

# **PRABUDDHA BHARATA** *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**



**JULY  
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Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

JULY 2003

## CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	337	Self-expressions or Self-control?	364
This Month	338	<i>Swami Adiswarananda</i>	
<i>Editorial:</i>		Swami Vivekananda's Passing	
We, God and the Universe	339	Away: A New Finding	371
<i>Prabuddha Bharata</i> —100 Years Ago	344	<i>Chandrashekhar Chattopadhyay</i>	
Reflections on the <i>Bhagavadgita</i>	346	Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad	375
<i>Swami Atulananda</i>		<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
The Appeal of the		Glimpses of Holy Lives	377
Upanishads Today	354	Reviews	379
<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>		Reports	383



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Cover: Temples in Dakshineswar seen from the Ganga; the divine site of the first 'awakening'.

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

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## ↔ Traditional Wisdom ↔

### DISCRIMINATION

श्वोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत्सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः ।  
अपि सर्व जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥

But O Death, these (alluring objects) last only till the morrow. Moreover, they sap the vigour of the senses. Even the longest life is but short. Keep your horses, dances and songs for yourself. (Nachiketas in the *Katha Upanishad*, 1.1.26)

[God] is not inciting you to evil action, it is all the creation of your desire for self-gratification. If one says the Lord is causing everything to be done, and wilfully persists in wrong-doing, it only brings ruin on him. That is the origin of self-deception. Don't you feel an elation after you have done a good deed? You then give yourself the credit of doing something good—you can't help it, it is very human. But how absurd to take the credit of doing the good act on oneself and lay the blame for the evil act on the Lord! It is a most dangerous idea—the effect of ill-digested Gita and Vedanta. Never hold that view. Rather say that He is causing the good work to be done while you are responsible for the evil action. That will bring on devotion and faith, and you will see His grace manifested at every step. ... This is discrimination, this is Vedanta. But one does not understand it before realisation. Therefore the aspirant should begin with the dualistic standpoint, that the Lord is causing the good actions, while he is doing the evil. This is the easiest way to the purification of the mind. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 7.275)

Spiritual practice means to try to know our own defects and to learn how to remedy them. You will certainly become perfect if you make a habit of seeing the good qualities of others and imbibing such qualities as far as possible. If you do not manage to become perfect in the present life, it is doubtful whether you will be able to become perfect even in a thousand lives. (Swami Premananda)

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## ∞ This Month ∞

The unreality or otherwise of the world around us, the place of God in it and our relationship with both—these are discussed in this month's editorial, **We, God and the Universe**.

Excerpts from an article entitled 'Spiritual Perfection and Evolution' and some pieces from 'News and Notes' are featured this month in **Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago**

Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*, titled **Reflections on the Bhagavadgita**, dwells on the all-pervasiveness of the Lord, and His special manifestations, followed by a discussion on the nature of maya and how to cross it.

In his thought-provoking and learned two-part article **The Appeal of the Upanishads Today** Swami Atmapriyanandaji traces the strides in science and technology during the past century and sets in perspective the present-day relevance of the Upanishads. An edited text of the Swami Shradhananda Memorial Lecture delivered by the author at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, on 2 November 2000, the article originally appeared in the February and March 2002 issues of the Institute's *Bulletin* and is being reproduced here with permission. A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur.

**Self-expression or Self-control?** by Swami Adiswaranandaji is an illuminating discussion on whether to rein in the senses or give them a free rein. Analysing the views

of those who advocate the latter and oppose self-control, the author rightly observes that 'True self-expression is the expression of our higher self, and this calls for both freedom and control.' The author follows this up with a masterly and detailed discussion on the means of self-control according to Yoga and Vedanta. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and former editor of this journal, the author is head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York.

Swami Vivekananda passed away 101 years ago on 4 July 1902. Sri Chandrashekhara Chattopadhyay, author of *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smritikatha*, wrote a vivid eyewitness account of events that followed Swamiji's death. These valuable reminiscences appeared as an article entitled 'Swamijir Mahaprayaner Anudhyan-chitra' in the April 2003 issue of *Nibodhata*, the Bengali journal of Sri Sarada Math. **Swami Vivekananda's Passing Away: A New Finding** is a translation of the article by Swami Chetananandaji. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and head of the Vedanta Society of St Louis, the translator is well known through his books *God Lived with Them* and *They Lived with God*, among others. We are grateful to *Nibodhata* for permitting us to publish the translation.

**Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad** is the fourth instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

**Glimpses of Holy Lives** features incidents from the lives of Mankoji Bodhla and Pundalika, two devotees of Lord Vitthala of Pandharpur.

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# We, God and the Universe

## EDITORIAL

Once a woodcutter lay dreaming, when someone woke him up. Greatly annoyed, he said: 'Why have you disturbed my sleep? I was dreaming that I was a king and the father of seven children. The princes were becoming well versed in letters and military arts. I was secure on my throne and ruled over my subjects. Why have you demolished my world of joy?' 'But that was a mere dream,' said the other man. 'Why should that bother you?' 'Fool!' said the woodcutter. 'You don't understand. My becoming a king in the dream was just as real as my being a woodcutter. If being a woodcutter is real, then being a king in a dream is real also.'<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna told this story to illustrate that according to Vedanta the waking state too is unreal.

### The World is Unreal, Dreamlike

The celebrated half-verse attributed to Sri Shankaracharya sums up Advaita Vedanta: 'Brahman is real and the world unreal. The jiva is nothing but Brahman.'<sup>2</sup> The world is not absolutely unreal like the son of a barren woman or the horns of a hare. What is meant is, as it appears to us, the world is not real. The famous snake-rope illusion explains the point. During twilight, we mistake a rope for a snake and experience all the emotions like fear and shock associated with witnessing a live snake. The rope stands revealed for what it is when darkness is dispelled by light. Even so, says Vedanta, the world is nothing but Brahman, the only Reality, but it appears as world because of darkness—because of our ignorance of its true nature. Another illustration is of a mirage in a desert or on a hot road. On nearing the spot we understand that what appeared as a sheet of water from a distance was nothing

but an optical illusion caused by atmospheric conditions.

A significant point emerges from these examples: The illusion is dispelled only when darkness, or ignorance, vanishes. In other words, true perception is possible only when there is knowledge. We saw that from the Vedantic standpoint, the waking state is also a dream. But our everyday experience seems to be otherwise: a dream is as much real to us as the waking state, if not more. The dream objects and the enjoyment or misery arising out of them are very real to us. We know only on waking up that all that was after all a dream. Even so, our experiences in the world during waking state are very real as long as we are participants in the dream called world. That it is a dream can be known only when our ignorance vanishes, when we wake up to our true divine nature. From the standpoint of a man of Knowledge the world and its events are mere shadows, since he is aware of Brahman, the divine substratum behind the world. This can be compared to a movie on a cinema screen. For the man of Knowledge, the screen alone is real; what appears on it has only a secondary order of reality. He is not affected by the proceedings on the screen. (Weapons, fire, rains or wind in the movie cannot tear, burn, moisten or dry the screen. Even so, our real nature, the Atman, remains unaffected by weapons, fire, water or wind, which affect only the body.)<sup>3</sup>

### Getting down to Brass Tacks

That the world is a dream is all right from the standpoint of the ultimate Reality, Brahman. Till we realize that, however, the world continues to be real; the waking state is real; the dream is real and our sleep is real. The world strongly impinges on our conscious-

ness and occupies our whole being. Know your divine nature and break the dream of this world, say the Upanishads with the solicitude and love exceeding that of thousands of parents.<sup>4</sup> Breaking the dream of the world is what spiritual disciplines are about. As long as our body and mind are real to us, the world is real to us and so is the practice of spiritual disciplines like selfless work, devotion to a Personal God, meditation and discrimination. Though essentially divine, we—this Divinity, or Consciousness—identify ourselves with the mind and body and think that we are individual entities. Vedanta has a name for these individual entities: *jivas*, or souls. In other words, *jivas* are different units of divinity, the difference arising from the degree of identification with the body and mind. As *jivas*, we find the universe very real. Equally real is a Personal God, who projects, sustains and draws back unto Himself the *jivas* and the universe.

### The God-Soul-Universe Triangle

God, universe and the soul (*jiva*) stand or fall by the same logic. As we saw, God and the universe are real as long as the *jiva* is aware of his individuality. If (Personal) God, soul and the universe were three vertices of a triangle, it would be clear that when one vertex is true the other two are also true. If the *jiva* vertex is real, the world is real for him and so is (Personal) God. Similarly, if the universe vertex is real, it will necessitate a creator (God) and a *jiva* to experience joy and sorrow from it. This is akin to a house implying a dweller for whom it is meant. Similarly, when the God (Creator) vertex is true, the universe and souls—His creations—must exist, for He cannot be called a Creator when he has no creation to speak of. He would then be just Brahman, actionless, one without a second.

A similar triangle provides further elucidation. Father, mother and child are the three vertices of this triangle. If the father vertex is true, the mother and child are implied, for a

husband becomes a father only when the child is born and his wife becomes a mother. The same is true of the mother vertex. And if the child vertex is true, it automatically implies a father and a mother. The point emerging from these triangles is that a Personal God can be negated only if an individual has transcended his individuality—characterized by attachment to body and mind—and knows that he is the Spirit. Till then the triangle is very real. It will be illogical to deny any of the vertices to the exclusion of the rest.

### Worship of God with Form

We next move to an important principle regarding the conception of God. How man looks upon God and the universe depends on how he looks upon himself. As long he looks upon himself as a body-mind complex he is constitutionally bound to look upon God as a superhuman being endowed with all auspicious qualities, with a divine family and children to boot—if his attachment to his own family is deep enough. The world and its sense objects, and the other beings in the world are very real to him.

Swami Vivekananda's words throw more light on the subject. 'Suppose a cow were philosophical and had religion, it would have a cow universe, and a cow solution of the problem, and it would not be possible that it should see our God. Suppose cats became philosophers, they would see a cat universe and have a cat solution of the problem of the universe, and a cat ruling it.'<sup>5</sup> Cows are constitutionally obliged to worship a cow God; cats, a cat God. Similarly, as long as man thinks he is an individual, he cannot but think of a human God, an embodiment of infinite power and strength and endowed with all auspicious qualities. Says Sri Ramakrishna, '... in the light of Vedantic reasoning Brahman has no attributes. The real nature of Brahman cannot be described. But so long as your individuality is real, the world is also real, and equally real are the different forms of God and the feeling that

God is a person.<sup>6</sup>

There are people who pride themselves in being rationalists. They deride the worship of a Personal God, but remain attached to the world and its enjoyments. They cannot be more irrational. And there are political rationalists who pride themselves in not believing in God, but have no qualms about worshipping the statues of their leaders with garlands and so on, or offering prayers at their memorials, or taking oaths in their names. A devotee on the other hand does all this to Personal God, the object of his worship. When he visits a temple he derives joy in the image of the Deity being bathed, decorated and taken in a procession. This gradually changes the centre of his consciousness from his body and reduces his attachment to it. By degrees his devotion can undergo a qualitative change, helping him unfold his own divine nature.

M, Sri Ramakrishna's householder disciple and author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, referred to worship of the 'clay image'. Sri Ramakrishna corrected him and said, 'But why clay? It is an image of Spirit [*chinmayi pratima*].' M felt that those who worship clay images should be told that it is *not* God and that while worshipping it they should have God in view and not the clay image. The Master sharply rebuked him and asked him to strive for knowledge and devotion himself instead of 'bringing others to the light'. (80)

After that first argument of M with the Master, and 'happily his last', the Master taught him: 'You were talking of worshipping the clay image. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms of worship. (81)

### The Three States of Consciousness vis-à-vis Conceptions of God

Emphasizing the potential divinity of man, Swamiji makes a bold statement in his first lecture on 'Practical Vedanta': 'Your god-head is the proof of God Himself. If you are

not a prophet, there never has been anything true of God. If you are not God, there never was any God, and never will be.'<sup>7</sup> The idea is this: According to Vedanta, behind our body and beyond our mind is the Atman, the divine core of our personality. And microcosm and macrocosm being built on the same plan, the divine core in us and the different tiers in our personality help us infer the presence of God, the divine core behind the universe, and corresponding different tiers in the macrocosm.

In the waking state our consciousness is usually associated with the body. Vedanta calls this consciousness *viśva*. In the dream state the gross body does not exist for the dreamer. Only his mind is then active and his consciousness is associated with it. The mind along with the pranas constitutes the subtle body. The same 'I' that experienced objects in the waking state does it in the dream state too. The consciousness during dream state is called *taijasa*. During deep sleep the 'I' does not experience any object but remains shrouded in ignorance. This state of 'I', detached from the body and mind and closest to the Atman, but separated from It by ignorance, is called the causal body—'causal' since the subtle and gross bodies arise from it in the dream and waking states. The consciousness associated with the causal body is called *prājñā*. Behind the three bodies (gross, subtle and the causal) is the Atman, their common substratum that lends continuity to the pre-sleep and post-sleep states of the individual.

We referred to the waking, dream and deep sleep states to facilitate description of the gross, subtle and causal bodies. Our discussion on the conceptions of God, however, centres mainly round the three bodies. Thus, at the microcosmic (individual) level, identification with the gross body = *viśva*. When body consciousness is absent, identification with the subtle body = *taijasa*. When identification with the mind too is absent, identification with the causal body = *prājñā*. Identification with

the body and mind cease spontaneously during dream and deep sleep respectively. Struggling to make this happen *in the waking state* is what spiritual life and spiritual disciplines are about.

*Vīśva, Taijasa, Prāñña:*

### **Their Macrocosmic Counterparts**

We saw that man's conception of God and the universe varies with his conception of himself. This is so because with the shift in the centre of his consciousness from the gross to causal bodies, there are corresponding changes in man's perception of God and the universe. The dynamic equilibrium between the microcosm and the macrocosm at different levels is responsible for these changes in perception. When man is identified with the gross body (*vīśva*), the universe appears to him in all its grossness and alluring variety. The corresponding consciousness in the macrocosm is known as *virāt*.

When his subtle body appears more real to him, man lives in the plane of ideas and is not much troubled by the body and its cravings. The universe as it appears to others does not hold much charm for him, for free from body consciousness, he is now in tune with the universal, cosmic Mind. The corresponding macrocosmic consciousness is called *hiraṇyagarbha*.

When he is far advanced in spiritual life to the extent of his body and mind becoming unreal to him, man identifies himself with his causal body (*prāñña*) and gets attuned to Personal God, the cause of the universe. The corresponding macrocosmic consciousness is called *īśvara*. Man is now said to have realized God in His personal aspect.

On transcending his identity with the causal body and realizing the Atman, the divine core in him, man simultaneously realizes Brahman, the divine core behind the macrocosm. There is now nothing for him to differentiate between microcosm and macrocosm and he realizes the famous Upanishadic equa-

tion: Atman = Brahman.<sup>8</sup>

Parenthetically, a word about the difficulty in conceiving the universe as the gross body of God and imagining the universal Mind, *īśvara* and Brahman behind it. An ant crawling on a human hand may not be able to imagine that it is moving on a much bigger human body. It can much less think of the mind and Atman that are behind the human body. Even so, inhabiting an infinitesimally small part of the universe—some limb of God—man finds it odd to visualize this entire universe as God's gross body and think of a cosmic Mind, *īśvara* and Brahman behind. What prevents this visualization is his attachment to the body. In fact, it is body consciousness that is responsible for the distinction between 'external' and 'internal'. Completely free from body consciousness, great souls are ever in tune with the universal Mind. This gives them control over other minds and helps them see their contents like objects in a glass case. Incidents from the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji and other great souls corroborate this fact.

### **The Need of Worship**

With the above theoretical background about the conception of God, we now turn to the question of why to worship God. The answer depends on our relationship with the world and our needs and goal in life. According to Sri Krishna four kinds of people worship God: the (physically or mentally) afflicted, those after worldly prosperity (wealth, name, fame and so on), the seeker (of knowledge) and the man of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Sri Krishna considers all of them as large-hearted. Seeking God for worldly things can make seeking God a habit in us and goad us into seeking Him for His own sake in course of time. But it is true that higher and subtler conceptions of God become relevant only to those who do not look upon God as a means to worldly ends. Swamiji's words set things in perspective:

Wherever there is any seeking for something in return, there can be no real love; it becomes a

mere matter of shop-keeping. As long as there is in us any idea of deriving this or that favour from God in return for our respect and allegiance to Him, so long there can be no true love growing in our hearts. Those who worship God because they wish Him to bestow favours on them are sure not to worship Him if those favours are not forthcoming.<sup>10</sup>

### With Form or without Form?

Those who worship God out of love have two temperament-based options: worship of God with form and worship of God without form. Sri Ramakrishna lived, moved and had his being in Divine Mother, in the form of Kali. He taught that both God with form and God without form are equally true. He called It Brahman when inactive and Kali when creating, preserving and destroying. What he wanted us to steer clear of is dogmatism:

If you believe that God is formless, then stick to that belief with firm conviction. But don't be dogmatic: never say emphatically about God that He can be only this and not that. You may say: 'I believe that God is formless. But He can be many things more. He alone knows what else He can be. I do not know; I do not understand.' How can man with his one ounce of intelligence know the real nature of God? Can you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jar? If God, through His Grace, ever reveals Himself to His devotee and makes him understand, then he will know; but not otherwise.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Krishna points out that the worship of a formless God is beset with difficulties, especially for the body-bound: 'Greater is the trouble for those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest. The goal of the Unmanifest is hard to reach for those who are body-conscious.'<sup>12</sup>

A few months after M first met Sri Ramakrishna, the Master asked him, 'How are you getting along with your meditation nowadays? What aspect of God appeals to your mind—with form or without form?' M, naturally inclined towards formless meditation, replied: 'Sir, now I can't fix my mind on God with form. On the other hand, I can't concen-

trate steadily on God without form.' The Master's reply was significant: 'Now you see that the mind cannot be fixed, all of a sudden, on the formless aspect of God. It is wise to think of God with form during the primary stages.'<sup>13</sup>

\* \* \*

A clear conception of God, universe and man's unique position in the scheme of things helps us in proper orientation of our search for meaning in life. Though formless worship might appeal more to the intellect, it is what we are able to effectively practise that counts in our progress towards our spiritual destiny. For the majority, the way is to worship God with form or an incarnation of God, who in Sri Ramakrishna's words is the doorway to the Infinite. 'Whether you follow the ideal of the Personal God or that of the Impersonal Truth, you will realize God alone, provided you are restless for Him'—these are the reassuring words of the Master.<sup>14</sup> \*

### References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 417.
2. *Brahma satyam jagannithya jivo brahmaiva nāparah*.
3. See *Bhagavadgita*, 2.23.
4. See Sri Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.15.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.155.
6. *Gospel*, 150.
7. *CW*, 2.308.
8. *Ayam ātmā brahma*. —*Mandukya Upanishad*, 2.
9. *Gīta*, 7.16.
10. *CW*, 3.87.
11. *Gospel*, 634-5.
12. *Gīta*, 12.5.
13. *Gospel*, 127.
14. *Ibid.*, 867.



July 1903

## Spiritual Perfection and Evolution

**L**ife means the play of two forces. In the material, the vegetable, the animal or the human world, two forces are eternally at work. The planets try to fly away from the sun; again they are attracted towards it by the centripetal force. Atoms and molecules try to fly away from one another; chemical attraction draws them together. Innumerable are the patent varieties of plants, trees, insects, birds, animals, men—in short, of living beings. Not one individual is exactly the same as another. ... Throughout Nature act two forces, one constantly producing variations and the other as constantly bringing about sameness in the midst of the variations.

Nor is life possible without either of the two forces. The very existence of an individual as such depends on his possession of certain attributes differentiating him from the rest. If there were no differentiation, there would be no separate individuals. It would be one nameless and formless homogeneous whole. ...

Differentiation in unification and unification in differentiation is the plan of Nature. In the real world, they always go together. Nor can they be separated theoretically. ... The state of difference only without unity and the state of unity only without difference—both are equally inconceivable.

Variety and unity are the two parts of a complete whole. Acceptance of one in exclusion of the other is one-sided and impossible. The goal of a perfect religion ought to be harmonious development of the knowledge of both the variety and the unity.

With the man of the world who has no idea of religion, the knowledge of the variety is exceedingly definite and of the unity exceedingly indefinite; the reverse is the case with the Yogi. In his Samadhi, his knowledge of the variety becomes exceedingly indefinite and of the unity exceedingly definite. Some of the Yogis will not or cannot return from their Samadhi. With them, for ever, it is all unity with an infinitely fine remnant of the variety. Mukti or freedom from variety is conceivable only in this sense. Absolute freedom with no variety is inconceivable. Others return and bring the glad tidings to the world of the freedom they realize. But, when returning, their knowledge of the variety gets more and more definite and of the unity proportionately indefinite. The Great Ones again walk, in their greatness, on the border-land, as it were, of variety and unity, commanding the views of both. They can combine in them infinite definite knowledge of both the variety and the unity or as little as they like of either or of both. They are, as it were, awake and sleeping simultaneously, as Swami Vivekananda used to describe them. In the words of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, they stand, as it were, on the threshold with one foot inside the room of unity and another outside in variety. This is spiritual perfection.

He who saw the scene in which Sri Ramakrishna cried aloud to his Mother, 'I do not want Brahma-Jnana, O Mother. Do not give it to me,' will ever carry with him the impression of the superiority of Divine Sonship over Brahma-Jnana, Sonship in which the divine son enjoys both the aspects, the unity (Brahma-Jnana) and the variety—and who knows of what more aspects of Her infiniteness the Mother reveals to Her son?—of the Mother who is, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, unity and variety and She alone knows what else besides.

The undertone of the life in India murmurs renunciation: 'Abandon the variety and seek the

unity'; that in the West hums enjoyment: 'Cleave to the variety and care not for unity.' Both the aspects of life are defective. Life cannot last long under either of them. Nature's blessing hand is not stretched to one who loves a portion of her and hates the rest. Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Greece—they ran after the variety and rose, only to fall and never rose again. Who can tell if their fate awaits not present Europe? India is dying and shall die unless she rectifies her folly. Union of the ideals of life of the Western and the Eastern alone can produce that harmony which will effect a natural and perfect evolution of the human race, and the sooner that union be brought about, the better for both.

If they in the West want to live on and if we in the East do not want to die, let the cry of renunciation be raised in the West and let the East be roused to activity and struggle after material prosperity.

Life, everywhere in Nature, is the balance of disintegration and integration, of variety and unity. The undue preponderance of one means death. And none can hoodwink Nature.

Ideal evolution then should be perpetual advancement and along with it, balancement of both variation and unification. Why should there be an end to evolution? There are infinite possibilities of progress in man and Nature and they require infinite time to be exhausted. Let there be as many variations as possible and let each grow in its own way to its excellence and at the same time, let them grow more and more strongly and deeply in the bond of unity.

Religion, science, industries and arts; castes, tribes, nations and races; the priest, the king, the merchant and the servant; the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the intelligent and the ignorant, the saint and the sinner—all these variations there are and will remain eternally. But let them be regarded as components of a common whole. Let the unity running through them be recognized more and more. Let there be no privilege, no aggression or suppression of one by another but mutual love and co-operation and recognition of the usefulness and the greatness of each in its own place.

### Success

Success grows out of struggles to overcome difficulties. If there were no difficulties, there would be no success. If there were nothing to struggle or compete for, there would be nothing achieved. It is well, therefore, that men should be under the necessity of exerting themselves. In this necessity for exertion we find the chief source of human advancement—the advancement of individuals as of nations.

### Longevity

Some curious statistics have just been published upon what an insurance actuary would describe as the 'expectation of life' in animals. Among the larger species of cattle there is some approach to uniformity. Thus for the horse and the ass the extreme limit is about thirty-five years, and for horned cattle about thirty. For the dog it is given as twenty-five, while sheep, goats, pigs and cats are grouped at fifteen. But there are stranger disparities among birds. While a goose may live thirty years, a sparrow twenty-five and a crow as many as one hundred, ducks, poultry and turkeys die of old age at twelve years. The palm of longevity is divided between elephant and parrot. Both pass the century.

### Acknowledgement

Swami Shivananda of our Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Benares, acknowledges with thanks the receipt of Rs 6 from Mrs C E Sevier for a time-piece for the Ashrama, Rs 13 from Mr Basudeo Sahai for clothes for the Ashrama Brahmacharins and Rs 5 from Mr Jadupati Chatterjee for the Ashrama.

—from 'News and Notes'

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# Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

## Chapter 7 (*continued*)

**7. Beyond Me, O Dhananjaya, there is naught. All this is strung in Me as pearls on a thread.**

**O** Arjuna, know it for certain that beyond Me there is naught, neither higher, nor lower, nor equal to Me. All the universe and whatever may exist beyond this universe depends on God for its existence. As pearls are strung on a thread and thus kept together form the necklace, so all that exists is strung on God, kept together by Him, each part in its place, thus forming the cosmos. There is no other cause besides Him. As the cloth is woven in the warp, so the universe is but a manifestation of His power. As the thread keeps the beads together making the necklace a necklace (whereas otherwise it would be a useless heap of pearls), so the Lord permeating His own creation makes the universe what it is and keeps it together, keeps it from running into chaos. He is in all. He sustains all. But we do not see Him. As the pearls hide the thread, so manifestation hides Him, who is the cause of all.

Since in our ignorance we are satisfied with His manifestation, we do not penetrate beyond the manifestation: we do not see Him. Because the basket looks pretty we do not open the basket to see the dazzling gems. Like children we are satisfied with the container and do not look for the contained. Hidden from our view, patiently, faithfully and lovingly He carries this universe for the good of His children. For in order that *we* may learn and gather experience this universe exists. 'Not the soul for nature, but nature for the soul,' says Kapila. To rouse the soul, to wake it from its slumber, to make it self-conscious, to

reveal to it its own bliss, *that* is the mission of the universe. The universe is the mirror in which the soul sees itself reflected. The soul seeing its own beauty and loveliness and bliss, and is satisfied. It knows itself. It is satisfied in itself. It realizes that whatever is blissful and good is within itself. Then it retreats, draws away from nature, and in solitude it rejoices. It has come to itself; henceforth it will not be deluded again.

But nature has other children who need her guidance. These she takes by the hand, leading them step by step, back to their Home from which they have strayed. And when these have found their way back, still others are calling. And so she goes on. One after another she delivers from bondage to freedom, never tired, always patient as a loving mother, through all eternity.

Sri Krishna has declared in the seventh verse that there is none else higher than Himself. That is, He is the only cause; there is no other cause besides Him. He is the cause of all causes in the universe. Everything has its origin in Him. And then, He declares, 'All this universe is strung in Me as pearls on a thread.' Though unseen, the thread keeps the beads together. So, though unseen by the ignorant, He keeps the universe together. He is in all; He sustains all.

We may now ask the question: In what wise is nature strung on nature's Lord? In what capacity, in what sense is God the underlying Reality of all we perceive? How does God's power form the essence of things? How

is He the thread, the basis, the substratum of everything? The following verses are an at-

tempt to answer these questions. Sri Krishna says:

**8. I am the sapidity in water, O son of Kunti, and the radiance in sun and moon; I am the syllable Om (*pranava*) in all the Vedas, sound in *akasha* (ether), self-consciousness in mankind.**

**9. I am the sacred fragrance in earth and brilliance in fire; I am the life in all beings and austerity in ascetics.**

**10. Know Me, O son of Pritha, as the eternal Seed of all beings. I am the intellect of the intelligent and the prowess of the powerful.**

**11. O mighty one of the Bharata race, of the strong I am the strength that is devoid of desire and attachment. In all beings I am the desire that is not opposed to dharma.**

The Lord abides everywhere and in everything. He is the essence, the support, the centre of all manifestation. And it is through His presence that things are what they are. He is the Soul, the life of everything, the characteristic quality of each type. We cannot think of water without sapidity, or of the sun without radiance. It is the sapidity that makes it water. It is the self-luminosity of the sun that makes it the sun. These characteristic traits are called up through the presence of God.

Then Sri Krishna says, 'I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas.' 'Om' is the most holy word in the Vedas. It is the highest symbol of God, His first and purest manifestation. From this sound Om has evolved the universe. It is the eternal sound that the yogis hear in *samadhi*.

'I am the life in all beings. And again, I am the eternal seed of all beings, their eternal cause.' He is the sound in ether and sacred fragrance in the earth. As ether is distinguished for its quality of carrying sound, so earth is known as the seat of fragrance. Sri Krishna calls it sacred fragrance. All things are sacred and pure and holy in their natural condition. They become defiled by contact with the impurity of creatures. So also when Sri Krishna says 'Of the strong I am the strength that is devoid of desire and attachment', He refers to strength in its pure state applied for the protection of others, not the strength that is used

for selfish ends. It is the strength that makes for universality that unites, that brings together into one whole, not that which separates. And 'I am desire unopposed to dharma', the pure, righteous, lawful desire.

These are all so many ways in which we may try to think of God. Sri Krishna mentions these to help us. Some may like one way, others something different. We may choose what best fits us. The poet Moore had the vision of God in nature. He sang, 'Thou art O God, the life and light of all the wondrous world we see. Its glow by day, its smile by night, are but reflections caught from Thee.' This is a form of realization to see God in nature, as the soul of nature, to see Him in water and in the sun—to know that should He withdraw for an instant, water would no longer be water, the sun would no longer be the sun. For He is the life and light of all the wondrous world we see. He is the support. He makes manifestation possible. And He is our pure desire, our well-directed energy. Our strength, our power, our vigour come from Him. The Hindu prays:

Om. Thou who art Light,  
give Light unto Me.  
Thou who art mental vigour,  
give that unto Me.  
Thou who art strength,  
give strength unto Me.  
Thou who art power,  
give power unto Me.<sup>1</sup>

In short, God is everything. We may not

realize it now. We may not like to acknowledge it even, but it is Sri Krishna's teaching. He

sums it all up in the next verse:

**12. Whatever modifications there are pertaining to the states of sattva, rajas, and tamas, know them to proceed from Me. Still I am not in them, but they are in Me.**

**W**e have seen that the universe is God's inferior nature. According to Vedanta, nature consists of three elements or gunas. The different combinations of these three gunas called sattva, rajas and tamas form all that exists in the universe. And everything receives its quality through the predominant presence of one of these three gunas. Wherever sattva guna is present it makes for perfection. Whatever person, condition or object is possessed of a predominant measure of sattva guna, such person, condition or object is in its highest state. A person rich in sattva guna is unselfish, truthful, intelligent and so on. The rajas guna leads to distraction, nervous activity, egotism and the like. And the tamas guna brings with it inactivity, indolence, ignorance and so on. We will learn more about these gunas when we come to the fourteenth chapter. Suffice it now to point out that Sri Krishna declares that whatever exists is the product of, and subject to, the gunas. And as the gunas are contained in God's nature, it is clear that everything proceeds from God.

But though all things proceed from God and thus exist in Him, God does not exist in them. Though all things are subject to nature, the Creator is not bound by nature. The divine Will is absolutely free, and the divine Substance is unconditioned. This is one point to remember. Everything is the outcome of the mingling of the three gunas of nature. Each being partakes of the gunas according to his past karma, but not the Lord, who was never born. Birth means manifestation and manifestation means a state of degeneration, of corruption, a state lower than the absolute, unmanifest condition.

God is never corrupted. He never identifies Himself with the manifested state. He is never deluded or bound by nature. He is not

subject to the gunas like the animal souls, but he governs the gunas. They depend on Him. This is the difference between God and His creation. God is free, the master; the creature is bound, the slave of nature.

Now Sri Krishna says, 'Know all things to proceed from Me. But I am not in them, they are in Me.' God is the source. The river is in the source; it proceeds from there. But the source does not enter into the river.

From the Advaitic standpoint all nature is a superimposition on God, through delusion. In the dark we see the stump of a tree, but we take it to be a ghost. Now from our standpoint, the ghost is there in the stump. But the stump is never in the ghost. Similarly the universe is superimposed on God. Because we look through the veil of darkness, the ghost was in the tree. The tree gave birth to the ghost. From the tree the ghost proceeded as it appeared to us. So God is the source of the universe. He appears to us as the universe, but in reality He is undivided consciousness. Because we saw the ghost, we did not see the tree. Because we see the universe, we do not see God. When we see the tree, there is no ghost. When we see God, then there is no universe. The superimposition vanishes with realization of Truth.

When a yogi hypnotizes the space in a room, all who are present there will witness whatever he creates in that hypnotized space. A landscape may appear before us with rivers running through it and animals grazing. It is all there before us, very real, and the hypnotized person takes it all as fact. He will stoop down to drink the water of the flowing river. Where did the landscape come from? It proceeded from the yogi. It was in him, otherwise how could he produce it? But he is not in the landscape. And he is not deluded like the hyp-

notized persons. Though it was all in him, and though it all proceeded from him, he was never in his creation. He always remained free and unaffected, no matter how wonderful his creation. The hypnotized person suffers or enjoys as conditions present themselves, until he is de-hypnotized, until he is roused and brought back to his normal condition. Through hypnotism the person was deluded. He saw the yogi's creation and took it to be real. He identified himself with it. In that hypnotic world, he lived satisfied. He never inquired what caused it, who was its creator. He

knew only that fantastic world. And that is the condition in which we all live, as the Lord declares in the next verse. In the ninth chapter we shall meet with this same subject again, and then we shall treat it more elaborately.

Sri Krishna now expresses His regret that the world, through spiritual blindness, does not know Him, who is the supreme Lord, eternal, pure and free, the Self, the Spirit in all beings, by knowing whom they might burn up the evil, which is the seed of samsara, the life of bondage. The Lord says:

**13. Deluded by these modifications of the three gunas (of Prakriti), the whole world does not know Me, who am beyond these and immutable.**

**W**e are all deluded by nature in her different aspects. We are hypnotized, charmed by her magic power. She appears in so many forms, always changing, so fascinating to the mind and senses. Enticed by her beauty we forget all else; we become mad in the pursuit of enjoyment. Love, hatred and attachment domineer our life. We are the slaves of our passions. We are satisfied to live a sense life. Therefore, says the Lord, the world does not know Him, who is beyond nature. We are so occupied admiring the dress and finery that we pay no attention to the person wearing it. We forget that these draperies should serve to attract our attention to the beauty of the person so adorned. Nature is but the garment, the veil, behind which the Lord is hidden. Only when our sight is trained shall we pierce the veil, and we shall behold the Lord Himself, Him who is immutable, the Spirit of all beings, distinct from the gunas, distinct from the causes constituting nature. All beings are subject to change, to birth and death, but the Lord is beyond these. He is not subject to any condition.

The whole world struggles under the de-

lusion that the sense life is the only life worth living, the only real life. If we have any faith at all in a life beyond, it is in a hazy, misty kind of way. God is a distant, fine, obscure vision, hidden behind the mist of doubt and unbelief. Why is it so? Who is to blame? Know it for certain: there is none to blame but we ourselves. We are the makers of our own destiny. We make and remake. We build and break down. We create or destroy. Do we want to know

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who is to blame? Have we the courage to look for the cause? The Vedas give us the answer. 'Because we talk in vain, and because we are satisfied with the things of the senses, and because we are running after desires, we, as it were, cover this Reality with a mist.'<sup>2</sup> There is the answer. We need not look far. We need not blame conditions, people, devils and ghosts. The cause is near at hand. Let the light of Truth

flash on our hearts. *There* the whole story is written. Because we talk in vain, because we want the animal life, sense enjoyment, we cover the Reality; *therefore* we put up a partition between God and ourselves; therefore we silence our conscience; therefore we drive off good thoughts and suggestions. We are not true to ourselves. We act against better knowing. We harden our conscience.

But let us not dwell too long on the cause. Let us see how this illusion, how this maya can

be surmounted. Difficult it may be. It is of old standing. It has been with us for eons. But every habit can be overcome by a contra-habit. Knowing the cause of the disease, the remedy will be forthcoming. Sri Krishna never neglects to show the way out of misery. He is the physician of the world-disease. He administers the medicine. Neither does He deny the bitter taste, nor does He overlook the struggle of swallowing it down, but He is positive regarding its effect. He speaks with authority:

**14. Verily this divine maya of Mine (elusive mystery) composed of the gunas, is difficult to surmount; those who take refuge in Me alone cross over this maya.**

**M**aya, that elusive mystery, is no other than nature, composed of the three gunas. It is the power inherent in God. It is *His* nature; *therefore* it is divine. This is the great mystery that what we regard as the universe, so solid, so hard, so matter-of-fact, is nothing but God's power. Yes, this earth, the stars, the moon—all that we so conveniently named matter is nothing but an illusive

***Within every one of us there is the Light, the Reality, Truth, God, the eternal Spirit. By shaking off the apparent man, by realizing and becoming the Real man, who dwells within, the Atman, man steps out of unreality.***

***He escapes maya and its unerring and unrelenting laws. The God in us alone is Real, the man an ever-changing illusory garb.***

power. Science today is approaching the conclusions preached in the Vedas in the remote past. For we are told that there is no such thing as matter. Everything is reduced to force. The whole aspect of creation has changed. 'Matter is only a thing imagined, which we have constructed for ourselves, very imperfectly, to represent the constant element in the changing series of phenomena,' says the scientist of today. 'Matter is but a form of motion in the

ether; atoms are minute vortexes or rapidly revolving portions of the ether, and ether itself (the one and only substance of the universe) an incomprehensible frictionless fluid.' Under the searching eye of science, this gross universe becomes finer and finer, until the material becomes immaterial, and physics ends in metaphysics. The present leads to the Beyond.

How very different then, even from a scientific standpoint, is this universe from what it appears to be. How ignorant we are in regarding everything in the wrong light, all the days of our lives. That which is responsible for our ignorance is maya, nescience. Maya makes us see the universe in place of the Atman. It makes one thing appear as another, forming this wonderful world out of darkness. Out of the unknown it projects the apparent universe, mind and matter. This maya is dependent for its existence on God, the Reality of the universe. It is a power very difficult to surmount, because we cannot know its method of occurrence. We ourselves, as we know ourselves now, are a product of maya. We are the effect, and maya is the cause. We are its creatures, under its influence. How then can we know it? It transcends human perception. We can never know it. We can never un-

derstand or analyse it. All that we can know about it is that we cannot know it. But, we can overcome it. Difficult though it be, we can surmount it. Because it is God's power, it is so difficult to surmount it by *individual* effort. 'They only pass this maya, who fly to Me for refuge,' says the Lord.

Within every one of us there is the Light, the Reality, Truth, God, the eternal Spirit. By shaking off the apparent man, by realizing and becoming the Real man, who dwells within, the Atman, man steps *out* of unreality. He escapes maya and its unerring and unrelenting laws. The *God* in us alone is Real, the *man* an ever-changing illusory garb. When man gets rid of the idea that he is body, then maya, the universe, vanishes forever. This is the standpoint of the jnani. He takes refuge in the Lord dwelling within, his Atman, his own divine Self. He raises the self by the Self. The higher Self is his teacher. *That* teacher he approaches; to *that* teacher he bows down. That teacher is full of Knowledge, free from bondage and perfect, eternal, full of unselfish kindness, the friend of all that lives.

But there is another way to freedom, the way of the bhakta. He passes over this maya (the cause of samsara) by renouncing worldly desires and personal will. He flies to the Master for refuge, who alone is independent of nature, who alone is free, who knows His own power and who can save him and lift him across the ocean of life. In Shankara's *Crest-jewel of Discrimination* the disciple appeals to the Master: 'I submit myself to thee, Master, friend of the bowed-down world and river of selfless kindness. Raise me by thy guiding light that powers forth the nectar of truth and mercy, for I am sunk in the ocean of the world. I am burned by the hot flame of relentless life and torn by the winds of misery. Save me from death, for I take refuge in thee, finding no other rest.'<sup>3</sup>

It is true, God-vision comes, freedom is attained, by becoming universal, by denying all limitations, by standing on Truth and Truth

alone, by ignoring the whole universe, and by taking one's firm stand in the Spirit; but that is a gigantic task, very difficult, because maya's power is so strong. Therefore Sri Krishna says, 'Take refuge in Me. Maya has no power over Me.' And the bhakta takes this safer path. As one saint expresses it, maya is God's dog. He will not let us go past; he keeps us from the Master. We cannot enter his territory. But when we call on the Master, then the dog will not hurt us. Then the Master, hearing our voice, takes us safely into His own house. When we call on God with all our might, He takes us beyond suffering, to His own abode. If we want God, we need not spend much time analysing and investigating nature. We may go to Him direct. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If you want to know a man's wealth, do not waste your time hunting up everything that the man possesses. Go to him and ask him. He can tell you in an instant how much he possesses. So it is with my Divine Mother.' He used to say, 'Go to Her, and She will tell you all there is to be known. She knows everything. It is all under Her power. Do not try to know God through all His manifestations.'<sup>4</sup>

That is the bhakta's attitude. And again we must remember that maya has two aspects. It consists of the gunas. In our last lesson we saw that sattva guna leads to perfection, to freedom, and the other gunas, to bondage. So we must take hold of sattva guna. It is by taking help from the water that the drowning man is saved. By using the water, by swimming, he is saved from the water. So by making use of sattva maya, we go beyond all maya. That is, by devotion, by faith in God, by depending on Him, freedom comes. Laying our burden at His feet, we shall find rest. That is what is meant by the path of sattvic maya, the path of goodness, of holiness, of righteousness. That is the path that leads Godward. The other path leads to greater bondage. Both paths are in maya. Through the phenomenal we must reach the noumenal. Through the changeable, we must reach the unchangeable,

through the passing the Eternal.

The three gunas have been called the three robbers. Certainly this maya robs us of our blissful state, our state of freedom. A belated traveller lost his way in the forest. Wandering about in the attempt to find his way out, he came upon three robbers. They grabbed him and took away from him all that he had on his person. Then one of the robbers said, 'We have taken all that he has, now let us kill him and go our way.' But one of the others said, 'No, why should we kill him? Let us tie him securely to a tree, and then go our way.' But the third robber said, 'Brothers, there is no sense in dealing harshly with this man after we have taken all he possessed. Leave him to me. I shall show him the way out of the forest. He can do us no harm.' The robbers are tamas,

***Still the time comes for everyone when happiness slips away; it evades our grasp no matter how careful we are. When all goes well and all is sunshine, our most loved one is taken from us, or in some other unexpected way sorrow will visit us.***

rajas and sattva gunas, respectively. Tamas robs us of all knowledge and drowns us in the sea of worldliness. Through desire and passion rajas deprives us of the happiness born of freedom, and ties us down with the rope of attachment. But though robbing us of our rightful blissful free state, sattva shows us the way back to our abode of happiness.<sup>5</sup>

Carnality, sensuality, delusion and ignorance—these are tamasic qualities that work our ruin. Egotism, arrogance, greed, passion and strong desires are the marks of a rajasic man, by which he is tied down to the world. Whereas, discrimination, self-control, devotion, charity and truthfulness are sattvic qualities leading to emancipation. Difficult though the path may be, 'Those who take refuge with Me,' says the Lord, 'cross over this maya'. As

many as take refuge in Him, to them the Lord grants the bliss of nirvana.

As we have seen, there is a way by which we can be delivered from bondage. There is a way that frees us from the misery of existence. We are all agreed that even taken at its best, life as a whole is disappointing and does not give the satisfaction that we crave. Our search for happiness, perhaps successful for a time, must meet with failure at the end. Life in short is miserable. We hate to acknowledge it. We try to convince ourselves that it is not so, that still the time will come when we shall say, 'It is good to live.' Once we get over our troubles, then the world will smile on us. Once our affairs are straightened out or our health is restored or wealth has come to us, then we will be happy, then nothing can stand in our way to contentment. A wholesome suggestion as long as it works is much better than grumbling and giving way to despair, but it is not philosophical. No one can escape misery. All may go well for a time; but as long as we are subject to change and death, happiness remains an uncertain quantity. Grasp it while you

can. Hold on to it with all your might. Repeat from the moment that you rise from your sleep till the end of the day: 'I am healthy, I am strong, I am prosperous.' Still the time comes for everyone when happiness slips away; it evades our grasp no matter how careful we are. When all goes well and all is sunshine, our most loved one is taken from us, or in some other unexpected way sorrow *will* visit us.

It was his great ambition to keep from his son even the *rumour* of misfortune that made King Shuddhodana rear his son, the future Buddha, in a surrounding and atmosphere as perfect, as happy, as man could make it. So carefully had every suggestion of misery been kept from the young prince that when leaving his father's pleasure gardens, he knew not disease, deformity, old age or death. And when

he met these conditions, his charioteer had to explain them to him. Long had the truth been hidden from Prince Siddhartha, but the inevitable had to happen. He *also* had to learn that sorrow is the common lot of man, 'Since pleasures end in pain, and youth in age, and love in loss, and life in hateful death, and death in unknown lives that will but yoke man to their wheel again to whirl the round of false delights and woes that are not false.' And not in others alone was he to witness sorrow. He also had to drink the bitter draught before he discovered the nectar—which he later offered as the panacea for all suffering—before he could proclaim his message of deliverance. And then the glorious message came: 'Rejoice at the glad tidings! Buddha the Lord has found the root of all evil. He has shown us the way to salvation. Buddha dispels the illusions of our minds and redeems us from the terrors of death. Buddha, our Lord, brings comfort to the weary and sorrow-laden; he restores peace to those who are broken down under the burden of life. He gives courage to the weak when they would fain (to) give up self-reliance and hope. Ye that suffer from the tribulations of life, ye that have to struggle and endure, ye that yearn for a life of truth, rejoice at the glad tidings! There is balm for the wounded, and there is bread for the hungry. There is water for the thirsty, and there is hope for the despairing. There is light for those in darkness, and there is inexhaustible blessing for the upright. Heal your wounds, ye wounded, and eat your fill, ye hungry. Rest ye weary, and ye who are thirsty quench your thirst. Look up to the Light, ye that sit in darkness. Be full of good cheer, ye that are forlorn. Trust in Truth, ye that love the Truth, for the kingdom of righ-

teousness is founded upon earth. The darkness of error is dispelled by the light of Truth. We can see our way and make firm and certain steps. Buddha, our Lord, has revealed the Truth. The Truth cures our diseases and redeems us from perdition; the Truth strengthens us in life and in death. The Truth alone can conquer the evils of error. Rejoice at the good tidings!'

But *through* suffering, beyond suffering! *Through* darkness to Light, that is man's experience. The thoughtful person cannot look upon life as the highest attainment. He wants to cross over this maya. He aspires for that eternal changeless state from which there is no returning. 'They who take refuge in Me alone cross over this maya.' That is Sri Krishna's solemn promise. 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed,' said Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

But if that is true, if there is a way out, if those who resort to God cross over this illusion, why then do not all men resort to Him? The next verse is an answer to this question.

*(to be continued)*

## References

1. *Tejo'si tejo mayi dehi ...* —See Swami Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), 60.
2. *Rigveda*, 10.82.7; quoted in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.88.
3. *Vivekachudamani*, 35-6.
4. See *M*, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 672.
5. See *Gospel*, 218-9.
6. *John*, 8:26.

**T**ry to love the Lord with your heart and soul. Then you will see how compassionate He is. It does not matter much what you eat or wear. There is no harm in fulfilling some of your small desires, but it should be done with discrimination. You must watch carefully so that you may not be attracted to anything else besides God.

—Swami Turiyananda

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# The Appeal of the Upanishads Today

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

**M**ay my limbs wax strong. May my speech, vital force, eyes, ears, strength and all the senses also increase in power. The Brahman expounded in the Upanishads is the all in all. May I never deny Brahman nor Brahman ever deny me. Let there be non-denial [of Brahman]; let there be non-denial on my part [of Brahman]. May the virtues proclaimed in the Upanishads reside in me, who am devoted to the Atman; may these virtues reside in me. Om Peace, Peace, Peace.<sup>1</sup>

Our subject this evening is 'The Appeal of the Upanishads Today'—today meaning

the present time in which we live; this, significantly, is the turn of the century. I would therefore try to present the eternal message enshrined in the ancient wisdom, which is the Upanishads, vis-à-vis the revolutionary thought currents that have been sweeping over today's world during the century gone by and at the turn of the new century. This would help us understand the eternal appeal the Upanishads exercise on the human mind today, and how the modern world thought is re-echoing the Upanishadic wisdom in modern and scientific language.

## Revolutionary Changes in World Thought During the Last Century

**S**ince the beginning of the last century, during last the one hundred years, that is, world thought has undergone certain sweeping changes. We may broadly classify them into four categories:

- ✓ in the field of physics, that is, the science of matter,
- ✓ in the realm of bio-science/biotechnology, that is, the science of life,
- ✓ in the domain of psychology, that is, the science of mind,
- ✓ in the sphere of communication—computer science/engineering, leading to the search for Artificial Intelligence (AI).

### Revolutions in the Field of Physics, the Science of Matter

Revolutionary thoughts that completely altered man's conception of the physical world were first conceived at the very beginning of the twentieth century by Albert Ein-

stein. In 1905, he propounded his famous theory of Special Relativity, which revolutionized our conception of space and time. This threw open a hitherto-unknown, and therefore unconventional, world view—Weltanschauung—whose scientific and philosophical implications are profound. That Nature does not have any preferential frame of reference, which means that all physical laws remain the same irrespective of the frame of reference used, is Einstein's famous discovery—the relativity principle—which has given us a new physics and a new understanding of Nature. One implication of this principle, philosophically speaking, is that Nature is impartial, for it chooses to treat all the frames of reference on the same footing. The my-frame-versus-your-frame quarrel, the root of all fanaticism and bigotry, was set at rest, once and for all, by this scientific discovery, applied to philosophy and religion. Swami Vivekananda

spoke about this in his famous address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, a decade before Einstein's enunciation of the relativity theory. Vivekananda called for the eradication of fanaticism and bigotry from the human heart. This call was echoed in scientific terms by Einstein, who proved that preferential attachment to one particular frame of reference—a framework of thought, in philosophical terms—is against Nature's scheme of things, for Nature treats all frames alike, on the same footing. This sameness—*samya* or *samatva* in Vedantic parlance—is a fundamental principle of Nature, whose violation leads to the undesirable feelings of fanaticism, bigotry, hatred and attraction/repulsion. The theory of Special Relativity was followed up by Einstein by the theory of General Relativity in 1925, in which he gave a very different interpretation of gravitation. Our concept of space, time and matter thus underwent a revolution. We were taught that the space that we see has a very special characteristic: it is 'curved' and, what is more interesting, its 'curvature' is influenced by the presence of matter. Thus space, time and matter are not to be considered as three distinct entities, but deeply intertwined with one another. It is not that matter is in space-time, but matter itself, in a sense, is space-time. Einstein was once asked to define the relativity theory in a few words. He said: 'Earlier, physicists thought that if all matter vanishes from the universe, space and time alone would remain; but the relativity theory has proved that space and time would also vanish with matter!' It is this continuum that brought about sweeping changes in our world view, *Weltanschauung*.

In parallel with Einstein's relativity theory came Max Planck's famous Quantum Theory, enunciated in 1900, whose centenary is now being celebrated all the world over. The tiny quantum—ubiquitous and powerful—began to dominate all science, not to speak of physics! Planck said that the emission and absorption of radiation takes place not in a con-

tinuous fashion, but in discrete bundles of energy, called quanta. Each quantum is a 'bundle of energy', and the energy content of a quantum is proportional to the frequency of radiation. Here we see how the particle concept, namely the discrete energy-bundle—the quantum concept—gets happily wedded to the wave concept, frequency being a typically wave concept. This was the beginning of the intermingling of the wave and particle concepts—that radiation takes place in terms of quanta. The quanta of electromagnetic radiation came to be known as photons, which soon came to be recognized as fundamental particles in particle physics, with specific characteristics.

When the correctness of Planck's quantum theory soon became a proven fact, thanks to its successful application in several phenomena, particularly in the atomic realm, a very strange idea was thrown up by de Broglie. Once again, the motivation for de Broglie's idea came from the philosophical world view of Nature already spoken about, namely, that Nature is impartial because it is symmetric. That Nature is symmetric and impartial is what makes it beautiful. The Sanskrit words corresponding to these concepts are, respectively, *shivam* and *sundaram*. It is well known in Indian spiritual thought that Truth (*satyam*) ought to be auspicious, just, impartial, fair, impersonal (*shivam*), and beautiful (*sundaram*). It is a simple fact that beauty is directly related to symmetry, for it is symmetry that engenders beauty. Further, there is a well-known theorem in physics, called Noether's Theorem, which states that it is symmetry that gives rise to conservation. Conservation laws are fundamental to physics, and in fact to all science, including perhaps social sciences like economics, political science and sociology. And the statement is that these conservation laws are a direct consequence of symmetry principles.

We thus see how the philosophical ideas of Vedanta in particular, and Indian spiritual thought in general, have found an echo in

physics and have exerted an unknown influence in shaping the world view emerging from the New Physics in the twentieth century. It would be too naive to claim that Indian thought has influenced these revolutionary discoveries in physics; what actually happens is that, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out, when certain fundamental ideas are conceived by great minds, these remain as a part of the Cosmic Mind—called Hiranagarbha in Vedanta—and every mind being an integral part of the Cosmic Mind, becomes vulnerable and sensitive to these cosmic vibrations of thought. Thus the sensitive minds of these great physicists—an Einstein or a Planck or a de Broglie—‘catch’ these vibrations in the Cosmic Mind and with their training and education in physics, formulate the laws, principles and theories which now bear their name. This discovery of the Hiranagarbha is one outstanding feat of the Upanishadic rishis—one of the ‘very bold generalizations’, in the words of Swami Vivekananda. It may be of interest to mention in this connection the joint research venture by Pauli, that genius of a physicist of the last century, and Jung, the famous psychologist and a contemporary of Pauli, in which they were trying to formulate a very generalized concept like the Cosmic Mind or the Hiranagarbha. Unfortunately, their research in this direction is little known and has been left unpursued by later researchers. The Upanishadic echo is too loud in this attempt to be ignored.

De Broglie, then, came up with his startling discovery of the matter-waves in 1924-25. With belief—*shraddha* is the Upanishadic word—in the symmetry and impartiality of Nature, de Broglie argued as follows: If, according to Planck’s quantum hypothesis, radiation can have particle (quantum or photon) characteristics, then, by symmetry, a particle should also be endowed with wave characteristics. The two fundamental manifestations of Nature, namely, radiation and matter, should be treated on an equal footing, there being no

partial treatment in Nature’s symmetric scheme, and therefore wave characteristics of matter (particle) should follow as a natural consequence of particle characteristics of radiation (waves). He thus came up with his startling discovery—this should have been considered a ‘mad’ proposition when de Broglie first propounded it!—of the matter-wave. What these waves are, what their nature is, how they are to be interpreted in physical terms and a host of other questions immediately came up and the answers to these questions form part of what is now known as the Wave Mechanics of Schrodinger, with its more abstract and general-formalistic counterpart, Quantum Mechanics of Heisenberg.

Heisenberg’s general formalism of Quantum Mechanics, and more particularly, his famous Uncertainty (or Indeterminacy) Principle has very profound philosophical implications: Is Nature probabilistic or is it deterministic? One finds here an echo of the free will-versus-predetermination debate in philosophy. Conditioned as he was by his own religio-philosophical conceptions, Einstein could not till the end of his life accept the probabilistic interpretation of Quantum Mechanics. He argued that it is the inability of the limited human mind to be able to comprehend certain ‘hidden variables’ in Nature that leads him to say that Nature is probabilistic at the micro (atomic/sub-atomic) level. There was a famous debate between Einstein and Bohr: Einstein said, ‘I can’t believe that God plays dice; he certainly knows what he is doing and going to do.’ In reply, Bohr quipped, ‘But you can’t dictate to God what he should do.’ Recall Sri Ramakrishna’s simple statement: ‘The Divine Mother is *icchāmayi* (self-willed); how can you say what She should do at what time?’ When the probabilistic interpretation came to stay, however, Einstein still found it unacceptable and spent the last part of his life like a recluse, cut off from the advances in contemporary physics, searching for something he could not find!

The story of Einstein's search for a Unified Field Theory, which never ended during his lifetime, is a fascinating chapter in the history of physics. Having propounded his Special Theory and General Theory of Relativity and having become frustrated with the probabilistic interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, to which he could not find an alternative, Einstein spent his life in quest of the Unified Field Theory, the Holy Grail that eluded him till the end. The motivation for the search is itself illuminating and remarkable. Swami Vivekananda said in his lectures on jnana yoga that the human mind always looks for generalization; it goes from the particular to the general, from the general to the more general and so on, till it reaches the most general—Oneness. When that is reached, all search comes to an end, for in that consummation of the quest, 'peace that passeth understanding' is reached, culminating in the attainment of supreme Oneness—*shantam, shivam, advaitam* in the language of the *Mandukya Upanishad*. Swami Vivekananda pointed out how the Upanishadic rishis made some bold generalizations, and saw the particulars as manifestations of those generalizations. By the turn of the last century, physicists were investigating into and researching with Supersymmetry, Grand Unification Theories (GUTs) and so on. Salam and Weinberg got the Nobel Prize for the unification of three of the four fundamental interactions—forces of Nature: the electromagnetic, weak and strong forces; the gravitational force is still eluding our grasp. Physicists are trying hard to bring that too under their unification scheme, as also to integrate quantum theory with gravitation—the microcosmic manifestation with the macrocosmic one through their quantum gravity theories. The hope, ultimately, is to discover a Theory of Everything (ToE). Do we not get here a clear and loud echo, in unambiguous language, of the Upanishadic enquiry: *Kasminnu bhagavo vijñāte sarvamidam vijñātam bhavati?*, Sir, what is it, by knowing which everything can be

known?<sup>2</sup> There have been speculations of late by some physicists that the ToE cannot be found at all, for no such theory really exists. But our ancient wisdom, enshrined in the Upanishads, clearly stated that it is possible to know That by knowing which everything else becomes known. But then, for this discovery to be possible, one should go beyond the level of matter and enter into the realm of pure Consciousness, absolute Awareness, or *chaitanya*.

### **Revolutions in the Realm of Bio-science, the Science of Life**

The last century saw some sweeping changes in the Science of Life. Interestingly, the pioneers, the founding fathers, of Quantum Mechanics were deeply interested in the question of Life: Schrodinger, the father of Wave Mechanics, wrote a book *What is Life?* Physics and bio-science were getting closer to each other and newer branches were getting developed: biophysics, biochemistry, biotechnology, biomedical engineering and so on. The revolutionary discoveries in the realm of life sciences during the last century, which began with the structure of the DNA, reached at the turn this new century a point where the decoding of the genetic code has become possible and a reality. Around the middle of the last century, hectic research activity was going on in the study of the DNA structure, and the final breakthrough came in 1953 through the researches of a British biophysicist, Francis Crick, and an American geneticist, James Watson. They suggested that DNA structure was a double helix—a conclusion they reached after studying X-ray photographs taken by the British X-ray crystallographer, Rosalind Franklin (1920-58). She used X-rays to look at DNA crystals. Crick, Watson and Maurice Wilkins (born 1916) got the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1962. Franklin died before her contribution was properly credited. The basic rules of genetics were, however, worked out long ago, during the nineteenth century, by one Gregor Mendel (1822-84), an Austrian

priest and botanist who discovered how characteristics were inherited. He found out that inheritance does not work by blending characteristics together, as people then thought. Instead, they are inherited in pairs. In each pair, only one characteristic is usually expressed (shown). Although Mendel had worked out the basic rules of genetics much earlier, it was not until the twentieth century that scientists rediscovered and re-substantiated his work.

It is now common knowledge that every form of life, from an elephant to an alga, is put together and controlled by a chemical 'recipe'. Instead of being written down, this recipe is in the form of a chemical code. The code is contained in helical (spiral-shaped) molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which are packed away inside the cells of all living things. The chemical code is very complex. The code inside one human cell contains fifty thousand to a hundred thousand separate instructions, called genes, and each gene controls a different characteristic. Genetics is the study of the way inherited characteristics are passed on. Genetic engineering is the technology by which one could manipulate the genes, thereby altering the inherited characteristics at the microcosmic level. In a cell's nucleus, there are several lengths of DNA. Each one is called a chromosome. A gene is one area of a chromosome that has the instructions to make one protein. DNA works by telling a cell how to make the many different proteins that our cells need to work. To do this, a part of the DNA helix is temporarily 'unzipped', so that its code can be copied. The copy moves out of the nucleus. Once outside, it instructs the cell to assemble a particular protein, which could be an enzyme or a collagen (a skin protein), for example.

Just by the turn of this century, as we were entering the new millennium, there were reports from British as well as American groups of biophysicists and biotechnologists that they had successfully decoded the genetic code. They were thus claiming that human be-

ings have, for the first time, access to the 'mind of God', a challenge the now famous astrophysicist Stephen Hawking has asked the physical scientists to take up in a different context. The bio-scientists hence lay claim to the discovery of the language of God—the *brahma-lipi* in the language of our ancient scriptures.

### **Revolutionary Discoveries in the Realm of Psychology, the Science of the Mind**

The principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, discovered and enunciated by him at the turn of the last century, around 1900, and developed by him in later years, set in motion revolutionary changes in our conception of the human mind and its functioning at deeper layers. These developments made psychology an independent and fascinating branch of study. Freud's theories of the unconscious, of the libido, funnelled through a personality structure of id, ego and super-ego, his concepts of eros and thanatos, of free association, of transference as methods of psychiatric treatment and so on are now well known. Later modifications of Freud's theories and concepts by Alfred Adler and Carl G Jung, who rejected some of the Freudian concepts like excessive emphasis on the libido, identification of the libido with the sex-instinct and so on, opened up newer dimensions in psychoanalytical research. Adler developed his own school of psychology called 'Individual Psychology' or 'Ego Psychology', while Jung developed his school of 'Analytical Psychology'. Jung expanded and modified the Freudian concept of libido to mean and represent the whole of psychic energy and the unconscious as the storehouse of all our psychic energy and power. Jung's concept of Collective Unconscious which includes 'archetypes' that provide the religious symbols and myths of different cultures, his concept of polarities in the unconscious, namely, the persona and the shadow, the anima and the animus and so on made our understanding of the human mind,

the science of psychology, wider and deeper. As the development of the various concepts of psychoanalysis progressed over the years, newer ideas emerged, essentially by the galvanization and interaction of these concepts constituting what is now known as the 'Third Force' in psychology. It is sometimes called 'Humanistic Psychology', some of the prominent members of this school being Karen Horney, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Eric Fromm.

Almost parallel to the psychoanalytical tradition, two other schools of psychology also developed, mostly in academic circles. These are behaviourism in America and gestalt in Germany. Some of the prominent names associated with behaviourist school are John B Watson, B F Skinner and Walter S Hunter, who reduced consciousness to a purely nervous phenomenon of 'stimulus and response', denying an independent existence of the mind apart from the brain. Many of the microbiologists also appear to hold this view about the mind. Gestalt Psychology developed in Germany with the researches of Wertheimer, Kofka and Kohler, who held that perception and other mental activities take place not as the coordination of a series of analytical processes but as integral wholes.

A third school of psychology parallel to the analytical tradition, known as Hormic Psychology, was founded in Great Britain by William McDougall around the beginning of the last century. This school differs from the psychoanalytical school in the introduction of will, which was conceived more or less as an instinct.

Yet another school of psychology was founded by some psychologists under the influence of the philosophy of existentialism. One of its leading exponents is Rollo May, who develops the essential ideas of this school in his book *Psychology and the Human Dilemma*.

Viktor Frankl emphasized that a human being's primary concern is the 'search for meaning', rather than the satisfaction of bio-

logical needs. Though not constituting a separate school of psychology, Frankl's ideas have considerably influenced several thinkers in the science of psychology.

The brief survey presented above gives a bird's-eye view of the vast amount of research and thinking that have gone into the understanding of the human mind in depth.

### **Revolutionary Ideas in the Field of Computer Science and Engineering / Information Technology, Leading to Speculations about Artificial Intelligence**

Over the past few decades, thanks to the enormous strides made by electronic computer technology, attempts at computer simulation of human intelligence are being made in a big way. This area of lively controversy that has been arousing tremendous interest in recent years is referred to as Artificial Intelligence (AI). There is a point of view, referred to as strong AI, which asserts that mental qualities of some sort could be attributed to the logical functioning of any computational device, even the simplest ones, what to speak of sophisticated ones like the computers. Computer science and engineering and information technology are still very young disciplines. Supercomputers are being developed; as years pass by, these devices will get faster and faster, will have larger and larger rapid-access memory stores, more and more logical units and will be able to perform larger and larger operations in parallel. All this is actually happening now, and that at a staggering speed. The idea behind strong AI is that mental activity is simply the carrying out of some well-defined sequence of operations via a specified calculational procedure, frequently referred to as an algorithm. AI protagonists believe that by developing powerful devices to execute these algorithms, computer simulation of human intelligence is possible.

Exciting and highly controversial research is going on in this field of intelligence, a revolutionary development at this turn of the

present century. Scientists (physicists, biotechnologists, computer engineers, artificial intelligence people) are now asking certain fundamental questions about consciousness, like 'What does consciousness mean? What is intelligence? What is awareness? Is the universe we see, perceive and live in, self-aware? What is the relation between consciousness and the brain?' In a word, consciousness research seems to be engaging the minds of scientists and thinking men and women all over the world.

Self-awareness appears to be a wonderful phenomenon in this consciousness research study. There is a funny story with which Roger Penrose's famous book *Emperor's New Mind* begins. The title of this book, as one can easily see, is a parody of the well-known story of the emperor's new clothes: how the nudity of the mighty and all-powerful emperor was exposed by the unsophisticated simplicity of an innocent little child! This parody of the story of the emperor's new clothes is about the emperor's new mind: how the mighty power and near-omniscience of a super-super computer was exposed as hollow snobbishness by a little boy, watching the inaugural ceremony where the mighty computer's great powers were being displayed.

The story is as follows: A super-super computer is created by a scientist, an AI protagonist. This near-omniscient machine is to display its might and genius at an inaugural ceremony where important dignitaries are present: scientists and technologists of all disciplines, political leaders, men of importance from all walks of life. The claim is that this super-super computer can, within micro-micro- or nanoseconds, answer any question that might be put to it.

At the inaugural ceremony, the President, the head of the whole country, gently requests anybody present in the audience to put the first question by way of inauguration. Everybody is keeping quiet—all the great stal-

warts among the scientists and engineers remaining silent and holding their breath, lest they appeared silly and stupid before such an amazing omniscience, by asking a question. A little boy gets up, puts up his hand, and says, 'Sir, may I have the privilege of asking the first question?' 'Yes, come on,' says the President. 'Go ahead, boy, it is your privilege to ask the first question.' The boy mutters in utter innocence: 'How does it feel to be a computer?' The computer activates, the various lights start glowing; seconds pass, minutes pass and almost an hour passes. There is no answer. The entire audience looks on flabbergasted, dumbfounded, confounded and nonplussed. There is a stunning silence all around. After a couple of hours of computation, the computer blinks and gives the message: 'I don't know.' There is uproar, hilarious laughter everywhere, and a curious joy at the performance of this 'God that failed', derision at this ignominous parading its wanton 'omniscience'!

The computer fails to answer a simple question, namely, how it *feels* to be a computer itself, because it is an 'unintelligent omniscience', capable of making very 'intelligent' computations at fantastic speed, much faster than an intelligent human being. Notice here the meaning of the word *intelligent* in regard to a human person and a computer. A human being is intelligent in the sense that he is self-aware. A computer is 'intelligent', in the sense of being capable of highly 'intelligent' computations, being itself absolutely 'unintelligent', that is, not self-aware. This 'unintelligent omniscience' is made to do all the bullwork by the 'little' intelligence of a human being, and it is doing things that he could never hope to do in a lifetime! But the 'little intelligence' of the human being has given birth to this fantastic 'unintelligent genius'! That is the paradox and the glory of Consciousness, the conscious Principle, *chaitanya* as the Upanishads would call it.

## Upanishadic Analysis of the Layers of a Human Personality vis-à-vis the Revolutions in the Thought Currents as Mentioned

The four main trends of thought mentioned above — the revolutionary changes in the thought current of the world during the last century and beginning of the present century—apparently look unconnected, or at the most running parallel, with hardly any meeting point. The physical, the biological, the psychic and the intellectual—how are they related to one another? Or, are they related at all? The human mind, as we have said, always looks for interrelationship, interconnectedness, unification and integration. There are attempts today to pursue what is known as 'inter-disciplinary' research. Most interestingly, in attempting this so-called inter-disciplinary approach, we have never asked whether these disciplines were separate at all at any time that an interrelationship is attempted to be discovered through inter-disciplinary approach? In India, the various disciplines, the branches of knowledge, were never separate from one another, all of them being classified under *aparā vidyā*.<sup>3</sup> In seeking the interrelation between these four, the physical, the biological, the psychic and the intellectual, we should seek how they are related to the individual, the person, the 'I', for whom they are intended in the first place. Without the 'I', the person, the conscious Principle, these disciplines have no meaning whatsoever.

The Upanishads have analysed the human personality into five layers or levels. Each layer is to be considered an autonomous self, governed and regulated by its own laws. Popularly, this scheme is known as *pañca-kośa-viślesana*, analysis of the five sheaths; but then the word *kośa*, or sheath, does not occur in the original text, the second chapter of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Commenting on this text, Shankaracharya introduced the concept of *kośa*, or sheath, to suit his Advaitic philosophy. So, going by the original text of the Upanishad, we may seek the correspondence of

the four disciplines mentioned above with the hierarchy of the following four layers of human personality: (1) the physical (*annamaya-ātman*), (2) the biological (*prāṇamaya-ātman*), (3) the psychological (*manomaya-ātman*), and (4) the intellectual (*vijñānamaya ātman*).

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* speaks of Bhṛigu, the son of Varuna, approaching his father with the following prayer: '*Adhīhi bhagavo brahmeti*. Sir, teach me Brahman.'<sup>4</sup> Varuna says, '*Yato va imāni bhūtāni jāyante; yena jātāni jīvanti; yatprayantya bhisaṁviśanti; tadvijñāsasva; tadbrahmeti*. Know That from which all beings originate, emerge; That in which all beings rest; and That into which all beings finally merge—That is Brahman.' (3.1.1)

He also instructs his son about the *sadhana*, the method or process by which this realization of Brahman could be achieved: '*Tapasā brahma vijñāsasva; tapo brahmeti*. Know Brahman by means of tapas; that is, by means of penance, austerity, meditation and control of the senses. Tapas is Brahman.' (3.2.1) A wonderful definition of tapas is given in the *Mahabharata*, which Shankaracharya quotes often in his commentaries on the Upanishads: '*Manasaśca indriyāṇām ca aikāgryam paramam tapaḥ*. Tapas is the concentrated focusing of the mind and all the senses (on the object of tapas, which is the Reality, or Truth).'<sup>5</sup> Only by an absolute control over the senses and the mind, and a concentrated, intense and passionate enquiry into the Reality, can one hope to realize the Truth: '*Āvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchān*', as the *Katha Upanishad* would say;<sup>6</sup> that is, anyone who desires to attain Immortality (*amṛtatva*), must be *āvṛttacakṣu* (senses and mind turned inward and focused on the Reality within). Note that the Upanishad says that 'Tapas is Brahman, *Tapo brahmeti*'. By saying that the goal is Brahman and the means (tapas) is also Brahman, the Upanishad indicates that in the ultimate Realization, the goal and the means

coalesce into one. Having been instructed thus, Bhrigu performs tapas, meditates. He then realizes the Truth, or Brahman, as physical, *annamaya*, for it is matter that pervades everything and is present everywhere; it is the physical universe that we perceive through our senses.

He then approaches his father again and tells him of his realization of Brahman as *annamaya*. The teacher does not say yes or no, does not give him the final answer, but encourages him to struggle further and to discover for himself the deeper layers of his self. The teacher says: 'Good, go on.' '*Tapasā brahma vijijñāsava; tapo brahmeti*. Know Brahman through tapas (meditation, austerity, penance); tapas is Brahman.' Bhrigu again goes back to do further tapas. Having performed tapas, having meditated, having investigated into himself, Bhrigu realizes Brahman as *prāṇamaya*, as life-force. He feels that the Reality cannot be just matter; for the whole universe is vibrating, animated, as it were, with life, prana. This principle of universal animation, this life-force vibrating through and through, is the *prāṇamaya*.

With this realization, he approaches the teacher once again and prays to be taught. With his characteristic style of propelling the student to further investigation, Varuna once again tells him: 'Good, go on. Meditate, do tapas and know Brahman.' This is the Upanishadic technique: the answer is not directly given to the student, for, then, he would never learn. The disciple should be taught the joy of struggle, the perseverance to investigate, to probe deeper and deeper into himself, until he comes face to face with Truth. The teacher just plays the catalyst and gently, but effectively, persuades the disciple to investigate into himself, to go deeper and deeper till he realizes the Truth for himself. Thus, on and on Bhrigu proceeds into the investigation of the nature of Brahman. He realizes Brahman next as *manomaya*—the mental. He feels that the entire universe is only thought, *bhāvamaya*. The objects

that we see and feel are also nothing but thoughts.

Again the teacher sends him back for further investigation, more vigorous tapas. Having meditated, having performed more profound tapas, Bhrigu realizes the Truth as *vijñānamaya*—the intellectual. Bhrigu comes closer and closer to the Truth, to the ultimate Consciousness. Life and Consciousness are not the same in Upanishadic parlance. The discovery of Consciousness as different from Life, enunciated by our Upanishadic rishis, is fundamental to Vedantic wisdom. Consciousness is at a much more profound layer than Life. And lastly Bhrigu realizes the Truth as *ānandamaya*—the blissful. He then feels that there is absolute, infinite Joy, and nothing but Joy pervading the universe.

This section of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* concludes by declaring that this Brahman-realization is 'established in the supreme Space (of one's own heart), *parame vyoman-pratiṣṭhītā*'.<sup>7</sup> This, once again, is one of the most important of Upanishadic doctrines: That Reality which is all-pervading, supreme and immense (Brahman)—the macrocosmic consciousness Principle—is non-different from, that is, absolutely identical with, the Truth, or Reality shining in one's own *cidākāśa*, the innermost Consciousness-Space of one's heart—the microcosmic consciousness Principle.

The Upanishads therefore analyse the human personality, the fundamental Atman principle, into five layers or levels: *annamaya-ātman*, *prāṇamaya-ātman*, *manomaya-ātman*, *vijñānamaya-ātman* and *ānandamaya-ātman*. Each of these layers is an autonomous entity by itself, governed by its own laws; it is not that one is superior or inferior to another; it is not that one is superseded by another; it is not that one is sublated or eliminated by another; it is not that one is more true and another less, or one is true and another untrue; but that the Atman manifests itself in the human personality as five different layers.

An example from atomic physics would

perhaps make the meaning of these layers or levels more clear. When we say that the electron revolving round the nucleus in (elliptical) orbits is in the K-shell, L-shell, M-shell and so on, it is not that the K-shell is superior to the L-shell or one of them is sublated or eliminated in favour of another, but that the electron happens to be in a particular shell when it has a certain amount of energy, and when it acquires greater energy or loses some energy it would shift to the succeeding or preceding shell. Similarly, by dint of sadhana, or spiritual practice, when a sadhaka, spiritual aspirant, acquires greater and greater energy, he would move over to higher and higher layers, the strength to move to a higher layer requir-

ing a quantum of energy supplied either by the guru, the spiritual teacher, or coming from one's own inner reservoir of strength and energy.

*(to be concluded)*

### References

1. *Āpyāyantu mamāṅgāni* ... —Shanti mantra for the *Kena Upanishad*.
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.3.
3. *Ibid.*, 1.1.5.
4. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 3.1.1.
5. *Mahabharata*, 'Shanti Parva', 250.4.
6. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
7. *Taittiriya*, 3.6.1.

## Spiritual Practice

One accomplishes much in this life by dint of special effort and care. Man suffers in various ways because of his own foolishness. But one can minimize these sufferings if one succeeds in purifying the mind. Everyone experiences happiness and misery and no one can escape from them. They remain as long as the body lasts; but one is no longer overcome by them if one becomes devoted to God. They come and go. The wise person ignores them and keeps himself engaged in sadhana. Their influence ceases when one becomes rooted in spiritual practices. Then the mind is absorbed in the bliss of devotion and enjoys peace. Worship the Lord; the mind will be calm automatically. Without depending on a place or a person, take refuge in the indwelling Self. Try to purify the mind with all your heart and soul. Curb your outgoing tendencies and make an effort to be indrawn. And shunning all worldly desires, direct yourself towards God. Then you will no longer go astray due to the vain prompting of your mind; and you will be endowed with peace and goodness by the grace of the Lord.

'Your mind forever' this is the right attitude. Everything in this world is very transient, lasting only a few days. Nothing is permanent except the Lord. Therefore, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, if we can live a God-centred life, no miseries can touch us.

There is no world outside. It is what we project outside. But how difficult it is to understand this, and how much more difficult to remember it always, even after understanding it. We feel unhappy when we make ourselves small. That is the bane. Yet we forget and are in the whirlpool of maya ever once again. But thanks to the grace of Mother, we remember it again soon. 'There is no happiness in that which is finite; that which is finite is perishable. That which is universal is Blissfulness itself.' Know the universal! That is thy real Self.

—Swami Turiyananda

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# Self-expression or Self-control?

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

## The Message of Self-control

Self-control is the control of the mind and its desires, urges, emotions and delusions. It is controlling the outgoing tendencies of the mind and the senses and bringing them back to our Self within. Self-control is the key to success in any field of life and it is an indispensable necessity for Self-realization, the goal of spiritual quest. Self-control is the message of the sages and saints. It is the exhortation of the scriptures and traditions, the foundation of all yogas and the very essence of all spiritual austerities and disciplines. In his *Vivekachudamani* Sri Shankaracharya says:

The mental sheath is the (sacrificial) fire which, fed with the fuel of numerous desires by the five sense-organs which serve as priests, and set ablaze by the sense-objects which act as the stream of oblations, brings about this phenomenal universe.

This is no ignorance (*avidya*) outside the mind. The mind alone is *avidya*, the cause of the bondage of transmigration. When that is destroyed, all else is destroyed, and when it is manifested, everything else is manifested.<sup>1</sup>

An unruly mind is our worst enemy. It is the root cause of all turmoil and mental darkness. Bringing the mind under control is the only way to inner peace and tranquillity. Control of this mind is the highest yoga and the most vital aspect of yoga practice. All spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, japa and pilgrimage lead to control of the mind. Sri Krishna says in his last message:

Charity, the performance of one's duty, the observance of vows, general and particular, the hearing of the scriptures, meritorious acts and all other works—all these culminate in the control of the mind. The control of the mind is the highest Yoga.

Say, of what use are charity and the rest to one whose mind is controlled and pacified? Of what use, again, are this charity and the rest to one whose mind is restless or lapsing into dullness?<sup>2</sup>

## The View against Self-control

There is a view upheld by a school of thought that any form of self-control is repressive, inhibitive and reactive. It creates neurosis, depression and fantasies that make a person experience so-called spiritual emotions and ecstasies. According to this view, a person's desire to renounce the world and worldly pleasures is often caused by the repression of his sense urges. This view holds that self-control obstructs spontaneity, brings personality disorders and forces a person to lead a false life. Cravings for sense enjoyment are natural and normal; when they are repressed, they go underground and create heightened desire for the objects craved, making such objects appear more real and alluring than they actually are. Self-control nurtures pessimism and is a practice of gradual suicide. Self-expression, not self-control, stands for freedom, authenticity and spontaneity.

## The View of Yoga and Vedanta

To the seers of Yoga and Vedanta so-called 'self-expression' is unhealthy and reckless. It is a philosophy of living that only brings dissipation, degradation and disintegration. Those who run wild in the forest of sense pleasures are eventually eaten up by the tiger that lives in that forest. As Sri Shankaracharya so appropriately says, 'In the forest tract of sense pleasures there prowls a huge tiger called the mind. Let good people who have a longing for liberation never go there.'<sup>3</sup>

Advocates of self-expression ask for giving free rein to all our thoughts, urges and desires with no restraint whatsoever. According to them, a human individual is driven by five basic urges: self-preservation, self-expression or power, sex, gregariousness and the knowledge of the world around him. They are of the opinion that the sex urge is the master urge and that all other urges are overt or covert expressions of that master urge. The sex urge, they say, is the desire for reproduction and is the most natural urge of life. It is this urge that is behind all hormonal and glandular urges. When repressed, it creates an unhealthy mental condition for a person and gives him no rest or peace.

The seers and sages of Yoga and Vedanta maintain that the human individual is not a libido-driven creature and his brain is not an appendage of his genital organ. The core of his being is the divine Self, and his basic urges are three: immortality, unbounded joy and unrestricted awareness. Of these three, the master urge is unbounded joy. Life must have joy in some form or other for its nourishment. The Upanishads tell us that Self-knowledge brings the most intense and pure joy ever imaginable. Sense enjoyment and sense gratification are the most polluted and perverted forms of the pure joy of Self-knowledge. One who has not yet tasted this highest joy cannot think of any other joy except the pleasures of the senses, and so he lives on those pleasures that are like nectar at first but like poison in the end.

In fulfilment of this urge for unbounded joy, a human individual looks for a new body, a new place, new possessions, new thrills of sense enjoyment and a new environment; but nowhere in the universe, or in any sense enjoyment, does he find fulfilment. Finally, he realizes that appeasing the mind is not the way to peace and happiness, because sense desires are insatiable and sense enjoyments deplete the vigour of the mind. He then begins to control his thoughts and sense desires in search of his true Self, which is immortal, all-pervading,

and the one source of all joy. Success in this quest is possible only through self-control. Emphasizing the need of self-control, Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Why is it that people do not see God? It is because of the barrier of "woman and gold" [lust and greed].'<sup>4</sup> 'The obstacle to yoga is "woman and gold". Yoga is possible when the mind becomes pure. The seat of the mind is between the eyebrows; but its look is fixed on the navel and the organs of generation and evacuation, that is to say, on "woman and gold". But through spiritual discipline the same mind looks upward.'<sup>5</sup>

The *Bhagavadgīta* says, 'He who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger even before he quits the body—he is a yogi, he is a happy man. Those who are free from lust and anger, who have subdued their minds and realized the Self—those *sannyasis*, both here and hereafter, attain freedom in Brahman.'<sup>6</sup>

The Upanishad says: 'The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires.'<sup>7</sup>

In his poem 'Song of the Sannyasin' Swami Vivekananda writes:

Truth never comes where  
   lust and fame and greed  
 Of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman  
 As his wife can ever perfect be;  
 Nor he who owns the least of things, nor he  
 Whom anger chains, can ever pass  
   thro' Maya's gates.  
 So, give these up, Sannyāsin bold! Say,  
   —'Om Tat Sat, Om!'<sup>8</sup>

Christ says, 'For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.'<sup>9</sup>

Practice of self-control is most purifying

because self-control transforms the quality of our mind. By controlling his crude and raw impulses and emotions, a human individual develops reason and by controlling reason, he develops intuition, which is the purified form of reason. Self-control is the mark of a pure mind. It is this purity of mind that distinguishes a saint from a worldly person. While a worldly person is guided by instincts of self-love and self-preservation, a saint finds his connection with the entire universe and is guided by the spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of others. Self-control is asserting our higher Self over our lower self. Life is a rebellion against the laws of nature. Submission to them would leave us at the mercy of the whims of our mind. Such submission is natural for an animal, but not for a human being.

The seers of Yoga and Vedanta speak of sublimation of urges and desires, not of their repression. Sublimation is spiritualizing all our urges and desires by channelling them towards the attainment of Self-knowledge, in

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which all desires and urges find their supreme fulfilment. Self-knowledge is not just cessation of suffering and attainment of peace, but intense bliss. When a person advances toward this Knowledge, he begins to taste the bliss of the Self and finds sense enjoyments increasingly tasteless and insipid.

True self-expression is the expression of our higher Self, and this calls for both freedom and control. In order to express our true self in every phase of our life, we must recover it first by exercising self-control. A slave of passion

cannot express anything—he only follows the dictates of his urges and impulses. He does not enjoy sense pleasures, but is addicted to them. Self-expression is always preceded by self-conquest. True self-expression is never a riotous living of licence and whimsicality driven by endless sense desires. Those who uphold the view of so-called ‘self-expression’ equate promiscuity with affection and infatuation with love, and look upon violence, greed and questionable morals as natural. Such living is the surest way to doom and destruction. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, those who uphold this view advocate living with the morals of a tomcat:

He [Swami Vivekananda] held purity to be for the householder as well as for the monk, and laid great stress on that point. ‘The other day, a young Hindu came to see me,’ he said. ‘He has been living in this country for about two years, and suffering from ill-health for some time. In the course of our talk, he said that the theory of chastity must be all wrong because the doctors

in this country had advised him against it. They told him that it was against the law of nature. I told him to go back to India, where he belonged, and to listen to the teachings of his ancestors, who had practised chastity for thousands of years.’ Then turning a face puckered into an expression of unutterable disgust, he thundered: ‘You doctors in this country, who hold that chastity is against the law of

nature, don’t know what you are talking about. You don’t know the meaning of the word purity. You are beasts! beasts! I say, with the morals of a tomcat, if that is the best you have to say on that subject!’ Here he glanced defiantly over the audience, challenging opposition by his very glance. No voice was raised, though there were several physicians present.<sup>10</sup>

### **Two Views on Self-control**

While both Yoga and Vedanta regard self-control as the key to success in a spiritual

quest, the two schools of thought have differing views on the subject.

*The Yoga view:* The Yoga methodology of self-control is based on the philosophy and psychology of Patanjali's Yoga way. The Yoga way says that all our pain and suffering are due to loss of contact with our true Self, our true identity. Because of this loss, the Self becomes entangled in the world of matter and is subject to the laws of the material world that is plagued by the pairs of opposites, such as pain and pleasure, birth and death. The goal of the Yoga way is to establish contact with our true Self. Only this contact can put an end to all the maladies of life. But this contact is not possible without controlling the mind. The first aphorism of Patanjali states, 'Yoga is suppression of the thoughts of the mind.' Suppression is different from repression. Suppression is positive; it is suppression of the mind's lower urges for the sake of the greater goal of Self-realization. In contrast, not having any such goal, repression proves to be negative and reactive. According to the Yoga system, there is no yoga without self-control, and such self-control must be forcible.

The logic of the Yoga way says that the mind is material and its conditionings of impurities are mechanical. It is most difficult to know the nature, depth and extent of these impurities. All we know is that the mind is restless and that restlessness is manifesting itself in our restless body movement, unevenness of breath and changes in biochemistry. This restlessness is more than disturbing thought. Thoughts when repeated become ingrained and turn into deep-seated habits and tendencies. These do not go away by themselves. Passage of time and change of environment are of no help. Old age cannot lessen their fury and distance cannot obliterate them. Habits and

tendencies are to be overcome by cultivating counter-thoughts and habits of tranquillity, and for that purpose we must hasten our steps. The reason for hastening is clear. Life is short and full of distractions; much of it is spent in sleep and daydreams. Hence control of the mind must be effortful and forcible, and to that end the Yoga system prescribes an eightfold practice:

(1) *Yama:* Five restraints: non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-receiving of gifts.

(2) *Niyama:* Five observances: internal

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and external purification, contentment, mortification, study and worship of God. (Internal purification is obtained through having friendship for all, being merciful towards those that are miserable, being happy with those that are happy, and being indifferent to the wicked.)

(3) *Asana:* Posture that is firm and pleasant.

(4) *Pranayama:* Control of the motion of exhalation and inhalation. (Controlling the breath is the easiest way of getting control of prana or the cosmic energy.)

(5) *Pratyahara:* Drawing in of the organs. (Preventing the organs from taking the forms of external objects, and making them remain one with the mind stuff.)

(6) *Dharana:* Concentration, or holding

the mind to some particular object.

(7) *Dhyana*: Meditation, or an unbroken flow of knowledge about that object.

(8) *Samadhi*: Complete absorption in meditation. (The state of meditation when the form is given up and only the internal sensations, or the meaning, is perceived.)

The first five are external practices, the last three internal ones.

The Yoga system asks a seeker to make relentless conscious efforts to overcome his mind, and to have unwavering determination and will power to reach the goal of Self-realization. Reason, it says, is too weak to overcome the perverted mind. Devotion to God is most often passive; true prayer and worship call for strong faith in God, which many are

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not endowed with. Educating the mind to give up its old ways is a slow process. Auspicious desires are not always forthcoming. The goal is never attained unless we make an all-out effort for it. The Yoga system reminds us that the ocean of the mind is always turbulent. If you want to take a dip in such an ocean, you cannot wait for the weather to improve and the ocean to become calm. You must plunge right into the ocean by learning how to handle the waves.

The Yoga system relies mainly on rigorous and wilful self-control, as distinguished from persuading the mind to give up its old ways by cultivating dispassion. Patanjali refers to dispassion as a complementary means

for controlling the mind. The main focus of the Yoga system is on the training and exercise of will power for the development of reason and discrimination. The Yoga system seeks to modify our subconscious mind indirectly with the help of regulation of breath, posture and diet. Modern psychology explains how our conscious thoughts and actions are heavily influenced by the deep-seated desires and urges of our subconscious mind. But the Yoga system further shows us how we can modify our subconscious mind by the efforts of our conscious mind, how repeated exercises of the will on the conscious level can influence the subconscious depths and modify them permanently. By controlling the manifested effects of impurities, the Yoga system seeks to eliminate the source of the impurities and regain contact with the true Self.

The Yoga system says that to achieve the goal of Self-realization the seeker must have full awakening of his mind, which is in deep slumber at the base of his spine. His mind must be made to rise to the upper centres of consciousness, and for that purpose the blockage of impurities in the *sushumna* canal, through which it has to travel upward, must be cleared. The Yoga system prefers 'dredging of the canal', rather than 'dissolving the blockage', which is the Vedanta method. Posture, diet and *pranayama* (breath control) are the means to dredge. Conversion of physical energy into *ojas* (spiritual energy) through the practices of continence, concentration and meditation provides the seeker with the sustained strength to dredge. The manifestation of yoga powers on the way generates confidence in the mind of the seeker regarding the infallibility of yoga, and thus encourages him in his task of attaining the goal. The Yoga system is for those in whom reason has not yet established

its natural supremacy.

*The Vedanta view:* The second view is that of Vedanta. The goal of life, according to Vedanta, is Self-knowledge. Self-knowledge guarantees all fulfilment, whether material, mental, or spiritual; but Self-knowledge is never possible without self-control. Self-control endows a seeker with a steel-frame foundation of mind, on which the structure of spirituality is raised. Self-control is essentially the control of the libidinal urges for sense gratification, the withstanding of the impacts of lust and greed. Through self-control a seeker converts his raw libidinal energy into spiritual energy. Without self-control prayer, meditation and the desire for Self-knowledge are empty dreams. Conversely, self-control is impossible and often dangerous without the desire for Self-knowledge. But the Vedanta system advises gradual control of mind, rather than its forcible control.

Vedanta maintains that the impure mind cannot be made pure by posture, diet and breath control. Thoughts and urges cannot be overcome by such physical means. Vedanta seeks to control the gross, that is, the body and bodily habits and urges, by controlling the subtle, which is thought. Vedanta seeks to educate and discipline the intellect (the discriminating faculty of mind) in order to overcome the mind and the body, instead of disciplining the mind and the body for the purpose of educating the intellect. Vedanta relies mainly on the practice of dispassion and believes that the master urge in all of us is the need to move towards the Divine and experience unbounded joy. Spiritual longing, it says, cannot be generated by mechanical means. Withdrawal of the mind is not possible unless the mind cooperates in the process. Forcible control can rouse the mind untimely, before spiritual longing has matured and spiritual motivation has become sufficiently strong. A roused mind without much longing for the goal can be self-destructive. Through spiritual practices of prayer, meditation and worship, we build

supporting spiritual platforms as the mind begins to move upward. These platforms keep the mind from falling headlong into the lower centres of consciousness. Vedanta believes in gradual control so that the mind does not rebel and react violently. Its process is the way of least resistance. Maybe it is slow, but it is sure and tested.

Regarding control of the mind, *Jivanmukti-viveka*, a Vedanta scripture, says:

Study of the knowledge of the supreme Self, association with the good, total renunciation of desires, control of vital energy—these are, as is well known, the perfect means to conquer the mind.

Those who apply *hathayoga* to control the mind while such effective means are available, resemble them who, abandoning the lamp, apply magic ointment to their eyes to dispel darkness.

The deluded who attempt to control the mind by force, they, as it were, bind the large, frantic elephant by lotus-fibres. (*Laghu Yoga Vasistha*, 28.128-31)

Control is of two kinds: violent control and gradual control. The first of them is done by blockading the knowledge-organs such as the eye, ear, etc and the action-organs such as the larynx, hands, etc at their respective seats by force. A deluded man, by this instance, wrongly thinks that in this manner he shall control the mind also. But the mind cannot be controlled in that way, since its centre—the lotus-like heart—is impossible to control. Therefore gradual control is justified.

The means to gradual control are the study of the knowledge of the Self and others. The science of the Self gives rise to the conviction of the unreality of all knowable things and of the Knower as the self-evident Reality. Having been convinced thus, the mind finds [that] knowable things that are within its purview are useless, and realizes that the Knower, although a useful thing (Reality), is beyond its grasp, and dissolves of its own, like fire without fuel.<sup>11</sup>

Vedanta interprets the practices of Yoga differently. *Yama* (self-control) of Vedanta is restraint of all the senses by thinking 'all this is Brahman (the Supreme Self).' The continuous

flow of this one kind of thought is called *yama*. Giving up of the illusory universe of multiplicity by knowing it as Brahman is true renunciation. Practice of silence is not a restraint of speech, but dwelling on Brahman. Solitude is interior, not external. Real posture is that in which the mind flows towards Brahman spontaneously. The blessed vision is directing the mind to the Knowledge of Brahman, not fixing the mind on the tip of the nose. *Rechaka* of *pranayama* is breathing out the thought that is not Brahman; *puraka* is breathing in the thought of Brahman; and steadiness of thought thereafter is called *kumbhaka*. Those who do not know this only torture their nose.

Absorption of the mind in Brahman, knowing that It alone abides, is called true withdrawal. Steadiness in dwelling on Brahman is concentration. Constant awareness of the fact that 'my true Self is verily Brahman' is called meditation. All obstacles on the way are overcome only by dissolving the mind in the ocean of infinite Brahman. By thinking of an object the mind gets identified with it; by thinking of void it becomes blank. But by thinking of Brahman it attains to perfection. Those who give up this supremely purifying thought of Brahman and put their minds on sense objects live in vain. Those who try to control the mind through posture, breath, diet and other physical means, are like those who hope to empty the ocean drop by drop with a blade of *kusha* grass.

The goal of Self-knowledge in Vedanta is not just release from the world of matter, but realization of the fact that all beings and things that are visible and perceptible are nothing but Brahman. To attain Self-knowledge, what is needed is to remove ignorance, the root cause, and not to fight against the habits, tendencies and desires, all of which are numerous branches shooting forth from that root. Vedanta asks the aspirant to go to the very root of the matter and remove ignorance.

### Self-control in Practice

What is the preferred way to achieve self-control? The arguments in support of forcible control of the Yoga system and those in support of gradual control of the Vedanta system are equally strong. The two ways are equally time-honoured and proven. However, spiritual seekers are not all of the same calibre and temperament. The way that is beneficial to one may not be beneficial to another. The fitness to pursue one way or the other depends upon the competence of the individual seeker. \*

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# Swami Vivekananda's Passing Away: A New Finding

CHANDRASHEKHAR CHATTOPADHYAY

*(Translated from Bengali by Swami Chetanananda)*

**4** July 1902 was a memorable day. Swami Vivekananda, a great prophet of modern India, passed away at about 9:00 pm while he was in meditation. The flame of his life-lamp, which brightened the spiritual world, suddenly blew out in the deep darkness of night. The next morning this sad news spread throughout Calcutta and all over India. Swamiji's disciple Kanai Maharaj (Swami Nirbhayananda) came to our house in Ahiritola and gave us the news. I was then busy performing worship in a temple nearby. I returned home before 9:00 am to find my mother crying loudly. When I asked why she was grieving, she said, 'My son, a great calamity has taken place. Swamiji is no more. He has passed away—and you never did take me to see him.' I replied, 'Mother, all monks in the monastery are called "Swami". Which swamiji are you talking about? Perhaps you have misunderstood something.' My mother answered: 'Oh no, Kanai came early this morning and said that the head Swamiji passed away last night at nine o'clock. He asked all of you to go to Belur Math.' I consoled my mother, saying, 'It is not good to express grief for the death of a monk.'

## Swamiji in Mahasamadhi

At that time my friend Nibaran, a disciple of Holy Mother, arrived. I decided not to go to work. Accompanied by Nibaran and my younger brother Dulalshashi, I went to the Ahiritola ghat, crossed the Ganges by boat, and then reached Belur Math at 10:00 am via Salikha (Salkia) and Ghusuri. It was raining a

little. I saw that Rakhal Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) and some monks were busy decorating a cot with flowers in the western veranda of the Math building. When Rakhal Maharaj saw me, he burst into tears. His voice was choked, so he pointed to the steps and indicated that we should go upstairs.

When I entered Swami Vivekananda's room I saw that his divine body had been laid on a carpet. His forehead was smeared with holy ashes; a bouquet of flowers was placed near his head; and his body was covered with a new ochre cloth. His right hand was resting on the floor and a rosary had been placed around his right thumb. His eyes were in-drawn and half-closed like Lord Shiva in meditation. The entire room was full of fragrance from incense burning at both sides of his body. Sister Nivedita was seated at the left side of Swamiji's body, steadily fanning his head with a palm-leaf fan. Tears were trickling down her cheeks. Swamiji's head was placed to the west and his feet to the east, towards the Ganges. Grief-stricken, Brahmachari Nandalal sat silently at his feet. We all three bowed down to Swamiji, touching his feet, and then sat there. When I touched his feet, they were as cold as ice.

I then touched Swamiji's rosary and repeated the mantra given by my guru. Meanwhile, many distinguished people and devotees from Calcutta and other places arrived to see Swamiji for the last time. One after another they bowed down to him and left; but the three in my party, Brahmachari Nandalal and Sister Nivedita stayed. When I finished my

japa, Nivedita whispered to me: 'Can you sing, my friend? Would you mind singing the songs that our Thakur used to sing?' I said that I could not sing. Nivedita then requested, 'On my behalf will you please ask your friend to sing?'

Then my friend Nibaran sang a few songs melodiously: 'Cherish my precious Mother Shyama tenderly within, O mind'; 'Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kashi, Kanchi or Prabhas?'; 'Is Kali, my Mother, really black? The Naked One, of blackest hue, lights the lotus of the heart'; 'The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet'; 'O my mind, chant the name of Kali. If you say Kali, Kali, the fear of Kala [Death] will disappear.'

### Nivedita's Reaction

Nivedita listened to these songs with all her attention. Pent-up emotions overflowed from her heart and began to flow from her eyes as tears. It was an unforgettable and sad scene; I shall never forget it. Although the incident occurred forty-five years ago, still its memory is written on my mind in golden letters. On that day the expression on Nivedita's face told me how wounded was her lost and sad heart! It truly stirred my consciousness. I realized that her reaction was not the result of mere emotional weakness. Where is this great, learned, spiritual English woman full of renunciation and forbearance, and where are we who are proud of a little learning and devoid of renunciation!

### The Last Rites

At about 1:00 pm Swami Saradananda came upstairs to Swamiji's room and said to Brahmachari Nandalal and the three in my party: 'Look, we are broken-hearted because of Swamiji's passing away. We have lost all our strength. Would you be able to carry Swamiji's body downstairs?' Immediately Brahmachari Nandalal and we three devotees slowly and carefully carried Swamiji's body

down the steps to the lower veranda and placed it on the cot decorated with flowers. As was the custom, some pomegranates, apples, pears and grapes were offered to Swamiji. Swami Advaitananda then said to the brahmachari, 'O Nandalal, Swamiji loved you immensely. You perform the last worship to him.' When Swami Brahmananda and the other monks approved this proposal, Nandalal performed the ritual offerings of garlands and flowers, and of fruits and sweets, then waving an oil lamp and finally chanting a hymn.

It was proposed that a final photograph of Swamiji be taken, but Swami Brahmananda would not allow it, saying, 'There are many good photographs of Swamiji; this sad picture will break the hearts of all.' Afterwards, Swami Brahmananda, the other monks and brahmacharins offered flowers at Swamiji's feet. Finally, Haramohan Mitra (a classmate of Swamiji's) and other devotees offered flowers. Later, Swamiji's feet were painted with red dye (*alta*) and footprints were made on small pieces of cloth. Sister Nivedita also took a footprint on a new handkerchief. I took a beautiful rose (not fully open), smeared it with sandal paste, touched it to Swamiji's feet and put it in my front pocket as a memento.

When the worship service was over, Swami Saradananda asked the same four of us to carry the cot to the spot where Swamiji's body would be cremated. All the monks and devotees followed the procession. There had been some rain before noon, so the monastery ground was wet and slippery, and moreover it was covered with spear grass. So we slowly and cautiously crossed the vast area and placed the cot on the funeral pyre set with sandalwood. At that time Swamiji's aunt and his cousin, Habu Datta, arrived by car from Simla (Calcutta), and began to cry and lament loudly.

Swami Saradananda then asked everyone, 'Please take a bunch of *pankati* [the dried stalk of the jute plant], ignite it, circle Swa-

miji's body seven times, place the blazing *pankati* under the cot just below Swamiji's feet, and bow down to him.' According to his instructions, Swamiji's body was consigned to the sandalwood fire, and the grief-stricken monks and devotees sat like statues around the blazing pyre. The funeral fire gradually rose high, extending its many lolling tongues to consume Swamiji's body. Girish Chandra Ghosh, Upendranath Mukhopadhyay of the *Basumati*, Jaladhar Sen, Mahendranath Gupta (M), Akshay Kumar Sen and other devotees were seated on a cement bench near the bell tree and watching this heart-rending scene.

Broken-hearted, Girish Babu began to lament: 'Naren, you were supposed to live and spread the glory of the Master by telling people my story of transformation. But this wish of mine has been destroyed by a horrible Providence. I am an old fellow [he was 19 years older than Swamiji], and I am left alive to see this terrible scene of yours. You are the Master's son and you have gone to him. Look, you have departed prematurely, leaving us in this pitiable condition. How unfortunate we are!'

At this, Nivedita could no longer suppress her grief. She got up and began to circle the blazing funeral pyre. Seeing her close to the pyre, Swami Brahmananda was concerned that her skirt would catch fire. He conveyed this to Swami Nirbhayananda, who then took Nivedita's hand and led her away from the pyre. He made her sit on the bank of the Ganges and tried to console her.

The sacred fire and a favourable wind consumed the lower part of Swamiji's divine body to ashes within a short time; but amazingly that fire did not touch his chest, face and the hair of his head. His facial expression and the look of his broad eyes were beautiful. It was suggested that someone shake Swamiji's body so that it would burn quickly. This greatly upset Swami Nishchayananda, a disciple of Swamiji. He did not want to see his guru's body prodded with a pole. So he immediately climbed up an old tree nearby, cut

some branches and set them on the funeral pyre.

### Afterwards

Meanwhile, Swami Brahmananda took me aside, gave me a ten-rupee note, and said, 'You and Nibaran take Girish Babu's boat, cross the Ganges and buy some *sandesh* [sweets] and other kinds of food from Baranagore Bazar. From last night on, no monk put anything in his mouth—not even a drop of water—and some devotees are also fasting.' When Bipin Saha of Baranagore saw us going to carry out Swami Brahmananda's order, he joined us. He contributed five rupees and asked a confectioner in Baranagore Bazar to prepare hot *luchis* [fried bread], *kachuri* and *sandesh*. He then carried the food basket on his head and returned to Belur Math with us. It was evening when we returned to the monastery, and the funeral pyre had been extinguished. Swamiji's remains had been collected, and the monks and devotees were bathing in the Ganges and making water offerings.

M said to me, 'You have touched the dead body. Now you bathe and offer water to the departed soul.' I replied: 'A sadhu is Narayana [God]. Have I become impure by touching that divine body?' Following Swami Brahmananda's orders, I carried the food to be offered to the Master without first changing my clothes. Swami Premananda understood my attitude, and said, 'You do not have to take a bath, but let me sprinkle Ganges water on your head. Take the food to the shrine and then go to the Ganges to offer water to Swamiji as is customary.'

There were no worship services that day. Vespers were conducted that evening and food was offered to the Master at that time. Prasad [offered food], tea and water were then distributed among the monks and devotees. Afterwards, the grief-stricken devotees returned home.

To fulfil Swamiji's last wish, Kali Puja

was held at Belur Math on the first new-moon night (*amavasya*) after 4 July. No outsiders were invited on that occasion, except for Bhupendranath Datta, Swamiji's younger brother. Makhan Maharaj asked me and Nibaran to bring thirty pounds of dry bel wood for the homa fire. The new moon fell on a Saturday. When Nibaran and I arrived at Belur Math with the dry bel wood, Swami Brahmananda was pleased. He recited two lines of a hymn to Shiva: '*Chandrashekhara chandrashekhara chandrashekhara pahi mam. Chandrashekhara chandrashekhara chandrashekhara raksha mam.*' [O Chandrashekhara, please nourish us. O Chandrashekhara, please protect us.] Then the swami continued: 'You have saved the situation by bringing dry bel wood in this stormy and rainy weather. May the Divine Mother bless you.'

At 10:00 pm Kali Puja began in the upper shrine room of the monastery. Ishwar Chandra Chakrabarty, a Tantric adept and father of Swami Ramakrishnananda, performed the worship. Monks and brahmacharins bowed to the Master in the shrine and then meditated in Swamiji's room. Before that, when the evening food offering was over, Swami Brahmananda

told Swami Premananda, 'Please give prasada to Bhupen and these two devotees; but the rest of us will fast.' After having prasada, we three lay down in the large room downstairs in the western part of the Math building. That night, Swami Nityananda (an elderly disciple of Swamiji) occasionally made loud and pathetic cries that reverberated throughout the monastery.

At 3:00 am Swami Saradananda came to our room and woke us up. He asked us to go to the room upstairs.

There Swami Brahmananda asked me to purify myself by sipping some water and to repeat my mantra. After a while Swami Brahmananda asked everyone present to go to the western courtyard where the homa fire was arranged. We joined the monks and sat around that sacred fire, repeating our mantra. After the homa fire, we all went to the spot where Swamiji's body had been cremated, circled it seven times, and bowed down. Everyone then sat under the bel tree for a while and repeated his mantra. Finally, all of us went to the Master's shrine and bowed down to him, and then took prasada downstairs. \*

## Towards Greatness

Strength, therefore, is the one thing needful. Strength is the medicine for the world's disease. Strength is the medicine which the poor must have when tyrannised over by the rich. 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 such strength as this idea of monism. Nothing makes us so moral as this idea of monism. Nothing makes us work so well at our best and highest as when all responsibility is thrown upon ourselves. I challenge everyone of you. How will you behave if I put a little baby in your hands? Your whole life will be changed for the moment; whatever you may be, you must become selfless for the time being. You will give up all your criminal ideas as soon as responsibility is thrown upon you your whole character will change. So if the whole responsibility is thrown upon our own shoulders, we shall be at our highest and best; when we have nobody to grope towards, no devil to lay our blame upon, no Personal God to carry our burdens, when we are alone responsible, then we shall rise to our highest and best.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 2.201-2

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# Kāṭha Rudra Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

The fruit of the knowledge of Brahman

ब्रह्मज्ञानफलम्

तद्विद्याविषयं ब्रह्म सत्यज्ञानसुखाद्वयम् ।

संसारे च गुहावाच्ये मायाज्ञानादिसंज्ञिके ॥१४॥

निहितं ब्रह्म यो वेद परमे व्योम्नि संज्ञिते ।

सोऽश्नुते सकलान् कामानक्रमेण द्विजोत्तमः ॥१५॥

14, 15. That Brahman,<sup>1</sup> which is the object of [real or supreme] Knowledge, is Truth, Awareness, Joy [Bliss] and non-dual [One without a second]. That seeker of liberation [literally, the best of the twice-born]<sup>2</sup> who realizes Brahman residing in what is called the cave [of the heart] designated as the supreme Space<sup>3</sup> [amidst] the transmigratory existence known as *māyā*, *ajñāna* (ignorance), attains [the fulfilment of] his desires instantaneously.

प्रत्यगात्मानमज्ञानमायाशक्तेश्च साक्षिणम् ।

एकं ब्रह्माहमस्मीति ब्रह्मैव भलति स्वयम् ॥१६॥

16. [He who realizes] the inner Self—which is the witness of the power of *māyā*, [of the nature of] ignorance, and which is One<sup>4</sup>—as ‘I am Brahman’, he [verily] becomes Brahman Itself.

ब्रह्मभूतात्मनस्तस्मादेतस्माच्छक्तिमिश्रितात् ।

अपञ्चीकृत आकाशः संभूतो रज्जुसर्पवत् ॥१७॥

17. From this Self, Atman, [which has become] that Brahman, associated with the power [of *māyā*], arose the unmanifest<sup>5</sup> *ākāśa*, like a serpent in a rope.

आकाशाद्वायुसंज्ञस्तु स्पर्शोऽपञ्चीकृतः पुनः ।

वायोरग्निस्तथा चाग्रेराप अद्द्रचो वसुन्धरा ॥१८॥

18. Again, from *ākāśa* emerged the unmanifest touch named air (*vāyu*). From air [emerged] fire; from fire [emerged] water; and from water, earth.

तानि सर्वाणि सूक्ष्माणि पञ्चीकृत्येश्वरस्तदा ।

तेभ्य एव विसृष्टं तत् ब्रह्माण्डादि शिवेन ह ॥१९॥

19. Then [by the process of] fivefold division and compounding of all those subtle elements,<sup>6</sup> from them alone did the auspicious Lord (Īśvara) create the cosmic Egg (*brahmāṇḍa*) and so on.

ब्रह्माण्डस्योदरे देवा दानवा यक्षकिन्नराः ।

मनुश्याः पशुपक्ष्याद्यास्तत्तत्कर्मानुसारतः ॥२०॥

20. Subsumed in Brahman are the gods, anti-gods, *yaksas*, *kinnaras*, human beings, animals, birds and so on in accordance with [the results of] their respective actions.

अस्थिस्राख्यादिरूपोऽयं शरीरं भाति देहिनाम् ।  
योऽयमन्नमयो ह्यात्मा भाति सर्वशरीरिणः ॥२१॥

21. That which is the physical body of embodied beings, appearing in the form of bones, sinews and so on reveals itself as *annamaya-ātman* (physical self) of all embodied beings.

ततः प्राणमयो ह्यात्मा विभिन्नश्चान्तरस्थितः ।  
ततो मनोमयो ह्यात्मा विभिन्नश्चान्तरस्थितः ॥२२॥

22. Thence is the *prāṇamaya-ātman* (self of vital energy) existing [further] within, and well split [into fivefold category<sup>7</sup>]. Thereafter [still further] within exists the *manomaya-ātman* (mental self), which is different [from the others].

ततो विज्ञान आत्मा तु ततोऽन्यश्चान्तरस्थितः ।  
आनन्दमय आत्मा तु ततोऽन्यश्चान्तरस्थितः ॥२३॥

23. Thence, there is the knowledge self (*vijñāna-ātman*) even further within and different [from others]. Thereafter [different] within and distinct is the blissful self (*ānandamaya-ātman*).

योऽयमन्नमयः सोऽयं पूर्णः प्राणमयेन तु ।  
मनोमयेन प्राणोऽपि तथा पूर्णः स्वभावतः ॥२४॥

24. That which is the physical self, then, is filled by the [self of] vital energy; similarly, the vital energy [self] again is pervaded by the mental self by its very nature.

(to be continued)

## Notes

1. The nature of Brahman described here is the elaboration of a similar discussion found in 'Ānanda Valli' of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*. —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.
2. Conventionally, the three castes, *brāhmaṇas*, *ksatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, are called the 'twice-born' because they have been initiated into the path leading to spiritual liberation—those who have been 'born in the spirit', in the words of Jesus Christ.
3. Three kinds of space are usually spoken of in Vedāntic parlance: (i) *mahākāśa*, the outer space, (ii) *cittākāśa*, the inner (mental) space, and (iii) *cidākāśa*, the space of Consciousness. It is *cidākāśa* where the Atman is realized. It is pictured as the *daharākāśa*, *hṛdaya-guha* (the cave of the heart) and so on. It is the meeting point of the microcosm (Atman-consciousness) and the macrocosm (Brahman-consciousness).
4. That is, non-dual, without a second.
5. The original word in Sanskrit is called *apañcīkṛta*. In the Vedāntic cosmology 'creation' (or rather projection) of the universe occurs through the process called *pañcīkaraṇa* (See the *Vedāntasāra* of Sadānanda).
6. This process is called *pañcīkaraṇa* (see note 5 above).
7. The original word in Sanskrit is *vibhinna*, which could mean divided (or split) as well as different. In the latter sense, it could mean that this self (*prāṇamaya*) is different from the earlier one (*annamaya*). In this sense, the meaning would be that there is *another* self apart from and interior to the earlier one. This meaning seems to go well with the *Taittirīya* text '*anyontara ātmā*'. ('Brahmānanda Valli')

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# ↔ Glimpses of Holy Lives ↔

## Real Worship, Real Service

**M**ankoji Bodhla was the chief of the prosperous village of Dhamangaon. He was wealthy, owned a large herd of cattle, and his granaries were always full. He and his devoted wife, Mamtai, were both extremely virtuous and put the welfare of the village before that of their own family.

Everything was going well for Dhamangaon, until a terrible famine visited the region and the village soon found itself in dire straits. Hunger stalked the land, and men and animals began to perish. One day Mankoji called Mamtai to his side and said, 'It seems to me that God wants us to worship Him in the form of the wretched and the miserable. Feeding the hungry, clothing the poor and serving the sick, feeling God's presence in them, is the best way one can worship Him—so say the scriptures. After all we are only custodians of the wealth which is in fact the Lord's. I think it is quite logical that what is really God's should go back to Him. So why not now?' Mamtai acquiesced without a murmur.

Without thinking twice, the couple threw their doors wide open. In a matter of hours they ran out of all their corn, cattle and money, and the family itself was out on the streets with not a worn-out coin in their possession. Mankoji was satisfied that he had done his duty. The village chief and his wife were now reduced to the status of common labourers who had to earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brow. But their hearts were full of joy. 'Enjoyment is one thing, happiness quite another,' said Mankoji to his wife. 'Pleasures corrupt man, breed evil and result in endless suffering—although pleasures themselves are momentary; whereas detachment purifies us, leads us Godward and brings about real happiness.'

Poor though he was now, Mankoji still

did not want to give up his religious observances, one of which was his Ekadashi day visit to the Pandharpur temple, followed by a night-long vigil and the feeding of brahmins the next day. Far from feeding others, Mankoji now had trouble feeding his own family. But he did not allow his poverty to deter him. Relying on Providence, Mankoji set out for Pandharpur as usual on the next Ekadashi day and spent the night singing kirtan at the temple. Early next morning he went to the nearby forest and gathered some firewood, which he bartered for a small quantity of flour at the market. Then he made his way to the bank of the Chandrabhaga to find a brahmin who would accept his humble offering.

But what brahmin in his right mind would want to take plain, dry flour when the riverbank was filled with rich zamindars offering delectable food—accompanied by gifts of money! Mankoji's throat tightened as it became obvious that this was going to be the end of his Ekadashi observance.

Just then he saw a haggard old brahmin couple tottering towards him. 'Hey you!' called out the brahmin. 'What are you staring at? Can't you see we are dying from hunger? What do you have in that bag of yours? Get it out, let us have something to eat!' 'But all I have is only dry flour, that too just enough for ...' 'As if we are loafing about with loads of cream and butter,' the old brahmin cut in impatiently. 'Now run along and get us some fire while my wife sees if she can make something out of your flour. Hurry up, please, we can't wait!' As soon as Mankoji brought a few pieces of charcoal from a nearby shop, the old man made a fire and soon a simple meal was ready. 'Why don't you join us, young man?' invited the brahmin. 'After you, sir,' said Mankoji politely. He would eat their leavings as

prasad, if anything remained. Finishing his meal, the old brahmin grunted satisfyingly and the couple rose. Thanking them profusely, Mankoji bent down to touch their feet. And before he raised his head, they were gone.

Mankoji Bodhla wept at the unsolicited

mercy of the Divine Couple Rukmini-Krishna. The compassionate Lord, who in the past had enjoyed the simple hospitality of Shabari and Vidura, had yet again shown His preference for a pure, though humble, offering. \*

### The Lord Waited for Him!

**T**hough born to holy and devoted parents, Pundalika somehow imbibed qualities contrary to theirs and led a loose life. Though married, he continued to stray, visiting women of ill fame. His parents' good counsel fell on deaf years. Incensed by their 'interference' in his life, he left his parents and lived elsewhere with his wife.

Seeing a group of pilgrims going to Varanasi passing their place, his parents decided to join them. Hearing this, Pundalika also took a fancy to visit Varanasi with his wife. Both of them set out for the holy place on two horses. On the way, Pundalika ignored his parents. After a long ride, Pundalika and his wife found a rest house and decided to stay there for a while. Next to the rest house was Sage Kukkuta's ashrama.

In the wee hours on the next day Pundalika saw three ugly women entering the ashrama. Presently they swept and wiped clean the ashrama campus. They decorated the ashrama with rangoli, flowers and garlands. When he was wondering who those maidservants could be, Pundalika saw them coming out of the ashrama with their countenance beautiful and luminous. He rushed to them and prostrated before them. 'Pray, could you tell me who you are with such bright faces?' he asked them. One of them said, 'We are the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati. People take a dip in us every day and are cleansed of their sins. Those accumulated sins make us ugly and repulsive. We visit this ashrama every day and serve Sage Kukkuta to gain back our purity. Renewed, pure and beautiful, we are now on our way back.'

Pundalika then asked how Sage Kukkuta's merited this greatness. Ganga said, 'Nothing spectacular. He just devotedly serves his parents looking upon them as God. That is the secret of his greatness.' Pundalika's eyes opened. With tears in his eyes he asked Ganga to show him the way. 'Forget about the past. From now on serve your parents and worship them. God's grace is bound to descend on you.'

At sunrise, Pundalika had his ablutions, visited the ashrama, bowed before Sage Kukkuta and returned with his wife. He found his parents on the way, fell at their feet and took them to a place near River Chandrabhaga. He served them devotedly and accompanied them on pilgrimages.

Lord Narayana was impressed with Pundalika's service and visited his house. Pundalika was thrilled at Ganga's prediction about the descent of God's grace. When the Lord arrived he was serving his parents. He placed a brick near the Lord and asked him to wait, standing on it for a while. The Lord obeyed him, witnessing the proceedings with a smile.

His duties over, Pundalika prostrated before the Lord, speechless and tears streaming down his face. 'What boon do you want, my child?' asked the Lord. 'You should establish Yourself in this very place as Vitthala. The very darshan of Yours should cleanse people of their sins and confer on them immortality.' The Lord granted him the boon and said that the place would from then on be known after him. Indeed it came to be known as Pundalikapur, which in course of time became Pandharpur. \*



## Reviews



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

**The Nakshatras: The Lunar Mansions of Vedic Astrology.** *Dennis Harness.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 2000. xxvi + 177 pp. Rs 195.

From time immemorial, many civilizations have succeeded in recognizing, listing, marking and naming stars. But our ancient Vedic seers saw them as much more than mere points of light. Apart from recognizing many of them outside the zodiacal belt and recording their qualities and seasonal appearances, they made extensive studies of those constellations found in the belt that coincided with the path of the luminaries and planets and called them *nakshatras*. Vedic astrology has shown their practical value in delineating the characteristics and personal traits of those born under specific *nakshatras* and timing events.

As a concise and comprehensive guide to information on *nakshatras*, the book under review fulfils a long-felt need with an excellent and information-packed introduction by Dr David Frawley. Divided into four sections, it contains a volley of information on the *nakshatras*, both selective and eclectic.

Section One deals with each of the twenty-seven *nakshatras* separately. Apart from giving extensive information about the span, *rasi*, lord, qualities, the details of the constituent stars and rare mythological information, a useful table is provided for each *nakshatra* denoting the symbol, directions, sound, qualities and deities associated with it. Also discussed are the attributes of persons born under the ascendant, the moon and the sun in the particular *nakshatra*, along with a list of famous people born under these heads. Additional information covers career interests and health issues.

Section Two deals with the choosing of an auspicious *nakshatra*, while Section Three compiles their comparative compatibility with useful tables to assess them. Section Four contains information-packed appendices on planets, houses and as-

endants apart from a resource guide. The Sanskrit glossary and index enhance the value of the book. The author has done a good job by projecting essential facts on the *nakshatras* in a nutshell for Western readers. Elegant and informative, the book is sure to be of much use and interest to both scholars and students of astrology.

'Veeskay'

**Practical Bhagavadgita.** *Nandury Venkateswara Rao.* Yasaswy Management Associates, 90A, Road No. 9, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad 500 033. 2000. xvi + 238 pp. Rs 50.

So many modern interpretations on the *Bhagavadgita* are being published, only to show its immense popularity and universal appeal. *Practical Bhagavadgita* slightly deviates from the standard commentaries, written with a view to providing philosophical interpretations. Here, the author attempts to *actually* show *how* to practise the precepts of this great scripture to the busy urban citizens of today, trapped as they are in the whirlpool of a myriad challenges, worries, ambitions, frustrations, and ups and downs of life.

The first half of the book is divided into four parts. Parts I and II give a brief resumé of the *Gita* and mention the reward one gets by practising the principles enunciated therein. Part III presents a list of essential traits one has to develop if one wants to be a *sadhaka*. Part IV constitutes practical guidelines for leading a spiritual life. It guides us about how to control anger, banish fear and so on. Relevant verses from the *Bhagavadgita* have been culled in these two parts.

The narrative is straight, logical and convincing. The chapters are so well planned and organized that they lead any aspirant towards his ideal in a scientifically graded manner. The reader also gets a clear understanding of the *Gita* by reading this book carefully as it bypasses philosophical

complications and offers a simple narrative, showing the way to a peaceful, contented, and meaningful lifestyle. And this is undoubtedly the success of the author, who deserves our thanks.

The second half of the book does not catch much attention. This section is divided into five parts and discusses worship, work, wisdom and so on. In conclusion, the author deals with topics like devotion, purity, japa, self-surrender, holy company and karma and rebirth.

On the whole, this is an elevating contribution, presenting a pragmatic approach to the eternal and universal philosophy of the *Bhagavadgita*.

*Dr Chetana Mandavia*

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**Ayurveda—A Way of Life.** *Vinod Verma.* Motilal Banarsidass. 2001. xx + 282 pp. Rs 295.

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian science of health and healing, has been in the focus of public interest in recent years, both in India and abroad, as people search for more holistic and nature-friendly ways of healing. This interest has been met not only by a spate of Ayurvedic medicines flooding the market, but also by popular books informing the general public about Ayurvedic concepts and remedies. Dr Verma's is an important book in this genre.

True to the name of the book, Dr Verma has attempted to present the approach to life of the exponents of Ayurveda, an approach that still determines the world view and actions of a large section of the Indian population. She has outlined in simple terms the theories of Sankhya, of karma, of the three gunas (or mental qualities) and the three humors (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*). She explains how Ayurveda determines the unique constitution of individuals based on the humoral theory, diagnoses diseases in terms of vitiation of the humors and suggests appropriate corrective measures. The balanced and holistic approach to the physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions of health and therapy, according to Ayurveda, has been well elucidated in this book.

Ayurveda lays emphasis on different body-cleansing procedures and nutrition, as well as a variety of yogic exercises and massages, besides the

use of the many drugs in its therapeutic armamentarium. The basics of these techniques have been well explained with illustrated notes. The author has detailed several simple herbal (and kitchen) remedies for a number of common, self-treatable ailments. A chapter on the identification and properties of common medicinal plants has been especially added for the benefit of the Western reader.

With an easy and readable style the author has successfully managed to make available to the general reader a vast and often abstruse subject.

*Swami Satyaswarupananda*  
Belur Math

**The Human Buddha: Enlightenment for the New Millennium.** *Aziz Kristof.* Motilal Banarsidass. 2000. xlv + 604 pp. Rs 600 (cloth), Rs 400 (paper).

This bulky 604-page book is an interesting and often startling one. The author, we are told, 'is a Self-realized spiritual Master who demystifies the phenomenon of Enlightenment and shows how to reach it directly. ... Beginning with the question: Who am I? Aziz guides his students [the readers, too] inside to discover their true identity.'

Aziz 'frees [us] from our crystallized and conditioned concepts about the Awakened State'. Clinching the originality of the author, it is claimed that Aziz liberates us from the denominational religious consciousness: 'If we are Buddhists, he takes us beyond the concept of no-self, beyond the concept of non-suffering, beyond the linear concept of liberation. If we are Advaita students, he frees us from the idealistic concept of Enlightenment, from the linear concept of not being a doer, from the static concept of non-duality. He clearly demonstrates the necessity of a methodical process in cultivating the Inner States in order to reach the Self.' With an 'agenda' like this, Aziz, as we are told, 'challenges many of the conclusions created by the past traditions in order to reveal a multidimensional reality of Awakening'.

This is quite a formidable portrait and the intention is to share with the readers/sadhakas 'a new technology of Awakening to the complete Inner State'. Consisting of intimate sessions with people who respond to Aziz's revolutionary No-method, the book is certainly a kind of comprehensive guide to Enlightenment here now. By the human Buddha

Aziz means 'the profound unity of the transcendental state with the human nature.' It is, in short, 'living fully and openly the life of the human including all its difficulties and challenges, while abiding in the Unconditional State'.

This aim is encased in the three parts of this volume: Part I is the 'Transmission of Awakening' with ten sections. Part II is called 'Awakening to the Question' with seven chapters. Part III is the one titled 'Autobiography of Awakening'. Readers are bound to be fascinated with the abundance of insights the volume contains. The basic idea is that the human aspects of the Buddha have been largely ignored. Aziz suggests that in India 'the human effort' to overcome limitations and suffering was so dominant that it elevated the Buddha into a 'Super-being, the Liberated One'. This led to the 'extreme model of Enlightenment'. 'This model' says the sage Aziz, 'negates our humanness as well as reality of the Soul'. This is also due to 'the incorrect assumption that Atman (the Soul) is Brahman (the Ultimate). This assumption was made because of the lack of a sophisticated enough view of Enlightenment.'

I am not sure that this is a valid kind of perception. To call Atman/Brahman equation as incorrect is, at best, an opinion which, alas, does not find convincing proof in the by-and-large lucid exposition of Aziz. In other words, often one is startled by the abundance of freshness and originality; equally often one is baffled by the categorical assertions advanced by the author. The autobiographical section is interesting for the candid responses of the author to some sages like Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramana Maharshi, Rajneesh and U G Krishnamurti.

A thought-provoking book that deserves attention and debate.

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**Tolkappiyam (Vol. 1)—Eluttatikaram.** P S Subrahmanya Sastri. The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 84 TVK Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. 1999. xx + 105 pp. Rs 100.

The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute are to be congratulated on their making available to research scholars rare and precious books like the

nivar and studied their views before expressing his own views. This shows the mature wisdom of this author. Until a few decades ago every student appearing for the Tamil Vidwan examination was required to have a good knowledge of Sanskrit. Only now we have a generation of Tamil scholars not exposed to Sanskrit, making them all the poorer for it. We agree with Dr P N Natarajan, who feels that 'Dr Sastri deserves to be better known to students of Indology and to those particularly interested in Tamil and Sanskrit languages. He was one of the rarest of scholars with deep erudition and insight in both these languages.'

C S Kuppu Raj  
Chennai

**Life Facing Death.** *Bankim Chandra Sen; trans. from Bengali by Rai Mohan Acharya and Arun Ganguly.* Sri Tarun Sen, 7/D Ramkrishna Lane, PO Baghbazar, Kolkata 700 003. 1995. x + 256 pp. Rs 70.

Narratives of near-death experiences have always had a special interest for human beings because there is an abiding curiosity in all minds about these inexplicable, mysterious phenomena of death and the process of dying. *Reader's Digest* often published such accounts and then also brought out a collection of these articles in the form of a single volume that is said to have enjoyed immense publicity.

Given this situation the present volume evokes interest because it records the first-hand account of Sri Bankim Chandra Sen's encounter with a near-death experience from a tram accident. But the book acquires an added dimension when it goes beyond the straight narrative to become a document of faith. The author finds this gruelling occasion to be a moment of epiphany, as he describes: 'I saw waves of light around me ... a wonderful flood of light dazzled the whole area around me and by the touch of that light my body and mind spread out like a blooming lotus.' This memorable vision reiterates his faith in the Divine and helps him formulate a spiritual ideal that not only guides him

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Direction is more important than speed.

We are so busy looking at our speedometers that we forget the milestone.

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## ❧ Reports ❧

**Started.** A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission; in Chapra, the birthplace of Swami Adbhutanandaji (Latu Maharaj). The centre has been started with the land and buildings received from Ramakrishna Adbhutananda Ashrama, Chapra. The address: Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chapra, Bihar 841 301 (Phone: 06152-220739). Swami Samarpananandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

**Inaugurated.** The platinum jubilee celebrations of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Contai; by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 4 April.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad; by Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; on 5 April.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh; by Sri Suraj Bhan, Governor of Himachal Pradesh, and Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; on 5 and 6 April, respectively. They participated in the centre's annual celebrations. Sri Chaturvedi also released a Punjabi version of the book *Vivekananda: His Call to the Nation* published by the centre.

**Appointed.** Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj; as a Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; with effect from 7 April 2003.

**Laid.** Foundation-stone for the proposed school and hostel block of the senior secondary section of Ramakrishna Mission Vidya-pith; by Sri Arjun Munda, Chief Minister of Jharkhand; on 9 April.

**Opened.** A newly built art gallery, titled 'Santa Darshanam', depicting prominent Indian saints; at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad; on 15 April; by Swami Smarananandaji, who also presided over a public meeting organized on this occasion. On the same day, Sri Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, declared open an audio-visual art gallery, titled 'Gita Darshanam', which depicts themes from the *Bhagavadgita* and the Upanishads. He also released a commemorative volume and some CDs brought out by the centre.

**Opened.** A new monks' quarters and a kitchen-cum-dining hall block; at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum; by Swami Smarananandaji and Sri T N Chaturvedi, respectively; on 18 April. Swami Smarananandaji addressed the public meeting, presided over by Sri Chaturvedi, held on the occasion.

**Held.** The concluding function of its platinum jubilee celebrations; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip; from 23 to 26 April. Swami Smarananandaji inaugurated the function.

**Visited.** The Nawaicoba vocational centre run by Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji; by Mr Ratu Jope Seniloli, Vice-President of Fiji; on 24 April. Mr Seniloli addressed a public meeting held on the occasion.

**Distributed.** Saris, dhotis, mosquito nets and medicines to 14 families of Tandikera village who lost their homes to a fire accident, by Ramakrishna Math, Puri; 1440 dhotis and saris, 500 children's garments and 160 blankets to poor people, by Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala; in March. During the same month Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allaha-

bad, distributed 321 warm garments; Ramakrishna Mission, Alang, 500 blankets; and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna, 422 warm garments to the poor as part of their winter relief work.

**Distributed.** Articles worth Rs 65,000 to 65 leprosy patients; by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; on 22 March. The work was intended to help the patients' rehabilitation through self-employment. \*

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## Prayer

A man's daughter had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father. When the pastor arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The priest assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. 'I guess you were expecting me,' he said. 'No, who are you?'

'I'm the new associate at your local church,' the pastor replied. 'When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up.'

'Oh yeah, the chair,' said the bedridden man. 'Would you mind closing the door?'

Puzzled, the pastor shut the door.

'I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter,' said the man. 'But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head.'

'I abandoned any attempt at prayer,' the old man continued, 'until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, "Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, "I'll be with you always." Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now.'"

'So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm.'

The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon.

'Did he seem to die in peace?' he asked.

'Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange, in fact, beyond strange kinda weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed.'