

Vedanta

408 JULY - AUGUST 2019

The Science of Mantra or the Sacred Word

Swami Ghanananda

**The Story of the First Hindu Temple in the
West**

Swami Tattwamayana



Divine Wisdom

Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 5



A WORLDLING IS A POOR EXPONENT OF THE SASTRAS

A man wanted to engage a Bhagavata pandit who could explain the Bhagavata to him. His friend said: "I know of an excellent pandit. But there is one difficulty; he does a great deal of farming. He has four ploughs and eight bullocks and is always busy with them; he has no leisure." Thereupon the man said: "I don't care for a pandit who has no leisure. I am not looking for a Bhagavata scholar burdened with ploughs and bullocks. I want a pandit who can really expound the sacred book to me."

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Swami Vivekananda's Moral Ideas and Ideals - 4

Swami Vivekananda on Good and Evil

One of the fundamental questions of ethics is: what is good and what is evil? According to the Swami: "Good and evil are but superstitions and do not exist. The difference is only in degree. It is all the manifestation of that Atman: He being manifested in everything: only when the manifestation is very thin, we call it evil and when it is very thick, we call it good. It is best when all covering goes away. There is evil and there is good; and the apex, the centre is the Reality. He is neither evil nor good; He is the best. The best can be only one, the good can be many and the evil many."¹

The relative nature of good and evil can be viewed from four different standpoints:

Good and evil are relative with respect to the same individual at different periods of existence and different states of his mind. Says the Swami, "How many things we see in our childhood which we think to be good but which are really evil, and how many things which seems to be evil which are good.what we thought good at one time we do not think so good now".²

"Life", says the Swami, "is good or evil according to the state of mind in which we look at it, it is neither by itself. Fire, by itself is neither good nor evil. When it burns our fingers, we blame it. Still in itself, it is neither good nor bad. According as we use it, it produces in us the feeling of good or bad; so also, is this world."³

Good and evil are relative with respect to different persons at the same time. Says the Swami rather humorously, "The thing that is good for me is bad for you. If you eat the dinner I eat you will begin to weep and I shall laugh. We may both dance but I with joy and you with pain."⁴

Good and evil are relative with respect to variations in external social conditions. The Swami, by giving the example of beef-eating shows how that act can be good for a Christian but bad for a Hindu. Similarly, if a man kills a person on the street, he is doing a bad act but the same man as a soldier in his regiment, may kill several enemies and yet he may feel he had done a good act.

In general, according to the Swami, "every action is a mixture of good and evil. We cannot put a line of demarcation and say: this action is entirely good and this entirely evil. There is no action which does not bear good and evil fruits at the same time."⁵

That is why he says: "Our philosophy teaches that evil and good are eternally conjoined, the obverse and reverse of the same coin. If you have one you must have other. This is the law. Therefore, the only thing that we can do is to understand that all this work against evil is more subjective than objective."⁶

A question may arise. How can we explain the universal prevalence of sorrow and pain caused by evil? How can we reconcile the optimistic views of Vedantic religion with the existence of evil in the world? The Swami gives a brilliant answer: "I can only answer the question if the existence of evil be first proved; but this the Vedantic religion does not admit. Eternal pain unmixed with pleasure would be a positive evil but temporal pain and sorrow, if they have contributed an element of tenderness and nobility tending towards eternal bliss, are not evils; on the contrary, they may be supreme good. We cannot assert that anything is evil until we have traced its sequence into the realm of eternity."⁷

Further, he points out the harm caused to humanity by stressing the erroneous concept of evil. He says: "Good and evil are different forms of superstitions. They have gone through all sorts of dualistic delusions and all sorts of ideas, and the words have sunk into the hearts of human beings, terrorising man and women and

living there as terrible tyrants. They make us become tigers. All the hatred with which we hate others is caused by these foolish ideas which we have imbibed since childhood – good and evil. Our judgement of humanity becomes entirely false; we make this beautiful earth a hell; but as soon as we can give up good and evil, it becomes a heaven.”⁸

Lest the above discussion be misinterpreted as a license for evil actions it needs to be pointed out that devil worship is not part of Swamiji’s ethics. He makes it very clear that “Unless a man cuts through the layers of evil he cannot be the layer of good and unless he has passed through both the layers of good and evil, he cannot reach the Self.”⁹

That is to say that by doing good alone we become happy and the same done unattached for its own sake leads us out of this life of contradiction. Moreover, for the individual the Swami asserts: “It is our own mental attitude which makes the world what it is for us. Our thoughts make things beautiful; our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds. Learn to see things in the proper light. First, believe in this world – that there is meaning behind everything. Everything in the world is good, is holy and beautiful. If you see something evil think that you are not understanding it in the right light.”¹⁰

“What is meant by morality? Making the subject strong by attuning it to the absolute so that finite nature ceases to have control over us. There are two components in every action, the one subject, the other object, and the one aim of life is to make the subject master of the object. For instance, I feel unhappy because a man scolds me. My struggle will be to make myself strong enough to conquer the environment, so that he may scold and I shall not feel. Change is always subjective...the conquest of evil comes by the change in the subject alone.”¹¹

Strength as a guiding factor in moral life

As we have already seen above, ethical thought is indeed very subtle. Coupled with this are the intricacies of practical moral life. Thus, even a person with right attitude and understanding of moral principles may well feel overwhelmed and at times the conflicts and deceptions of the mind may leave him stranded in the midst of the fierce battle of life. The case of the hero of the Mahabharata, Arjuna, at the beginning of the battle of Kurukshetra is too well-known to merit further elucidation. Here, too we have a unique and remarkable solution given by the Swami. Says he, "This is the one question I put to every man, woman or child when they are in physical, mental or spiritual training. Are you strong? Do you feel strength? For I know that truth alone gives life and nothing but going towards reality will make us strong."¹²

In fact, strength forms the focal point of all judgements and decisions in the Swami's scheme of life including moral and ethical ones. He is so emphatic on this point that he again and again reiterates this central point, "and here is the test of truth – anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject it as poison : there is no life in it, it cannot be true."¹³

But what makes Swami Vivekananda give such a pivotal role to 'Strength' as the guiding force? Is it a mere pep-talk? Is it meant for only a select few? Or is it restricted to certain phases of life? Or is it limited to certain aspects of life? No, says the Swami, "the best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it."¹⁴ "Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating."¹⁵

This dictum is based on the teachings of the Upanishads and the Swami's realization of the same which he asserts emphatically: "So I preach only the Upanishads. If you look, you will find that I

have never quoted anything but the Upanishads. And of the Upanishads, it is only that idea – Strength. The quintessence of the Vedas and Vedanta and all lies in the one word.”¹⁶

The means to achieve moral perfection

Despite his high idealism Swami Vivekananda was not merely an ethical philosopher or a preacher of morality, but he was a prophet of the highest order concerned with the moral and spiritual well-being of entire mankind. Therefore, he always felt that, “The great error in all ethical systems without exception, has been the failure of teaching the means by which man could refrain from doing evil. All the systems of ethics teach, ‘Do not steal’: very good : but why does a man steal? Because, stealing, robbing, and other evil actions as a rule, have become automatic. The systematic robber, thief, liar, unjust man and woman are all these in spite of themselves.”¹⁷

Having enunciated this problem he then elaborates the practical means of achieving good moral character within the framework of his religious disciplines in the form of the four yogas. Each of these four yogas is so devised so as to transform the rational animal into the moral man and review the principles underlying the method of moral perfection according to him. To the intellectual men, the Swami exhorts: “Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.”¹⁸

He further asserts: “Strength is the medicine that the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned; and it is the medicine that sinners must have when tyrannised over by other sinners and nothing gives us such strength as this idea of monism.”¹⁹

On being questioned whether this philosophy of Vedanta is practical the Swami emphatically replies: "It is practicable, and the only thing that is practicable in this world. We say you are a born Vedantist, each one of you. You are declaring your oneness with everything each moment you live. Every time that your heart goes out towards the world, you are a true Vedantist, only you do not know it. You are moral without knowing why; and the Vedanta is the philosophy which analysed and taught man to be moral consciously."²⁰

Before this Vedantic teaching of Oneness, the fictitious difference between religion and the life of the world vanishes. This ideal must cover the whole field of life and must enter into all our thoughts and find expression in all our actions. Vedanta insists that the positive side of things should be stressed in each one of our thoughts or actions. It teaches everyone not only to merely have faith in the power and purity of one's own soul but have intense sympathy for man in his weakness as all are going to the same goal. The Swami points out that the first thing that a Jnani should do is to stop brooding over evil and sin. Calling oneself and others sinners and dwelling too much on sinfulness, will make things worse only. Mistakes are to be overcome and not merely bemoaned. Men should be taught that they themselves are responsible for their ignorance. That is why he says that it is we ourselves who put our hands over our eyes and weep that it is all dark. The moment we take our hands away there is light; for the soul of man is self-effulgent.

In his lectures on Practical Vedanta the Swami says, "that these highest truths of Vedanta are to be made practical, to be made simple (for the highest truths are simple) so that it may penetrate every pore of human society, and become the property of the

highest intellects and the commonest minds, of the man, woman and child at the same time.”²¹

He calls upon every one to manifest the divinity within in the following inspiring words: “Build up your character, and manifest your real nature - the Effulgent, the Resplendent, the Ever Pure, and call it up in everyone that you see. I wish that everyone of us had come to such a state that even in the vilest of human beings we could see the Real Self within and instead of condemning them, say, ‘Rise thou effulgent one, rise thou who art always pure, rise thou birthless and deathless, rise almighty, and manifest thy birthless and death less, rise almighty, and manifest thy true nature. These little manifestations do not befit thee. This is the highest prayer that the Advaita teaches.”²²

In his Karma-Yoga the Swami says that “if a man thinks good thoughts and does good works, the sum total of these impressions will be good; and they, will force him to do good in spite of himself. When such is the case, a man’s good character is said to be established.”²³

But how is this to be brought about? The Swami answers: “By this continuous reflex of good thoughts, good impressions moving over the surface of the mind, the tendency for doing good becomes strong and as a result we feel able to control the indriyas. Thus, alone will character be established, then alone a man gets to truth. Such a man is safe for ever; he cannot do any evil. You may place him in any company, there will be no danger for him. There is a still higher state that having this good tendency and that is the desire for liberation.”²⁴

The formation of the character is the field of practical morality and liberation which is the transcending of this good character is the field of religion proper. As far as Bhakti yoga is concerned Swamiji clearly distinguishes between worship of God to fulfil

desires and real Bhakti or Love of God. He is of the opinion that this Bhakti cannot be used to fulfil any desires for it in itself is a check on all worldly desires. Also he says: "The great quality of Bhakti is that it cleanses the mind and the firmly established Bhakti for the Supreme Lord is sufficient to purify the mind."²⁵

In fact, the Swami's method of achieving moral perfection through love of God is based on a very fundamental psychological insight based on sublimation of emotions. He explains it beautifully in the following words: "We see love everywhere in nature. Whatever in society is very bad, nay diabolical, is also the ill-diverted working out of the same emotion of love. The emotion is the same, but its manifestation is different in different cases. It is the same feeling of love well or ill-directed, that impels one man to do good and give all he has to the poor, while it makes another man cut the throats of his brother and take away all their possessions. The former loves others as much as the latter loves himself. Bhakti Yoga is the science of higher love. It shows us how to direct it. It shows us how to control it, how to manage it, how to use it, how to give it a new aim, as it were and from it obtain the highest and the most glorious results – that is, how to make it lead us to spiritual blessedness. Bhakti yoga does not say 'Give up'. It only says Love- love the highest; And everything low naturally falls off from him, the object of whose love is the highest."²⁶

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The Science of Mantra or the Sacred Word

Swami Ghanananda

Introduction

There are six systems of Hindu philosophy, and these are known as *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Purva Mimansa* and *Uttara Mimansa* (Vedanta). Of these *Purva Mimansa*, which is based on the ritualistic portion of the Vedas, may be called the philosophy of ritualism. The teachings of this school are embodied in the form of short aphorisms by Jaimini, their author. Jaimini holds that the Vedas—not merely their teachings on spiritual laws and principles, but even their very words—are eternal. The words of the Vedas are uncreate, that is, the connection between a word and the object named by it, between sound and sense, is eternal. The perception of sound is doubtless momentary, but sound always is. Its non-perception is due to the absence of the union of the hearer with it. Sound ever exists, but becomes manifest when uttered by man. Says Jaimini, “Sound is eternal, because it serves to convey a meaning. The object denoted by a name always goes with the name.”

In Indian philosophy mind is considered to be subtle matter and made of *akasha*, the first of the five ‘elements’. It must be remembered that the mental concept of an object is a modification of mind, and therefore of the same *akasha* of which mind is made. The uttered name of that object is a temporary manifestation of the eternal sound which is a permanent manifestation of the *akasa*. Hence a thought exists permanently attached to its name; the thought and the name rise together in consciousness. This is why the Hindu scriptures call manifestation mere *namarupa* (name and form) (Ch. Up. vi. 1.3).

The Indian philosophers considered the study of language an integral part of philosophy. Commenting on this, Max Muller observes in his *Six Systems of Philosophy*: "They had evidently perceived that language is the only phenomenal form of thought, and that, as human beings possess no means of perceiving the thoughts of others, nay even their own thoughts, except in the form of words, it was the duty of a student of thought to inquire into the nature of words before he approached or analysed the nature of what we mean by thought, naked thought, nay skinned thought, as it has been truly called, when divested of its natural integuments, the word. They understood what even modern philosophers have failed to understand, that there is a difference between *Vorstellung* (presentation or precept) and *Begriff* (concept), and that true thought has to do with conceptual words only, nay, that the two, word and thought, are inseparable, and perish when separated." (P. 401, 1928 edition)

Sir Oliver Lodge points out the same truth when he says: The connection between soul and body, or more generally between spiritual and material, has been illustrated by the connection between the meaning of a sentence and the written or spoken word conveying that meaning. The writing or the speaking may be regarded as an incarnation of the meaning, a mode of stating or exhibiting its essence. As delivered, the sentence must have time relations: it must have a beginning, a middle and an end; it may be repeated, and the same general meaning may be expressed in other words; but the intrinsic meaning of the sentence itself need have no time relations, it may be true always, it may exist as an eternal "now" though it may be perceived and expressed by humanity with varying clearness from time to time." (Life and Matter, p.115)

Patanjali, an elder contemporary of the Buddha, modified the doctrine of the eternity of sound (*śabda*) by holding that the substance of the Veda is eternal, but not the words.

Bhartrihari (seventh century A.D.) expounded the doctrine of the *śphota*. In his *karika* called *Vakyapadiya* he says: "Those who know sound know that there are two sounds in the words we speak—one the cause of sound, and the other denoting the object." This means that one sound exists in the mind before we utter a word, and the second is the uttered word. The potential word which is in our mind is called the *śphota*. This *śphota* is also called Sabda-Brahman or Nada-Brahman. Hiranyagarbha (the Cosmic Mind) first manifested himself as name, and then as form which is this universe. Behind this form there is the eternal inexpressible *śphota*, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, the power through which the Lord creates the universe; the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *śphota*, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This *śphota* has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is Om. (Swami Vivekananda - Bhakti Yoga)

In the Rig Veda Vagdevi—the goddess of speech, known also as Saraswati—is praised in many hymns. In the Brahmanas she is identified as the sole companion of Hiranyagarbha, who cooperated with him in the evolution of name and form. The Satapatha Brahmana teaches 'His mind entered into union with speech and identifies her with Aditi.' As she represents the power of the mantras, she later became identified with the Sakti of the Agamas (known also as the Tantras).

Word as Power

When a word is uttered it conveys a meaning, and this meaning is the object or the idea denoted by the word. When someone hears a word, first it creates a mental apprehension and then the

meaning flashes in the mind whether the object is at hand or not, or if an idea is meant it is grasped by the mind. If this is true of ordinary words, it is also true of divine words or mystic syllables. There is such a thing as the divine word which is the causal stress. This causal stress creates cosmic ideation. A spoken word is but a gross manifestation of the subtle word, and the subtle word is a manifestation of the causal word.

That God speaks the Word and the universe appears as a result of His speaking is a very ancient conception, accepted by all religions except Jainism and Buddhism which deny God. In Genesis we find, "God said: 'Let there be light' and there was light". The divine Word, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, possesses creative power. The word preceded creation. The Fourth Gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Veda, the oldest extant scripture of the world, says: "In the beginning was Brahman; second to Him was the Word which was with Him; the Word is Brahman." The Word is spoken of as second to Him, because it is first potentially in Him, and then as Power issues from Him. The Word is thus the Power of Brahman, which is one with the Possessor of Power.

Creation

The transcendental Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is quiescent. In it there is no sound and therefore no meaning and no mental apprehension or cosmic ideation, and therefore no name or form either. In this infinite calm of Brahman, a metaphysical point of stress arises, and from this issue forth the myriad forces of this universe. This energizing is the cause of the world process and of the duality of subject and object, of mind and matter. The play of Power (*Shakti*) occurs in the ether of consciousness (*Chidakasa*) in such a manner that this ether is neither effaced nor affected when the new condition appears, and this new condition

is that of both transcendence and immanence. Through the operation of this Power the homogeneous Unity of Pure Consciousness becomes the diversity of the universe of subject and object: however the Unity does not cease to be such, but only involves Itself in subject and object This is creation which endures for a cycle, which is only a day of Brahma; afterwards dissolution takes place. In the state of dissolution there are the seeds of future manifestation of creation.

Om, the Sound of the First Cosmic Vibration

Creation is possible only through an initial movement or vibration in what we in the West call the cosmic stuff and which in Sanskrit is known as *Prakriti*. Pure Consciousness is equated with absolute rest and absolute quiescence, but *Prakriti* has movement and power. During the state of dissolution of the universe *Prakriti* is in a state of equilibrium of the three gunas (which are both substance and quality) known as *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. When this state of equilibrium, which is often known as cosmic sleep, is over. *Prakriti* begins to move. This movement is the first cosmic vibration in which the equilibrated energy is released, the approximate sound of this movement being the mantra Om. The causal stress or vibration is also known as Sabda-Brahman.

Subject and Object

Duality with all its multifarious varieties is produced by this creation. As consciousness bifurcates into subject and object, mind and matter, these form a parallelism of common origin. Within this subject there is the Thing-in-Itself called the Atman and within the object also there is the Thing-in-Itself. Mind and matter are, therefore, mutually connected by a natural relation. Hence the correlation between feeling and the object of feeling, perception and the object perceived. Thus, sensation and its object are only two

aspects of one and the same thing. When an object is perceived with the help of the senses and the mind, there arises in the mind a modification of its substance which is an exact counterpart of the object perceived. This explains why by *japa* (repetition) of mantra (spiritual formula), worship and meditation, the mind takes the form of the object of worship and is rendered pure for the time being through the purity and holiness of the divine object, namely the *Ishtadevata* (chosen Ideal), which is its content. By continual practice the mind thinks only of this object to the exclusion of all else and becomes steady in its purity. This is the purpose of spiritual disciplines.

Mind and Matter

According to Vedanta everything is matter which is not Pure Consciousness or Spirit. When this is associated with mind and matter, it is immanent. When the Spirit is clothed with mind and matter in a living thing, say man, it becomes individualized. When it is clothed with cosmic mind and cosmic matter, it is the Cosmic Spirit.

Each of these—both the Cosmic Spirit and the individual soul—has three bodies, causal, subtle and gross. When we are awake, we are in the gross physical body. When we are in a dream state, we are said to be in the subtle body made up of thoughts and feelings. When we are in deep sleep without dream, we are said to be in the causal body which is made of individual *prakriti* or *maya*. Though man exists in one or the other of these bodies, the individual soul that is in them all is one and the same. The three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep are the three modes of being of the same individual soul. In the waking state it is called *viswa* in the dream state it is called *taijasa*; and in the sleep state it is called *prajna*.

Corresponding to these three modes of being of the individual soul, there are three modes of the Divine Being, called *Virat*, *Hiranyagarbha* and *Ishwara* (God). The Power of *Ishwara* is often termed the Power of *Prakriti* or Power of *Maya*. Thus *Virat* is the Cosmic Spirit whose body is the entire universe, corresponding to our physical body of which we are aware in our waking state; *Hiranyagarbha* is the Cosmic Spirit whose body is the mental universe, that is, subtle, made of ideas and feelings, like those of our dream; and *Ishwara* as the Cosmic Spirit has for His body *Prakriti* or Cosmic Nescience, corresponding to the nescience we are in when we sleep, but with this difference, that whereas we are overpowered by individual nescience, God is the controller of nescience, also known as *Maya* in Vedanta and *Prakriti* in *Samkhya* which contains the seeds of future creation. These three bodies of one and the same Cosmic Spirit correspond to our gross, subtle and causal bodies in which we are said to exist when waking, dreaming and sleeping soundly. These bodies, whether they belong to the individual soul or the Cosmic Spirit, are its adjuncts (*upadhis*) which are evolved from the power of *Maya* or of *Prakriti*.

Mind being a manifestation of Sakti or Power, translated to the material plane, it is as much a material as is matter itself. Mind is subtle compared to matter, and matter is a dense and gross form of the more subtle and tenuous form (known as *tanmatra*) of the Power of *Prakriti* which in the ultimate analysis constitutes both mind and matter, and which is common to both.

Vedanta holds that mind is neither all-pervading nor atomic, but limited and divisible into parts, and thus can take the form of its objects. One part of the mind can attend to something and also to something else at one and the same time. It also can assume the shape of an object perceived and therefore can spread or shrink with it. It pervades our whole body whether we are awake or

dreaming, and in deep dreamless sleep it is withdrawn as all else into the casual body.

Matter exists in differing forms of density. Thus, there is gross matter which is derived from a subtle form (*tanmatra*) of the same, which is not sensed by the gross ear or other senses but mentally apprehended by the yogi. There are subtle objects which may be perceived through the senses or the mind by one who possesses 'powers', these powers being mere extensions of the normal faculty. The 100-inch telescope at Mt. Wilson revealed, it is said, one eighth of space, and the 200-inch telescope at Mt. Palomar can now reveal a quarter of observable space. As we improve our instruments, we see more, but beyond a certain point perception takes place not through the senses but through the mind. Everything may be perceived by the mind, except the supreme Self or Spirit. This in Itself is never an object, being beyond mind and speech. The experience of objects becomes more and more subtle until the state of Supreme Experience is attained when there is neither subject nor object. Mind and speech can only hint at it.

The Supreme Sound

Sound exists only where there is movement or vibration. If there is no vibration, there is no sound, and if there is no sound, there cannot be vibration. The supreme Brahman beyond attributes and activity is beyond sound, but *Ishwara* (Brahman with Power) is Sabda-Brahman or the Supreme Sound. This is the causal body of sound; *sabda-tanmatra* or the principle of sound is the subtle body of sound, and *akasa* (subtle ether) is the gross body of sound (apprehended only through the medium of air, the sound waves in which strike the ear). When the mind is joined to it, the sensation of sound is experienced.

Sabda-tanmatra or the principle of sound, is pure natural sound as apprehended by Hiranyagarbha (Cosmic Mind) and by yogis

who share the experience of Hiranyagarbha. Gross sound is either the sound represented by revealed words (Veda), or the speech of man.

Ishwara (God) directly apprehends all four kinds of sounds— Sabda-Brahman (the Supreme Sound), *sabda-tanmatra* (the subtle principle of sound), Vedic sound and human speech; Hiranyagarbha or Cosmic Mind directly apprehends the last three; Rishis the last two; and ordinary men the last only. Now when we deal with apprehension, meaning and sound in their cosmic and individual aspect, we shall see that on the *Ishwara* (God) level, that is, in so far as there is the cosmic causal body, apprehension is the *Ishwara* (God) Consciousness of His own sheath of Bliss (*Anandamaya*) and the cosmic ideation whereby He projects the universe. This cosmic ideation is the Supreme Sound. It evolves into various kinds of lower sounds including mantras. Its approximate representation to the Rishi's ear is Om. *Anandamaya Kosha*, mentioned above corresponds to the sheath of bliss in which man is said to exist in deep dreamless sleep. It is so called because such sleep is happy. Man has five sheaths. In terms of bodies he has three bodies. The sheath of bliss is the same as the causal body in which he remains in deep dreamless sleep.

The Veda explains creation in this manner. Regarding the universe as constituted of sound in its causal sense, the Veda says, "Creation is out of the Supreme Sound. Using creation in the sense of creative ideation it says that creation is only apprehension. When it speaks in terms of the meaning of the sound, it says, "Creation is only *artha* (meaning)", i.e. the Supreme Meaning, the cosmic 'stuff' or cosmic 'Matter' which is *Prakriti-Shakti*, Primal Matter-Power.

As God (*Ishwara*) is conscious of His causal body from which has evolved the universe, He experiences "I am all." He experiences

Himself as all, whether as a whole, as generals or as particulars. He wills to be many and the elements issue from Him. The creation of these elements according to Vedanta means (1) the evolving of the *tanmatras*, which are infra-sensible, (2), their primary compounds. These primary compounds are either subtle or gross. The subtle ones are the ego, *buddhi* (determining faculty), *manas* (that part of the mind which receives the impressions from the outside world), and *chitta* (mind-stuff), the sub-conscious—which four are known as the internal organs,—and the organs of action and the organs of knowledge (nerve-centres in the brain) and *pranas* (vital energies). The creation of all these implies also their natural names. Thus from Om, the sound representing the acoustic aspect of the tendency of potential stress to pass into kinetic stress, are evolved the natural names (called *bijas*, literally meaning 'the seed words') of the elements—*Ham*, *Yam*, *Ram*, *Vam*, *Lum* and other *bijas* such as *Hrim* (the *Maya Bija* or *Pranava* of the differentiating *Shakti* or Power).

We are all aware that by using delicate instruments we may hear sounds which are not sensible to the unaided ear. An adept in yoga may hear more. As Sir John Woodroffe aptly points out, if you were to hear the rise of sap in a tree, that sound would be the direct approximate natural name of that vegetable function. It is said that in a similar manner, when the *Kundalini Shakti* pierces the six centres, the yogi can directly apprehend the *bijas Om*, *Ham*, *Yam* and the rest as the passage of *Shakti* gradually vitalizes the six centres. By rising to the highest plane a yogi can directly experience any or all kinds of sounds. In the experience of Brahman or the Absolute the yogi becomes the Brahman Itself when all stress ceases and there is Peace.

Om, the sound of the first creative movement or stress of *Prakriti* or *Shakti* is the totality of the universe denoted by the creative

impulse and also of all sounds. From Om all mantras are derived. From Om were derived all the letters and sounds. Om is the approximate representation of the primordial sound.

Natural Names

We have already referred to the natural name of a moving object, say the rising sap in a tree, or in yogic language the rising of the *Kundalini* power in men from the basic centre to the higher centres. A natural name is, therefore, the sound produced by the generating stress (*Shakti* or power) or constituting forces of a thing, not as apprehended by the human ear but by the supreme and infinite ear which apprehends unconditionally sound in itself or as such, without being subject to the varying conditions of time, place or plane, or person. The natural name of a thing is that sound which the supreme infinite ear hears. Strictly speaking, this cannot be the natural name that man employs, as the latter can only approximate. In this sense even Om is sound only approximately representing the first general stir or vibration of *Shakti* or *Prakriti*, but the yogi's ear can hear the exact sound: the primordial sound Om has descended down to our human plane in a form which cannot be exact but which is the nearest approach to the sound intended to be reproduced. No finite tongue can utter it exactly and no finite ear can hear it perfectly.

Om is an open continuous sound, uninterrupted by any consonant which clips it, vanishing as it were upward in the *Nadabindu* which is placed on the vowel.

According to the science of mantra what are known as *bija* mantras (seed-words or root words) approximately represent natural names, but when we explain their import or significance, we have to employ words which are not natural names at all.

Om, *Hangsah*, *Swaha*, etc., are approximate natural names of fundamental or primary sounds from the Vedas, the revealed

scriptures of the Indo-Aryans. *Ram, Hrim, Aim, etc.*, are *Tantrik bijas* from the science and literature of the Tantras.

Hamsah represents the causal sound of the function of vital energy (prana) as breathing, and is called the *prana-bija*. If we watch the breathing, we shall notice that the outward breath produces the sound represented by *Ha* and the indrawn breath by *Sa*. This is also true of Om.

The Supreme Consciousness known as *Paramashiva* is changeless and enduring from the static transcendental standpoint, but from the kinetic creative aspect (*Shiva-Shakti* or *Shiva* with Power) there is a polarization in Consciousness, the poles of which are *Shiva* and *Shakti* (Consciousness and its Power). Consciousness then identifies itself with the products of its own kinetic *Shakti* (Power), that is, with mind as the subject of experience and with matter as its object.

The *Prapanchasara Tantra* says: "The *Parabindu* divides itself into two parts, of which the right is Purusha (*Ham*) and the left is *Visargah* (*Sah*). *Hamsah* is the union of the Purusha or Consciousness with Prakriti or Matter, and the *Hamsah* is the universe

Take a *Tantrik bija* like *Ram*. It is said to represent the causal stress of fire, as heard by a yogi, which in human language is known as *Ram*. The sound accompanying causal stress and the sound which issues forth from something under the action of stimuli are not the same. The latter may be heard, but the causal stress is heard as a sound only by the ear of a yogi. At the time of worship, the worshipper utters *Ram* and imagines he is surrounded by a wall of fire which protects him from evil influences from outside.

What are known as *Nada* and *Bindu* exist in all *bijamantras*. Etymologically, *Nada* means sound and is a technical term in the

science of mantra. It is the more subtle aspect of sound (known as *sabda* in Sanskrit), as the first putting forth of *kriyasakti* (power of will). Supreme *Nada* is Supreme Power. It evolves into *Nada* which is the unmanifested seed or essence of that which is later manifested as *sabda* (sound). It develops into what is known as *Bindu* which is of the same character.

Literally the term *Bindu* means a drop or a point such as the *anuswara* breathing. It is a point, not the atom or mathematical point which has no magnitude but has position, but the diffusive with neither magnitude nor position. It is the One in which the Many was implicitly contained, Being and Non-being, Everything and Nothing. It is represented diagrammatically by the central indivisible point of the double triangle (*shatkona yantra*), regarded as the symbol of creation. Sometimes this point is set in a sphere.

Bindu can be conceived by man only as a point, infinitely small and subtle, into which the extended manifested universe is withdrawn. But really it is an aspect of *Shakti* or consciousness.

Bijamantras are written with the *Bindu* above and the *Nada* below. We have already pointed out the significance of the *Tantrik bija, Ram*. Now let us consider the *Tantrik bija, Hrim*. This great bija is composed of *Ha, Ra, I (long I), and M*. Of these *Ha* is said to represent *akhasa* (ether) which is the subtle principle of ether, of which the ether of modern science is only a gross manifestation; *Ra* is fire (the principle of fire of which what we know as fire is but a gross form); *I (long I)* is *Ardhanariswara*, that is *Shiva* and *Shakti* combined into one (Consciousness combined with Power), and *M* is *Nadabindu*. What does all this mean?

The meaning will be clear when we consider that the five 'elements', five tanmatras or the five subtle principles, namely, 'ether', 'air', 'fire', 'water' and earth', known to Indian cosmology, which are directly from *Prakriti* or Primordial Matter, are divided

into two groups. One of these groups comprising 'ether' and 'air' is without form; the other group comprising 'fire', 'water' and 'earth' is with form. 'Ether' and 'air' are formless, because until the appearance of 'fire' as form there is neither colour nor form. 'Fire' is the first of the second group possessed of form. When 'ether' is with 'fire', there is form: *Ra* is the first manifestation of form. This form is in *Ardhanariswara*, the combined Siva-Sakti (Consciousness-Power) holding all in themselves. Thus, the first three letters Ha, Ra, I (long I) represent the form aspect. The mantra is completed by the addition of *Nadabindu*. Now *Nada* and *Bindu* are formless and the cause of the other three in which they are implicitly and potentially contained (being held within *Bindu*). The meaning of *Hrim* is that the *Chidakasa* (the ether of Consciousness) is associated with Form. This *bijamantra* is thus a statement (in terms of sound) of the birth of General Form; that of Form as such of which all particular forms are a derivation. *Hrim* is the gross body as sound of the ideation of Form as such in the Cosmic Mind. This is the explanation of *Hrim* according to Sir John Woodroffe.

The *Varada Tantra* ascribes more or less the same meaning to the letters composing *Hrim*. Ha means *Shiva*. Ra is said to be Prakriti. I (long I) means *Mahamaya*. *Nada* is said to be the Mother of the universe. *Bindu* means dispeller of sorrow. With that *Bhuvaneswari* (literally the Goddess of the universe) should be worshipped.

The *Devi Bhagavata* (xxxii.22-26) says: " He by His Maya . . . becomes desirous of creation. This emanation, O King of mountains, is not preceded by *buddhi*. This transcendental form of Mine that I have described to thee, is the undifferentiated *Avyakta* (known also as *Prakriti*), and the *Maya*-coloured; in all the Sastras it is described as the Cause of all causes, and the first Element of all the elements, the embodiment of *Satchidananda*, compacted of

all karma, the base of desire, knowledge and action. It is declared by the mantra '*Hrim*' and is called the *Adi-tattva*."

Thus, *Hrim* is the *Sakti bija*, the *bija*, or seed-word by which the Power of *Brahman* is expressed. It has the power to take the soul of the devotee who is initiated to the plane in which *Hrim* as a sound was produced and heard, and from there to the Absolute.

Each *Devata* has His or Her own *bija*. The primary mantra in the worship of any Deva or Devi is known as the *mula mantra* (literally meaning root mantra). Every letter, syllable and mantra is then a form of the Brahman and so is the image and so are the lines of the *yantra* and all objects in the universe. All letters are forms of *Shakti* as sound-powers. The *Shakti* of which they are a manifestation is the living Energy which projects itself into the form of the universe. The mantra of a *Devata* (Deity) is the *Devata*. The rhythmical vibrations of its sounds transform the worshipper by regulating the unsteady vibrations of his sheaths. Through the power of sadhana of the worshipper there arises the form of the *Devata* which the mantra is. The meaning of a *bija* is the *Devata* Itself.

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The Story of the First Hindu Temple in the West - 1

Swami Tattwamayananda

The story of the first Hindu Temple in the West (which is also the story of the first Hindu temple in America) actually begins with Swami Vivekananda's arrival in Chicago to attend the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893. The Vedanta Society of Northern California was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1900. The Hindu Temple was built in the year 1905 by Swami Trigunatitananda who was sent to San Francisco by Swami Vivekananda before his passing away to take up the leadership of the Society. The story of the Universal Hindu Temple of San Francisco is not just the story of a temple. It is the saga of a saint - Swami Trigunatitananda - a humbling, inspiring model for all spiritual seekers. It takes the reader on a pilgrimage that explores several little-known aspects of a heroic spiritual saga that unfolded in the city of San Francisco on the West Coast of the United States during the early decades of the 20th century.

Swami Trigunatitananda was chosen by Swami Vivekananda to take charge of the Class that had been founded in San Francisco in 1900 for the study of the Vedanta Philosophy and for the practice of the spiritual disciplines of yoga leading to spiritual insight and experience. This class had been led by Swami Turiyananda until the latter's return to India in June of 1902. Swami Trigunatitananda arrived in January 1903, fully prepared to continue this work and to inspire, train, and mould the Americans who would come to him, with the ancient traditional spiritual ideals and practices that would enrich their lives and lead them to spiritual depth and fulfillment.

Swami Trigunatita viewed and organized the Vedanta Society as a spiritual institution where students would come to be trained. They would be taught to focus on spiritual goals and they would be expected to commit themselves to practice and, under his guidance, strict discipline was expected of students. The Swami was thus to be the guide whose instructions were meant for the advancement of the students, as well as for the welfare of all, and therefore his instructions were to be followed strictly by all, just as medicine and diet prescribed by a physician for the patient's welfare are obligatory and not optional on a patient who has approached him for relief from a serious illness. This special relationship between teacher and students, though traditionally admitted for thousands of years in the fields of medicine, art, and specialty crafts, had, in the American popular mind, not heretofore been extended to the spiritual realm.

Swami Trigunatitananda did not exclude himself from this discipline and led by example, demonstrating in his own life and in his daily schedule, a steadfast adherence to the qualities which he expected his students to embody. Even as physical illness caused him increasing difficulty, he nevertheless maintained this practice.

The philosophy that formed the center and the support of the work of Swami Trigunatitananda consisted of the ancient spiritual system of the Vedanta, as embodied in the Upanishads and in the Bhagavad Gita and interpreted into a compact metaphysical and spiritual system by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century AD, and as lived by Sri Ramakrishna and taught by Swami Vivekananda. The applications to the contemporary necessities of life around him, however, were significantly his own. In fact, shortly after his arrival in San Francisco, he understood the special characteristics of the civilization in which he found himself. He could therefore,

quickly orient himself to addressing its pressing needs and to develop a surprisingly large number of innovative methods of procedure.

The Significance of Temple Worship in Hinduism

Temples in India have a long history and building a temple in the Hindu tradition was considered to be a spiritually meritorious act that brought spiritual merit to the builder and sanctity to the place. As a religious institution, temples have always played an important role in the history of religious practices in Hinduism, where traditionally a temple is conceived as a symbol or a combination of various symbols and, much like a human organism, is considered to be the abode of God, the immanent divine spirit.

A temple is also a symbol of the omnipresent, cosmic, and transcendental dimension of God. The *Brihat Samhita* states that a temple is a microcosm of creation. Temples were conceived to be ever-lasting spiritual symbols of human effort and devotion (*Yaavat chandraarkamedini*—“as long as the moon, the sun, and the earth exist”). From the standpoint of the individual spiritual seeker, a temple represents the subtle body with the seven psychic centers mentioned in the Tantrik texts. A temple, in essence, is the link between man and God which helps us to evolve from the earthly level to the transcendental divine realm. Traditional Sanskrit texts on Indian temple architecture define a temple as a microcosm of creation, a symbol of the discovery of the spiritual truth in our journey through life, in fact, as the physical body of God. Agni Purana, on the other hand, considers the sanctum sanctorum alone as the body of the presiding deity. All rituals performed in temples symbolize different stages in our spiritual journey to discover the presence of the immanent divine reality or God as residing in our own heart.

It is said that the history of God and religion is the evolution of the human consciousness of the Divine, the history of our ideas and concepts of God. In the history of Hinduism, especially after the Vedic age, temples were centers of religious life. But conventional temple worship did not have anything to do with religious universalism as understood today. Credit should go to Swami Trigunatitananda for giving a universal dimension to the very concept of temple worship by building the Hindu Temple in San Francisco that was dedicated to interfaith harmony, a place of worship and contemplation, that has stood out as a picturesque landmark in the urban landscape of San Francisco.

Swami Trigunatitananda's universal Hindu Temple was built as a symbol (*pratika*) of the great Vedantic ideal that the ultimate reality is one and that every religion is an equally valid path leading to the same spiritual goal. Every religion represents an expression of the same eternal, transcendental truth. This integral view of the ultimate reality and the diverse human attempts to reach that goal, as taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, formed the philosophical and spiritual symbolism of the Hindu Temple of San Francisco built by Swami Trigunatitananda.

A whole lifetime could have been spent in building a structure like this; but Swami Trigunatitananda seemed to be always in a hurry. Immediately after landing in San Francisco, he set himself to work. He had a clear idea about his mission. He reorganized the Vedanta Society and established it on a secure, traditional spiritual foundation. Every act of his remaining twelve years seemed to have spiritual significance, as evidenced, for instance, by the planning and building of the Hindu Temple in 1905.

Symbolism in Temple Worship

Symbols represent our efforts to understand the invisible and the abstract through the visible and the concrete. They help us to conceive of a higher and transcendental idea through concrete representations.

Symbolism plays a very important role in Hinduism, especially in the construction of temples and the rituals performed therein. Every act of worship and every form of the deity is raised to a higher level through philosophical and spiritual reinterpretation. The whole idea of temple worship is built on symbolism. Sound symbols, such as OM, the Gayatri-Mantra, Bija-Mantras, and the sacred mantras chanted in various ceremonies, as well as the form symbols of different conceptions of deities, diagrammatic symbols like yantras, the *Shiva-linga* and the *Salagrama*, the lotus, the different elements and rituals of formal worship of various deities, especially in the temple installation ceremony, the *upachaaras* (five, ten, sixteen, sixty-four, or one hundred eight items or articles ceremonially offered with appropriate mantras to the deity invoked in the temple image), and the elaborate celebrations like the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath of the Puri temple—all these have a deep symbolic significance.

The symbolism of temples, as well as of all aspects of temple worship, are meant to help us to eventually realize the immanent presence of God in our own heart, because the light in the temple ultimately represents the light of our own soul, the atman. Thus, symbolism helps spiritual aspirants to transcend external rituals and ceremonies. A devotee experiences the fact that God, whom he worships in the temple, is, in reality, the divine spirit present in his own heart. Finally, this living presence of God then vividly manifests in one's everyday life.

Symbolism in the Architectural features of the First Hindu Temple of San Francisco

The following excerpt from “The San Francisco Vedanta Society and Hindu Temple,” a pamphlet published by the society in Swami Trigunatitananda’s day gives a clear picture of the complex architectural symbolism of the Hindu Temple. (*Swami Trigunatitananda: His Life and Work, Appendix D, p. 368-369, published by the Vedanta Society of Northern California.*)



General Features of the Hindu Temple: "The Style.

This temple has been built after the lowest miniature styles:

1. Of the great Taj Mahal of Agra, India, one of the seven wonders of the world.
2. Of one of the famous Temples of Benares (one of the ancient holy cities of India.)
3. Of the modern provincial Shiva-Mandirs (Temples of Shiva) of Bengal,

India.

4. Of the Temple-garden of Dakshineswar, Calcutta, India, where Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna, the great master of Swami Vivekananda and many other Swamis, used to live; and

5. Of some of the old castles of Europe.

The arches have been constructed after the Moorish style of those of the corridors of many a fine stone-built palace and temple in India. This Temple may be considered as something essentially

universal - a combination of a Hindu Temple, a Christian church, a Mahomedan mosque, a Hindu math or monastery, and an American residence.

The Symbols.

(It is to be remembered that the following is only a rough representation of the main or original symbols.)

(1) The Canopy, over the mosaic and marble entrance to the auditorium, (the north side of the temple, on Filbert street) represents the supposed thousand-petalled Lotus in the brain. Some of the Hindu yogins claim that when this lotus opens through the intense power of concentration and meditation, they get the highest spiritual illumination or perfection.

According to one of the systems of Hindu Yoga Anatomy, there are three tubular vessels in the spinal cord running up from the bottom to the brain. They are Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. They are the passages for the vital power of spirituality. Sushumna is in the middle; Ida on the right; and Pingala on the left. Of these three the Sushumna is the finest but the most important for the final spiritual realization. Ida and Pingala are auxiliary. These two also help the main passages of breath and air in the gross scientific anatomy of the human body. The two-tubular side-lights on both sides of the canopy are roughly symbolic of Ida and Pingala.

This Temple being the first Hindu Temple in the whole western world, erected in America, the honor and appreciation have been shown by carrying in the architectural art of the temple, the Sushumna – the main channel of spiritual illumination- up to an American eagle".

All the distinguishing features of the San Francisco Hindu Temple or the Old Temple, as it is now referred to, are symbolic of a basic concept which Swami Trigunatitananda expressed in these words: "This Temple may be considered as a combination of

a Hindu temple, a Christian church, a Mohammedan mosque, a Hindu Math or monastery, and an American residence."

The large round tower at the northeast corner of the building is fashioned after some of the modern provincial temples of Shiva of Bengal, complete with the usual emblems common to Shiva temples.

The next tower, west of it, is a model of one of the twelve small Shiva temples along the Ganges at Dakshineswar, near Kolkata, where Sri Ramakrishna lived, and Swami Vivekananda and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna first came under his influence and training. This middle tower is surmounted by a combination of three symbols. First, it has a crescent form at the bottom, which is a Turkish or Mohammedan symbol, but this is also the type of symbol used by some Hindu devotional sects, as well, and represents the spiritual path of devotion to God. Second, the middle sign looks like the sun: Without sunlight and heat, we cannot grow, and, therefore, this symbol indicates the path of work or karma. The third symbol, in this group of three, is the trident, which in Hindu tradition is the scepter of Shiva, who destroys ignorance, and, therefore, it symbolizes the path of knowledge or of spiritual inquiry and philosophy.

The particular order of these three symbols on one staff has additional meaning: Generally speaking, one must have a little faith and love to start some real kind of work. Therefore, the sign for the path of devotion has been put first. Then through love and faith comes a true sense of duty or work. Therefore, the path of karma has been put next. Then when we finish all our karma or work, and, when we become pure, we pierce through the veil of ignorance. Therefore, the sign of the path of knowledge has been put last. Another meaning can also be derived, as follows: Unless our spiritual culture transcends in greatness the sun, moon, and everything, we cannot reach the ultimate truth.

The next tower to the west, with its cluster of multiple small, pointed domes surrounding a large central dome, is a replica of one of the principal temples of Varanasi, the most ancient centre of Hindu learning and spiritual tradition. This tower has also a little similarity with the top of the temple of the Divine Mother Kali at Dakshineswar, as mentioned earlier.

The small tower farther west, high above the entrance to the temple, is a miniature, modeled after the Taj Mahal at Agra in North India. On the southeast corner of the building is a crenelated round tower modeled after some of the old castle towers of Europe, which belong to the medieval era of Christianity. The veranda that runs along the third floor on the north and east sides of the building is lined with sculpted arches in Moorish style.

Over the entrance door to the temple is a canopy with further symbolism to illustrate the soul's rise to spiritual insight and illumination. It also contains a mosaic inscription in Sanskrit which reads: *Om Namō Bhagavate Ramakrishnaya*, which means: "OM, salutation to the blessed Lord Ramakrishna"; OM being a word indicative of divinity in its most universal aspect, Namō or namah refers to salutation. The word Bhagavate or bhagavan, signifying Lord, implies that the holy personality, Sri Ramakrishna, named in this verse is considered to have a divine, rather than a merely human origin and function.

The metal canopy above the entrance door is decorated around its edge with a fringe of lotus petals, symbolizing the inner mental lotuses of increasing beauty seen by mystics in meditation. The whole is surmounted, as though protected, by an American eagle with wings outspread. The eagle seems to fly beyond this world, which is the realm of creation, preservation, and destruction—the realm of relativities. The eagle can also be seen as expressive of the

Hindu mythological bird, Garuda, the symbol of great strength, spiritual devotion, and of steady and rapid progress.

A Unique Temple Dedicated to Inter-faith Harmony and Inter-spirituality

Swami Trigunatitananda wanted to construct a building in San Francisco that would be an architectural representation of the message of religious harmony, dedicated to the ideals of interfaith and inter-spirituality, a medium for communicating the Vedantic universalism that was the central theme of Sri Ramakrishna's message to the modern world, as so ably expounded by Swami Vivekananda. That partly explains his decision to build a temple so unlike the traditional Hindu temples in India, yet incorporating many of their aspects like the pointed towers, domes, etc. The message of the Old Temple was the message of religious harmony, based on the fact that spiritual experience knows no barriers of race, nationality, or external practices.

Perhaps, the most remarkable thing about the whole work was the amazing speed of the construction of the temple—an astonishing feat accomplished within less than five months! Swami Trigunatitananda installed the cornerstone on August 21, 1905, and the dedication ceremony was held on January 7, 1906. This original structure had only the tower at the northeast corner of the building. That tower was removed in 1908, and an additional floor was added to the building. Along with all the other towers now seen, the corner tower was reinstalled.

The Nature of Time in Vedanta and Christianity

Umesh Gulati

The difference in the nature of time between the Indian and Western traditions can best be described by an anecdote regarding a conversation between Swami Vivekananda and Robert Ingersoll. The Swami said: "Ingersoll once said to me, 'I believe in making the most out of this world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all we are sure of.' I replied, 'I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do; and I get more out of it. I *know* I cannot die, so I am not in a hurry. I know that there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property; and so I can love all men and women. Everyone is God to me. Think of the joy of loving man as God! Squeeze your orange this way and get ten thousand fold more out of it. Get every single drop!'"¹

It seems to us that what Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) said about the difference between the way Ingersoll thought of squeezing an orange dry and his own way of doing so reflects how the two cultures, Western and Indian, look upon the nature of time. Time to a westerner is a resource, which like any other resource, labor or capital, is scarce. A moment ago that what was ten o'clock is dead and so are we, and everything else in nature is dying. Therefore, since each one of us has a limited span of life in which we have to accomplish so many things, we must make the most of our time; one has to use one's time as a businessman would use any resource for producing things.

Swamiji said that he knew that *he could not die*, and therefore he was not in a hurry; he did not believe that time was just a resource that he had to economize. Of course, he did not mean to waste this 'phenomenal' time. But he had another, and much

broader, perspective about time. He looked at time as endless and infinite. Therefore, he wanted to enjoy the act of squeezing the orange without caring to measure the use of the *phenomenal time* against the result he would get in squeezing. Before we go into the depth of what Swamiji meant by what he said, let us try to understand by his assertion, 'he knew that he could not die.'

The clue to understand these two statements lies on the assumptions that the two people made with regard to the question that everyone of us should always ask ourselves: 'who am I' and 'what is my destiny?' Ingersoll and the people from the non-Indian tradition assume that we are this body-mind complex only; I am a physician or a teacher, a man or woman, Indian or American, and so forth, and the death means the end of everything. That is why any person belonging to any of the monotheistic religions would be in a hurry to do what he or she thinks has to be done.

Swamiji, a true Vedantist and a monk at that, however, did not identify himself with his body-mind complex. Vedanta, the underlying philosophy of Hinduism, asserts that our *real essence* is Brahman, which is the same as Atman (or the Self). Upanishads say that Brahman is of the nature of Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss Absolute. Atman, the Bhagavad-Gita (2.23) says, is that which no weapon can cut or fire burn, no water can wet or wind can dry. In other words, the Self is deathless – beyond time – It is eternal, pure and perfect. Says Swamiji: 'It [Atman] always existed; there was never a time when it did not exist, because if the soul [Self] did not exist, where was time? Time is in the soul; it is when the soul reflects its power on the mind and the mind thinks that time comes.'²

Once someone asked Sri Ramakrishna: "Sir, what is Knowledge?" His reply was: "It is to know that God is the only Reality and that all else is unreal. That which is Real is also called

Brahman. It has another name: Kāla, Time. ...There is a saying, 'O brother, how many things come into being in Time and disappear in Time!' That which sports with Kāla is called Kāli. She is the Primal Energy. Kāla and Kāli, Brahman and *Shakti*, are indivisible."³ Kāli, of course, is the presiding deity of this phenomenal world, which Sri Ramakrishna called as the Divine Mother, popularly called *Personal* God in every religion.

In the Bhagavad-Gita (11:32) Sri Krishna says: 'I am time, the destroyer of all; I have come to consume the world. Even without your participation, all the warriors gathered here will die.' One may ask isn't there some contradiction between what Sri Ramakrishna calls 'Time' with regard to Brahman as 'Existence Absolute' and what Sri Krishna says about the world-destroying time in this verse of the Gita? We don't think so. For, in this latter case it is the *relative* existence of the phenomenal world. Brahman is Absolute, and is beyond time space and causation. 'All attempts of language, calling Him father, or brother, or our dearest friends, are attempts to objectify God, which cannot be done. He is the Eternal Subject of everything.'⁴ So, Brahman is Impersonal God, while Sri Krishna is Personal God. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Kāli and Krishna are one and the same. Time, too, is both absolute and also relative.

In other words, Brahman alone is Real or *permanent*, while this world of names and forms is unreal, apparent or *transient*. So, on the one hand every being is subject to change and death, but on the other hand, every one is beyond death, immortal! 'The existence of the eternal now,' says Aldous Huxley, 'is sometimes denied on the ground that a temporal [transient] order cannot coexist with another order which is non-temporal; ... This objection, it is obvious, would be valid if the non-temporal order

were of a mechanical substance, or if the changeless substance were possessed of spatial and material qualities.’⁵

In other words, Brahman (Kāla, Time) or Atman, as mentioned above, is not like any other material substance, which could be cut or modified. The verse 2:24 of the Bhagavad-Gita further reinforces the assertion made in the previous verse quoted earlier, and categorically asserts that the Self (Atman) is eternal. Says Huxley: ‘But the God who comes so terribly as Time also exists timelessly as the Godhead, as Brahman, whose essence is Sat, Chit, Ananda, Being, Awareness, Bliss; ...’⁶

Swamiji also told Ingersoll that he had no bondage of wife, children and property, and loved everyone equally. Being established in the Self, he saw the same Self in one and all. Can we, the householders, rise to the same exalted state? The answer is yes; for, he himself once said: Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy – by one, or more, or all of these – and be free.⁶ So, we too can realize the Self, provided we *mentally* renounce our selfish desires for the fruit of action, says the Bhagavad-Gita (18.11), and also Sri Ramakrishna in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In other words, we householders, must do all our duties in the spirit of detachment, forgetting ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ reminding ourselves that every thing belongs to God and we are His or Divine Mother’s trustees.

From what we have said above, it follows that behind this time-bound body-mind complex is something permanent, Atman or the Self, which is unborn and also deathless. Can we say the same thing about this universe of names and forms as a whole? Yes, certainly. Said Sri Ramakrishna, “It is He alone who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic

principles. When He is actionless, I call Him Brahman; when He creates, preserves, and destroys, I call Him Sakti. Brahman and Sakti are not different from each other. Water is water, whether it is still or moving.”⁷ In other words, while the universe like the *ocean of consciousness* is eternal, its contents – waves of different form – are subject to change.

Once again, while Christianity and other two monotheistic religions believe that almighty God *created* this universe some five or six thousand years ago, and He will certainly end the universe as it is; for, anything that has a beginning, also has an end. Unlike this theology, Hindus believe in what the modern-day scientists have come to accept, that this world of names and forms emerged through the process of evolution. Evolutionists don’t accept the story of Adam and Eve being our ancestors. They don’t accept that God first created man out of *nothing*, as it were, and then created woman out of man’s rib. Logically speaking, for every effect like the creation of man, has to be preceded by a cause. Therefore, nothing would come out of nothing!

Out of what has this universe been produced then? Swamiji answered that question on the evolution of our universe in a lecture on Cosmos—The Macrocosm, delivered in New York on January 19, 1896.⁸ He said: This universe came into existence ‘from the preceding fine form. ... Out of what has the tree been produced? Out of the seed, and the whole of the tree *was* there in the seed. Just as the tree came out of the seed and became manifest as a tree, so also the whole of this universe has been created out of this very universe existing in a very minute form. It has been made manifest now. It will go back to that minute form, and again will be manifest. ... This coming out of the fine [seed] and becoming gross [tree], simply changing the arrangement of its parts, as it were, is what in modern times called evolution.... We

have to go one step further, and what is that? ... Every evolution is preceded by an involution. The seed is the father of the tree, but another tree was itself the father of the seed. ... The whole of this universe was present in the cosmic fine universe.

'We see then, that nothing can be created out of nothing. Everything exists through eternity, and will exist through eternity. ... This involution and evolution is going on throughout the whole nature. The whole series of evolution beginning with the lowest manifestation of life [like amoeba or mollusc] and reaching up to the highest, the most perfect man, must have been the involution of something else. [And what is that? It is Brahman, or God, Impersonal and Absolute]...from the protoplasm at one end to the perfect man at the other, and this whole series is one life. In the end we find the perfect man [The Buddha, Jesus Christ, Ramakrishna, a Yogi], so in the beginning it must have been the same. Therefore, the protoplasm was the involution of the highest intelligence, the perfect humankind.' (CW, II, 207-208)

Therefore, from the perspective of Vedanta, this whole universe comes out of Brahman, which is of the nature of Consciousness, lives in Brahman and goes back to Brahman. As such, just as each soul is deathless, death being the death of the body, the same way the universe as a whole is eternal. The difference between this view and the evolutionist's view is that the latter doesn't accept God as the original source from which this universe was evolved. So, both of these views accept the same logic that the effect is the cause manifested, but while science says that the successively higher life has come from lower life, 'Vedanta regards the whole evolutionary process as *progressive evolution of structure and form, and a constantly increasing manifestation of the infinite Self within. It is the evolution of matter and manifestation of spirit.*'⁹ As such, unlike science, Vedanta asserts that our essence is spiritual, not matter.

Srimad Bhagavatam, reiterates this view of the evolutionary process and humankind's uniqueness in the following statement: The divine One, having projected [evolved] from out of itself, with His own inherent power, various forms such as trees, reptiles, cattle, birds, insects and fish, was not satisfied at heart with forms such as these. He then *projected* the human form endowed with the capacity to realize Brahman [the universal Self of all], and became extremely happy. (Ibid. 200-201) Notice, the divine One did not create, but projected from out of itself through its *Shakti* or primordial energy, the world of many forms. *For, the divine One to have created all this would imply that it created out of nothing. Since effect is the cause manifested, only nothing will come out of nothing.*

Interestingly, Vedanta doesn't say that the whole evolutionary process is now a thing of the past. Rather, it asserts that further evolution would be in quality and not in the appearance of a new species. By this we mean that apart from man becoming more and more socially responsible, he will also become progressively more spiritual, a goal, which might take *more than one life*. However, according to the Christian belief, human destiny has to find its fulfillment in *this very life*. That is why we said that a Christian, and even an agnostic Ingersoll having been nurtured in the Western culture, has no time to lose, what has to be done has to be done in this very life on earth. For, the God of monotheistic religions is extra cosmic who like an absolute monarch, keeps a keen watch over His people; anyone going against His will gets punished after *this life*.¹¹

A Hindu, however, has a faith in the notion of many lives or reincarnation. So he or she takes time, or life for that matter, without much seriousness, giving the impression of a lack of interest; he is not in a hurry as he has an infinite time to work out his destiny. Having said that it would be a mistake, however, both

morally and spiritually, to ignore *this* life or discount it as of no consequence. For, how one lives one's this very life from day today determines one's character and will determine what he or she will become. For a Hindu, there is no extra cosmic God; he or she believes in making his or her own destiny. That leads us to the doctrine or law of Karma, which is the process through which one works out one's destiny.

Literally karma means action, but it has a much broader connotation because it also includes *thought, word or deed*. According to the Gita every person must act according to one's nature, and every act must have its appointed effect. The effect lies inherent in the cause, as a tree lies potentially hidden in the seed. This doctrine of karma asserts that whatever we do – thoughts we think, words we speak, or actions we act, will have their consequences either in this life or in the lives to come, because our present life may not be long enough for all our karmas to work themselves out. So at death the un-ripened karmas, or actions that have not yet yielded their fruit, called *prarabdha* karmas, give the soul its initial start in the next birth.

There is a second kind of past actions, *sanchita* or stored-up karmas, which will bear fruit in a future life. The third kind of actions, those performed after the attainment of self-knowledge, realization of God or Brahman, bear no result or fruit, because the doer is entirely free from motive. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a perfect dancer cannot take a wrong step; or an expert musician cannot play a wrong note. So also a perfect man or woman will do everything perfect, and the question of getting another chance does not arise. In short, according to this law, we alone are responsible for the pleasures and pains we experience: as we sow, so shall we reap.

A corollary of the law of karma is the doctrine of reincarnation. The death of a body does not settle all one's accounts, for all the credit and debit balances are forwarded to the next page of the ledger. This means that we are born again and again to work out all our stored up karmas that could not fructify in the present life; nor were all the karmas that we incurred in the present life able to bear their fruit. The doctrine of Karma itself is an indispensable corollary of the immortality of the soul, for without it a beginning of the soul would have to be assumed. The doctrine of rebirth is more probable than any alternative hypothesis because it explains many phenomena of life that otherwise won't be understood.

In other words, when a person dies with a strong unfulfilled desire that cannot be satisfied on earth, his or her mind strongly yearns to fulfill the unsatisfied desire. It is this unfulfilled desire that eventually brings the person back to take the new birth or reincarnate. Reincarnation gives such a person another chance or chances to gradually evolve spiritually by gaining various valuable experiences he or she acquires in one's different incarnations. Eventually, when one reaches the acme of one's spiritual progress through God realization, one goes beyond all desires and becomes eternally free; for him or her there is no more birth or death or he or she becomes *jivan-mukta*.

Culture is the way people live and act, their values, secular and spiritual, and how they relate to other people and the world as a whole. An upward movement of culture occurs when people feel interconnected with every member of society in the spirit of brotherly and sisterly love and fellow feeling. Then follows a downward movement, when everyone is for himself or herself. There is a feeling of separateness from their fellow men and women. There is no concern among people of following any moral code. So when the pendulum swings low and truth and

righteousness are forgotten, the necessity arises for the coming of an avatar or incarnation of God. Avatar, which literally means a descent of God, is not just a reformer; but provides a new system of values and teaches humanity by living those values by his or her own example.

The Gita doctrine of the avatar is parallel and almost identical with the conception of the Word made flesh, 'full of grace and truth', as we find it in the Gospel according to St. John, which said: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and Word was God. However, there is an important difference: whereas St. John identifies Jesus of Nazareth the 'only begotten Son of God' (John, iii. 16), in the Gita it is clearly stated that God is made flesh *many* times, in different ages and in different forms. Once again, just as according to orthodox Christianity we have just one life to live on this earth, while for the Hindus one is born again and again until one attains liberation, the same way in Christianity there can be one and only one incarnation, and Jesus is that one.

Krishna, the teacher of the Gita openly declares himself to be an incarnation of the Godhead, asserting that he appears whenever he is needed upon earth. His birth, however, was not like that of Arjuna and other embodied souls like us, who were born in ignorance, and remain under the bondage of Maya. The birth of a Krishna or a Christ for that matter, is the result of free choice; for the Incarnation is not under Maya's control, but Maya is under his control, and he does not live in ignorance but lives in full consciousness of his divinity. Sri Krishna says:

I am the birthless, the deathless,
Lord of all that breathes.
I seem to be born,
It only seems so,

Which is my Maya.

I am still master of my Prakriti,

I am born of my own Maya. (BG: 4. 6.)

To know a Krishna, or for that matter a Christ, is to know God; for verily these are the children of Light – indeed, they are Light themselves. Though God dwells everywhere, to see him one must look through these divine incarnations. Sri Ramakrishna said that the divine incarnations are like so many doors through which we peep into or touch the Infinite.

In the Bhagavad-Gita (4: 7-8), Sri Krishna says that in order to reignite dharma or ethical values in society, he comes again and again to the world as a human being. In the earlier Incarnation, like Sri Krishna and Sri Rama, we see them actually destroying evil people, like Krishna destroying a Kamsa, or Shishupala and Sri Rama destroying Ravana. But in Buddha, we don't find any killing of evil people physically, only love and compassion and the lifting of people morally and spiritually. In Jesus also one finds the same. Today, in Sri Ramakrishna, one finds the same power working, just to influence people gently, silently, even without their knowing it.

Finally, we would conclude this essay in the words of Huxley: '... we find that the religions, whose theology has been least preoccupied with events in time and most concerned with eternity [or attaining *moksha* or *nirvana*], have been consistently the least violent [or more tolerant] and the most humane in political practice. Unlike early Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism (all of them obsessed with time), Hinduism and Buddhism have never been persecuting faiths, have preached almost no holy wars and have refrained from proselytizing religious imperialism. ...' ¹²

Pre-empting, as it were, Huxley's claim, Swamiji affirmed, in a lecture in the West on "The Ideal of a Universal Religion," never

to disturb any man's convictions so far as they are sincere. For, iconoclastic reformers do no good to the world. He said: 'If it is true that God is the center of all religions, and that each of us is moving toward Him along one of these radii, then it is certain that all of us must reach that center. ...'¹³ *Ergo*, all religions lead to the same God.

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- 11 Please see this author's essay, The Nature of God in Monotheistic Religions and Hinduism, in the June, 2012 issue of the Prabuddha Bharata.
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Leaves from an Ashrama 68

Golden Age already Here

Swami Vidyatmananda

In the year 1895, from the United States, Swami Vivekananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda in India: "With the coming of Sri Ramakrishna commenced a new golden age."

It is said that the words of a knower of Brahman are always true or must come true. But evidence now before us suggests that Swamiji could hardly have been more mistaken. For during the past few years--more than a century since Sri Ramakrishna began his ministry--man seems to find himself on a narrowing road leading to an age not of gold but of dross.

Scientific advances, which only a few years ago were counted on to provide progress and abundance, are now everywhere mistrusted. Technology is seen as a pillage of natural and human resources; and even trouble saved by labour-saving devices turns into new trouble when gadgets don't work as they should. A British cabinet minister said recently that people must abandon the concept of a progressively higher standard of living. And some, it seems, must even get used to the prospect of chronic hunger.

Moreover, that traditional sustainer of morality and hope in the West, organized religion, has declined to such an extent that the Pope himself was moved to say, in the autumn of 1974: "The church seems destined to die."

Improved physical and psychological welfare was anticipated from medical progress. But ills chased away by new remedies reappear in disconcerting other forms--such as so great an increase in human numbers that humanitarian means are now urgently sought to control or reduce the proliferation of life.

And collectivist-type political arrangements, put forward by their supporters as capable of bringing altruistic gains for the many, have thus far revealed themselves in practice as schemes for the many's oppression by the few. And so, it goes. Is this the golden age envisaged by Vivekananda?

But let us look again. Perhaps we have misunderstood Swamiji's meaning. From the full content of the letter to Ramakrishnananda it is apparent that Swamiji was thinking of an age of gold in spiritual terms. And if we examine present indications from this standpoint, we shall see that he was right.

"In my distress I called upon the Lord." It has to start there. When no solutions are forthcoming from the exterior, when we are in want of alternatives, then we turn to God. The collapse of the better world our fathers believed that they could construct forces their children to examine and try new possibilities.

The only purpose of human life is to seek God. Seek him in any fashion that seems good to you. God-knowledge is the sole remedy for the human condition. Coming at this juncture, despite the disruptions of the present hour--indeed, thanks to them--many are finding, as Swamiji predicted would be the case, that for them a golden age has in fact begun.

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| Statue Unveiling Celebration of Sister Nivedita in her family cemetery at Great Torrington on her 150th Birth Anniversary. |
| Date: Saturday 27 th July 2019 at 2 p.m Venue: Torrington Cemetery, New Street, Torrington, EX38 8BY Castle Hill Community Centre, Great Torrington EX38 8AA |
| Organized by Monks and Devotees of Ramakrishna Order Statue donated by Govt. of West Bengal, India |

continued from front cover



PUMPKIN CUTTER

You must have seen the sort of elderly man who lives in a family and is always ready, day and night, to entertain the children. He sits in the parlour and smokes the hubble-bubble. With nothing in particular to do, he leads a lazy life. Now and again he goes to the inner court and cuts a pumpkin; for since women do not cut pumpkins, they send the children to ask him to come and do it. This is the extent of his usefulness - hence his nickname, 'Elder, the pumpkin cutter.' He is neither a man of the world nor a devotee of God. That is not good.

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Every soul is destined to be perfect, and every being, in the end, will attain the state of perfection. Whatever we are now is the result of our acts and thoughts in the past; and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now. But this, the shaping of our own destinies, does not preclude our receiving help from outside; nay, in the vast majority of cases such help is absolutely necessary. When it comes, the higher powers and possibilities of the soul are quickened, spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end. This quickening impulse cannot be derived from books. The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual, but in the end we find that we have not developed at all spiritually... To quicken the spirit, the impulse must come from another soul. The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru — the teacher.

Swami Vivekananda



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