



Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

NOVEMBER 2005

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Internet edition at: [www.advaitaashrama.org](http://www.advaitaashrama.org)

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राथ  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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

Vol. 110

NOVEMBER 2005

No. 11

## ⇒ Traditional Wisdom ⇐

SĀKṢĀTKĀRA: ON REALIZING THE DIVINE

घनश्छन्नदृष्टिर्घनश्छन्नमर्कं यथा निष्प्रभं मन्यते चातिमूढः ।  
तथा बद्धवद्भ्राति यो मूढदृष्टेः स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा ॥

That which appears as bound to the deluded vision—just as the sun appears dark and gloomy to the fool of clouded sight—that ever-manifest Atman am I.  
(Hastamalaka)

नित्यशुद्धविमुक्तोऽहं निराकारोऽहमव्ययः । भूमानन्दस्वरूपोऽहमहमेवाहमव्ययः ॥

Eternal, pure and free am I, formless and changeless. Of the nature of infinite bliss, I am my-Self the Immutable. (Shankaracharya)

विश्वं यदेतत् स्वतनौ निशान्ते यथावकाशं पुरुषः परो भवान् ।  
विभर्ति सोऽयं मम गर्भगोऽभूदहो नृलोकस्य विडम्बनं हि तत् ॥

That You who bear the whole universe within Yourself at the end of cosmic sleep have been born of my womb is only Your imitation of human ways to hide Your identity—what a great joke You are playing on the world! (Devaki)

योऽन्तः प्रविश्य मम वाचमिमां प्रसुप्तां संजीवयत्यखिलशक्तिघरः स्वघाम्ना ।  
अन्यांश्च हस्तचरणश्रवणत्वगादीन् प्राणान्नमो भगवते पुरुषाय तुभ्यम् ॥

My salutations to the supreme Being, the possessor of divine majesties, who, having entered my heart, has quickened my dormant limbs, senses and vital powers, and has presently awakened the power of speech with which I can now express myself in these words. (Dhruva)

What evil can there be when gods are playing with gods, when gods are working with gods, and gods are loving gods? That is the great utility of divine realization.  
(Swami Vivekananda)

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## ∞ This Month ∞

The whole of spiritual life is a search for the Reality behind appearances. The editorial, **From the Unreal to the Real**, examines how the concept of *mithyātvā*, falsity, has been used by Advaitins to explore the reality of our Being.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** takes us to the beginning of the Swadeshi movement and the call for an Indian National University in Bengal.

**The Ways of the Illumined** is an insightful and authentic narrative of the nature of God realization and the remarkable characteristics of God-realized souls—their freedom from egoism and body-consciousness, and their exceptional zeal for service. The article is an edited transcript of a lecture by Swami Satprakashanandaji (1888-1979) made available to us by Br. Brahmachaitanyaji of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur.

Who is a prophet? In what sense was Swami Vivekananda a prophet? What is meant by the harmony and fundamental unity of all religions? Is such a harmony possible? These are some of the questions that Swami Sunirmalanandaji answers in his penetrating study, **Was Swami Vivekananda a Prophet?** The author is Assistant Minister, Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

In the first instalment of her article **All This Is Verily Brahman**, Pravrajika Sevapranaji discusses how this Upanishadic dictum may be practically realized by training ourselves to change our perspective on the world through the paths of affirmation and negation. The author is serving at Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi.

**Beyond Illusions** is a fascinating reflection on the nature and variety of illusory experiences to drive home the difference between perception and knowledge that points to a higher order of reality supporting the phenomenal world. The author, Swami Satyamayanandaji, is a monastic member of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Sri Ramakrishna said that he could see God in exactly the same way that we see each other, only much more clearly. He also asserted emphatically that this God vision is possible for all. What this actually means and what it takes to see God is the subject of Swami Purnanandaji's brief but engaging essay, **The Instrument for Realizing God**. The author is a member of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

Sri Kalyan Kumar Mitra, Advocate, Calcutta High Court, has given us a perceptive analysis of what it takes to achieve a harmonious personality and a harmonious society in his article **The Micro and Macro of Harmony**, based on the Gita, Upanishads, and related texts.

In the third instalment of his survey of the history of the record of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings by his devotees and admirers, Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, presents a study of **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to Ram Chandra Datta**.

Continuing the story of Sadhu Kishandasji, this month's **Glimpses of Holy Lives** recounts how this genuinely spiritual soul transcended conventions and formalities in manifesting the ideals of selfless love and service.

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# From the Unreal to the Real

## EDITORIAL

One of the measures that has been suggested by some economic thinkers to tackle black marketeering is for the government to withdraw all bank notes from circulation and issue fresh currency notes every few years. Imagine yourself in a situation where you have just missed the final deadline for exchanging your not very insubstantial stock of honestly earned old notes for the new currency. As you open your locker now you find the notes reduced to mere scraps of paper—useless even for jotting down sundry notes.

Or, consider the situation that Argentina had landed itself in a few years ago. The economic collapse had been compounded by runaway inflation and people ended up virtually carrying bagloads of hopelessly devalued currency notes to the market for their daily purchase, only to return empty-handed. One of the first government responses to this crisis was to slash several zeros from the face value of the peso bills in order to restore a semblance of value and check the chaos let loose by the astronomical rise in prices.

Such drastic economic changes expose the intrinsic worth of the currency notes we value so much—they are mere paper after all. But it is much more difficult to accept this as fact. The value of bank notes is pegged to gold holdings in the ultimate analysis, we may argue; and surely gold is intrinsically and universally valued. It is to counter such hard realism that Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly announced: ‘*Kamini-kanchana* alone is maya.’ He further clarified: ‘Whatever you see, think or hear is maya’, and ‘According to Vedanta, Brahman alone is real and all else is maya, dreamlike and unsubstantial.’

These statements radically challenge our

common-sense view of the world. To declare data of our conscious sense perceptions, when we are alert and wide awake, to be unsubstantial and dreamlike, may well be the woolly thinking of muddle-headed armchair philosophers, but it can hardly appear credible at a time when our universities have few takers for such philosophies. Even if there be some hidden truth in this statement, the pragmatist will argue, what practical purpose can such a world view serve? In fact there has been no dearth of people who have attributed India’s ills to such negative philosophies.

### *Mithyātva*: Unreality

The concept of *mithyātva* or unreality of the phenomenal world posited by Advaita Vedanta has been one of the most hotly debated topics in India’s rich philosophical tradition and has engaged the thinking of the keenest dialecticians and most astute logicians. A whole host of dualistic refutations of this theory culminated in Vyasa-tirtha’s brilliant polemical work *Nyayamrita*. This in turn elicited a detailed rebuttal from Madhusudana Saraswati in his *Advaita Siddhi*. Madhusudana clarifies this concept of *mithyātva* by listing five different definitions.

The first definition can be traced back to the *Panchapadika* authored by Acharya Shankara’s eminent disciple Padmapada. According to him *mithyātva* is *anirvacanīyatā*, or being incapable of predication as ‘existent’ or ‘non-existent’ (*sadasadanadhikaranārūpam*). To the dualistic realists this assertion is self contradictory as it violates the law of the excluded middle: an object either exists or it does not; it cannot be something in between. Madhusudana clarifies that there is no contradiction involved here because the two terms refer to two

different orders of reality: 'existence' refers to the Absolute Reality that is not amenable to sublation at any point of time (past, present or future) while the 'non-existence' that is denied of the *mithyā* object is a simple lack of cognizability. In simple terms, any appearance that is not permanent is called false, unreal or *mithyā* by Advaitins.

It is argued that if the Absolute Reality (or Brahman) is *sat* or existent, the appearance may also be termed *sat* for that is how we commonly take things to be: that which is perceivable exists. This is refuted by Prakashatma Yati in his *Panchapadika Vivarana*. According to this second definition *mithyātva* is *bādhyatva*, being subject to negation. A simple illustration cited in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* to illustrate this fact is that of pots made of clay. The shapes and names of pots originated with the potter and will disappear once the pots are destroyed, but the clay can never be destroyed. Hence the forms are classed neither as *sat* nor as *asat* (or non-existence, as is exemplified by the phrase 'barren woman's child') but as *mithyā*. Although this illustration is revealing, Prakashatma Yati conceives of *bādhyatva* in much harder terms. To him the 'unreal' is the counter-entity (*pratiyoginī*) of *absolute negation* in the very substratum where it is cognized (*pratipannopādihau traikālika niśedha pratiyogitvam*). This means that when the appearance is sublated you realize that it had no existence in absolute terms at any point in time. The illustration commonly cited to drive home this point is that of an illusion, the mirage being a typical example. The water in the mirage is actually perceived, and the unwary traveller may even try to reach out for it, yet at no point of time is this water really existent. This phenomenon was described by Chit-sukhacharya, one of the foremost Advaitic dialecticians, as appearance in the very substratum where it is absolutely negated—*svātyantābhavādhikarāṇe eva pratiyamānatvam*. This is another definition of unreality.

The fourth feature of unreality is

*jñānanivartatva*: it can be sublated by knowledge per se (*jñānatvena*). No real object will meet this criterion. Also, as *ajñāna* or *avidyā* (ignorance) alone, being the counterpositive of knowledge, can be negated by *jñāna*, it follows that the *mithyā* object is *avidyā* itself or one of its derivatives. Epistemologically speaking, *mithyātva*, being a form of *ajñāna*, is essentially ignorance or erroneous knowledge, or the perception of an order of reality that can be sublated by a higher order of reality. This last predicate is exemplified by dreams. Dreams are a projection of the personal unconscious structured out of *samskaras*. They are a classic example of personal 'ignorance' projecting appearances and masquerading as reality, for as long as one is dreaming and is not lucid, the dream events appear very much real. This illusory (*prātibhāsika*) dream reality is sublated by the empirical (*vyāvahārika*) reality of the waking state.

### Does This Concept Have Pragmatic Value?

It is unfortunate that all these elaborations on the concept of *mithyātva* have largely been taken as of merely polemical value aimed at establishing the logical superiority of the Advaitic viewpoint. This is especially unfortunate because the *Brahma Sutras* categorically assert that the knowledge of Brahman, the Reality, that is available in the Vedas cannot be had by reasoning alone, for reason not based on the Vedic revelation is inconclusive in these matters (*tarkāpratiṣṭhānāt*) and because, as Acharya Shankara puts it, human conjecture has no limits (*utprekṣāyā niraṅkuṣatvāt*).

But a closer look at the four concepts of falsity advanced above will show that they all adduce ordinary facts of daily experience—facts that we take very much for granted—to explicate the Advaitic thesis. In so doing they challenge the common notions of perceptibility as criterion of reality and the cut-and-dry dichotomy of reason (objects either exist or they do not; anything in between is irrational

and therefore not worthy of consideration), and expose us to the possibility of multiple orders of reality.

It is also worth noting that in pointing to the loopholes in sense perception and reason (the very soul of empiricism and rationalism, the foundations of the physical sciences and mathematics), Advaitic thought does not simply attempt to undercut scientific thinking and undermine the edifice of science, à la the postmodern deconstructionists. Instead it opens trapdoors to more fundamental realities—trapdoors of which we are either unconscious or which we ignore even when we repeatedly keep stepping on them.

These concepts call attention to the fundamental nature and properties of consciousness as also to the fact that no reality (whether subjective or objective) can be apprehended dissociated from consciousness. The objective world of sense perceptions is illumined by the light of consciousness streaming through our own beings. The mental constructs of space and time not only organize and order the data generated by the senses but they also give rise to the apprehension of sequentiality and relatedness that we call logic or reason. It is this relation between sense data and reason that helps us discover the laws of external nature and also correctly predict the course of external events simply on the basis of reasoned judgement.

Thus, to comprehend and successfully manipulate the external objective reality one need not worry about the nature of consciousness—only the mind and the senses need to be in working order. In fact the fundamental role of consciousness in all forms of knowledge is brought home only in situations that reveal the limitation of the senses and the fallacies of reason. The Advaitins point out these situations to stimulate an understanding of consciousness which is prior to and independent of both reason and sense perception, for the latter are dependent on consciousness for their functioning. It is this priority that grants

a higher order of reality to consciousness, and it is the dependence of the mind and the senses on consciousness that makes for their unreality.

It is this concept of Brahman or Consciousness as the sole Reality that is stressed in the final description of falsity cited by Madhusudana, and which can be traced back to Anandabodhacharya's *Nyaya Makaranda* and *Nyaya Dipavali: sadvīkṭatvam*, the fact of being distinct and different from Reality, even when appearing as real (*satyatvena pratiyāmānatve sati*). It is significant that Madhusudana takes Reality or *sat* to be amenable to direct proof (*pramāṇasiddhatva*) by means that are not handicapped by obstructions to the manifestation of consciousness (*avidyādi doṣā-sahakṛta jñānakāranatvam*). The mind and the senses, being conduits of consciousness, must also necessarily be obstructions to the manifestation of consciousness (just as a pipe is to the free flow of water), and hence cannot reveal the ultimate Reality that is Consciousness. The direct apprehension of Reality therefore requires the negation or transcendence of both the mind and the senses. It is to highlight the indispensable nature of this requirement that the Advaitins stress the fact of the unreality of the phenomenal world, an unreality that does not deny the empirical reality of all our normal activity.

The negation of the usual means of phenomenal knowledge also means that the knowledge of the ultimate Reality or Brahman can be had from the revelation (*aparokṣānubhūti*) that is termed Veda, a revelation that is neither exclusive nor dependent on any intermediaries, but is accessible to all who meet the criteria for such revelation cited above.

The contributors to this number write about this transcendence and about the people who have achieved this transcendence—the illumined souls, prophets and avatars—and of the grace and harmony that follows in their train. So let us read on. ~

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# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

November 1905

## A National University in India

**A**s a necessary outcome of the British Empire in India, the National Idea has been forming in the minds of the people of this vast continent, and were it not for the partition of Bengal, it would probably not have made its appearance so soon in the world. That wicked measure of dividing and disuniting a people bound together by the genius of a common race and by common ties of emotion and sentiment, has not unnaturally furnished the occasion of its first expression in Bengal.

As one current of electricity induces another of the opposite nature, so has this blow of separation called forth in resistance the feeling of national unity in all India. That the National Idea has found its first voice in Bengal is simply due to the fact that, since the inception of the sentiment in India, the greatest assault to the national mind has been delivered for the first time *there*, in that province. There is no doubt that the same strain would have produced the same result in any other part of the country. ...

The well-known saying of the Bengali mother, 'As earnestly do I pray for the long life of my son, so do I pray for his education,' is peculiarly applicable to the present situation in India. If the *Swadeshi* movement is the life of the National Idea, a system of national education is our next requisite. With the same fervour that we wish the life and growth of the forces building a united Indian nation, we should also wish for the education of the nation. This need has been felt everywhere, for it is the next natural step in the development of the national movement. And we feel, to Bengal should belong the honour of organising and founding the first National Indian University. Not a *Hindu, Mahomedan* or *Christian* University, which by isolating class and creed cultivates fanaticism, religious hatred and sectarianism and serve[s] to accentuate and widen the differences already in existence, but an *Indian National* University, which will bring all classes and creeds together under the same educational influence and teach them through mutual association and understanding the highest lessons of the religious and social consciousness, namely, that the same divine spirit is in all men irrespective of creeds and dogmas and that the sons of the same motherland are brothers by a relation and tie more inviolable even than those of common parentage.

Bengal is deservedly reputed as the richest province in India not only in money but in education. Among her sons can be counted millionaires by the hundred and educationists by the score. Bombay and the Panjab have reared educational institutions which are monuments of the selfless patriotism of some of the best of their sons. We know Bengal is just as much blessed with able, devoted and true-hearted sons as any other of her sister provinces. We feel this is the time for her to rise to her highest, and among other deeds, raise such a monument to Divine Saraswati, with the loving devotion and sacrifice of self of the worthiest of her sons, as would shed undying lustre on the whole of the Motherland—a National University for the education of the people and the reshaping of the highest national ends.

We learn a national fund is being collected in Calcutta with great zeal. The movement will by this time have extended to other parts of the province. So far as we know no definite object has been put forward for the utilisation of this collection. Why cannot the fund be devoted to starting a National University?

—Sananda

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# The Ways of the Illumined

SWAMI SATPRAKASHANANDA

*Om. Eko devah sarvabhūtesu gūḍhah  
sarvavyāpi sarvabhūtāntarātmā;  
Karmādhyakṣaḥ sarvabhūtādhivāsaḥ  
sākṣi cetā kevalo nirguṇaśca.*

The one supreme Being is hidden in all beings. He penetrates everything; He is the innermost Self of all creatures. He distributes the fruits of actions. He is the one support of everything, the Witness, the bestower of intelligence, beyond all dualities and free from the gunas.

*Tamiśvarāṇām paramam maheśvaram  
tam devatānām paramam ca dāvatam;  
Patiṁ patinām paramam parastāt  
vidāma devam bhuvaneśamīḍyam.*

We know Him: the supreme Ruler of all rulers, the supreme Deity of all deities, the supreme Master of all masters, the adorable Lord of the universe.

There are some who realize God at the time of death, and there are other rare individuals who realize God while still living in their bodies. How do these latter behave for the rest of their lives? This is the point that we shall discuss now.

A person can realize God clearly and distinctly. Just as this manifoldness is perceived, in exactly the same manner God can also be directly experienced. God is not simply a unity of existence; He is the very perfection of being, who answers to all our conceptions of the highest and the best. That supreme Being is not just a subject of speculation. Just as this manifoldness, these dualities of good and evil are a fact of experience, even so is that unitary Existence, the one source and support of all things and beings, a matter of experience. This has been testified to by the great seers and sages. Many saints and mystics—not only the founders of the great religions like Christ, Buddha, Chaitanya and Ramakrishna—have said that they had the direct experience of God. We find that Plotinus, Pythagoras, Eck-

hart, the Sufi saint al-Ghazali and many more have had this experience while they were living in the body.

## Grades of God Realization

We see God in the particular form in which we worship or meditate on Him. God, out of compassion, assumes form and appears to His devotee. If the devotee approaches God with the attitude of a son, he realizes God as his Father; if we meditate on Him as Jesus Christ, then He assumes the form of Jesus Christ and appears to us. So God can be experienced in the depth of the heart as the innermost thought. However, even these experiences are not considered to be of permanent value if they do not completely remove the source of our troubles and bondages.

God may be experienced not only as the inner Self, but also as the all-pervading Self. A person does not realize God objectively. The innermost being that becomes God is not apart from anything. It is the one Essence of the universe. The essence of mind and matter is identical. And that Reality, which is the innermost Self of everything, cannot be objectified. An individual realizes God by realizing his very being in the inmost depths of his being. So God realization means realizing one's own essential unity. When a person realizes God, he becomes unified with God. This unification or unitary experience is called samadhi.

In each and every kind of knowledge, there is always some distinction between the knower and the known. It is only in the state of samadhi that all distinctions between the knower and the known are coalesced into the one Existence. It is only then that the realization of God is possible. The God that is known in this case is the innermost Being. And that is

the kind of realization that brings about complete freedom. That is the illumination of the Chosen Ones. I am referring particularly to those rare individuals who realize God as the innermost Self untouched by the psycho-physical system.

Then again, there are two kinds of samadhi: savikalpa and nirvikalpa. I will not go into those differences right now, but when a person realizes God as the one all-pervading Reality in the state of samadhi, his mind becomes completely tranquil and is suffused with the light of divine Consciousness. After that realization, the person may come back from that august state to the ordinary level. But though he may not look extraordinary outwardly, he is no longer an ordinary person.

### How Does Such a Person Live?

The illumined soul lives as a form of Consciousness—God is ever showing through him. When he descends from samadhi, from that mystic or superconscious experience, he continues to use his sense organs just as everybody else does in this world of multiplicity. But the jnani says there is but one reality. As Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita, '*Yo mām paśyati sarvatra sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati; Tasyāham na pranaśyāmi sa ca me na pranaśyati.* He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me—he never loses sight of Me nor do I ever lose sight of him.' All is clearly manifest to such a person. Krishna also says: '*Yā nīśā sarvabhūtānām tasyām jāgarti samyamī; Yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni sā nīśā paśyato muneh.* What is night to ordinary mortals is clear as day to the illumined soul; and what is day to ordinary mortals is night to the illumined soul.' In broad daylight the illumined soul perceives not light but darkness, and at midnight he perceives not darkness but light! Living in the full brilliance of that luminous Reality, they can perceive It, but it is all darkness to ordinary mortals. In other words, what is as clear as daylight to illumined souls is like night to ordinary mortals. And this multiplicity, which is

fully manifest to ordinary mortals, perishes into insignificance in the sight of illumined souls. So what is day to ordinary mortals is night to illumined souls. That Light of all lights, the source of consciousness in all living creatures, the supreme Reality, is ever manifest to them.

These very highly advanced spiritual personalities become fully free from all bondages. They live only for the good of the world and have no selfish motives or objectives to gain. They are personalities of the highest order. Generally speaking, they live in three different states. Sometimes they live in the superconscious state—wherein they do not sense the 'now'—when they experience God in samadhi. But that experience is not often repeated in their lives. Plotinus experienced that state four times. However, there are extraordinary personalities who are messengers of God. They have the superconscious experience more than just a few times. In the modern age, Chaitanya and Ramakrishna used to experience this state very often. Both of them would be found in the superconscious state not once but almost every day—which is very rare in the history of religious experience! In that state of samadhi, they would not have any consciousness of the outer world. Then there is another state, the state of ecstasy. While in that mood, they are intoxicated, fully inebriated with divine knowledge and divine love. This is the second state. The third state is when they live in ordinary consciousness like the generality of human beings. It is only in this state that they speak and talk to people, or do good to the world. In the superconscious state, they are unaware of the external world. In the state of ecstasy, they are in a semiconscious condition, intoxicated, as it were. Ramakrishna used to live in that state very often. Once a person who saw him in that condition thought he was drunk. But Ramakrishna was drunk with the nectar of the Divine Mother's bliss. Ordinary people cannot differentiate between the intoxication of divine bliss and ordi-

nary intoxication. If they associate with these illumined people, then they can understand the difference. In that state, sometimes they sing, sometimes they weep, sometimes they dance in an ecstatic manner. It is only when they descend to our level of consciousness that they can talk with people.

### Helping and Inspiring

It is with regard to this state of spiritual consciousness that Shankaracharya says, 'There are illumined souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as spring does to nature. Having themselves crossed the fateful ocean of life, they help others also to cross it, without any motive whatsoever.' It is in the very nature of great souls to try and remove others' troubles, even as the moon soothes the earth parched by the flaming rays of the sun. It is quite evident that Shankaracharya spoke those lines from his own experience.

Illumined souls are not all alike in their outward behaviour. There is some individual character in each of them; each is in his own way a solitary person. There are some who do not appear dynamic, who do not move from place to place. Their sermon is of a quiet nature. And yet seekers of Truth come to them. As Ramakrishna says, a lotus may bloom in a sequestered place, unknown to the world. Yet the bees come to it, uninvited, to suck honey. Similarly, when the lotus of the heart blooms, seekers of God come uninvited, for inspiration, for solace, for guidance. These spiritual souls generally preach the highest spiritual ideal: How can one be free from bondage and suffering? How can man's problems be permanently solved? So to seekers of God realization they speak freely of devotion and knowledge, renunciation and desirelessness.

There are many aspirants who are inspired by these spiritual ideals, but all cannot accept them in toto. The lives of the great ones are an inspiration for all. Each and every individual who comes within their ambit receives this inspiration for a higher life. Due to their

teachings, there is a great all-round development, an uplift in moral and cultural life everywhere. Even people who do not follow the spiritual life in the strictest sense of the term indirectly accept God as the ideal, and their inner tendencies manifest themselves as strivings after cultural refinement or social work. So, either as a direct result or as a side effect of the teachings of the great ones, many social organizations come into being. Cultural activities begin to flourish, and not only a tidal wave of spiritual development, but waves of social development also begin to rise in the world.

These great spiritual personalities have been worshipped in the world not only for their spirituality, but also for the inspiration and uplift the world gets from them. Why do spiritual personalities receive the highest homage in the world? No scientist, no philosopher, no politician is worshipped in the way great spiritual teachers are worshipped. Why? Because their lives are a blessing to the world.

It is evident to each and every one of us that our material life is not safe without moral teachings, and our moral life is not safe without a spiritual basis. There cannot be a sound ethical life without a spiritual foundation. In order to be secure, our lives must be based on the consciousness of the spiritual relationship that exists between human beings. Those great spiritual leaders see God in all. It does not mean that they do not make any distinction between a sage and a sinner. But they know that the distinctions are only with regard to psychophysical constitutions; so far as the essential human nature is concerned, there is no difference. Since they see the innate Spirit in all, surface distinctions do not count for much in their eyes.

### Absence of Egoism

Their feelings are never embittered even when there is a provocation. In the life of Ramakrishna we find that once a priest kicked him. He was at that time a guest in the house where the priest was officiating. But Rama-

krishna did not speak about it to anyone. Again, we find in the life of Pavhari Baba that once a thief entered his cell and was about to take away the few belongings he had. Pavhari Baba became aware of this, and when the thief came to know that Pavhari Baba was awake, he took to his heels. Pavhari Baba ran after him and said, 'All these belong to you.' The thief was overwhelmed and his life changed completely. It is also said that Pavhari Baba was once bitten by a snake. For some hours the pain was severe, but he did not complain. Later, when he was asked how he felt, he said, 'It was a messenger from my Beloved.' We all know another story told by Ramakrishna, that of a holy man beaten unconscious by an angry landlord. Somebody reported it to the monastery. The monks ran to the place and brought their wounded brother back to the monastery. When milk was poured into his mouth he started regaining consciousness. One of the monks asked him, 'Who is giving you milk?' He answered, 'The same person who beat me.' Vivekananda was often mistaken for a Negro and refused admission into some American hotels. But he did not protest. When others came to know about it, they asked him, 'Why did you not protest? Why did you not say that you are from India?' 'What! To rise at the cost of another!' replied Swamiji. He never did that. These illumined souls do not have the ego idea. Apparently they may say, 'I', 'I', but their 'I'-consciousness is completely suffused with divine Consciousness, the 'I' of Knowledge or Devotion, as Ramakrishna used to say. That 'I' cannot create any bondage, for it is always submerged in God consciousness, always identified with the universal 'I'. And illumined souls know that God is the one source of all strength, wisdom, joy and love.

### **Absence of Body-consciousness**

Ramakrishna was once requested to pay more attention to his body, because he was suffering at that time. He asked the Divine Mother to make it possible for him to swallow

some more food. At once it was shown to him that he was eating through many other mouths; what did it matter if he was unable to eat through his own mouth? That is to say, the one and the same all-pervading Self dwells in each and every individual. So these great souls do not have the body idea, that is, they cannot think of themselves as physical or psychophysical beings. Having realized the free and immortal spiritual element behind their body and mind, they are ever united with the supreme Spirit.

They do not think themselves superior. We see in Ramakrishna's life that sometimes even the loincloth he wore slipped off from his body. He was just like a child. We see his profound wisdom, but outwardly he was like a child, without any sex consciousness. We are told that there was a great sage in India, Shukadeva. He was born free. Even at the age of sixteen, he did not know how to clothe himself. His father Veda Vyasa, one of the greatest literary figures of ancient India, is universally acknowledged as the author of the Mahabharata and the major Puranas. One day Shukadeva renounced home and was going away. Vyasa followed his son, who passed by a lake, where young women were bathing. The women did not feel shy when the son went by, but when the father came near the lake they became bashful and began to look for their clothes. Vyasa thought, 'What is this! My young son, completely naked, passed this way, and they were continuing their bath, but they became bashful when they saw me, an old man! What could be the reason?' Then it was revealed to him that his son, though young, was completely free from the body idea; just like a child, he had no consciousness of the body. And like a child, he also enjoyed a spontaneous spiritual joy that wells up from within. This is supreme perfection.

### **Beyond Karma and Suffering**

However, these highly evolved souls too pass through the experiences of this world. If

they have any ailment, it does not go unnoticed. But when a person realizes God, he is freed from the hold of past karma. All the latent impressions of past deeds and experiences are wiped out, and he is free from all sense of egoism. The work that such people do cannot create any bondage, cannot create those *samskaras* that generate and fortify good and evil actions in the future. In their case the deposit of karma, past and present, is eliminated. So whatever they do, be it teaching or helping, karma cannot bind them.

What then causes them to undergo the different experiences of life? It is the 'remnant' of that karma that has brought about their present life. Their present psyches and physical constitutions are a result of the fruition of this remnant karma, and so they continue to exist. When a potter makes a pot, he turns the wheel with a stick. The wheel continues to move even after the stick is taken away because of its momentum. Similarly, that past karma which has brought about the present life continues to provide momentum to it, and as long as this momentum remains, their life remains. They do not have any desire to live, nor do they think that they should die. They are free from all desires, free from all undertakings, free from their own will too, because they have surrendered their will to God. So it is this remnant of past deeds that is the cause of the illumined soul's life and experience.

As mentioned before, sometimes these illumined souls do experience pain, say physical pain. But they are, as Ramakrishna expresses it, like dry coconuts, that is, their 'I'-ness or ego is completely disengaged from the psychophysical constitution. So even though they apparently suffer from ailments, they do not actually suffer. They can hold themselves aloof from the psychophysical system. I have seen this in the life of Swami Turiyananda. Once he had to undergo a painful operation. Dr Sarvadhikari wanted to give him anaesthesia, but the swami said, 'No, I hold consciousness to be the highest treasure

in life. I shall not allow myself to be unconscious.' The doctor said the swami might not be able to bear the pain as it was a major operation. But the swami said, 'Just let me draw myself in a little bit.' Saying this, Turiyanandaji withdrew his mind and Dr Sarvadhikari performed the operation. Turiyanandaji's personal attendant stood behind, ready. But the swami did not make a single noise throughout the operation. The doctor was surprised. How could such a thing be possible? Turiyanandaji explained: 'I have practised this all my life, and I am trying to realize my own spirit as distinct from the body-mind complex. And if you try that, you too will be able to realize yourself as pure, luminous Spirit.' So, a person can remain detached even while living in the body—like the kernel of a dry coconut separated from the shell. The separation is so complete that when the coconut is shaken, you hear the kernel moving inside the shell. This is how illumined souls live.

I had the blessed privilege of meeting another disciple of Ramakrishna. His name was Swami Subodhananda. He was the youngest of the group of Ramakrishna's monastic disciples. I used to go to him every morning at that time, as I was living in Belur Math. One day Subodhanandaji had some fever. I went to him and enquired how he was. He said, 'I am feeling very well. I feel that I am quite distinct from the body.' I said it was no great wonder that somebody who was a disciple of Ramakrishna should feel so. He replied, 'I know that, but I have never felt it this way. I think I am dwelling in a house and the feeling has become very intense. That is one great benefit I have derived from my sickness.' He told me he felt that distinctly. It is not like our knowledge. All of us read scriptural texts, but intellectual knowledge is one thing and spiritual perception is another. Realization is entirely different. Illumined souls realize that the conscious Spirit is distinct not only from the body but also from the mind. They realize that and live accordingly. Having transcended relativ-

ity, they go beyond all laws and regulations. No prescriptions or prohibitions bind them. *'Nistraigunye pathi vicaratām ko vidhīḥ ko nīśedhaḥ;* Persons who walk on the transcendental path—what direction or what prohibition can there be for them?'

A subnormal person, who is below the average level, violates moral principles; his tendency is to go against rules and regulations. Normal persons observe moral principles with difficulty. A supernormal person, however, does not pay any attention to these things. But his life is so attuned to the highest Reality that anything he does is naturally right and good. As Ramakrishna says, an expert dancer never takes a false step. All his movements, whether conscious or unconscious, are harmonious. His inner consciousness is filled with divine Consciousness, the purest and holiest of all. Naturally, all his movements, physical or mental, become pure.

### Beyond Death

These personalities, when they leave the body, generally leave in full consciousness. We have observed it in their eyes and looks. Generally speaking, their eyes are fully open. Because they have realized their identity with the supreme Reality even in their lifetime, they have nothing else left to achieve, no place to reach. So when the body drops, their individualized consciousness becomes identified with the supreme Consciousness, which is the underlying Reality, and becomes merged in It. So there is no 'individual' who would go anywhere. The all-prevading Spirit cannot go anywhere.

Those who retain their individuality experience God in His personal aspect. The distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped is retained. This comes from savi-kalpa samadhi. When the body drops, such a soul goes out of the body. Only the body falls, but the mind is still there. In the case of ordinary individuals, death means just the fall of the physical body and nothing more. The

mind with all its contents goes with the departing spirit. When spiritually advanced souls leave the body, they generally leave through the eyes. We have noticed in the case of some of the great ones that when they left the body their eyes were open. We cannot see how the spirit passes through this aperture, but we have seen that their eyes were wide open. It was particularly so in Swami Adbhutananda's case. And the face beams. So their death shows that there is some distinctiveness in these personalities. They always live in God consciousness, wherever it be. And at the death of the body, they pass on to Brahmaloaka, the Kingdom of God, never again to return to the mortal world to suffer birth, growth, decay and death.

But there are some very special souls who are, so to say, saved by God for the welfare of humanity. Generally, they come to Earth as Incarnations or their apostles. In Vedanta they are called *adhikarika purushas*, persons who have the special capacity to move the world, who are commissioned by God, as it were, to guide the course of humanity. Such souls, after realizing God, may not return to this world at all. If they do come back, they do so at the will of that supreme God. And there are certain rare illumined souls who do not achieve complete liberation, that is, they never become merged in supreme Consciousness. They are called ever-free souls. They come back repeatedly as the saviours of the world.

So there are different types of illumined souls, always free from egoism, always living in God consciousness, and seeing God in all beings. They all dedicate their lives to the good of humanity, and because of their blessings human beings are uplifted in all spheres of life.

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[The anecdote about Swami Subodhananda is also available in Swami Satprakashananda's Vedanta for All (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2001, pp. 265-7). The person referred to therein, however, is Swami Akhandananda. —Editor]

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# Was Swami Vivekananda a Prophet?

SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

## Who Is a Prophet?

God loves His creation. His love manifests itself in His attempts to contact us in diverse ways. He may manifest Himself as an incarnation, which is perhaps the greatest expression of His love; He may send His chosen children to speak for Him. These are the messengers of God, popularly called the prophets. He may speak and enlighten humanity through His devotees, jnanis and yogis. He may grant visions, experiences or enlightenment, liberation or even worldly good to seekers or to the ones He chooses. Sri Ramakrishna says that the compassion of God knows no bounds; He is the Wish-fulfilling Tree.<sup>1</sup> He is our own. He gives everything we want. God sees that we don't overburden ourselves with evil karmas and so He may send painful treatment occasionally: pestilence, floods, drought. Since we are viewing only a little piece of a long movie, we can not understand why such things happen. Yet God loves us and keeps on reminding us about our spiritual goal.

Anyway, God's sending His chosen children, the eternally perfect ones, known as *navis* in Hebrew, *nabis* or *rasuls* in Arabic, *prophetes* in Greek, prophets in English, and *rishis* in Sanskrit, is what concerns us here. A prophet is one who is sent by God to teach people. One who speaks of the future is also a prophet, but we are concerned with the messenger of God. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says:

According to whether the emphasis is on possession and ecstasy, inspired utterance, prediction of the future, visionary experience, ethical fervour, passionate social criticism, sense of absolute commitment, millenarian and apocalyptic expectation, etc., the most diverse phenomena and personalities have been called pro-

phetic: Montanists, Pentecostals, Zoroaster, Muhammad, Joachim of Fiore, Savonarola, Thomas Müntzer, Jakob Böhme, George Fox, Joseph Smith, and many others.

Evidently, there have been innumerable prophets, big and small, and countless false prophets. Our historical awareness is limited to a few thousand years only, and so we don't know how many prophets have been here. However, it is interesting that most of the prophets we know—Christian, Jewish, Muslim—were born in Asia.

There are two classes of prophets. Of the Jewish prophets, we have Moses, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and others, who virtually ruled over the Jews. Moses brought physical freedom to his people, while the other prophets performed miraculous deeds to help them. But one common thing is, these Old Testament prophets professed a particular creed—of faith in Yahweh, of belief in the Commandments, of adoration of the sacred Tablet—and they did not found new religions. But there were other prophets who initiated, and even founded, new religions. These were the greatest prophets who revolutionized the world. Mani, a Babylonian, was the initiator of Manichaeism, but it died out. Confucius was also a prophet, and an 'ism' in his name has started influencing Chinese thought once again. Then we have Prophet Muhammad, who is called 'the seal of the prophets', and nineteen per cent of the world's population now, roughly speaking, follow his religion. What about Jesus Christ? Jesus was prophetic in his utterances, true, but he is better known as an incarnation.

## What Does the Prophet Do?

A prophet generally speaks of the imminent doomsday and warns people around to

be penitent and to pray. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion* gives five general characteristics of the founding prophets of the past: 1) Prophets conceived of their activity as the result of a personal divine commission. 2) There arose religious traditions that regarded some oracles of these prophets as uniquely heaven-sent, sacred, and binding upon people. Their words became part of a scriptural canon and that was the standard for later traditional judgement. 3) Though their teachings differ significantly from one another, depending on historical circumstances and inherited tradition, all of the founding prophets proclaimed what their later tradition regarded as universal truths. 4) The founding prophets were, in their own individual ways, social critics. 5) The founding prophets helped both maintain and reform religious traditions.

### Prophets of India

We have had rishis, munis, *adhikarika purushas*, siddhas and yogis in India but perhaps we do not have the founding-prophet classification as in the Semitic system. To the Hindu everyone is an avatara. Leaving aside claims of prophecy, and also not considering the first few of the known incarnations, we find that Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Mahavira, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna have been considered incarnations of God. Religions and sects were born after their advent, true, but they were not responsible for that. For convenience's sake we shall include the great acharyas like Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and others under the category of prophets. They initiated new schools of thought, which subsequently became sects within Hinduism. We may also call Nanak a prophet.

### In What Sense Was Swami Vivekananda a Prophet?

The question now is, where do we place Swami Vivekananda? Sri Ramakrishna called his Narendra the incarnation of Nara (Man). He said to Narendra: 'I know you are that an-

cient sage, Nara, the Incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind.'<sup>2</sup> Sri Ramakrishna considered everyone as Narayana. He would wax eloquent in Narendra's praise and would say, for instance: 'Narendra belongs to a very high plane—the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. So many devotees come here, but there is not one like him. Every now and then I take stock of devotees. I find that some are like lotuses with ten petals, some like those with sixteen petals, some like those with a hundred petals; but among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petalled one' (1.91). 'Naren is a Nitya-siddha, perfect in realization even from his very birth; Naren is a Dhyana-siddha, an adept in meditation; the roaring fire of knowledge, always ablaze in Naren, burns to ashes whatever impure food he may take. Impurity of food can never tarnish his pure mind. He is always cutting to pieces the veils of Maya with the sword of knowledge. The inscrutable Maya can never bring him under Her control' (1.93). Narendra was considered Shiva by some. One of the Seven Sages, he was brought down to earth from the plane of the Absolute. However, since Sri Ramakrishna is the avatara, Swami Vivekananda is the prophet preaching his master's message; he is Sri Ramakrishna's prophet.

But what type of prophet was he? In the above-mentioned characteristics of a prophet, the first one is true of Vivekananda, since he always said he was spreading his master's message. The second and third are not true, since his words have not become the canon for any religion and he did not found a sect or religion. The fourth point, that Vivekananda was a social critic, is partially true because he was a reformer of a different kind—he wanted root-and-branch reform, as he termed it. In this root-and-branch reform was involved his concern for maintaining religious traditions, which is the fifth point.

Thus Swami Vivekananda was a prophet. But he was quite different from Mani,

Confucius, Muhammad, Shankara, or Ramana. Vivekananda was unique. What was his uniqueness? He was unique in numerous ways, but we shall mention only a few specialities. One, while all other prophets spoke of one particular form of religion, Vivekananda alone spoke of all religions with equal faith and devotion. Two, while other prophets condemned alien practices, Vivekananda said that all are paths to the Divine; that we go from truth to truth and not from error to truth. Three, while all other prophets claimed that their path alone was the best and that their God alone would lead to salvation, Vivekananda said that one could attain salvation through any path. Four, Vivekananda spoke of universal religion, the harmony of all yogas, and of the secondary character of scriptures and churches and temples, which none else did. Five, Vivekananda spoke on the world stage addressing the whole world, while others were limited, at least initially, to their regions. Six, Vivekananda concerned himself more than other prophets with the all-round well-being of all, from the lowest to the highest, and firmly stated that religion can bring about this all-round well-being. Seven, Vivekananda was unique in terms of depth and broadness of mind, social concern, spiritual experience and power to transmit spirituality. Eight, Vivekananda condemned none and said that all were entitled to spiritual glory, which some others did not. Nine, Vivekananda travelled extensively, which others could not. Ten, Vivekananda, a monk, founded a worldwide monastic order and did work of great diversity and magnitude. Eleven, Vivekananda used scientific expertise to explain religion, and gave a rational background to it, which was not possible for others. Twelve, with peoples coming closer—with Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others living in the same apartment building—a new dimension was needed for religion, and Vivekananda alone could give it. He is, therefore, the first prophet of his kind.

During his lifetime, this great prophet was recognized as such not only by Sri Ramakrishna and his own brother disciples, but also by the greatest and best of the religious and intellectual world. Except for his critics, everyone who saw or met him was simply awestruck by his astounding personality. An American newspaper commented that he was an 'orator by divine right'. About recommending him to the organizers of the Parliament of Religions of 1893, Professor Wright exclaimed, 'To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!' (1.405-6).

### **Did Vivekananda Say He Was a Prophet?**

Yes, he did! But Swami Vivekananda was always reluctant to claim a status for himself. Yet he had to state the fact. So he declared that while Buddha had a mission for the East, he had a mission for the West. Once even Swami Saradananda was stunned by a remark Vivekananda let fall during the course of a conversation with Miss Henrietta Muller. Vivekananda said, 'I will have a lot of difficult work to do in this life. Compared with last time, there is much more to be done.' And a little later: 'I have just begun my work; in America I have raised only one or two waves; a tidal wave must be raised; society must be turned upside down; the world must be given a new civilization. The world will understand what that Power is and why I have come. Compared with the power I showed last time, it will be tremendous.'<sup>3</sup> So Vivekananda *was* a prophet.

Next we come to his ideas on religion.

### **What Has Vivekananda Said about Religion?**

Swami Vivekananda's concern was religion at its best. Religion is realization, he declared. He was initially a Brahmo who did not believe in image worship, but was smoothly led past all hurdles by Sri Ramakrishna until he attained the highest—nirvikalpa samadhi.

Sri Ramakrishna had experienced that all religions are true. He declared: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' All religions lead to the same goal. This spirit entered Vivekananda. And he himself must have had varied experiences of the ideals of different religions: we know he had visions of Buddha; we know of his love for Christ, and of his translation of the *Imitation of Christ*. On the secular side, Vivekananda had world history and the history of religions at his fingertips. He knew fully well the way religious movements affected the world. Later, Vivekananda travelled all over India and different parts of the world and thus had first-hand experience of religion in practice. By the time he went to the US to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, he had attained a very exalted state, spiritually and intellectually.

### **What Was Religion like during Vivekananda's Time?**

Swami Vivekananda himself said that religion had entered the cooking pot. That is, what remained of religion was only ceremonials and non-essentials. Considering these to be everything, people quarrelled, and there was disunity, discord and pogroms. Even today this goes on. The Catholic Church proclaimed: '*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Outside the church, no salvation.' The world-renowned German Jesuit priest Karl Rahner remarked that anyone in the world who is pious and seeks God is an anonymous Christian. Or, there are those who believe that they are God's chosen people. Then there is the militant appeal of religion. All these are aberrations of reality. Vivekananda remarked in his famous lecture titled 'The Way to the Realisation of a Universal Religion', delivered in 1900: 'Each religious sect has claimed the exclusive right to live. And thus we find that though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. ... Nothing has built more charitable institutions,

more hospitals for men, and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion.'<sup>4</sup> And he said elsewhere: 'There has been more bloodshed in the name of God than for any other cause, because people never went to the fountain-head; they were content only to give a mental assent to the customs of their forefathers, and wanted others to do the same' (1.127).

Vivekananda repeatedly said that instead of quibbling over inessentials, if only there was an ounce of practice, much could have been done. He observed with sadness: 'Even at the present time we find many sects and societies, with almost the same ideas, fighting each other, because one does not want to set forth those ideas in precisely the same way as another' (2.68).

What was his panacea for this fundamental and eternal problem of religion? He said that religions will have to broaden: 'Religious ideas will have to become universal, vast, and infinite; and then alone we shall have the fullest play of religion, for the power of religion has only just begun to manifest in the world. It is sometimes said that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out of the world. To me it seems that they have just begun to grow' (ibid.). With Ramakrishna-Vivekananda we are becoming religious.

While on the one hand we have become a global village and there is information boom, in the religious field we are becoming pluralistic, with peoples coming so close to one another. Now a church, a temple and a mosque all coexist in the same locality, which was rare even until the last century. So the idea of one religion and one faith has to go. Individualism and exclusivism—'my religion alone is true'—will have to leave. In today's society, pluralism is the ideal, since it says that all religions have some truth in them. Vivekananda suggested this: 'The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and, at the same time, have infinite scope for future development. ... Reli-

gions must also be inclusive, and not look down with contempt upon one another, because their particular ideals of God are different' (2.67). Of course there should be *nishtha* towards our own, but we should be broad enough to assimilate good ideas from every religion.

The Chicago Parliament of Religions can be said to be an important point in recent history because it began with the old idea of selfish religion and ended in making way for a universal religion. And Swami Vivekananda was responsible for it. Though its chief purpose was to show the superiority of the majority religion, Vivekananda's broadness came as a surprise to everyone because he spoke highly of other religions—Christianity, Buddhism—as if they were his own. He declared:

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight,' 'Assimilation and not Destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension' (1.24).

Thus within a few days the world had changed, as it were—from exclusivism to pluralism—with Vivekananda as the instrument. So he is the greatest prophet of harmony we have seen.

### What is Religious Harmony?

Practically speaking, is such a religious harmony or religious unity possible? To answer this, we should know the nature of human growth. We are trichotomous: we have the body, the mind, and the Self. Other religions speak of the body and the soul—not the Atman, or Self. The concept of Atman is India's contribution to the world. Most Indian

religions centre round the Self, which is the only reality. This much is at the individual level. At the collective level, we have the physical world, the world of ideas, and the Spirit. This Spirit, known as Brahman, is again an Indian discovery. Moreover, there is one more discovery of the Indian sages which is the profoundest of all. That is the simple equation: Atman = Brahman. All is one and one is all.

Where then is difference? Difference is at the physical level, at the bodily level. Where is harmony? Harmony is at the mental or ideational level. And where is unity? Unity is at the level of the Self, or Atman or Brahman. So there are three levels. If we hold on only to the gross physical, there is only difference and discord because of variety. 'Unity in variety is the law of nature,' Vivekananda remarked on several occasions. At the physical level, no two things can become one. Communists failed because they thought of bringing about physical equality. But equality can only be at the spiritual level. Next, peaceful coexistence can be at the mental level, where we cannot 'see' difference. And finally Oneness: unity is at the Spirit level.

Thus, both at the collective and the individual levels, there are three dimensions, physical, mental, and spiritual. The spiritual alone is true, and the rest are not. And we move from discord, through harmony, to unity. Now, is there such a gradation in the field of religion also? Yes, there is. There is ritual, there is mythology, and there is philosophy. All our discord and dissension is at the ritualistic level and about theories of rituals, which are wrongly called philosophy. There is harmony at the mythology level, because stories are stories. Then there is unity at the level of philosophy, which I equate with the experiential level. The word *philosophy* needs to be taken in its truest sense, the dimension of experience. Then there will be unity. When Vivekananda spoke of harmony, he spoke of the coexistence of different mythologies. When he spoke of a higher dimension of unity, he was

speaking of the experiential dimension of the Spirit. This we shall see now.

### Is Such a Harmony Possible?

We have already spoken of the first stage, religious discord. We shall now turn to harmony. Vivekananda says: 'Amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout these discordant sounds there is a note of concord; and he who is prepared to listen to it will catch the tone' (3.1-2). 'Had it been the will of an All-wise and All-merciful Creator that one of these religions should exist and the rest should die, it would have become a fact long, long ago. If it were a fact that only one of these religions is true and all the rest are false, by this time it would have covered the whole ground. But this is not so' (2.362). Vivekananda explained his ideal of a universal religion thus:

What then do I mean by the ideal of a universal religion? I do not mean any one universal philosophy, or any one universal mythology, or any one universal ritual held alike by all. ... What can *we* do then? We can make it run smoothly, we can lessen the friction, we can grease the wheels, as it were. How? By recognising the natural necessity of variation. ... We must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints, and yet be the same thing (2.382-3).

This is harmony.

Next, unity. Using the scientific discoveries of his time, Vivekananda proved that there is basic unity at the physical level. Then he gave the instance of Humphrey Davy's experience to say that there is unity at the thought level. Finally, he added: 'Unity in variety is the plan of creation. However men and women may vary individually, there is unity in the background' (1.41). He also said: 'Even in the universe of thought we find unity, and at last, when we get to the Self, we know that that Self can only be One. Beyond the vibrations of matter in its gross and subtle aspects, beyond motion there is but One. Even in manifested motion there is only unity' (1.152). Finally, an

individual, through varied experiences of innumerable lives, will have to expand towards unity. Vivekananda says: 'He expands into one mass of universal love, infinite love—the love that is God' (2.51).

Thus it is evident that Swami Vivekananda was the first prophet to speak of the fundamental unity of religions on such a universal scale. There was harmony in India, as can be seen in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. But Vivekananda was the first prophet to bring the whole world of religions, at all levels, together. Those who understand him will benefit immensely. None of the previous prophets spoke of a universal religion, or of harmony among religions or of unity of different religions. Buddha condemned brahminic sacrifices; Muhammad condemned idolatry; Nanak created a new group. Others had something or other to say against others' practices. But Vivekananda accepted all.

His wonderful declaration says it all: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details' (1.124). ~

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# All This Is Verily Brahman

PRAVRAJKA SEVAPRANA

**A**ll this verily is Brahman; *Sarvam khalvidam brahma.* The Truth of Vedanta rings out in these words from the *Chhandogya Upanishad*.<sup>1</sup> Although this Upanishadic saying is not considered to be one of the four major *mahavakyas*, or great sayings, which are used as mantras in the largest monastic branches of Advaita Vedanta in India, it certainly is a *mahavakya* in its own right, and as such is a potent Vedantic mantra. The Upanishad states: 'All this verily is Brahman. From Him do all things originate, into Him do they dissolve, and by Him are they sustained. Therefore one should meditate by becoming calm. A person is identified with his conviction. So the conviction a man has in this world dictates what he becomes. Therefore a man should carefully shape his conviction.' If we have the conviction that 'All this verily is Brahman', and if we try to live up to that conviction, it will revolutionize our lives.

## Everything Is Indeed God

When Swami Vivekananda first went to Sri Ramakrishna he had been going to the Brahmo Samaj and considered it blasphemous to look upon man as one with God. At this time Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendranath to read to him from the *Ashtavakra Samhita* in order to teach him the Vedantic truths. Naren did not agree with the idea expressed there, that everything was Brahman. In fact he made fun of it. Once in the temple garden he scornfully said to a friend: 'How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God and we too are God: nothing can be more preposterous!'<sup>2</sup> He just did not believe it. Sri Ramakrishna heard what he said and came out of his room and touched him. Narendranath immediately perceived that everything in the world was in-

deed God. This was not just a momentary experience. He lived in this experience for days. Wherever he looked, all was God. When he walked in the street, he saw that the cabs, the horses, the streams of people, the buildings, were all Brahman. He could hardly function in his daily business. When the intensity of the vision lessened a little, he saw the world as a dream. It took him a number of days to recover his normal state of mind. He experienced directly even at this early time in his spiritual life the fact that everything was indeed Brahman, the living Truth of Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda has given us a lecture entitled 'God in Everything'. It appears as part of his Jnana Yoga series. This lecture is a perfect gem with many facets and it actually presents the idea 'All this is verily Brahman' in a profoundly beautiful, and practical, way.

When we read this lecture of Swami Vivekananda we find that these ideas have the power to galvanize a person's mind and heart. Perhaps it is the inherent truth of this statement—'All this is Brahman'—that makes it so thrilling. Something in us recognizes that it is *true*. Let us think about this idea using Swamiji's lecture as a guide. What does this mean and how can we apply it in our lives?

## Changing Our Perspective

Swamiji delivered his 'God in Everything' lecture on 12 October 1896 in London, and he actually used the *Isha Upanishad* as a springboard for it. In a way, it is his commentary on this important Upanishad. Here he puts in simple English, understandable to the modern mind, these ancient Upanishadic truths.

He begins his lecture by pointing out that all religions agree that the world as it appears

to us is full of evils and unhappiness. This we can all see. Just look at the recent world events. Inconceivable acts of planned violence and destruction perpetrated against hundreds of innocent people, people starving by the thousand, war and pestilence, and worse yet, disease manufactured by man and then used as a weapon against men. It is a world of unrest and violence. How can we see any higher meaning in a world that is manifesting such violence and chaos?

Swamiji says religion offers God as a solution. In what way is this true? Various religions say that there is something infinite, undying, behind this phenomena, and that life in the senses is only a small, superficial portion of what is available to man. Vedanta philosophy says, beyond phenomena and in and through phenomena lies the infinite Brahman, which is beyond both good and evil. The power that is behind all manifestation, Shakti, the divine Energy, can manifest in a benign or in a terrible way. Mother Kali grants fearlessness and boons with two hands but holds a severed head and sword in the others. Mother's terrible form or Shiva's dance of destruction, both are manifestations of the Divine. The snake and its wriggling motion, Brahman and Shakti, Sri Ramakrishna tells us, are both one. The 'Brahma Stotra' tells us: 'Thou art the Dread of even the dreadful, the Terror of the terrible, the Refuge of all beings, the Purifier of all purifiers. Thou alone art the Controller of those in high places, the Supreme over the supreme, the Protector of the protectors.'<sup>3</sup> Everything in manifestation comes out of the Unmanifest on creation and returns to it on dissolution. It is in this sense that the Reality is the 'refuge' or ultimate source or resting place of all the worlds in manifestation. That is the source of all. 'All this verily is Brahman.'

It is a world of both good and evil. How can we see God here? In his lectures on 'The Practice of Religion' Swamiji says that simply trying to fix up the world by charitable works

and such other things is not the solution to the problem of evil.<sup>4</sup> We simply will not be able to make it all good, all peaceful. The world will always be the Divine Mother's hotchpotch pot, a mixed bag, as it were. We need to go beyond the world of the senses, really beyond. The goal of human life is Freedom. So what does this mean? Does it mean we must give up everything?

In one sense, it does mean that. It does mean renunciation, but there can be a danger here of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as it were. We need to change our *perspective* of the world. We need to give up our idea of *possessing* all this, and see what is behind this apparent universe. We need to put what is behind on top, as it were, to 'cover everything with God', as the *Isha Upanishad* tells us. It won't work to simply try to delete everything as we know it. Swamiji gives the example of a man who is trying to help his friend who has a mosquito on his forehead. The man gives such a blow to the mosquito that he inadvertently kills the friend also. If the average man tries to renounce everything suddenly, he is likely to end up with a blank screen, a frozen computer, as it were, with the screen saying: 'You have performed an illegal action.'

### Training to See God

In one of her lectures Pravrajika Vivekaprana says it is like a man lost in a forest who wants to go home. The man is already in the forest. He needs to find a way out from where he is. It is too late for him to decide not to enter the forest at all. This is the situation in which we find ourselves. And it seems to be getting more confusing every day, especially with the world unrest we presently face. We become fearful and lose our mental balance. We feel weak and shaky, uncertain of ourselves and our environment. We do not know how to proceed, how to find our way out. Here we are. Now what?

Swamiji tells us that we have misunderstood the religious teachings. We need to look

at the problem more closely. We need to chew on it, as it were, again and again until we begin to get the real import of it. It is only possible for us to transcend if we use both our heads and hearts. Swamiji points out that we need heart very much. In fact he says he would prefer to have 'a little heart and no brain, than be all brains and no heart' (2.145). But he also *does* say that most religions are carried away by feelings or heart. They are not practical, because they are not based on a rational philosophical system and tend towards emotionalism. People can be led by strong irrational emotions that only lead to further confusion and death. We need to use our heads as well as our hearts. Fanaticism is not the answer.

The *Katha Upanishad* tells us that Brahman is hidden in the heart and that It is known by the pointed and subtle intellect.<sup>5</sup> The *Mundaka Upanishad* says the Self is attained by the practice of truth, austerity, right knowledge and continence.<sup>6</sup> 'This immortal Brahman alone is before and behind, to the right and left, above and below; this world is indeed the supreme Brahman!' (2.2.12). The Bible also tells us, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'<sup>7</sup> So we must purify our minds through spiritual discipline. Our minds must be made pointed and subtle so that we can see God everywhere.

### Waking Up to Truth

In Advaita Vedanta we see the rational basis for the ideal of renunciation. It is not suicidal advice. Instead, it advises us to give up ignorance, our mistaken conception of the world, until we see that the world in fact *is* Brahman. We must know what really is. We must deify the world and see Brahman in and through it. 'Open your eyes and see Him,' Swamiji tells us.<sup>8</sup> Brahman is right here before us, and we are not different from It. Swamiji gives us a very poignant example. He says, 'We are dying of thirst sitting on the banks of the mightiest river' (2.150).

Why do we not see God then, if every-

thing is God? Swamiji tells us it is *we* who have put our own hands before our eyes and say we cannot see. Something is obstructing our vision and it is this obstruction, this ignorance about the world and about ourselves, that must be removed. Our conception of the world has been based on a partial understanding, a misunderstanding. We have been seeing everything through the senses. We have based our knowledge on a false reading, that we are bodies only, and we have been clinging to this idea. This idea that we are bodies is only acting as an eye shield for us, blocking out the light of Truth from our inner vision. In truth, God is in everything. He is everything. He is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. He is in good and bad, life and death, Swamiji tells us. He is even in what we call evil. Swamiji says there is a utility even in evil. Sometimes a blow can awaken our compassion, our understanding, our common feeling. Suffering can deepen the response of the heart. We must 'cover everything with God' and learn to see things as they really are. This may sound as if we are trying to hide something, as though we are 'painting the roses red', as it were, but this is not really the case. By practising the presence of God, by trying to see Him everywhere, we are actually only removing our ignorance about things. It is the Truth we are practising. That never changes. It is always there and always here; and eventually we *will* wake up to it.

### Being Ourselves

This does not necessarily mean giving up all the things of this world in an external way. It means deifying the world, seeing the true nature of things. We have been thinking of ourselves and of others as bodies only. We cannot understand the true nature of the universe through our senses. The senses are so limited. They go outward. Man wants to understand all phenomena, to find something which includes all. We are so unhappy because we think of ourselves as limited. We

must go deeper and find the centre, the common solution, the innermost core of the universe and of man himself—because the innermost core of the universe is, in fact, in man himself, in his innermost heart. ‘The kingdom of God is within you.’<sup>9</sup> Here comes the old story of the musk deer. We are running round and round looking for something that is our own true nature. It is right here and we are searching everywhere outside for it. We keep thinking, ‘If only I could do this thing or that thing, have this or that. If only things were different, if I were somewhere else or were somebody else, then I would be happy.’ But we are told it is here, now. Again, we are dying of thirst on the banks of a huge river.

What is making us so miserable? It is our own minds. It is desire. Swamiji says, ‘If there is no desire, there is no suffering.’<sup>10</sup> But here comes the next question: What does giving up desire mean? It means, according to Swamiji, giving up the idea that I own anything. It is this idea of possessing that is the problem, that makes us miserable. If we think we possess anything, then we will suffer. We will always feel unfulfilled. Swamiji says a person does not have to give up his family or wealth. It is the idea of possessing them that must be given up.

All in fact belongs to God. Everything is His alone. We also are His. He is even in the desires that rise in our minds. Our bodies too belong only to Him. If we could really see it in this light, the world would become a place of joy—a wondrous universe where God is peeking out from behind each face, where He is shining through every object—the world would be permeated by Light and Joy, because in fact that is its very essence. What is really happening here? It is a continuous worship. You can say ‘the play of God’, or if you choose to look at it in a more personal way you can say God is always with us, ‘in Him we live, and move, and have our being’.<sup>11</sup> Yes, even in the terrible, in life and in death. He is ‘the Terror of the terrible, the Refuge of all beings’. The

sages tell us that the knowledge of Oneness is attained by merging our individual consciousness in the universal Consciousness, which is hidden within our heart and is the ultimate Reality underlying the whole universe. The divine Consciousness with which the individual consciousness merges is called Refuge because it gives the only real protection to the individual from all the miseries of the world.

Giving up the world also does not mean we must not work. We go on working, but the motive for working changes. If we are working to get something, be it an object or recognition, fame or even just to be known as a great worker, it will only bring us pain. If we are being propelled by desire, by our senses and feelings, by our egos, misery and frustration will be the result. We do not have to *be* anything. In fact, if we could *be* nothing, it would solve all our problems. One of Sri Ramakrishna’s disciples once said, ‘Sri Ramakrishna made us nobodies.’ Swamiji says, ‘He works, who has no ulterior motive in view. He works, who has nothing to gain from work.’<sup>12</sup> He says we should work by giving up the apparent, illusive world. We should work seeing God everywhere: ‘Eternal Love and Service Free’ (4.389). Think of it! If we saw that, everything would be just worship, just adoration. How could it be anything else if we could see God in everything, if we also are God?

### Negating the Unreal

In order to understand this, Swamiji tells us, we have to go through negation. In his Jnana Yoga lecture on ‘Realisation’ he says we must understand things in their true light. All joy really is coming from the Atman—but it is obscured, made separate, and *appears* to be coming from somewhere else. ‘Not for the sake of the husband is the husband dear, but for the sake of the Self. Not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear, but for the sake of the Self.’<sup>13</sup> At some point in our lives we come to realize that all our little loves are just imperfect

reflections of the Love of God. Our little loves are narrow, hemmed in, not inclusive, not big enough. We get a glimpse of a higher, larger love through them, but we do not get the whole picture. Everyone wants love. Love or bliss is the very essence of all reality, of ourselves, but in order to understand it we need to focus ourselves—give up ignorance, what is false, exclusive, negative; and then the positive side will shine through. Then things that we gave up at first will take new shape and form and will appear to us in a new light and become deified. But to understand them, we have first to get a glimpse of Truth. We have to give up things first, Swamiji tells us, and then we get them back again, deified. But what are we giving up? I repeat, our false ideas about things, our attachment and sense of ownership, our separation, the ways we are limiting and restricting our love. Love itself is God, and it is all-inclusive. It is our idea of separateness that is the problem. We suffer intensely because we view ourselves as separate. We long for Oneness. The poet Rumi says:

Listen to the story told by the reed,  
Of being separated.  
Since I was cut from the reed bed I have  
Made this crying sound.  
Anyone apart from someone he loves  
Understands what I say.  
Anyone pulled from a source  
Longs to go back.

We need to see the Oneness of Life. 'They grope in darkness who worship this ignorant world.... But he who knows the secret of nature ... he crosses death.'<sup>14</sup> Swamiji says that this separation does not really exist; it is not real, it is merely apparent, on the surface. If you go beneath the surface you will find that Unity which is in the hearts of all. But how do we get there?

### Covering Everything with God

Swamiji gives us some practical advice.

First he says we must keep a high ideal. We must never lower the ideal. We need to hear about it and meditate on it. We must constantly insert this idea into our lives: 'Cover everything with God.' One of our senior swamis once gave this advice to a student. 'Act as though you see the Atman in all beings. Imagine that you do see it shining there behind each face, in every form. Try to see the Consciousness that is behind all of this universe. Make this your practice, and in the end you will realize it, because it is the Truth. If you go deep enough, the means will become the end—in essence they are not different.' As we have already seen, 'A person is identified with his conviction'. Swamiji asks us to *fill* the mind with the highest thoughts, hear them day after day, think them month after month. These ideas will invigorate us and fill us with strength. For it is thought that is the propelling force in us.

(To be concluded)

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# Beyond Illusions

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

**M**ost of us remember having watched a sunset. This daily occurrence has never failed to make an observer calm. As the sun dips inexorably towards the horizon, it appears to get progressively closer and larger, and then, with a burst of glory, sinks below the horizon. What most of us do not realize is the fact that though the sun is real, a sunset is subject to two types of illusion: one, the very structure of the universe makes one see the sun 'set'; the other is the illusion of size and colour resulting from the very structure of the mind. The latter is due to subconscious perceptual conditioning. The brain uses the horizon or the objects on the terrain, as visual reference points. This makes the sun appear closer and larger. When it is overhead, its size appears much smaller. Apart from this, atmospheric dust and water vapour distort light and make the sunset colourful.

Illusions are never willed; illusions are harmless; illusions enhance life. If we are conditioned to experience illusions we have also conditioned ourselves to take them for granted. Besides, illusions are not indicative of any visual or psychological disorder. But a question arises: If this experience is true, then illusions might cover similar or all experiences, for the two factors (the structure of matter and mind) are common to all experiences. What, then, is actually 'out there'?

## Illusory Experiences

Let us say you are travelling in a train which has temporarily halted for some reason at a station deep in the Indian countryside. It is late and as you gaze out of the window, you notice the moon racing across the dark cloudy sky. The noise usual in a second-class coach recedes to the background as the sound of an-

other train's horn is heard rising in volume. You crane your neck out to watch the other train approaching on the opposite track. As the other train passes by your window, you feel a sudden lurch as if your own train has started and moved forward. Simultaneously the sound of the other train's horn begins to fade. As that train speeds away, you notice that your train has not moved an inch. After five minutes the train does move on and you notice the sylvan landscape flying backwards. Relaxing in the seat you glance at the wrist-watch, which says the train was detained for just ten minutes. But it felt like half an hour. You acknowledge a smile of relief from the dark co-passenger sitting in front. His smile reveals brilliant white teeth. A few feet away a child inadvertently drops the fragile toy she is playing with. She lets out such a wail seeing her toy broken that everybody within earshot is made to wince. A full minute of this assault on the eardrums is stilled as the child suddenly gets another toy from her mother. The passengers luxuriate in the wonderful silence.

What you experienced during the last ten minutes was something remarkable. Clouds sailing across the sky due to a stiff wind made the moon appear to race. The fact that you felt the train had restarted while it was stationary was an illusion. This was due to the mind using the passing train and its sound (which itself was varying due to the Doppler effect) as frames of reference. The landscape flying past the window is an illusion related to the direction of movement. Time seems to crawl while waiting and fly when we are engaged in something. The brilliant white teeth of the co-passenger are an illusion occasioned by the contrast of his dark skin. The child's wail had masked all other sounds, even the clutter of

the wheels, and when she stopped, the 'silence' you experienced was also an illusion.

### Profound Questions

If such human experiences are illusory, why then are they categorized as real? Is our conception of reality then a mixture of the real and the illusory? Is it illusion that makes us think of human experiences as real? Or is it an illusion that we think we experience illusions? This is no illusory 'loop within a loop' clever argument. This subject has been studied down the ages and has retained its contemporary relevance. For answers to this question will reveal the nature of the physical world that exists independent of the sensory organs. Or, in other words, whether what one experiences at all exists the way it is perceived.

### Illusions Closer Home

Illusions are closer at hand than sunsets. An artist paints with the idea of creating an illusion of depth on the canvas. Do we see the artist's illusion, or does our mind create the illusion of three dimensions when there are only two? A writer creates an illusion in the reader's mind that the latter comprehends what has been written. Does the writer create the illusion or is it our mind that deceives us? Movies also create illusions in which we lose ourselves. There are many people and many philosophies that foster the illusion that our lives and times are perfectly all right, 'So enjoy yourself!' As if this were not enough, there are people who have closely and professionally studied illusions, not to eradicate but to magnify them. Magicians and illusionists are looked at with awe and fascination. They make use of illusions to entertain and educate.

### Science and Sensory Deception

Evolution has endowed human beings with a refined sensory nervous system, capping it with a cerebral cortex superior to that of other creatures. Yet it is known how inadequate our senses are compared to those of

other life forms. To offset this limitation and further enhance knowledge, humans have developed instruments to peer minutely at things to find out how they work; for we dislike misinterpreting reality, whatever be the 'reality' of illusions. The history of science itself is a history of humanity trying to understand the environment and come to terms with it. But it seems for every problem it solves, a new one arises in its place. However, studies in neurology and the structural formation of sensory organs, besides those in electromagnetism, optics and thermodynamics, have eradicated a lot of misconceptions. But with all this knowledge it is seen that either matter seems to be deceiving us, or our senses, along with the brain and mind, are.

### Visual Perception and Our World

Take the amazing visual apparatus, the foremost among our sense organs. We perceive in colour. Many wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation enter our eyes and a two-dimensional inverted image of the object is formed on the retina in each eye. Then with the help of photoreceptor cells (rods and cones), and dedicated nerves, the images are transmitted via the optic nerve, containing millions of nerve fibres, further up to the visual centre at the back of the brain. The brain re-inverts the images while fusing them into a single composite picture. This super-fast process that involves no less than forty centres simultaneously gives the complex spatial, temporal and colour information about the object 'out there and now'. Yet with all these advances the actual process is still only vaguely understood. It must also be emphasized at this point that real perception is in the mind.

Our world is densely packed with electromagnetic radiation, though only a small portion of it is perceptible. Every object, including our bodies, emits and absorbs radiation. Over and above these are the wavelengths emitted by modern machines, all impinging continuously on the organism (your

cell phone begins beeping, and this is no illusion!). The brain has to sift through all this stimulus energy to give a coherent picture of things. At the same time, it is known that the brain can work only selectively, interpreting some stimuli and ignoring a good deal, in order to save itself time and energy to coordinate the motor nerves. This selection is made on the organism's basic need for survival. If every sensation from outside were to be interpreted, it would lead to terrible chaos. It is postulated that a major portion of the sensations is ignored. If this is the state of things, how can anyone believe that this tiny fragment of what is interpreted by the brain gives a perfect picture of the external world?

The mind, apart from interpreting sensory stimuli, also contributes its own data to them. When still pictures are flashed on the screen at a certain speed, the brain interprets the pictures as continuous and fluid by completing the movements. This is done subconsciously and this is what has made motion pictures and television possible and enjoyable. Then, the familiar nearby objects, which we are used to seeing daily, are stabilized, which means that within a certain range the objects' sizes will not vary. Another interesting auto-corrective phenomenon has been reported: In a study the subjects were made to wear special glasses that made the world appear upside down. Initially the brain got confused, but then it took over and astoundingly corrected the vision, right side up, though the special glasses were still on—and when the glasses were removed, the brain again got back to its old way of seeing things!

### Perception and Knowledge

A mirage is experienced when light passing through the layers of hot air above a heated surface undergoes total internal reflection through the denser cold layer of air above it. Sometimes a mirage may contain not only trees and water, but whole towns may be seen floating in the air (the proverbial *gandhar-*

*vanagari*, city of the celestial musicians). Even alleged UFO sightings could be the result of such illusion. Rail tracks converge at a distance. A stick half immersed in water appears bent. But we have the knowledge that mirages are unreal, that tracks do not converge and that sticks do not bend on immersion. Further, a whirling firebrand is seen to create a circle of light, but its illusory nature is known. This common knowledge proves that perception of an object and knowledge of it are two different things.

### Trans-sensory Illusions

Illusions are not limited to visual ones alone but may also be trans-sensory. Very sensitive people say that they 'perceive' colour when they hear certain words. Some musicians can also see colour when particular notes are struck. Then there is the mirror-ego phenomenon. It is questioned whether, when one's skin is touched while he is looking at himself in front of a mirror, one experiences the touch as if it were in the mirror image or perceives it to be in contact with one's own body as it actually appears in front of the mirror. These may be classed as pseudo-hallucinations, but whatever they are called, the bottom line is that perception of something is giving rise to a different cognition. There seems to be no strict cause-and-effect relationship in these cases. Anyone stepping out from a giant-wheel ride or from a rough boat trip feels the ground moving beneath the feet. Some scholars even include the phantom-limb phenomenon that amputees have under illusion, although the pain is very much experienced, and one takes real painkillers for it. *Déjà vu* is a re-living of the experience of some person, place or thing; it is an illusion. Touching a hot object and then immersing the hand in lukewarm water will give a cold sensation. Lifting a heavy object before lifting another will make the second one seem lighter. These are a few illusions that are now being explained not as illusions but as simple experiences of disparity.

## The Great Deception

It was mentioned that the brain reads only a part of the sensory stimulus; this means knowing the external world only partially. Secondly, the stimulus energy is subject to distortion (*arthādhyaśa* in Vedānta). Thirdly, the senses are limited. Lastly, and most importantly, the mind contributes its own data (*jñānādhyaśa* in Vedānta), which is itself based on the first and second imperfections. Now a serious question that arises is this: Is the mind itself the cause of illusions? Is everything that is experienced a deception? To look at it philosophically, science deals with sensory knowledge. Does it mean that science is taking help of imperfect sensory knowledge in trying to search for reality?

An illusion is different from hallucination, a mild form of epilepsy, self-hypnotism or absent-mindedness. Illusion, as we have seen, has to have a 'real' sensory stimulus from an object. There has to be a substratum. The experience of seeing illusions has been studied by most Indian philosophical systems, from hard-core Realists to the Nihilists (Buddhist Shunyavadins).

## The Real Psychology of Perception

Let us take up the distinction between perception of the object and its knowledge once more and have a look at Swamiji's explanation of this fact:

The whole universe is like ... the pearl which is being formed by us. What we get from the external world is simply the blow. Even to be conscious of that blow we have to react, and as soon as we react, we really project a portion of our own mind towards the blow, and when we come to know of it, it is really our own mind as it has been shaped by the blow. Therefore it is clear even to those who want to believe in a hard and fast realism ... that supposing we represent the external world by 'x', what we really know is 'x' plus mind, and this mind element is so great that it has covered the whole of that 'x' which has remained unknown and unknowable throughout; and, therefore, if there is an ex-

ternal world, it is always unknown and unknowable. What we know of it is as it is moulded, formed, fashioned by our own mind.<sup>1</sup>

## Pseudo-hallucination and *Adhyaśa*

Pseudo-hallucination was mentioned earlier in passing. Let us look at it again in order to illustrate *adhyāśa*, or superimposition. Suppose a lazy worker notices his boss talking to a colleague. He can hear only snatches of indistinct conversation but when the word 'fired' falls on his ears his apprehensions and fears hit him like a storm, and his hatred he then projects on the boss. Actually his boss had said 'tired' referring to something else.

When our feelings—wishes, anxieties and fears—are projected (or superimposed) on external objects, we misinterpret things and situations. This is what is called *adhyāśa* and is one of the main pillars in understanding the Advaita Vedānta of Sri Shankaracharya. To let Swamiji explain *adhyāśa*: 'There was a stump of a tree, and in the dark, a thief came that way and said, "That is a policeman." A young man waiting for his beloved saw it and thought that it was his sweetheart. A child who had been told ghost stories took it for a ghost and began to shriek. But all the time it was the stump of a tree' (2.87). One can never see two things in one; either it is a stump (*sthānu*) or a man (*puruṣa*).

## Reality from Illusion or Vice Versa?

From a different standpoint, science still leaves us as confused as ever. Laws that operate in the world of objective matter are found to become completely unsubstantiated on a different scale and plane. The strict physical laws that govern the perceptible world of matter break down in the quantum world of subatomic matter. Indeterminacy, uncertainty, in this realm is giving rise to determinate laws and objects on the gross surface. One may well question whether chaos is giving rise to concrete objects or whether order is breaking

down into chaos? One can also ask: Is illusion giving rise to the supposed reality or is something called reality giving rise to the illusion of objects? It is for sure that one thing is appearing as another. In the classical illustration of Vedanta, the rope is appearing as a snake.

### Three Orders of Existence and Experience

Vedanta acknowledges three orders of existence: the absolute, *pāramārthika sattā*; the relative, *vyāvahārika sattā*; and the illusory, *prātibhāsika sattā*. These orders of existence are not graded. The absolute (Brahman) appears as the relative world, objects in the relative world cause illusions, and the illusory may appear as the real.

We do not know anything about this universe, yet at the same time we cannot say that we do not know. ... This standing between knowledge and ignorance, this mystic twilight, the mingling of truth and falsehood—and where they meet—no one knows. We are walking in the midst of a dream, half sleeping, half waking, passing all our lives in a haze; this is the fate of everyone of us. This is the fate of all sense-knowledge. This is the fate of all philosophy, of all boasted science, of all boasted human knowledge. This is the universe (2.111-2).

This explanation could also mean that Vedanta is trying to evade questions. But unlike the Buddhists who say 'Realize all this as illusion', Hinduism (Vedanta) says that within the illusion is the Real (8.273). In each act of cognition the reality called Brahman is vaguely perceived. It is due to this that there exists in everyone an unshakable belief in everything, including illusions, as permanent and real. It has to, because Brahman is Consciousness Absolute and illusion, maya, is indefinable.

### The Cause of Illusion

A young man once asked Sri Ramakrishna: 'If the world is of the nature of illusion—magic—then why doesn't one get rid of it?' The Master replied: 'It is due to the sams-

kāras, inborn tendencies. Repeated births in this world of māyā make one believe that māyā is real.'<sup>2</sup>

To sum up this article with Swamiji's words of hope:

We are all travelling in this mirage of the world ... not knowing that it is a mirage. One day it will break up, but it will come back again; the body has to remain under the power of past Karma, and so the mirage will come back. This world will come back upon us so long as we are bound by Karma ... all will come back to us, but not with the same power. Under the influence of the new knowledge the strength of Karma will be broken, its poison will be lost. It becomes transformed, for along with it there comes the idea that we know it now, that the sharp distinction between the reality and the mirage has been known.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

As we gaze at the beautiful sunset once more, nothing has changed optically but we have changed. We had so long lived in a self-constructed prison of our experiences. Now that we have had intimations of the Reality behind the illusion, our being vibrates with the great mantra of the *Isha Upanishad* addressed to the Reality behind the Sun (and Nature): 'O thou who art the nourisher, the solitary traveller, the controller, the acquirer, the son of Prajapati, do remove thy rays, do gather up thy dazzle. I shall behold by thy grace that form of thine which is most benign. I am that very Person that is yonder (in the Sun).'<sup>4</sup> ~

### References

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# The Instrument for Realizing God

SWAMI PURNANANDA

**W**hat is God realization? It is a state of being. As Swami Vivekananda says, it is being and becoming. It is not like perceiving objects by means of our sense organs. God is beyond the senses, internal or external. So God cannot be perceived or realized through them. We do use terms like God realization, God vision, Self realization, realization of Brahman, and so forth, but all these terms are synonymous and are generally used to facilitate a practical expression or description of a particular indescribable state.

We go through many states of being in our day-to-day lives—the states of pleasure, of pain, of illness, and the like. Is the state of God realization like any of these? No, because these states are actually imposed on a state of pure being by our mind due to its inherent ignorance. The original state being basic, it cannot be compared with the later ones. Still, the scriptures have somehow tried to give us an idea of that pure state. The Bhagavata says, ‘*Yatreṃe sadasadrūpe pratiśiddhe svasamvidā; Avidyayā’tmani kṛte iti tadbrahmadarśanam.* When the attributes of gross and subtle nature, superimposed on the Atman through ignorance, are sublated by the knowledge of their Base, that is *brahmadarśana*, the vision of Brahman’ (1.3.33). But what is that instrument by means of which this state can be realized? The scriptures and persons established in that state have described it in many ways. Says the Bhagavata, ‘*Paśyantyo rūpamadabhracakṣuṣā; They perceive Its form by means of a vast eye (that is, by spiritual vision)*’ (1.3.4).

## The Immanent Form of God

Being the *antarātman* (indwelling Self) of all beings, God has an immanent form. He is inherent in all creation. Because of His con-

spicuous existence in various names and forms (*vividhena rājamānatvāt*), He is called Virāt, the Omnipresent One. The Bhagavad-gita describes Him thus: ‘*Sarvataḥ pāṇipādām tatsarvato’kṣīromukham; Sarvataḥ śrutimalloke sarvamāvṛtya tiṣṭhati.* With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and faces everywhere, with ears everywhere, It exists pervading everything in this world’ (13.13).

## The Personal God

God can also assume innumerable other forms—any form in which His devotees wish to see Him. The omnipresent God comes down to the level of human beings for the sake of His devotees, in order to satisfy them. He has promised, ‘*Ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃstathaiva bhajāmyaham; In whatever way men approach me, in the same way do I reward them*’ (4.11). These forms are called *iṣṭas*, chosen forms—chosen by the devotees personally. That is why they are called forms of the Personal God. It is in this sense that we say gods are many. The one God becomes many in order to satisfy many. Just as one light is reflected by innumerable reflectors in innumerable ways, even so is God reflected variously, according to the diverse natures of different minds.

## The Transcendental Form of God

Apart from these, there is God’s *nirviśeṣa rūpa*, His transcendental, undifferentiated aspect, without name, form or attribute—a form without a form, as it were. This form of God cannot be comprehended by the senses, not even by the mind or the intellect. This is God’s Absolute Form, the Supreme Self, called Svarāt. This transcendent Being is beyond and free of all limiting adjuncts. The *Bṛihad-*

*aranyaka Upanishad* says: 'The knowers of Brahman, O Gargi, verily describe It, the unchanging One as the Absolute. It is neither gross nor subtle, neither short nor long, ... neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste or smell, without eyes or ears, ... non-luminous, ... without measure, and devoid of interior or exterior' (3.8.8). In short, It is free from all attributes and is One without a second. Here the shruti describes (*abhivadanti*) the Absolute by means of the process of total negation (*neti, neti*) because It is bereft of any 'such-ness'. Objects are known by their 'such-ness' ('*idamityā*, it is such'). This is called *viśeṣa*, the extraordinary attribute of the given object which distinguishes it from others (*idam asmāt prthak iti buddhiḥ jāyate yasmāt sa viśeṣaḥ*). The transcendent Being can only be described by the process of negation simply because It is *nirviśeṣa*, devoid of any *viśeṣa*. Moreover, the *nirviśeṣa* cannot be many. Everything, right from the Creator down to a clump of grass, has evolved from this Absolute Being. Says the *Mundaka Upanishad*: '*Tathā'ksarāt sarībhavatīha viśvam*; (Similarly) from this unchangeable Absolute evolves this universe' (1.1.7).

### Pure Mind: the Instrument of God Vision

Every human being has the power to perceive all the above-mentioned forms or states of God—Absolute, Immanent and Personal, but not with any physical sense organ, including the mind stuff (*antaḥkaraṇa*). We find in the *Kena Upanishad*: '*Yanmanasā na manute*; Who is not comprehended by the mind' (1.6). Then how is It perceived? The *Katha Upanishad* states: '*Manasaivedamāptavyam*; It is to be perceived by the mind alone' (2.1.11). However, this is not an example of contradiction between two shruti passages. In the second statement it is not the ordinary mind but the pure mind that is meant. As Sri Ramakrishna says, the pure mind, the pure intellect and the pure Atman are all identical. This pure mind has been variously described.

*Adabhracakṣu*: The Bhagavata says that sages see the Lord's magnificent form by means of a 'vast eye' (*adabhracakṣuṣā*). What is it? It is the pure mind, free from all impurities.

Mental impurity is of three types: concealment (*āvaraṇa*), distraction (*vikṣepa*) and stain (*mala*). They are the results of nescience (*avidyā*), desire (*kāma*) and action (*karma*) respectively. The pure Self in association with nescience gives rise to desire; desire involves a man in action; and action produces results which leave psychic impressions (*samskāra*). This mental impression produces future enjoyment or suffering for the doer. It is this impression that stains the mind. However, *mala* can be destroyed by good action, works done for the sake of God offering their results to Him, or works performed without selfish desire, done 'for the good of the many, for the welfare of the many; *bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya*'. The impurity caused by distraction can be overcome by regular worship of the Lord (*upāsana*). Any work can be considered worship if it is done for the sake of God with utmost love. Nescience can be got rid of forever by Self knowledge. By these processes the mind becomes entirely free from all impurities. It is this mind that is called *adabhracakṣu*, the divine eye capable of spiritual vision.

*Divyacakṣu*: Krishna says to Arjuna in the Gita: '*Dīvyam dadāmi te cakṣuḥ paśya me yogamaiśvaram*; I bestow on you the divine eye; (with that) behold My divine yoga' (11.8). Here the Lord graciously grants Arjuna's prayer to see His Universal Form with the gift of supernatural vision by removing all impurities from the latter's mind for the time being. Thus Arjuna was able to perceive the Lord's magnificent form. Experiencing the immanent form of the Lord, Arjuna exclaims: 'You are the Imperishable, the supreme thing to be known; You are the ultimate resting place of the universe; You are the undying Preserver of the eternal religion; I regard You as the primeval Being' (11.18).

*Premacakṣu*: Sri Ramakrishna says: 'He

cannot be seen with the physical eye. As a result of sadhana a “love body” comes into being. It has “love eyes” and “love ears”. One can see Him with those “love eyes” and hear His words with those “love ears”. Love has the power of purifying the mind, because love is pure—nay, purity itself. A genuine and intense love for God without any selfish motive is rare indeed. When such love manifests in the heart, the entire body becomes a structure of love, every part and limb of it is made pure—made of love, as it were. Being super-saturated with pure love, the mind takes the shape of God, for pure love is God Himself: ‘*Sa īśvaraḥ anirvacanīya premasvarūpaḥ*; God is love indescribable.’ Jesus says: ‘God is love’ (1 John, 4.8). The lines of a famous Bengali devotional song run thus: ‘With mind serene and eyes made radiant with heavenly love, behold that matchless sight (of His wondrous form).’ Although it may be the Personal God who is referred to here, the devotee can still see His immanent form by His grace, just as Arjuna saw the Lord’s Universal Form (*viśvarūpa*).

*Bhāvacaḥṣu*: Sri Sarada Devi says that God is realized in spirit. It is one’s spiritual attitude (*bhāva*) that condenses into the divine form. A well-known Sanskrit verse says: ‘*Bhāvena labhate jñānam bhāvena devadarśanam; Bhāvena labhate sarvaṁ tasmāt bhāvāvalambanam*. Through *bhāva* knowledge is attained, through *bhāva* God vision. Everything is attained through *bhāva*, therefore *bhāva* is to be adopted.’

This *bhāva* also helps a man free his mind from all limiting adjuncts (*upādhi*) and reach the transcendental state. Then the mind itself becomes the pure Atman, for the pure mind and the pure Atman are identical.

*Sūkṣmadṛṣṭi*: The *Katha Upanishad* says: ‘*Eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho’tmā na prakāśate; Dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣmadarśibhiḥ*. That Self hidden in all beings does not shine forth; but It is seen by seers through their one-pointed and subtle intellects’

(1.3.12). Here the instrument for perceiving God is the pointed and fine intellect. Only a one-pointed mind can penetrate through the thick wall of ignorance and reach the subtlest of the subtle, the immanent Atman hidden in every being. The one-pointed mind, fixed as it is on a single chosen object, acquires infinite power. Worship is necessary to make the mind sharp and one-pointed. ‘*Upāsānānām tu cittaikāgryam*,’ says the *Vedantasara*, ‘*Upāsānās* aim at concentration of the mind’ (1.13). The *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts: ‘*Śaram hyupāsānī-śitam sandhayita*; Fix on it (the bow called *praṇava*) the arrow (the soul) sharpened by meditation’ (2.2.3).

*Vimalanayana*: Swami Vivekananda in his *ārātrika* hymn on Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘The vision of the eyes purified by the collyrium of knowledge (*jñānāñjana*) cause all delusion to disappear.’ All delusions created by ignorance cease forever—*vikṣāne moha jāy*, says the hymn. But the question is, who is it that sees? Is it God or is it the devotee? The devotee can see neither the transcendental nor the immanent nor even the personal form of God with his eyes of flesh. Rather, he can only see the ever changing world of name and form. But if God looks at the devotee, if He casts His compassionate glance on him, then the devotee’s delusion vanishes and his vision is purified—and the devotee too becomes a *vimalanayana*, of pure eyes! And it is with these divine eyes that he beholds God’s divine form. Then Swamiji goes on to say: ‘When by Your grace all modifications of the mind are subdued and the mind is fixed on You, then I am able to see You.’ Until now, because of the delusion created by his ignorance, the devotee was only aware of his own ‘I’, his own ego. But now he realizes that it is ‘not I, but Thou’. All are Yours, nay, You are all. The devotee’s ‘I’ has totally metamorphosed into ‘Thou’.

This is the culmination of human life, this is the sole aim of every human being, and this is God realization. ~

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# The Micro and Macro of Harmony

KALYAN KUMAR MITRA

The *Webster's New World Dictionary* gives the meaning of the word *harmony* as: (a) 'a combination of parts into a pleasing or orderly whole' and (b) 'agreement in feeling, actions, ideas, etc.; peaceable or friendly relations'. Thus, in a nutshell, harmony for humans means a happy blend or synthesis of values despite differences in mental tendencies, thought or action at different levels, facets and stages of human life. Even in legal parlance there is the principle of 'harmonious construction' between the different sections or provisions of a law so as to avoid conflicting or contradictory interpretations. It is my endeavour here to conceptualize harmony first at the micro level of the individual self and then at the macro level of human society at large, and discuss how such harmony may be achieved. However, it is the individual who is the centre and vital base of the process of harmony.

## *Caturvarga*: Human Goals

Vedanta has classed the urges and aspirations of the human ego into four categories (*caturvarga*) of purusharthas: dharma, artha, kama and moksha. These apply to society as well. Dharma, consisting of the accepted principles and norms of the community, is the cornerstone of the social structure. The laws and policies of administration conducive to the community's general welfare are all based on dharma. Artha means wealth, the money or assets acquired within the framework of dharma by the righteous performance of one's duties. Artha is necessary for a meaningful growth of both the individual and society. Kama, as distinguished from *moha*, or passion, stands for healthy desire and represents the aspirations and ambitions that are the driving force behind all action. Work, again, must be

within the bounds of dharma; it must be ethical, honest and, above all, selfless. Along with the achievement of personal success one has social obligations that one must fulfil. Finally, man arrives at a stage when he aspires after moksha, or liberation from samsara and union with God.

## Yoga in Practice

As the Bhagavadgita teaches, there is a need for control and restraint of the baser instincts such as jealousy, anger, lust, greed and desire. This is to be achieved by yoga, which is interpreted by Swami Ranganathanandaji (in his magnum opus *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*) as steadfast effort or sadhana, in order to achieve efficiency of character and action (*yogah karmasu kauśalam*).<sup>1</sup> Efficiency of character means selflessness accompanied by an effort to practise the eternal values formulated by the sages, eliminate or sublimate the ego, and attain the higher Self. Such yoga enables us to control our sense organs (*dama*) and mind (*śama*), and brings us closer to the realization of the Divinity, a spark of which is within all of us. It is thus that we achieve both social welfare (*abhyudaya*) and spiritual emancipation (*nīḥśreyasa*).

## *The Basics of Yoga*

People desiring to traverse the course of life delineated above must first take recourse to *śama* and *dama*. Then come *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. *Pravṛtti* could be interpreted as the tendency to do good, and *nivṛtti* as the tendency to refrain from evil. Both help in the attainment of mental equipoise and indirectly bring about social stability.

Another necessity is a steady, balanced mind, *sthītā-prajñā*. That in turn requires

introspection. One needs to analyse one's thoughts and deeds and strive for greater control of mind and keener discrimination. All this, however, presupposes a measure of detachment. Says the Gita: '*Sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau; Tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivam pāpamavāpsyasi*. Having made pain and pleasure, gain and loss, victory and defeat the same, engage yourself in battle. Thus you shall incur no sin' (2.38). Self-control is the key. A person gets an idea of his mental strength and energy only when he begins to regulate his own life. As Swami Ranganathanandaji explains, those who are great workers face and overcome problems with tremendous conviction and mental strength, keeping their minds calm and steady. He adds that the whole of the Gita is about training the mind for total human development.

### The Path of Action

Work is of great help here. If we know how to work intelligently we will learn to deal with our fellow human beings in a judicious manner. The most encouraging thing about work is that no effort is ever lost; moreover, it protects us from fear, doubt, anxiety and frustration; *svālpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt* (2.40).

But how is work to be performed? What is the secret of this path of action? Work with detachment. '*Karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana; Mā karmaphalāheturbhūrmā te saṅgo'stoakarmaṇi*. You have the right to work, but not to the result. Be not attached to the fruits of action, but do not cease to work' (2.47). This is called the yoga of non-attachment.

### Equanimity: Intrapersonal Harmony

This yoga-buddhi is elaborated in the following verse: '*Yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgamī tyaktvā dhanañjaya; Siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate*. Being steadfast in yoga, perform actions abandoning attachment, remaining unconcerned as regards success and failure. This evenness of mind is

known as yoga' (2.48). Verse 2.55 further expounds the yoga of equanimity: '*Prajahāti yadā kāmānsarvānpārtha manogatān; Atmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate*. When one completely casts away all the desires of the mind, satisfied in the Self alone by the Self, then one is said to be of steady wisdom.' It is thus that an individual attains inner harmony. Society, consisting as it does of individuals, should strive to uphold this teaching. This is how harmony between the constituents of a society is brought about. Verse 2.56 further describes the state of steady wisdom: '*Duḥkheṣu anudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprahaḥ; Vitarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrmunirucyate*. He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after happiness, who has become free from attachment, fear and anger, is indeed a sage of steady wisdom.' Here again equanimity is emphasized by the word *sthitadhīḥ*. Such equanimity comes from the control of opposite feelings like happiness and sadness, ambition and frustration (which are all temporary), as well as the restraint of the 'six enemies' (*saḍṛipu*): lust (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), infatuation (*moha*), arrogance (*mada*), and jealousy (*matsara*). Driving home the point, verses 2.64-5 say: '*Rāgadveṣaviyuktaistu viśayānindriyāiscaran; Ātmaśāyairvidheyāt mā prasādamadhigacchati. Prasāde sarvaduhkhānām hānirasyopajayate; Prasannacetaso hyāṣu buddhīḥ paryavatisthate*. The self-controlled person, moving among sense objects with restraint, and free from attraction and aversion, attains tranquillity. In tranquillity all sorrows are destroyed. For the intellect of one who is tranquil-minded is soon established in firmness.'

So once the inimical forces in it are subdued, the mind becomes *prasanna*, calm, joyous and free. It is such a mind that is steady, and its advantages in individual and collective life, where it enables men and women to boldly face their problems in the midst of increasingly complex imponderables, is better imagined than described.

### Mastering the Ego and Its Cravings

The *Hitopadesha* says: '*Vipadi dhairyam-athābhyudaye kṣamā sadasi vākpaṭutā yudhi vikramah; Yaśasi cābhīruciroyasanam śrutau prakṛtisiddhamidam hi mahātmanām*. Fortitude in times of adversity, forgiveness in triumph, eloquence in conferences, bravery in battle, ambition for success, interest in scriptures—these are inherent qualities of the wise and great.<sup>2</sup>

There is an obvious contrast between the assertiveness of the ideal person described above and the egoless of the *sthitaprajña* described in the Bhagavadgita. But the former quality is necessary if spiritual values are to be passed on to others.

Verses 24 and 25 of the fourteenth chapter of the Gita also mention equanimity and same-sightedness as the characteristics of a person who has risen above the gunas.

Sri Ramakrishna says craving for enjoyment decreases to the extent that one meditates on God. He also says that as long as the ego remains true knowledge does not dawn in a person's heart nor does he become free from bondage. Such a person will be born again and again until he develops an attitude of self-surrender to the Lord and thus overcomes his weaknesses. Such a state is difficult to achieve, no doubt—'*Kṣurasya dhārā nīṣitā duratyayā durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti*. Sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread is that path; so sages declare<sup>3</sup>—but it must at least be striven after.

The Buddhist scriptures too advise restraint, spiritual discipline and non-attachment: '*Na attahetu, na parassa hetu, na puttamicche, na dhanam na rattham; Na iccheyya adhammena samiddhimattano, sa silavā, paññavā dhammiko siyā*. One who, for himself or for the sake of another, does not crave for son or wealth or kingdom, who does not desire his own prosperity by unjust means—such a person is truly righteous, wise and religious.<sup>4</sup> Also, '*Tañhāya jāyati soko, tañhāya jāyati bhayam; Tañhāya vipamuttassa, natthi soko kuto bhayam?* Crav-

ing gives rise to grief, craving gives rise to fear. For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, whence fear?' (215).

### Buddhi Yoga: The Art of Work

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that we must work with one hand and hold on to God with the other, and after the work is done hold on to Him with both hands. In other words, we must limit our works to only those that are absolutely necessary for us and society at large and devote the rest of our energies to God realization.

The words of the Gita tally with Sri Ramakrishna's: '*Cetasā sarvakarmāni mayi sannyasya matparaḥ; Buddhiyogamupāśritya maccittah satatam bhava. Maccittam sarvadurgāni matprasādattariṣyasi; Atha cettvamahankārānna śroṣyasi vinaṅkṣyasi*. Mentally resigning all deeds unto Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to buddhi yoga, ever fix your mind on Me. Fixing your mind on Me, you shall, by My grace, overcome all obstacles; but if from self-conceit you will not hear Me, you shall perish.<sup>5</sup> Here we need to focus on the term *buddhi yoga*. It implies concentration of mind, intelligence, discrimination and will power along with humility; it is a technique to derive psychic energy and guidance from the Divine.

It is needless to repeat that the whole process is very difficult, but then *svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*.

### Harmony in Social Interaction

Buddhist literature also contains many instructions helpful in bringing about harmony in social interaction. The *Dhammapada* says: 'It is easy to see the faults of others, but one's own faults are not as easily seen. A man tries to hide his own faults, even as a cheat hides an unlucky throw.<sup>6</sup> Again, '*Na paresam vilomāni, ha paresam katākatam; Attano va avekkheyya, katāni aktāni ca*. One should not look at the faults of others, nor their (sinful) deeds of commission or omission, but at one's own deeds done and undone' (50). These

words are very reminiscent of what Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi said: 'Do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults.'

Similar advise is found in the Bible too: 'Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble ... Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.'<sup>7</sup> However, there are occasions in our lives when we have to deal with mischievous and unscrupulous persons. Sri Ramakrishna says that with such people one must be strong and firm, and perhaps even make a show of aggression, but one must never actually be vicious or vituperative.

### Balancing Individual and Social Welfare

Modern man's selfish pursuit of money, power and pleasure is leading to widespread erosion of values with a consequent increase in violence and conflict. It is all a result of a lack of awareness and proper application of the ideas of *pravṛtti*, or engagement in right action, and *nivṛtti*, or restraint of one's selfish tendencies, for the welfare of society (*abhyudaya*). Ordinarily speaking, the goals of human life are dharma, artha and kama. But as pointed out earlier, the latter two have to be achieved within the limits set by the former. For any society to remain firmly oriented to lofty values, the people comprising it need to adopt a sattvic way of life. It is here that society realizes the importance of the presence of spiritual people in it and the significance of their teachings and guidance.

If the above conditions are fulfilled, it is only a matter of time before society begins to appreciate the ideal of moksha. It is only when more and more people try to become spiritual that individual and collective harmony is achieved—and it is only of such a society that Abraham Linclon's famous words 'With malice toward none; with charity for all' hold true. World bodies like the UNO and such other agencies are commendable global experiments for creating international peace and

harmony, but unless men and women of character are produced they are bound to fall short of success. That is why, according to Swami Vivekananda, a country that hoped for progress needed to produce men and women of character, because it is only such people who are able to dedicate themselves to the welfare of humanity (*lokasaṅgraha*).

The Ramakrishna Mission, with its motto '*Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*; For one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world', is a bright example of how individual and social welfare can go side by side.

The third chapter of the Bhagavadgita contains this advice: '*Lokasaṅgrahamevāpi sam-paśyan kartumarhasi*; Even with a view to guiding people, you should perform action.'<sup>8</sup> So it is work for the good of others and for the welfare and stability of society that is emphasized here. Even the Gita idea of '*parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyah paramavāpsyatha*; cherishing one another you shall gain the highest good' (3.11) may not be out of place here, if we take *society* as the 'other' instead of *devas*. Because a person gets whatever he needs for growth and sustenance from the surrounding society, it is his duty to do what he can to promote its welfare and progress. And this he can do effectively if he renounces his ego, sacrifices self-interest, cultivates humility and love, and serves in a detached manner. In other words, only a person who has realized inner harmony can work for outer harmony successfully. Furthermore, the Gita says, '*Saktāḥ karmanyavid-vānso yathā kurvanti bhārata; Kuryādvidvān-stathā'saktaścikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham*. Just as the unenlightened act, attached to work, even so should the enlightened act, but without attachment and desirous of the well-being of the world' (3.25). Commenting on this verse, Swami Ranganathanandaji says:

These verses contain a profound message to all of us. If I am un-enlightened, how do I perform work? I work hard, but only to fatten myself. I don't care for others at all. That is called the un-enlightened type. The other is the enlight-



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# The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to Ram Chandra Datta

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

## The Life of Ram Chandra Datta

Ram Chandra Datta, a householder disciple of the Master, was one of the recorders of Ramakrishna's gospel. Ram was born in Calcutta on 30 October 1851. From his boyhood Ram was very bold and straightforward in his convictions, and no one could persuade him to act contrary to them. He studied at the General Assembly's Institution and later was admitted to the Campbell Medical School in Calcutta. Sometime after his graduation he was appointed as an assistant to the Government Quinine Examiner.

Ram was deeply interested in science and studied chemistry under his English supervisor with great diligence. Having learned this subject thoroughly, Ram extracted from an indigenous medicinal plant an antidote for blood dysentery. This drug was approved by the government and was recommended by leading doctors. As a result, Ram's fame spread and he was appointed a member of the Chemist Association of England. He was also promoted to the post of Government Chemical Examiner and was asked to teach the military students at the Calcutta Medical College.

Ram's great enthusiasm for science and modern knowledge made him an inspiring lecturer, but it also made him an atheist. In his own words: 'In those days we did not believe in God. We considered that everything happens, changes, or dissolves by the force of nature. We were rank materialists, and we held the view that eating, sleeping, and creature comforts were the summum bonum of life.'<sup>1</sup> Ram was fond of debating with others about God and religion and found great satisfaction in defeating his opponents. This ardour for

atheism lasted five years.

The death of his young daughter was a terrible shock to Ram, and a great change came over his life. On the evening of Kali Puja, sometime after his daughter's death, he went up to the roof of his house and observed the houses of Calcutta glittering with lights. Above, the dark, clear sky was studded with twinkling stars. His grief-stricken heart seemed to be searching for something meaningful in that panorama of nature. All of a sudden he noticed some clouds passing overhead, driven by the wind. They quickly disappeared. Ram asked himself: 'Where do they come from and where do they go? Does God exist? If so, can He be seen?' (80).

He started to visit different religious leaders of the Brahma, Christian, and Hindu faiths, but no one could answer his questions about God and religion. During this time Ram's family guru came to his house and wanted to initiate him. Ram was forthright. He said: 'Sir, I don't believe in God. I have terrible doubts about His existence. Can you tell me the way to realize God?' The guru kept quiet. He did not know what to say.

Ram became more and more determined to have his doubts removed and to satisfy his hunger for God. He studied many religious books but could find no satisfactory answers to his questions. At last he came to know about Ramakrishna from the writings of Keshab Chandra Sen, a Brahma leader of Calcutta.

On 13 November 1879, Ram went to Dakshineswar with Gopal Chandra Mitra and a cousin, Manomohan Mitra. As soon as they reached the Dakshineswar temple garden, they enquired about Ramakrishna and were

directed to his room. But when they reached it they found the door shut, and their Western education made them hesitate to call out or knock. Just then Ramakrishna opened the door himself and asked them to come in. Ram noticed that Ramakrishna did not look like the traditional ochre-clad monk with matted hair and ash-smear body. On the contrary, the Master was the embodiment of simplicity.

Ramakrishna saluted them, addressing them as Narayana, and asked them to sit down. Then he smiled at Ram and said: 'Hello, are you not a doctor? [*Pointing to Hriday*] He is suffering from fever. Could you check his pulse?' Ram was astonished that Ramakrishna knew he was a doctor.

From the very beginning Ramakrishna made Ram his own and would often inquire about his personal life and mental conflicts. Ram was greatly attracted to the Master and started visiting him every Sunday, returning home in the evening. Soon Ram felt bold enough to ask the questions that had been haunting him.

Ram: 'Does God exist? How can one see God?'

Ramakrishna: 'God really exists. You do not see any stars during the day, but that does not mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in milk, but can anyone know it merely by sight? In order to get the butter you must churn the milk in a cool place before sunrise. If you want to catch fish in a pond, you have to learn the art of fishing from those who know it, and then you must sit patiently with a fishing rod, throwing the line into the water. Gradually the fish will grab your bait. Then, as soon as the float sinks, you can pull the fish to the shore. Similarly, you cannot realize God by a mere wish. Have faith in the instructions of a holy man. Make your mind like a fishing rod and your prana, or life-force, like a hook. Your devotion and japa are like the bait. Eventually you will be blessed by the vision of God.' (81)

Ram had recently been connected with the Brahmo Samaj, whose members did not believe in a God with form, so he was wondering how one could see a formless God. The

Master read his mind and said: 'Yes, God can be seen. Can God, whose creation is so beautiful and enchanting, be imperceptible?'

Ram: 'Is it possible to realize God in this life?'

Ramakrishna: 'You get what you desire. Faith alone is the key to success. ... The more you advance in one direction, the more you leave behind the opposite direction. If you move ten steps towards the east, you move ten steps away from the west.'

Ram: 'But one must have tangible proof. Unless we have direct experience of God, how can our weak and doubting minds have faith in His existence?'

Ramakrishna: 'A typhoid patient in a delirious state clamours to take gallons of water and heaps of rice. But the physician pays no heed to these entreaties, nor does he prescribe medicine at the patient's dictation. He knows what he is doing' (81-2).

Ram was very moved; he was impressed by Ramakrishna's simple, convincing answers. He became so intoxicated listening to these divine discourses that he was reluctant to return home. Whenever he visited the Master, he would forget all about the world, his family, and his duties.

As the days went by, Ram saw more and more of Ramakrishna's extraordinary spiritual powers, and his scepticism was replaced by faith.

Quite often the devotees of Ramakrishna would arrange festivals in their homes and would invite the Master and other devotees to attend. At these gatherings the Master would talk about God and sing and dance in ecstasy, filling the whole house with an intense atmosphere of spirituality. The host generally bore all the expenses of the feast, including paying the Master's carriage fare and sometimes hiring a musician. Now, Ram was known for his miserliness, and when he started to calculate the expenses involved in hosting such a festival, he hesitated. But when Ramakrishna set a date to visit his home, Ram had a change of heart and gladly began to make the necessary preparations.

On Saturday, 2 June 1883, the full moon day of the Bengali month of Vaishakh, Ramakrishna went to Ram's house. Ram felt so blessed on this occasion that afterwards he would arrange a festival every year to celebrate that auspicious day. After this, Ram invited the Master to his house many times and became so expert in festival management that other devotees would consult him before inviting the Master to their homes.

A true disciple carries out his teacher's instructions to the letter, proving thereby his love for the teacher. The Master had said, 'Those who serve the devotees, serve me.' Ram strictly observed this commandment of the Master, serving the followers of Ramakrishna with great devotion until the end of his life. He used to say, 'He who calls on Ramakrishna is my nearest relative.' His wife, Krishna-preyasi, was also very devout, and she cheerfully helped her husband in his spiritual path. Ram, furthermore, had heard the Master cautioning the devotees about money: 'Just as water under a bridge is constantly flowing and as a result it never becomes stagnant and foul, so also the money earned by a real devotee should be spent for a noble cause rather than be accumulated. The desire for accumulation breeds the poison of attachment' (86). Ram, therefore, did not save his earnings, but spent money freely for the good of others—especially for the poor, the needy, and the afflicted. He helped many students financially, even to the extent of providing free board and lodging in his own home. But Ram's main interest was in arranging kirtan every evening in his home and feeding the thirty or so participants.

Spiritual life is not always smooth. Ram and the other devotees would be absorbed in their singing until the late hours of the night, and this naturally caused much disturbance. Soon Ram's neighbours began to complain. He then decided to buy a secluded garden house where he could hold kirtans and practise spiritual disciplines. When he informed the Master of his intention, Ramakrishna ad-

vised, 'Buy such a solitary garden house that if a hundred murders were committed there no one would know it' (ibid.). Accordingly, in the middle of 1883 Ram purchased a garden house at Kankurgachhi, a suburb just east of Calcutta.

After a few months the Master said to Ram: 'How is it that you have not yet taken me to the new garden you have purchased for holding kirtan? Let us go one day to your garden to see what it is like' (ibid.). Ram was exuberant. Immediately he arranged everything for the Master's visit. On 26 December 1883 the Master visited Ram's garden house (Yogodyan). That visit is recorded in M's *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

In September 1885 Ramakrishna moved to Shyampukur, in the northern section of Calcutta, for his cancer treatment. Ram took an active part in the arrangements that were made for the Master's care. The stuffy and polluted atmosphere of Calcutta aggravated Ramakrishna's illness. In accordance with his doctor's advice, the devotees moved him to a garden house in Cossipore, a suburb north of Calcutta. Ram, as usual, took the managerial role there, and he also contributed money towards the Master's living expenses according to his means.

On 1 January 1886, Ramakrishna went into an extraordinary spiritual mood and blessed many devotees, saying, 'Be illumined.' Ram was one of those present on that occasion. Later he celebrated that day every year as 'Kalpataru Day' (Wish-fulfilling Day) at his garden house.

On 17 January 1899, at 10:45 p.m., Ram breathed his last. His body was cremated on the bank of the Ganges and the relics were placed next to Ramakrishna's temple at Yogodyan. Before he passed away he told his disciples: 'When I die please bury a little of the ashes of my body at the entrance to Yogodyan. Whoever enters this place will walk over my head, and thus I shall get the touch of the Master's devotees' feet forever.'

### Ramakrishna's First Biography

In 1885 when the Master heard that Ram was writing something about him, he cautioned Ram, saying: 'Do not publish my biography now. If you do, my body will not last long.' Ram honoured this request. But in July 1890, four years after the Master's passing away, he wrote the first biography of Ramakrishna: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivanvrittanta*.

In the introduction to the biography Ram wrote:

Whatever I have written in this book about Paramahamsadeva is based on some incidents I have witnessed myself, some I have heard directly from the Master, and some on information sent by Hridayram Mukhopadhyay, the Master's nephew. I verified some incidents of the Master's early life supplied by Hriday through Manomohan Mitra, who went to Kamarpukur and compared them with the statements of the local people.<sup>2</sup>

Ram further wrote:

I had a keen desire to write a chronological biography of Paramahamsadeva, but failed because only the Master knew what he had done and none else. Even Hriday did not know everything about him although he constantly lived with him. I asked questions of the elderly people of Dakshineswar, but they also could not give any information about the Master. When the Master talked, he did not say anything about the date, month, or year. He only told us the chronology of his practising sadhana that we have recorded accordingly (ibid.).

Ram's biography of Ramakrishna is 240 pages long, with twenty-two chapters and an appendix. He describes the Master's birth and early life, his coming to Calcutta and accepting the post of priest at the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, his vision of Kali, his various sadhanas, his marriage, his practising Christianity and Islam, his pilgrimage, his meeting with the great people of India, the coming of his devotees, the training of his disciples, and his passing away. Although this biography has tremendous historical value, it seems that

Ram wrote and interpreted it according to his understanding.

### *Tattwasara*

Ram was so moved by the teachings of Ramakrishna that he would go to Dakshineswar with paper and pencil to write down the Master's immortal words. Seeing him taking notes, the Master said to Ram: 'Why are you writing all these things? You will see, later your mind will be your guru.' However, in May 1885 Ram compiled some of Ramakrishna's important teachings that he had noted down and brought them out in a Bengali book entitled *Tattwasara*. A few of the devotees objected to this and they reported it to the Master. Ramakrishna called Ram aside one day and said: 'Look here, some devotees informed me that you were publishing a book. What have you written?' Ram replied that he had collected some of his teachings and put them together in a book. Ram then read some of it to the Master, who said: 'Oh, you have written those teachings? Very good. Listen, if you think that you have written them you will get very little response from others; but if you think that the Lord is working through you then it will be in great demand.'<sup>3</sup>

Ram wrote in the introduction to his version of the Master's gospel:

The goal of *Tattwasara* is to spread the teachings of a holy man. It would be nice if a wise pandit would take over this task, but I am sorry to say that no one came forward. However, I have given a start and I believe that henceforth some competent people will write many books based on the teachings of Paramahamsadeva like *Tattwasara* and spread many profound truths of the spiritual realm.

Finally, I should say that it is extremely difficult to express fully the words and ideas of the Master. For that reason, I suggest that those who want to attain true knowledge should go to Paramahamsadeva at the Kali temple of Dakshineswar. Once in an ecstatic mood the Master said: 'Those who come here with simple faith for pure knowledge and God realization, their desires will certainly be fulfilled.'<sup>4</sup>

There are six chapters in *Tattwasara*: God; The Nature of God, with Form and without Form; Brahman and Shakti; Methods of Sadhana; How to Attain God; and Necessity of Practising Sadhana. Ram included his own commentaries on Ramakrishna's teachings in this book.

*Tattwa-prakashika*,  
or *Teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa*

In 1886 Ram collected more of the Master's teachings, which he published in three volumes in 1886 and 1887 under the title *Tattwa-prakashika*, or *Teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa*. This 460-page book includes 300 teachings. It should be noted that the gospel Ram recorded is different from other gospels. He wrote commentaries on the Master's teachings according to his knowledge and comprehension, and elaborated them based on science, philosophy, folklore, and scripture.

Ram wrote in the preface to this book:

The gems of my heart are now published in the form of *Tattwa-prakashika* for bringing happiness to humanity. The gems I received from the Master are undecaying and infinite. No thieves or robbers can steal them. None can have them until I offer them willingly. Previously I published some of these gems [in *Tattwasara*], and many people were eager to have more, so I have published this book in an enlarged form.

As rainwater falls from above and takes form according to the container, so the Master's teachings have been understood by people according to their capacity. I interpreted his teachings according to my knowledge. Some people think that material science, mental science, and spiritual science are contradictory; but the Master's teachings harmonize all three sciences.<sup>5</sup>

Like the gospel according to Girish Chandra Sen, the teachings of Ramakrishna in these books are recorded in Ram's own language. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, however, M tried to preserve the Master's language in his record. In *Tattwa-prakashika* Ram included 300 of the Master's teachings, with

his own interpretations, in ten chapters: God; Difference between Brahman and Shakti; Nature of God, with Form and Formless; Maya; Place for Sadhana; Methods of Sadhana; Guru; God realization; Who is a True Spiritual Aspirant? and General Teachings: to the Monks and the Householders.

It is noteworthy that Ram was the first person to publish a biography of Ramakrishna, the first to build a temple for the worship of the Master's relics, and the first to preach publicly that Ramakrishna was an avatara. His burning faith, devotion, renunciation, erudition, and his power to convince people made him an ideal evangelist. And more important, he had the blessings of his guru, Ramakrishna.

From 1893 to 1897, Ram gave eighteen lectures on Ramakrishna's life and teachings at the Star, City, and Minerva theatres. These lectures created a sensation in Calcutta. At first some of Ramakrishna's devotees objected to these lectures, but Ram would not listen to them. He gave his first lecture on Good Friday in 1893, entitled 'Is Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Avatara?' Ram substantiated his belief that Ramakrishna was an avatara through scriptural quotations, reasoning, empirical evidence, and incidents from his own personal experience. Ram's writings and lectures about Ramakrishna are written in Bengali and have not been translated. ~

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# Glimpses of Holy Lives

Sadhu Kishandas

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**I**n the early stages of his spiritual life Kishandasji was strict about his food habits. He used to say: 'I was born in a brahmin family and then I became a Vaishnava sadhu. So I was quite puritanical, especially with regard to food. Whenever I had to prepare my meals outside, I would make a small cloth enclosure and cook the food inside. And if anybody's eyes fell on the food at that time, I would consider the meal defiled and would not eat it. So fanatical I was. I used to think that faithfulness to custom was the first step in religious life. I practised japa too, but it was seldom deep. Outer observances were all-important to me. But now I see that Narayana is everything and don't pay much attention to outer things. If I still observe certain things, it is due to habit; but they lack the earlier seriousness. Now I can eat with everybody. I don't feel any differentiation—I see everybody is Narayana, everything is pure.'

That Kishandasji had indeed reached the state he was talking about Mahendranath was to see shortly.

## Seeing God Everywhere

Mahendranath had gone to witness the chariot festival of Gyangudri with some other devotees. Since the place had not had any rains until then, the air soon became very dusty. Feeling uncomfortable, Mahendranath and his friends went to the river and sat down on the steps of a ghat. There they spread a large sheet of paper on the ground to serve as a plate to hold the savouries they had brought.

As they sat chatting and enjoying themselves, Kishandasji joined them. But Mahendranath did not offer him the delicacies for

fear of a group of five or six Ramayat sadhus who were sitting some distance away. Kishandasji said, 'What is this! Won't you people give me anything to eat?' Saying so, he took a handful of the spicy fare and began munching. 'Look, sir,' they said, 'we would like to let you know we have been eating from this, so it is defiled. Moreover, you see those Ramayat sadhus over there?' Kishandasji laughed and said, 'So what? Everything is Narayana's prasad. If you can eat it, why can't I? But the Vaishnavas will not agree with me, because they are hidebound by rules and conventions. If the mind is given to Narayana, it is no more attached to things like customs and traditions.'

Not that Kishandasji threw everything to the winds. On another occasion, speaking about fasting on Ekadashi days, he said, 'I know these things are not important, but I will continue to observe them as long as I can.'

## Beyond Purity and Impurity

In order to test whether Kishandasji had really transcended all sense of distinction, Mahendranath one day asked him: 'Kishanji, you know we are Bengalis, worshippers of Shakti. If we are not eating non-vegetarian food, it is just because we are living in Vrindaban and we don't want to violate the sanctity of the place. But back in Bengal we are used to eating fish and meat. Ever since coming here I have not tasted either. Would it be possible for you to procure non-vegetarian food for me?' 'Why not, sir!' exclaimed Kishandasji enthusiastically. 'Of course I can get meat for you.' 'But where will you get the money?' asked Mahendranath. 'Why, I will go

from door to door and beg from people. I will tell them I want to serve somebody with non-vegetarian food and they can contribute as much as they can. Then I will buy some meat, cook it with my own hands and serve you,' Kishandasji replied calmly. His answer caught Mahendranath by surprise: 'You mean to say you are going to tell people you want money for meat—being a Vaishnava—and a monk! They will hate you for that.' 'I don't think so. I am not eating the meat myself, I am only serving somebody else with non-vegetarian food. So why would they hate me?' 'Oh, that means you are going to take my name in order to collect the money.' 'Not at all. Why should I do that?' 'Good. You said you are going to cook with your own hands. I hope you won't find that repulsive.' Kishandasji laughed: 'Nothing of the sort. It is you who are going to eat, so why should it be repulsive to me? On the contrary, I will prepare the dish with all care. Don't worry about me.'

Kishandasji's readiness and his boylike simplicity made Mahendranath very happy. He did not need to test the saint any more. He said, 'Kishanji, your sweet words have satisfied my desire. But you know what Sri Ramakrishna said about these things? Every holy place has its own peculiar atmosphere, and it is not good to do anything that goes against it. That is why, as I said before, I don't eat fish and meat while I am in Vrindaban. It is evident from your words that fastidiousness about small matters has left you entirely, and that you have no hesitation in serving others.'

### **Work and Worship, Work Is Worship**

In fact, Kishandasji actively participated in the birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda that were celebrated at the Sevashrama every year. He was usually entrusted with cooking the food that was to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna—which he did with great devotion. This apart, whenever there was need he would also work hard and wholeheartedly in the kitchen,

as if he belonged there.

At the same time, Kishandasji kept up his regular spiritual practices, never relaxing his effort. Doing japa whenever he had time had become a habit with him and often he would meditate until very late in the night.

As a result of this combination of devotional exercises and service, his mind had attained great serenity. He was totally free from any kind of narrowness or fanaticism, and his heart overflowed with a feeling of love for all beings. It is rare to find such a complete transformation among austere Vaishnavas, and so Kishandasji became an object of reverence. Let alone his speech and actions, it was obvious from his very looks that he was experiencing inner peace and happiness. Kishandasji was always immersed in an ocean of joy.

### **Kishandasji's Antecedents**

Kishandasji was a very humble person by nature. He would never sit on the same level with others, always preferring to sit on the floor, and he would address others with a respectful 'sir'.

But one day, in the course of conversation, Kishandasji revealed certain facts to Mahendranath about his pre-monastic life: 'Sir, I was born in a family of royal priests, priests to the maharaja of Jaipur. The royal family is very large, each branch having its own priest, and we were priests of one branch. They owned land just a little distance from Jaipur and our family was settled there.

'I was married at a very young age, soon after my sacred-thread ceremony, so I have not had much of an education. Soon after my marriage, I began to lose interest in family affairs. At this time a group of wandering sadhus came to our village and spent a few days there. I would spend my time with them and serve them. And when they left our village, I too left with them. From then onwards I have been living as a wandering sadhu.'

*(To be continued)*



## Reviews



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

**Religion as Knowledge: The Hindu Concept.** *Janaki Abhisheki.* Akshaya Prakashan, 2/18 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. E-mail: [harish@busyinfotech.com](mailto:harish@busyinfotech.com). 2003. xxvi + 462 pp. Rs 300.

This book is a sincere attempt at informing Indians of their ancient and glorious philosophy, culture and heritage. Though India has enjoyed an unbroken continuity of rich civilization, most of us are ignorant of our heritage. This comprehensive and concise collection of all the important Sanskrit scriptures also explains the Hindu way of life, the vitality of the *chaturvarna* system, the status of women in Indian society, the basics of the theory of karma and reincarnation, the four aims of human existence, namely, dharma, artha, kama and moksha, and so on.

The gist of each of the ten major Upanishads, the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavadgita, the six systems of Hindu philosophy, dharma shastra, artha shastra, and kama shastra are summarized in impeccable language and inimitable style.

To a Hindu, religion is inseparable from life. Religion has percolated through all levels of his life and has influenced Hindu culture and civilization for centuries. Thus we find mention, with some details, of the sixty-four fine arts; the 1,74,720 methods of manufacturing perfumery; the six canons of painting; ornamental arts such as making images with grains, arrangement of flower vases, decoration of temple doors and gates, and the art of inlay, which means paving the floors and walls of temples with semi-precious gems to keep them cool in summer; *vastu vidya* or architecture; and even a sign language for the deaf and dumb, called *sabhasha*. The list is seemingly endless. All these clearly reveal that from time immemorial a society highly advanced in culture existed in India with spirituality as its basis. Swami Ranganathanandaji remarks that a study of this book 'will be a much-needed re-education to all our educated people in politics, administration, teaching, journalism, the profes-

sions, and in private life'.

A chronological table of important Sanskrit works from 4000 BCE till date, given at the end of the book, stands as a monumental proof of the continuous unbroken civilization that India has enjoyed, a privilege without any parallel in the history of the human race. A more appropriate title for this book would have been 'A Compendium of Hinduism' or 'A Bird's-eye View of Hindu Scriptures and Way of Life'.

This invaluable book should be in the possession of all Indians who seek to know about their own cultural roots. A study of this book would reassure them of their incomparable and glorious heritage, which is the only way to restore the self-confidence of the collective Hindu race, shattered by successive alien invasions over a thousand years.

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**Sri Ramakrishna Darshanam: Sri Ramakrishna's Life and Message in Paintings.** Ramakrishna Ashrama, Dr Yagnik Road, Rajkot 360 001. E-mail: [srkaraj\\_ad1@sancharnet.in](mailto:srkaraj_ad1@sancharnet.in). 2003. 86 pp. Rs 150.

The life of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet for the modern age, continues to attract people from all walks of life and his universal appeal is evident from the variety of literature published in his name. His well-documented life and teachings have enriched world literature and multitudes are deriving benefit thereby. Yet another addition to this hagiography is the book under review.

Swami Jitatanandaji, in the preface, details the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life and his singular contribution to world thought. The foreword by Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj also states the central theme of the Master's life: 'It was Sri Ramakrishna's passion to bring peace and fulfillment to men and women in bondage and suffering, and elevate ordinary humans to divine conscious-

ness.' The book is a combination of colourful paintings, depicting thirty-six important events from the Master's life arranged chronologically, and relevant descriptions. The text and quotations are carefully selected from authentic source books. Apart from the paintings, real pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, the Dakshineswar temple, Panchavati, Kamarpukur and Cossipore form the background of the initial pages and introduce the reader to the places that nurtured the saint.

The descriptions are elaborate but precise and suitably adapted so as to bring out the theme of the accompanying painting. Each significant detail of the saint's life is illustrated and lucidly explained. The paintings, rich and vibrant, suit the Indian context and the artists have judiciously used various colours to highlight the central character in each painting. It is obvious that the artists have an admiration for the individuals they are depicting!

The figures seem disproportionately long and do not conform to the standards of portrait painting. But the pastels add to the spiritual dimension of the theme and do not distract the reader's attention. The inclusion of the parables of Sri Ramakrishna with corresponding illustrations will certainly help the readers in understanding their true import. Sri Ramakrishna could explain abstruse philosophical truths through such simple parables drawn from daily life. His God-intoxicated mind would see all these commonplace events from a different angle and reveal the nature of men and their doings to him.

The book concludes with the opinions of world-famous thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Max Muller, Romain Rolland and Arnold Toynbee on Sri Ramakrishna. This highlights the fact that society pays homage to truth and just as truth is eternal the appeal of Sri Ramakrishna shall also be eternal. The back cover also carries a painting depicting the harmony of religions as preached by Sri Ramakrishna.

The book is a must buy for the admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and provides a new way of savouring his life and teachings. It will certainly appeal to young minds and evoke their imagination. Considering its size, the high-quality paper used and multicolour printing of all pages, the price is quite reasonable and affordable.

*Swami Atmajnananda*  
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### Thousand Glories of Sri Ramakrishna.

*T A Bhandarkar and Panchugopal Bandyopadhyay; trans. Dr T M P Mahadevan.* Ramakrishna Math, 16 Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: *srknath@vsnl.com*. 2003. iv + 236 pp. Rs 40.

Hindu religious literature is enriched with the *Sahasranamas* of different gods and goddesses, like the *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, and *Lalita Sahasranamas*. The recital of the holy names of a chosen deity is an effective form of meditation; it cleanses one of sin, and imparts true devotion, everlasting peace, discrimination, and purity of body and mind. Sri Ramakrishna is adored and worshipped as a chosen deity by innumerable devotees all over the world who consider him an incarnation of God. Naturally, they would like to sing his glories while worshipping him. This need of the devotees is fulfilled by this book.

This compilation was first published in 1980, under the title *Sri Ramakrishna Sahasranama*. There the names were given in hymnal form along with the English meaning of each name. In the present edition, the simple names are converted into dative case in order to make it convenient for offerings or *archana*. The translation has also been effected to suit the present format.

The book begins with salutations to Ganesha, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and to all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. This is followed by ten verses which serve as an introduction to the *sahasranama* and the thousand names in the hymnal form, based on a series of divine sports performed by Sri Ramakrishna. The *uttarabhashya* elucidates the benefit of chanting 'Sri Ramakrishna Sahasranama Stotram'.

The last part of the book comprises 'Sri Ramakrishna Sahasra Namavali', the recital of which can facilitate the *archana* and worship of Sri Ramakrishna with flowers and kumkum. The English translation enables the reader to comprehend the true meaning of the worship he or she is performing.

The *Sahasranama Stotram* and *Namavali* are based on the events of Sri Ramakrishna's life, his divine lila, his unprecedented spiritual sadhana, and his mission of life—worshipping jiva as Shiva. Hence, one has the feeling of reading a complete biography.

It is beyond doubt that this book will help the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to worship him mean-

ingly and experience peace, happiness and spiritual fulfilment.

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**The Millennium Bridge: Towards the Mechanics of Consciousness and the Akhanda Paradigm.** *Dr A K Mukhopadhyay.* Conscious Publications, 22B, DDA Flats, New Friends Colony, Tamoor Nagar, New Delhi 110 065. 2001. 244 pp. Rs. 650.

Professor Mukhopadhyay of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, is a familiar and formidable voice in consciousness studies. His earlier book, *Conquering the Brain*, has achieved wide recognition as breaking new ground in the interrelated areas of biology, psychology, neuroscience, cosmology and yoga. The present book is particularly relevant as neuroscientists such as V S Ramachandran (in the *Phantoms in the Brain* and *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness*) are exploring, with characteristic postmodern openness, the apparently elusive areas of brain, consciousness and awareness.

'I appreciate the *timing* of this work,' says the Polish scientist, Lorimer, in his note on the book. The old paradigms 'are exhausted' and 'a new holistic approach which takes a processual view of the world (you may call it a paradigm or *Weltanschauung*) has been much needed both for the further progress of science and for the common people to understand their place in nature and in society,' he adds. He rightly identifies the uniqueness of the book: 'It would be really interesting to see how the ancient Eastern (Indian) thinking responds to supposedly universal "Western science".'

This openness is somewhat rare among Western scientists. Correspondingly, the task Dr Mukhopadhyay set himself is fascinating but formidable, often frustrating. The wilful one-sidedness of the pervasive Anglo-American and European explorers is enough to annoy even a sage. The Newtonian, Darwinian and Freudian hypotheses (they are no more than hunches), for instance, are so embedded that few can disengage themselves from their sway without irrationally writing them off. This delicate balance is held by the author in a remark-

able way. He follows the methodology of scientific exploration without ceasing to highlight areas of consciousness which are not amenable to objective analysis.

The Akhanda Paradigm holds the various chapters together: beginning with 'Consciousness-Mother Nature', followed by a discussion of classical and quantum mechanics, the 'Dynamics of the Akhanda Paradigm', 'Elementary Phenomena', the phenomenological implications and the problems of integrating the brain, and the science of consciousness. Of the three concluding chapters, those on 'Ananda, the Mechanics of Being' and 'The Open Brain' seem exceptionally fascinating to me. At every stage Professor Mukhopadhyay provides visual texts—diagrams, graphs, etc.—which make the arguments come through clearly.

The author foresees the difficulty of the reader interested in but unfamiliar with the technical idiom (there is plenty of it). Hence the extremely helpful glossary and the format of 'Questions and Answers' for basic insights into the arguments.

'The Akhanda Paradigm is', says the author, 'the domain of Mother Nature as the kinetic extension of consciousness.' In this 'Systems Holism, Perennial Philosophy and Goethian science find a common place', and this is 'the paradigm designated for the third millennium'. In other words, this is 'the paradigm of Consciousness-Mother Nature, the paradigm of Science, Humanity and Spirit'. But firmly rejecting a facile openness and endless relativism, the Professor holds firmly that 'Consciousness-Mother Nature is the inviolable, irreducible, fundamental constant. All other constants, man-made or universal are regarded as flux in nature.' With this constant, the Akhanda Paradigm grows into an open-ended theory of multi-versity and supracortical consciousness.

The book is admittedly complex but is never abstract. The impression of complexity is just that, an impression. *Human Being in Depth*—the title of Rev. Ranganathanandaji's book on the same areas—is the area which Professor Mukhopadhyay explores. In effect, for its originality, authenticity, sincerity and, above all, depth and range, *The Millennium Bridge* remains an indispensable source book. (Only one rider: Why not 'Dynamics' instead of 'Mechanics' of consciousness?)

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## Reports

### New Math Centre

The town centre under Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, was made a new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math under the name **Ramakrishna Math, Coimbatore**, on 7 September 2005. Its address is: Ramakrishna Math, 189-VI-B Mettupalayam Road, Kavundanpalayam, Coimbatore 641 030 (Phone: 0422-244 2990). Swami Bhaktikamanandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

### News from Branch Centres

Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated 'Vivekananda Darshanam', an art gallery on Swamiji's message, which is a part of the Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence, at **Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad**, on 11 September.

At a special programme held at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum**, on 13 September, prizes were given away to the winners of the 'Viveka Vahini' competition for students. A written competition based on the student life of Swami Vivekananda was held earlier for 1,700 students from various schools in the city, of whom 100 won prizes. On the same day, as part of its annual scholarship



Swami Atmavidanandaji distributing the prizes

programme the centre also disbursed scholarships to 200 poor and meritorious students. The total worth of the scholarships amounted to Rs 5 lakh. Woollen blankets were also distributed to 100 poor people under the Narayana Seva scheme. Sri D R Patil, MLA, Gadag, was the guest of honour at all these functions.

Swami Smarananandaji inaugurated a newly constructed school building at **Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi**, on 20 September.

On 24 September Swami Smarananandaji released at **Ramakrishna Math, Bagh-bazar**, a new software product, *Udbodhan—100 Years*, a set of 21 CDs containing a searchable archive of the Ramakrishna Order's Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* from 1899 to 1999.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, commissioned a dental chair at the dispensary of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi**, on 24 September. On the 26th Revered Maharaj dedicated a Ramakrishna temple at Soba village, adopted by the centre, in Burnu block of Ranchi district.

Sri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Chief Minister of West Bengal, and Swami Smarananandaji addressed a public meeting held to mark the first anniversary of the inauguration of **Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House, Kolkata**, on 26 September.

Sri Pranab Mukherjee, Union Defence Minister, inaugurated a new operation theatre complex at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban**, on 28 September.

### Achievements

Two students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, ranked first and second at the state-level science seminar jointly organized by Birla Industrial and Technological

Museum, Kolkata, and Department of Science and Technology, Government of Jharkhand.

The **Deoghar Vidyapith** was also honoured by Indian Epic Cultural Society, Kolkata, with the 'Viswanayak Vivekananda Award' on 11 September. The award carried an amount of Rs 10,000, a citation and a trophy with a bust of Swami Vivekananda.

A senior teacher of physics of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur**, was given the 'Eminent Teacher Award' by Calcutta University at its convocation.

A team of two students of the **Vidyamandira** won the first prize at a poster competition on arsenic pollution organized by Bose Institute, Kolkata.

### Relief and Rehabilitation

Floods caused by breaches in the embankments of Roymangal and Vidyadhari rivers deluged many villages and rendered homeless thousands of people in the Sundarban area of West Bengal in September. Our centres in Sikra-Kulingram and Taki started relief work in the affected areas immediately.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Sikra-Kulingram**, distributed 3,050 kg *chira*, 630 kg gur, 225 kg biscuits, 250 kg milk powder and 1,50,000 halazone tablets in 17 villages of North 24-Parganas benefiting 2,837 families.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Taki**, distributed 1,000 kg *chira*, 250 kg gur, 192 biscuit packets and 26,500 halazone tablets among 786 families in a village of the same district.

Meanwhile, in Maharashtra and Gujarat, our Mumbai, Pune and Vadodara centres continued their flood relief operations.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai**, distributed 14,985 kg rice, 8,734 kg dal, 450 l edible oil, 2,718 blankets, 900 bed sheets and 1,000 sets of utensils (each containing 3 plates, 3 bowls, 3 tumblers, 2 pans and 2 spoons) among 3,333 families in 33 villages of Thane district.

**Ramakrishna Math, Pune**, distributed 8,750 kg rice, 4,500 kg wheat, 1,900 kg vegeta-

bles, 3,770 blankets, 4,040 chadars, 3,740 saris, 7,236 candles and 1,206 matchboxes among 3,336 families in Sangli city and 31 villages of Raigad, Sangli and Kolhapur districts.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara**, distributed 2,928 blankets, 110 tarpaulin sheets and 40 utensil sets (each set including 4 cooking vessels, 4 plates, 4 bowls, 2 tumblers, 1 spoon, 1 griddle and 1 spatula) among 2,375 families in Vadodara city and 5 villages of Vadodara and Anand districts.

In Andaman, **Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair**, distributed 1,679 shirts to tsunami victims at different places in and around Port Blair.

On 13 September, Swami Smarananandaji inaugurated a new colony of 104 houses built by **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, at



Houses built by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai

Vadakku Mudasal Odai in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu. The centre has also undertaken construction of 106 more houses, 20 toilets, 2 community halls, 1 school-cum-shelterhouse and a park in Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari districts. In September it distributed 31 sewing machines to needy people in Nagapattinam district.

The Batticaloa sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, has undertaken construction of over 120 permanent dwellings for tsunami-affected people. Work on 114 houses is in progress while two have already been occupied.

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