

VEDANTA

and the West

175

*A Question-Answer Session
At a Franciscan Seminary*

LUIS A. JORDAN

What Vedanta Means to Me

SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA

What Do We Need?

Félix Martí-Ibáñez, M.D.

The Pale Sweetheart



Vedanta Press

SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

Sri Rama Krishna Vivekananda Seva Sadā
Shivala Mandir Srinagar Kashmir.



EDITORIAL ADVISERS

SWAMI ASESHANANDA
Vedanta Society of Portland
Portland, Oregon 97201

SWAMI NIKHILANANDA
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center
New York, New York 10028

SWAMI PAVITRANANDA
Vedanta Society
New York, New York 10023

SWAMI SARVAGATANANDA
Ramakrishna-Vedanta Society of Massachusetts
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

The Vedanta Society of Providence
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

SWAMI SATPRAKASHANANDA
The Vedanta Society of St. Louis
St. Louis, Missouri 63105

SWAMI BHASHYANANDA
Vivekananda-Vedanta Society
Chicago, Illinois 60611

SWAMI VIVIDISHANANDA
Ramakrishna Vedanta Center
Seattle, Washington 98102

VEDANTA

and the West

175



VEDANTA SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Vedanta Press

1946 VEDANTA PLACE • HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA 90028

First Published September-October, 1965

Six numbers of *Vedanta and the West* are issued yearly. Subscriptions are accepted at \$4.00 for six issues, postage paid, \$6.00 for twelve issues, or \$7.50 for eighteen issues. Published issues are available at seventy-five cents each through book-sellers or by writing the publisher.

INDIAN AGENT
Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore, Madras 4

EDITORS
Swami Prabhavananda
Swami Vandananda
Swami Vidyatmananda
Pravrajika Anandaprana

Copyright 1965 by Vedanta Society of Southern California

Printed in the United States of America

C O N T E N T S

Tukaram 7

Nancy Pope Mayorga

Tukaram, a poet-saint of seventeenth-century India, is revered by millions, who sing his songs to this day.

A Question-Answer Session At a Franciscan Seminary 13

Swami Prabhavananda

What Vedanta Means to Me 32

Luis A. Jordan

The Secretary of the Vivekananda-Vedanta Society of Chicago relates how he came in contact with Vedanta and how the practice of its disciplines brought added meaning in his life.

What Do We Need? 38

Swami Gnaneswarananda

Swami Gnaneswarananda was the leader of the Vedanta Society in Chicago from 1930 until his early death in 1937. "What Do We Need?" was adapted by Mallika Gupta from a lecture the Swami gave in Chicago in 1935.

The Pale Sweetheart 50

Félix Martí-Ibáñez, M.D.

A physician considers the subject of death and suggests attitudes with which death may be faced. Dr. Martí-Ibáñez is Editor of the medical news-magazine *MD*. "The Pale Sweetheart" is copyrighted, 1963, by Félix Martí-Ibáñez, M.D.

TUKARAM

NANCY POPE MAYORGA

TUKARAM was born in 1598 in a state of India called Maharashtra, a southwest central state which includes Nagpur, Poona, and Bombay. The language is Marathi. A Sudra by caste, a farmer without education, nevertheless, through his love for God, Tukaram became the greatest writer in Marathi. He is famous for his hundreds of *abhangas*, or unbroken hymns, which flow on and on with astonishing facility and exuberant abundance. The divine love that filled his heart overflowed in fervent words. And he took no credit for his songs to himself, for, as he said simply, "I am ordered by God. My words are like the falling of rain."

Marathi is a copious, flexible and beautiful language. It delights in all sorts of jingling formations and playful diminutives. So was Tukaram—full of fun and delight. Troubles and misfortunes he took with humility, with fortitude, and a beautiful saving sense of humor.

"Well done, God!" he says with sturdy relish, looking back on the poor circumstances in which he had been born, the difficulties through which he had had to struggle. "For if I had been born high caste or rich, if I had been comfortable, I might not have had the opportunity to suffer and learn."

Few lives have started out so inauspiciously. Tukaram was a farmer at a time of drought. He was a shopkeeper at a time of depression. He married a young girl who contracted

tuberculosis and died of starvation during a famine. His second wife was a Xanthippe who drove his spiritually-minded friends from the house. His only son died. Poverty, misery, bereavement dogged his every step. "Well done, God!"

From the beginning Tukaram was a good man. But suffering exercised his soul, and it was not long before he was discontented with being just a good man and began to aim at being a god-man. With Plotinus he concluded that "it is not enough to be sinless. We must be nothing less than God." And once he had set sail to the breeze, the irresistible grace of God took him. He received his mantra in a dream from the famous saint Babaji, who was said to have lived three hundred years before. He gave up his futile efforts in the world, and his life became one long striving to raise himself from the human state to the divine.

Tukaram's struggles took on the classic pattern of the mystic way. First, anxious self-examination, even to the point of admitting ruefully that he regarded himself as a great singer. "I think in my mind there is no singer like me. Dispel this illusion, O God." About the world he says, "Let people be as they are. My only business is to bid them good-bye as soon as I see them." About living, he says, "Let me get no food to eat, nor any child to continue my line; but let God have mercy on me."

THE GREAT APPEAL of Tukaram to us is that he is one of us. He presents himself no better than we know ourselves to be. He is frankly afraid: "Accidents befall me and I am afraid." He complains of his restless mind: "Save me from the wanderings of my mind. It is always moving and never rests a moment." He is painfully conscious of his own defects: "I have

been a mine of faults. My idleness knows no bounds. I have assumed a saintly exterior, but have not really bidden good-bye to the things of the world. I have been a thoughtless, crooked, duty-avoiding, censurable wrangler, entirely addicted to sex. I have been a man of dull apprehension. I have entertained false shame."

Well, as we get to know the man, we have to take this self-excoriating with a grain of salt. For always this man of "dull apprehension" is throwing himself and his failings upon the grace of God. "Let my body suffer all kinds of adversities; but let God live in my mind. For God alone is happiness. All my personal endeavor has come to an end. I am only waiting to have Thy grace. I offer my life to Thee as a sacrifice." And "Happy am I that I have determined to find out God!"

Alas! This first fine fervor soon gets bogged down in the dark night of the soul. Not all saints have to pass through the dark night and its sufferings. But Tukaram did. He had a dark night to end all dark nights. Then the personality, the ego of the man comes leaping out at us in loud laments and bitter complaint. How intimate he felt with God is shown by the astounding abuse he heaped upon him, calling him cruel, a liar, and without charity. He flung this odd accusation into the face of God: "I don't believe you exist anyway!" Then in the next breath, a strange plea, "Tell me, O God, the way to find thee, if thou dost exist."

Finally, in despair because he seemed unable to find God, Tukaram came to the extreme point of deciding to end his bodily life. At that very moment of hopelessness, God, who all along had had his child very much in mind, revealed himself. When he had brought Tukaram to his knees, then he raised him up. From that time on, one hardly knows where to begin or where to stop in quoting the endless outbursts of

joy and gratitude. The language soars, yet struggles to express the amount of joy. "Oh God, today's gain is indescribable! Divine joy is seething through my body! Every day to me is now a holy day. We shall sing and dance and clap our hands. I know not night from day, the illumination is ceaseless. How shall I be able to describe the great bliss I enjoy? When I walk, I turn round about thee, when I sleep, I fall prostrate before thee. All houses and palaces have now become the temples of God. Whatever I hear is the name of God."

"We shall sing and dance and clap our hands." Here is the seed of what was to become Tukaram's most characteristic mode of worship—the kirtan—which he calls "that holy confluence of God, the devotee, and his name." "I find," he says, "that God runs to the place where his name is celebrated." He adds, "If a devotee sings lying in his bed, God hears him standing; if he sings sitting, God begins to nod his head with joy; but if he sings standing, God begins to dance."

And if God dances, who can stand on the sidelines? All must lift their arms, all must let his grace put wings to their feet. It actually happens that way when a great soul is caught up in spiritual ecstasy. All the bystanders are drawn in. This was seen whenever Sri Ramakrishna danced. A tremendous spiritual current whirled everyone into the center. They forgot themselves with joy. They laughed and sang and cried. The sacred place of the kirtan was a mansion of merriment. "From joy this universe has sprung, in joy it dwells, unto joy it returns." The poetry is actuality. "Without doubt," says Tukaram, "one can meet God by performing a kirtan. It is a river which flows upward toward God. The gods themselves are unable to describe the happiness produced by it."

In Tukaram's teaching there is nothing new—tell the truth, do not hurt others, be moderate, chant the Name, keep company with the saints. This is all very familiar. Common-

places, perhaps. But the fact is, that a platitude ceases to be trite and dull when it is acted upon. There is nothing new in Tukaram's teaching except the ever-new fact that he lived it absolutely. That is what drew people to him. The flower of purity and devotion opened, the bees came.

"Try it yourself," he pleads sincerely. And assures everyone, "Nothing can stand in the way of a determined effort."

People will come from the corners of the earth to get that particular assurance from a man of God, from within him, from his experience.

Tukaram taught that all life is sacred. "He who helps his fellow being truly worships God." No sinner is past redemption. "Come to me, come to me, great and small, men and women. I shall carry all of you to the other shore." He says very practically, "One should not flutter about, but remain steady, chanting the name of the Lord." He gives this comfort. "God really does come to our rescue. What is needed is patience."

LEGEND has it that Tukaram ascended to heaven in his body. If he did, it seems not so great a miracle as he performed in his life in the face of overwhelming odds. We who have been with him through his struggles and agonies cannot help but rejoice at the calm, unshakeable assurance of his last teachings. "Tell God your sorrow and ask him whatever you want. God will never leave his devotee uncared-for." And again, "I know this—that God will never neglect his saint." Death holds no fear for Tukaram. He sings out triumphantly, "Ring the bell of bhakti! It will send a threat into the heart of death!"

Then finally Tukaram assures us, "The way to God is so bright and straight that nobody need ask any other man

about it." Indeed, Tukaram's life underscores the truth that God is more within the reach of the simple and faithful than of the learned. What can we say finally about this simple and faithful and shining saint, except to echo with satisfaction his own words, "Well done, God!"

I saw my death with my own eyes.
Incomparably glorious was the occasion.
The whole universe was filled with joy.
I became everything and enjoyed everything.
I had hitherto clung to only one place,
 being pent up in egotism in this body.
By my deliverance from it,
 I am enjoying a harvest of bliss.
Death and birth are now no more.
I am free from the littleness of "me" and "mine."
God has given me a place to live
 and I am proclaiming him to the whole world.

—Tukaram

A QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION AT A FRANCISCAN SEMINARY

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

IN THE winter of 1964-65 a public lecture series was conducted in Santa Barbara, California, titled "Ferment in Religious Thought." It was sponsored by the Adult Education Center of Santa Barbara City College, in cooperation with the Catholic Human Relations Council. There were four sessions, a week apart, each session lasting about two hours. There was a lecture by some authority in the field, followed by a panel discussion and a question period. The coordinator of the series was an Instructor in Philosophy at Santa Barbara City College, Dr. Timothy Fetter.

The first session concerned itself with the topic of "Ferment in Modern Catholicism." On this occasion the many questions having to do with Roman Catholic doctrine being considered in the two recent ecumenical councils were discussed. The second session dealt with "Ferment in Modern Protestantism." The fourth meeting was concerned with the controversy raging at the moment in America over prayer and the teaching of religion in public schools, as well as the complex problem of maintaining separation of church and state in the United States.

At the third session, on February 4, Swami Prabhavananda was the main speaker. He spoke on "Ferment in Religions of the World." The lecture was later printed in *Vedanta and the West*, Number 173.

The Swami's lecture was received attentively by an audience of record size. Among those most intently interested was a group of fathers from the Franciscan Seminary situated in Santa Barbara. After the lecture the seminarians held the Swami for some time, asking many questions. When it was realized that Swami Prabhavananda was the translator of some of the very books they were using in their course in oriental religions, and that the Swami spent part of every month in Santa Barbara where the Vedanta Society of Southern California maintains a convent and church, the young fathers were delighted. An invitation to visit the Seminary was extended, and Swami Prabhavananda accepted. The Swami went to the Seminary on the afternoon of March 13, 1965. The very cordial session consisted mostly of a question and answer period, the major portions of which are reproduced below, from a transcription.

Q: Swami, do you feel, in general, that the moral beliefs and practices, the world principles and the needs, of the average Western man—one who is born and grows up in Western society and has no acquaintance with Eastern religions—are similar to those of the Eastern man, say a Hindu?

A: First, I must point out to you that this distinction between "eastern" and "western" religion is a wrong distinction. After all, Christ, in whose name you are devoting your life, was an Easterner. He was born and lived in the East.

And in relation to moral life, or ethical life, or spiritual life, I think that all believe in the same general principles. For instance, you have devoted yourselves to the religious life, and have taken vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. In our religion, also, we take such vows; only our terminology is different. We say that we have to give up cravings for progeny, cravings for wealth, cravings for name and fame

—you see, it amounts to the same thing. We are taught to be truthful; not to hurt any being in thought, word, or deed; not to express greed for another's property; and to overcome lust.

We point out that this whole world really is bound by lust and greed, and that worldliness and God do not go together. Therefore, in order that we can devote ourselves to God and realize God in this life—that's what we emphasize—in order that we can acquire the saintliness which comes when life and character have been transformed by the vision of God—these are the necessary precepts to follow: truthfulness, not hurting any creature, chastity, overcoming greed.

As for obedience; what is meant by obedience after all? To renounce the ego, the little self—"I" as distinct from everybody else. This is the cause of all bondage. We point out that the first-begotten son of ignorance is ego. And from that comes attachment, aversion, and clinging to the surface life. Jesus pointed out: "He who loves this life shall lose it." Clinging to life is something instinctive, through ignorance. But it has to be overcome. How? There is only one way: to devote ourselves to God, to follow the first commandment: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, with all thy strength." This commandment is universal. The same in the east or west, north or south.

We all worship one God. In Vedic times, long before any history was recorded, it was stated: "Truth is one; sages call it by various names." And so it is—one God. You call him Christ, I call him Krishna. One man says "Allah," while another says "Brahman." What difference does it make?

This reminds me of a story. Four men were traveling in the desert. One of them said, "Oh, I wish I had a drink of water."

Another said, "I wish I had a drink of *pani*."

A third said, "I wish I had a drink of *jal*."

The fourth, "Oh for a drink of *aqua*."

But the first one said, "What are you three talking about? *Pani* and *jal* and *aqua* cannot satisfy your thirst; only water can!"

Just then somebody came with some water, and all four pointed to it and proclaimed: "That's it! That's it!" And they all took some and drank it.

Q: Could you elaborate a little bit on your understanding of God?

A: Is it possible to have any understanding of God? That's where we get into difficulty! You define God in this way and I define God in that way, and we quarrel. You say, "My God is the only God," and I say, "No, my God is the only God." But what is the truth? I'll tell you what our Master, Sri Ramakrishna, said about God. He said the bee, before it sits on the flower and begins to suck the honey, makes a big, big noise. Then, as it sits on the flower and drinks the honey, it becomes silent. Then again, having drunk the honey and become intoxicated, the bee makes a sweet humming noise. Similarly, those who have no vision of God, who have not gone to the neighborhood of God even, who only have book knowledge—they make a big noise about God: "God can only be defined this way, can only be defined that way." But as one begins to drink that honey, that sweetness which is in God, one becomes silent; and then again, becoming God-intoxicated, one begins to talk about God.

Some say God is personal, some say he's impersonal; some say he's with form, some say he's without form. Some say God is with attributes; some say he is without attributes.

Yet they have drunk of the same ocean of nectar. According to their temperaments, they introduce different ideas when they come to define God. But the truth is, his name is Silence.

I'll tell you a story from our scriptures. A father sent his son away, saying, "Go and study religion." The young boy studied for twelve years, and then came back. His father asked him, "Tell me what you understand of God." The young man gave a wonderful sermon, quoting the scriptures. But the father said, "My boy, go back. You have not yet learned what is to be learned. Go back. Study some more." So the son studied for another twelve years. Then he came home again. And again his father asked, "Now tell me what you have learned of God." But the son kept silent. So the father said, "Why, my son, your face shines like a knower of Brahman. You have known him. His name is Silence."

Q: We feel, though, that God can only be defined as silence in the sense that we cannot completely put down what he is—he's way beyond us.

A: The moment you say, "He is this and that," you are limiting the unlimited, the infinite.

Q: Then how do you explain Christ? In him we see the love, the justice, the mercy—all these aspects.

A: Wonderful! That's right! Christ is like a door through which you gaze into the Infinite, the Absolute.

Q: From this point of view, how do you speak of God as silence?

A: When you see Christ, and through that door you reach That (the Absolute), then you become silent. Until you have seen Christ you talk about him, and you say he is this and that. We say Krishna also is this and that. If you were

to take Christ and Krishna and Buddha and Ramakrishna and shut them all in one room, they would embrace each reach That (the Absolute), then you become silent. Until you other. But if you shut a Buddhist, a Catholic, and a Hindu together they'll fight one another. Why? Because none of them has known anything about Christ or Buddha or Krishna or Ramakrishna. When you know, it is different. A dog has the canine instinct for recognizing his master no matter what clothes he is wearing, but we human beings have not even that canine instinct—to recognize that Christ can come in other dress also. It is the same God. (I hope I have not disturbed any of you!)

Q: Swami, one comment—almost accusation—made against Eastern religions is that these religions de-emphasize the individual so much that they want to annihilate him, to dissolve him so he cannot be himself anymore. In other words, I cannot be “me” anymore, in a sense.

A: What is your “me”? Explain it, define it. Is it your body? Your mind? Your senses? Your character? Would you like to be what you are now forever? Aren't you changing? Aren't you losing your “me” all the time? So your real “me” is in the infinite—in God. Find yourself in him; then you have truly found yourself. This idea about individuality—where is it? Define that which is you. Sages and saints—Christians and Hindus and Buddhists—have dedicated years of their lives to finding out, “What am I?” Ultimately they lose themselves in God. Shall I quote to you Meister Eckhart, one of the great Christian mystics? This is what he says: “Most people are so simple that they consider we are here and God is out there. But it is not so. God and I are one.” Is that blasphemous? Find that out for yourselves. We are not the “I” or “me” that we think ourselves to be.

Q: Well, how can you speak of transforming yourself then?

A: Transforming yourself? You cannot transform yourself; but by devoting yourself to God, by loving God, you can *be* transformed by him.

Q: Then who is it that seeks the real identity?

A: We have an ego. God has given us an ego, he has given us the little self, in order that we can love him, and in order that ultimately the love, lover, and the Beloved can become one.

Q: I'm still confused. You say we are to seek our true identity in God, and yet I am confused by who this is then that is doing the seeking.

A: For this you have to go to Upanishadic thought. Atman, which we call the true Self, the real Self, the real I, is Brahman: "I and my Father are one." And that Atman is the unchangeable reality within each one of us. But through ignorance from a beginningless time the Atman identifies itself with the sheaths covering it. For instance, the body is a sheath, the mind is a sheath, the life principle is a sheath, and we are identified with them; therefore, the sense of ego. When you analyze what the ego is, you find it has no existence, no reality at all. And yet, such is our ignorance, that we settle our whole world upon the false ego. All the Western mystics point out to you (and they are all at one with Eastern thought) that if you can empty yourself of your "self," there will come the greater unfoldment of God. So this ego that we are holding onto, the individuality that you speak of, is just a shadow.

Here is a parable that we find in our scriptures. Two birds of beautiful golden plumage are sitting on the selfsame

tree. The bird on the upper branch is calm and is in its own glory. The lower bird, hopping from one branch to another, tasting the sweet and bitter fruits, forgetful of the upper bird, continues to enjoy and suffer. When it has eaten a very bitter fruit it looks at the upper bird, and sees how calm and majestic, how glorious that bird is; but again forgets, and goes on eating sweet and bitter fruits, until it has become completely frustrated. Then it gazes at the upper bird, moves nearer and nearer to it, and is gone. All the time the upper bird's shadow was playing; there was all the time just one bird, calm, majestic, in its own glory.

Q: What is it that caused the bird to look up?

A: His true nature. Man's true nature is infinite and divine, and no matter how he may go down and down, ultimately that divinity in him unfolds itself and lifts him up. Therefore, none will be lost. As Christ said, we have to be born in spirit, but we have to bring about the death of the ego. Buddha showed the difference between ignorance and spiritual knowledge. He said we are asleep, and we become awakened. Buddha was asked, "What are you? Are you a god?" He answered, "No." "Are you a man?" "No." "Then what are you?" He said, "I am *Buddha*, the awakened one." And he said that everyone will be awakened.

Q: This unity that we strive for, the unity with God, is accomplished through love. But love demands a separation, and once we arrive at that identity, there's no more love. Right?

A: No! Love wants to become completely absorbed in the Beloved.

Q: But as soon as it is absorbed, it is no longer love.

A: We have a saying in India: "I want to *taste* sugar and not *be* sugar." That is your viewpoint. But learn to taste sugar and then see what happens. This is not human love, but in human love also there is what you can call a fruition, a complete absorption. The Sufi mystics describe it this way. There is a knock at the door. From inside comes the question, "Who is that?" Answer: "I." The door does not open. Again a knock. "Who is that?" "I." No response. For a third time comes the knock. "Who is that?" "Thou." The door opens. Love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength, and then see what happens. I don't have to prove anything to you. You will prove it to yourself.

Q: Is union with God the same in all the Eastern religions?

A: "Union with God" is not exactly correct. The language does not express it. The Vedantic (Hindu) idea is this: you are God, and that God becomes unfolded. There are no two to have union. There is just one. I believe Meister Eckhart, among the Christians, had that kind of experience.

Q: Many of us are not familiar with the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, or the Vedas. Could you just explain to us what these scriptures are—the general content?

A: Well, I don't know. Suppose I were to say to you, will you explain to me what is in the Bible? That's a very hard task! I'd have to give a series of lectures on the Gita, a series of lectures on the Upanishads. But, generally, these scriptures give the methods and means by which one can realize God.

Let us look briefly at one, the Bhagavad-Gita. According to the Gita there are four ways, called yogas, by which

one can attain God. One is the path of discrimination. That is, through a process of analysis we try to find out what is Real. Now of course in your discrimination you must define the Real as that which is abiding and eternal. Unreal is that which today is, tomorrow is not. And so when you learn to discriminate this way you find that God alone is the Reality. Everything else is unreal. He is the one treasure. You devote yourself to him. This is the path of knowledge, discrimination.

Then there is the path of love or devotion. It is the same as your idea to love God.

Then there is the path of action—work as worship—where every act becomes an act of worship.

Last, there is the path of meditation—psychic control.

All these paths are brought out in the teachings of the Gita. The teacher, Sri Krishna, says that a harmonious combination of all these yogas is best. You see, we have certain natures: emotional, intellectual, active, meditative. So we are told, "Be emotional. Love God. But be discriminative. Also be active. At the same time be contemplative. Combine these yogas." That is what we emphasize—not to be one-sided.

Of course this summary does not do justice to the Gita!

Q: Swami, could you explain to us a little of the doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation?

A: The idea is this. If you consider God as the creator of this universe, you cannot admit the beginning of a creation. To admit the beginning of creation is to admit the beginning of a creator. So this creation is from a beginningless time. Now, for instance, if this is our first birth, and the only chance we have, what a calamity! You may say God has given us freedom, freedom of will to devote ourselves to whichever we choose.

But why did he not give us the will to devote ourselves to God? Why did he create some morally blind? Why did he create so many differences amongst individuals? That God must be a cruel, unjust God. And then if this is the only chance we have, and some go to heaven and the rest go somewhere else—well, God is responsible for that; and who would like to love such a God? Love him through fear? No, we cannot love God that way. In order that we can believe in a just God, we have to believe that he will give us every opportunity, many opportunities, through rebirth or reincarnation, until we wake up. Then all will come to him. So that, in short, is the theory of reincarnation. It is the giving of many chances.

But, you know, Sri Ramakrishna one time was asked, "What do you think about reincarnation?" And he answered, "Yes, they say there is reincarnation. But learn to find God, here and now." That is the practical teaching.

Q: One of the greatest puzzles for us is why the Hindus and the Hindu religion insist so much on respect for cows. Is not the economic system a bit difficult because the cows are respected thoroughly and are not eaten?

A: We don't have any such thing as holy cows. It is your missionaries that go and talk about holy cows! Yes, we see God in everything. In the cows and in the dogs, in the birds and the beasts—everywhere we see the presence of God. But we don't believe in "kneel down and worship mother cow!" I began to hear of that after I came to this country. Some people in India are fanatics, but this is true of any country.

Q: But they don't eat the cow, and therefore they start to—

A: They don't eat the cow. Is that anything so bad? Do we have to eat cows to be spiritual, or civilized?

Q: No, but the economical—

A: Economical! After all, they talk about poverty in India. Yes, there are poor people, true, and you go there and shed tears for the poor people of India. Yes, they are poor, but what has that to do with spiritual life? Do wealth and spiritual life go together? "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Did not your Master teach that? Don't you take a vow of poverty willingly? So what is wrong with poverty? Of course, I don't want India to be poor. But we were slaves for so many years, centuries, that it is truly a wonderful thing that we have kept up our culture, our spiritual culture, in spite of poverty and slavery. That is something to admire. And what caused England, what caused Portugal, what caused France to go and conquer India? Her poverty, or her wealth? They drained the wealth of our country. So you talk of economy. Yes, we also want to be rich, we want to feed our people; but we are helpless. Do you think if we just kill those cows the people will be satisfied? That is not the way of a sound economy.

Q: Swami, one thing that confronts our missionaries when they go to a country is that the people are really so poor; their only concern is where they can get the next meal, and their spiritual concerns are neglected because of that. Have you seen this a problem in India?

A: No, I would not say so. In spite of her poverty, in spite of her slavery for so many centuries, India has kept her spirituality intact. There is still a living religion of India. I have seen the masses of this country, and I have seen the

masses of India—the poor of India. What great depth of devotion they have for God in India! But that does not mean I want them to remain poor.

Q: Swami, in the Christian religion we make the distinction of natural and supernatural. I was wondering, for example, how would you look upon a couple who loved each other, but let us say they weren't familiar at all with any religion; however, there was love, a true love between this man and woman. Would you call that love exclusively human, or does it in some way participate in divine love? Is there a distinction?

A: All love is divine. But when one loves a man or a woman and does not know that one is loving God in that person—if one is loving the flesh, or the character, or the mind—it is misguided love, no matter how true that love may be, no matter how faithful it may be. That would not lead you to God. But if you can love somebody, with the idea that there is God dwelling in him, and you love God—that would lead you to the highest.

Your distinction between natural and supernatural is true. This is what we call "relative" and "beyond the relative." In the relative there are three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. We live within these three states, but in them we cannot find God. Yet it is within the waking state that we struggle to find God. Then we are lifted above the relative plane to the plane of—I cannot describe it, it is something *beyond*, that's all I can say. Here we live in the relative plane, and it is by transcending this plane that we have the vision of God, or an experience of God. None can see God with the physical eyes, but he who has eyes to see, sees him; he who has ears to hear, hears him—in another plane of consciousness.

Q: Swami, what was your impression when Pope Paul visited India? What did the people feel about his visit?

A: People in India don't care to what faith you belong. They would accept and love and respect anyone who represents any spirituality. The people in India saw in Pope Paul not a Christian, or a Hindu, but a holy man. We embrace all religions; we accept them all as true. This is the example that we give. There is a certain center; the center is God. There are so many radii. As you go along one of these radii you reach the center, and you see that all radii meet there. That is our belief; that is how we are trained from our childhood. This is the prayer that the Hindu learns as a little boy, or a little girl: "As there are different streams coming out from different sources, all mingling in one ocean; similarly, the many religions of the world, coming from different sources, all mingle in that one great ocean of love."

Q: Is there any distinction between persons and classes in India?

A: Of course! Just as you have different classes and persons and castes in America, in Europe, everywhere, so we have different classes and castes in India. We know that in God, in spirit, we are all one; but manifestations differ. There's good, bad; saint, sinner; all kinds of people: ignorant, wise; learned, illiterate. In spirit there is oneness, but in expression there is difference, of course!

Q: Is there any effort to make India classless?

A: If you made America classless, there would be no America. Distinction, difference, variety—that is what makes life interesting; that is what makes the world function. If we all behaved alike, and if our tendencies were all the same

—how awful! Why don't you want differences? Variety is the law of nature. But at the same time, recognize the underlying unity.

Q: I think what Father was talking about was difference of opportunity. We talk about a classless society in the sense of equal opportunity.

A: Oh, yes, in America I know even a pauper is dreaming to be a millionaire, and perhaps he can be a millionaire. So it is in India, everywhere.

Q: But can a lower-class person become a brahmin in that sense?

A: Not a brahmin. He can go beyond brahminhood. I, for instance, was not a brahmin to begin with, yet now brahmins come and bow down to me. So what do you say to that? Right here, an example!

Q: Can you point to any experience in India, Swami, where you feel that the Christian faith has made a creative contact with the Hindu faith?

A: Frankly speaking, as long as I lived in India, I never came in contact with Christians at all. I've seen them, lecturing in the corner of a park. But we never went there, because they would be denouncing the Hindus. That is their way of preaching. You see, such preachers were untouchables to us. I'm sorry to say that, but it is true.

Q: Swami, I'm very impressed with how very close you seem to be to nature, and I just wondered if you could amplify on your outlook toward the world, and just how nature itself fits into your theology, or approach to God.

A: In order to approach God there are two things we

must practice. One is to close our eyes, forget the world—just God and me. But that is not enough. Then we open our eyes and see God dwells in everything.

Q: Well, how about utilizing a response to nature? Say the birds, or the trees, or a beautiful place?

A: Wonderful! I'll give you an illustration of that. I was once on a pilgrimage; I was about twenty years old at the time. There were about a hundred of us, men, women, old and young, traveling in the Himalayas. As we were walking, we saw the sunrise over snow-capped mountains. It was an exquisitely beautiful sight. All these hundred people sighed, "Ah!" Then they sat down and closed their eyes. Can you imagine it? You know what they felt? If this is so beautiful, how much more beautiful would be the source of all that beauty! And where is that source? The Lord within. And so they closed their eyes and tried to commune with God. Yes, nature is beautiful and we love it, but it should remind us only of God.

Q: I thought you said that God is not really the source of all creation.

A. Who else?

Q: Well, you said he could not be a creator.

A: I said if God is regarded as the creator, and if the creation had a beginning, then God had a beginning. And we say God is beginningless, creation is beginningless.

Q: We would say that matter could not be eternal, because then it would be like God.

A: Nature is not eternal, in the sense that nature is always changing. We do not say it is eternal in that way.

Q: Swami, is Hinduism polytheistic?

A: Neither "polytheistic," nor "monotheistic," nor any other of your English words can apply. Forget what you have learned about Hinduism before, please. There is one God. He has many aspects.

Q: How does Hinduism regard good and evil?

A: In creation there is good and evil both. Either you have to take this as a relative creation, or nothing at all. But what is good and what is evil? Can we define it? What is good to you today becomes evil tomorrow. There is no such thing in this relative world as absolute good and absolute evil.

Q: Would a Hindu consider the principle of good and the principle of evil as unequal elements?

A: They are both here in this universe; otherwise, if there were no evil, you would not recognize good.

Q: Will evil be defeated?

A: No, there cannot be a millennium in this world. *You* can defeat evil by rising above good and evil, to God. Goodness is the path to the absolute. But you have to rise above both good and evil. You have to rise above both pleasure and pain, through Christ, to God, the absolute.

Q: What would you say is the basis of Hindu ethics?

A: The basis of Hindu ethics has this one ideal in view: without purity of heart there is no possibility of realizing God. That which would lead you to God is good; that which would take you away from God is evil. For instance, why should I not hurt anybody? Because when I hurt another I hurt myself. I hurt God, for God is within.

Q: But on an abstract level, you might say God is not "hurttable."

A: Yes, that's true. But because I recognize God in you, I would not hurt you.

Q: I'd like to know what you think about the relationship of poetry and religious language.

A: You know, I'm not a poet. But it's wonderful to express God's truth in poetry and poems. In fact, God is said to be a great poet. *Kabi* in Sanskrit means "poet," and God is considered a great poet.

Q: Do you have any comment on the Christian belief that this world comes to an end? Do you believe that?

A: No, I believe it is beginningless and endless. But for you and me—we get out of this mess!

Q: But we come back?

A: Oh, no! If we are devoted to God, and find God, then we do not come back. We have to come back *until* we find him. This creation is infinite and is going on infinitely. That is his play.

Q: What would you say about Christ's statement interpreted as saying the world will end?

A: Did Christ say that?

Q: According to his followers, he did.

A: I'd like to see that—what Christ said. You know, at one time I was in an apartment in Portland, Oregon. And two young ladies knocked at the door. I opened the door and said, "What is it?"

They said, "We are preachers."

I said, "Just a moment. I'm going to hold a class; you come along with me."

So I went and gave a class and they followed me and attended the class. After the class, when I asked for questions, they said, "Do you believe in the Bible?"

I said, "Yes, I do."

They asked, "Every word of it?"

I replied, "Do you believe every word of it?"

"Yes, we do."

I asked then, "Have you read it?"

And they answered, "No."

I said, "That's why you believe in it!"

WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME

LUIS A. JORDAN

I READ Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* in my early twenties. Larry Darrell's search for God and his eventual encounter with him in Travancore held me spellbound. The transformation in his life and the ultimate anonymity he chose—possibly driving a taxicab in New York—filled me with admiration. Larry had found peace of mind and the wisdom necessary to be a king among men even while leading a humble existence.

How different from and yet how similar to my situation! Different, because I was a worldling attracted like a magnet to beauty and power. Sometimes this attraction was so strong that I could have sold my soul to the devil in order to possess both. Similar, because Larry Darrell's story gave expression to vague stirrings in my soul, the yearning for something higher than myself and my environment. Here was a man who had rejected the best of life in order to search for something intangible and elusive, the reality of which can easily be denied and cannot be scientifically proved. It was like Christopher Columbus accepting the challenge of the unknown.

Larry had achieved something that only in my most courageous moments did I dare to acknowledge: the wish to be free from myself. Free from desire, ambition, and passion; from the thousand chains with which the world enslaves a man. It is true that most of the time I loved those chains. But there were moments when I knew that the majority of the world and I were wrong and Larry Darrell

was right. In Larry Darrell I saw the end of Renaissance man—mainly concerned with the sensorial and intellectual world around him—and the beginning of twentieth-century man. We live today in a world dislocated by two world wars, facing the possibility of annihilation in a third war, and confronted by the challenge of space exploration. Before such awesome prospects we cannot fail to ponder upon the deep mystery of our Self and seek for a meaning in life. Death has never been closer. Traditional man seems puny before the great challenges.

We need the strength and wisdom found by Larry Darrell, who fulfills so well Plato's definition: "Man is declared to be that creature who is constantly in search of himself, a creature who at every moment of his existence must examine and scrutinize the conditions of his existence. He is a being in search of meaning."

AT THE TIME I read *The Razor's Edge* I was living in Puerto Rico, my homeland. Travancore seemed very far away indeed. But the years went by and circumstances brought me to the continental United States, first to New York, and then to Chicago. Slowly, through experiences, crises, and sometimes intuitions, the worldling in me began to undergo a process of erosion. And all the time in the back of my mind the example of Travancore continued to beckon to me. A friend of mine—a Spaniard who like myself had been an agnostic and who, while in India during the Second World War—had experienced a transformation in his thinking. He used to talk to me about Vedanta often. It was through him that I first read Romain Rolland's works about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. My friend also introduced me to Unity and the writings of Emmet Fox. For quite some

time I attended regularly the Unity lectures in Chicago and read Emmet Fox assiduously. His interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments, and David's Psalms disclosed for me a panorama of reality unknown to me before. I began to realize that God was not an illusion and that he could be reached by human contact.

I also read some of Yogi Ramacharaka's books. It was while reading his *Jnana Yoga* that I first had an inkling that the Atman and the Supreme Reality are one and the same. I remember very distinctly that occasion. It was a very cold winter night in Chicago and the radiator in my room was shaking noisily with the steam. While reading the book I was suddenly overwhelmed by the realization that the power which produces heat, moves a locomotive, and explodes an atomic bomb is the same power which throbs in my veins and which gives me life. A thick snow was falling the following morning and the ground looked like a white blanket. I walked a few blocks to my job. I still remember how joyfully I welcomed the snowflakes falling over my face and overcoat. This feeling of exaltation was short-lived but unforgettable.

One day my friend said, "Vedanta must have a center in Chicago. Let's find out." He opened a telephone directory and dialed a number. A conversation ensued. At the other end of the wire I could hear the muffled sound of a very hearty voice. After ringing off, my friend said, "That was the Swami-in-Charge. He invited us to attend his lecture next Sunday. He is a swami from India, from the Ramakrishna Order, the same organization I used to visit while I was in the Army."

The following Sunday we went to the service. That first day, as soon as the Swami began his powerful invocation in Sanskrit, a wave of emotion engulfed me. I knew then that there was no need for me to go to India.

TODAY, a dozen years later, I am a householder with a wife and three children. The search has ended, but by far the most difficult task remains, which is to continue the ascent of the mountain where, at its summit, lies the prize of peace of mind and wisdom found by Larry Darrell.

Throughout all the years that I have been attending lectures and meditation classes and enjoying the guidance of the Swami and the company of other devotees, Vedanta has come to mean much to me.

First of all, Vedanta has brought about a revolution in my thinking, produced a radical change in my attitude toward the world, and taught me to accept life on its own terms and how to improve on it. In short, Vedanta has unveiled for me a new and better way of life.

Vedanta has shown me that life can be fun. It introduced me to the concept of God's *lila*, which to say the least is a very original way of looking at life. It taught me that adventure is not by any means limited to physical exploits. That romance doesn't necessarily involve human love or brave deeds. That the universe is not only worlds and constellations; there is within each one of us a spiritual universe bigger and mightier than the one without.

Vedanta has shown me that the path of spiritual life is rich in excitement but plagued by adversity. That it has moments of fierce battle and long hours of tedium; of grave dangers and unsuspected invulnerabilities; moments of anguish and of bliss. That it is a road demanding courage, patience, persistence, and a will of iron from those who hope to reach the goal. In this adventure one has to engage in mortal combat with the most formidable opponent that man has ever faced; his own self. And one has to wage his crucial battles in the arena of his own soul. The prize of victory is cosmic love.

Vedanta has taught me to love the storm and admire the strength of the tiger; to see in evil the potentiality of good; and above all, to revere life as the most priceless gift that God has given us.

It provided me with the opportunity to read many of Swami Vivekananda's books, which form a spiritual powerhouse.

Vedanta introduced me to the Bhagavad-Gita with its message of altruism. If selfishness could be wiped out from man's consciousness, the misery of the world would disappear overnight. The Gita tells just how this can be accomplished. If *The Prince* of Machiavelli explains how to achieve, consolidate, and preserve political power, the Gita teaches how to attain eternal power.

Vedanta matured my religious thinking on the subject of divine retribution, by explaining philosophically the truth in Lord Byron's stanza:

The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
I planted,—they have torn me,—and I bleed:
I should have known what fruit would spring
from such a seed.

Vedanta disclosed for me the purpose of life, which is that we are born not to be happy but to grow spiritually. And that both joy and sorrow seem to be necessary for this growth.

Vedanta has opened for me a boundless universe, the beauty of which surpasses the majesty of nature, the loveliness of woman, the greatness of the hero. It is the world of wonder. How do we go about unlocking its secret? Vedanta shows that this world surrenders its glory and splendor only to the spirited adventurer who dares to sail across the turbulent waters of self-discovery. It is a voyage into the deep and

mysterious ocean of the spirit of man, and its destination is an uncharted island of incomparable beauty. This ocean is fraught with perils and hardships. The seafarer can lose his way and the rage of the waters can smash and sink his ship. But the captain has with him an invaluable guide and friend who directs him at all times. This trustworthy friend provides the genius of orientation, so important in the vastness of the sea. The compass is this guide.

In the language of symbols, one could say that the ship is the mortal body of the aspirant; the captain the will of man; the ocean is his soul; the crew is the captain's thoughts which alternately work for and against him, but which can always be at a strong captain's command. The compass is the guru. The uncharted island is God.

Many times the trip seems to be a hopeless undertaking doomed to failure. It is marked by long hours of despair and appalling loneliness. Only the captain's courage and determination can finally bring the vessel to the safety of the port. When this land is reached one could say with Browning:

Are there not . . . , dear Michal,
Two points in the adventure of the diver,
One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?

SUMMING up, Vedanta presents a challenge, makes a promise, and points a way. It presents the challenge of self-conquest; promises the uncharted island (or the pearl); and points the way in the general direction of discovery. Then it says: "The discovery is up to you and your compass. Remember that you are the captain of the ship."

All this and more Vedanta means to me.

WHAT DO WE NEED?

SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA

THERE are three things, fundamentally, that differentiate humans from animals: ambition, initiative, and aspiration.

If we consider biological needs, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, fighting, multiplication of species, and so on, we find very little distinction between the human and animal species. Man is fundamentally an animal; but there are certain distinctive features which differentiate the human kind from the animal. We are told that animals work because they are goaded on from within by a kind of instinct. The urge of hunger sends them out into the world of action and expression. And the fundamental need of protecting themselves against their enemies urges them to fight.

MAN might not be very different from animals in many respects, but he is supreme in one thing: he is endowed with something which makes him man. That something is ambition. Now, exactly what is ambition? To put it briefly, ambition is the urge to gain something. But such a vague statement will not satisfy us. What is that something? It is something which we feel we do not now possess. Herein lies the distinction of man. He is able to find out, with reason, what he wants. In other words, he is capable of being ambitious. He sets before himself an ideal and convinces himself of his ability to achieve it.

Therein lies the need of man for the faculty for thinking. Man is a thinking animal. Other animals do not have to think, to any great extent at least, because they do not have ambition. Therefore man, in order to be man, must want to achieve something—the definite ideal of which he must determine with the help of his reasoning faculty. Consequently, the first item man requires is the cultivation of his faculty of thinking.

Let us take it for granted that all of us have ambition to achieve something in this world. Some people may say that their ambition is to have better living conditions. But how many have reached a definite conclusion even with regard to that ideal? Almost like animals, we intuitively accept conditions from our environment or our tradition as the standard of better living conditions for ourselves, without thinking very deeply about the matter. That cannot rationally be considered as ambition at all. That is just a habit of thinking. I would say that ambition means the gradual formation of an active inner urge to gain something worthwhile.

Now what is that worthwhile something which we must all gain in this life? Human life is a great opportunity. It gives us a chance to achieve the highest goal that any being can attain. And that goal, the ambition to achieve that goal, can only be gained by exercising our faculty for thinking. Man must think it out, understand the process of thinking, and consider the value of the ways and means at his command. All these items I include under the expression: the faculty for thinking.

Today we find a lack of this fundamental faculty of thinking, especially here in the West where life has been made so easy, so comfortable. When life is speeding headlong, towards what we know not, we have very little time to think. Our advantages have stunted the growth of our faculty

for problem-solving. Nowadays if you want to get in touch with someone you reach for the telephone, and almost immediately you are speaking to that person. There is no need for thinking out ways and means for reaching him. An efficient process, no doubt; but this advantage has robbed us of something. If you did not have that telephone handy, you would have been forced to do some thinking. It is not the action of doing that is so important; it is the exercise of our faculty for thinking. That has deteriorated by our having too many advantages. If your child has a cold, you pick up the phone, call the doctor or the druggist, and say, "Oh, Johnny has a cold! What shall I do?" Then someone else will do all the thinking for you. Or perhaps you have an argument with a neighbor. You go to the telephone and consult your friends: "What would you do in such a case? Tell me, what do you suggest I should do?" You have your friends think it out for you. In every aspect of life you will find that the advantages we are enjoying today, this almost instant co-operation from our friends and neighbors, have undermined our faculty for thinking. In commercial life, in the field of selling, you find that much money is spent to tell you how good an item is. Everything is placed before us in this way. In our business and social life, even in our religious life, everything is ready-made. There is not time for thinking, for we are speeding ahead at a great pace! So abundant are our conveniences that the most essential parts of our lives are presented to us in the same standardized way. If there were more difficulties, we might be given the opportunity for determined thinking of the pros and cons of things. Life then might not be easy, but it would develop our faculty for thinking.

Shall we then go back to primitive life, you ask? No. But why should we not harmonize the two sides? What

harm is there in using all the advantages of modern life *for the attainment of a higher life*? Modern civilization has put much more time at our disposal, has saved us a lot of energy and drudgery, but are we using the time saved to the best advantage?

What we need fundamentally is the ability to think. But do we know how to think? Do the questions of "Who am I? Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going?" bother us at all? Do we ever seriously consider them? If we question ourselves and try to find the answers to these queries we will sharpen our faculty for thinking, and that power will be helpful to us in every aspect of our lives.

Those who do not think just follow the crowd. Of course, they may be successful to a certain extent. And no doubt there are many people who do give serious thought to the deeper problems of life. But in general we need to be more thoughtful regarding all our problems.

We should also consider the obstacles and dangers involved in proceeding blindly. In a civilization of such great advantages there seems to be a childish optimism; we rarely think seriously that there might be many obstacles to overcome. We are rushing headlong. We do not go deeply behind, to work out the solutions to vital questions which, one day, we shall have to face. We spend our lives dodging the issues. We just follow the crowd. We must have a definite goal to achieve in this life; and that can only be arrived at by a good deal of thinking and experimentation.

THE second requisite, or distinct feature of man, is initiative. Ambition without initiative is of little value. You may sit in your armchair with a great ambition to travel around the world, but if you have no initiative your ambition will never

bear fruit. Your energy will be frittered away in daydreams of exotic lands far away. First, we should have a clear-cut idea of what we want to achieve, of what our ambition is; and next we need initiative.

Do we realize what is meant by this expression, initiative? We may vaguely think that it means some kind of activity or the ability to do something in an energetic way. My definition of initiative is: That which flows through your actions, after you have filled yourself up with a thorough comprehension of your ideal. Initiative translates your ambition into action.

In considering initiative, we find two extreme types of people, the underactive and the overactive. The underactive type is lacking in the initiative of translating his ideal into action. Such people think that if someone else would do the favor of getting for them what they want, it would be fine. They may be filled with an ideal, but their lives become a sad contradiction. Their tendencies and their ideals are contending with each other. This shows a lack of the expenditure of energy. This type should be goaded to action.

But one should take action commensurate with the status he has reached. Suppose a man has the ambition to achieve the greatest attainment in life—spiritual realization. Say he is a beginner, yet he thinks he should be doing nothing but meditating. You will find that he will make many mistakes, and he will make it difficult for others who have to come in contact with him. Therein lies his lack. If that person suspends his highest ambition for the time being; if he takes the next step forward to discipline himself to be more active, to assert his initiative, he will reach his goal much sooner than otherwise.

Once a young man came to my teacher, seeking spiritual instruction. It was in Benares.

"How long have you been here, and what have you been doing?" asked my teacher.

"I have been here three or four months," answered the boy. "I am trying to find a holy man to teach me."

My teacher said, "Is that *all* you have been doing?"

The boy thought this an odd question and he looked puzzled.

My teacher said, "I will ask you to do something. Will you do it?"

The boy replied eagerly that he would.

Then my teacher explained: "When I was taking my bath in the Ganges this morning I found that the steps of the river ghat were covered with slippery moss. It is dangerous for people. Someone might slip and have a bad fall. Will you scrub those steps for the good of all who go there for their baths? That will lead you towards the realization of your highest goal."

The boy did not give any reply. He seemed disappointed and went on his way.

That young man was wasting his time. It is essential that we learn the discipline that will translate our ambition into action. We must have initiative. It is not the quantity of work that is done that brings one to the realization of his ambition. Initiative presupposes a skill in expanding your energy with a good deal of consideration, so that you do not expend too much or too little. That, to my mind, is the real meaning of the word "initiative."

One who rushes ahead into action does not necessarily have initiative, either. That type will achieve nothing. He wastes his energy, fritters it away in a chain of endless actions, without assessing what is needed for him to reach his goal. Right initiative is not wrong expenditure of energy. Our energy is meant for the achievement of something defi-

nite. We need to give a good deal of thought to that also. In the West, there is quite a lot of wrong expenditure of energy. We might be exercising our muscles or our vocal organs for hours and hours, but at the end, when we take stock of ourselves, we find that nothing has been achieved. It is because of wrong expenditure of energy.

THE third quality which distinguishes man from the animals is aspiration. I mentioned these three: ambition, initiative, and aspiration. Man is so constituted that he cannot remain satisfied with anything that is in the finite, anything which has an end. Suppose you have the ambition to make money, and you set a limit of a million dollars. You then exercise your initiative and you find out ways and means to earn this money. You expend your energy towards that goal, and you are successful. Will you be satisfied with your million dollars? Certainly not. The same may be said of everything in the realm of the finite. That which has the qualification of finiteness cannot satisfy the ambition of man. That is because we are made of the stuff of the Infinite. The Infinite is our nature. Anything that has a limit cannot satisfy the inner being; it is inadequate, and the inner being rises and protests against it. But because of our lack of thinking we come to a deadlock and gradually stagnation sets in.

Aspiration may be described as thoughtfully knowing what we have and looking forward to something else finer to achieve. The gross can lead us only so far. When we have achieved some amount of success in the material world we can go deeper into the psychological, the intellectual, and the spiritual aspects of our being. We should create higher aspirations as we proceed. Man looks forward. If it is pointed out to man that there is a great realm within himself, and

if his understanding is drawn towards that and he is shown the ways and means to reach this realm, he will be able to go forward. There is no place to stop until we have reached perfection within.

If one does not have aspiration, if he denies the protests of his inner being against finiteness, he reaches a stage of stagnation. And if life is stagnant, degeneration sets in. Along with ambition and initiative there must be aspiration.

It is self-satisfaction that causes stagnation in our lives. This point has been illustrated in a story told by Sri Ramakrishna. There was once a poor man, a very, very poor man, who made his living by cutting wood in the forest. He would cut logs and carry them on his shoulders and go to a market-place, or bazaar, and sell them. The man had to walk many miles to gather the logs and he could not carry many; thus he could earn very little each day. One day—it was a sultry summer afternoon—the woodcutter became tired; so he sat down to rest under a tree. He was thinking of his unfortunate circumstances when a holy man appeared. They talked together. The poor woodcutter told the holy man how he did not have enough to eat or wear, and how his family was suffering, almost starving. He asked if the holy man could help him. The holy man thought for a moment and said, "Go farther ahead." And then he got up and went on his way.

(I am glad that the holy man did not give the woodcutter a bag of gold, which is probably what you are thinking would have done the poor man much more good than advice. But the holy man knew better. So he said, "Go farther ahead.")

The woodcutter pondered over the words of the holy man. He began to think: "What could he have meant?" The next day the woodcutter was going as usual to cut

wood when he wondered, "I have been cutting wood in this part of the forest for a long time. What is beyond? Should I go farther in? Perhaps that is what the holy man meant."

So he began to penetrate the deep forest. After great difficulty the woodcutter found himself in a forest of sandalwood. He was very happy. He was able to make more money by cutting just a small part of what he had formerly carried to market. Sandalwood brought a good price. His burden was lighter; he had more money, and his wife and children were better taken care of than before. He did not tell anyone about how or where he found his new riches. He progressed in his new business of selling sandalwood and he and his family were contented.

But one day the woodcutter was thinking of the holy man he had met in the forest, and of his advice, "Go farther ahead." The woodcutter thought, "The holy man didn't tell me to go to the forest of sandalwood. He said, 'Go farther ahead.'" So the next day, he went deeper into the forest. On and on he went and he found a copper mine. He became richer than before, much richer. But he remembered the words of the holy man. So he continued going deeper and deeper, and on and on, and he found a silver mine, then a gold mine, and finally a diamond mine!

This little story conveys a deep philosophy. Analyze it and you will find that the one thing which brought the man to his goal was his aspiration to go farther ahead. Too often we think that if we have progressed to some extent, why bother to do any more? The fact is, we lack the aspiration to attain anything worthwhile. And then we slip into the stage of stagnation, which is the beginning of degeneration.

Determination—aspiration—that is what we must have. Our ambition must be well-planned and reinforced by

serious thinking. First of all, let us learn to do our own thinking. What if there are a few problems? Life would not be worth living without a few problems! And let us learn to solve our problems, not to depend upon others. You will find that there is an enjoyment, a sort of satisfaction, in solving your own problems.

I WOULD like to bring to your notice one or two more points. We find that because of our lack of thinking we cannot stick to anything. Modern life has become too inconsistent. There is no security in anything. Your money is not secure; your marriage is not secure; nothing is secure. All of this results from poor thinking. Each step in life should be taken with the consideration it demands. Our plans may have been all right, but the ambition was absent or the aspiration lacking. That is why things are so unsteady today. We should develop the faculty for thinking before we enter into activity. And then, a good deal of tenacity is needed. People come to conclusions too quickly and then change their minds without real reason. Or they find themselves unable to make up their minds about even the most commonplace things. Because of our lack of thinking we have no constancy, no tenacity. We are swayed by the thinking of other people, whether good or bad.

Sri Ramakrishna told a story which illustrates this state of affairs. A man decided that he must have a well on his property. He decided upon a spot and started to dig. His nextdoor neighbor saw him digging, and as he had nothing much to do he went over to watch him. (You always find that people like to watch others work!) After some time the neighbor said, "Oh, is *that* where you are digging your well? You'll never find water there. Why don't you try over here?" And he pointed to a spot a little distant from where the man

was digging. The man thought that perhaps his neighbor was right; so he left the spot he had begun and started digging where the neighbor had indicated. Later, another neighbor joined them. He told the man that it was much more likely that he would find water several feet from where he was then digging. The man had already dug many feet into the ground; but upon hearing the new advice he scratched his head, heaved a sigh, and started digging where the second neighbor had suggested. And so it went on. Many came to give advice and the man followed it all. He never found any water. If he had stuck to the place he had first decided upon, without listening to all the advice from his friends, he would have had his well.

I do not mean to say that we should not take advice and we cannot profit by the experience of others; but we must have a background of our own experience for advice to be of any benefit to us. Before you set to work to achieve anything you must consider all the angles involved. And then you must have real bulldog tenacity. That is not all. Your plan has to be overhauled once in a while, according to the demands of your environment. It has to be revised at every step, according to experience you have gained.

Another illustration, which is also a story told by Sri Ramakrishna, comes to mind. A farmer wanted to irrigate his farm, so he had conduits made to bring the water to all parts of his farm. He had to draw water from his well and then direct it into the channels, which carried it to the different parts of his land. He worked hard all day long. When the day was over he went over the land to see that all parts had been irrigated. To his amazement he found that one of the most important sections had not been watered at all, because of a leak in one of the conduits. The water had flowed out into a ditch instead of entering that plot of land. The farmer

had not inspected the channels beforehand through which the water was to reach the land. He had not set his mind to all the details. Somebody formulated some idea and he followed. He didn't think the matter out for himself.

Another thing. It is not mere intellectual tenacity that is necessary. It is the ability to adapt yourself according to the exigencies of the occasion. This man in our story had the ambition and the initiative, but he had not taken into consideration all the details regarding the scheme. He did not find out the flaw in the arrangements. And I might mention here that when we do try to find out flaws, obstructions, and difficulties in what we are doing we always find them *around* us; never *here*, within our own selves. If we find a mistake or a flaw in our activities, let us look for the cause of it *here*, within. We always think it is someone else's fault. The trouble is that we lack self-analysis. For that reason, although we expend our energy, we often get little or no results.

Let me appeal to you that what we need, fundamentally, is to develop our power of thinking. It is calm, thoughtful, and deep consideration of life that is necessary. We are not just biological animals; we have finer faculties within us. Civilization does not extend outward. It is not by the cultivation of outside nature that we attain progress. Real progress lies in going deeper within one's self. Let us start the cultivation, the discipline, there—within. Then, like the woodcutter, going through the different stages of material prosperity, we shall be able to attain the only worthwhile ambition in life, which is the realization of the Perfection within.

THE PALE SWEETHEART

FELIX MARTI-IBÁÑEZ, M. D.

LIKE every physician, and even more often because I have roamed around the world several times, I have frequently come face to face with the drama of Death, that pale sweetheart. I have seen men dying and I have seen men dead. Although death is certainly no stranger to me, it has never ceased to be grievous and disquieting.

I have known no greater stoicism at the imminence of death than that shown by my former teacher Gregorio Marañón, the learned endocrinologist, writer, and humanist, who in 1958 in Madrid suffered a cerebral hemorrhage from which he fortunately recovered. Months later, feeling ill again, Marañón consulted his famous colleague Dr. Rof Carballo. "Do you think," inquired Marañón, "that my illness is about to reach the—transcendent solution?" And again some time afterward, in reply to another colleague who sought to comfort him regarding his ailment, he said: "No, my friend, I know exactly what is the matter with me and its prognosis. If you'll look in my own *Manual of Etiological Diagnosis* [a monumental textbook of more than a thousand pages that he had written, possibly the most important treatise in the history of etiologic medicine] you will find my exact ailment described by myself, on page such-and-such." And, unfortunately, his self-prognosis was correct.

Another fine example of a noble, stoic attitude before

dying is to be found in the last letters that Dr. Edward Wilson, physician, naturalist, artist, and Antarctic explorer, wrote to his wife from the icy wastes of the South Pole. The men in Scott's ill-fated expedition, of which Dr. Wilson was a member, had met death from starvation and cold. When discovered months later, their emaciated bodies were sheathed in a permanent, thick crust of ice. Dr. Wilson's letters were found near his body. "Don't be unhappy," he wrote his wife, "all is for the best. We are playing a good part in a great scheme arranged by God himself, and all is well. . . . We will all meet after death, and death has no terrors. . . . I leave this life in absolute faith and happy belief. . . . All is for the best to those that love God. . . . All is well."

TODAY we know a great deal and at the same time very little about death. Lipschütz called death the last phase in individual growth; for Verworn it was the irreversible cessation of the nutritional processes. Tange considered death as a general property of living organisms; Sedgwick Minot, as an accidental characteristic produced by the differentiation of living matter in the course of phylogenesis. In his time, the biologist August Weismann maintained that unicellular organisms, such as protozoa and bacteria, are essentially immortal, that their death not only is an accident caused by ecologic variations, but also is absolutely unnecessary, since any organism that reproduces itself by fission or gemmation is in essence "immortal."

From this it may be understood that death ceases to be an accidental phenomenon and becomes inevitable with the development of sexual reproduction. In higher organisms, including man, we must differentiate between somatic cells,

which are perishable, and reproductive cells, which perish only by accident but are intrinsically immortal. The soma is perishable; the germ cell is immortal.

Owing to the perennial nature of the germ cells, man is perpetuated in his descendants and is himself a living fragment of his ancestors. The death of millions of spermatozoa and ova is purely accidental; the fact that only a few of these cells are allowed to survive guarantees to a certain extent the survival of the species and the continuity of the germ cell.

There is a general and an elemental death: in the first, the individual as a co-ordinated unit of a superior order is destroyed; in the second, the nutritional processes of the cells that constitute the whole of the organism are halted. Every day a large number of our epithelial cells, erythrocytes, and other cells of the body perish and are replaced by newly formed cells. But the life of the whole organism is preserved by the continuation of the metabolic process, as revealed by the regenerative capacity of the germinal cells and by the persistence of nutritive changes in those muscle and nerve cells that have lost their regenerative capacity.

Every living creature—of the higher animals at least—bears within it the seed of death. There exists in almost every living thing a thanatic impulse that is translated by the organism into a tendency toward biologic stabilization. Individual death assures the renewal and progress of existence, thereby entailing and symbolizing a paradoxically creative tendency.

IN THE history of medicine, many great physicians after Hippocrates concerned themselves with the phenomenon of death. Bichat, for example, established a vital tripod com-

posed of the heart, lungs, and brain, which succumb one after the other in a particular order, and he described as signs of death the clouding of consciousness, delirium, dyspnea, the death rattle, the Hippocratic facies (the pinched, livid face), arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythm), bradycardia (slow heart beat), and hypothermia (subnormal body temperature).

Contrary to popular opinion, death to all appearances (apart from exceptional cases or accidents) is not accompanied by physical pain; rather, it is suffused with serenity and even with a certain well-being and spiritual exaltation, a premortal euphoria that has no religious or philosophic origin but is caused by the anesthetic action of carbon dioxide on the central nervous system and by the effect of toxic substances. "The pang of death," wrote Ernest Hemingway, "a famous doctor once told me, is often less than that of a toothache." There is no physical pain, properly called, but there may be a feeling of anguish, a certain premortal psychosis comparable more or less to a symptomatic toxic psychosis.

Of enormous interest are the studies of A. W. Kneucker, who for nineteen years studied the process of senile death, death through conditions incompatible with life (asphyxia, submersion, severe diabetes), and death from other causes, observing that death is forged in the neurovegetative system, adrenal glands, heart, and blood. Two substances of lethal effect are the acetylcholine liberated by endogenous or exogenous stimulation of the vagus nerve, which paves the way for the lethal action of potassium on the heart, and serotonin, which liberates histamine and adrenaline.

From Kneucker's viewpoint, death is the irreparable disruption of the equilibrium among hormones, enzymes, and ions. In two thirds of all cases death would occur through

an excess of acetylcholine, potassium, and serotonin, and a deficiency of hydrocortisone, cholinesterase, magnesium, and adrenaline, but death would not be a fatality against which the physician is powerless, since he could fight it or delay it through the use of hormones, enzymes, and ions.

PHILOSOPHICALLY, death is an enigma, even for physicians who witness it so often. When blood—the symbol of life!—flows freely in a fatal accident, glowing like rubies in the sun, or when life escapes naturally from the body like a bird from a cage, there remains only an inert mass of purely organic matter with nothing concealed within it.

But death is the essential human vocation. Man's physiologic race is only a race toward its ultimate culmination, which is death, a logical obverse of the medal of life. Diseases themselves are but pathophysiologic accidents in that great process toward death which begins to unfurl in time as soon as we are born.

Death is less frightening when we concede that life attains maximum fullness only when it is guided by an ideal, by something for which we are willing to die if necessary. That is why the lives of heroes, mystics, and martyrs have much more meaning and are more intense than the life of an ordinary mortal. That is also why the willing martyr is to be envied. In a way, the physician Michael Servetus, discoverer of the pulmonary circulation, was a willing martyr, for he went to Geneva even though he knew that the implacable Calvin was waiting for him. Accused of doctrinal heresy, Servetus was put to a horrible, slow death on a green wood pyre.

Whatever incites us to die also incites us to live with greater intensity. That is why life is lived and why love and

the pleasures of the senses are felt with more intensity by people who are facing death in a war or revolution. The memoirs of those condemned to the guillotine by Robespierre and his colleagues during the Terror of the French Revolution are highly enlightening in this respect. I, myself, remember that, during the years of menace and death of the Spanish Civil War, for those of us who were living in the expectation of dying at any moment everything acquired a sublime and unexpected value: a day of sunshine, the clasp of a hand, a glass of wine, a pretty face, a bird, a rose. But even as a coin attains its full value when it is spent, life attains its supreme value when one knows how to forfeit it with grace when the time comes. Good bullfighters give us a fine example of how to die, when the time comes, with grace and *garbo*.

Death is an essential attribute of life, and life should never become a hospital or a clinic in which we dare not live for fear of death. The essential thing is to know how to live. People who prefer the safety of a retired life to the dangers of an active one do not know how to live; indeed, they are not living, they are half dead. On the other hand, the man who loves life as much as he does not fear death lives a fuller and better life because he has killed death. Of course, life can be prolonged by not using it, just as money will last longer if it is not spent, but such a soporific extension is obtained only by sacrificing all intensity in living, thereby turning life into a *vita minima*, into mere hibernation.

The physiologist Ehrenberg stated that it is impossible to define life without death. Up to its very last link, life is a biochemical chain reaction. Once life is launched, like a bullet it must reach its final destination, which is death. We live and un-live life simultaneously, since the phenomenon of dying is engendered as soon as we are born, it being im-

possible to change the inexorable course of life, except perhaps to slow it down. However, a life with a slow rhythm lasts no longer than a life with a fast rhythm. But both slow and fast lives may include the same content, just as a film includes the same number of frames, whether it is projected at a low or high speed.

Emotions and thought are accelerators of life's chemistry. They are, in the words of Baltasar Gracián, "life's postilions who add their stimulating haste to the normal march of time." The noble emotion of heroism is a voluntary anticipation of death. But if we seek to profit from life, we ought to profit also from death. Instead of trying to avoid the involuntary "chemical" death of a plant or animal, we ought to command death. That is what medieval knights did, inspired by the warrior spirit of the Middle Ages. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, the horror of death mounted, and chemical, medical, and mechanical techniques were invented to fight it and to allow us a voluntary choice of death.

Today we know that fear of death is a necessary concomitant of our existence, but we must not allow it to influence that existence. Of course, every human being comes to know at one time or another what William Dunbar meant when he said, "*Timor mortis conturbat me*" ("The fear of death disturbs me"). Sir Thomas Browne himself said: "The long habit of Living makes meer Men more hardly to part with life, . . ."

WHAT ARE the roots of the fear of death? First of all, it is the fear of pain and the feeling of anguish that is implicit in dying; second, the sadness of leaving our loved ones and everything—work, joy—that binds us to the world; and

third, and perhaps the most important, fear of the unknown.

But the testimony of those who have been at the point of death and have returned to life and everything known to medicine about the death process seem to show, as I said before, that the moribund usually undergo no great physical suffering and that the sensation of dying is like that of falling asleep. Muscular convulsions can be seen, but these are probably automatic and caused by the lack of oxygen, which in turn engenders a merciful anesthesia. Moreover, if a person accepts his death as an act of service to an ideal or as the end of his life's work, the feeling of dying may be no more unpleasant than that of falling asleep. Eternal rest could be a blessing and could be accepted more willingly if we knew that we had at all times fulfilled our duty in life.

Furthermore, abandoning our worldly goods and our loved ones would be less distressing if we knew we were leaving behind a legacy of love, creation, goodness, justice, and ideals. This legacy would allow us to humanize death by endowing it with liberality, generosity, and graciousness. "Let us be poets of our existence," said Ortega y Gasset, "by knowing how to find for life the exact rhyme of an inspired death."

But the great fear that death inspires—so perfectly and beautifully analyzed by the eminent Spanish clinician Dr. Roberto Nóvoa Santos—is fear of the unknown, similar to the childhood fear of darkness of which Lucretius spoke. Religion and philosophies have tried in vain to dissipate this fear, as did Plato in his *Phaedo*, Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, Sir Thomas Browne, and St. Paul ("O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?").

This fear is not so much of dying as of what comes after death. Does our protoplasm dissolve into its primordial elements and return to the universe, or does the complex system

of images that we call consciousness survive? Even if we knew that there would be no pain in dying, that instead we would feel a premortal "psychosis," a euphoria of death that would fill us with a sense of well-being and ecstasy, even if we knew that, while the body is reacting in death with automatic reflex movements, the spirit is free and pure and feels no pain or anguish, the mystery of the Beyond would still terrify us. To fight that fear we should remember Maurice Maeterlinck's words: "Once the doctor and the sick man have learnt what they have to learn, there will be no physical nor metaphysical reason why the advent of death should not be as salutary as that of sleep." Death ought to be a rest after a tiring journey, as Hesiod hinted when he said, "Night, having Sleep, the brother of Death." It could also be, as Leopardi said, "*. . . quel dolce naufragare in questo mare!*" ("*. . . how sweet to be shipwrecked on that sea!*")

It might help to dissipate our fear of the unknown if we remember that, were we endowed with consciousness before birth, we would probably feel the same fear of the unknown when passing from the shadow world of the womb, all peace, silence, and darkness, into the light world of life, all noise, commotion, and cold. We should know how to leap into the unknown world of death just as we do into life at birth, particularly since when we die we have the advantage of having lived, of having cultivated life, of having a treasury of memories, of tasks completed, of tenderness and affection, of possibly possessing a Stoic philosophy, as did Seneca or Marcus Aurelius, of having fulfilled a duty with love and generosity. We cultivate the will to live, but unfortunately we do not try to cultivate the will to die. We desire death only in moments of utter desperation or intense happiness, as is the case with martyrs and lovers.

Were we to deem death a physiologic necessity like hunger or thirst, we would aspire to die, as Nietzsche said, ". . . like a torch . . . which dies exhausted and glutted with itself." But this philosophy has not occurred even to medical philosophers. The great Élie Metchnikoff, who studied old age so extensively, was obsessed with the fear of death and saw dangers to his life everywhere, even to the point that on his dining table he kept a lighted gas burner on which he sterilized every morsel of meat he ate. This same distress about the afterlife also harassed the final years of Ramón y Cajal, an optimist in his writings although not in his tormented intimate life. "Death seems unbearable to us," said Élie Metchnikoff, "because it occurs at a moment when man has not completed his physiological evolution and is in full possession of his instinct for life."

SUCH ATTITUDES could be combated by learning how not to die "too soon," before one has done everything one wants to accomplish, by learning how "to die when the time comes." In the Orient, there are millions of people whose philosophy and religion have taught them how "to die when the time comes," people who have the will to die or who, as in the nirvana of the Buddhists, try to reach a deathlike state during life. Thus they love life, just as when the time comes they know how to love death. The gentle and incomparable Rabindranath Tagore once said: "It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and flow. . . . And, because I love this life, I know that I shall love death as well." In contrast to the Orient there are nations, like

Mexico, where worship of death has been cultivated as an expression of individual courage. This contempt for life and love for death is perhaps responsible for the fact that Mexico has produced more revolutionaries and bullfighters than any other country in Latin America.

No one has taught us better than the mystics to cultivate the desire to die in order to attain the immortality of union with God. Years ago I wrote an essay on the mystic psychology of St. Teresa of Jesus. I also made a study of Spanish mysticism, and my attention was caught by its many analogies with Hindu mysticism, to which I had previously devoted a book. St. Teresa, a pure, honest Castilian woman, spent many years in the sonorous silence of her jasmine-scented cell, intimately communing with God. Her stirringly profound verses later inspired her disciple, St. John of the Cross, who, speaking of his beloved Master, said, "He left them clad in His beauty." And St. Teresa in her famous verse said:

This life I am living is a deprivation of living
And so is continual dying
Until I live with Thee.
Hear O, Lord, what I say,
That I want not this life,
That I am dying because I do not die.

Just as lovers throughout the course of history have killed themselves because they could not break down the barrier of the flesh to make possible the perfect union of their souls, so also mystics, craving to unite themselves with the deity, have sought to destroy the corporeal substance that barred them from the total possession of the Beloved. For that reason, as St. Ignatius of Loyola advised, they mortified the flesh in a slow daily suicide of the body. The ecstasies

and raptures of mystics, from Plotinus of Alexandria to St. Teresa have been *muerter pequeñas* or little deaths (García Lorca's own description for the sexual act), transitory deaths during life. At such moments their bodies remained alive but without a soul, the field of consciousness contracting in such manner that, lacking memories and hopes, past and future, there remained solely the image of the deity flooding their souls with its radiant glory.

The great physician and humanist Sir Thomas Browne spoke much about death in his *Religio medici*: "We term sleep a death, and yet it is a waking that kills us, and destroys those spirits that are the house of life. 'Tis indeed a part of life that best expresth death, for every man truly lives, so long as he acts his nature, or some way makes good the faculties of himself. . . ." And before going to sleep, he would say:

Sleepe is a death; O make me try,
By sleeping, what it is to die:
And as gently lay my head
On my grave, as now my bed.
Howere I rest, great God, let me
Awake again at last with thee.
And thus assur'd, behold I lie
Securely, or to awake or die,
These are my drowsie days; in vain
I do now wake to sleep again:
O come that hour, when I shall never
Sleep again, but wake for ever.

To which he added: "This is the Dormative I take to bedward, I need no other *Laudanum* than this to make me sleep: after which, I close mine eyes in security, content to take my leave of the Sun, and sleep unto the resurrection."

WE SHOULD always remember that death is the biologic price we pay for our differentiation on the zoologic ladder, and that before sex made its appearance, organisms were biologically immortal, inasmuch as primary beings do not reach senescence nor succumb to natural death. Only man possesses the luxury of "natural" death and of desiring death.

Carl Jung, speaking profoundly and wisely about death, narrated a dream he had had in which he saw a yogi, seated in the lotus posture and sunk in deep meditation, whose face was the same as his own. This caused Jung to think on waking that the yogi "is the one who is meditating me. He has a dream, and I am it," and that when the yogi woke up, that dream, that is to say, Jung, "would no longer be." Jung's idea was that part of man's soul was not subject to the laws of time and space. For that reason, perhaps, Jung liked the karma theory, the theory of action and reaction in human life, and for the same reason the oriental theory of successive reincarnations is so appealing to many of us. Said Jung: "The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life. Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance."

Today the apocalyptic terrors engendered by the threat of nuclear warfare have produced a remarkable paradox: although the increase in longevity, made possible by the progress in medicine, has been accompanied by a parallel increase in the fear of "natural" death through old age or disease, on the other hand, despite its growing threat, the fear of atomic death has diminished. The Dantesque vision of a nuclear holocaust that would destroy millions of people has, by dint of being ever-present in people's minds, suc-

ceeded in rendering them insensible to such a horrendous fate. The notion that *everyone* without exception is exposed, by chance or deliberate calculation, to destruction in a few minutes by the hydrogen bomb has made sudden collective death less frightening to people than the idea of their *individual* deaths from cancer, coronary occlusion, or encephalitis. The magnitude of the collective nuclear risk has dwarfed its psychologic impact on the individual.

The same attitude of philosophic stoicism that people in the mass have adopted in the face of collective death from nuclear war should also be applied to individual death from disease or accident. To attain this, it will not be enough to conquer the fear of natural death, as we have in the case of atomic death, but we must also cultivate the idea of dying with wisdom and dignity as a fine end to a fine life. *Un bel morir tutta la vita onora* (A noble death is an honor to a life), as the Italians say.

Let us learn, then, to go forth to our meeting with death as though we were going into a scented garden under a bright autumn moon to receive the pure, cool kiss of a pale sweetheart. Only then shall we be able to end our pilgrimage through life with the words of the gentle St. Francis of Assisi: "Welcome! O Sister Death!"

practiced bhakti toward his gurus. He described the correct attitude in an illustration about Sri Krishna's disciple, Arjuna. Krishna had pointed out some birds to Arjuna and identified them as pigeons. Arjuna saw that they were pigeons. But a moment later Krishna said that the birds were not pigeons at all. Arjuna responded that now he could see that indeed they were not pigeons. This was not a yes-man's acquiescence. "Such faith had Arjuna in Krishna," was Ramakrishna's comment, "that what Krishna said, Arjuna perceived at once to be actually true."

No, what such knowers of God practiced, I cannot term only customary. The wonder of their lives has established this tradition as spiritually necessary.

What is the secret of guru-bhakti? It is, I perceive, simply that, as a preliminary to knowing God, one *must* learn to surrender oneself; submit one's will to a visible spiritual authority, gladly, through love. One does it, of course, not for the guru's sake, but wholly for one's own sake. But how one shrinks from submitting! Yet surely if one cannot unreservedly devote oneself to the Good one has seen, how can one hope to adore the Good one has not seen?

Nor is there anything unique to Vedanta in this. The same stress is found in Christianity. Christ taught us to become as little children. Thomas à Kempis in his *The Imitation of Christ* commends loving obedience toward one's religious superior in the strongest terms. And confession becomes an act of self-abnegation before God's representative.

Then why does one resist? Why does one conjure up rational reasons for remaining one's own master? Pride, vanity, self-love. What must be eliminated if one is to progress spiritually? Pride, vanity, self-love. How to rid oneself of such egotistic tendencies most painlessly, most positively? Practice of guru-bhakti. The process, which can lead us to the highest result, is as simple—and demanding—as that.



Vedanta and the West

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

STUDENT'S NOTEBOOK

No. 31

I have been thinking lately about the practice of "guru-bhakti" and trying to understand its ways and wherefores. Vedanta teaches that utter devotion to one's preceptor is fundamental to progress; in fact, that if the relationship of the disciple to the teacher is not one of unreserved submission and selfless reverence, the disciple cannot hope to make spiritual progress.

Is there any rational, psychological basis for this extreme doctrine? Or is the guru-bhakti concept merely a religious custom?

Swami Vivekananda said: "Without faith, humility . . . and veneration . . . toward our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth in religion in us; and it is a significant fact that where this kind of relation . . . prevails, there alone gigantic spiritual men are growing." The intensity of Swami's devotion to his own teacher is proverbial. Sri Ramakrishna, in turn,

Concluded on page 64