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EDITORIAL

The Mark of a Spiritual Person

When life is coming to an end, when all responsibilities are over, a person becomes alone, lying in bed, looking at the sky through a window. At that moment, their prayer is, “Oh Lord, now You should not leave me. My family, my friends, my relatives – they were all with me, but now, before my eyes, I like to see You only. I don’t need anyone else.” That is the mark of a spiritual person.

At the moment of death, thinking of God is crucial. That’s why Sri Krishna said,

अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम् ।

यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥ ८/५ ॥

anta-kāle ca mām eva smaran muktvā kalevaram

yah prayāti sa mad-bhāvaṃ yāti nāsty atra saṁśayaḥ.
8/5

“You will go to the loka (realm) you are thinking of at the time of your death.”

Swami Vivekananda said, “You are the maker of your own destiny.” Your current life is the result of your past actions, and your next life will be shaped by what you do now. This is the basis of Hindu religion – the theory of karma. We should be careful to prepare ourselves for death so that we are not afraid but rather welcome it as a release from the body.

The body is nothing but bones, marrow, and blood. Yet, we love it so much. We must understand that the body is temporary, and our true self is the consciousness within. Without consciousness, the body is just a dead body, ready to be buried or burned. We take so much care of the body, but we often neglect the consciousness.

To experience true joy, we must meditate and go beyond the body and mind.

As in deep sleep, we forget the body and mind and experience pure consciousness, which is the source of joy, similarly in meditation too, knowingly, we should go beyond the body and mind and enjoy true happiness. The Fourth state – beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep – is the state of meditation, where we experience the ultimate joy. To experience this Ultimate Happiness, one should make his mind pure. How to make the mind pure? Scripture teaches to perform Pancha-Maha-Yajna, the Five Great Sacrifices for every householder - *Deva Yajna, Rishi Yajna, Pitri Yajna, Nri Yajna, and Bhuta Yajna*.

To become a spiritual personality, one should follow the path of righteousness. Righteousness depends on four major principles, that is *Tapa* (Austerity), *Shaucha* (Cleanliness), *Daya* (Compassion), and *Satyam* (Truthfulness).

Tapa is a necessary practice for spiritual growth. In the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavan Sri Krishna very clearly mentioned (18/5):

यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।

यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥ १८/५ ॥

yajña-dāna-tapaḥ-karma na tyājyaṃ kāryam eva tat
yajño dānam tapaś caiva pāvanāni manīṣiṇām. 18/5

The work of Yajna, Gift, and Austerity should not be relinquished, but it should indeed be performed; for Yajna, Gift, and Austerity are purifying to the wise.

This austerity has three different varieties according to the mental attitude and temperament of the people: *sattvic tapasya*, *rajasic tapasya*, and *tamasic tapasya*. As we perform work in three different ways—physical, mental, and verbal—our austerities are also threefold, as described in the Bhagavad Gita. The descriptions are given in the Bhagavad Gita in the 17th chapter, 14, 15, and 16^t

verses, which one should practice to become a spiritual personality.

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञापूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।

ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥ १७/ १४ ॥

deva-dvija-guru-prājña-pūjanam śaucam ārjavam

brahmacaryam ahimsā ca śārīram tapa ucyate. 17/14

Worship of the Devas, the Twice-Born, the Gurus, and the Wise, as well as purity, straightforwardness, continence, and non-injury are called the austerity of the body.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥ १७/ १५ ॥

anudvega-karam vākyaṁ satyaṁ priya-hitam ca yat

svādhyāyābhyasanam caiva vāṅ-mayaṁ tapa ucyate. 17/15

Speech which causes no vexation, and is truthful, as also agreeable and beneficial, and regular study of the Vedas – these are said to form the austerity of speech.

मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।

भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते ॥ १७/ १६ ॥

manah-prasādaḥ saumyatvaṁ maunam ātma-

vinigrahaḥ

bhāva-saṁśuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam ucyate. 17/16

Serenity of mind, kindness, silence, self-control, honesty of motive – this is called the mental austerity.

Cleanliness is one of the pillars of righteousness, Dharma. This cleanliness is both external and internal. External cleanliness, we all understand, can easily be done by taking a shower, using body wash, and wearing fresh clothes. But the most important thing is internal cleanliness, which is the purity of thought. Thought is subtle, and it is obviously very difficult to control because our five sense organs—eye, nose, tongue, skin, and ear—are constantly collecting information from external objects and feeding the mind. One should be very careful about the type of “food” they take in. When we can control our sense organs, we can control

our thoughts; only positive, happy thoughts should be in our mind, and that is called internal Shucha, purity. To become a spiritual personality, Daya, or showing compassion, love, and concern for other beings, is a quality that one must develop. If one does not feel the suffering of other beings, then that person is not considered a human being. Human beings must always be very sensitive to the problems of others. This quality is one of the pillars of Dharma. And finally, there is Satyam, Truthfulness. Whatever the situation, one should try to stick to the truth. If we deviate from the truth, our mind starts adjusting to many false things and takes us down toward an irreligious condition. It requires a very strong mind to stick to the truth. There may be temptations, there may be fear, there may be different obstructions, but one should stick to the truth. As a shining example, we can cite the life of Sri Kshudiram Chattopadhyay, the respected father of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. He accepted all kinds of suffering but never deviated from the truth.

Of course, in very special circumstances, for the sake of saving lives, there are examples of adjusting the truth with falsehood. As we find in the Puranas, a monk who never spoke untruth and was famous for his truthfulness, without hesitation, told a lie to save the life of a person who was attacked by robbers. Also, to save the lives of thousands of soldiers, Bhagavan Sri Krishna Himself insisted that Yudhishtira tell a lie before Dronacharya. These are very special cases; otherwise, one should stick to the truth. Falsehood is the sign of Tama, Kaliyuga. To become a spiritual personality, one should avoid falsehood.

If one can follow these four principles of Dharma, then at the end of life, they will be completely fearless and full of bliss. And that is the mark of a spiritual person.





When the Stone Walks

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This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on July 28, 2024 at Vivekananda Retreat, Ganges

यो ब्रह्माणं विदधाति पूर्वं यो वै वेदांश्च प्रहिणोति तस्मै
तं ह देवमात्मबुद्धिप्रकाशं मुमुक्षुर्वै शरणमह प्रपद्ये ॥ ४७ ॥

Whose light reveals the knowledge of the Atman; who first creates the cosmic Soul and delivers to him the supreme knowledge; Desirous of emancipation I seek refuge in that effulgent Being.

The title of today's lecture actually originated from a rhetorical question. The person to whom this question was directed was Bhairavi Brahmani, the guru of Sri Ramakrishna's tantra sadhana.

She was one of the Sri Ramakrishna's teachers who remained with him for the longest duration, residing in Dakshineswar for nearly six more years and earning the respect of all. The Brahmani guided the Master in practicing the principal disciplines of the sixty-four Tantras, one after another. She was well-versed in Vaishnava Tantra. Through her practice of Vaishnava sadhanas, she experienced moments of bliss associated with the sakhya bhava (friendship attitudes towards God) and vatsalya bhava (parental attitudes towards God).

She regarded Sri Ramakrishna as her own son. While residing at the Devamandal ghat in Dakshineswar, she would often become absorbed in the vatsalya mood. She would shed tears for Sri Ramakrishna, holding butter in her hand and calling out, "Gopala, Gopala (another name of little Krishna)." She would bring various delicacies to him, singing songs about Gopala on her way, and after feeding Sri Ramakrishna, she would depart. The Master recounted that, during such moments, when the Brahmani was in a heightened spiritual

state with disheveled hair, it seemed as though she was Yashoda, the queen of Nanda, lamenting her separation from Gopala, her son.

About Bahairavi Brahmani Swami Saradananda wrote, *"The Brahmani possessed extraordinary beauty along with her noble qualities. The Master told us that Mathur at first doubted her character upon seeing her grace and beauty and hearing that she travelled freely without companions. One day Mathur sarcastically remarked, "O Bhairavi, where is your Bhairava?" (Bhairava is the masculine form of Bhairavi, a Tantric nun. Mathur's insinuation was that Bhairavi must have a consort somewhere in the neighborhood.) The Brahmani was then leaving the Kali temple after saluting the deity. She was neither embarrassed nor angered by this rude question. She calmly looked at Mathur and pointed to the image of Shiva in the shrine, lying prostrate beneath the feet of Kali. The worldly, suspicious Mathur would not let this go so easily. He said, "But that Bhairava is motionless." The Bhairavi then gravely replied, "Why should I have become a Bhairavi if I could not move the immovable?" Hearing this answer and noting the Brahmani's calm and majestic demeanour, Mathur remained speechless, ashamed and embarrassed. (Sri Ramakrishna and his divine play, P-522)*

That is the spirit of a true seeker of God. Marching towards the goal with a heroic mood!

In the history of the spiritual world, we find many extraordinary personalities who, through their dedication, purity, and remarkable self-abnegation, made the impossible possible.

Several years before this incident, one of Bhairavi Brahmani's disciples had posed a

question to the 'Stone image' of Mother Kali with great spiritual fervour, *"Mother, You showed Yourself to Ramprasad. Why won't You show Yourself to me?"*

That disciple was none other than Sri Ramakrishna! While building his disciples' spiritual lives, Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly stressed the importance of having some indispensable or essential qualities.

First comes faith. With pure faith alone a seeker of God can achieve unachievable goals.

In this regard, Sri Ramakrishna used to share a story with his disciples, *"A little boy, named Jatila used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him. One day he told his mother of his fear. She replied: "Why should you be afraid? Call Madhusudana." "Mother", asked the boy, "Who is Madhusudana?" The mother said, "He is your Elder Brother." One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods, he cried out, "O Brother Madhusudana!" But there was no response. He began to weep aloud: "Where are You, Brother Madhusudana? Come to me. I am afraid." Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: "Here I am. Why are you frightened?" And so saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said: "I will come whenever you call me. Do not be afraid." One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.*

Now, brother Madhusudan didn't actually exist. But what that boy possessed was the purity of his heart, his faith in his mother's words, and his earnestness in calling out to his brother.

The scriptures and the advice of the guru should be to us like a mother's words—we need to have faith in these two.

In the Ramayana, to attack Ravana's kingdom of Lanka across the ocean, the monkey army needed to cross the sea. For this, a bridge was necessary. There is a legend that when the monkeys wrote Rama's name on stones and threw them into the ocean, the stones did not sink but floated.

These stories, popular among the general public, have been imparting the lesson of the necessity of

faith in spiritual life for generations.

In the pages of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we encounter the following dialogues with those who came to visit Sri Ramakrishna. These conversations reveal several additional challenges in spiritual life, along with crucial insights for overcoming them.

"One must have faith in the guru's words. The guru is none other than Satchidananda. God Himself is the Guru. If you only believe his words like a child, you will realize God. What faith a child has! When a child's mother says to him about a certain man, 'He is your brother', the child believes he really is his brother. The child believes it one hundred and twenty-five percent, ... The mother says to the child, "There is a bugaboo in that room', and the child really believes there is a bugaboo in the room. Such is the faith of a child! One must have this childlike faith in the guru's words. God cannot be realized by a mind that is hypocritical, calculating, or argumentative. One must have faith and sincerity. Hypocrisy will not do. To the sincere, God is very near; but He is far, far away from the hypocrite.

"One must have for God the yearning of a child. The child sees nothing but confusion when his mother is away. You may try to cajole him by putting a sweetmeat in his hand; but he will not be fooled. He only says, No, I want to go to my mother.' One must feel such yearning for God. Ah, what yearning! How restless a child feels for his mother! Nothing can make him forget his mother. He to whom the enjoyment of worldly happiness appears tasteless, he who takes no delight in anything of the world—money, name, creature comforts, sense pleasure, becomes sincerely grief-stricken for the vision of the Mother. And to him alone the Mother comes running, leaving all Her other duties.

"Ah, that restlessness is the whole thing. Whatever path you follow—whether you are a Hindu, a Mussalman, a Christian, a Sākta, a Vaishnava, or a Brahmo—the vital point is restlessness. God is our Inner Guide... (Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna, P- 673)

But this childlike faith and simplicity come into our lives only through God's special grace and tremendous self-effort. One must be very sincere.

JAYGOPAL: *"How does one receive the grace of*

God?"

MASTER: "Constantly you have to chant the name and glories of God and give up worldly thoughts as much as you can. With the greatest effort, you may try to bring water into your field for your crops, but it may all leak out through holes in the ridges. Then all your efforts to bring the water by digging a canal will be futile.

"You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from attachment to the things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God. A telegraph wire cannot carry messages if it has a break or some other defect.

"I used to cry for God all alone, with a longing heart. I used to weep. 'O God, where art Thou?' Weeping thus, I would lose all consciousness of the world. My mind would merge in the Mahāvāyu.

"How can one attain yoga? By completely renouncing attachment to worldly things. The mind must be pure and without blemish, like the telegraph wire that has no defect."

(Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna, P-375)

Certain individuals with an interest in spirituality occasionally speak of having divine visions. However, upon closer examination of their character and lifestyle, it often becomes apparent that these visions may not be genuine.

Genuine spiritual experiences are exceedingly rare. The true measure of progress in spiritual life is purity and devotion to God, which are uncommon in this world. Attaining such divine wealth is possible only through the grace of God.

The cultivation of virtues and good qualities is closely linked to spiritual advancement. When individuals regularly attend temples, churches, or mosques yet display no inclination towards living a righteous life, it raises questions about their actual spiritual progress.

Conversely, those who earnestly seek to make spiritual gains must also engage in deep introspection. To succeed in their spiritual endeavors, they must carefully consider and reflect upon certain aspects of their lives.

A medieval Indian saint wrote these words in

his doha, a couplet.

Yo parabitta hare sadā, so kahu dān kiyā na kiyā.

Yo paradār kare sadā, so kahu tīrth gayā na gayā.

Yo para āś kare sadā, so bahu dīn jiyā na jiyā.

*Yo muhumē paracukli ogārat, so muhumē harinām liyā
na liyā.*

For a person who is habitually greedy, giving generously or not giving at all is the same—meritless; for one who has a sinful eye for others' spouses, visiting a holy place or not visiting is equally fruitless; for someone who lives with expectations from others, life and death are of equal significance; and for one who habitually speaks ill of others, engaging in chanting the Lord's name or not doing so is equally meaningless.

Our sincerity is not always true. In our love of God there is no doubt some sincerity, but this sincerity is mixed up with desires, and is not perfect. In spiritual practice sincerity is an important factor.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there should not be any theft [i.e., hypocrisy] in the inner chamber of the heart. He had great affection for the simple-hearted. He used to say: "I don't care for flattery. I love the person who calls on God. The Master also said that all impurities of the mind disappear by calling on God with a sincere heart. Thus, when the leaks from the agricultural fields are mended—repairing the punctures in a telegraph wire has been addressed—the topic of pure love for God emerges. Rather than the mechanical observance of ritualistic devotion, pure and heartfelt love for God blossoms. Sri Ramakrishna often described the early stages of devotion as the devotee being like a needle attracted to God, the magnet. When devotion reaches maturity, it appears as if God becomes the needle, drawn to the devotee, who has become the magnet.

"But it isn't any and every kind of bhakti that enables one to realize God. One cannot realize God without prema-bhakti. Another name for prema-bhakti is rāga-bhakti. God cannot be realized without love

and longing. *Unless one has learnt to love God, one cannot realize Him.*

"A man with 'green' bhakti cannot assimilate spiritual talk and instruction; but one with ripe bhakti can. The image that falls on a photographic plate covered with black film is retained. On the other hand, thousands of images may be reflected on a bare piece of glass, but not one of them is retained. As the object moves away, the glass becomes the same as it was before. One cannot assimilate spiritual instruction unless one has already developed love of God."...

Once Sri Rādhā said to her friends that she saw Krishna everywhere—both within and without. The friends answered: 'Why, we don't see Him at all. Are you delirious?' Rādhā said, paint your eyes with the collyrium of divine love, and then you will see Him.'

(Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Page-172)

Yesterday evening, when we were together, sitting outside with the devotees and discussing some spiritual topics, one of the devotees sang a beautiful song. The song went somewhat like this—

Achyutam Keshavam Krishna Damodaram

"O Achyuta (Infallible), O Keshava (Killer of the Keshi demon), O Krishna, O Damodara (He who was bound with a rope around His belly)"

Rama Narayanam Janaki Vallabham "O Rama (Pleaser of all), O Narayana (The refuge of all), O beloved of Janaki (Sita)"

Kaun Kehtha Hai Bhagwan Aate Nahi"

Who says God does not come?"

Tum Meera Ke Jaise Bulate Nahi"

You do not call Him like Meera did.

Kaun Kehtha Hai Bhagwan Khate Nahi

"Who says God does not eat?"

Ber Shabari Ke Jaise Khilate Nahi

"You do not feed Him like Shabari did"

Kaun Kehtha Hai Bhagwan Sote Nahi

"Who says God does not sleep?"

Ma Yashoda Ke Jaise Sulate Nahi

"You do not make Him sleep like Yashoda did"

Kaun Kehtha Hai Bhagwan Nachte Nahi

"Who says God does not dance?"

Gopiyo Ke Jaise Nachate Nahi

"You do not make Him dance like the Gopis did"

Achyutam Keshavam Krishna Damodaram

"O Achyuta, O Keshava, O Krishna, O Damodara"

Rama Narayanam Janaki Vallabham

"O Rama, O Narayana, O beloved of Janaki"

What a beautiful message this is! You can do anything once pure love dawns in your heart. Meera, Shabari, Yashoda, and the Gopis of Vrindavan made the Lord their life's companion through their pure love. The impersonal, attributeless Brahman was drawn to them, and, out of love for His devotees, adorned His body with the dust of the earth.

The stories of Tulsidas are known across every corner of India. In one tale, as he was preparing sandalwood paste for worship, his beloved Rama and Lakshmana appear as two boys, standing before him to receive the tilak. Similarly, the blind poet Surdas sings, and the child Krishna sits in front of him, listening intently. Khudiram Chattopadhyaya, while picking flowers, receives help from his chosen deity Shitala, who holds down the tall branches for him. And Ramprasad, as he mends a fence, is assisted by the Mother of the World, who appears as a little girl.

There is a beautiful song, *"God sports in this world. He is under the control of His devotee. Shyama, the Divine Mother, is Herself tied by the cord of the love of Her devotee."* Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *"God very much relishes the bhakti of the poor the lowly, just as the cow relishes fodder mixed with oil-cake. King Duryodhana showed Krishna the splendour of wealth and riches, but Krishna accepted the hospitality of the poor Vidura. God is fond of His devotees. He runs after the devotee as the cow after the calf."* (Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna, P-355)

"And, for that love, the mighty yogis practise yoga from age to age; When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul."

(Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna, P-157)

"One must take up a definite attitude toward God. Then alone can one realize Him. Rishis like Sanaka

cherished the attitude of *śānta*; Hanuman attitude of a servant; the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, like Sridāma and Sudama, the attitude of a friend; Yaśodā the attitude of a mother; and Radha the attitude of a sweetheart.

"O God, Thou art the Lord and I am Thy servant—that is the servant's attitude, a very good one for aspirants." ...

"Can one attain knowledge of God by merely repeating the word 'God? ... You may indulge in reasoning or discussion, but if you feel no longing or love, it is all futile.

(Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna, P- 610)

The thing is that one must love God. Through intense love one attains the of Him. The attraction of the husband for the chaste wife, the attraction of the child for its mother, the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man; when a man can blend these three into one, and direct it all to God, then he gets the vision of God." (Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna, 216-17)

During his days of incomparable and intense spiritual practice, Sri Ramakrishna himself became the embodiment of all the teachings he later imparted.

In his masterpiece "Sri Ramakrishna and His divine play", Swami Saradananda eloquently recorded this unparalleled chapter of Sri Ramakrishna's life.

The same Mathur Babu, who once remarked to Bhairavi Brahmani that her Bhairava—Shiva—was lying like a stone at the feet of the Universal Mother Kali, was later astonished by Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary worship. He expressed his amazement to Rani Rashmoni, the founder of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, saying that they had found such a remarkable priest whose devotion would soon awaken the goddess.

The Master's mode of worship.

"We have already mentioned that after Ramkumar's death the Master concentrated more intensely on the worship service of the Divine Mother. Whatever he considered necessary for attaining Her vision, he performed with eagerness and wholehearted faith. We

heard from the Master that after the regular service was completed he would continue his worship of Her by singing devotional songs of Ramprasad and other mystics. His heart filled with emotion as he sang those songs with exuberant devotion. He thought:

"Ramprasad and other devotees had the vision of the Divine Mother. One can definitely see Her. Why can't I?" He would often exclaim piteously: "Mother, You showed Yourself to Ramprasad. Why won't You show Yourself to me? I don't want wealth, friends and family, or objects of enjoyment. Please reveal Yourself to me." Thus he would pray, as tears streamed from his eyes and flooded his chest. This would somewhat lighten the burden of his heart. Then prompted by burning faith and heartened with hope, he would again try to please the goddess with songs. Thus the Master spent his days in worship, meditation, and devotional singing; and day by day his love and longing increased. From that point on he began spending more time performing worship and serving the goddess than was regularly allotted. While performing worship, he sometimes placed a flower on his head, according to the prescribed rule, and then he would meditate for two hours, sitting still as a log. After offering food to the goddess, he might spend a long time thinking that the Mother was eating the food. On some mornings he would spend several hours picking flowers, making garlands, and decorating the goddess. Or for a long period he would remain engaged in performing the vesper service with exuberant devotion. Sometimes in the afternoon he would sing for the Divine Mother and become so absorbed and overwhelmed with devotion that he would be unaware that the time for the vesper service had passed. Although he was reminded again and again, no one could induce him to conduct the vesper service. Thus, the worship continued for some time... It is said that when he had observed the Master performing worship, Mathur joyfully told Rani Rasmani: "We have got a wonderful worshipper. It seems the goddess will be awakened very soon."

"As the days went by, the Master's love and longing continued to increase. Because of his uninterrupted current of thought towards the Divine Mother, some external signs manifested in his body. His appetite and

need for sleep diminished. As blood flowed continually to his chest and head, his chest turned crimson and his eyes were often drenched with tears. He was filled with a constant and intense desire to see the Divine Mother, and repeatedly asked himself: "What shall I do? How can I see Her?" Signs of anxiety and restlessness were therefore always visible in his body except when he meditated and performed worship. We heard from the Master that one day at that time he was singing to the Divine Mother and praying and crying bitterly. He implored piteously: "Mother, I have been praying to You so long! Why don't You listen to me? You showed Yourself to Ramprasad. Why won't You show Yourself to me?"

"The Master described what happened then: "There was an unbearable pain in my heart because I could not have a vision of Mother. Just as a man wrings out a towel with all his strength to get the water out of it, so I felt as if my heart were being wrung out. I began to think I should never see Mother. I was dying of despair. In my agony, I asked myself: 'What's the use of living this life?' Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the Mother's shrine. I decided to end my life then and there. Like a madman, I ran to the sword and seized it. Then I had a marvellous vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. Afterwards what happened in the external world, or how that day and the next passed, I don't know. But within me, there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss that I had never before experienced, and I felt the immediate presence of the Divine Mother." ...

The difference between his earlier and later modes of worship and visions.

Previously, during worship and meditation the Master would see the Mother's hands, or Her shining delicate feet, or Her beautiful, loving, and smiling face. But now — even when it was not the time for worship and meditation — the Master would see the complete form of the luminous Divine Mother smiling, talking, accompanying him, and guiding him by saying, "Do this; don't do that." Earlier in his sadhana, while offering food to the Mother, the Master would see a flashing ray of light emanate from the Mother's eyes, touch the

offered food articles, gather their essence, and then withdraw back into Her eyes. But now as soon as he offered food, and sometimes even before that, he would see the Mother Herself seated to eat the food, the luster of Her body pervading the whole temple.

[Hriday told us that one day he went to the shrine and watched as the Master took a hibiscus flower and a bel leaf in his hand to offer at the feet of the Mother. He held them and meditated, but then he suddenly cried out: "Wait, wait! Let me say the mantra first, and then You can eat." He then offered food to the Mother before finishing the ritual.]

During worship and meditation the Master used to see the living presence of the Mother in the temple's stone image of Her; now he could not see that stone image at all. In its place was the living Mother, the embodiment of consciousness, Her hands bestowing boons and fearlessness. Later, he described what happened: *"I put my hand near the Mother's nostrils and felt that She was actually breathing. At night I watched carefully, but in the lamplight I could never see Her shadow on the temple wall. From my room I would hear Mother running upstairs, as merry as a little girl, with Her anklets jingling. I would rush outside to see if this was true. And there She would be standing on the veranda of the second floor of the temple, with Her hair blowing in the breeze. Sometimes She would look towards Calcutta and sometimes towards the Ganges."*

(Sri Ramakrishna And His Divine Play, 210-215)

This is not the only instance; time and again, Sri Ramakrishna turned the impossible into the possible. He made the unbelievable believable through his truthfulness, sincerity, and love.

As we conclude today's discussion, let us recall the story of the Vaishnava ascetic Jatadhari and his playful deity, Ramalala—the little Ram.

"Jatadhari was very fond of the image of Ramlala. Because he had served that image for a long time, his mind was extremely contemplative and established in an ecstatic state. Even before he came to the Master at Dakshineswar, he would

actually see the luminous form of Ramlala appearing before him and receiving his loving service. ... and Ramlala was his constant companion. This image of Ramlala thus brought a great blessing to his life. Engaging himself in the daily service of Ramlala, Jatadhari travelled freely to various holy places in India and at last arrived at the Dakshineswar Kali temple.

“Jatadhari never divulged to anyone that while serving his image of Ramlala he always saw the living form of the child Rama. People knew only that he always served the metal image of Ramlala with steadfast devotion. But at their very first meeting, the Master, a unique spiritual teacher, was able to see behind the façade that Jatadhari showed to the world, revealing the mystery that he kept hidden. That is why the Master showed such respect for Jatadhari from the very beginning of their relationship and gladly supplied all the articles he needed for the service of Ramlala. Moreover, the Master began to stay with Jatadhari for long periods every day and would devoutly observe his service to Ramlala. ... Thus, the Master’s relationship with Jatadhari gradually became intimate and respectful...

“After meeting Jatadhari, the Master’s love and devotion for Ramachandra were enkindled, and he had the vision of Ramlala’s luminous form. ...He felt the same love and attraction for Ramlala that a mother feels for her child. This loving attraction made him sit beside the image of Ramlala, unaware of how time was slipping away. We heard from the Master that the luminous divine child would try to keep him near by means of sweet, childish pranks. Ramlala would wait anxiously for the Master’s return when he was away and try to follow him everywhere, despite being forbidden to do so.

...“Jatadhari was an adept in the mantra of Ramlala, and knowing the Master’s eagerness in this regard, he gladly initiated him into the mantra of his Chosen Deity. With that mantra and Jatadhari’s instruction, the Master became absorbed in sadhana, and within a few days had the uninterrupted vision of Ramlala. Adopting vatsalya bhava, he became absorbed in the meditation of that divine form and soon he saw that:

Yo Ram Dasharathka beta, Ohi Ram ghat-ghatme leta; Ohi Ram jagat pasera, Ohi Ram sabse neyara. [Rama, who is a son of Dasharatha, is in every being; the same Rama is immanent in the universe and yet transcends it.] (Sri Ramakrishna And His Divine Play, P-275-279)

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna:

“That babaji [Jatadhari] served the image of Ramlala for many years. He carried his deity wherever he went. Whatever he got by begging he would cook and offer to him. Not only that, he actually saw Ramlala eating, or demanding something to eat, or wanting to go for a walk, or childishly asking for something, and so on. Jatadhari was absorbed in serving Ramlala and overwhelmed with joy. I also saw Ramlala acting like that. I stayed with Jatadhari for almost the whole day and watched Ramlala.

“As the days passed, I felt that Ramlala loved me more and more. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala was happy and playful. But whenever I left and went to my own room, he followed me there at once. He wouldn’t remain with Jatadhari, even though I ordered him not to come with me. I thought at first that this must be an illusion. For how could the deity whom Jatadhari had worshipped for so long with such devotion love me more than him? But it was not my imagination. I actually saw Ramlala as I see you — now dancing ahead of me, now following me. Sometimes he insisted on being taken on my lap. But then when I picked him up, he wouldn’t want to stay there. He would run around in the sun, plucking flowers among the thorns, or splashing and swimming in the Ganges. I told him over and over again: ‘Don’t do that, my child. You’ll get blisters on the soles of your feet if you run in the sun. You’ll catch cold and fever if you stay in the water so long.’...

Saradanandaji wrote: While recounting this incident to us much later, the Master became overwhelmed with the same feeling and began to cry so intensely that tears came from our eyes, although we did not have the slightest understanding of his loving relationship with Ramlala. ...

When the Master described the marvellous behaviour of Ramlala, he said: “On some days Jatadhari would

cook food to offer Ramlala, but couldn't find him. Then he would come running in distress to my room, and there would be Ramlala playing on the floor. Jatadhari's feelings were terribly hurt. He'd scold Ramlala, saying: 'I took so much trouble to cook food for you. I looked all over the place — and here you were, all the time! You don't care about me. You have forgotten everything. And that's how you always are. You do just as you please. You have no kindness or affection. You left your parents and went into the forest. Your poor father died of a broken heart, and you never even came back to show yourself to him on his deathbed!' Talking like this, Jatadhari would drag Ramlala back to his own room and feed him. Thus, the days rolled on. Jatadhari stayed on at Dakshineswar for a long time, because Ramlala didn't want to go away and leave me. And Jatadhari couldn't bear to leave Ramlala behind, having loved him for so long.

"Then one day Jatadhari came to me, crying with joy, and said: 'Ramlala has revealed himself to me in a way that I have never known before but have always longed for. Now the desire of my life is fulfilled. Ramlala says he won't go away from here; he doesn't want to leave you. But I'm not sad about it anymore. He lives happily with you and plays joyfully, and I am full of bliss when I see him this way. I have learned now to be happy simply in his happiness, so I can now leave him with you and go away. I will enjoy knowing that he is happy with you.' Then Jatadhari gave me the image of Ramlala and said good-bye. And Ramlala has been here ever since." (Sri Ramakrishna And His Divine Play, P-574-579)

Truely, Sri Ramakrishna reinstated an

unparalleled spiritual ideal before the modern materialistic world—a standard that had long been forgotten as it was not practiced before the eyes of people. Humanity had nearly forgotten the extraordinary spiritual lives of their ancestors, during which their beloved deities would emerge from all veils to walk and converse with their dear devotees. In this age, Sri Ramakrishna once again brought forth this supreme ideal powerfully to humanity: do not halt on your journey; within you lies the potential to accomplish the impossible.

In the society of India's ascetics, there is a popular couplet that conveys a profoundly beautiful message.

Yo Yāko sharaṇ liye, so rakhe tāko lāj.

Ulaṭh jale machhali chale, bahi jāe gajarāj.

Whoever seeks refuge in Him, He protects their honor. In turbulent waters, a fish can swim, but even an elephant is swept away.

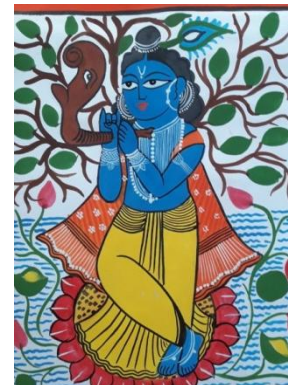
When someone wholeheartedly surrenders to a person, that person gives shelter and removes the fear of the one who seeks refuge. An example of this is seen around us: even the smallest fish effortlessly navigate against the current, but a mighty elephant is swept away by the same stream.

Let us conclude today's talk with a prayer,

मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्गु लङ्घयते गिरिम् ।

यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्दमाधवम् ॥

I salute that All-bliss Madhava whose compassion makes the mute eloquent and the cripple cross mountains.





NEW PRESIDENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH and RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj was elected the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held at Belur Math on 24 April 2024. He is the 17th President of the twin organizations. He succeeds Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj who passed away on 26 March 2024.

Swami Gautamanandaji was born in Bengaluru in 1929, though his ancestors were all from Tamil Nadu. In his youth, he came in contact with Bengaluru branch of the Ramakrishna Order, headed by Swami Yatishwarananda Maharaj (1889–1966). He received Mantra Diksha (spiritual initiation) from Swami Yatishwaranandaji in 1955. The following year, he embraced monastic life by joining New Delhi branch of the Ramakrishna Mission as per the advice of his guru. He spent six years in Delhi centre getting introduced to monastic life and serving in different departments. He received Brahmacharya vows from Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj (in 1962) and Sannyasa ordination and the name 'Swami Gautamananda' (in 1966) from Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj, the 10th President of the Ramakrishna Order.

In 1964, he moved from Delhi to the Mission's centre in Sohra (formerly Cherrapunjee) and then to the centre in Mumbai. In these two centres he served for about 12 years altogether. Subsequently, he was appointed the head of the Mission's centre in the remote tribal village Aalo (formerly Along) in Arunachal Pradesh in 1976. He served there for 13 long years bringing the light of education to

tribal children. During his leadership, the centre in Aalo attained national stature and reached new heights.

He became a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in March 1990. Thereafter, he served brief stints as the head of Raipur and Narainpur centres (in Chhattisgarh) and Saradapitha centre (adjacent to Belur Math).

From Saradapitha he went on to become the head of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, in 1995—a responsibility that he shouldered for almost three decades. Under his stewardship, the activities and influence of this important branch expanded significantly. He also lent his support to the starting of new branches of the Math and Mission in places like Puducherry (a union territory), Kadapa & Tirupati (in Andhra Pradesh), Chengam, Tanjavur, Tirumukkudal & Villupuram (in Tamil Nadu), and nurtured scores of unaffiliated centers in Tamil Nadu.

He started his spiritual ministry in 2012 following the authorization given to him by the Trustees to give spiritual initiation to devotees. A few years later, in 2017, he was elected a Vice-President of the Order.

As a Diksha Guru and Vice-President, he travelled extensively in India and different parts of the world and visited the branches of the Math and Mission and also unaffiliated centers in those places. Through those visits he endeavored to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta among a vast number of people and gave Mantra Diksha to many spiritual seekers. He has contributed several articles to various journals of the Ramakrishna Order. His physical fitness, mental alertness and jovial nature even at this advanced age are an inspiration to the younger generation.



Soul's Journey After Death

Swami Ishadhyanananda
Vedanta Society of Sacramento

This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on July 28, 2024 at Vivekananda Retreat, Ganges

The question of what happens after death has intrigued humanity for centuries, cutting across various cultures and religions. This exploration, known as eschatology, delves into the afterlife and the fate of the soul. In Vedantic philosophy, the concept of the soul and its journey after death is particularly nuanced, offering a rich tapestry of beliefs that provide both comfort and profound insight.

What is the Soul?

In Hindu philosophy, the soul, or Jiva, is considered an eternal entity that transcends the physical body. According to Vedanta, the soul, or Jiva, does not perish with the physical body. The soul is of divine origin, a spark of the infinite divine consciousness. This belief is eloquently expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, where Lord Krishna explains that each soul is a part of the divine, akin to droplets from the vast ocean of consciousness. This divine spark is encased in a subtle body, made up of the mind and sense organs, and ultimately manifests in the physical body composed of the five gross elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space.

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः।

मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥

(Bhagavadgītā, 15.7)

This indicates that each Jiva is a reflection of the supreme consciousness, Brahman, much like how sunlight reflects off multiple surfaces. While Brahman is the singular, infinite source, the Jivas are the numerous reflections manifesting through various bodies.

What a grand idea! Each of us is a reflection,

amśa, of the divine. We are not fallen; we are part of the divine, reflection of the divine. Let us not forget it.

This reflective nature of consciousness means that while the physical body is subject to birth and death, the soul remains unchanged. The body and mind serve as temporary vessels that allow the soul to interact with the material world.

The Subtle Body and Transmigration

The subtle body, or sukshma sharira, is crucial in this framework. It consists of the mind and the inner senses, which are not the physical senses we are familiar with but subtle counterparts that exist beyond physical perception. The physical body termed the *sthula sharira*, acts as an outer shell that enables interaction with the material world. This arrangement allows the soul to experience life, engage in actions (karma), and enjoy or suffer the fruits of those actions.

When the physical body dies, the subtle body does not perish. Instead, it accompanies the soul as it leaves the deceased body and prepares to enter a new one. This process of transmigration is governed by the individual's karma, which dictates the conditions of the next birth.

The Bhagavad Gita uses a vivid analogy to describe this transition: the soul, along with the subtle body, moves to a new physical form, just like the wind carrying the fragrance of flowers. Just as the wind, which is invisible, transports the invisible fragrance from the visible flower; similarly, the soul, an invisible entity, carries the invisible subtle body to a visible physical body.

This metaphor emphasizes the continuity of the

soul's existence, irrespective of the physical body's demise.

शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः।
गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥
(bhagavadgītā, 15.8)

The Leech Analogy: Transitioning to a New Body

One of the most vivid analogies used to describe the soul's transition from one body to another is the leech analogy, found in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Just as a leech moves from one leaf to another by first attaching to the new leaf before letting go of the old one, the soul secures a new body before relinquishing the old one. This analogy beautifully captures the idea of continuity and the seamless nature of the soul's journey.

तद्यथा तृणजलायुक्ता तृणस्यान्तं गत्वान्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुप
संहरति।

एवमेवायमात्मेदं शरीरं निहत्य अविद्यां गमयित्वा
अन्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति ॥ 4.4.3

“Just as a leech supported on a straw goes to the end of it, takes hold of another support and contracts itself, so does the self throw this body aside—make it senseless—take hold of another support, and contract itself.”

The process involves not just the transfer of the soul but also the subtle organs. These organs, invisible to the physical eye, move with the soul to the new body, where they align with new physical organs. For instance, the capacity to see (not the eyeball itself) moves and integrates with the new physical eye in the new body.

The Role of Karma: Determining the Next Birth

The nature of the next body is determined by karma, the accumulated results of one's actions. Karma dictates not only the kind of body the soul will inhabit but also the circumstances of its new life. This cosmic law ensures that every action has a corresponding consequence, guiding the soul's journey through various lives.

One verse in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad metaphorically describes how just as villagers prepare for a king's arrival, the elements and

organs align for the arrival of the soul into a new body, guided by its karmic imprints— तद्यथा राजानमायन्तमुग्राः प्रत्येनसः सूतग्रामण्योऽन्नैः पानैरवसथैः प्रतिकल्पन्ते । अयमायाति अयमागच्छतीति एवं हैवंविदं सर्वाणि भूतानि प्रतिकल्पन्त इदं ब्रह्मायाति इदमागच्छतीति ॥ 4.3.37

The Sentient Body: Evidence of the Divine

The Gita underscores that the presence of life in a body is evidence of the divine. The mind, as a reflection of Brahman, makes the body sentient. This idea is akin to seeing the light in a room and understanding it as evidence of the sun. Similarly, the life force within us points to the divine consciousness that pervades everything.

We may ask the question, if the subtle body is real, why can't we see it? Gita says that the enlightened ones, or those with the eye of wisdom (ज्ञानचक्षुषः), recognize the invisible soul, whereas the deluded (विमूढा) fail to perceive this reality.

उत्क्रामन्तं स्थितं वापि भुञ्जानं वा गुणान्वितम्।

विमूढा नानुपश्यन्ति पश्यन्ति ज्ञानचक्षुषः ॥

(Bhagavad Gita, 15.10)

For example, Sri Ramakrishna, a revered mystic and spiritual teacher from 19th-century India, shared a profound mystical experience associated with Varanasi, particularly the Manikarnika Ghat—a sacred cremation ground. Sri Ramakrishna, in an exalted spiritual state, perceived the God Shiva himself performing a sacred duty at this ghat. According to his vision, Shiva, the great cosmic deity known as the destroyer of evil, was seen whispering the *Taraka Mantra* (a liberating mantra) into the ears of the departing souls. This act is believed to free the soul from the cycle of rebirth and lead them directly to liberation.

We have many such incidents in the lives of illumined souls who could see the subtle bodies of human beings.

Continuity of Experience: From One Life to the Next

The transition from one life to the next is not merely a change of bodies but a continuation of

experiences and tendencies. The subtle body carries with it not just the senses but also the mind and its impressions (vāsanās). These impressions shape the individual's experiences in the next life, determining their desires, fears, and inclinations.

The Gita assures that spiritual aspirants, those who strive towards self-realization, are granted favorable circumstances to continue their journey towards liberation-- न हि कल्याणकृत्कश्चिद् दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति (Gita 6.40). This assurance is comforting, emphasizing that sincere spiritual effort is never wasted.

The Illusion of Death: A Misconception

The concept of death, as commonly understood, is merely an illusion. The Gita teaches that death is only the dissolution of the physical body, not the end of the soul. The soul, being eternal, merely transitions from one state to another, much like changing clothes. This understanding reframes death from a tragic end to a natural and inevitable transformation.

Those with spiritual knowledge (ज्ञानचक्षुषः) perceive the eternal essence behind the transient phenomena. They understand that the soul's journey is part of a grand cosmic play orchestrated

by the divine.

The Reflection of the Divine: Every Moment of Life

Every experience in life, every joy and sorrow, every pleasure and pain, is an opportunity to glimpse the divine. The very act of living is a manifestation of the divine consciousness. For the discerning, each moment is a revelation of Brahman, the ultimate reality. Just as electricity's presence is inferred from the functioning of electrical appliances, God's presence is inferred from the existence and functioning of life itself.

The Gita's teachings on life, death, and what lies beyond provide a profound and comforting perspective. The soul's journey is seen as a continuous flow, governed by the laws of karma, guided by the divine, and ultimately aimed at realizing oneness with Brahman. Death is not an end but a transformation, a transition to another phase of the soul's eternal journey. Whether we perceive it through the eyes of wisdom or remain deluded, the divine presence is ever-present, guiding and sustaining us through every moment of existence. That is the most excellent message for hope and optimism.



“When a man dies after attaining Knowledge, he doesn’t have to go to another plane of existence; he isn’t born again. But as long as he has not attained Knowledge, as long as he has not realized God, he must come back to the life of this earth; he can never escape it. For such a person there is a hereafter. A man is liberated after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth. If a boiled paddy-grain is sown, it doesn’t sprout. Just so, if a man is boiled by the fire of Knowledge, he cannot take part any more in the play of creation; he cannot lead a worldly life...”

-- The Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna,
pp.729-730



Arise, Awake, And Stop Not...

The Story of Nandini (Nikki) Singh

Nandini Singh, age thirty-three, whose parents and friends call her Nikki, made her first court appearance as a trial attorney in August 2023 in front of a California-based federal judge from her office in Washington, D.C.

That day in August took a long time to arrive. Nikki is totally blind.

She lost her vision at the age of eleven, progressively over a series of eye surgeries in sixth grade. During that time, she learned various adaptive techniques as fast as she could. "I learned Braille and how to use a screen reader, software that reads aloud text displayed on a computer screen," Nikki says.

Despite her vision loss, Nikki stayed focused with school, overcoming academic challenges through creative thinking, problem solving and self-advocacy. As a college student at Yale University, for instance, she enjoyed completing math-based courses in Braille. However, no Braille existed for the symbols used in her first order logic class. Nikki therefore invented an alternate code and shared its text translation with her professor, who subsequently agreed to grade her work using the alternate code. She also availed herself of a reader to sit with her during class to convey to her the logical notations on the board.

As a student at Yale Law School, Nikki spent hours reading her dense textbooks using a screen reader, after the resource office scanned the course materials and converted them to Word documents. She completed exams, including the bar exam, with the help of a Braille note-taker, a small Braille computer that has word processing and file translation software loaded on to it.

After graduating law school, Nikki clerked for

a federal appeals court judge, a coveted position for law graduates. From there, she advanced to a prestigious law firm in Washington D.C., where she represented large corporations in government investigations. She also represented a multitude of clients pro bono on important constitutional matters, including issues arising out of different clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment that arrived before the Supreme Court.

"Clients of large firms typically avoid trials," Nikki says, "but I wanted to experience the rigor, drama, and satisfaction of practicing law in what I consider to be its most traditional form: that of trial litigation unfolding in a courtroom before a live judge, opposing counsel, and even a jury." It would take every adaptive technology, and technique she could muster in order to work in such a role.

Nikki today works as a trial attorney for a large federal government agency. As a single blind professional living in Washington, D.C., she commutes independently to her office during the work week, and she often visits her parents who live in nearby Virginia on the weekends.

"My parents were my first advocates. They found every possible resource that was publicly available for blind students to ensure that I had an education equal to my sighted peers," Nikki says. Her sustained achievement in school motivated her instructors, from her Braille teacher to a neuroscience teaching assistant, to work with her to make academics accessible. That spirit animates the litigation workshops that Nikki currently completes as a new trial attorney. "I am thankful to all those who contributed time and energy to my success today," states Nikki.

If you'd like to talk to Nikki, she can be reached at nikki.v.singh@gmail.com. "It is always good to meet new people," she says enthusiastically.

SOURCE: Interview with Neera Varma

BHAGAVATA (23): THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN

Swami Ishatmananda

श्रीब्रह्मोवाच

अजातजन्मस्थितिसंयमाया-गुणाय निर्वाणसुखार्णवाय ।

अणोरणिम्नेऽपरिगण्यधाम्ने महानुभावाय नमो नमस्ते ॥ 8/6/8

śrī-brahmovāca ajāta-janma-sthiti-saṁyamāyā-guṇāya nirvāṇa-sukhārṇavāya aṇor aṇimne aparigaṇya-dhāmne mahānubhāvāya namo namas te 8/6/8

To save the gods, Brahma prayed (invoked divine grace) to the Supreme Being. Brahma said: "O Great Being, You are free from Birth (janma), Existence (sthiti), and Destruction (saṁyamāyā); beyond the qualities (transformation) of Nature (guṇāya), You are the ocean of Bliss. You are subtler (aṇor aṇimne) than the subtlest, and Your forms are limitless (aparigaṇya-dhāmne). Your greatness (mahānubhāvāya) is inconceivable. I offer my salutations again and again."

In the Gita (2/20), a similar concept is conveyed:

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि-न्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।

अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ 2/20

"The Atman is neither born nor does it die. It is Unborn, Eternal, Constant, and Ancient."

In the texts of devotion, such as the Bhagavatam, and the book of knowledge such as Upanishads or Gita, this Truth is expressed through three principal deities: Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva. Brahma, while invoking divine grace, said:

त्वं माययात्माश्रयया स्वयेदं निर्माय विश्वं तदनुप्रविष्टः 8/6/11

"O Great Being, through Your Cosmic Power (Maya), You have created this Universe and entered into it (creation)."

The Taittiriya Upanishad 2.6.1 describes Vedantic creation:

सोऽकामयत । बहुस्यां प्रजायेयेति । तदसृष्ट्वा । तदेवानुप्रविशत्

"He, the Self, wished, 'Let me be many; let me be born.' Having created, that Brahman entered into the very creation."

The Katha Upanishad 2/2/9 illustrates:

अग्निः यथा एको भुवनं प्रविष्टो रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।

एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बाहीश्च ॥

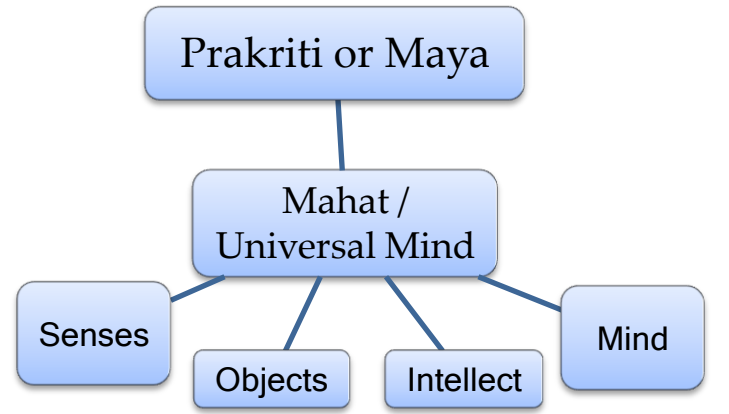
"Just as fire, though one, assumes various forms upon entering the world, the Self, though one, assumes different forms within all beings. It also remains unmodified outside."

Questions may arise: Who understood this truth? Was it only Brahma? To address this, Brahma added:

पश्यन्ति युक्ता मनसा मनीषिणो गुण व्यावपि अगुणो विपश्चितः

"Those holy souls, whose minds have become pure through spiritual practices, see this: You are free from any qualities, though You created through them."

According to Vedanta creation begins with:



What Brahma said to the Supreme Being?

अहं गिरित्रश्च सुरादयो ये दक्षादयोऽग्नेरिव केतवस्ते ।

किं वा विदामेश पृथग्विभाता विधत्स्व शं नो द्विजदेवमन्त्रम् ॥

8/6/15

"I (meaning) Brahma, Shiva, and other gods, maintaining a separate existence from You, as sparks from fire, wonder about the power of understanding we might have. Therefore, please instruct us on what will be beneficial for the world, the Devas, and holy people. विधत्स्व शं नो - Kindly tell us clearly."

The great Shuka described how all those celestial beings heard a voice as deep as thunder: "Go and churn the ocean."

Among the many religious celebrations of Hindus, the churning of the ocean (Samudra-manthana) and the discovery of Amrita (the immortal nectar) is considered the greatest and

most significant (Bangkok airport features a large and beautiful sculpture of this event, as noted in our E-zine “Chicago Calling,” No. 24, 2019).

The Devas and Asuras have different mothers but the same father. Rishi Kashyapa had two wives:

- Diti, the mother of Asuras
- Aditi, the mother of Devas

Then the Supreme God said:

सहायेन मया देवा निर्मन्थध्वमतन्द्रिताः ।

क्लेशभाजो भविष्यन्ति दैत्या यूयं फलग्रहाः ॥ 8/6/23 ॥

O Devas! With my help (God’s Grace) you will be able to churn the Ocean – अतन्द्रिता = without fatigue (Self-Effort).

There will be always debate on these two ideas - daiva and purushakara God’s Grace & Self Effort.

Whether one of these two are sufficient or need both to be successful?

In the Gita 18/78, the idea is clear: both self-effort (purushakara) and divine grace (daiva) are necessary. यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।

तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥ 18/78

“Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of Yoga,

Wherever is Prartha, the wielder of the bow. There are prosperity, victory, expansion and sound policy – such is my conviction.”

The same statements appear in the Mundaka Upanishad (3.2.3) and the Katha Upanishad (1.2.23):

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनू स्वाम् ॥ 3/2/3

nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena ॥ 3/2/3 ॥

yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyastasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām ॥ 1/2/23 ॥

Through the attractive story of Churning the Ocean (Samudra-manthana) importance of Meditation is described.

The Supreme Being clearly instructed: अमृत उत्पादने यत्नं क्रीयाताम् अविलम्बितम् -- Do not delay in arranging to procure Amrita—the immortal nectar.”

Which ocean to churn? Kshirodadhī (the Milk Ocean). That means our Mind.

1. Mix useful shrubs, creepers, and medicinal plants. Which means - Shama (calmness), Dama (self-control), Uparati (dispassion), Titiksha (forbearance), Shradha (faith), and Samadhana (meditation).

2. Use Mandara Mountain, it means Firm Decision, as the churning rod.

3. Have Vasuki for the churning rope, which

means Yoga.

4. Let the Asuras (bad tendencies) hold one side and the Devas (good tendencies) the other side.

5. The Supreme Lord Himself became a huge tortoise (faith in God) to support the churning rod, mount Mandara on His back.

The Supreme being cautioned the Devas:

न भेतव्यं कालकूटाद् विषाज्जलधिसम्भवात् ।

लोभः कार्यो न वो जातु रोषः कामस्तु वस्तुषु 8/6/25

“O Devas, when the ocean is churned, ‘Kalakuta’ (the poison) will emerge. Many objects will appear; do not be attracted to them, and do not become angry if you are prevented from obtaining them.”

Despite their best efforts, the Devas and Asuras were unsuccessful until the Supreme Lord took the rope and started churning. Spiritual meaning of this act of God is - If one takes a step towards God, God will take ten steps towards them.

The result of the churning, as described in the Bhagavata, is as follows (8/7/18):

निर्मथ्यमानादुदधेरभूद्विषं महोल्बणं हालहलाहमग्रतः

सम्भ्रान्तमीनोन्मकराहिकच्छपात् तिमिद्विपग्राहतिमिङ्गिलाकुलात्

nirmathyamānād udadher abhūd viṣam maholbaṇam hālalahāhvam agrataḥ sambhrānta-mīnonmakarāhikacchapāt timi-dvīpa-grāha-timīṅgilākulāt

“First, a tremendous poison (Halahala) emerged”.

The Suka narrated beautifully how Lord Shiva, upon hearing the sufferings of the people, came forward to help them, even at the cost of His own life.

Who is this Shiva?

We get a glimpse of Shiva from the prayer of the Prajapatis (8/7/21 – 8/7/35) “O Lord of Lords (Devadideva), save us from this poison. You are the All-pervading Being (twam Brahma). When You desire to Create, Preserve, and Dissolve, You assume Your power Maya with its three-fold aspects of Sattva, Raja, and Tama, and become known as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.”

Swami Vivekananda, in his ‘Sri Shiva Stotram,’ expressed the greatness of Shiva as follows:

परहितकरणाय प्राणविच्छेदसूक्तम्

नतनयननियुक्तं नीलकंठं नमामः

Parahita karanāya prāṇa-vicchedasūktam

Natanayananiyuktam nīlakaṇṭham namāmaḥ.

“For the good of all, You are ready to sacrifice Your life. I bow to You, the Blue-throated One.”

Hinduism explains the great Truth in a symbolic way.

Introduction to the Cover Page :: Independence

Pravrajika Matriprana
Sarada Convent
Vedanta Society of Southern California

July and August are connected with each other through an invisible thread of renunciation that is called independence. Or may be a thread of Swami Vivekananda, an embodiment of renunciation. At the beginning of July the day when the whole of the USA celebrates political independence, on that very same day lovers of Swami Vivekananda remember his messages of spiritual independence. Following his Song of the sannyāsīn, they say high that note, “OM Tat Sat OM”! They remember Swami Vivekananda’s words, that the national ideal of India is “renunciation and service”. And, India celebrates her nationwide independence day at the middle of August. Independence is verily renunciation. That is why the king of renunciates, Yati Raja, to give up the bodily bondage, chose the independence day of the country of his love, USA.

Whether it is called the final goal, or absolute freedom, or god realization, in Sri Ramakrishna’s opinion nothing is possible without renunciation: “Suppose one thing is placed upon another; how can you get the second without removing the first?”

In every religion, renunciation is associated with joy, selfless giving, love, self-dependence, and the like. With these thoughts in mind, spontaneous questions that come to mind are: What is renunciation? Who can be called a renunciate?

“Sannyāsī” or renunciate, as soon as we hear this word, ochre color emerges before many of our eyes. Wearing ochre clothing some are cultivating scriptures under a tree by a river or some are walking towards the destination infinite. Some visualize Sri Ramakrishna absorbed in samādhi or Swami Vivekananda – in any posture!

The concept of renunciation is there in India from the very ancient time. Sanyāsa is mentioned in the purāṇas (date to at least several centuries

BC), in knowledge and traditions of individual and social practices of India such as in Arthaśāstra by Kautilya (3rd century BC) or in Dharmasāstra (religious law), and of course in the Upanishads. The very first verse of the Isha Upanishad (composed around 800–300 BC) suggests Through renunciation enjoy the bliss, *tyaktena bhujīthā*.

According to the ancient religious law, sannyasa is the last of the four stages of life known as Āśramas. It is the topmost and final stage of the ashram system and is traditionally taken by people over fifty or by young Brahmacharis who wish to renounce worldly and materialistic pursuits and dedicate their lives to spiritual pursuits. The legal treatise of Manu (*Manu-smṛti*) makes a clear distinction between the old age samnyāsa and the life of a wandering mendicant.

Truthfulness, kindness to all, observance of non-injury in thought, word and deed, freedom from desires and passions and complete equanimity in pleasure and pain, gain and loss and also sameness of attitude towards friends and foe, are some of the traits of a sannyāsī. Though underlying characteristics are same, yet there are varied ritualistic austerities for different sects of sannyāsīs. For example, according to the Shiva puranas he has to bathe thrice a day and besmear his body with ashes. He should utter ‘*praṇava*’, study the Vedanta and meditate on the all-pervading Ātman, Lord Shiva, the cause of creation. A sannyāsī subsists on leaves and leads a life of peace, silence and celibacy not expecting any reward and caring neither for life nor death. He transcends the bonds of the flesh and rises into another realm of the Ātman.

Symbolically, a sannyāsī casts his physical body into fire by wearing saffron robes when entering

this phase, signifying purification of body through fire thus freeing the soul while the body is still alive. Philosophically it represents the renunciation of body-identity. Sannyāsīs may therefore be buried instead of being cremated after death. According to Vedānta, sannyāsa means set down completely and represents *tyāga* (letting go) or *parityāga* (complete abandonment). Traditionally, only a sannyāsī is entitled to receive the teachings of Vedānta.

During the sannyāsa phase of life, a person abandons Vedic rituals associated with fire, or Agnihotra, that are allowed during the householder phase. Sannyāsīs may choose not to cook, perform fire rituals, or even take heat from fire. In practice, however, they often engage in various services and partake in sacred rituals to set an example for others. A sannyāsī focuses solely on the Self and spirituality, not even on the gods, as indicated by the abandonment of fire.

The very vision of a renunciate inspired Crown Prince Siddhartha Gautama to seek freedom from the cycle of birth and death, leaving behind hearth and home. The realization of Truth transformed him into the Buddha, making him the first to establish a community of monks or monastery. Researchers have studied the evolution from individualistic monasticism to the community living of monks and the monastic rituals followed by different sects. There are certain characteristics and duties that institutional sannyāsīs are expected to observe.

Adi Shankaracharya organized the Hindu monastic system by categorizing it into ten different sects (*Dashanami Sampradaya*). In his commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, three terms are identified: *vyutthāna* (transcendence—literally intensely rising up or away from), *bhikṣācārya* (begging), and *parivrājīn* (one who goes forth).

In Jainism, *nyāsa*, *saṁtyāga*, or *saṁnyāsa* refers to “abandonment (of attachment).” Abandonment of attachment (*saṁga-saṁnyāsa*) is mentioned in the 11th century Jñānārṇava, a treatise on Jain Yoga.

Gaudiya Vaishnavism defines sannyāsa as completely giving up the results of one’s activities and divides it into four stages: (a) *Kuṭichaka*: Resides in a hut and accepts alms until his *sādhana* matures; (b) *Bahūdaka*: Travels on pilgrimage and bathes in many waters, practicing detachment through dependence on Bhagavān; (c) *Parivrājaka*: Preaches realizations to everyone when transcendental knowledge arises; (d) *Parama-haṁsa*: Like a swan, one’s mind is absorbed in the thought of the Absolute through full absorption. The Chaitanya Bhāgavātam notes that immediately after Sri Chaitanya accepted sannyāsa, he instructed Mukunda (a singer) to perform *kīrtana*.

A sannyāsī following Vaiṣṇava principles must be aware that sannyāsīs are respected as members of the topmost āśrama and should also respect other sannyāsīs. He must be humbler than a blade of grass. The ritual of giving up the tuft of hair and sacred thread exemplifies pride or the desire for high fame. He should not accept respect from anyone but should offer obeisance, seeing Vishnu everywhere—to a dog, a dog-eater, a cow, and an donkey.

A spiritual seeker of Vedānta has to undergo a formal initiation ceremony called sannyāsa dikṣā, during which they take vows of renunciation in front of a guru and often receive a new name. This ceremony marks their official entry into a Vedantic monastic order.

After realizing God through yoga and tantra, Sri Ramakrishna was prepared to renounce the world. Totapuri formally initiated him into the monastic vows toward the end of 1864. This monk of dashanami “puri” sect was probably the head of a monastery in that (Punjab) province of India and had seven hundred sannyāsīs in his Math.

Sri Ramakrishna was a *paramahansa* sannyāsī. In modern times, Sri Ramakrishna revived the fundamental concepts and practices of sannyasa. He himself was the Lord of renunciates (*tyāgīśwara*). Regarding his disciples he observed there are two categories. One are the “Youngsters

like Narendra and Rakhal are ever-perfect. Every time they are born they are devoted to God. An ordinary man acquires a little devotion after austerities and a hard struggle. But these boys have love of God from the very moment of their birth. They are like the natural image of Shiva, which springs forth from the earth and is not set up by human hands." The Master blessed them with ochre cloths of renunciates.

Till now the real strength of the Ramakrishna Order lies in its spiritual foundation, with love and compassion as its backbone. Its members are to recognize the divinity within themselves and in all others, and then to engage in acts of useful service.

The Master did not hide the fact that he wished to make Narendra his spiritual heir. Narendra was to continue the work after Sri Ramakrishna's passing. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "I leave these young men in your charge. See that they develop their spirituality and do not return home." One day, he asked the boys, in preparation for monastic life, to beg for their food from door to door without concern for caste. They obeyed the Master's order and went out with begging bowls. A few days later, he gave each of them the ochre cloth of the sannyāsī. Thus, the Master himself laid the foundation for the future Ramakrishna Order of monks.

During their formative period the Master made it clear to his followers that everything can be sacrificed for God, but God cannot be sacrificed for anything. Naren and the other monastic disciples practiced total renunciation without any reservation. To conquer lust, a careful selection of spiritual practices is required. The Master warned them about tantrik practices, which involve female companions and can often lead to downfall. Meditation is a safer starting point but it too requires preparation.

On one morning, Narendra and his Brahma friends came to meditate in the Panchavati. Later, Sri Ramakrishna approached them and said to the Brahma devotees: "In meditation one must be absorbed in God. By merely floating on the surface of

the water, can you reach the gems lying at the bottom of the sea?"

Through meditation, when the mind becomes pure, one can achieve sufficient concentration and conquer mental agitations. Gradually, the mind becomes firmly fixed on the Self, and all actions are performed with perfect equanimity. This state of being is effortless and transcends the distractions of both the external world and the mind's own desires.

Narendra and his friends then left their seats, and the Master returned to his room with them. The Master continued: "When you plunge in the water of the ocean, you may be attacked by alligators. But they won't touch you if your body is smeared with turmeric. There are no doubt six alligators - lust, anger, avarice, and so on - within you, in the 'heart's fathomless depths'. But protect yourself with the turmeric of discrimination and renunciation, and they won't touch you."

How much to renounce lust, anger, and the like? To a person living in a household with internal renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna said, they "should hiss, but he shouldn't pour out his venom." Without injuring others he should make a show of anger to protect himself from enemies. For a sannyāsī even hissing is not as he renounces the world fully.

Speaking of meditation, the Master shared one of his amazing visions through meditation that manifested his eternally bright sannyāsī-mind. He was then suffering from a burning sensation in his body: "During worship in the temple, following the scriptural injunctions, he would imagine the presence of the "sinner" in himself and the destruction of this "sinner". One day he was meditating in the Panchavati, when he saw come out of him a red-eyed man of black complexion, reeling like a drunkard. Soon there emerged from him another person, of serene countenance, wearing the ochre cloth of a sannyāsī and carrying in his hand a trident. The second person attacked the first and killed him with the trident. Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna was free of his pain.

He saw the sannyāsī who had previously killed the "sinner" in him again coming out of his body, threatening him with the trident, and ordering him to concentrate on God. Or the same sannyāsī would visit distant places, following a luminous path, and bring him reports of what was happening there. Sri Ramakrishna used to say later that in the case of an advanced devotee the mind itself becomes the guru, living and moving like an embodied being."

Another type of renunciates are the devoted householders who are renunciate in spirit, the Master realized that they "have to do a little of Her (Divine Mother's) work". Therefore, he accepted M, Nag Mahashay, Girish, and others like them as sannyāsīs in heart, even though they continued to live as householders to spread the word of God to humanity – "The Mother keeps a Bhagavata Pandit with a bondage in the world!" Swami Vijnanananda, a direct sannyāsī disciple of Sri Ramakrishna remarked to M. : "By enquiry, I have come to the conclusion that eighty percent and more of the sannyāsīns have embraced the monastic life after reading the Kathamrita (Bengali name of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) and coming in contact with you."

After the Master's demise, M spent his weekends and holidays with the monastic brethren, who had formed an Order with a Math at Baranagore, and participated in their intense life of devotion and meditation. Swami Vivekananda wrote from America in a letter to the inmates of the Math: "When Sri Thakur (the Master) left the body, every one gave us up as a few unripe urchins. But M. and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We cannot repay our debt to them."

The Master also initiated Narayan Sastri, at his earnest request, into the life of sannyās and gave ochre cloth to Girish who was second to none in his spirit of renunciation.

The vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience are universal requirements for institutionalized monastic orders. Monastics are supposed to live a life of simplicity, often owning only the bare necessities being detached from worldly possessions and relationships.

To fulfill the primary goal of attaining spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) or direct, *aparokṣa* realization of the divine sannyāsīs keep themselves engaged in spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, study of scriptures, and service.

A sannyāsī carries only his staff, water pot, and begging bowl. While he may perform certain *nityakarma* (obligatory Vedic duties), with detached mind, merely to set an example for the world. Even when a householder, who is a renunciate internally, performs such actions, their recollection and contemplation of God remain uninterrupted. In the Master's word, "In this state a man communes with God through the mind alone."

The practice of wandering and pilgrimage help a sannyāsī to maintain detachment from any fixed abode and worldly ties. So sannyāsīs lead a nomadic life, traveling from place to place and living off alms.

Although some sannyāsīs become spiritual teachers or guides, formally sharing their wisdom and insights with others, however, all are expected to provide teaching and guidance.

In spiritual organizations sannyāsīs must play a community role. They contribute to the preservation and dissemination of spiritual traditions and teachings.

Clearly there are many facets of the sannyāsa ideal and each is related to independence – physical, mental, intellectual, and of course spiritual. The main obstacle to attain any types of independence is desire. Attainment of the state of 'desirelessness' is an important milestone in the spiritual journey of a renunciate. One must practice and pray for a desire-free mind. Of the four noble truths Buddha mentioned, craving or desire is the cause of suffering. Sri Sarada Devi affirmed that if you become devoid of desires, liberation is yours right now, right here.

The abode of desires is primarily the body identity. Sri Ramakrishna asked M, the writer of the Gospel, to live in the world in the spirit of a monk. The disciple truly carried out this order, realizing, : "Love on the physical level never lasts. He is

indeed blessed who can give his love to God with his whole heart. Even a little attachment to the body endures for several births. So do not be attached to this cage of bone and flesh. Take shelter at the feet of the Mother and think of Her alone. Thus your life here and hereafter will be ennobled."

When a young man became a monk, Sarada Devi was very pleased and said, *"It is nothing but three pounds of ashes when it is cremated. Why so much vanity about it? However strong or beautiful this body may be, its culmination is in those three pounds of ashes. And still people are so attached to it!"*

Sri Chaitanya was very strict about maintaining physical distance between male sannyāsīs and women. Whenever the Master heard about Chaitanya's renunciation, his mind would become self-absorbed. Like Sri Chaitanya, he also said, *"A sannyāsī must not look at a woman." This is the sannyāsī's dharma. What a lofty ideal!* ... *"Others learn from the sannyāsī's example. That is why such strict rules are prescribed for him. A sannyāsī must not look even at the portrait of a woman. What a strict rule! A sannyāsī must be endowed with the quality of absolute self-control.*

The Master used to say a sannyāsī with lust and greed is like a beautiful lady with a bad odor; her beauty becomes worthless altogether. No spiritual progress is possible without the renunciation of land, wife, and wealth. Sri Ramakrishna once went to the Registry Office to register some land, which was titled in the name of the family deity, Raghuvir. The officer asked him to sign his name, but he was unable to do so as he was entirely free from the thought of 'my' land.

On another occasion, the Master recounted, *"a Marwari devotee wanted to give me some money. Mathur wanted to deed me some land. But I couldn't accept either. He was always aware that, "The rules for the life of a sannyāsī are very strict indeed. If a man takes the garb of a sannyāsī, he must act exactly like one."*

A sannyāsī, as a world teacher, has the responsibility to set an example of renunciation of lust and greed, which encourages others to

practice complete renunciation. Not getting attached to gold or money benefits renunciates themselves. Sri Ramakrishna explained that money, when near, *"brings in its train calculation, worry, insolence, anger, and such evils. There is an instance in the sun: it shines brightly; suddenly a cloud appears and hides it. ..."* *That is why I didn't agree to the Marwari's depositing money for me with Hriday. I said: 'No, I won't allow even that. If I keep money near me, it will certainly raise clouds.'*

The Master attended various programs or sat-sangs in Calcutta, where the distribution of prasad was customary. On his way back to Dakshineswar, if the host wished to send any food or fruits, he would not carry them home, as *"a sannyāsī cannot lay things up"*.

To attain this state of desirelessness a foundation must be built. According to Sri Ramakrishna, truthfulness is the foundation of one's spiritual life. Not only telling the truth but also keeping one's word is a practice of truthfulness. Truthful thoughts and actions develop one's latent impressions, *samskāras*. Spiritual accomplishment greatly depends on one's tendencies. Sri Sarada Devi used to give mantras according to one's *samskāras*.

The primary way to begin the journey towards a desire-free mind is through the practice of selfless action. Good *samskāras* or *vidyā-māyā* motivate one not to give importance to trivial things in life, which is core to spiritual life. This maturity helps the aspirant continue with selfless action. Hence, renunciation of worldliness is necessary. Only then does *vidyā-māyā* help the mind engage in selfless action, where work and worship can go side by side. Gradually, work appears like worship, and ultimately, work is identified as worship.

Selfish action with prayer precedes the practice of selfless action. It is worth remembering the Master's suggestion: *"One must pray to God without any selfish desire. But selfish worship, if practised with perseverance, is gradually turned into selfless worship. Dhruva practiced tapasya to obtain his kingdom, but at last he realized God. He said, 'Why should a man give*

up gold if he gets it while searching for glass beads?'

The Master summarized: "*The whole thing, in a nutshell is that one must develop ecstatic love for Satchidananda. What kind of love? How should one love God? Gauri used to say that one must become like Sita to understand Rama; like Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, to understand Bhagavan, Shiva. One must practise austerity, as Bhagavati did, in order to attain Shiva. One must cultivate the attitude of Prakriti in order to realize Purusha -- the attitude of a friend, a handmaid, or a mother.*" The Master himself showed how he became mad for Ramlala, baby Rama. He bathed it, fed it, laid it down to sleep, and carried it wherever he went.

However, such love is not possible if the mind dwells on sex life. To encourage the aspirant to enjoy the happiness of communion with the Atman, the Master shared his vision of Sita: "*I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything -- her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama.*" What is this total detachment from the world, if it is not called sannyāsa?

To attain such a state, Sri Ramakrishna reminded us, "*One must call on God with a longing heart. One must learn from the guru how God can be realized. Only if the guru himself has attained Perfect Knowledge can he show the way.*" However, this longing heart or restlessness does not mean becoming emotional. Control of emotions is a necessary practice in spiritual life. There should be no public display or superficial expressions, but rather a genuine connection. Sharing spiritual experiences can diminish their impact or intensity. Thus, Swami Vivekananda suggested the practice of perseverance – "*patience, perseverance, purity, and above all love.*" Love for nothing other than God is the key to success.

Strict practices are required at the beginning. Once a monk becomes established in dispassion, there is less to fear; they can simply remain watchful.

The same applies to a householder's life after

realizing God. It is like churning butter from milk and then keeping the butter in water. Janaka led the life of a householder after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. He wielded two swords: one of Knowledge and the other of action. The sannyāsī renounces action and therefore wields only the sword of knowledge. "*Generally speaking there are two kinds of yoga: karmayoga and manoyoga, that is to say, union with God through work and through the mind.*"

The path of Knowledge is also a way to prepare the mind. However, there is a possibility of downfall due to the entanglement with name and fame. The mind can deceive very subtly. Therefore, merely studying scriptures is not enough. Sri Ramakrishna raised the question, "*What can you achieve by mere lecturing and scholarship without discrimination and dispassion? God alone is real, and all else is unreal. God alone is substance, and all else is nonentity. That is discrimination. ... "First of all set up God in the shrine of your heart, and then deliver lectures as much as you like. How will the mere repetition of 'Brahman' profit you if you are not imbued with discrimination and dispassion?"*

There is a significant difference between a scholar and a holy man. The mind of a mere scholar often chases worldly desires, and their works and words frequently do not align. In contrast, the sadhu's mind, words, and actions are focused on God. Gradually, when one attains the state of a knower of Brahman, they find their minds free of desires. When it comes to setting the goal of attaining desirelessness, the paths of devotion and selfless action play a major role.

A young Sikh sannyāsī from Benares used to refer to the Master as the '*loving monk*'. One day, the Master visited their monastery and saw that the abbot of the monastery took care of the center like a housewife. The Master appreciated his understanding that for this age, '*the path of devotion as enjoined by Narada*' is the way to liberation. At the end of his class, the abbot chanted, '*Vishnu is in water, Vishnu is on land, Vishnu is on the mountain top; the whole world is pervaded by Vishnu, ... Peace!*

Peace! Abiding Peace!' He attempted to see all planes as pervaded by Vishnu

In response to Narendra's question about practicing spiritual discipline, the Master emphasized, "Bhakti, love of God, is the essence of all spiritual discipline. Through love one acquires renunciation and discrimination naturally."

"A man, gets rid of all desires when he has Perfect Knowledge. He becomes like a child five years old. ... The Jnani gets rid of all desire if any is left, it does not hurt him. At the touch of the philosopher's stone the sword is transformed into gold. Then that sword cannot do any killing. Just so, the Jnani keeps only a semblance of anger and passion. They are anger and passion only in name and cannot injure him." He goes beyond the three gunas. By renouncing everything, a sannyāsī can subdue māyā.

Until one is done with worldly enjoyments, one should not renounce the world—such is the conclusion of the Master. Until then, he said, "one must always chant the name and glories of God and pray to Him. An old metal pot must be scrubbed every day. What is the use of cleaning it only once? Further, one must practise discrimination and renunciation; one must be conscious of the unreality of the world. ... And renounce the world only in mind." An uninterrupted practice with devotion and for a long time is necessary, told Patanjali. Sri Chaitanya also advises taking the name of the Lord *unceasingly*.

Right companionship helps one to see the end of worldly enjoyment, lust, and greed. Holy company reminds one of God. Thus, the Master instructs, "the worldly man must constantly live in the company of holy men. It is necessary for all, even for sannyāsīs."

If men with desires live with women endowed with *vidyā shakti* or spiritual attributes, they lead men to a God-centered life and to overcome the ocean of worldliness. The Master alerts, "Whatever you see, think, or hear is māyā." Basically, lust and greed are the coverings of māyā. The Master further explained, "There is no harm in chewing betel-leaf, eating fish, smoking, or rubbing the body with oil. What will one achieve by renouncing only these

things?" ... "This universe is created by the Mahāmāyā of God. Mahāmāyā contains both *vidyā-māyā*, the illusion of knowledge, and *avidyā-māyā*, the illusion of ignorance. Through the help of *vidyā-māyā* one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love, and renunciation."

Therefore, cleaning up of mind means to renounce two tendencies: lust and greed (for gold). Nothing else. Sri Ramakrishna did not encourage householders to adopt the attitude of 'I Am That'; this is the view of the sannyāsīs of the Vedantic school. As long as one is conscious of doing everything oneself, one should not declare, 'I am That, the actionless Supreme Self.' Rather, as the Master emphasized, devotion is the royal path for all. "If a man is able to weep for God he will see Him. He will go into samadhi. Perfection in yoga is samadhi. A man achieves kumbhaka without any yogic exercise if he but weeps for God. The next stage is samadhi."

The Master affectionately explained, "According to the non-dualists the Self is unattached. Good and bad, virtue and vice, and the other pairs of opposites, cannot in any way injure the Self, though they undoubtedly afflict those who have identified themselves with their bodies. Smoke soils the wall, certainly, but it cannot in any way affect Akasa, space. But to feel that one is a free soul is very good. By constantly repeating, 'I am free, I am free', a man verily becomes free."

Practice of humbleness cleans ones mind. Once, the Master had a broken arm, yet he continued his conversations with devotees. During one such conversation, he shared the following story: Along with Keshab Sen, a renowned devotee in Calcutta, and his group, the Master went to watch the Nimai Sannyas play. Keshab's group members were trying to prove that Keshab was the same as Chaitanya. Keshab was curious to know how the Master saw himself. Sri Ramakrishna told him: "I am the servant of your servant, the dust of the dust of your feet.' Keshab said with a smile, 'You can't catch him!'" Hearing this, a devotee mentioned, "Sometimes Keshab used to say you were John the Baptist" and another added that Keshab had also said, "That Chaitanya has been incarnated again in the

present century of the Christian era, and that you [the Master] are he." The Master, however, became absent-minded with such conversation and asked, *What of it? Can you tell me now how my arm can be cured? This arm is worrying me so much."*

Doctor Durgacharan Nag was a devotee and once he heard the Master saying, he said, *"If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicine, how can it conceive of the Infinite?"* Swami Nikhilananda writes: *"That was the end of Durgacharan's medical practice and he threw his chest of medicines into the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna assured him that he would not lack simple food and clothing. He bade him serve holy men. On being asked where he would find real holy men, the Master said that the sadhus themselves would seek his company. No sannyāsī could have lived a more austere life than Durgacharan."*

Nag Mahashay was perfectly free from ego. And that is why desires could not bind him. He became so small that māyā's net could no longer hold him. He was able to slip through the gaps between the knots of the net.

An ego-free — that is, a desire-free — pure mind begets simplicity. Swami Adbhutananda had a childlike simplicity. Sri Ramakrishna assigned him to serve the Holy Mother. Without an extremely pure mind, it is difficult to serve the Mother. An impure or clouded mind requires fanning to remove all clouds. Sarada Devi suggested that constant mantra-japa or repeating the name of the Lord is the way to attain the highest spiritual wisdom. The Mother's own life was a perfect example of blending simplicity, purity, and deep spiritual wisdom.

Spiritual aspirants go beyond māyā when they experience divine love transcending the three gunas. In the words of the Master, *"Attaining that love, the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him 'Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness'. The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love. ... He becomes like a child five years old ..."*. Readers of the Mother's biography know how, during the festival of colors,

she enjoyed herself immensely when she realized that the noise she heard was not the hissing of a snake but merely the sound of trapped air in a water pipe!

Sri Sarada Devi lived on a plane where everything was a play of the Divine. She loved everyone, whether it was Swami Saradananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and her attendant, or Amjad, a Muslim cultivator who was also a part-time thief. She loved the young revolutionaries engaged in India's freedom struggle, but that did not prevent her from acknowledging that the British were also her children.

Austerities are needed to clean up one's mind. Ma Sarada's life was grounded on worship, meditation, and austerity. After the demise of the Master, when her mind was totally detached from everything, her burning dispassion manifested in the form of this nun. *"At Kamarpukur she had seen with open eyes a girl of eleven or twelve years of age moving about her — sometimes in front of her and sometimes behind, with hair unkempt, and with an ochre cloth and a necklace of rudraksha beads on her person. It looked as though the Mother's extreme abhorrence for the world consequent on the Master's demise had taken the form of that young nun. ... at last the desire for panchatapa became active in her mind during her stay at Belur... Arrangements were accordingly made. After the conclusion of the panchatapa austerity, the nun disappeared in the Mother's body."*

Mother's pure mind knew no give-and-take relation with any single being in this universe; it was all self-less giving from her side. The satisfaction lay in giving alone — this is the complete manifestation of *samarthā* love. That is total freedom from expectation or desire!

"After so much austerity," Swami Vivekananda also arrived to the same level from where he could say, *"I have understood this as the real truth — God is present in every jiva; there is no other God besides that, 'Who serves jiva, serves God indeed."* The self-less service is the royal path to attain independence through desire-free mind for the members of the.

Ramakrishna Order, who see the sangha as the embodiment of Sri Ramakrishna himself Sri Ramakrishna said that those who take refuge in him will attain absolute freedom. Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the Order, said that sannyāsa is necessary for liberation. Sri Sarada Devi confirmed that both are equally true. Her prescription was, *“Surrender yourself to the Master and always remember that he stands behind you.”*

These were not mere words. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, although not formally initiated into sannyāsa, embodied many of these principles and is revered for her profound spiritual influence and guidance. She played a crucial role in the spiritual nurturing of the Ramakrishna Order, and her selfless service, compassion, and teachings have inspired many to pursue the path of renunciation

and devotion.

One day, in Jairambati, almost at the dead of night, her attendant found the Mother removing small pieces of bricks and stones from the courtyard. She held a trowel in one hand and a lamp in the other. The attendant was surprised and requested her to let him finish the work. The Mother replied that she was cleaning the courtyard because otherwise devotees of the Master from different places would come walking barefoot, and these rough fragments would hurt their feet. There was no staff (*danda*), oblong water pot (*kamandalu*), rosary, or begging bowl, but a trowel, symbolizing selfless action and her love for the immanent, and a lamp, representing her knowledge and devotion for the transcendent. This is a Self-dependent sannyāsīn as envisioned by the Master.



Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend?
 The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food
 What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.
 No food or drink can taint that noble Self
 Which knows Itself. Like rolling river free
 Thou ever be, Sannyāsīn bold! Say —
 "Om Tat Sat, Om!"

--The Song of the Sannyāsīn by Swami Vivekananda



2nd-3rd century, Gandhara, Presentation of the bowls (British Museum, London, UK)



Swami Vivekananda, (1891) probably in Jaipur, India. His only "wandering monk" picture without a turban.



Sankaracharya with Disciples by Nandalal Bose (Watercolor on paper, 1947)

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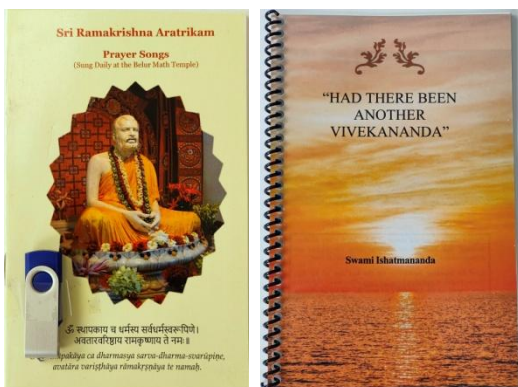


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