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# ॥ Tanme Manah Śivasamkalpam Astu ॥

May My Mind Dwell On That Which Is Auspicious

यज्जाग्रतो दूरमुदैति दैवं तदु सुप्तस्य तथैवैति ।  
दूरङ्गमं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरेकं तन्मे मनः शिवसङ्कल्पमस्तु ॥

- Vajasaneyi Samhita, 34-1

## Introduction

*Siva-sankalpa-suktam* is a hymn of six verses in the Chapter 34 of the Shukla Yajurveda Vajasaneyi Madhyandina Samhita. Shiva means the auspicious one who does good, and connotes liberation to all beings. The six verses describe the mind that can achieve and attain anything with virtues and righteousness, which is Sankalpa. Suktam means hymns or verses in praise of God or any Deity or Guru. Maharshi Bodhayana in his compilation of Mahanyasa included these six mantras along with other mantras. This suktam explains the nature of mind in detail. Also, it is very important for every individual to know his/her mind. Hence, chanting the Siva-sankalpa mantras will allow us to focus our attention and energy on auspicious thoughts and good intentions. The 1<sup>st</sup> mantra of the six mantras is discussed here:

## Mantra Word Meaning

यत् – what, जाग्रतः – the creature, one who is awake, दूरं – as far away, उत्-आ-एति – all-pervasive and all-pervading, दैवं – capacity or ability to enlighten, तत् – that mahatattva, सुप्तस्य-सतः – in a state of sleep or dream, तथा-एव – similarly, एति – wandering, दूरंगमं – it travels near and far, ज्योतिषां – all luminaries, एकं – be the only one, ज्योतिः – luminary, मनः – Omniscient (knowing all things), तत् – that Parameshwara-tattva, मे – to self, शिव-संकल्पं – mind with good intentions and auspiciousness, अस्तु – may God answer our prayers.

## Reflections

The human mind is a sophisticated multi-tasking instrument that God has endowed us with. The mantra highlights the nature and quality of the mind. We all appear to be present with our mind, but our mind is not present with us. The first two words in the mantra state that the mind is a wanderer, slipping from one object to another in our waking state.



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The mind in its waking state has the habit of drifting into the materialistic world through the means of the senses, and it returns back to the Self only in the state of deep sleep. May this extraordinary mind, which is the most luminous of all lights, ever dwell on good intentions and auspicious thoughts.

### Significant Quotes on the Mind

Sri Ramakrishna declares, 'That knowledge which purifies the mind and heart, alone is true Knowledge, all else is only a negation of Knowledge'. He further elaborates that only two kinds of people can attain Self-knowledge: those who are not encumbered at all with learning, that is to say, whose minds are not over-crowded with thoughts borrowed from others; and those who, after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realise that they know nothing. 'As long as I live, so long do I learn', says Sri Ramakrishna.

'Arise awake and stop not until the goal is reached', the famous quote by Swami Vivekananda, is the essence of the mantra from *Katha Upanishad* of Yajurveda. This message always inspires and motivates everyone at every stage of life. Swamiji linked morality with control of the mind, seeking truth, pure and selfless acts as traits that strengthen it. In order to make one's mind strong, Swamiji advised his followers to be holy, benevolent and to be self-reliant (*shraddha*). Swamiji emphasised in another quote, 'Throw away all weakness. Tell your body that it is strong. Tell your mind that it is strong and have unbounded faith and hope in yourself'. By repeating this continuously one can build a strong mind.

### Conclusion

Oh Lord! Grant me -

The capacity to always receive the right knowledge from right sources.

The right attitude based on which my actions are performed.

And finally to achieve good results based on right attitude.

Tanme Manah Shiva Sankalpam Astu!

## Natural Path to the Divine

**T**he eternal religion of Vedanta is based on the realisations of truths that are unchangeable irrespective of place, time, persons, and so on. Naturally, these principles of truth are difficult for most of us humble mortals to comprehend. Moreover, they require absolute renunciation of any identification with the momentary appearances of this world. Generally pure Vedantins are well-known for their dry intellectualism and lack of emotions. Others argue that unless the mind understands the importance of the attributeless Reality, how is it going to get attracted to it? The mind would not get attached to the abstract principles of Vedanta. And therefore, Vedanta largely remained within the jurisdiction of argumentative intellectuals and learned scholars. One more factor kept it out of reach of the masses and that is, all the Vedantic texts were written in the ancient language of Sanskrit, which is not spoken by the common people. Swamiji said,

My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books and in the possession of a few only, hidden, as it were, in monasteries and in forests — to bring them out; to bring the knowledge out of them, not only from the hands where it is hidden, but from the still more inaccessible chest, the language in which it is preserved, the incrustation of centuries of Sanskrit words.

It was so far believed, till Swami Vivekananda's broadcasting the ideas to the world and making them practical, that these gems of

spirituality were a theoretical science, if at all they can be called a science.

And here comes the beauty of Truth that it makes itself accessible to those who cannot grasp it. Though the names and forms are momentary in terms of material reality, there can be names and forms in divine reality that are 'nearly' eternal. In the sense, they may not be there ultimately, with the dissolution of the entire cosmos, but they are there from the beginning to the end of the universe—they belong to the material and efficient Cause of this universe. Such names and forms are the basis of devotion to God and they relate to the same absolute principles of Vedanta, which are otherwise transcendental. Humanity finds ultimate solace in these innumerable names and forms of God.

We see that some experiments to reach the unreachable were done by creating the concept of a prophet or a messenger of God. It was done to help the ordinary people who could not fathom the eternal essence of religion and needed a grosser form of religion to hold on to. What we understand now by religion is nothing but the jacket of the true eternal religion that is designed according to the need of the person wearing it. Such forms of prophets or messengers help people to first go near the formless and then subsequently 'enter into' it. Similarly, the Vedantic religion too allows the devotees to have their own Chosen Ideal in the form of any divine personality, or a realised saint. The only mandate is that one should consider their chosen form as the manifestation of the eternal infinite Formless.

We learn about the Arundhati Nyaya in the scriptures. For the one who wants to see the Arundhati star, which is very dim and scarcely visible, the guide shows a branch of a tall tree, then the brighter stars nearby and then gradually directs the person's eyes to the real Arundhati. This is known as Arundhati Nyaya. In logic and philosophy, it signifies the method of leading from the gross to the subtle, from the known to the unknown. The path of progress from *dvaita* to *vishishtadvaita* to *advaita* is led with a similar intention in view. The aspirant gradually evolves from one stage to another. One's devotion to God starts through either of the following—*आर्तः*, the afflicted, *जिज्ञासु*, the seeker of Knowledge, *अर्थार्थी*, the seeker of wealth, but finally it must culminate in becoming *ज्ञानी*, the man of Knowledge. The path of devotion does not demand violent renunciation of our 'worldly' life but requires sincere love for our chosen name and form of the Divine.

Swami Vivekananda says in Bhakti Yoga, The one great advantage of Bhakti is that it is the easiest and most natural way to reach the great divine end in view; its great disadvantage is that in its lower forms it oftentimes degenerates into hideous fanaticism. The fanatical crew in Hinduism, or Mohammedanism, or Christianity have always been almost exclusively recruited from these worshippers on the lower planes of Bhakti. That singleness of attachment (*Nishtha*) to a loved object, without which no genuine love can grow, is very often also the cause of the denunciation of everything else. All the weak and undeveloped minds in every religion or country have only one way of loving their own ideal, i.e. by hating every other ideal. Herein is the explanation of why the same man who is so lovingly attached to his own ideal of God, so devoted to his own ideal of religion, be-

comes a howling fanatic as soon as he sees or hears anything of any other ideal. ... (CW:3.32)

We see fanatics imposing their ideas upon others. But it is pertinent to keep in mind that we should not disturb anybody's faith. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, '*karur bhav nashta korte nei*', which is explained by Swamiji thus: 'Do not try to disturb the faith of any man. If you can, give him something better; if you can, get hold of a man where he stands and give him a push upwards; do so, but do not destroy what he has' (CW:4.183). We find a similar dictum in the Gita (3.25–26) also: '*सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत। ... न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेदज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम्। जोषयेत्सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान् युक्तः समाचरन् ॥* — As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing for the welfare of the world. Let no wise man unsettle the mind of ignorant people who are attached to action; he should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion.'

Unless the culture of pure devotion to God without any consideration of religion, caste, or creed is evolved, the spiritual progress of humanity cannot be accelerated. Swamiji says, 'We all know in modern times of nations which have masses of knowledge, but what of them? They are like tigers, they are like savages, because culture is not there. Knowledge is only skin-deep, as civilisation is, and a little scratch brings out the old savage' (CW:3.291).

As Sri Ramakrishna used to say that devotees of God do not belong to any caste, they have to unite and work together in spreading the glory of God. *Adi-Purana* says: '*ये मे भक्तजनाः पार्थ न मे भक्ताश्च ते जनाः । मद्भक्तानां च ये भक्तास्ते मे भक्ततमा मताः॥*—Those who claim to be My devotees are not My devotees; Those who are the devotees of My devotees, I consider them to be the best of My devotees.' \*

# Handling Sorrow and Grief

SWAMI SAMARPANANANDA

## Introduction

Misery is the bane of existence in all living forms. In the case of humans it is worse, since, in addition to the physical, it comes at mental and emotional levels too. At its mildest, it creates longing, and at its worst, it makes one depressed and suicidal.

Most miseries are rooted in sorrow at some loss, or in the lusting to acquire something. The consequences of both these, *shoka* (sorrow) and *moha* (lusting), are the same – suffering.

Many people approach us, monks, to help them tide over the misery born out of their lifestyles, or due to circumstances. The materially advanced society of today seems to be losing the battle against misery. Too many avenues seem to have opened up through which sorrow makes the onslaught. Pink slips, separations, terminal diseases, rejections, etc. are just few of the commanders of the marauding army of Misery, the king.

The resulting crisis all around is frightening. We regularly read of youngsters taking the extreme step, and we also find that borderline

personality disorder, use of antidepressants, and consumption of party drugs is on an exponential overdrive.

Over the years I have met many people who have been suicidal. In many cases I succeeded in talking them out of it, and in some I had to be a helpless watcher.

Once I chanced upon a young lady who had come a long way to drown herself in the Ganga. She had all the good things in life, but unfortunately, her husband had died a year ago, leaving behind a baby. For reasons best known to them, the family got her married off to another person of their liking so that they could keep the baby with them. The lady, already in a crisis, was now finished. She had become like a zombie after her husband's death, and now she was a walking corpse.

When I tried to reason with her saying that life does not end with death, and that she will have to begin where she left it, she broke her sobs to say, 'Everything ends when the eyes get closed'. Something had snapped deep within her.

The question that haunts us at such moments is whether there is a way out of such



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grief? Is there a way out of this kind of sorrow? How can one come to terms with loss? How can one cope with this kind of stress?

This is not easy, but nor is it impossible.

### **Two approaches to Life— Candlelight and Sunlight**

Before we take on the issues of grief and sorrow, let's first look at life—how we lead our daily life, what life means to us, what present, past, and future mean to us; and how these affect our life.

These can be best understood if we take the analogy of walking in darkness with a candlelight. Let us call it the Candlelight Approach.

In this approach it is like walking through a dense forest at night with a candlelight that throws limited light around us, forcing us to focus only on the immediate present and a little of the future. We can hardly see a step forward or backward. This leaves immense room for surprises and shocks in the form of sudden appearances or disappearances. Irrespective of how much we can see, events, favourable and unfavourable, will be taking place all the time around us, and entering the lighted zone of ours. If these are unpleasant, there would always be karma or God to be blamed, and if pleasant, we would thank our luck. We would never realise that the events were all along in the making, and that no one has been responsible for the abruptness.

Unlike us, there are great souls like Jesus, Buddha and others who never cared for the world or for its pleasure and pain. Jesus was crucified, but he did not complain. Sri Ramakrishna suffered from cancer, but he never had a sense of loss, as the term is understood. He never despaired, nor did he ever feel any kind of sorrow. These are the people who walk, as if, in perpetual light. This can be called the Sunlight Approach. In this approach, one has a

complete view of things as they are. One can see oneself, and also the world clearly; and one can see forward, as also backward and around. Naturally, there can never be surprises, since events unfold at a natural pace.

The Sunlight Approach is for people who are real spiritual masters. They can see the whole picture in front of them as also around them. They can see if a snake or a tiger is approaching them from a distance, and hence they are never caught unawares, nor do they get scared. They know what is inevitable, and what is not.

People like us, who have a view of only a limited horizon, as in the Candlelight Approach, cannot see things that are in the making. We naturally get hit by the abruptness of developments that result in shock and pain. There may be a sudden loss, shocking bereavement, or unexpected turn of events. Not being trained to handle such abruptness, our training of life, accumulated so far, is of no use.

### **Understanding Smriti**

The mental training that we acquire from our parents, teachers, books, spiritual masters, scriptures etc. has a term in Sanskrit—*Smriti*. Translated loosely, it means memory, but its deeper connotation implies mental training imbibed and absorbed by a person.

Whenever a situation arises before us, good or bad, we handle it with the help of our smriti. Thus when there is a crisis in the family, say, someone has cancer and he is withering away, we handle it with the help of our smriti, and the same smriti helps us handle power and glory with humility when we are successful.

Misery comes when we lose this smriti.

There is a famous instance in Valmiki's *Ramayana* highlighting this point. When Sri Rama was sent to exile by his father, Dasharatha, for 14 years due to the palace politics, Kaushalya, his mother was devastated. She was

a pious and devoted wife, but at the shock of his son's exile, she started abusing and condemning her husband King Dasharatha, who was repentant, and was asking for forgiveness. To this Kaushalya said, 'Don't think that I am a bad wife, nor must you think of me to be a bad person but *this shoka* (sorrow) *has shattered my smriti. I have lost my "shrutam"* (the mental training to stay calm)'. She added, 'it is easy to fight an enemy who rushes with a raised sword, but it is so difficult to come to terms with this kind of sudden loss'.

The idea is that one cannot cope with losses when one loses one's smriti. This loss makes one behave in unpredictable ways.

So, how to get the smriti back when the chips are down?

There is no single answer to this, nor does one successful method apply to everyone. Here we make an overview of techniques which can be useful.

### 1. Buying Time

The famous adage that 'time heals everything' is indeed perfectly true. No doubt that the best cure for sorrow and grief is time. Unfortunately, in many cases we are not left with the luxury of time to handle such crisis. The suddenness springing at us does not allow us to collect ourselves, and we end up acting foolishly. Negativity, depression, suicidal tendencies are all born of this lack of time to react.

So, the most important thing in handling sorrow is to build up a system that will help us buy time till the wound is healed, or smriti returns.

### 2. Shifting the Focus of the Mind

In the famous poem, 'Home they brought her warrior dead', there is the young lady whose husband died in the battlefield. On seeing the body, she went into such shock that she

did not shed a single drop of tear. This worried people around her, for she could die due to this shock. This, in spite of the fact that the lady knew about the dangers that lie in a soldier's life, but the suddenness of seeing her husband's dead body made her smriti—the basic facts associated with a soldier's life—vanish.

This happens with everyone. If we go back to the candlelight example, it is like the sudden appearance of a dangerous beast before us in that candlelight zone.

In the narration of that poem, an elderly lady then brought the infant baby of the lady and placed him on her lap. This broke the spell of shock, and the lady broke out into wails and tears. Her life was thus saved when someone tactfully shifted her focus from the dead husband to the living baby.

This shifting of focus can be done by the strong, or can be carried out by a good support system.

### 3. Building a Support System

We invest in a lot of things—house, cars, insurance, luxuries, and in a lot of other things that seem important to us. But, we hardly invest in relationships.

We socialise, but we don't invest in people; we don't reach out to people when they need us. As a result, we do reach the top, but it is so lonely there. In our desire to be the best, we forget that life is not about winning a competition, but about cooperation. Our schools and colleges may reward us for topping the exam and winning a race, but in real life we can't leave people behind to move forward. Doing so only means that when sorrow strikes, there would be no one to console and support us.

We may be materially advanced compared to our rural brothers and ancestors, but they were certainly more secure emotionally than we can ever be.

The famous saying, ‘a man who is down does not fear fall’, is not only about having nothing more to lose, but it also hints at the fact that such persons have a very good support system, for, people who are suffering, tend to bond together. Compared to that, a successful person has a lot to lose materially, and also lacks the support system when his going is not good anymore.

#### 4. Rebuilding Smriti

Life ultimately gets back on track after a spectacular fall, but only when smriti is brought back into life.

In the famous Mahabharata war, Arjuna, the chief warrior, was filled with *shoka* and *moha* when he saw his near and dear ones standing before him to kill and get killed. The resulting emotions made Arjuna lose his smriti, and he refused to fight. This is again the typical example of walking in the Candlelight approach. Arjuna knew all along the consequences of the war, but when the suddenness of it sprung before him, he could not handle it, and he collapsed.

Sri Krishna, who was his charioteer, was no ordinary person. He was one of those who walks always in the Sunlight approach. He was not only aware of the consequences of the war, but he could also foresee them the way one sees things clearly in daylight. That is one reason why he is never seen frowning or getting angry. He is always calm, for he knows what things are approaching him.

Sri Krishna then placed before Arjuna the philosophy of life, which is known as the Bhagavad Gita. The exalted teaching drove away the darkness of Arjuna’s mind, and he roared that he had got his smriti back, and that he would fight the war. Basically Sri Krishna did not teach Arjuna anything new. He only helped Arjuna get

back his smriti—the mental training, the learning, and the spiritual leanings.

There is a very interesting thing about the scriptures. They teach how to handle emotions like lust, greed, fear etc., but they don’t teach how to overcome sorrow. This is because sorrow is the most powerful emotion that swamps us, and it is directly related to our very existence. So, to handle sorrow a few teachings are not enough ... just not enough. We need the entire scripture, and a lifelong training to be able to counter the marauding army of sorrow. Those who read the Gita regularly would know that it is a panacea for all our maladies, but nowhere does it suggest how to overcome sorrow. To be able to do so, we need the whole of Gita, and that too all the time in our mind. Same with, say, Ramayana, Bible, and every other scripture.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* concludes its teaching with, ‘thus one conquers sorrow’, meaning, one can overcome sorrow only by mastering the knowledge of such scriptures and applying them fully.

#### 5. Acceptance

The goal of all such spiritual training is *acceptance*. Coming to terms means to accept the situation. In the Gita, the Upanishads, or any other scripture, we will see that they all teach only one thing—acceptance. Sorrow comes when we refuse to accept a situation—Why did it happen? Who ordered that? These are all meaningless wrangling. The art of life lies in accepting the suddenness with dignity.

Those of us who cannot do so, have to learn to move around with people who can infuse strength within us. If that also is not possible, then we need to have a support system that will be with us when we are shedding our tears; and, may be, they will shed a drop or two with us. \*

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# Spiritual Realisation through Communion with Nature

SWAMI SURARCHITANANDA

**S**piritual realisation or the experience of oneness with the 'infinite' is in almost all cases attained through well-trodden and verified religious paths. However, there are some isolated cases wherein this experience is obtained through 'non-religious paths' as well. So, what are these non-religious ideals? Is spiritual realisation really possible through them? Are these ideals worth emulating? And do they stand on par with religious ideals? These and many such questions naturally arise, as we are unfamiliar with them. These ideals, if brought on par with religious ideals, will then represent a unique approach in the spiritual history of mankind. It would then represent a new path, a new door to the infinite, outside the realm of conventional religious ideals.

At the outset, one may dismiss these ideals as a mere fantasy of the mind. It may appear ridiculous or even blasphemous, as we have never heard of or explored these ideals. Whereas, religious ideals have been explored in their minutest detail. It can be authenticated from religious textbooks and from the lives of great saints who have followed these ideals and attained spiritual perfection. Moreover, these ideals have been given a concrete shape by philosophers, and their commentaries and ex-

positions have plugged all logical loopholes in their belief-system. Around these systems are formed religious communities, and a person who is born in such a community has therefore firm reasons to believe in a religious ideal, and also the conviction that only a religious ideal can bring about spiritual realisation.

Therefore, one needs to look at these ideals with an unbiased approach. One such ideal is 'communion with nature'. To understand this ideal, an incident from the life of Sri Ramakrishna is mentioned here.

In Sri Ramakrishna's own words:

One morning I took the parched rice in a small basket and was eating it while walking on the narrow baulks in the corn fields. It was the month of Jyaishta or Ashadh. In one part of the sky there appeared a beautiful black rain cloud. I was looking at it while eating the rice. Very soon the cloud covered almost the whole sky, when a flock of milk-white cranes flew against the background of that black cloud. It looked so beautiful that I became very soon absorbed in an extraordinary mood. Such a state came on me that my external consciousness was lost. I fell down and the rice got scattered near the baulk. People saw this and carried me



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home. This was the first time that I lost external consciousness in ecstasy.<sup>1</sup>

This is the first of the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and ironically this is the least analysed of all his experiences. *As all other spiritual experiences in life are the outcome of religious ideals, this one stands unique as an outcome of a non-religious ideal.* This experience is not a mere fainting or losing of external consciousness, but an experience of unspeakable bliss arising out of communion with nature.

Swami Vivekananda, his chief-disciple, too had such an experience in his childhood when he was travelling through the Vindhya forests. He narrates:

What I saw and felt when going through the forest has for ever remained firmly imprinted in my memory, particularly a certain event of one day. We had to travel by the foot of the Vindhya mountains that day. The peaks of the ranges on both sides of the road rose very high in the sky; various kinds of trees and creepers bending under the weight of fruits and flowers produced wonderful beauty on the mountainsides. Birds of various colours, flying from tree to tree, filled the quarters with sweet notes. I saw all these and felt an extraordinary peace in my mind. The slow-moving bullock-carts arrived at a place where two mountain peaks, coming forward as though in love, locked themselves in an embrace over the narrow forest path. Observing carefully below the meeting-points I saw that there was a very big cleft from the crest to the foot of the mountain on one side of the path; and filling that cleft, there was hanging in it an enormous honeycomb, the result of the bees' labour for ages. Filled with wonder, as I was pondering over the beginning and the end of that kingdom of bees, my mind became so much absorbed in

the thought of the infinite power of God, the Controller of the three worlds, that I completely lost my consciousness of the external world for some time. I do not remember how long I was lying in the bullock-cart in that condition. When I regained normal consciousness, I found that we had crossed that place and come far away. As I was alone in the cart, no one could know anything about it.<sup>2</sup>

Here, Swami Vivekananda too lost his consciousness as his mind pondered over creation and the infinite power of God. Surely, he would have experienced inexpressible bliss, and his mind would have probably merged in the infinite arising out of communion with nature.

The communion with nature, though ample proofs are required, is probably the first spiritual experience that human beings might have come across. The ancient men, before the advent of worship of gods and goddesses, found spiritual sustenance in nature. Nature not only provided them with food and shelter but also opened the gates to the infinite as well. Though they lived like savages, hunting and gathering, nature provided them with the wherewithal to commune with the infinite. *Nature thus provided in an unconscious way the first spiritual bliss to mankind.* If this experience of ancient men can be verified and taken into account, then Sri Ramakrishna would not just stand for the 'consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people'<sup>3</sup> but would represent the consummation of millions of years of spiritual life of the entire *Homo sapiens* species.

With the progress of material civilisation and with the founding of permanent settlements, men slowly drifted away from nature and turned towards the worship of gods and goddesses—nature-gods, war-gods, and healer-gods—for protection and prosperity. But men did not forsake nature altogether. Indeed,



from time to time they sought refuge in nature. It provided the much-needed relief from the ever-increasing burden of material needs and necessities and its implication upon the spirit. Today, we find men rushing towards all corners of the world to find isolation and a break from the material life. We find them trekking mountains, exploring lakes and visiting places of pristine purity, devoid of material intrusions, to commune with nature. *In all these instances, we find the spiritual element of communion with nature deeply embedded in our human consciousness.*

The bliss experienced by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through communion with nature is tangible. *Nature, all of a sudden, unlocked its secrets, and their minds imbued with the quality of Sattva from birth, readily discerned those secrets. As a result, their minds experienced unspeakable bliss.*

Nature-poets like William Wordsworth too had such experiences in their lifetime. And

delineating one such experience in a poem called 'Excursion' by Professor William Hastie in a classroom in Calcutta brought Swami Vivekananda [then Narendranath Dutta] and Sri Ramakrishna together. *It is as if nature has conspired and brought together the two great spiritual giants—one Guru and another disciple—for the welfare of mankind.* The nature poems of William Wordsworth are not just renderings of physical beauty of natural objects, but the expression of the 'infinite' hidden behind them.

Many poets have expressed similar feelings. John Clare (1793–1864), the famous English poet, in one of his poems 'All Nature Has a Feeling' expresses this sentiment. He says:

All nature has a feeling: woods, fields, brooks  
 Are life eternal: and in silence they  
 Speak happiness beyond the reach of books;  
 There's nothing mortal in them; their decay  
 Is the green life of change; to pass away  
 And come again in blooms revived.

Its birth was heaven, eternal is its stay,  
And with the sun and moon shall still abide  
Beneath their day and night and heaven wide.

'There's nothing mortal in them', 'eternal is its stay', are the transcendental expressions which convey the infinitude of nature and its phenomenon.

Nature presents the best chance of unfolding the spiritual elements in man. And every day, nature gives them gifts without fail. There are certain hours—morning and evening hours—when the quietude of nature is overwhelming. Nature is at its best at the sunrise and sunset hours, providing the ideal atmosphere for communion with it. If a person can extricate himself or herself completely from all worldly engagements at those hours and commune with nature in isolation, he or she is bound to experience sublime bliss and joy. It brings the much-needed peace and consolation to the spirit troubled by material shackles. What more, if our minds are imbued with the elements of Sattva, it can even bring about the oneness with the infinite, as we have seen in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The effect of communion with nature upon our spiritual bearing cannot be dismissed. It has a great influence on our lives, and is even capable of delivering a spiritual experience.

Now the important question arises. Whether this experience can bring about liberation? Can it bring about the destruction of

'kleshas' (pain-bearing impressions) and bring about the final Samadhi? The answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. 'Yes' in the case of the minds having the preponderance of Sattva, where the kleshas have already been attenuated and is on the verge of attaining Samadhi. In such minds, the communion with nature can serve as a trigger to the highest Samadhi. We find Swami Vivekananda, for example, transported to the highest Samadhi at Camp Percy on the shore of Lake Michigan in America. "This is one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen", he said, "Imagine a lake, surrounded with hills covered with a huge forest, with nobody but ourselves. So lovely, so quiet, so restful! And you may imagine how glad I am to be here after the bustle of cities. It gives me a new lease of life to be here. ... I will meditate by the hours and days here and be all alone to myself."<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, he was transported to the highest Samadhi.

Again, it is 'no' for the ordinary minds having the preponderance of Rajas and Tamas, which invariably brings the mind to the normal plane, and the communion with nature in such cases can only give a peep into the infinite and not the highest Samadhi.

The best answers that human beings have derived are from the laps of nature. Nature is ready to give away its secrets and open the doors to the infinite only if our minds are prepared for it. Here concludes the ideal of communion with nature. \*



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# Inspiring Anecdotes and Parables ①

SWAMI VIDEHATMANANDA

## King Bharata

According to Sanatana Hindu traditions, three strong fetters of mind, keep the immortal soul, the Atman, in perpetual bondage with this transitory world. They are: desire for (i) progeny, (ii) wealth; and (iii) name-fame and recognition. Of these, the desire for name and

fame is the subtlest, predominant and hard to get over.

There is an inspiring anecdote in the annals of Jain history. Bharata, the first sovereign emperor of India, whose name this country bears, having conquered all the kingdoms of the sub-continent, finally reached Rishabh-koot mountain to hoist his victory flag and put up a memorial for this landmark event.

There, he wanted to raise a victory pillar and inscribe on it – his name, bio-data and a brief description of this remarkable event. Thereby he wanted to satisfy his desire for name and immortalise his glory and fame.

After reaching there, he looked around and found that there were already inscribed thousands of names of prominent peoples of yore, and there was no space left even to chisel a few letters of his own name, not to speak of the narration of his glorious achievements.

He thought – why not erase someone's name and get his own name engraved in its place? At his command, it was done so.

But no sooner than the task was completed, a ray of conscience flashed in his heart. The Emperor thought, 'Today I have erased someone's name, but tomorrow someone else may come and erase my name too. This is how, it is all merely a play of ego. The egoism in the form of – desire to immortalise once name, keeps people behaving in various strange ways. Nobody's name can remain immortal and indelible on the vast canvas of time and space.'

Thus, the desire for name and fame vanished forever from the heart and soul of the Monarch. ✨



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## A Bhakta's Journey to Non-Duality— Mirabai: Loving Krishna to Being Krishna

DR SHIBANI CHAKRAVERTY AICH

**F**luidity between the paths of *bhakti* and *jnana* occurs through the transcendent notion of everything existing in unity. There is only the one, but the one is in motion, so there appears to be two. Relationships can only occur between two. Yet, in the sacred relationship between the disciple and the guru or between the devotee and the divine, devotion acts as a ladder to *advaita* – to total unity, where the idea of self merges in the infinite, supreme reality. Thus, though appearing as opposites, the dual and non-dual paths are in accord. Concordantly, *bhakti* does not oppose *advaita* but serves as a means of attaining that high state. The life of the great *bhakti* saint, Mirabai, serves to exemplify this truth.

The duality of *bhakti* is not binary in nature, rather it is transformational. Just as the wave is not separate from the ocean, the lines of individuality are indistinct and moving, existing only in perception but not in actuality. An ant can taste sugar, but a sugarcane plant can-

not do that. While creation manifests as duality, the seeming separation does not exist on the absolute plane. A relationship is the expression of the creative principle, but its blossoming stems from our essential unity. The act of composing literature or music requires identity constructs, yet, ironically, the poetry and music of Mirabai merges the *jiva* into ultimate divine consciousness.

*Bhakti's* sense of unity in motion reveals a dynamic interplay illuminating the intersection between devotion and transcendence. *Bhakti* is a multidimensional, humanistic approach to reaching the ultimate spiritual goal.

Mirabai was a royal princess who renounced comfort, family honour and security; crossed caste boundaries with fierce, courageous defiance; and endured persecution to become a devotee. Her poetry, her personality, and her life became a shining example of devotion and a compelling story of struggle and perseverance. Mirabai sometimes refers to



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herself in the third person. This reveals her utter identification with the Divine Reality rather than her individuality.

Mysticism is essentially an intuitive campaign of the heart. It seeks to transcend the limitations of ego by surrendering it to the truth of reality, not to satisfy curiosity or obtain any gain other than to aspire to the heights of pure love.

The core reality that is the substratum and source of the tangible world is present, in a modified form, in every art form. It bestows the power of communicating exalted experiences through poignant emotions. A true mystic is a person in whom such powers transcend the merely artistic stage, in whom the transcendental consciousness can dominate the normal consciousness and in whom the surrender of ego is complete.

Although the Upanishads primarily focus on seeking the ultimate unity of existence, knowing which, everything is known, devotion is not ruled out. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* teaches devotional attitude and discipline with the concept of a Deity who can be communed with, prayed to and who responds to prayers. It says, as quoted in *Bhakti Ratnavali*, 'It is only in an aspirant having supreme devotion to God and also to the Guru that the truths of the Upanishads will fructify a realisation'.<sup>1</sup>

The word 'bhakti' is derived from the word *Bhaj* which means 'to love', 'to serve', 'to honour', 'to adore' and so in the current usage it means 'devotion to God'. Considered almost a Gospel in bhakti, the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* defines bhakti as wholehearted and supreme love of God. There is a sense of complete self-dedication to God and the devotee remains always absorbed in His worship.

*Para bhakti* is the highest form of bhakti. According to Swami Vivekananda, the most important thing needed for the attainment of

supreme devotion is renunciation. This renunciation is 'internal' and comes from the realisation of the impermanence of the world and all matter, including this body. It is only then that the mind turns inward to the spirit or 'the Self' and single-mindedly looks for the higher truth, the Eternal Truth. Without this, the goal cannot be reached. However, for the bhakta, this renunciation comes more as a matter of course, compared to a *jnana yogi*.

While the *jnana yogi* travels on the difficult path of renunciation wherein, from the very start, he has to realise the illusory nature of the world and tear himself away from it, the *bhakti yogi* does not have to forsake anything forcibly, as renunciation comes naturally to him. When love for God intensifies, the bliss he experiences is greater than any other pleasure. This makes the bhakta's mind concentrate only on the Divine; other cravings and attachments fall off on their own. This leads to *vairagya* or renunciation of all things except love for the Divine. All the bindings—forms, images, temples etc.—are loosened and the soul travels beyond all limitations. Swami Vivekananda describes this beautifully in *Bhakti Yoga*:

Nothing remains to bind him or fetter his freedom. A ship, all of a sudden, comes near a magnetic rock and its iron bolts and bars are all attracted and drawn out, and the planks get loosened and freely float on the water. Divine grace thus loosens the binding bolts and bars of the soul, and it becomes free. ... The Bhakta has not to suppress any single one of his emotions; he only strives to intensify them and direct them to God.<sup>2</sup>

When, with one-pointed love, the soul feels anguish at not yet knowing the only one worthy of being known, this deeper longing is called *viraha*. The soul becomes restless, almost insane in its search for the Divine. In this stage of *para bhakti*, the bhakta wants to speak and

listen only about the Divine; any other talk is distasteful. Later, the body serves but for the one ideal of Love—to enjoy the bliss of the Divine. The bhakta becomes pure, and his purpose of life is fulfilled. As he merges into the Divine, everything becomes Divine to him as everything in the world belongs to Him.

In the state of *para bhakti*, the bhakta loves the Lord for love's sake; he cannot help but love the Divine. Nothing is desired in return for this love. It is just the pleasure of loving that is the source of the greatest happiness to the lover, i.e. the bhakta. There is no fear in this love. It is the highest ideal of pure love. The bhakta becomes the object to be worshipped by virtue of this pure love, which is the Lord Himself.

At this stage the bhakta sees the Lord alone everywhere and feels His Power manifest as the entire universe, and naturally recognizes the transcendental nature of God. That is why it is said that *para bhakti* and *jnana* are one. The fruition of both is union with the Divine. It is in this exalted state that Mirabai merged with her beloved Krishna.

Among the various forms of love for the Divine, it is *madhura bhava* (*parakiya bhava*) that is considered the acme of devotion. It is love of the beloved for her lover as the *gopis* of Vrindavan had for Krishna. It is considered the epitome, even superior to *kanta bhava* (wifely devotion), as in it there are no expectations. Like a girl in love with her paramour, the devotee stakes everything for the Lord in utmost confidence—her past, present and future.

Mirabai gave expression to this highest form of Bhakti in her exemplary life. She lived life on her own terms, unafraid of opting out of domesticity and defying existing social norms, ignoring taboos and restrictions of caste and religion. She lived among the masses composing songs of bhakti in a personal style, different

from established literary traditions. She composed poems that expressed a passionate romantic love for God, and eventually 'merging' or 'becoming one' with the Lord enshrined in a holy place.

The acme of spiritual realisation Mirabai achieved conveys contemporary social relevance even in the modern era. Her fierce independence from society thrived in tandem with her intense attachment to her beloved Lord. Bhakti bestows her grace on the sincere, steadfast and zealous devotee, not to the weak or fickle. In Mirabai's words:

My sisters, O my friends,  
Devotion's path is hard;  
It's not for the timid  
Nor for the weak to take.  
The path of devotion  
Only tread the rare brave.<sup>3</sup>

Only an advanced devotee is born with such all-consuming bhakti. One who has reached a level of *chitta shuddhi* (purity of mind), and cultivated qualities like *viveka* (discrimination) and *vairagya* (detachment) evolves to the final stage to become a *jnani bhakta*, an enlightened soul, who is established in the Truth. In this state, there is no expectation or longing for anything as the *jnani* is 'complete'. He has reached the final stage or rung on the ladder of bhakti, and merges into divine effulgence.

Mirabai dove into the 'Sea of Immortality,' which only the truly courageous ones do. Once this plunge is taken, indeed, there is no return. The waves of individuality are lost in the ocean of immortality. Such a pure, untainted devotee is often stigmatised as mad by the world; Mirabai answers the worldly wise in these words:

Mad? Yes, I am insane.  
But the love of my Lord  
Through madness I gained  
I am, indeed, insane,

In the Lord's love, though;  
The joy of my madness,  
Can the world ever know?  
The bliss for which in vain  
Even gods and angels pray,  
In that bliss this mad one  
Does revel night and day.<sup>4</sup>

Higher stages reflect in her poetry as an understanding of the illusory, transient nature of the world and its objects *vis-à-vis* the eternal and 'Indestructible' principle of the Divine. Her tragic life wherein she was persecuted by her family and the society for her boundless devotion to the Lord, led her to this understanding. It served to strengthen her devotion to the Lord and have complete dependence only on the Lord. Mirabai now sings:

False is the ocean of transmigration  
False is bondage to the world  
False all family ties...  
My mind is dyed in the feet of Hari. (77)

After this stage of steering away from the world on the recognition of its falsity and blatant hypocrisy, Mirabai learned to assimilate everything without rejecting anything. She learned to give the apparent world its due place with an in-depth understanding of its changing nature, thereby giving importance to the changeless reality in the form of Her Lord. This transition is evident in Mirabai's poem when she observes astutely:

Do not forget thy duty to serve,  
O servant.  
The joys are of short duration,  
Like the blossom on the pomegranate.  
You came here for the sake of profit,  
But forgot your capital  
And threw it away.  
Mira's Lord is the courtly Giridhara.  
She says:

In this world you must practice detachment. (118)

In *Lead Us to Light*, Mata Amritanandamayi defines 'devotion' as, 'Real devotion is to discriminate between the eternal and the transitory' (210).

A further understanding of the role of discrimination and detachment in bhakti in the context of Mirabai's words of wisdom can be found in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, where Sri Ramakrishna defines discrimination and the role it plays in the life of a person living in the world:

God alone is real and all else illusory – this is discrimination. The clear water goes through the sieve leaving the dirt behind. One strains water through a fine sieve in order to separate the dirt from it. Apply the sieve of discrimination to the world. Live in the world after knowing God.<sup>5</sup>

Discrimination gives a new dimension to a bhakta's journey into renunciation. It begins with external renunciation, the expression of dispassion to the world and evolving commitment to the devotional ideal. External renunciation keeps the mind concentrated on the Lord, steering it away from all distractions. It is also a constant reminder to the seeker of the spiritual goal. There are various poems that shed light on how Mirabai practised external renunciation. She talks about 'shaving the head' and 'donning the ochre' in one of her poems. In another poem she says:

I took up my asana  
And sat in a cave:  
I engaged in contemplation of Hari,  
Beads round my neck,  
Cloth in hand, body covered in ashes.<sup>6</sup>

Armed with this realisation, embellished with dispassion and renunciation, Mirabai sailed forth effortlessly towards her divine goal. The mind, devoid of all distractions and concentrated on the Divine, becomes steady and one-pointed. Gradually, it sinks into deep silence. From the

depth of silence the eternal Truth reveals itself. Mirabai, glimpsing this Truth, sings: I am drowning in the Ocean of Becoming. (54)

Her journey culminated in the realisation of 'Oneness', which is called 'Liberation'. At this stage, she declares with complete conviction:

The Lord and His devotees are one,  
The flower is not separate from its fragrance,  
Merged are they in each other,  
As butter is in milk.<sup>7</sup>

Mirabai's life shows that just as all rivers merge in the ocean, the path of bhakti also eventually leads bhaktas to the ultimate goal of non-duality.

Lord Krishna declares (*Bhagavad Gita*, 8.22):

That highest Purusa, O Arjuna, is attainable by unswerving devotion to Him alone within Whom all beings dwell and by Whom all this is pervaded.

In *para bhakti*, the truth of union with the divine concurs with the non-dual nature of reality as perceived by a jnani. In the ultimate state, the experience of unity is a common factor. Mirabai's life illuminates this truth of the parallel between the paths of bhakti and the non-dual approach. While the paths climb up different sides of the spiritual mountain, the view from the summit is the same. ✱



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# Sri Ramakrishna's Thread of Love for Resolving Conflict

NAVIN CHANDRA MISHRA

**T**he vibrant organisation we know as the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission came up through trials and tribulations in its infancy. While Sri Ramakrishna through his divine vision foresaw a great future, he let each of his disciples grow in their own unique way. The common factor was their love for each other. But for the thread of love woven by him among them, some could have ended up as wandering monks instead of remaining as a cohesive entity. This author is incapable of fathoming those great minds, but nevertheless attempts to highlight some aspects of conflict resolution through examples which may be useful for modern organisations.

## Service of Man

The first serious difference among the disciples arose after Swami Vivekananda returned from the West. He could not convince some of his brother disciples about his new conception of religion, namely, the worship of God through service of Man. They recalled Sri Ramakrishna's advice to aspirants to engage in prayers and meditation in solitude. One of them told Swamiji bluntly, 'You did not preach our Master in America; you only preached yourself.' Swamiji too retorted bluntly to this.

The matter further aggravated one day in Balaram Basu's house when brother disciple Swami Yogananda said that the Master had emphasized bhakti for spiritual seekers and that the philanthropic activities, homes of service,

patriotic work were Swamiji's own peculiar ideas, which were a result of the Western influence and travel in Europe and America. Swamiji burst out on all those present. He became very emotional and went to another room. Some of his brother disciples followed him to find him absorbed in meditation with tears flowing from half-closed eyes. After regaining composure Swamiji came back and spoke softly of his being a slave of Sri Ramakrishna to do his work. Swami Yogananda and others understood that the Master alone was working through him. They stopped being critical. It was the thread of love which held them together at this critical juncture which had strategic importance for the future of the organisation!<sup>1</sup>

An incident recorded in Swami Akhandanandaji's book<sup>2</sup> possibly echoes the outcome of the above conflict resolution. He was having a trying time to arrange food for people at Murshidabad, West Bengal, during the famine of 1897. He wrote to Swami Premananda at Belur. He received a letter of Swami Ramakrishnananda from Chennai, stating, 'You are but a mendicant Sannyasin. It is not possible for you to provide food for thousands of mouths. So you should go back to the Math.' Swami Premananda also replied along similar lines. Swami Vivekananda was overwhelmed with sorrow upon learning this and wrote to him encouragingly. He even sent him two assistants—Surendranath Basu (later Swami Sureswarananda) and Nityananda. He also sent rupees one hundred and fifty out of



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his own savings as the first contribution for the Famine Relief Fund. This finally took shape on a grand scale with the then government also stepping in to provide rice at three rupees a maund (thirty-seven kilograms) and subsequently at two rupees a maund, which was cheaper than the market rate. The seed for service to mankind had been firmly planted!

The lesson here is: a leader must inspire the team members to see the larger objectives and not be limited to a narrow worldview. He must also lead by example. By withdrawing, Swamiji nudged his brother monks to delve deeper and then they understood that Swamiji was working towards the common goal. His encouragement with support to Swami Akhandananda demonstrated his commitment towards service to man. Swamiji did not use any fiat to make others agree to his view.

### Belur Math

A few instances demonstrating mutual love among the brother monks in trying situations at Belur Math are given below for the readers.

Swami Vijnanananda, an engineer by qualification, gave an underestimated budget for building an embankment on the Ganges at Belur. Swami Brahmananda took the risk of going ahead with the project. When Swamiji learnt about exceeding the budget he scolded him harshly. The Swami went to his room and cried. Later Swamiji tearfully apologised: 'Brother, please forgive me. I know how much the Master loved you and never said a harsh word to you. And I, on the other hand, for the sake of this petty work, have verbally abused you and given you pain. I am not fit to live with you. I shall go away to the Himalayas and live in solitude.' Swami Brahmananda, also upset, said, 'Don't say that Swamiji. Your scolding is a blessing. How can you leave us? You are our leader. How shall we function without you?' They both then calmed down.<sup>3</sup>

One day none of the junior monks turned up for vespers in the shrine. Swami Premananda found them attending a class being conducted by Swamiji. He told the monks to come to the shrine. Swamiji angrily said to Premananda, 'Is it your idea that what I am doing here is not worship? When you ring the bell in the shrine, is only that worship?'

Swami Premananda finished the vesper service by himself and went into seclusion. All the monks searched for him but he was not found. Meanwhile Swamiji, feeling remorseful, went into the shrine and struck his forehead repeatedly on the threshold so fiercely that the skin broke and he was bleeding. Swami Premananda was found alone on the roof. Swamiji embraced him and asked for forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>

Swami Vivekananda made a rule that monks in Belur monastery were to get up at 4 a.m. and after washing, sit down for meditation in the shrine room. Those who failed to do so would have to beg for alms that day. Latu Maharaj (Swami Adbhutananda) did not like this rule. He decided to leave the monastery. The next morning as he was leaving with his clothes and towel, Swamiji stopped him and enquired, 'Where are you going?' Latu Maharaj replied, 'To Kolkata.' Swamiji wanted to know the reason for his leaving, to which Latu Maharaj said, 'You have recently returned from the West and are introducing new rules and regulations. It will not be easy for me to abide by them. I do not have that degree of control over my mind that it will quiet down to meditate when a bell is rung. Who knows when my mind may become absorbed? I have not yet reached that state. If you can do it, that is fine.' Swamiji said, 'All right. You can go.' Barely had Latu Maharaj reached the gate when Swamiji called him back and said, 'You don't have to observe this rule. You should do as you like. These rules are meant for the novices.'<sup>5</sup>

The lesson here is that a leader should have empathy, be willing and courageous enough to accept his fault. He should be willing to change his decision. To be able to do this one has to conquer the ego.

### Swami Vivekananda's Works

After appointment as the second President of Mayavati Ashrama, Swami Virajananda had the herculean task of compiling the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (CW)*. Additional data in whatever form were collected from various sources across several countries. Some of the notes of those who attended his lectures had often vital portions missing and needed to be put together. Swami Virajananda and Mother Sevier jointly took up the job of compilation and editing. While Swami Virajananda would try to maintain the idea and message which Swamiji meant to convey, Mother Sevier would not tolerate any compromise in perfection of language. She would exclaim, 'To bring from Swamiji's mouth *such* English, which people will criticize, is certainly not proper!' Frequently, disagreements between them would almost turn into quarrels; yet at the root of the matter was the deep love both had for Swamiji.<sup>6</sup>

On the completion of the fifth volume of *CW* the idea of bringing out a biography of Swami Vivekananda was decided upon by Swami Virajananda and Mother Sevier. At that time one American devotee named Francis (Frank) John Alexander was staying in Mayavati Ashrama. He was a qualified writer and good at typing. Frank was given the proposal to write this biography to

which he gladly agreed and immediately plunged into it sincerely. Swami Virajananda found that his language was simple and forceful, but he made too many repetitions and his understanding of Indian thought and culture was not deep. Swami Virajananda found editing it difficult. Frank would become annoyed at what he thought were unnecessary changes in his manuscript. Mother Sevier had a trying time mediating for peace and progress. Frank expressed his displeasure and said he would not stay at Mayavati and do this job. Frank ultimately shifted to Almora. A few years later a letter of apology for differences of opinion from Frank reached Swami Virajananda in Shyamala Tal. Swami replied offering his love and good wishes. Before returning to America, Frank visited Shyamala Tal on 26 September 1915. He was well received by Swami Virajananda and Mother Sevier. The intensity of their bonding can be gauged from the report of Sister Christine who was at Frank's deathbed in America. He joyously said, 'Swamiji is calling me. I am very eager to join him.'<sup>7</sup>

The lessons that can be drawn from the above examples are that one should have a professional approach towards work and iron out differences without affecting interpersonal relationships. There are many such instances where the strong bond of brotherly love among the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna held them together and enabled resolution of differences inevitable in the building and running of an organization.. This is worth emulating by decision-makers and those in power in any organisation in modern times. \*

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# THE VEDANTA KESARI



First issue of  
*Brahmapradin*, September 1895

He was a much-celebrated and much-feted Swami. His famous address at The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893 had catapulted him to the status of a super star. But Swami Vivekananda was not one to bask in chaffy glory. A letter written from the USA to one of his trusted followers, dated 12 Jan 1895, read, 'I want to preach my ideas for the good of the world. ... What work have you done in the way of advancing the ideas and organising in India? ... My life is more precious than spending it in getting the admiration of the world. I have no time for such foolery.'

Swamiji, as Swami Vivekananda was fondly addressed, loved and revered his motherland as his own mother. Every breath of his aspired for her well-being and every cell in his body yearned that she regain her lost glory. She had been a beacon light for the world until repeated invasions pillaged her ruthlessly and left her not just poverty-stricken but also psychologically drained. The latter struck at the very core, underlining the urgency for immediate redressal. Swamiji's panacea for this lay in India's very own practical and ennobling Vedantic wisdom. Vedanta recognises no weakness. It proclaims that in every individual lies a mine of strength. All that is needed is an effort to draw from it.

Swamiji started looking for the right channel to propagate the powerful message of Vedanta. He opted for the print medium and decided to bring out a journal, giving it the name *Brahmapradin*. In February 1895, he sent from USA \$100 and a letter to his trusted disciple Alasinga Perumal. The letter read: 'Now I am bent upon starting the journal. Herewith I send a hundred dollars ... Hope this will go just a little in starting your paper.'

If selflessness and devotion would have a form, it would have borne the name of Alasinga Perumal. *Brahmapradin* became Alasinga's calling and the first issue rolled out from a press in Broadway, Chennai on 14 September 1895. The magazine included a poem by Swamiji which was specially composed for the occasion. It was titled, *The Song of the Sannyasin*. One verse ran thus:

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

With this message that marked its mission, *Brahmapradin* made a determined entry into the strife-ridden climate of pre-independence India. The birth of the magazine was certainly an occasion for celebration but the struggles were far from over.



First issue of  
*The Vedanta Kesari*, May 1914

## One hundred and ten years and going strong....

One of Swamiji's letters to Alasinga read: 'I learnt from your letter the bad financial state that *Brahmavadin* is in.' This was followed by another letter that carried the line, 'I pledge myself to maintain the paper anyhow.'

Bolstered by this pledge, Alasinga Perumal braved on, surmounting many an impediment. Sadly, Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine. Alasinga's intense anguish morphed into heightened devotion towards the magazine. But the next hurdle in *Brahmavadin's* journey came in 1909, in the form of Alasinga's own demise. In May 1914, the magazine, tottering as it was, floundered and grounded to a halt.

It was at this crucial juncture, that the Ramakrishna Mission stepped in to revive it. The Mission was itself in its nascent stages with many a teething problem but nothing could come in its way of reviving the *Brahmavadin*. For, had not their beloved Swamiji repeatedly said, '*The Brahmavadin is a jewel - it must not perish!*' And so, the very next month when *Brahmavadin* closed down, it was resuscitated with the new name *The Vedanta Kesari*.

The history of *The Vedanta Kesari* is much more than just a tale of sweat, toil, and a dream realised. It is a narrative of Swamiji's passion for India and Alasinga's devotion to his master. It is a celebration of love, transcending forms.

## Appeal

For the last 110 years, without missing a single issue, the magazine has been carrying the invigorating message of Vedanta, and alongside, continuously revamping itself to meet the changing needs of the times.

The relevance of Vedantic wisdom to everyday life is all the more pertinent today than ever before. 'Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached' is the thundering motto of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Mission, as you all know, is a unique organisation where sannyasis and lay people come together and endeavour for the common good. Let's join hands in taking forward our revered Swamiji's vision and mission for *The Vedanta Kesari*.

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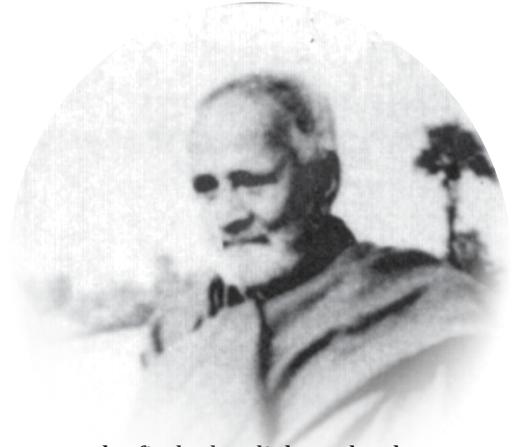
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## Reminiscences of Sargachhi

SRIMAT SWAMI SUHITANANDA JI

(Continued from the previous issue ...)



**Question:** The Raja Yoga mentions—sit steady by restraining your mind. Is that right?

**Maharaj:** Sitting still through restraining your mind, the mind may gradually become subtle, subtler, and finally subtlest till it dissolves completely. But there are innumerable dangers on the way; the aspirant may take the wrong route at any point. But, there is no risk of falling if one's mind takes the form of higher thoughts by meditation through constant remembrance of God. That is why Bhagawan says: न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति — My devotee never perishes (Gita, 9.31).

An unmarried young man used to work in a government office. One day Maharaj called him to Sargachhi, and told him privately: 'See, there is an old woman sitting on the road. You go and give her this saree. However, you have to give it in such a way that you do not see her face and she too does not see your face. Have you understood it?'

Householders have to stick to the path of piety, otherwise they are ruined. One does not know when he is ruined. It happens all of a sudden. There is a Sanskrit verse - आजगाम यदा लक्ष्मीर् नारिकेलफलाम्बुवत् । निर्जगाम यदा लक्ष्मीर् गजभुक्तकपित्थवत् ॥—This means Mother Lakshmi cannot stand even a little bit of impiety. She

leaves as soon as she finds the slightest haphazardness. It is difficult to understand how Mother Lakshmi comes. It is like the accumulation of water in coconut—how does the water rise to such a height! Similarly, we are unable to understand when Lakshmi departs. It's just like a sour wood-apple, *kayet-bel*, which appears to be solid, but when we break it, it's found to be empty. There is a kind of worm called *gaja* – it eats up the pulp from inside.

16.06.62

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon, the news came that Swami Vishuddhananda Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Order, has passed away. He had been operated at Park Nursing Home on the 13<sup>th</sup> (June); he expired at 9 a.m. today. At 1.30 p.m., the news was announced on the radio. As soon as he heard the news, Premesh Maharaj was grief-stricken. His countenance changed. It was obvious that he was terribly shocked. After remaining silent for some time, he started saying: 'Now he is in supreme bliss with Holy Mother. He is in *Ramakrishna-loka*. There won't be *nirvana* (total emancipation). He has met the Mother.'

Somebody asked about the obligatory rituals. At this Maharaj said, 'He was a sanniyasi;



The author, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, presents here his conversations with Swami Premeshananda (1884–1967), a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. ❧

even the obsequies have been performed. There is a [Bengali] saying—*kārā, poḍā, bhāsā, tin vairāgīr āśā*: a monk can hope for three kinds of ends—imprisonment [entombment], cremation and getting floated. However, after Baburam Maharaj passed away, Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] observed the practice of taking *haviṣyānna* (sacred oblatory food) for three days. Sannyasis have no obligation to perform any ritual, this is just a dead body. But as we live in society, we have to eat vegetarian food for three days. But as householders, you will have to follow some injunctions – take oblatory food for three days and vegetarian food for twelve days, don't chew beetle leaves, don't use shoes or umbrellas, and lie down on a bare rug etc. Observe this much. If you do not observe even a little, your children will not do even that much – they will finish their duty by offering 100 rupees in lieu of observing actual rituals.'

### 18.06.62

A young man comes to Sargachhi Ashrama occasionally. A certain Brahmachari's wish is that he become a sadhu – he even persuades him sometimes. Premesh Maharaj observed this, and said, 'If monasticism spreads too much, the society becomes weak. The sannyasis think that they are superior to the householders; and assuming the role of teachers of the masses, they preach that – "Householders have no chance of redemption". That leads the householders to consider themselves as weaker than the monks and thus they harm themselves and the society. The sannyasins and the householders represent two schools, and not two stages. It is a question of evolution. In each school, some members are successful, and some are not. A certain householder's father was a farm-

er in Sylhet – he died with the feet of his Guru on his head. Again, there are sadhus who only enjoy the world – their struggle has just begun.'

**Question:** योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि — Perform actions being established in Yoga (Gita, 2.48). Is it feasible to perform actions while remaining established in Yoga?

**Maharaj:** It is the same as a labourer toiling to earn eight *annas*; and a mother working very hard for her son round the clock.

**Question:** बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते |—endowed with this evenness of mind, one frees oneself in this life from both virtue and vice (Gita, 2.50). Is it possible for the even-minded to commit a vice?

**Maharaj:** Even if he happens to commit something wrong, that affects his body only, not his mind. Therefore, the effect of the vice will affect his body alone, it will not have any impact on his mind. He will then live in the spirit of नैव किञ्चित्करोमीति — I certainly do not do anything (Gita, 5.48). यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला|—When [the intellect] will become unshakeable and steadfast in the Self [firmly established in samadhi]. Here samadhi means thought of God. If the person does not have steady devotion for God, he will run about in a disorganised way; he will busy himself with collection of subscriptions, building of temples etc. Atman is *aprameya* (incommensurable). It cannot be known in the way things are known, Atman is the knower. That is why It is *aprameya*; cannot be measured or [intellectually] conceived in any way.

**सर्वशः** (Gita, 2.58,68) – Nag Mahasaya never had greed for any good food ever in his life. As for ourselves, we sometimes feel like tasting something a little. It is for this that they say test a sadhu by day, and by night.

(To be continued ...)



# Spiritual Aspirants and Weltanschauung

SWAMI ARUNACHALANANDA

‘ब्रह्म सत्यं जगत् मिथ्या’—Brahman is Real, World is unreal,<sup>1</sup> says the famous dictum by Sri Shankaracharya. Vedanta maintains that the general human experience of subject-object divide, i.e. of separation between world and oneself, is a spiritually ignorant outlook. There is an infinite Reality, called Brahman, which is the substratum of the entire world as well as of all living beings; this Reality is Pure Consciousness and Bliss. When a spiritual aspirant realises his or her real Self as this Brahman, the world of multiplicities becomes unreal like a dream and he or she overcomes the subject-object split. Such a seer, for all external appearances, may continue to live a life like any other ordinary human being, but his inner Consciousness is: ‘I am all-pervading, world and everyone in it are within Me, I am in all beings’. Srimad Bhagavad Gita puts it thus: ‘All beings exist in Me’ and ‘I am the Self residing in the hearts of all beings’<sup>2</sup>. And Swami Vivekananda, in one of his class talks, puts it as:

Assert what we really are—existence, knowledge, and bliss—being, knowing, and loving.

Meditation is the means of unification of the subject and object.

Meditate: Above, it is full of me; below, it is full of me; in the middle, it is full of me. I am in all beings, and all beings are in me. Om Tat Sat, I am It. I am existence above mind. I and the one spirit of the universe. I am neither pleasure nor pain.

The body drinks, eats, and so on. I am not the body. I am not mind. I am He.

I am the witness. I look on. When health comes I am the witness. When disease comes I am the witness.

I am Existence, Knowledge, Bliss.<sup>3</sup>

Until a spiritual aspirant reaches this extraordinary height of Advaita experience, despite being sincere and serious in his spiritual practices, he has to confront the basic dichotomy between his ‘inner conviction’ and ‘outer day-to-day experience’. Aspirants on the spiritual path are yet to transcend the duality of subject-object split, and at the same time they have developed the intellectual conviction—



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moulded by critical analysis of life-experiences as well as by studying scriptures—that the world ‘as it appears’ is unreal. Thus they have to continue their lives in a dualistic world experience and yet at the same time they feel within themselves the utter uselessness of duality-filled life. People who are totally immersed in worldliness and hedonistic materialism remain completely ignorant about their real Self as well as about the real nature of world; they do not face this dichotomy acutely; neither is it felt by the select few who have realised their real nature. Thus we can say that serious spiritual aspirants form a class by themselves. In this article an attempt is made to delve a little deeper into this issue and come to some conclusion that would be helpful for spiritual aspirants.

### Need for a Weltanschauung

A well developed Weltanschauung [a particular philosophy or view of life; the world view of an individual or group] guides human life better than stumbling through life buffeted by endless present moment situations. The need for such a Weltanschauung becomes imperative for serious spiritual aspirants. Vedanta scriptures broadly describe three Weltanschauungs:

1. *Srishti-Drishti-Vada* – world is pre-existing and is the primary reality, while the perceiver of it is secondary and transitory.

2. *Drishti-Srishti-Vada* – the perceiver is the primary witness of his perceptions, and the perceived world is secondary and transitory.

3. *Ajata-Vada* – there is no world and no perceiver.

As long as a spiritual aspirant believes in the first view mentioned above, he cannot go deeper into spirituality and has to remain contented at surface level; this is because, in this view, the self remains circumscribed by the

body-mind complex and life-vision remains extroverted. Serious spiritual quest begins when the second view is taken as the main focus of life; Swami Yatiswarananda observes:

The world, even if it exists, exists only as a shadow, not as a reality. It is only a figment of the mind. So long as the world is given a primary importance, primary reality, spiritual life can never begin ...

The trouble is that our mind is so out-going that ordinarily, to us the world is real, i.e. primarily real, but, as long as we have this attitude, there can never be any true devotion. *God must be more real than the world.* As long as we do not even come to doubt the reality of the world, of our waking state, there can never be any real spiritual life.<sup>4</sup>

From the perspective of absolute Reality, both the views of *Srishti-Drishti-Vada* as well as *Drishti-Srishti-Vada* are ultimately false and only the view of *Ajata-Vada* is the absolute Truth; but for our day-to-day ‘experienced-world’ point of view, both *Srishti-Drishti-Vada* and *Drishti-Srishti-Vada* can be utilised by a spiritual aspirant for his spiritual journey. According to Advaita Vedanta, the perceiver (subject) and the perceived (object), are both mind-waves which apparently divide the undivided homogeneous Reality into ‘inner’ and ‘outer’; both subject as well as object appear and disappear simultaneously. Taking this into account we can say that *Srishti-Drishti-Vada*, which treats world as primary, can be utilised for spiritual journey to some extent, but in it Brahman/Self, the ‘creator’ of world and perceiver, has to be given more importance and Bhakti should dominate the mind. And *Drishti-Srishti-Vada*, which treats the perceiver as primary, is directly useful in making the aspirant introspective quicker than *Srishti-Drishti-Vada* and in it the ‘inner’ Self (Atman), which is the ‘substratum’ for the perceiver and the world perceived, is the focus of spiritual quest with Jnana aspect

dominating. A spiritual aspirant should reason within himself and find out which Weltanschauung suits his temperament. With this idea fixed in mind, facing challenges of spiritual life becomes little bit methodical and easier.

### Saints on Weltanschauung

It is interesting to study some of the quotations of great spiritual giants in this respect. Swami Vivekananda had said that Sri Ramakrishna was all Bhakti outside and Jnana inside while he himself was all Jnana outside and Bhakti inside! In California Swami Vivekananda said to Mrs. Edith Allen, 'Madam, be broad minded; always see two ways. When I am on the heights I say, "Shivoham, Shivoham: I am He, I am He!" and when I have the stomach ache I say, "Mother have mercy on me!"'<sup>5</sup>

It seems for conducting empirical world interactions, Srishti-Drishti-Vada is found to be easier as majority of humanity subscribes to it but for developing inner spiritual strength Drishti-Srishti-Vada is found to be more useful.

Sri Ramana Maharshi, the famous 20<sup>th</sup> Century Jnani of Tiruvannamalai, stressed the need of self-enquiry to all serious spiritual aspirants. It is a spiritual technique which traces the source of the fundamental 'I' thought in us to the Self/Atman (i.e. Brahman); every thought in our mind is intrinsically related to the basic 'I'-thought and by continually questioning 'who am I', we are taking ourselves back to our true nature. Here, Drishti-Srishti-Vada is of paramount importance as seen from the following answer to a question given by Sri Ramana Maharshi:

Q: How shall I realise God?

M.: God is an unknown entity. Moreover, He is external. Whereas, the Self is always with you and it is you. Why do you leave out what is intimate and go in for what is external?<sup>6</sup>

Q: Is it possible to gain that consciousness which is beyond thoughts?

M.: Yes. There is only one consciousness, which subsists in the waking, dream and sleep states. In sleep there is no 'I'. The 'I-thought' arises on waking and then the world appears.<sup>7</sup>

Also:

The entire universe is condensed in the body and the entire body in the Heart. Thus the Heart is the nucleus of the whole universe. This world is not other than the mind, the mind is not other than the Heart; that is the whole truth. ...

The source is a point without any dimensions. It expands as the cosmos on the one hand and as Infinite bliss on the other. That point is the pivot. From it a single *vasana* starts and expands as the experiencer ('I'), the experience and the experienced (the world).<sup>8</sup>

Also regarding spiritual aspirants choosing a Weltanschauung and subscribing to theories of creation of world, Sri Ramana Maharshi says:

The Vedanta says that the cosmos springs into view simultaneously with the seer. There is no detailed process of creation. This is said to be *yugapat srishti* (instantaneous creation). It is quite similar to the creations in dream where the experiencer springs up simultaneously with the objects of experience. When this is told, some people are not satisfied for they are so rooted in objective knowledge. They seek to find out how there can be sudden creation. They argue that an effect must be preceded by a cause. In short, they desire an explanation for the existence of the world which they see around them. Then the Srutis try to satisfy their curiosity by such theories of creation. This method of deal-

ing with the subject of creation is called *krama srishti* (gradual creation). But the true seeker can be content with *yugapat srishti*—instantaneous creation.<sup>9</sup>

Vedanta takes into account the confusion of humanity regarding the world and hence describes *krama srishti* i.e. Srishti-Drishti-Vada, only to point out the source material of the universe as Pure Consciousness-Bliss i.e. Brahman. The cosmic evolution process is narrated not for its own sake but to stress the material cause of the universe, which is also immanent in the phenomenon. And thus make the spiritual aspirant focus on Self/God and not on the world.

In Sri Ramakrishna's teachings we find stress on Bhakti and not on dry intellectual discussions or pursuit of *siddhis* (extra-sensory powers). Whenever he was asked about essence of spiritual practice or about Vedanta or about *siddhis*, he would invariably say that 'To love God is the essence'. Here we can say that in this way Sri Ramakrishna was pointing to the essential element in Srishti-Drishti-Vada and Drishti-Srishti-Vada—God/Self is more important than world. His following teaching is indicative of this:

Is it possible to understand God's action and His motive? He creates, He preserves, and He destroys. Can we ever understand why He destroys? I say to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I do not need to understand. Please give me love for Thy Lotus Feet.' The aim of human life is to attain bhakti. As for other things, the Mother knows best. I have come to the garden to eat mangoes. What is the use of my calculating the number of trees, branches, and leaves? I only eat the mangoes; I don't need to know the number of trees and leaves.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's famous mantra for spiritual aspirants—'*Naham Naham, Tuhu*

*Tuhu*' i.e. 'not my will but Thy Will be done, O Lord'—is a Bhakti technique to overcome the hurdle of ego. It is an indirect way of saying 'Brahman is Real, World is unreal!'

Swami Vivekananda refers to Drishti-Srishti-Vada when he says, 'the world we have been thinking of so long, the world to which we have been clinging so long, is a false world of our own creation. Give that up; open your eyes and see that as such it never existed; it was a dream, Maya.'<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Swami Virajananda, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order, says, 'The universe and the body are both simultaneously revealed to me. I have no right to say that the body is mine and the universe is not mine. Both are mine because both are revealed to me.'<sup>12</sup>

Spiritual aspirants can find numerous quotations from thousands of saints world over stressing the need to focus more on God and less on world.

### Scriptures on Weltanschauung

The three main schools of thought in Vedanta, namely dualism (*Dvaita*), qualified non-dualism (*Vishishtadvaita*), and non-dualism (*Advaita*), can be said to represent Srishti-Drishti-Vada, Drishti-Srishti-Vada, and Ajata-Vada respectively. The sense of reality of the world is most acutely felt in dualism and in Srishti-Drishti-Vada, the same is somewhat reduced in qualified non-dualism and in Drishti-Srishti-Vada, while in Advaita and in Ajata-Vada it can be said to be totally wiped out. Corresponding to these three systems, the following words of Jesus Christ can also be thought of as representative of these three views: 'Father in Heaven' akin to Srishti-Drishti-Vada, 'Kingdom of Heaven is Within' to Drishti-Srishti-Vada, and 'I and My Father are One' to Ajata-Vada.

If we study *Mandukya Upanishad* along with the exhaustive *Mandukya Karika* on it, then we see that primarily the *Upanishad* points to *Ajata-Vada*, and for the sake of meditation/*upasana* *Drishti-Srishti-Vada* is elaborated. One of the famous *karika* (verse) says: ‘न निरोधो न चोत्पत्तिर्न बद्धो न च साधक। न मुमुक्षुर्न वै मुक्त एत्येषा परमार्थता॥; In Truth there is no origination, no dissolution, none in bondage, none striving or aspiring for freedom, and none liberated.’<sup>13</sup> Another *karika* says: ‘प्रपञ्चो यदि विद्येत निर्वर्तेत न संशय। मायामात्रमिदं द्वैतमद्वैतं परमार्थतः॥ If the perceived manifold were real then certainly it would disappear. This duality (which is cognized) is mere illusion (*Maya*). Non-duality is (alone) the Supreme Reality.’<sup>14</sup> Commenting on this *karika* *Sri Shankaracharya* says in the beginning, ‘This manifold being only a false imagination, like the snake in the rope, does not really exist.’<sup>15</sup> Other scriptural texts that have a similar approach are: *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Ashtavakra Gita*, *Ribhu Gita* etc.

Many Puranas as well as *Vaishnava*, *Shai-va*, and *Shakta* Agamas extol primarily *Srishti-Drishti-Vada* and try to drill *Bhakti* in the hearts of spiritual aspirants. Even in *Upanishads* *Srishti-Drishti-Vada* is explained, for those who are inclined to think primarily in terms of the phenomenon; the *Mundaka Upanishad* says: ‘तपसा चीयते ब्रह्म ततोऽन्नमभिजायते। अन्नत्प्राणो मनः सत्यं लोकाः कर्मसु चामृतम्॥ Through knowledge Brahman increases in size. From that is born (the unmanifested) food. From food evolves *Prana* (*Hiranyagarbha*); (thence the cosmic) mind, (thence) the five elements; (thence) the worlds; (thence) the immortality that is in *karmas*.’<sup>16</sup> Before starting his commentary on this mantra, *Sri Shankaracharya* says, ‘the universe while emerging out of Brahman, does so in this order of succession and not simultaneously like a handful of jujubes thrown down.’<sup>17</sup> The *Taittiriya Upanishad* too gives a

sequence for manifestation of the phenomenal world: ‘तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः संभूतः। आकाशद्वायुः। वायोरग्निः। अग्नेरापः। अद्भ्यः पृथिवी। पृथिव्या ओषधयः। ओषधीभ्योऽन्नम्। अन्नात्पुरुषः। ... From that Brahman, which is the Self, was produced space. From space emerged air. From air was born fire. From fire was created water. From water sprang up earth. From earth were born the herbs. From the herbs was produced food. From food was born man. ...’<sup>18</sup>

As for the *Drishti-Srishti-Vada*, a *karika* from *Mandukya Karika* says, ‘कल्पयत्यात्मना आत्मानमात्मा देवः स्वमायया। स एव बुध्यते भेदानिति वेदान्तनिश्चयः॥ The self-effulgent Self imagines Itself through Itself by the power of Its own *Maya*. The Self Itself cognizes the objects. Such is the definite conclusion of *Vedanta*.’<sup>19</sup>

Spiritual aspirants can go through the words of saints and various scriptures carefully to choose a proper *Weltanschauung* suitable to their temperament.

## Conclusion

In *Vedanta*, the absolute Reality (infinite Pure Consciousness-Bliss i.e. Brahman) is the only substratum existing; names and forms, time and space, world and souls are appearances in It. Also the waking, dream, and deep-sleep states of a soul (*sthani* or soul experiencing these states, technically called *vishwa*, *taijasa*, and *prajna* respectively) and corresponding waking world, dream world, and ‘world-less void’ of deep-sleep (*sthan* or sphere of activity, technically called *virat*, *hiranyagarbha*, and *ishwara* respectively) are too imagined in Brahman. Thus ultimately ‘*Ajata-Vada*’ alone can be said to be true, while ‘*Srishti-Drishti-Vada*’ and ‘*Drishti-Srishti-Vada*’ are imagined appearances in Brahman. Keeping this supreme knowledge in mind, spiritual aspirants should decide which *Weltanschauung* can best guide their spiritual journey.

The importance of proper Weltanschauung in all walks of life, especially so for spiritual aspirants, cannot be overemphasized. The following words of Swami Vivekananda highlight this. Swamiji mentions about his interaction with Robert Green Ingersoll, the famous 19<sup>th</sup> Century agnostic speaker:

In America there was a great agnostic, a very noble man, a very good man, and a very fine speaker. He lectured on religion, which he said was of no use; why bother our heads about other worlds? He employed this simile: we have an orange here, and we want to squeeze all the juice out of it. I met him once and said, 'I agree with you entirely. I have some fruit, and I too want to squeeze out the juice. Our difference lies in the choice of the fruit. You want an orange, and I prefer a mango. You

think it is enough to live here and eat and drink and have a little scientific knowledge. ... I want to understand the heart of things, the very kernel itself. Your study is the manifestation of life, mine is the life itself. ... I must know the heart of this life, its very essence, what it is, not only how it works and what are its manifestations. I want the why of everything, I leave the how to children.<sup>20</sup>

Also Swami Vivekananda highlights the importance of a goal in life, 'If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal.'<sup>21</sup>

Let every human being, and especially every spiritual aspirant, have a Weltanschauung that would take him or her closer to God or Self. \*



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# The Humbling of Durgadas Pyne

GITANJALI MURARI

*A fictional narrative based on incidents from the childhood of Sri Ramakrishna.*

Out on a stroll with friends, Durgadas Pyne stopped in his tracks and said, 'You see these women? They shouldn't be roaming about like this. No one in Kamarpukur has ever seen the ladies of my house and no man outside of the family is allowed into their quarters. I'm very strict about this,' he boasted, 'women are safe only behind high walls.'

Overhearing the remarks, Gadai retorted, 'Women cannot be protected like that kaka.'

'Eh? What do you mean?'

'Only good moral training and devotion to God can protect them. What can walls do? If I want, I can go inside their quarters and find out everything.'

'Ha,' scoffed Durgadas, 'not even a fly can get past me my boy.'

'We'll see about that kaka,' Gadai smiled and continued on his way.

Days went by and Durgadas forgot the conversation. He was enjoying an after-dinner smoke in his parlour one evening when his servant ushered in a poor woman. 'Sir, this weaver is from Anur. She asked to meet you.'

Durgadas looked at the girl with some concern. Even though her face was partially covered with her coarse cotton sari, he could tell she was still a child. Clutching an empty basket, she shivered from either cold or fright.

'Why are you alone in Kamarpukur at this hour?' he asked.

The girl bent her head. 'I came with my companions to attend the fair,' she began timidly, 'after selling the yarn, we went to the Mukundapur Shiva temple. I got separated from the others there. I tried, oh so very hard, to find them,' she sighed, 'then I set out for Anur hoping to meet them on the road but it became dark. Someone directed me to your house. Please help me father. I'll stay only for the night and leave at first light.'

Durgadas nodded approvingly. The girl was modest and well-mannered. 'Go to the women's quarters. They'll take good care of you.' Stammering out her thanks, the weaver followed the servant down a long passage. It had rooms on either side and she peeked into them, asking the servant many questions. Finally, they went into a large room where she met the women and children of the family. Being a friendly soul, she was soon chattering away and after a hearty dinner, prepared to lie down. Just then a loud shout from outside the window startled everyone in the room.

'Gadai O Gadai, where are you?' called out a familiar voice urgently.

The weaver-girl started up and to everyone's shock, ran to the window. 'Ramesh-



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Illustrator: Smt Lalithaa Thyagarajan. ூ



war dada,' she cried, 'I'm here, I'm coming home.'

'Gadai?' gasped the women and the weaver, throwing off the sari from her head, instantly transformed into a boy. Dashing out into the passage, he bumped into Durgadas.

'I've met all the ladies kaka,' Gadai waved cheerfully, 'and I've seen every room!'

Durgadas's jaw dropped. Hurrying inside, he was taken aback to see his family doubled up with laughter. 'He's so endearing, baba,' his

daughters at last managed to say, 'and so pure. He told us such uplifting stories. Oh please allow us to meet him.'

A rueful smile tugged at Durgadas's mouth. 'I recall his words now. He has certainly proved his point,' he admitted, adding after a moment, 'in that case, you may meet him at Sitanath's house.' As the delighted women began to thank him, he held up a warning finger, 'But Gadai cannot come in here, not even in the guise of a god!' \*



## Seva for Culture as Dharma Practice

RAMASUBRAMANIAN O.B.

‘We both have been volunteering at the Boston Ashrama’, said my host in Boston. The Ashrama has several such dedicated volunteers. A senior devotee whom I met said, ‘Some of us have been coming here for nearly three decades. Every weekend regardless of the Sun or snow or holidays, volunteers come here. Some devotees had come earlier with small children and now it is heartening to see the children grow up and they are coming with their children as well. The Pooja, lectures, retreats, and all other activities here are all managed by the volunteers, she added stating that ‘Swamiji here insists that we attend to our own families first and only then volunteer here, that the seva begins at home’.

‘We go to the Balaji temple during the weekends and volunteer at the canteen there’, said my host in Chicago. This working couple has been volunteering at the local temple. ‘We are not particular about any work, we take up whatever work is available. It is not about what we do as much as what needs to be done’, her spouse said. ‘It is a way of staying connected with our culture and customs here’, he added. Last year when the temple had a new section being inaugurated, this couple managed to do a large *kolam* (Rangoli) in front of the temple amidst freezing temperatures, which was appreciated by everyone. The canteen in the temple serves Indian food apart from Prasad. ‘Families drive long distances, sometimes three to four hours to get here. So, it becomes important to provide them with food’, said the temple priest.

When people move far away from their centre of faith, how do they re-establish the core principles of their faith in a new culture? Do they miss their native country? Those who had moved to America from India, said, ‘For us religion is a memory of spending time with our grandparents, of a different kind of life. We know that there is something more profound than what we have in our life currently!’ They also see their parents and other elders volunteering as a way of practising religion. Some younger scholars who are doing deeper studies on religious and cultural texts added that ‘We are proud of our Indian heritage and legacy. But we were born and brought up here. So, we are trying to understand the literature and its relevance to the way of life here’, said one researcher. ‘There is so much of appreciating diversity and freedom in our scriptures, that is refreshing and seems relevant today. To explore and articulate the same to ourselves and others is critical’, completed another young scholar. These scholars are also helping students from diverse communities and faiths to express themselves. They have regular reading sessions and invite scholars to join them.

Service and renunciation are the core of the Indian faith system as Swami Vivekananda has emphasized. Listening to several people in the USA, it is clear that the majority are interpreting it in newer ways as dictated by the current needs. It is amazing to see that Swamiji’s words and the work of several institutions that are inspired by his words are influencing the manifestation of India’s core ideals deep in the foreign land. ✨



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# The Story of Zero

ANKIT ARORA

**M**athematics today owes its existence in part to the discovery of zero. It would be not be an overstatement if we say, no single mathematical concept ever has been more potent than Zero. Today, denoted as a small circle in nearly every part of the world, zero has a long history of origin, starting from the early Vedic period. The idea of zero would probably have stemmed from the need to name or denote nothingness, a connotation which has no intrinsic value or properties. The two most common Sanskrit words in Indian mathematics for zero are śūnya and *kha*. *R̥gveda* uses the word *kha* for empty space, cavity, hollow, aperture, vacuity, sky and the great Void. While the *Bṛhādāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* identifies *kham* with Brahman, the Supreme Spirit, indicating that the śūnya or *kha* is not a mere void, it has immense possibilities and carries the essence of all that is yet to be formed or created. The term *lopa* (elision, disappearance, absence) has been used in *Pāṇini's* grammar treatise (700 BCE), where he says *adarśanaṃ lopaḥ*, that is non-visibility is *lopa*, a concept analogous to zero and as a tool similar to the 'null operator' in higher mathematics. Unfortunately, mathematical texts from the time of Pāṇini have not survived.

While the structure of the Sanskrit vocabulary indicates the knowledge of the concept of zero, in the absence of any direct palaeographic record, one does not know how numbers were written in the far-off Vedic times, when the idea of zero occurred in the context of number representation. Śūnya appears as a symbol

in *Piṅgalācārya's* prosody text (300 BCE) while enunciating an algorithm. The choice of the labels suggests the prevalence of the mathematical zero and possibly a zero-symbol by his time. In the Bakhshali Manuscript, the oldest extant manuscript of Indian mathematics (200 CE), both a small circle as well as a dot are used for zero. In *Amarakośa* (400 CE), the oldest extant thesaurus, zero (śūnyam bindau) was represented by a dot.

Āryabhaṭa (500 CE), the first of the major mathematician-astronomers from the classical age, has made intricate use of the concepts of zero and place value for several operations on numbers in *Gaṇita*. The fact that these concepts are briefly stated without elaboration indicates that the decimal place value with the notation of zero had already become firmly entrenched in Indian arithmetic.

Zero in the decimal system was initially just a notation as a placeholder in a place value numeral system, indicating absence of all the nine digits. However, in modern mathematics, the abstract concept of zero as an integer in a number system is a central idea, a number which is amenable to arithmetic operations. This profound step of elevating zero to a *saṅkhyā*, an algebraic number and not a mere placeholder appeared for the first time in India. *Brahmagupta*, in his book *Brāhmasphuṭasiddhānta* (628 CE) defines zero along with the algebraic rules for elementary operations of arithmetic with zero, which are quite close to our modern understanding. ✨



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# Vivekananda Way

ISSUE 66



## Series 5: Understanding India - through Swami Vivekananda's eyes

In this series we understand India through Swami Vivekananda's eyes, and thereby build a deeper appreciation of the country. We explore the key messages of the 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora', delivered by Swami Vivekananda on his return from the West. Currently, we are exploring his lecture on "The Vedanta", delivered in Lahore on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1897.

### focus in this issue:

## The Vedanta - part 3

This Issue carries the third part of the lecture: The Vedanta (at Lahore), in which the ideas of mind, Atman, Paramatman, and the infinite potential of the soul are discussed:

### 1 The limits of our knowing



**What we know of... is moulded, formed, fashioned by our own mind**

“ The whole universe is like the pearl which is being formed by us.

- What we get from the external world is simply the blow. Even to be conscious of that blow we have to react, and as soon as we react, we really project a portion of our own mind towards the blow, and when we come to know of it, it is really our own mind as it has been shaped by the blow.
- Therefore it is clear, that supposing we represent the external world by "x", what we really know is "x" plus mind, and this mind-element is so great that it has covered the whole of the "x" which has remained unknown and unknowable throughout.
- Therefore, if there is an external world, it is always unknown and unknowable. What we know of it is as it is moulded, formed, fashioned by our own mind.
- So with the internal world. The same applies to our own soul, the Atman. In order to know the Atman we shall have to know It through the mind; and, therefore, what little we know of this Atman is simply the Atman plus the mind. That is to say, the Atman covered over, fashioned and moulded by the mind, and nothing more.

### Analog of the Pearl

A grain of sand enters into the shell of a pearl oyster, and sets up an irritation there, and the oyster's body reacts towards the irritation and covers the little particle with its own juice. That crystallises and forms the pearl.

So the whole universe is like that, it is the pearl which is being formed by us.



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## 2 The Real Soul – the Atman of man



**The idea is this, that in spite of this continuous change in the body, and in the mind, there is in us something that is unchangeable**



This body is the name of one continuous stream of matter — every moment we are adding material to it, and every moment material is being thrown off by it — like a river continually flowing, vast masses of water always changing places; yet all the same, we take up the whole thing in imagination, and call it the same river.

- What do we call the river?

Every moment the water is changing, the shore is changing, every moment the environment is changing, what is the river then? It is the name of this series of changes. So with the mind. This is the Kshanika Vijnâna Vâda doctrine.

- We shall regard the mind as a similar river, continually filling itself at one end and emptying itself at the other end. Where is that unity which we call the Atman?

- The idea is this, that in spite of this continuous change in the body, and in spite of this continuous change in the mind, there is in us something that is unchangeable, which makes our ideas of things appear unchangeable.

- When rays of light coming from different quarters fall upon a screen, or a wall, or upon something that is not changeable, then and then alone it is possible for them to form a unity, then and then alone it is possible for them to form one complete whole.

- Where is this unity in the human organs, falling upon which, as it were, the various ideas will come to unity and become one complete whole? This certainly cannot be the mind itself, seeing that it also changes.

- Therefore there must be something which is neither the body nor the mind, something which changes not, something permanent, upon which all our ideas, our sensations fall to form a unity and a complete whole; and this is the real soul, the Atman of man.

- And seeing that everything material, whether you call it fine matter, or mind, must be changeful, seeing that what you call gross matter, the external world, must also be changeful in comparison to that — this unchangeable something cannot be of material substance; therefore it is spiritual, that is to say, it is not matter — it is indestructible, unchangeable.

### Analog of the River



The river is continuously flowing, and the water is continuously changing, yet there is a unity in it, which makes us call it the river.

Similarly, all our ideas and sensations, fall to form a unity and a complete whole; and this is the real soul, the Atman of man.

### 3 The Soul of Souls – the Paramatman



**Apart from those old arguments which only rise in the external world,  
...the idea here is to know truth only from the inner nature of man**

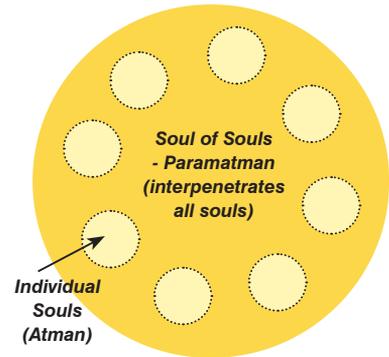
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Taking for granted that there is a soul, unchangeable, in each man, which is neither the mind nor the body, there is still a unity of idea among the souls, a unity of feeling, of sympathy.

- How is it possible that my soul can act upon your soul, where is the medium through which it can work, where is the medium through which it can act?  
How is it I can feel anything about your souls? What is it that is in touch both with your soul and with my soul?
- Therefore there is a metaphysical necessity of admitting another soul, for it must be a soul which acts in contact with all the different souls, and in and through matter — one Soul which covers and interpenetrates all the infinite number of souls in the world, in and through which they live, in and through which they sympathise, and love, and work for one another.
- And this universal Soul is Paramâtman, the Lord God of the universe.
- Again, it follows that because the soul is not made of matter, since it is spiritual, it cannot obey the laws of matter, it cannot be judged by the laws of matter.
- It is, therefore, unconquerable, birthless, deathless, and changeless.
- We learn according to the Gita and the Vedanta that this individual Self is also Vibhu — i.e. all-pervading, and according to Kapila, is omnipresent.
- There are sects in India which hold that the Self is Anu, infinitely small; but what they mean is Anu in manifestation; its real nature is Vibhu, all-pervading.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः।  
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः॥  
नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः॥

#### The nature of Consciousness



### 4 The Infinite Reservoir



**I beg you to pay attention to this one idea and to remember it, for  
this is the very foundation of everything that we have in India**

- The doctrine of physical evolution preached in the Western world says that the bodies of the different animals are really one; the differences that we see are but different expressions of the same series; that from the lowest worm to the highest and the most saintly man it is but one — the one changing into the other, and so on, going up and up, higher and higher, until it attains perfection.

>>  
continued

- India too had this idea. जात्यन्तरपरिणामः प्रकृत्यापूरात्।  
According to Patanjali —  
One species, the Jāti is species, changes into another species — evolution; Parināma means one thing changing into another, just as one species changes into another.
- *What is the difference between the Indian view and the European view?*
  - According to the Indian view, it is Prakṛtyāpurāt, "by the infilling of nature".
  - According to the European view, it is competition, natural and sexual selection, etc. that forces one body to take the form of another.
  - But in India it is said that it is through the infilling of nature.
- *What is meant by this infilling of nature?*
  - The Indian view admits that the amoeba goes higher and higher until it becomes a Buddha.
  - But, if you want a mass of energy at one end, you have got to put it in at the other end; it may be in another form, but the amount of energy that should be produced out of it must be the same.
  - Therefore, if a Buddha is the one end of the change, the very amoeba must have been the Buddha also.
  - If the Buddha is the evolved amoeba, the amoeba was the involved Buddha also.

### Patanjali's Analog



Says Patanjali: "Like the peasant irrigating his field."

Through a little corner of his field he brings water from a reservoir somewhere, and perhaps he has got a little lock that prevents the water from rushing into his field. When he wants water, he has simply to open the lock, and in rushes the water of its own power.

The power has not to be added, it is already there in the reservoir. So every one of us, every being, has as his own background such a reservoir of strength, infinite power, infinite purity, infinite bliss, and existence infinite — only these locks, these bodies, are hindering us from expressing what we really are to the fullest.



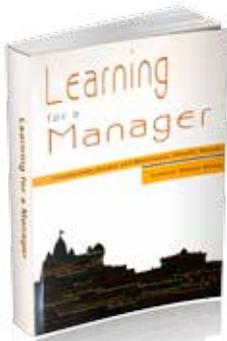
**Every soul is infinite. From the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the noblest and greatest saints, all have this infinite power, infinite purity, and infinite everything. Only the difference is in the degree of manifestation. The worm is only manifesting just a little bit of that energy, you have manifested more, another god-man has manifested still more: that is all the difference. But that infinite power is there all the same.**

**TO BE CONTINUED...**

# BOOK REVIEW

## **LEARNING FOR A MANAGER, by Prof. Subhash Bhave.**

*Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust, No.5, Singarachari Street, Triplicane, Chennai-600 005. Email: vkpt@kendra.org. 2016; paperback; pp.280; ₹125.*



Swami Vivekananda had predicted that even after he left his mortal body he would continue to work and inspire generations to come to carry on his unfinished work. The magnificent mid-sea Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari

commemorates his hallowed memory, and the spiritually oriented, 'living and dynamic' service mission, Vivekananda Kendra, translates his 'man-making and nation-building' vision into reality. These are but two outstanding instances, which owe their existence to Swamiji's undying source of inspiration. And the histories of both, the Rock Memorial and the Kendra, are closely bound up with the life of a 'heroic patriot', Mananeeya Eknathji Ranade (1914–1982), who exemplified in his life's mission Swamiji's exhortation to 'take up one idea, make that one idea your life'.

The book under review highlights the vision and mission of Eknathji, viewed from the perspective of modern management studies. The author quotes copiously from Eknathji's books like 'The Story of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial', 'Sadhana of Service' and some of the innumerable letters written by him (more than

22,000 between 1963 and 1982!) and also books written by others, including modern management experts, to analyse the extraordinary managerial acumen, skills and capabilities Eknathji possessed; his clarity of vision, the precision and perfection of his methodology and the multi-dimensional approaches he practised to overcome formidable odds to fulfil his noble mission. Although he was not a professional manager, his plans, strategies, organisational and communication skills can serve as an infallible practical guide to those who undertake voluntary organisational works.

The book contains a brief life sketch of Eknathji and traces his close association with the R.S.S. An organiser and motivator par excellence, an effective communicator, an inspiring leader and 'a man of steel', even while he was young, won the appreciation of such stalwarts as Shri Guruji Golwalkar and Sardar Patel. He was instrumental in compiling and publishing 'The Rousing Call to Hindu Nation', a selection of Swamiji's writings and speeches in 1963, his birth centenary year. So, when Eknathji was called upon to take up his destined mission at the age of 49 — Phase I of which was the construction of the Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari to perpetuate the memory of Swamiji at the place where he meditated and where he had the vision of a future India, and Phase II, the more important, 'the living and vibrant monument', the Vivekananda Kendra, capable of bringing into fruition Swamiji's grand vision of an integrated and rejuvenated India — he was

in all readiness. It was here that Swamiji decided to set up an organisation of selfless monks, with renunciation and service as their ideals, for his man-making and nation-building mission, which culminated in the establishment of the Ramakrishna Order. Eknathji conceived Vivekananda Kendra on the lines of the Ramakrishna Mission, as a service organisation, but to be manned and run by non-sannyasins dedicated to life-long service—an ongoing Centre for training and moulding an all-India cadre of selfless workers, both men and women, to be deployed particularly in the backward areas of the country for the social and spiritual upliftment of the people.

The main part of the book consists of chapters titled Vision and Mission, Planning and Strategy, Organising, Project Management, Human Resource Development and Communication, which give an idea of the various management dimensions and principles under which Eknathji's work is analysed and studied. The construction of the Rock Memorial in itself was a formidable task. A work of this magnitude involved a lot of ordeals, mobilising the requisite man power and material, getting the requisite permissions from the authorities, collecting the needed funds and organising and executing the work to perfection. Even while the work on the Memorial was in progress, Eknathji was planning and visualising the more ambitious and nation building project—Vivekananda Kendra. Hence, no sooner the Memorial

was inaugurated in 1970, than he began the work of the Kendra in right earnest. That was another and greater saga of firm will, hard work, precise planning, team work and meticulous execution. He not only fulfilled this second mission but also saw to it that its services expanded, awakening and benefitting the target people all over the country before he breathed his last. Today the Kendra has 810 active Branches within the country, runs 10 trusts, and implements over 22 development projects, not a mean record by any standard. Included in these chapters are his 'Alasinga way' of fund collection, covering every section of society, financial discipline and commendable inter-personal relations.

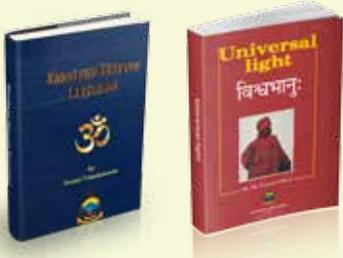
Selection of the right type of people, training, moulding and deploying them was the most challenging of all tasks and the book reveals how well he accomplished it.

In the Appendices, extracts from Eknathji's writings, correspondences, appeals and approvals are given to substantiate the contents. Some of the repetitions, however, could have been avoided. A few spelling and grammatical errors are also noticed.

The book is not only a fitting tribute to Eknathji on his birth centenary year, but also a vindication of Swamiji's assurance that seemingly incredible things can be achieved by one who has faith in himself, one who has sincerity, holiness, gigantic intellect and all-conquering will.

PROF. S. RADHAKRISHNAN, TRICHUR.

Books Received



**SANATANA DHARMA EXPLAINED** by Swami Vimalananda

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Sasthamangalam,  
Thiruvananthapuram - 695010. Email: thiruvananthapuram@  
rkmm.org. 2022; hardbound; p. 480; price: ₹450/-

**THE UNIVERSAL LIGHT** by Dr. P.K. Narayana Pillai. Sri  
Ramakrishna Ashrama, Sasthamangalam, Thiruvananthapuram  
- 695010. 1979; paperback; p. 288; price: ₹270/-



# The Order on the March

*News & Notes from Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*

**New Centres and Sub-centres:** ❖ Ramakrishna Math, **Dakshineshwar** is now a full-fledged branch centre. The address of the centre is 'Ramakrishna Math, 22, T N Biswas Road, Dakshineshwar, Kolkata 700035', phone number: 74394 89799 and email: <dakshineshwar@rkmm.org>. ❖ Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Ujjain, was taken over and a new centre of the Ramakrishna Mission started there last month. The address of the centre is 'Ramakrishna Mission, Triveni, Indore Road, **Ujjain**, Madhya Pradesh 456006', phone number: 0734-2991422, and email: <ujjain@rkmm.org>. The Ashrama was founded in 1985. ❖ A sub-centre of **Somsar** branch was formally inaugurated at Indas in Bankura district by the General Secretary on 24 September, following the taking over of Indas Sri Ramkrishna-Gouri Pandit Smriti Kendra. In this connection, special worship, *homa*, a procession, a public meeting and bhajans were held. Indas is the birthplace of Gourikanta Tarkabhusan (Gouri Pandit), a renowned scholar and ascetic who was associated with Sri Ramakrishna. The address of the sub-centre is 'Ramakrishna Mission, Divakar Bati, **Indas**, Dist. Bankura, West Bengal 722205'. ❖ In Malaysia, Sri Ramakrishna Panimandram (in Johor state) and Sri Ramakrishna Dhivya Sangam (in Perak state) were taken over by Ramakrishna Mission, **Malaysia**, and made its sub-centres. In this connection, a day-long programme was held at Malaysia centre on 31 August. The addresses of the sub-centres are: 'Ramakrishna Mission, No. 9, Jalan 12, Taman Sri Kulang, 86000 Kluang, **Johor**, Malaysia' and 'Ramakrishna Mission, Pt. 130057, Lorong Jelapang 44/1, Jelapang Tambahan, 30020 Ipoh, **Perak**, Malaysia'.

**News of Branch Centres:** ❖ Swami Gautamanandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, inaugurated the working women's hostel at **Chennai Sarada Vidyalaya** on 27 August. The hostel had been discontinued in 2016 owing to the dilapidated condition of its building. It is now reopened after the repair and renovation of the building. ❖ Srimat Swami Smarananandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Order, laid the foundation stone for a medical building at **RKMVERI** (deemed university) on 7 September, the sacred Krishna Janmashtami, in the presence of Swami Bhajananandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Suviranandaji, the General Secretary, and several monks, faculty and students. ❖ A bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled at **Kalady** centre on 11 September. ❖ **Narottam Nagar** centre held the concluding function of its centenary celebration on 11 September. Sri Kaiwalya Trivikram Parnaik, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh; Sri Wangki Lowang, Cabinet Minister in the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, and others took part in the programme. ❖ Srimat Swami Smarananandaji laid the foundation stone for the proposed Sri Ramakrishna Temple at **Dakshineshwar** centre on 13 September, the sacred birthday of Swami Advaitanandaji Maharaj. Swami Girishanandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, along with Swami Suviranandaji and others spoke in the public meeting held in this connection. About 800 devotees and 175 monks attended the programme. ❖ Swami Suviranandaji opened Sarada Bhavan at **Kailashahar** ashrama on 18 September. The building will house a dispensary and

other units. ❖ Srimat Swami Smarananandaji dedicated 'Chinu Shankharir Bari and Gadadhar Vidyamandir' at **Kamarpukur** on 19 September. This new building of Kamarpukur centre stands as a memorial to Chinu Shankhari at the place where he lived and adored the boy Gadadhar, as Sri Ramakrishna was known in his childhood. ❖ Swami Suviranandaji opened Chandramani Bhawan (monks' quarters) at **Viveknagar** centre, Agartala, on 19 September. ❖ The newly constructed boys' hostel at Irakbhatti tribal development centre of **Narainpur** Ashrama was opened on 27 September. ❖ The off-campus centre of **RKMVERI** (deemed university) in **Ranchi Morabadi** centre held its convocation on 27 September. In all, 158 successful candidates were awarded certificates and degrees. The Chief Minister of Jharkhand Sri Hemant Soren, Agriculture Minister of Jharkhand Sri Badal Patralekh and Swami Suviranandaji addressed the students. ❖ A team of six students of **Chennai Vidyapith** won the first prize in the music competition conducted by Akashvani Chennai on 24 and 25 August. Smt Tamilisai Soundararajan, Governor of Telangana & Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, presented the award at a programme in Chennai on 3 September. ❖ The Education Department of the Government of West Bengal presented the 'Sera Vidyalaya Sammanana' (Best School Award) to our six schools at **Asansol, Kamarpukur, Malda, Medinipur, Narendrapur** and **Sarisha** centres on 5 September, Teachers' Day. Each school received a trophy, a citation and a sum of one lakh rupees. In all, only eleven schools in West Bengal received the award for academic excellence this year; out of which six belonged to the Ramakrishna Mission. ❖ A teacher at our **Narottam Nagar** school received the National Teachers' Award from Smt Droupadi Murmu, President of India, at a function held in Delhi on 5 September. The award carried a memento, a

citation and a cash prize of 50,000 rupees. On the same day, another teacher of the school received the State Teachers' Award from Sri Pema Khandu, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. The award carried a memento, a citation and a cash prize of 25,000 rupees. ❖ A teacher at **Purulia** Vidyapith and a lecturer at our **Narendrapur** college were awarded the Shiksha-ratna Sammana awards on 5 September. ❖ A student of the Blind Boys' Academy of **Narendrapur** Ashrama achieved a top position in the All India Trade Test held in July. ❖ Students of the Matriculation Higher Secondary School of **Chennai Mission Ashrama** took part in the zonal level athletic meet conducted by the Education Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, in Chennai and secured 21 gold medals, 12 silver medals and 11 bronze medals. The school won the Overall Championship Trophy in the tournament. ❖ **Pune** Math opened a bookstall at Pune Railway Station on 2 August. It is located on platform no. 1. ❖ **Lucknow** Sevashrama conducted a masterclass on endometriosis (a disorder that affects women) on 4 and 5 August. It was attended and appreciated by some renowned gynaecologists from India and abroad. ❖ Two new STEM laboratories were inaugurated at the schools run by Malda (on 11 September) and Visakhapatnam (on 13 September) centres. (STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.) ❖ The new ashrama campus of **Berlin** centre, Germany, was formally inaugurated with special worship, *homa*, devotional singing and public meetings from 5 to 10 September. The shrine with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna was consecrated on 7 September, the sacred Krishna Janmashtami. Sri Harish Parvathaneni, Ambassador of India to Germany, ten visiting monks and about 100 devotees in each session attended the celebrations. ❖ **Dinajpur** centre, Bangladesh, celebrated its centenary through a

series of programmes from 7 to 9 September with grandeur. Swami Suhitanandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, Mr Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Minister of State for Shipping, Government of Bangladesh, and several other dignitaries and monks from our centres in India and Bangladesh took part in the celebration. A colourful procession, public meetings, cultural events, release of a documentary and a commemorative volume, cultural competitions among students, and welfare activities formed part of the celebration.

**Commemoration of the 125th Anniversary of the Ramakrishna Mission:** Hyderabad; Narendrapur; Prayagraj; Viveknagar, Agartala, centres organised various seminars and public meetings.

**Universal Brotherhood Day (11 September) Celebrations:** The following centres commemorated Swami Vivekananda's First Address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA, in 1893, with different events: **India:** Baranagar Math; Basavanagudi, Bengaluru; Chennai Math; Kalady; Lucknow; Mangaluru; Muzaffarpur; Nattarampalli; Purulia; Thanjavur; Varanasi Advaita Ashrama & Varanasi Home of Service; Visakhapatnam; Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Values Education and Youth Programmes:** The following centres held various programmes like teachers', parents' conventions, youth workshops, cultural and other competitions, and so on: **India:** Almora; Coimbatore Mission; Cooch Behar; Dibrugarh; Gurugram; Halasuru, Bengaluru; Haripad; Medinipur; Raipur; Rajkot; Salem; Shyampukur Bati, Kolkata; Thanjavur; Viveknagar, Agartala; Yadadri Bhuvanagiri.

#### **RELIEF WORK:**

In the wake of recent disasters, centres carried out relief operations by distributing items such as: **List of items:** rice, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, assorted spices, salt, biscuits, baby food, tea powder, infant milk, sugar, soya chunks,

plates of food, tinned food, bread, mosquito nets, breakfast cereal sachets, cakes, cans of jam, assorted fruits, assorted vegetables, cereals, flour, gram, Horlicks, maize meal, milk powder, pasta, porridge, pulses, semolina, snacks, tamarind, flavoured milk, fruit juice, hand wash, milk, peanut butter, dhotis, saris, assorted bedding items, assorted garments, lungis, children's garments, cutlery items, toiletries, stationery kits and so on:

**Flood Relief: India:** Floods caused by heavy rains wreaked havoc in some parts of the country. In continuation of its relief operations among the people affected by floods and landslides, **Himachal Pradesh, Shimla** centre distributed various items from the above list among 17 families in Solan and Bilaspur districts in September.

**Disturbance Relief: Manipur:** Continuing its relief operations for the victims of ethnic clashes which began in May, **Imphal** centre distributed various items from the above list during September in 5 relief camps in Imphal West and Bishnupur districts sheltering 945 people from 316 families.

**Distress Relief:** The following centres distributed various items from the above list to needy people: **India:** Kasundia, Krishnanagar, Davanagere, Dibrugarh, Digboi, Indore, Venkatapura; Bangladesh: Bagerhat; Fiji; South Africa: Durban, Phoenix; Sri Lanka: Batticaloa.

**Economic Rehabilitation: India: West Bengal: Gurap** centre distributed 4 sewing machines to as many poor women in Gurap on 7 September.

**Infrastructural Support: India:** Madhya Pradesh: Indore centre gave 5 metal trunks, 2 tables, 5 water purifiers, 3 Bluetooth speakers and 4 ceiling fans to ten schools in Khargone district on 8 and 9 August; **Fiji** centre handed over a CBG monitoring machine, a vital monitor cuff and 100 pairs of latex gloves to two hospitals in Fiji between 1 May and 25 September. \*

## AN APPEAL

Dear Devotees and Friends,  
Please accept our loving Namaskaras and best wishes.

In the innermost sanctuary of the Himalayas there is a centre of the Ramakrishna Order at the holy town of Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand. The Ashrama was started in 1963, during the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda, for the *sadhus* of the Order, who wish to perform intense *Tapasya* in the *Tapobhumi* Himalayas. Over the years, hundreds of *sadhus* performed austerities here for spiritual upliftment. Monks and *brahmacharins* of the Order continue to visit here in large numbers for *Tapasya* and pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri-Gangotri-Yamnotri as well.

In view of expanding the popular Retreat Centre, we have recently acquired a parcel of land measuring 1.5 acres at village Sukhi near Harshil valley on the Rishikesh-Gangotri National Highway.

We have drawn a master plan to make the place a spiritual hub for the monks and devotees. Two separate residential quarters, one each for monks and devotees, and a common meditation hall are proposed to be built in phases.

It is decided to construct a **Sadhan Kutir for monks** at present for which a building plan is approved by the Headquarters at Belur Math, with an **estimated cost of Rs.56 Lakhs only**. We earnestly request you to come forward with your liberal offerings to materialize the project at the earliest.

Donations can be made by NEFT/RTGS to the **Ramakrishna Math, Union Bank of India, Uttarkashi Branch; IFSC: UBIN0560189, A/c No. 601802010006696**. Kindly mention the purpose- **"Donation for Land & Building Fund,"** the PAN and Full Address of the donor by email to **uttarkashi@rkmm.org** or SMS /WhatsApp to **8630487274**.

Donations towards our Math is exempt from IT under 80G Act.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda bless you all.

Yours in the Lord,  
Swami Amaleshananda  
Adhyaksha



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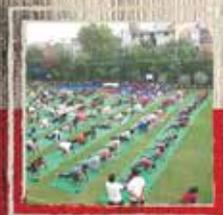
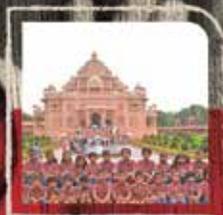


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Sri Ramakrishna suffered from cancer, but he never had a sense of loss, as the term is understood. He never despaired, nor did he ever feel any kind of sorrow. These are the people who walk, as if, in perpetual light. This can be called the Sunlight Approach. In this approach, one has complete view of things as they are.

They can see if a snake or a tiger is approaching them from a distance, and hence they are never caught unawares, nor do they get scared. They know what is inevitable, and what is not.

(Inside this issue: Handling Sorrow and Grief, Page 9)

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