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Sri Ramakrishna—As I Understand Him*

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

I am grateful to you for your invitation to come to this celebration, and I am happy to have this opportunity to express my homage to the memory of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I do not know that I am particularly fitted to speak about the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, because he was a man of God, and I am a man of earth, engaged in earthly activities which consume all my energy. But even a man of earth can admire, and perhaps be influenced by, a man of God. I admire godly men, and even though sometimes I do not altogether understand them, I have been influenced by what has been written about them by their disciples. These extraordinary personalities—Sri Ramakrishna and others like him—have powerfully influenced, not only their own generation, but succeeding generations. Not only so; they have also powerfully influenced great men and have changed the whole tenor of their lives.

Sri Ramakrishna was completely beyond the average run of men. He appears rather to belong to the tradition of the great Rishis of India, who have come from time to time to turn our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit. For, throughout her long history, and in spite of what has gone on elsewhere in the world, India has never ignored the spiritual values of life. She has always laid stress on the search for truth, and has always welcomed the searchers of truth in whatever guise they have come. Not only so; for, while India has built up this tradition of the search for truth and Reality, she has also built up the tradition of the utmost tolerance toward all who strive for truth, no matter what path they may follow. Unfortunately, that tradition of tolerance has recently been shaken; we have at times fallen into evil ways, and have begun to think that we who walk in a certain narrow path alone are right, and others are wrong. This narrow-mindedness has never been the tradition of India. What made India great was her broadmindedness, and her conviction that truth is many-sided and of infinite variety. How can any one man presume to say that he alone has grasped the entire truth. If he is earnest in his search, he may say that he has seen a particular facet of truth, but how can he say that no one else can do so unless he follows a similar path? India has always encour-

aged the pursuit of truth and of moral values, and this, perhaps, is the most distinctive feature of her culture. Thus, in spite of the many ups and downs of her history, the original impress still remains.

Sri Ramakrishna had a peculiar way of influencing the lives of people who came in contact with him. From a distance men often scoffed at this man of no learning, yet when they came to him they bowed their heads, and, ceasing to scoff, remained to pray. Many of them gave up their vocations in life and business and joined the band of devotees. They were all great men, and one of them, more widely known than the others, both in India and in other parts of the world, was Swami Vivekananda. I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and the writings of Swami Vivekananda, but I can say that many of my generation were powerfully influenced by him, and I think it would be well worth while, and would do a great deal of good to the present generation, if they also were to study his works and teachings. They would learn much from them. They would, perhaps, catch a glimpse, as some of us did, of the fire that raged through Swami Vivekananda's mind and heart, and which ultimately consumed him at an early age. Because of this fire in his heart—the fire of a great personality expressing itself in eloquent and ennobling language—he spoke no idle words. He poured his heart and soul into the words he uttered. He became a great orator, but with none of the orator's flashes and flourishes; he spoke with a deep conviction and earnestness of spirit.

Much has happened since Swami Vivekananda's time, things which perhaps make some of us forget those who came before and shaped India in those early and difficult days. Curiously enough, if you read Swami Vivekananda's writings you will find that they are not old. They are as fresh today as when they were written, because what he wrote or spoke about dealt with certain fundamental aspects of the problems of the world today. He gave us something which brings us a certain pride in our inheritance. He did not spare us. He spoke of our weaknesses and our failings. He did not try to hide anything, and indeed he should not, because we have to correct those failings. Sometimes he strikes hard at us, while at other times he points out the great things for which India stood, and which, even in the days of her downfall, helped her to maintain—in some measure—her inherent greatness.

What Swamiji has written and said is still of interest and is

likely to influence us for a long time to come. He was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word, yet he was, in my opinion, one of the great founders of the modern national movement of India, and a great number of people who took a more or less active part in that movement later on, drew their inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. Directly or indirectly, he has powerfully influenced the India of today, and it is my belief that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, spirit, and fire that flowed through him.

In India and in the world we are faced with many problems, terribly difficult problems. How are we to deal with them? There are two ways: the way of the politician and the way of the statesman—I am not speaking of the opportunists. To some extent, unfortunately, the politician or statesman has to be an opportunist, in that he has to deal with things as they are, with the material he has. He cannot put across something which the people do not understand or cannot live up to. He has to face that difficulty always, especially in an age which calls itself democratic. Democracy, I believe, is fundamentally good—but democracy means that what you do must ultimately be understood and appreciated and acted upon by a large majority of the people. If this majority of the people do not understand or do not appreciate it, then even the truth that you possess cannot reach them. So it is that, very often, politicians and statesmen have to compromise, even with the truth, because the people's receptivity of truth is not sufficient. I do not know whether this is good or bad. But so it is, and, looking at it from a statesman's or politician's point of view, there appears to be no alternative, for, if he were to do anything else, he would soon be pushed aside, and another, with a clearer perception of the limitations of the people, would replace him. On the other hand, the prophet deals with truth in a different way. He adheres to truth, whatever the consequences; and often, because of this adherence, he is either stoned to death, or shot, or killed in some other way. That is the way of the prophet. That has been and always will be the way of the prophet. But though the prophet is slain, the truth does not die. Truth is greater than the prophet, and the prophet continues to live in that truth even more vividly than if he had not died.

Always there are these two approaches, the approach of the prophet and the approach of the political leader or statesman. Neither

approach can be said to be, at least in terms of today, or in terms of a limited period, a wholly effective approach. In long distance terms one might say perhaps that the prophet's approach is the better one; but one cannot carry on politics or the public affairs of a country in these days in long distance terms, even though, generations later, the truth would be appreciated; if he attempted such a course, he would cease to have the opportunity to carry on. Though the prophet's way may be theoretically the better way, it does not seem difficult to believe that its effects would be seen or felt during his lifetime. Yet, on the other hand, however well meant, the politician's and statesman's way leads from compromise to compromise. It is a slippery path, and once one enters that path each succeeding compromise will lead him farther away from the truth. What he may wish to do may be ignored in the existing circumstances. Shall we then hold on to the truth as we see it, or shall we think so much about the existing circumstances as to forget the truth itself? That is the problem that humanity and those who are responsible for the ordering of the affairs of the world have continually to face, and it is indeed a difficult problem. All one can say is that insofar as it is possible the statesman should adhere to truth, or, at any rate, he should aim at truth, even though he may indulge in temporary compromises. Once he loses sight of truth, he may go very far astray. It is difficult to deal with day-to-day affairs without paying some heed to men's understanding of the truth and their receptivity to it. It is important to know how far the truth is understood and finds some kind of reception in men's minds. If the words of the politician are not understood, then even the words of the prophet would have no meaning. Therefore one has to interpret the truth, and even limit it to some extent, with reference to men's receptivity to it.

We are living in an age when scientific and technical progress has gone very far indeed, especially in the United States of America. Technically and industrially the Americans are a very advanced people, and have attained a high standard of material and physical life. I have no doubt that culturally also they are advancing in many ways. Nevertheless, it must be said of the whole world that man's mental and moral growth has not kept pace with his technical and scientific advance, and this is a very dangerous thing, because science and technology are weapons of tremendous power. We have these

Art and Religion

Aldous Huxley

Does art hold up the mirror to its period? Or does every period hold up the mirror to its art?

Does the artist follow or lead? Or does he walk alone, heeding only the categorical imperatives of his talent and the inner logic of the tradition within which he works?

Is he the representative of his epoch? Or does he stand for a constituency no wider than that particular class of talented persons—his predecessors, contemporaries and successors—to which, by the predestination of his heredity, he happens to belong?

All these questions can be correctly answered now in the affirmative, now in the negative, now with a simultaneous yes and no. There are no general rules; there are only particular cases; and most of these cases exist, so far as we are concerned, in a thick night of ignorance.

Here, for example, is the case that presents itself to every tourist who goes to Rome—the fascinatingly enigmatic case of baroque art and seventeenth-century Catholicism. In what way were the two related? What was the nature of the connection between the art forms of the period and the religious experiences of those who lived through it?

Three hundred years after the event all that we know for certain is that the personages represented in baroque religious art are all in a state of chronic emotional excitement. They wave their arms, roll their eyes, press hands to palpitating bosoms, sometimes, in an excess of feeling, swoon away into unconsciousness. We look at them with a mixture of aesthetic admiration and moral distaste, then start to speculate about the men and women who were contemporary with them. Was their religious life as wildly agitated as the life of these creatures of the painters' and sculptors' imagination? And, if so, had the art been modelled on their agitation, or was their agitation due to familiarity with an art that had become agitated for purely aesthetic reasons? Or, finally, was there no agitation in the real world corresponding to that prevailing in the worlds of painting and sculpture? Baroque artists were tired of doing what their predeces-

sors had done and were committed by the inner logic of their tradition to an exploration of the inordinate; therefore the figures above the altars had to gesticulate in a studied frenzy. But the religious life of the people who worshipped at those altars—had that become significantly different from the religious life of the men and women of other periods? Were there not then, as always, a few ardent contemplatives and actives, imperfectly leavening a great lump of the legalistic and the corybantic, the time-serving and the luke-warm?

I myself incline to the last alternative. Environment is never the sole determinant, and heredity is always at work, producing every variety of physique and temperament at every period of history. All the potentialities of human nature exist at all times, and at all times (in spite of an environment which may be unfavorable to some of them) practically all the potentialities are to some extent actualized. One has only to read Salimbene's *Chronicle* and Law's *Serious Call* in order to realize that there were as many irreligious people in the ages of faith as there were pietists in the ages of reason. The Byzantines who went mad about trinitarian theology were the same Byzantines who went mad about the chariot races. And our own age of atomic physics is also a notable age of astrology and numerology. At every period there exists, not a synthesis, but a mere brute collocation of opposites and incompatibles. And yet at any given epoch there is only one prevailing style of art, in terms of which painters and sculptors treat of a strictly limited number of subjects. Art may be defined, in this context, as a process of selection and transformation, whereby an unmanageable multiplicity is reduced to a semblance, at least, of unity. Consequently we must never expect to find in art a reflection of contemporary reality as it is actually experienced by human beings in all their congenital and acquired variety. Thus, from a study of the restrained and formalized art of the Italian *trecento* who could infer the existence of those wild religious revivals, which were so characteristic a feature of the period? And, conversely, who from the frenzies of the baroque could infer the facts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mysticism? Looking at a Carlo Dolci Magdalen, who could guess what St. John of the Cross had said about true Charity—that it is a matter, not of feeling, but of the will? Or who, with Bernini's St. Teresa before his eyes, would ever suspect that Bernini's contemporary, Charles de Condren, had deplored the weakness which caused ecstasies to receive God *si animalement*? The

truth would seem to be that while the great masses of the people remained, as ever, indifferent or fitfully superstitious, and while the masters of the spiritual life preached a worship of the Spirit in spirit, the artists of the time chose to glorify a Christianity of thrills and visceral yearnings, now violent, now cloyingly sentimental. And they chose to do so for reasons connected, not with the problems of life, but with those of art. Their painting and sculpture did not, and indeed could not, reflect the manifold religious experience of the time, nor did the religious experience of most of their contemporaries reflect the prevailing art. Art and religious life went their separate ways, the artists using religion as their opportunity for developing a baroque expressionism, and the religious using this art as an instrument for achieving the various kinds of experience for which their temperaments had fitted them. And precisely the same relations between religion and art had existed when the 'Primitives' were using a multi-form Catholicism as an opportunity for creating one particular kind of static composition, and when the religious were using these works as instruments for the practice now of revivalism, now of contemplation, now of magic.

From Rome and the baroque let us pass for a moment to Tuscany and the rococo. A few miles from Siena there stands among the vineyards a large Carthusian monastery, called Pontignano, now inhabited by a score of peasant families. In the old days each of the monks occupied an apartment of three rooms—a kitchen, a bedroom and a tiny oratory. The front doors of these apartments give on to the cloisters and at the back are little walled gardens, where a man could grow vegetables and dig his own grave. Every brother lived independently of all the rest, a solitary in a community of solitaries, a mute among the silent. Most of the buildings at Pontignano date from the fourteenth century, but were re-furnished by an interior decorator of the eighteenth. Under his direction the church was adorned with an enormous high altar of wood, painted to look like marble, and the little oratories, in which the monks said their private prayers, were stuccoed over with rococo twiddles, till they looked like the boudoirs of so many provincial Pompadours. To us, with our incorrigible sense of history, this conjunction of St. Bruno and Louis XV seems deliriously incongruous. But how did it strike the monks who actually prayed in those oratories? Did they suddenly start to think, feel and behave like those libertine *abbes*, whom we

associate with that kind of decoration? Surely not. "Never reformed, because never deformed," the Carthusian order held on its way regardless of changes in aesthetic fashion. In their newly plastered oratories the brethren meditated on death, just as their predecessors had meditated when the decorations were baroque or renaissance, Gothic or Romanesque. Styles change, empires rise and fall; but death remains itself, a brute fact, sooner or later, of every individual's experience—a fact that has no history and to which, in consequence, all historical changes, whether political or economic, scientific or artistic, are completely irrelevant. The Pompadourish art in the Pontignano oratories tells us nothing whatever about contemporary Carthusian religion, which was centered, as ever, upon the contemplation of death. All we learn from it is that, when eighteenth-century monks found it necessary to restore ancient buildings, the only restorers available, in an age that was still innocent of pastiche and antiquarian forgery, were men brought up in the current tradition of art.

In our own days the religious are worse off than were the monks of Pontignano. Not living rococo, but the bogus-medieval, or some atrocious piece of mass-produced *bandieuserie* is all that they can find for their purposes. And yet, in spite of the nullity of modern religious art, religion, in all its aspects from the fetishistic to the contemplative, continues to flourish and to produce its good or evil fruits. Man is a whole and so, perhaps, is society; but they are wholes divided, like ships, into watertight compartments. On one side of a bulkhead is art, on the other religion. There may be good wine in one compartment, bilge-water in the other. The connection between the two is not by pipe or osmosis, but only from above, only for the intellect that looks down and can see both simultaneously and recognize them as belonging (by juxtaposition rather than by fusion) to the same individual or social whole.

Vedanta and Western History

Gerald Heard

A new thing has come into history—that is Western Vedanta. For centuries and perhaps millenia Vedanta influenced and moulded the East, passing from the richness of original Brahmanism to the austerity of Theravadin Buddhism, through the counter-richness of Mahayana and so again to the counter-reformation of Sankara and the Vedanta we know. But, save for some tentative influences—such as the missionary effort of Asoka and the small though steady trickle of Indian ideas through Alexandria—Vedanta did not really strike the West. Christianity, had it not been torn from its original rooting spots by Islam and made to specialize in the western legalistic form of Catholicism, would no doubt have exchanged many ideas with India. As it was the Christian Church on the Coramandel coast—and claiming descent from St. Thomas—did not remain a live link and the Buddhist missionaries who entered the Mediterranean world made no distinctive mark. True, there is a church in Sicily dedicated to St. Barlaam—a garbled form of Buddha's name made famous and saint-worthy because of a garbled but very popular story of his life and renunciation. The width and subtlety of Indian thought, the range of its cosmology, the depth of its psychology never, however, succeeded in enlarging that narrow Hebrew scheme of things, that Apocalypse and Escatology, that has ever since cramped and hobbled the religion of the west. That the eastern churches of the Levant would have made some use of this treasury of knowledge there can be little doubt when we see how many Indian ideas are present in Origen, how clearly he holds reincarnation and with what liberality he wished to draw upon the East for insights, for those illuminations from 'the Christians that were before Christ.' The mistake of the Council of Chalcedon—fourth century—in condemning reincarnation—removed from Christianity a view of things which till then had been liberally entertained and with which the cruel finality of everlasting punishment for the mistakes of this one life would not have disgraced the 'religion of love.'

Indeed we may say that the appearance of Vedanta in the West as a living religion—and not as an academic study, is inevitable just be-

cause the religious heredity of the West has now outgrown the tight Hebrew pot of cosmology in which it has been growing for two millennia. A faith that taught hell for those who did not get themselves saved in this life was suited enough to put 'the fear of God' into barbarians or into men too busy to do much more than make a dash with their last breath for a death-bed repentance. But for people really interested in the spiritual world, really desirous of growing in spirituality and filled with a real longing to know and love God such doctrines were, far from being any help, a terrible obstacle. Catholicism has become increasingly dogmatic; Protestantism increasingly secular and humanist. Where were men to find a religion that was intense but not cruelly narrow, wide but not vague, loose but not tepid? Vedanta in the broad range that it is given by the Vedanta mission of Southern California is the answer.

And the very breadth of Vedanta combined with its force is bound to embrace and develop much that is now lying latent in our western thought and spirit. When Christianity went to India it became in form and in much of its spirit Indian. When the Indian reformed Brahmanism that we call Buddhism went into China it took on many of the forms and manners of China—so much so that today when people imagine that warrior spirit Gautama they think of a rather obese Mongolian dozing. So today when Vedanta comes to the West it will, now that it has been acclimated here—to which acclimating it owes so much to Swami Prabhavananda—take on and make a distinctive Western Vedanta. What that will be we cannot say. Few historical studies are more interesting than to see what it is that the spirit of an area and province will pick as its peculiar accent and expression of a universal truth. For example when Tantric Buddhism—a queer enough synthesis in all conscience—entered China by way of Tibet and the Shakta-Shakti Symbol of Union was shown to the Chinese, they made no protest as far as can be discovered to this rather startling picture of Spirit and Expression, they simply dropped that symbol making gradually their own iconography. So no doubt gradually the West will pick those Asiatic forms and from them make ones of its own which best express for it by symbol that which all agree is in his Essence inexpressible.

It is easier to speak of the Perennial Philosophy, the Eternal Gospel, the Universal Religion than actually to define them—or it. We can see that certain general principles run through the great

religions that have affected mankind for many centuries. But when we come to consider what are the actual essentials and what merely matters of time and place, topical and local, then the issue is far more difficult. Probably there is not a religion that is extant that does not in some way and degree meet the deep demands of its worshippers, for relief from the false self, for some vision of a vast meaning in which all may find both loss of their separation and fulfilment of their deepest nature. But certainly religions just as much as individual persons grow old and in their decrepitude they may like ourselves produce ugly features and show evidence of disease. The Congress of World Religions when being summoned in London in the thirties had many sessions of its main committee to decide on how this act of union could be best expressed. The secretary very rightfully wished all religions to be invited. There was however a long and inconclusive discussion when a member asked whether all religions would include such tribes as might still wish to practice human sacrifice or even temple prostitution. A great deal of thinking has to be done on Ramakrishna's ecumenical statement—All roads lead to God. It is possible to think of all religions as tending to enlightenment and liberation but only if some of the more decadent and crabbed are considered as those strange and tortuous paths whereby as Blake puts it in his gnomic utterance, 'Were the fool to continue in his folly he would become wise.' You may get to Catalina by sailing straight southwest from Los Angeles. You can also go there via New York, Lisbon, Cairo, Ceylon, Wake Island and hence come upon it from the sea-ward side. As the Sanskrit tradition holds that the gods themselves are mortal—only the imageless Brahman is unchanging—so it would seem is it with all religions, they may need to die and transmigrate and their essential nature take form again in another guise in another epoch.

There is however another consideration that today arises when we think of the Perennial Philosophy and especially of Vedanta as its most ancient expression. There may not be progress in history in the way that the nineteenth century thought of historical progress—a process whereby men became better just by going on 'and', as Tennyson says, 'the thoughts of men are widened with the circling of the suns'. But undoubtedly there is an element of irreversibility in history—a process is working itself out. History does not repeat itself—only, as in music a theme given earlier may be repeated and

developed further on in the composition. There can be no doubt that no age resembling ours has existed before and that in one respect we have an opportunity denied to earlier ages—Today the world is in touch with every part of itself as never before. We know that in spite of the exclusiveness of certain theologians, religions themselves are strongly inclined, as said above, to borrow from one another. Today there is no doubt we must look forward to and should anticipate a new syncretism of the religions of the world. In a succeeding article some of the possible results of this intercourse and exchange will be considered and the part that Vedanta will play in that process will be suggested.

“What is there in outward seeing? It is the inward seeing that counts, for the Lord is within everyone. He is the source of everything in this universe; He is the source of the universe. From Him it has come out, and to Him it will return. He is the controller of everything. God alone is immutable and immortal. To realize Him within is the ideal of life.

“This world is temporary — parents, brothers, friends, all are temporary. At the time of death everything is left behind, and the world will remain as it is. Only the Lord, who is the soul of our soul exists at all times. He alone is eternal.

“It is not an easy thing to realize the unreality of the world. One cannot have that realization without the grace of God. Pray that you may have His grace. He is within you, and you will realize Him the moment He lifts the veil of ignorance. Grace and grace alone is the one thing needed. There is no other way.”

Three Types of Disciples

Swami Gnaneshwarananda

“Gurus there are by thousands and tens of thousands, but a real disciple can hardly be found—he is one out of a million”.

There are three things that are considered of utmost importance for a student of spiritual enlightenment. The first is his human birth. It is a rare opportunity to be born as a human being. This earth planet of ours is inhabited by innumerable species of living beings and the proportion of human beings to the other species is as a handful of dust to the vast desert of Sahara. Certainly privileged we are, for as human beings we have the possibility of attaining the highest illumination. Individuals belonging to the other species do not have the instruments for higher understanding.

Then, it is a great privilege for a human soul to be awakened to the fact that there is a world of spirituality, by knowing which one may attain infinite bliss and inexhaustible existence. Out of thousands we would not be able to find even one who is really awakened, who understands and comprehends the beauty and the magnificence of the inner world. For this reason, the awakening of the soul to the inner truths has been considered the second great privilege.

The union of this awakened soul with its spiritual guide or Guru, is the third supreme privilege. But it cannot be gained without a good deal of conscious preparation. Only when the soul has been fully awakened to the finer ideals of the spiritual world, and the mind has been completely directed inward, can one contact a real Guru. Before that, even if a real Guru comes, one would not be able to gain much by contacting him. The Guru is the living luminary, or the lighted torch that kindles the potential fire of spirituality in a disciple. Do you think that a torch, with all its fire, can kindle a piece of ice? It is only when the student has reached a certain stage of unfoldment that a Guru can help him. There are stages of preparation which he must go through alone, and as soon as he is ready to receive the light the living luminary comes spontaneously, drawn by a subtle law of spiritual magnetism.

The question is often asked how to obtain a real Guru. But this is not a matter for the student to solve, for as soon as he is ready he certainly gets his Guru. The problem is for the Guru—how to get a fit disciple. The illumined souls are always radiating the truth,

so that those who are ready for it may receive it at once, and the seed of spirituality may be sowed. But a seed cannot grow on a bed of rock. Unless it is sowed on fertile ground, and nurtured with water, light and air, it will not mature and fruit cannot be produced. So the soil of the mind of the student has to be prepared. He has to start work all by himself. He has to draw his inspiration from his own inner self, his environment, and the world at large. He must cultivate sincerity of heart and strength of mind, and develop his power of understanding. The stupid and the weak are unfit for the realization of higher truths. They must gain the fitness first.

There is a very common saying in the Bengali language. It is a colloquial expression, and can be translated only in slang. "A 'hobo' disciple always attracts a 'hobo' Guru". And it is remarkably true. If a student is not fit, but just for the sake of doing something he tries to find a guide, what kind of a guide do you think he deserves and would actually get? Because his appetite is for the sensational it is only proper that he will attract a guide who will give him plenty of stunts. Such a student very often turns around and blames his guide, but he alone is to blame. He gets what he draws by his inner state of consciousness. When I was in India I came across a so-called Sadhu. He could not read very well so he brought me some manuscripts to read to him. I discovered that they contained matters of jugglery and trickery, which could be used only to fool people, and I ask him why he was studying such things. He frankly answered, "You people are educated and have patience to understand things, but what can I do? There are many people who like to be fooled, and I am thinking of something that will satisfy them. They will be fooled by others anyway, so why shouldn't I fool them? Fine logic! Nevertheless it is true. This is only an illustration of the fact that stupid seekers create a demand for "naughty" guides.

Then there is the opportunist type. They have the idea that by practicing the occult sciences of breathing, yoga, and so forth, they might be able to attain great material results in a very easy and inexpensive way—a short-cut to success! But these people are deluding themselves. They do not have the stamina and intelligence to follow the royal road of reason. If you want to follow some profession you must work for it and study for it. If you want good health you must exercise, eat right, and live a good life. But those people

who are weak and gullible and who cannot think of any reasonable process of study and discipline are the ones who resort to this kind of miracle-mongering. It is not higher spiritual unfoldment that they are interested in at all. What they really want is an easy-going life of do-little and get-much! for that reason, what they get is enough to bring them stern disillusionment. In the last analysis, nothing great can be accomplished by trickery. It is only through diligence, courage and the power of understanding that great things are achieved in this life. A story of such an opportunity will give you a clear conception of the type I am speaking of.

There was a man who worked very hard in his line of business for some time, but he could not succeed. He thought he would try to become more successful by following the occult method, by getting a Guru who would teach him some yoga. In that way he would live in greater enjoyment. He went to a monastery, met the holy people and expressed his wish to be taken into the brotherhood as a disciple. The chief said to him, "Do you think you will be able to follow all the disciplines which a disciple has to go through?" He answered, "Oh, yes, I am ready. But please tell me how soon am I going to be illumined?" The teacher replied, "That depends on you. However, I shall put you in the care of another teacher who will explain everything to you." So he started through the monastery with the other teacher. His guide said, "If you stay here you must rise early in the morning, forty-five minutes before sunrise, take your bath, and meditate for two hours. After that, there will be some housework to do. You must render personal service to the teachers and advanced disciples, cook food, draw water, and get wood. This will be your room." The man found nothing that he could call a bed. There was only a raised platform with a blanket over it. The teacher said to him, "Here you will sleep. You have to have control over your senses, so you must practice austerity. You will be served only coarse food. You must have just bare sustenance for a while." During this time the man noticed that there were other rooms with better beds and furnishings. "I saw some very nice rooms with good beds. Who lives in them?" he asked the teacher. "Oh, those are for the Gurus, who have advanced in their understanding." The man then asked, "Who eats that good food I saw in the kitchen?" "That is for the Gurus," said the teacher. The man abruptly turned to him, "I have made a mistake. I want to see the chief again." When

he was taken back to the head of the monastery he said, "Master, I am very sorry, but I have made a mistake. I don't want to be taken in as a disciple. I want to be taken in as a Guru!"

The question is, do you really want spiritual illumination or is it only a passing hobby? Are you ready to go through all the practices of disciplines, austerities and sacrifices for the attainment of the state you say you want? If so, you are to be considered a real student. No cleverness or miracle is necessary. Only genuine and sincere thirst for truth makes the student ready, and when he is ready he receives the leadership and guidance of a Guru. Let me tell you again, it is not the disciple who has to find the Guru. It is the Guru who discovers the disciple. So do not worry yourself about finding a Guru. Just make the soil ready, so that when the seed comes it will not be wasted. It will sprout and produce rich harvest.

Now let us consider the different types of real students. Those students who are attempting to attain the highest truth fall under three different types. They do not all belong to the same level of unfoldment. There are some who are highly developed and can work things out in a much shorter time than others. There are others who are mediocre and occupy the ordinary level. They take a longer time and have to go through more elaborate processes of discipline and study. Thirdly, there is the slow type. They are awakened but have not yet developed the faculties needed to reach spiritual perfection.

These three types have been classified in the technical language of Hindu psychology under three terms: Sattwic, Rajasic, and Tamasic. The slowest type is called Tamasic. Tamas means darkness. This type has not yet gained the necessary preparedness. They have the spirit of awakening, but so far as the instrument of the mind is concerned it has not been fully developed. They work through fear, mystery, superstition, secrecy and ignorance. Let me tell you, before I enter into details, that when I am describing this particular type I am not condemning them. They are real students, as distinguished from the false types we have considered before. It is their sincere urge that qualifies them as students. Although they have that right motive force, yet they do not have the other qualities which are present in the higher types. In their case the urge for the purification and improvement of life comes from the motive force of fear. They are afraid of hell-fire, brimstone, and the devil,

and for that reason they want the mercy and protection of God. There is no trickery or insincerity about them. They are only weak, and they cannot feel secure without the protection of some overlord. If they are told about the truths of higher spirituality in plain, logical language they will fail to understand it. However, if you tell them stories about the terrors of hell and how to avoid them by performing some rituals, they will be roused to action. This is the only appeal through which they can be helped. They will go through the different stages of evolution and will eventually reach the goal. Being of weak mentality they are naturally interested in all kinds of mysteries. If they are told something about the relationship of the human soul with the ultimate reality they will simply look vacant. If you present something to them in a logical and reasonable way they will become bored or go to sleep, but if you appeal to their weakness of superstition, fear or mystery, they will wake up and become enthusiastic about it. They are very much like little children and should by all means be helped to unfold rather than be exploited.

Do not think that by going after mystery you act very smart, or that you are an advanced student and above the ordinary. It bespeaks only of an undeveloped state of one's consciousness. Nobody should think that if he belongs to a mysterious society he is holier than the rest. Far from it. It only shows that one is not at all advanced in the path of spirituality. Such a student is queer in everything. He talks queerly, acts queerly, and thinks queerly in matters of spirituality. This Tamasic type is, for these reasons, very slow in his process of development. Such a student will have to go through a cleaning process. Sometimes even a well-meaning teacher cannot help presenting things to him in a way he can understand. For that reason I do not blame teachers who use a moderate dose of hellfire and brimstone to get these Tamasic students stirred up.

Suppose you are taking care of three children. You want them to do their school work. You realize that one of them will obey you only when he is afraid of something, say punishment. Therefore it is necessary for you to appeal to that child in the stern language of fear. He will behave only under repression or coercion. Certainly this shows a poor state of unfoldment in the child. He should be carefully helped to improve his mental make-up by a gradual process of education.

The second child you have to deal with is of a different mentality. You cannot scare him into obedience, and you should not. But he responds quickly to the idea of competition and reward. He gets quite enthusiastic about rising above his fellow students or about obtaining some prize, which he values more than his education. This is the illustration of the Rajasic type of student. The sense of competition, ostentation, power, noise, and vanity appeals to him more than the ideal of spiritual unfoldment. In the first place he likes display of any kind. He can only follow a course that has a great deal of pomp and show in it. No doubt he wants the truth, but the truth in its own simple form does not make an impression on him. So it has to be presented to him with all the splendor of material life. He will join a church that will spend a million dollars for its building. He will talk about the million dollar organ, the costly velvet hangings, and the expensive robes of the pastor or priest. His is an adolescent soul and must go through the experience of material splendor, even in the path of his spiritual development. His vanity is satisfied by the exclusive nature of his religion. God, in his estimation, is a mighty big autocrat whom only titled peers can see. So he cares more for his titles than for real illumination. This Rajasic type of student moves in a roundabout way. He thinks he is speeding but he gets caught at every corner, so his progress is slow too. The dust and dirt of vanity, pride, love of splendor and display have to be thoroughly washed out before he can attain spiritual perfection.

The third child is such that he understands the value of education for its own sake, and he does not have to be appealed to either through fear or competition and reward. He goes directly into the truth. Therefore he is the quickest of the three. He illustrates the Sattwic type of student. He gets to the goal very quickly, for he does not have to stop for anything. He is like a piece of dry fuel. As soon as the spark comes from the Guru he catches the fire. He is thoroughly clean and pure. His mind is so constituted that it can go directly into the truth. He does not have to follow any roundabout method. The seed of spirituality grows into a beautiful tree in this field and bears the most wonderful flowers and fruits.

There is infinite possibility of growth for every soul. It would be absolutely wrong to presume that if a person is now occupying

the state of Tamas he cannot improve his condition. But one has to be thoroughly conscious of his present state in order to improve his condition. Where there is no self-deception there is a chance of improvement, but where there is misunderstanding, conceit, vanity or ignorance about one's own position, there is danger of being detained for a longer time.

The first thing necessary for such an improvement is self-analysis. Analyze and try to find out if you are a real student or just an amateur. If you are convinced that you are a real student, try to find out to what stage of evolution you belong. If you belong even to the lowest, do not despair. Cultivate courage, strength and perseverance, and exercise your power of reasoning. If you are the Rajasic type rise above that restlessness of worldly desire. At the dictates of your ego you have been chasing phantoms in the maze of worldly glamour. Endeavor to unfold the higher qualities of Sattwa—peace, poise, and directness of understanding. Whatever your condition, sincerely and diligently work to better it. Every soul has to pass through these different stages of evolution, and one will attain the goal sooner if he does not let anything stop his endeavors.

There was once a poor woodcutter who cut wood in the forest and took it to the market to sell. Thus he supported his family, although by that work he could not earn much. One hot, sultry summer afternoon he was carrying a big load that was too heavy for him. He threw down the load and sat under a tree to escape the scorching sun. He was complaining about his hard lot when a holy man came by. The woodcutter was glad to see him. He said, "Father, can you tell me how I can improve my condition? How can I get what I want?" The holy man simply said, "Don't stop. Go right ahead." The poor woodcutter did not understand, and he sighed and went on his way. The next day when he went again into the forest he remembered the words of the holy man. "Don't stop. Go right ahead." So he went deeper into the forest, where, to his surprise, he discovered a forest of sandalwood. By selling this sandalwood he got much more money than before. Then one day he remembered that the holy man had told him not to stop, but to go ahead. He penetrated beyond the forest, and there he found a gold mine! He became very rich. Then again one day he remembered what the holy man had said. He left his family and his riches and went on and on past the gold mine. There he found the holy man sitting in his cottage. The holy man smiled

and said, "My son, after all you have come to me! Those were necessary steps which you had to go through, and I am glad that you did not stop. Now you are with me, and I will give you the secret of highest spiritual understanding. Now is the time. Before, you would not have been able to avail yourself of it. Having gone through all these stages of experience without stopping, you are now ready. Whereupon he gave him the highest spiritual illumination.

This is the lesson of life — DON'T STOP. GO RIGHT AHEAD!

"No one can say with finality that God is only 'this' and nothing else. He is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms; for the jnani — one who looks upon the world as a mere dream, He is formless. The bhakta feels that he himself is one entity and the world another. Therefore God reveals Himself as a Person. But the jnani always reasons, applying the process of 'not this, not this'. Through such discrimination he realizes that the ego and the universe are both illusory, like a dream. He realizes Brahman in his own consciousness, but he cannot describe what Brahman is.

What I mean is this. Think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the bhakti's love, the water has frozen into blocks of ice. In other words, God assumes forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a Person. But with the rising of the sun of Knowledge, the blocks of ice melt, and one no longer sees God with form. What He is cannot be described. Who is left to describe Him? He who would do so disappears.

There is a sign of perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the 'I' — which is like the salt doll who went to measure the depth of the ocean, melts into the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with It. No trace of distinction is left.

As long as self-analysis is not complete, man argues, but when it is complete he becomes silent. When the empty pitcher has been filled with water, when the water inside the pitcher becomes one with the water of the lake outside, no more sound is heard.

Sri Ramakrishna

Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali

Swami Prabhavananda

Christopher Isherwood

27. *The word which expresses Him is OM.*
 28. *This word must be repeated with meditation upon its meaning.*
 29. *Hence comes knowledge of the Atman and destruction of the obstacles to that knowledge.*

'In the beginning was the Word,' says the Gospel according to St. John, and 'the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. This statement echoes, almost exactly, a verse from the Rik Veda: 'In the beginning was Brahman, with whom was the Word; and the Word was truly the supreme Brahman.' The philosophy of the Word may be traced, in its various forms and modifications, down from the ancient Hindu scriptures through the teachings of Plato and the Stoics to Philo of Alexandria and the author of the Fourth Gospel. Perhaps an actual historical link can be proved to exist between all these succeeding schools of thought; perhaps it cannot. The question is not very important. Truth may be rediscovered, independently, in many different epochs and places. The power of the Word, for good and for evil, has been recognized by mankind since the dawn of history. Primitive tribes enshrined it in their taboos and secret cults. Twentieth century cultures have prostituted it to the uses of politics and commercial advertisement.

Words and ideas are inseparable. You cannot have the idea of God without the word which expresses God. But why, necessarily, use the word OM? The Hindus reply that, because God is the basic fact of the universe. He must be represented by the most basic, the most natural, the most comprehensive of all sounds. And they claim that this sound is OM (or AUM, as it should be properly pronounced). To quote Swami Vivekananda: 'The first letter, A, is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding-board of the mouth. Thus, OM represents the whole phenomena of sound-producing.' If any of us feel that a mere argument from phonetics is insufficient to establish this claim, we should

remember, also, that OM is almost certainly the most ancient word for God that has come down to us through the ages. It has been used by countless millions of worshippers—always in the most universal sense; implying no special attribute, referring to no one particular deity. If such use can confer sanctity, then OM is the most sacred word of all.

But what really matters is that we should appreciate the power of the Word in our spiritual life; and this appreciation can only come through practical experience. People who have never tried the practice of repeating the name of God are apt to scoff at it: it seems to them so empty, so mechanical. 'Just repeating the same word over and over!' they exclaim scornfully, 'What possible good can that do?'

The truth is that we are all inclined to flatter ourselves—despite our daily experience to the contrary—that we spend our time thinking logical, consecutive thoughts. In fact, most of us do no such thing. Consecutive thought about any one problem occupies a very small proportion of our waking hours. More usually, we are in a state of reverie—a mental fog of disconnected sense-impressions, irrelevant memories, nonsensical scraps of sentences from books and newspapers, little darting fears and resentments, physical sensations of discomfort, excitement or ease. If, at any given moment, we could take twenty human minds and inspect their workings, we should probably find one, or at most two, which were functioning rationally: 'If A plus B equals C, and if we know that D equals C plus A, then A . . .' etc, etc. The remaining eighteen or nineteen minds would look more like this: 'Ink-bottle. That time I saw Roosevelt. In love with the night mysterious. Reds veto Pact. Jimmy's trying to get my job. Mary says I'm fat. Big toe hurts. Soup good . . .' etc, etc. Because we do nothing to control this reverie, it is largely conditioned by external circumstances. The weather is cloudy, so our mood is sad. The sun comes out; our mood brightens. Insects begin to buzz around us, and we turn irritable and nervous. Often, it is as simple as that.

But now, if we introduce into this reverie the repetition of the name of God, we shall find that we can control our moods, despite the interference of the outside world. We are always, anyhow, repeating words in our minds—the name of a friend or an enemy, the name of an anxiety, the name of a desired object—and each of these words is surrounded by its own mental climate. Try saying 'war,' or 'tuberculosis,' or 'money,' ten thousand times, and you will find that

your whole mood has been changed and colored by the associations connected with that word. Similarly, the name of God will change the climate of your mind. It cannot do otherwise.

In the Hindu scriptures, we often find the phrase: 'to take refuge in His name.' This phrase—which at first may sound rather too poetical—comes to have a very real and literal significance in our spiritual life. When the mind is so violently disturbed by pain or fear or the necessities of some physical emergency that it cannot possibly be used for meditation or even rational thought, there is still one thing that you can always do; you can repeat His name, over and over. You can hold fast to that, throughout all the tumult. Once you have really tested and proved the power of the holy Word, you will rely upon it increasingly. Through constant practice, the repetition becomes automatic. It no longer has to be consciously willed. It is rather like the thermostat on a water-heater or a refrigerator. Whenever the mind reaches an undesirable 'temperature' you will find that the repetition begins of itself and continues as long as it is necessary.

Mere repetition of God's name is, of course, insufficient—as Patanjali points out. We must also meditate upon its meaning. But the one process follows naturally upon the other. If we persevere in our repetition, it will lead us inevitably into meditation. Gradually, our confused reverie will give way to concentrated thought. We cannot long continue to repeat any word without beginning to think about the reality which it represents. Unless we are far advanced in spiritual practice, this concentration will not be maintained for more than a few moments; the mind will slip back into reverie again. But it will be a higher kind of reverie—a reverie dominated by *sattwa* rather than by *rajas* or *tamas*. And the Name, perpetually uttered within it, will be like a gentle plucking at our sleeve, demanding and finally recapturing our attention.

In India, when a disciple comes to his teacher for initiation, he is given what is called a *mantram*. The *mantram* consists of one or more holy names which the disciple is to repeat and meditate upon, throughout the rest of his life. It is regarded as very private and very sacred—the essence, as it were, of the teacher's instructions to that particular disciple, and the seed within which spiritual wisdom is passed down from one generation to another. You must never tell your *mantram* to any other human being. The act of repeating it is called *japam*. You can make *japam* aloud if you are alone, or silently

if you are among other people. It is convenient to do this with a rosary—thus linking thought with physical action (which is one of the great advantages of all ritual) and providing a small but sufficient outlet for the nervous energy of the body, which might otherwise accumulate and disturb the mind. Most spiritual aspirants resolve to make a certain fixed amount of japam every day. The rosary serves to measure this—one bead to each repetition of the mantram—so that you are not distracted by having to count. Needless to add, the practice of making japam is not confined to the Hindu religion. The Catholics teach it also. 'Hail Mary' is a mantram.

30. *Sickness, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, sloth, craving for sense-pleasure, false perception, despair caused by failure to concentrate, and unsteadiness in concentration: these distractions are the obstacles to knowledge.*

31. *These distractions are accompanied by grief, despondency, trembling of the body and irregular breathing.*

It will be noticed that nearly all the distractions listed by Patanjali come under the general heading of *tamas*. Sloth is the great enemy—the inspirer of cowardice, irresolution, self-pitying grief, and trivial, hair-splitting doubts. Sloth may also be a psychological cause of sickness. It is tempting to relax from our duties, take refuge in ill-health, and hide under a nice warm blanket. The body resists all unaccustomed disciplines, and will perhaps try to sabotage them by alarming, hysterical displays of weakness, fainting spells, violent headaches, palpitations, and so forth. This resistance is subconscious. The symptoms it produces are genuine enough. It is no good trying to fight them by sheer force—dragging yourself out of bed and staggering around in a fever. But you can attack your sloth on the subconscious level by quiet persistence in making japam. You are never too weak or too sick for that. And sloth will relax its hold upon you, little by little, when it understands that you really mean business.

When an aspirant enters upon the spiritual life, he naturally does so with great enthusiasm. The first steps he takes are almost always accompanied by feelings of peace and delight. Everything seems so easy, so inspiring. It is therefore very important that he should realize, right from the start, that this mood will not continue, uninterrupted, throughout the rest of his course. Religion is not simply a state of euphoria. There will be relapses; phases of struggle, dryness and doubt. But these ought not to distress him unduly. Con-

scious feelings, however exalted, are not the only indications of spiritual progress. We may be growing most strongly at a time when our minds seem dark and dull. So we should never listen to the promptings of sloth, which will try to persuade us that this dullness is a sign of failure. There is no failure as long as we continue to make an effort.

23. *They can be removed by the practice of concentration upon a single truth.*

That is to say, the truth of God's existence. God has many aspects, and so there are innumerable approaches to Him. Patanjali will deal with some of them, later, in detail. This aphorism simply stresses the importance of single-mindedness. When the aspirant has chosen his ideal form of the Godhead and his way of approaching it, he must hold fast to that. Some people are apt to be too catholic in their attitude to religion; they try a little of this cult, a little of that, and fail to follow any one path through to the goal where all are united. Sri Ramakrishna compared them to the man who digs a number of shallow wells, but never goes deep enough to find water anywhere.

In order to achieve this concentration, we must calm and purify our minds. Patanjali now tells us how to do this. He prescribes the mental attitude we should take toward our neighbors in this world.

33. *Undisturbed calmness of mind is attained by cultivating friendliness toward the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and indifference toward the wicked.*

If we meet someone who is happy in his way of life, we are inclined to envy him and be jealous of his success. We must learn to rejoice in it, as we take pleasure in the happiness of a friend. If someone is unhappy, we should feel sorry for him, instead of despising him or criticizing him for bringing misfortunes upon himself. The virtue of others is apt to irritate us, because we take it as a reflection upon our own shortcomings. We are tempted to sneer at it and suggest that it is only hypocrisy. On the contrary, we should delight in it and see it as an inspiration to ourselves to do better. As for the wicked, we must remember Christ's words: 'Be not overcome by evil.' If someone harms us or hates us, our first instinct is to answer him with hatred and injury. We may succeed in injuring him, but we shall be injuring ourselves much more, and our hatred will throw our own minds into confusion. So we must practice indifference toward

the hurts we receive from others. We must go behind the wickedness of the wicked and try to understand what makes them treat us in that way. Very often, we shall discover that we ourselves are partly to blame for their attitude. The relationship between the aggressor and his victim, the murderer and the murdered, is not always one of simple guilt and innocence; it may be very complex. There may be provocation on both sides.

Our proper approach toward our fellow human beings is summed up in one of the first of the Hindu monastic vows: 'The flies seek filth, the bees seek honey. I will shun the habit of the flies and follow that of the bees. I will refrain from finding faults in others and look only for the good which is in them.' That is a vow which we should all take and try to live up to.

Religion is Realization

Swami Prabhavananda

“God,” it has been said, “is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.” The infinite God is centered in every heart, and, in turn, every heart must make God the center of its life and existence, in order that He may be immediately and directly experienced.

The one and only purpose of life is to realize God, to attain union with Him, to know that He is the Self, one with Satchidananda Brahman. All religions are agreed on this point. Jesus expressed it by declaring: “Be ye perfect even as the Father which is in heaven is perfect,” and St. Paul commented upon it by affirming: “Ye are complete in Godhead.” This perfection, in the language of the Upanishads, is the attainment of Immortal life, Pure Consciousness, and Love, or Abiding Joy—Satchidananda Brahman.

The attainment of Satchidananda Brahman, however, is not the acquisition of something new. It is the discovery of the forgotten treasure already within. We *are* that Satchidananda Brahman, but we have to wake up to that knowledge. Truly has the mystic poet Kavir said:

“I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty:
 You do not see that the Real is in your own home,
 And you wander from forest to forest listlessly!
 Here is the truth! Go where you will, to Benares or to Mathura;
 If you do not find God in your own soul, the world is meaningless to you.”

How true! For indeed the world is meaningless, and life yields no purpose, until we wake up to the realization of the “Eternal amongst the non-eternals of life,” the “highest abiding joy in the midst of the fleeting pleasures of life.”

Yagnavalkya, the well-known seer of the Upanishadic age, taught king Janaka this truth: “Brahman may be realized while yet one dwells in the ephemeral body. To fail to realize Him is to live in ignorance, and therefore to be subject to birth and death. The knowers of Brahman are immortal: others, knowing Him not, continue in the bonds of grief.”

Each soul is divine, and perfection is attained by the knowledge and experience of this divinity. The soul is never lost, nor can it ever be lost. Failure to realize God is to remain subject to birth, death, and

rebirth. This rebirth, according to Vedanta and Buddhism, is known as reincarnation. A man is born again and again, and remains within the bonds of pleasure and pain, birth and death, until he finally attains union with God. By this process of evolution and reincarnation every being will attain his birthright, which is eternal life. Why, then, do we wait? Why do we continue to go through this repeated round of birth and death, with its bonds of grief and pain, when, already within our hearts, there is that "well of water springing up unto eternal life?"

"As one not knowing that a golden treasure lies buried beneath his feet, may walk over it again and again, yet never find it, so all beings live every moment in the city of Brahman, yet never find him, because of the veil of illusion by which he is concealed." We need to come out of this gloom of ignorance, to remove this veil of illusion, in order to attain union with Brahman.

Brahman is, and "*that thou art.*" This truth is not based merely on the authority of the scriptures, or on the experiences of the saints, seers, prophets, and sons of God. It is based on the fact of one's own experience. You and I and everyone can experience the truth of Brahman. Indeed, we *must* experience it in order to be freed of all bondage. When we are thirsty we have to quench our own thirst.

To experience Brahman is to wake up, as it were, from our long sleep of ignorance. Buddha was once asked: "Who are you? Are you a god?" "No". "Are you an angel?" "No". "Who are you then?" He replied, "I am the Buddha—the Awakened One."

Man himself is the measure of all truth, and every man lives in a world of his own. True, there are common and universal experiences known to all, for the same experiences come to all, whether they be of the world and the universe of appearance, or of God and the world of God. What experiences a man will have depends upon the level of consciousness in which he lives; for every level of consciousness exists in all men. According to the mystic philosophy of India there are seven such levels of consciousness. They are: *Muladhara*, at the base of the spine; *Swadhistan*, at the root of the genitals; *Manipur*, near the navel; *Anahata*, in the heart, or, more correctly, near the pit of the stomach; *Vishuddha*, near the throat; *Ajna*, between the eyebrows, and *Sahashrara*, in the brain. Ordinarily, man lives within the three lower centers of consciousness, and his experience is of the world of appearance; his mind dwells on bodily comforts and sense pleasures. Eating, drinking, procreation, and all that goes with them, become the be-all and end-all of his life, while

religion or God remains an almost unknown quantity. If, in such a man, the thought of or belief in God arises, it is usually as a means whereby his material well-being may be further enriched.

When, however, one begins to experience the consciousness residing in the heart, there comes to him a certain degree of faith in God and in the higher things of the spirit. As this consciousness persists, faith and love increase, and one learns to pray, and delights to dwell in the thought of God. Thus does a man become a spiritual aspirant, and thus he sets about to discipline himself and to practice spiritual exercises. Whenever the mind of such a man descends to the lower levels of consciousness and the hunger of the senses overpowers him, he feels deep remorse, and increases his spiritual self-disciplines. Every struggle brings greater control, until the time comes when the mind begins to dwell constantly in the consciousness of the heart, and the aspirant attains certain mystical experiences. For example, he may see a light within and around himself, and at the same time feel a vivid sense of the presence and reality of God, together with a kind of joy and sweetness which are not of this earth. Or it may be that he will experience ecstasy and become drunk with the joy of the Lord. Yet, even after he has had such experiences as these, it is still possible for his mind to sink occasionally to lower levels and cause him to yield to the grosser passions. Therefore it is expedient that the aspirant live a carefully disciplined life and never expose himself to temptation.

As the aspirant progresses, and his mind rises above the heart to the throat center, he recognizes the shadowy nature of this world-appearance and the futility of life on the plane of the senses. His mind so dwells in God that all worldly talk, all worldly thought, and all selfishness become intolerable to him.

Continuing to rise, the mind next reaches the center between the eyebrows, and the aspirant experiences what is known as *savikalpa samadhi*. He sees God, talks to Him, and knows His love and grace. Yet, even in this exalted state, there still remains the sense of ego or duality. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'In this state one sees the blissful light of God shining through the thin veil of ego which still persists. A great longing then arises in the heart of the aspirant to reach complete union with God. With intensified yearning he struggles to overcome the last traces of the ego which separates him from God, until at last his mind soars to the *Sahasrara*, the highest level of consciousness, and he becomes one with God. Then it is that he can truly say: "I am Brahman!" "I and my Father are one!"'

The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination

(VIVEKA-CHUDAMANI)

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