whatever it may be. Haven't you noticed that, if you read a little English, you at once begin to utter English words: Foot fut it mit? Then you put on boots and whistle a tune, and so on. It all goes together.*

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, October 27, 1882*

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## Vedanta

is a bi-monthly magazine published, since 1951,  
by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End,  
Buckinghamshire SL8 5LF, U.K.

Phone: (01628) 526464 - [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Subscription rate for 6 issues: £9 or \$17.50 post free.

*Editor: Swami Dayatmananda*

*Assistant Editors: Swami Shivarupananda,  
Swami Chidakarananda*

*Editorial Advisers:*

*Swami Swahananda, Hollywood;  
John Phillips*

£1.50

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Spiritual attainment does not depend on any dogma, or doctrine, or belief. Whether one is Christian or Jewish or Gentile, it does not matter. Are you unselfish? That is the question. If you are, you will be perfect without reading a single religious book or without going into a single church or temple.

*Swami Vivekananda*



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