

# SPIRITUAL TALKS

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

**S**ri Ramakrishna has said that the considerations of purity and impurity are for a bhakta and not for a jnani. This is because the devotee accepts the duality of God and the devotee. The devotee always tries to serve God. Service must be done very carefully. This is the path to God realization.

Jnani negates everything by reasoning. He does not have the sense of purity or impurity. Even God is negated. Only Atman remains. However, this cannot be attained as long as there is body-consciousness. Body, mind, senses—everything is transcended or negated. Even my 'I' will go away. What remains when 'I' is destroyed? Only that Satchidananda Brahman. But this knowledge is not dry knowledge. After negating everything should one sit idle? No, not at all. One may think that everything has been negated, but if body-consciousness remains, everything would reappear. This is as Sri Ramakrishna has explained: However much one may say, 'There is no thorn, it has not pricked', as soon as the thorn pricks, one exclaims, 'Oh, it is painful.'

Besides, whether one is a bhakta or a jnani, there is one common precondition—intensity, yearning. There must be yearning for God-realisation or Self-realisation. However much one may reason or observe rules or discriminate, nothing can be attained without intense yearning. One will not have the vision of God. If it were so easy that one could attain by merely offering bel leaves or by the ritual movements of utensils (*kosha-koshi*) then there

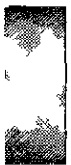
was no problem. In the blacksmith's shop there is so much movement of these utensils. But nothing is attained. Where is the yearning for God? If there is yearning, nothing else is required. One can reach God by the pull of that yearning. Together with yearning one must do spiritual practice—*upasana*. By *upasana* alone both bhakta and the jnani can get realisation.

There are sixtyfour types of activities or interests which are considered hindrances in the path of devotion. One of them is astrology. Talks or discussions related to it are considered detrimental to devotion.

**Q:** Why Maharaj? Do the stars and planets not have an influence on us?

**A:** Why not? Circumstances and surroundings do affect our mind always. For example, intense heat in the afternoon affects our body and mind; we lose interest in everything and become high strung. Again, when the heat subsides and the southern wind starts blowing, the body cools down and mind too becomes joyful. Similarly, various planets affect the body and mind in a subtle way.

These stars and planets have their presiding deities. For example, a planet's controlling deity is goddess Chinnamasta. Some other is governed by Tara, yet another by Kali. Now, if these deities are ritualistically propitiated, then these gods and goddesses can ask their subordinate planets not to trouble the individual. For example, goddess Chinnamasta is the deity governing the planet Rahu. By pacifying the



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goddess, a fatal blow might get reduced to a small injury and the impact of that constellation might get nullified. But these considerations are not relevant for a devotee. He is solely dependent upon God. 'His will be done. He is ever auspicious. Whatever He does is good. If the body were to die, let it, if He so wills.' This is the attitude of a devotee.

What is required is self-surrender. Surrender yourself to the Lord. He will definitely show you the path. He will surely protect and support you. This lamp in front might be false, but what has just been told, cannot be false.

One must be emotional. Without being emotional, it is not possible to progress in spiritual life. How far can philosophical texts take you? Intellect serves one purpose—it tries to prevent emotions from leading in the wrong direction. It helps only this much. Feeling is the real thing. What is required is surrender. One must humble oneself. What will you understand by intellect or by much studies? Sri Ramakrishna has infinite moods. He can be perceived only through 'bhava' or feelings. Is it so easy to understand him? Sri Ramakrishna once asked Master Mahashaya 'M', 'Have you understood?' 'M' answered, 'Yes, I have understood!' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No, it cannot be understood with this (impure) intellect.' Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda) used to say, 'It is not possible to understand Sri Ramakrishna without having body and mind like those of Swami Vivekananda.' Hari Maharaj once asked Mahapurush Maharaj the meaning of the phrase '*karma kathora*' (austere in his deeds) in the *Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna*. Mahapurush Maharaj replied, 'Didn't you see, how efficient and inclined towards work was he?' Besides, Sri Ramakrishna was infinitely compassionate. .

The mind does not dwell on high spiritual mood always. Hence one must remain engaged in a specific work. But then, the difficulty with work is that often it becomes more important. Therefore one must take refuge in the Lord while doing work. Do introspection in solitude

and find out what mistakes one has committed. It is essential to detect one's defects. Love all. Mix with everyone. See how Sri Ramakrishna used to mix with all.

Do you know what was Swami Vivekananda's ideal? To be a 'complete man'. There shouldn't be the slightest unmanliness in such a man. Do work quickly. On seeing you, one must feel that you are full of life. Our seniors never liked lukewarm or easy-going attitude while doing work. We had to complete the assigned work quickly. It is difficult to understand Swami Vivekananda if the body and mind are not like his. Have self-control, be a man of character. Be methodical. With this, there must be obedience towards the Order. Memorize the Gita and the Upanishads. The main fault of the Bengalis is that they are weak. Nothing can be achieved without being strong. Look at Sri Ramakrishna's photo. How thick was his collar bone? Without such a strong body he couldn't have been able to do so much spiritual practices. Carefully and seriously read books about Sri Ramakrishna as also Swami Vivekananda's works. To begin with read for ten minutes and then close the book and think about what you have read. You will find that you don't remember anything. Then again read, you will notice that you are now able to recollect what you have read. Then read again. Thus bring the mind under control.

No work is inferior or unimportant. Look at the story of Booker Washington. He worked as a poor servant. Observing the way he cleaned the table, the lady of the house predicted that this boy would be a great man. And he did become great. The famous Taskan University was built by the bricks made by the Greek boys. Look at Napoleon. How this Corsican boy, who used to massage and take care of the horses became great in spite of bearing the insults of others! But, genius is born—geniuses are not made. Look at Akbar, Shivaji, Ranjit Singh.

Have self-control. Be a man of character. Have self-confidence. Swami Vivekananda

wanted manhood. Never keep the picture of Radha-Krishna with the thrice-bent Krishna in your house. That is the highest Truth. That is not for you. Keep the pictures of Sri Krishna in the Kurukshetra, Shiva and Parvati, Rama having bow and arrows, and Swami Vivekananda. Keep away pictures which are contrary to your ideal, or those which make you weak.

Is it easy to acquire devotion? Before that mind must be purified. The bottle must be cleaned well if you want to keep good clarified butter in it. Similarly, to acquire love and devotion for God, the mind must be thoroughly cleansed. For this one must do with dedication whatever work is assigned. If that is there, as you do work, devotion will grow by itself, automatically. Nothing can be achieved by force.

The zeal of the rishis is worth seeing. Many of them had falls, yet, when they again started striving for Truth, what great dedication and determination they had! Look at the zeal of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. 'I must know the truth, and for that I am prepared to do anything, face any difficulty'—this was their attitude. In spiritual life there cannot be any compromise. Harmony of religions does not mean compromise. Sri Ramakrishna never compromised.

If you want to lead a spiritual life, hold on to the Mother. Mother has a heart, hasn't she? If you weep, she will definitely listen.

Take the name of God and do spiritual practice while the body is strong. When the body would fall ill, then you won't be able to take the name of God or remember Him. Master Mahashaya was an experienced person. He has said, 'If you don't repeat the name of God from the very beginning, at the time of death you will chant something else, something worldly.'

One must meditate at least ten minutes every day in the morning and evening. Of all activities this is the most important. If you don't do this, in old age your condition will be like that of the stem of a plantain tree. When it is

burnt, various hissing sounds are produced and the fire gets extinguished.

You are young. Be up and about and do japa and meditation. Swami Vivekananda has taught Karma Yoga. Is Karma Yoga so easy? Remember, it is one the Yogas. On doing work in the right way, devotion, broadmindedness, humility, etc. would grow. Tell me, what is there in large buildings? With work, one must do japa and meditation with great intensity and thus keep oneself on the right track. True self-surrender is required. Is it so easy to get it? When you get completely exhausted, physically and mentally, then only real self-surrender will come, not before that. Keep alive a sense of dissatisfaction in spiritual life. Keep spiritual discontent alive. It is required always, at every stage. If you feel, 'I am quite well', then you won't be able to progress much. This sense of lack of fulfilment is the important thing.

(To a woman devotee) Try to find some time for spiritual practice yourself. And if you are really not able to find time, wouldn't Lord know this? There was a person at Dakshineswar who used to do a lot of japa and meditation. Sri Ramakrishna told his attendant, 'Let us go and meet him.' He was so compassionate that he himself went and gave darshan to him because he was doing spiritual practice. Has Sri Ramakrishna now shut his eyes that he won't look at your difficulties? Then why do you worry? Besides, now the hindrance caused by the physical body is no more. Pray earnestly, 'Lord, you can see our condition—have mercy on us. Shower your grace on us.' If you can't insist upon Sri Ramakrishna to bless, then call on the Holy Mother. She is the Divine Mother of the universe Herself. She has incarnated this time only for solving your problems. You have great support in her. In Rama-incarnation or Krishna-incarnation, the shakti had also incarnated, but did not do much work. This time Mother came and lived for such a long time—specially for you (women-folk).



# Renunciation and Spiritual Practice

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

**Q.:** Maharaj, What is meant by merging the mind into the intellect and the intellect into the Atman, as described in the scriptures?

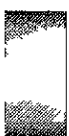
**A.:** The mind always cogitates. Various thoughts and ideas contrary to one another constantly keep arising in the mind. Many complain that they are not able to meditate; that their mind is unsteady. The fact is that if the mind is left free to do its own, it will follow its nature and remain occupied with various thoughts. Hence the intellect is required. The intellect is the determinative faculty. It decides: this is right and must be done, this is wrong and must not be done. The intellect decides that there must be only one ultimate goal or ideal—that of God-realization or Self-realization. Thus when the mind is bound by one single idea, then it gets merged into the intellect. Thence onwards the intellect alone helps in meditation and leads from meditation to samadhi. Then the intellect gets merged into Atman. Does it not?

Therefore, it is essential to control the mind if you want to achieve something in spiritual life. Without doing that, many people try to meditate. But that is no meditation at all. Either they get confused by various thoughts during the time of meditation or fall asleep. Both are *tamasika* states. They are signs of inertia. Instead of trying to meditate that way, if one takes up one holy scripture and reads it for an hour, it will act as meditation. Because, during that one hour the mind will not be able to run around to various objects and would flow consistently in one direction. Thus the mind gets controlled.

**Q.:** But, Maharaj, the mind remains occupied with the office files.

**A.:** True, the mind will remain occupied with the office files, wife, children, family, money and property. True, quite true. Householders have certain duties. They must be fulfilled. Wife and children must be looked after and for them money must be earned. To be able to lead a decent cultured life in the world, certain things must be done. One must have a house, and must maintain it and so on. Beware of those householders who, being in the world, say: the Lord's will be done, everything depends on the Lord's mercy, the jiva is only an instrument etc. These are all foolish talks. They are married and have children. And yet, they sit idly without moving the limbs! This is not dependence on God. This is the sign of idleness and inertia. Dependence on God, on His grace—these come only in the end. When, after doing one's level best for fulfilling one's duties, one is not able to cope with their demands, then only shall one realize that without the grace of God, one has no other go, then only God's grace truly descends. Then alone total surrender comes and then alone the Divine Mother takes Her child into Her lap. Not to do anything and expect God to do everything is an absolutely unacceptable proposition. One must definitely exert oneself to the utmost. There must be self-effort.

There is a technique by which the mind can be controlled. The best and the easiest method is to first of all decide what must be done as a duty and then to go on doing it in a



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disciplined way This is Karma Yoga. But then, in the interval between two bits of work, one must remember God; as if one is doing the work after taking His permission. As one continues with this practice, gradually love for God would go on increasing. Next, of the various activities, a few must be given up. For example, when the son gets settled down in life after completing his education, one should give up worrying about the boy's future; so also one must give up worrying as to what will happen in one's absence to the wife and children, once one has arranged for their basic subsistence.

In this way if one gradually relinquishes anxieties and desires, the mind will get attached to only one idea, one desire. This idea is the remembrance of God, which was present, associated with every work. Then alone the thought of total renunciation, i.e., sannyasa would arise. This idea will have to arise. This must come in everyone's life—whether in this life or in some other future birth. Without sannyasa, there cannot be Self-realization.

**Q.:** A lady devotee asked: Swami Vivekananda has said, nothing can be achieved without renunciation. Then what is the way for us?

**A.:** What do you mean by renunciation? The householders must renounce internally, not externally. You talk of renunciation. Will you be able to renounce if I ask you? Renunciation is not so easy. One has to remain totally helpless and supportless. Are you ready to give up your husband? Therefore, better don't talk about it. Accept the state in which the Lord has kept you and go on taking His name. Don't get attached to anything. Don't seek too much wealth. Live depending upon God. 'Lord, May Thy will be done'—let this be your attitude and mood. Don't be afraid. The Infinite Lord has this time incarnated with His Shakti, for the good of the world. Why do you fear! Thakur is there, the Holy Mother is there; Swamiji is there to guide. Keeping the goal steadily in sight, holding on to the goal, the ideal, steadily move on, taking His name. You will get filled with joy. But then,

you must call on God not merely verbally. It must be from the heart.

God's Name, Name, Name!

Name alone is the real thing. One must hold on to Thakur's name. And one must think of his divine sports. For example

\* Sri Ramakrishna is seated on a small cot in his room. Devotees are seated around and are listening to his ambrosial words.

\* Sri Ramakrishna is in deep meditation at Panchavati. There is profound silence around. He is the very embodiment of incomparable compassion. He becomes one with whichever deity. He meditates upon

\* He is seated in a horse-carriage and is passing near the Nakhoda Mosque on the Chitpur Road. Suddenly he becomes restless. A fakir is alone in the mosque, calling on God. 'Come, O Beloved, come. Come O Beloved!' He is calling from his heart. Can the Lord stay behind unmoved? He alights from the carriage, enters the mosque running and stands in front of the fakir. The fakir opens his eyes, sees, again closes his eyes, and starts meditating.

Contemplate upon such divine sports.

One must struggle to the utmost; must hold on to one idea, it must engulf you. Mere discussions about Vedanta will not do. You have already done a lot of studies. Now get down to work. Do worship, do spiritual practice. Just remaining inactive now with this idea 'Lord's will be done', will not do. You must hold on to *upasana* or worship. But it is not what you think. One must work very hard. One must try one's utmost. You think, 'I have done japa 108 times, why does not God reveal Himself?' Is it so easy? One must go on struggling and must hold on.

Here (at Kankurgachi) Sri Ramakrishna's divine presence is there. Do 'Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram' Japa from sunrise to sunset, and let me see how Ram can remain away from you. One must remain lying at the door of the Lord for days at a stretch, day-after-day without any other

thought; then only one succeeds. You might say, 'Is it possible? Can we do it?' If you can't, then clean the utensils, sweep Sri Ramakrishna's temple, clean it, till the ground, water the plants. If you can't do even that, then do what you want, but don't come to us to complain.

My boy, is it so easy? We have learnt this from the seniors and that is what we are telling you. You think that the Guru will do everything for you. He will look after your well being. Give up this idea. Who is the Guru? Sri Ramakrishna (Thakur) alone is the Guru. He is the Jagadguru. He is the all in all. The Guru who imparts you a Mantra, who initiates you, is the conduit through which the divine power flows. One will have to get hold of that source of shakti.

At the time of japa, whether you understand the meaning of the mantra or not, sit for japa with the firm faith and think that, 'I shall definitely attain my coveted goal'. Read the Works of Swami Vivekananda, especially his *Letters and Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. We can understand a little of Sri Ramakrishna only when we try to do so in the light of Swami Vivekananda's teachings.


One must do intense spiritual practice. But while doing so, do not try to assess your progress. If you do so, you will stumble and fall. Where do you have the capacity to assess your progress? 'Mantra' means 'Man-tore', i.e., mind is yours. That means as you go on doing japa, you will gain control over the mind. To think that 'first let there be love for God and then I shall chant the name of God', is not right. First do japa; love for God will definitely arise in your heart.

It is better not to keep the picture of the Guru. Even a person like Swami Premananda, who was pure to the marrow, would not allow himself to be photographed. One must keep the pictures only of Thakur and Sri Sri Maa. Many devotees keep

the pictures and images of many gods and goddesses on their altar. Aye, Sri Ramakrishna Himself had incarnated in previous births in various forms. Hence, after offering salutations to those divinities, one must worship Sri Ramakrishna alone. Kamarpukur, Jairambati, Belur Math, Kashipur Gardenhouse, Udbodhan, Dakshineswar—these are *mahatirthas*, great places of pilgrimage. What is required is holy company and remaining associated with any one of these places. On special occasions it is essential to visit any one of these. When a devotee comes to me I ask him, 'Where did you go on that specific day?' But if he says that he didn't go to any one of these places, I feel very unhappy.

**Q.:** How do we get over the restlessness of mind?

**A.:** Do japa and meditation to your heart's content as much as you can. Mind must be controlled before it becomes restless. Does one dig a foundation after the rains set in? Mind must be brought under one's control before such a situation arises. Do discrimination between what is truth and what is untruth and pray importunately. What *should* you seek: that sense-enjoyment which leads to suffering or that by which you get infinite unending happiness? Bliss of God-realization is immeasurable. To get rid of lust, one must get hold of the embodiment of love. God is the embodiment of love. Daily pray to God that he may not entangle you in Maya. One must keep holy company. It helps in keeping evil thoughts away. It is not wise to do something which entails heavy labour. But then, one cannot remain without work, therefore mind must be kept engaged with remembrance of God and work. However, by doing strenuous work excessively spiritual practice suffers.

Nothing can be achieved without character. 

### NO SPEECH TODAY

Swami Tyagishananda, a great scholar, could speak for hours together on spiritual topics without any preparation. But once he behaved in a peculiar manner. He was to speak in one meeting. The swami went to that meeting and when the time for his speech came, he stood up and said, 'Excuse me, Sri Guru Maharaj is not putting any matter into my head.' Saying this, he sat down! Although such an action might appear ridiculous, it shows that he always spoke from inspiration.



# Reminiscences of Swami Premananda

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

I first saw Swami Premananda in the year 1910. Jiten (Swami Vishuddhananda) was with me. That day we didn't have any conversation. Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) and Budho Baba (Swami Advaitananda, who was the manager of the Math) were seated in the verandah on the ground floor of the Math building. Earlier they used to take tea there only. One gentleman came and asked Maharaj, 'What should be done to realize God?' Baburam Maharaj asked with a gesture (of putting food in the mouth with the hand) whether there is enough to eat at home? That means, concern for food is terrible. It makes us forget everything else. The idea is, you shouldn't be an escapist.


Later, when I joined the monastery, I came into intimate contact with Baburam Maharaj. We knew the householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. I was very intimate with Master Mahasaya. In fact, I used to study in his school. But when I saw Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples, then I gained a new perspective. They were like flaming fire. Others appeared insignificant in comparison to them.

Baburam Maharaj had a great spirit of service. He was very particular that each and every visitor to the Math should get the prasada of Sri Ramakrishna (fruits or sweets offered to Sri Ramakrishna). Once a gentleman came to the Math and after paying obeisance at Sri Ramakrishna's shrine, went to the other temples. When he was coming down the steps

of the shrine, the Brahmachari in charge of distributing prasada was busy on some other work, and could not give him prasada. The gentleman also did not know anything about this custom. Baburam Maharaj met him near Swami Vivekananda's temple and on enquiry learnt that he had not got prasada. He immediately took the gentleman with him to the Brahmachari and asked the latter to give him prasada. He said, 'Couldn't you give a little prasada to this gentleman? What else can we give? Can't we give a bit of prasada to these people?' He spoke with such feeling that the Brahmachari felt ashamed and the gentleman marvelled at his love.

The point is, Baburam Maharaj's name was 'Premananda'. True to his name; his love continually welled up for everyone. He used to befriend people through service in such a way that anyone who met him once would never be able to forget him. He did not make any disciples. Had he done so, many would have approached him for initiation without approaching others.

Once a C.I.D officer came to the Math. Those were the days of the 'Swadeshi Movement'. Many people were being arrested. Police kept a close watch over the Math. The gentleman had come to gather information in this regard. It was summer. He was perspiring profusely, having walked all the way in the sun. As soon as Baburam Maharaj saw him, he started fanning him with a hand-fan. The gentleman was embarrassed and immediately

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said, 'Maharaj, what are you doing? Please don't fan me.' Maharaj answered, 'What is wrong in it, my boy? It is very hot. Get well in this breeze of the fan.' After some time, the gentleman said, 'Maharaj, because of my service (in C.I.D department), I have come here for a very despicable work. I am a C.I.D officer. I want some information.'

Maharaj immediately replied, 'Very Good. See everything. We are the disciples of Thakur. We won't hide anything. Thoroughly inspect the Math.' The gentleman, however, did not see anything. Many years later he said, 'Unfortunately, I have met Baburam Maharaj only once, on that particular occasion. But I can never forget that wonderful love and service rendered by him.'

One afternoon, when everyone had had his meal, Baburam Maharaj saw that a group of devotees was coming by boat. Lest they return without prasada and lest the workers should feel annoyed, he quickly entered the kitchen and started lighting the oven himself. Seeing this, the workers told Maharaj, 'Maharaj, please get up. We shall cook.' Maharaj felt a little embarrassed and said, 'My boys, I didn't want to trouble you again. Hence I was myself trying to cook a little *khuchadi*.'

Baburam Maharaj's mind used to remain filled with the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. It appeared from his every action and movement that he was in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna. We saw Sri Ramakrishna only in the picture in the shrine. But from Baburam Maharaj's movements we felt as if Sri Ramakrishna was alive and was moving around. While he was engaged in work in the shrine, his movements used to be so respectful that one felt Sri Ramakrishna was just in front and therefore Maharaj was so careful and full of respect. His eyes and face would become red then. His complexion was very fair. The red hue on his face would match well and

become one with his ochre dress. It would appear as if his face were glowing with the light within.

He had a great concern for everything in the Math. Once he asked us, 'Tell me, how many cows are there in the Math, belonging to Sri Ramakrishna?' One said, 'seven,' the other said, 'nine'. But none could tell correctly. At this Maharaj said, 'Look, one must keep full information about Sri Ramakrishna's belongings. You must know everything. Everything of the Math belongs to Sri Ramakrishna, won't you keep a watch?' He did not like that the money given by the devotees should be spent carelessly. He once asked a monk at Kashi to send him two stitched shirts. The monk stitched and sent four shirts. Seeing four shirts, Maharaj said, 'What is this? Devotees give their hard-earned money for the service of Thakur and monks. Should it be misused? I need only two shirts. Why did you get four shirts stitched?'

Sri Ramakrishna also acted in a similar manner. When Master Mahasaya brought two clothes instead of one, he had said, 'Take back one'.


Maharaj used to personally supervise all the activities of the Math. He would get up at 4 a.m. and meditate in the shrine. His face and eyes would get reddened then. His face would glow, as it were. After meditation he would inspect and decide how many fruits and which flowers should be plucked from Thakur's garden. Then he would inspect the cows in the cowshed. After this he would himself bring the vegetables and start dressing them. Other younger members also would join him. Every action was, for him, a spiritual practice and an act of worship. While dressing and cutting vegetables he used to say, 'Cut the vegetables like this and while doing so, think, "I am sacrificing lust, anger, greed, etc."' What a lofty attitude!

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*Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime.*

ARISTOTLE

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## Mother Answers

### ON FIXING MIND ON GOD

*Disciple:* Why is it that our mind is not absorbed in God when we repeat His Name?

*Mother:* It will come about in due course. Even if the mind is not concentrated, do not give up the repetition of the holy Word. You do your duty. While repeating the Name, the mind will get fixed of itself on the ideal, like a candle flame in a place protected from the wind. It is the wind alone that makes the flame flicker. In the same way, our fancies and desires make our mind restless.

I shall tell you an example of how he used to feel the presence of Sri Ramakrishna always. Once he told the Brahmacharins to trim the twigs of the rose plants so that they might flower better. We trimmed the plants and threw away the twigs. Maharaj came and noticed that a few thorny twigs and leaves were still lying there. He carefully picked them up and threw them away and minutely inspected the site and said, 'Look, one must do Sri Ramakrishna's work very carefully. See, what you have done? Don't you know Sri Ramakrishna's feet are very delicate? He strolls in his garden. Tell me, how much pain Thakur would have had, had this thorn pricked his foot?' He spoke these words with such feeling that our eyes too became wet with tears. We come to understand how deeply these great saints used to feel the presence of God.

During the monsoon, rain water used to enter and accumulate in the southern verandah of the shrine room. So, Maharaj would instruct that it should be cleaned as often as water collected. Many would wonder what was the need to clean it so often? Once he explained, 'Thakur strolls on this verandah. He will be inconvenienced if there is water.'

I have noticed that Baburam Maharaj greatly valued even the most insignificant object belonging to Thakur. He had made a rule that the same stick must be used to light

the camphor during vesper service, by which the lamp has been lighted. Once the *pujan*, worshipper, threw away the stick and used another for lighting the camphor. Maharaj observed this and explained to him how stringently the objects belonging to Thakur should be used.

Initially Baburam Maharaj did not speak much. Later, in 1915-1916, he became inclined towards preaching and delivered some lectures. Swami Vivekananda had probably told him, 'The responsibility of preaching in Bangladesh (East Bengal) is yours.' (Literally, 'Bangladesh is for you'.) And indeed, it is difficult to describe in words the great spiritual upsurge which people felt when he went to East Bengal and preached there.

Even poor Muslims used to call him 'Our Prophet'. A group of Muslims had also come upto Belur Math with him. He had lovingly fed them.

One day he had asked Sri Sri Maa (the Holy Mother), 'Mother, what is this that is happening to me? *Rajoguna* is increasing; I have started delivering lectures! Why has this happened?' The Mother had replied, 'Why are you afraid, my child? Thakur is with you.' When he asked the same question to Mahapurush Maharaj, he said, 'This is after all Thakur's work. He is getting it done. Why do you worry?'



## Detachment and Love of God

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

What is *vairagya* and how does one achieve that state?

*Vairagya* does not mean only detachment from worldly affairs, it means love of God, together with detachment from worldly things and worldly people. Without love of God *vairagya* can only be transitory in nature. The feeling of attraction to Him is necessary. You must sincerely love God. Try hard, be up and doing and you will surely gain it.

*Vairagya* or renunciation is that state of mind which nurtures no other thought but sacrificing all for the sake of God. For example, at the time of robbery, robbers are very vigorous. As soon as this kind of strong emotion comes up in the mind for god-realisation, the feeling of renunciation follows soon.

How can we be detached from body consciousness?

You must differentiate between good and bad. What is there in this body? It contains only blood, excreta, etc. Then why are you so attached to it? Think in this way and remember Him always. Otherwise, everything will go in vain. Of course, it does not mean that you have to hate the body.

When does one achieve fulfilment of mind?

'Achieving fulfilment' means the state of mind in which one forgets oneself. This becomes possible by forsaking all connected with the physical self, with the help of self-confidence. This can be achieved also by taking the body and mind as completely different entities, with the power of the pure self, strong determination,

and holy ideas. The movements of the mind can be controlled by regular spiritual practices. All the above mentioned activities, as well as worship, prayer, chanting mantras, etc. are necessary for controlling the unsteady movements of the mind. The mind cannot overpower us if we conquer it completely by concentration, which is the only way to attain the summum bonum of life.

How does 'love and devotion' to God come about?

Conscience, that is, the power to judge between good and bad always inspires love of God. Once we differentiate between good and bad, we have to cling to the good and also feel Him to be our most beloved one. Once we start practising this, gradually the mind will be tinged with the colour of love and at the same time the source of devotion (*bhakti*) will express itself. The mind has to be turned away from all kinds of worldly pleasures and it must have total surrender at the lotus feet of God. But then a *bhogi* (one who is immersed in material pleasure) should satisfy his desires. He should realise that there is no end, no actual satisfaction to material joys; then only will he find spontaneous rejection of his desires, not before that. Take for example the story of Yayati who realised after a long life that there was no satiation of desire through enjoyment!

What is the concept of *prema* (love)?

Spiritual love denotes that state of being, when the whole mind is immersed in God, and is even totally forgetful of its own existence.



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This is the condition which Srimati (Sri Radha) was in. *Prema-sutra* has nothing to do with our limited household life. We are sympathetic towards our near and dear ones, and we also take great care of all our needs. In the same way, we should love and sympathise with all, crossing the limited boundary of our small family. We should always try to help others in the same manner as we do to our dear ones. In this way, we may be able to spread our faith to the whole of India, and to rest of the world as well.

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The naked image of Paramahansa would come out of Sri Ramakrishna's body and stay with him, and he would play with his own image. Please explain.

The Avatars play with themselves in this way, in order to taste the joy of such playing. Otherwise who else will they play with? It is not possible to play with a person who is not one's equal. Thus Sri Krishna created Srimati from His own 'Sattva' (self) and enjoyed her company being in love with her. Thakur also always had some such unseen *Leelashakti* in him. For His *Leela* in the West, he entered into Swamiji and led him by the hand and made Swamiji do his work there. Swamiji too was a pure and sacred receptacle like him.

Can we say India has benefited from Thakur?

Does Thakur belong to India only? It is this mean attitude that has brought about the downfall of India, and no welfare of the country is possible unless this attitude is destroyed. It is the purity and sanctity of these *Paramahansas* that is holding the world properly.

The ancient civilization of India itself was an example of spiritual upliftment for the general public. It could not fully remove the worldly want of the people, but could surely bring down the level of want to a great extent. In the present age, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna has arrived on earth for uniting these two civilizations.

Thakur was an efficient gardener. Hence, he formed this Sangha with various flowers and gave it the shape of a bouquet. All the good of all places has been combined here and much more will come in future. Thakur used to say, 'One who has prayed to God sincerely, even for a day, is sure to come here.'

How is the Holy Mother the ideal for household life?

The Holy Mother used to obey all that Thakur told her to do, throughout her life. She used to tell her children about initiation and other matters, 'Thakur Himself is making me do everything.' She always used to pray to Thakur sincerely for the good and well-being of all her children. She was extremely patient and hard working, very very pious and religious minded. With all these great qualities, she appeared as real *Mother Jagadamba* and arrived on earth for our education.

Mother Sarada was actually the outward manifestation of the power of Sri Ramakrishna, just as goddess Lakshmi is the power of Sri Vishnu, Durga of Shiva, Radha of Sri Krishna, Sita of Sri Ramachandra, and Vishnupriya of Sri Chaitanya. Although she was a village girl without much education, she had sharp intelligence and extraordinary courage. She really deserves appreciation for the manner in which she talked to the foreigners.

Mrs. Ole Bull, Sister Nivedita and many others came to India. Sister Nivedita became very much attached to the Mother and continued to stay in India for the upliftment of mankind. One could know a little about Thakur through various discussions by him and because of his *samadhi*, but nobody could know anything about the Holy Mother, who has bound us with such affection and compassion that it was almost impossible even for our own mothers to do so. She was fully involved in all her activities, and yet was always detached from everything, and this is the best way to follow in the household life.



## On Spirituality

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

Does God incarnate as an *Avatara* especially?

Once, when all the devotees were present, Narendra and Girish started talking on *Avatara*. Thakur was listening to their discussion, sitting nearby. He told Girish, 'I would like you to talk in English.' Girish had firm faith that God Himself was the *Avatara*, while Narendra believed that God is present in every being.

At this point, Thakur intervened and said, 'But God lives in a particular *Sakti* and particular *adhara* (container). Mind cannot know Him, words cannot express Him; but a pure mind can understand Him. This is how the *rishis* (sages) had the vision of the eternal Self. I had direct realisation in my own life. Hence I am advising each of you to try hard for your spiritual development.

'A fertile land will surely have a good harvest, irrespective of the quality of seeds sown there. Similarly, when we have been initiated, we should prepare ourselves (the land) accordingly, i.e., try to purify our mind through spiritual discipline, *japa* and meditation. We must utilise that mantra and inculcate faith in ourselves.'

How is Sri Ramakrishna inspiring all?

Thakur came to enliven and inspire all kinds of *bhava* (moods) and education. That is why this Math of Thakur must be formed in such a way that things like religion, education, knowledge, devotion, and all welfare activities might spread throughout the world. It also makes people grow in sincerity and honesty.


Did anybody ever think that almost the whole world would come to know of the life and teachings of the village Brahmin boy within such a short period? Our ancestors did not even

dream of the existence of such a person on earth. And now, look at that small group of young boys who worked together and were inspired by the divine touch of the lotus feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. They were initiated in the mantra of fearlessness from the Veda and got inspiration from the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna. Afterwards, they spread his holy teachings from Assam to Sindhu and from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari. Each of them tried to talk about Thakur's qualities as much as they had within their power of speech. And this is a very necessary thing to do. But if anybody among his devotees thinks that whatever he has realised is the only Truth, then he is pitiable.

Sri Ramakrishna came to rejuvenate the Indians who were charmed by the glamour of the West. That is why he chose most of His monastic disciples from among the students of the University.

What is the significance of *Avatara*?

'*Avatara-leela*' (the divine sport of an *Avatara*) is done with the help of *adyashakti* (the primordial power). An *Avatara* incarnates with his power. You can see God in any form, even in human form. God Himself arrives in the world assuming a human form. God's *leela* is *deva-leela* (divine sport), *nara-leela* (human sport) and *jagat-leela* (cosmic sport). The *Avatara* of God is expressed in *nara-leela*, e.g., a large amount of water on the roof is falling with great force through a pipe, as if it is Sacchidananda whose power is passing through a pipe. The *tattva* (element) of fire is everywhere, but its expression is more in wood. Similarly, if you seek *Iswar-tattva*, seek for this in man, because He expresses Himself more in a human form.

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The man who has boundless and sincere love and devotion, who is mad for God, and is fully absorbed in His thought—know surely that it is through him that God expresses Himself. You think of God alone, when you think about an Avatara. He has said, 'It is My promise—he who thinks of Me, is sure to obtain Me, and gain My wealth too.' The son inherits the material property of his father, but God's wealth is *jnana*, *bhakti*, *viveka*, *vairagya*, *prema* and *samadhi*.

How to purify the mind?

The more a person grows in his power of imagination, the more he gains knowledge. Sincerity, too, will grow more in this way. What a great devotion and sincerity to work Einstein had! If he puts on a *namabali* instead of his coat and pants, he would look just like a yogi and *sadhaka*. He became great only because of his strong imagination and sincerity of purpose. We too could develop our power of thinking in this way. We have to reach the goal and for this, we have to think spiritually and develop our human quality—that is the *sattva* quality. We are covered by the power of *tamas*; we must get rid of it by means of good deeds and thoughts, and through public welfare activities. We have to develop our quality of *rajas* in order to apply our strength to all deeds. Only welfare activities done with God in view help one to acquire purity and innocence of mind.

One has to maintain *purushakara* in order to gain purification of mind (*chittasuddhi*). As Thakur used to say, 'Do your work with one hand and count the name of God with the other.' You will attain *chittasuddhi* only when these two actions unify, i.e., there is unification of mind and soul. All the Master's disciples used to say, 'Never be depressed, never give vent to weakness.' Once I asked a direct disciple, 'How is it that I have gained nothing?' He answered, 'Firmness is sure to come with endeavour and *purushakara*. You have to drive away *tamas* from your mind, and always remember that you are doing everything for Thakur only.

This will empower you with mental strength and you will be able to continue your work forcefully.'

Can one continue in the worldly life, after attaining realisation?

Here realisation does not mean 'ultimate realisation'. Because, a person who has achieved ultimate realisation, never leads a worldly life, the only exception is a 'Vijnani', and none can become a Vijnani, without being 'Iswarakoti'. So, realisation really means complete faith in God and to live with this strong conviction, performing all the activities of the worldly life with the knowledge that God is the sole Lord of all.

What is reincarnation?

Thakur replied to a Vaishnava's question about reincarnation that it was irrelevant. You should concentrate on how to acquire devotion to God. You have been born as a human being only for attaining mukti. You have come to the grove to eat mangoes; what is the use of worrying about how many branches or leaves there are in the trees? Is it necessary to worry about reincarnation?

What is the aim of human life?

Liberation is the goal; and the most important thing you have to know is that you have to return to this earth, until you achieve your emancipation.

Thakur has also said that in order to fulfil this mission of life, one should withdraw one's mind from material thoughts and immerse oneself totally in Him. It is absolutely necessary to have full devotion and sincerity and to completely surrender to Him and pray for His blessings. During 'shava-sadhana', one has to feed the 'corpse' a little whenever it wakes up, in order to remove small hindrances from the path to success. Similarly, one has to fulfil even some small desires of life, to clear the way to the greatest desire of attaining God.





## Importance of Holy Company, etc.

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

How does one get attached to God?

God is always attracting us like a magnet, but barriers hinder this attraction. This is why we cannot find the thread that binds us to Him. Do you know what this attraction is? It is like the sun pulling the water upward in the form of vapour; but the water always has a tendency to flow downward.

Similarly, God is ever drawing us towards Him, but our own worldly desires and ambitions are always pulling us down in the opposite direction. It is very difficult to get rid of this attachment to worldly life. The attachment may gradually weaken through *sadhu-sanga* and continuous prayer.

How does one attain *sadhu-sanga*?

If one has yearning, one will find *sadhu-sanga*. While in the company of *sadhus* (holy men), one can re-set one's clock to a great extent. No matter how wrong all the other clocks are, the Sun is always on time. So one needs to set one's clock by the sun. Man is ignorant and can err easily; one can correct one's erroneous ways in the company of *sadhus*. For this *abhyasa yoga* (spiritual discipline) is necessary. One needs to develop the habit of praying to Him and of immersing one's mind in Him everyday.

What are the benefits of *sadhu-sanga*?


It inspires love and devotion for God. In order to develop an interest in any particular

subject, e.g., medicine, music, gems, you have to keep company of those who have specialised in that field. If one studies a subject with full devotion and sincerity, one will gain a thorough knowledge of that subject, and will also feel much interested in it. At the same time, the enthusiasm to learn more will grow. *Sadhu-sanga* does not mean visiting the *sadhus* occasionally and mouthing words of devotion. One has to devote a fair amount of time everyday to be in regular contact with *sadhus*, and must have a true desire to learn.

How does *Maya* prevent us from perceiving God?

*Maya* is both a barrier and a misleading idea. It has shrouded God from us and has created false notions about certain things. Anything that distances us from God is called *Maya*. The beautiful example Thakur has given about *Maya* is the water of stagnant pond, covered all over by weeds. The weeds which have covered the water are causing confusion between water and earth in our minds. The mind becomes purified through good qualities (*sattva-guna*). His light is reflected in a pure mind and one can see Him in His own light. He alone can express Himself; nothing else can. However great one's spiritual practices may be, it is only by His grace that one is able to see Him at last.

How will God's vision come about?

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The vision of God or *Iswar darshan* happens in the mind, and not by the eyes. Any feeling or visualisation is reflected in the mind which is free from any attachment to worldly things, and from any egoistic feeling, etc.; until such a state is attained, we only imagine God in the light of our own mental colouring. It is He who colours us with that, but He Himself retains His original appearance. A coloured glass makes a thing look different; similarly, God makes His love appear in the same shade of colour which tinges the mind of a particular devotee. He is sitting with a tub full of colour. Here God Himself is the painter, the pot represents the world and the colouring agent is the various moods of God. He is covering our mind with Maya, which includes both *vidya* (knowledge) and *avidya* (ignorance). *Jnana*, *bhakti*, *viveka* (discrimination), *vairagya* (renunciation)—all these come under *vidya-maya*; and the worldly attachments are *avidya-maya*, which should be replaced by *vidya-maya*. Later on, you have to renounce both, and only then can you realise God.

*Is it proper for a jnani to retain ego after enlightenment?*

One can live with the knowledge of *vidya-maya* even after attaining enlightenment. One can retain feelings of *bhakti* (devotion), *daya* (compassion) and *vairagya* (renunciation). This has two purposes: first, for educating and training the people, and secondly, for enjoying the divine bliss.

Education cannot spread among the ordinary people if the jnani remains silent and quiet in his meditation. Sankaracharya thus preserved the 'ego of *vidya*'. Similarly, devotion is required for enjoying the divine bliss and a *bhakta* (devotee) is absorbed in that. There is no harm in the ego of a *bhakta* or the 'ego of *vidya*'; all harm is caused by the

'wicked ego.' After one attains *darshan* (God-vision), one's nature becomes childlike. There is no harm in a child's ego. Just as the reflected face in a mirror cannot abuse people, just as the burnt rope merely looks like a rope but cannot bind anything and is scattered by the slightest breath, similarly the fire of knowledge does not do any harm after it burns out the ego; only a nominal ego remains. This ego can realise the eternal truth, and enjoy *leela* (cosmic play) at the same time. It can cross over to the other side and return to this side again—this is done in order to educate ordinary people.

*How do we eliminate ego and progress in spiritual life?*

If you sincerely perform your spiritual practices, you can gradually reach *Nitya* (Truth) and get rid of the ego. You have to try again and again, till you are free from the egoistic attitude. Love is both the beginning and end of religion. It is very difficult to love God, but this feeling should be brought about through continuous endeavour. Thakur and Swamiji had two different types of attitudes which merged into one later on. The immature ego was transformed into the mature ego. Thakur offered Swamiji (then Naren) to goddess Kali and Swamiji was relieved of the persistent doubt and confusion of his mind. His faith in the Divine Mother gradually became stronger and his love for Thakur grew more and more. A person who has self-control is sure to be victorious. Everyone should possess and maintain self-control.



Don't ask for a light load, but rather ask for a strong back. - UNKNOWN

## On Spiritual Life

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

How can we overcome obstacles in spiritual path ?

Worldly distractions and disturbances are very natural and common in day to day life; they are always present from the beginning till the end of life. There is no way to avoid these turmoils and tribulations. Pray and remember Him with utmost conviction. And after that do your duties without being deceived by Maya. Pray to Thakur, pray to Holy Mother, 'Please do not let me forget you by the Divine Mother's Maya, and rescue me from being drowned in it. I have come to take shelter in you, help me to turn my mind to your lotus feet with love, faith and devotion.'

What about the small pleasures of life?

Enjoy the small pleasures of life; I don't impose any restrictions there. I know that all these desires will dissolve spontaneously. Else the mind will go astray due to the obstructions. You may indulge a little in the desires left behind in your mind. Are you going to fall in the grip of actual desires of materialistic life while trying to control these small wishes and aspirations? If any real desire is left in you, is it possible to become purified through only worship, *japa*, etc and by outward discipline? Be very careful. We cannot fathom the depth of the mind. You don't know when the Divine Mother will make you forget everything. You cannot fully depend on your mind; so never think yourself to be over-secure; you can never be so unless you surrender yourself completely to Thakur. It is only through His grace that you can escape the *maya* of Mahamaya. Do your work and enjoy yourself, I have no objection to that; nor do I put any restriction to anybody's natural


tendency. Otherwise, they cannot develop their individuality. Every individual should blossom in his own characteristic way. Don't get scared of the various *bhavas* (emotions) rising in your mind. Whatever you are doing in this life, or have done in the previous life, has its *samskaras* (impressions), which won't go in a day.

How effective is *kirtan* (collective singing of devotional songs) in spiritual evolution?

The unrestrained singing and dancing during *kirtan* gives rise to a feeling of ecstasy, and the mind rises to a high level. But the mind comes down very quickly as a reaction. Only when this mood lies hidden and is lasting does the mind make good progress on the spiritual path. This is the reason why Swamiji has specially warned us about the shortlived excitements caused by getting too involved in singing *kirtan* etc.

Thakur tells Master Mahasaya—'This is a great secret which a mortal should not know. Because this is part of a feeling of a sweet relationship. While imagining himself as the *Prakriti*, the *bhakta* (devotee) feels like embracing and kissing God as the *Purusha*.'

This is the great mood of Sri Radha, and it belongs to the highest level of ecstasy, bereft of any sensual desires. But ordinary beings can never think of such things. None excepting a man free from all desires can practise this spiritual mood of sweetness. A man without control of his mind and desires, is sure to suffer a fall. There is a detailed explanation of the great mood and *madhurya rasa* in the book

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*Ujjwal-Nilmoni.* A man may realise some of this feeling if he reads these *bhakti-sastras* (devotional literature) with a pure mind.

Every person has a nature of his own. This is why a man cannot succeed unless he proceeds along the path appropriate to his individual nature. But often most of us cannot understand our own nature. Only the real guru has the insight to judge one's nature and can lead his disciple accordingly.

*How do we perceive happiness or Ananda?*

Don't go into detailed discussion on what *sacchidananda* is. It is better to stick to what you understand easily. Try to know Him as your own kin, and also know that there is none else dearer to you. Thakur is the king of all the *jnanis* and *bhaktas*; and at the same time He behaves like a child. Naren once said to Him, 'What you are saying is not correct.' He believed this just like a child, went to the Divine Mother and said, 'O Mother, Naren says that what I say is not correct.' Mother replied, 'No, my son, not only this, but everything else that you say will also be right. And he too will accept your words.' At this, He felt very happy, came to Naren and said, 'You see, Divine Mother has told me that you will also accept everything I say.'

*This is innocence.*

This only shows His inherent child-like nature. Try to make this innocent attitude a permanent quality of your character. Does a small child have any idea about the great virtues and qualities of his own mother? Yet 'mother' is the closest and dearest one to him. If

some-body comes and tells him, 'Do you know your mother has studied so much, gone to England, and has done so many things?' he only listens to him with all wonder. Similarly you should know that Thakur is your dearest one; and love Him sincerely with this thought in your mind. You need not always know every detail of His virtues and qualities. You just repeat His name and always keep that in your mind. You will glean the fruit even if you do this in a casual manner. As for instance, Thakur said, 'A candy will always taste sweet, in whatever form you like to eat it.'

While reading Thakur's description of *Nitya* and *Leela* it appears that both *Nitya* and *Leela* are equally true. Please explain.

This is a wrong idea. *Leela* (creation) cannot be true in the same sense as *Nitya* (Brahman) is. It can be deduced from Thakur's advice that Brahman and Sakti are one and the same thing. Water remains water, whether it is still or whether it is flowing. When water becomes turbulent, it remains water, and when it is calm it continues to be water. Likewise, Brahman is Brahman irrespective of whether It is engaged in *Leela*. Now Truth is that which remains constant under all conditions. In a given moment one may or may not observe *Leela* but the water (or Brahman) remains at all times. Thus Brahman or *Nitya* is the only Truth; *Leela* is not Truth in the same sense. For as long as we are aware of our 'ego' we are unable to deny the material world; and *Leela* appears to be the truth.

## For One Use

At the time of Durga Puja at Jayrambati a devotee was coming with a basketful of lotus flowers. He saw a monk at a distance, and raising his hand together with the basket, saluted him. The Holy Mother saw this from a distance and later said that such flowers should not be used to worship the Master. If flowers are shown to someone along with salutation, they are deemed to have been offered to that person and cannot be offered to the deity afterwards.

# Mother Answers

## ON REALIZATION

**Disciple:** It is said that one realizes God by praying to Him sincerely for two or three days. I have been praying for such a long time, but why do I not get any realization?

**Mother:** Everything will come in time, my child. The words of Sri Ramakrishna ... can never be in vain. Be devoted to him and take shelter at his feet. It is enough to remember that there is some One, call Him father or mother, who is always protecting you.

What is the significance of Thakur telling Master Mahasaya: *You see, I have had so many visions of God, and so much bhava samadhi. Then why do I suffer from so much pain in the throat?*

When God assumes a human body and descends on earth, His devotees also come along with Him—some being very intimate, some formal, and some prosperous. The Avatara thus brings along his playmates and companions with him. The Avatara has infinite power. His *Leela* (divine sport) is also very difficult to understand. He can make the impossible happen. An Avatara is omnipotent and omniscient even when he assumes a human form. His *leela* is beyond human understanding. This is why an ordinary man is unable to analyse his life, or write a proper biography. For this, a God-loving person with divine power like Swamiji arrives on earth.

Is it right to say that all happenings are His *Leela*?

His devotees keep talking about His *Leela*. But how many of them really perceive or understand the true meaning of it? See, the man who truly perceives all as His *Leela* will no longer feel any grief. He will actually feel only His bliss. Often, people speak of everything as His *Leela* in one moment and the next moment they

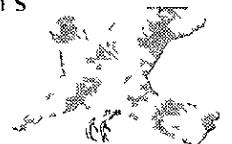
are troubled and disturbed by trifling household matters. It is better not to speak in this way. This is only hood-winking oneself; it is nothing but being pretentious.

Are both good and evil also His *Leela*?

Thakur replies: 'There are all kinds of things in His world. It is He who has created both the honest and the dishonest persons; and it is also He who infuses all good and evil thoughts in us.' The meaning of Sri Sri Thakur's saying is as follows:

If you think carefully and try to understand, you will no longer think of a person as dishonest. Those who think that 'God is all-honesty, and without anything dishonest' forget that there is anything but God in this world.

It is simply His wish or *Leela* to play good or evil. Can there be any necessity for discriminating between honesty and dishonesty? The only difference one needs to understand is that *sat* (existence) is what is eternal, i.e., God, and *asat* (non-existence) is what is *anitya* or transitory. You have to judge properly and take care. You will be in trouble only if you take the *asat* path, i.e., any path other than the path of God. Only when an elephant tries to feed on some other person's banana plants does its driver beat it on the head. So try to control yourself.





# On Spiritual Life

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

## Realization; Aim of Life; Rebirth . . .

**What does Thakur convey when he says: 'How can I advise you to go ahead? If a householder wants to make much progress, the whole family will be ruined.'**

Maharaj: Here, Thakur is explicitly expressing his views that there is no way for saving both sides. A householder thinks that everything can be attained while leading a material life; one can even succeed in achieving God. But, Thakur has made it clear that one cannot reach God unless one renounces one's family.

## Should realization be left to God's will?

Maharaj: We should not always refer to everything as 'His will'. We will earn that right only when we feel exactly the same in both happiness and unhappiness, joys and sorrows. Till then, we are overwhelmed with grief with the loss of a son, even if we ascribe everything to 'His will'. That is, we have not been able to surrender totally at His feet; hence 'His will' is a misrepresentation of the Truth.

## Does one retain the ego after realization?


Maharaj: The 'ego'- which remains even after God-vision or realisation is the 'ripe ego'. For instance, a sword when touched by a touchstone becomes a golden sword, with its original shape, but it can no more be used as a weapon. These are Thakur's words.

God realisation does not mean simply seeing God's image. The 'darshan' or vision has fulfilment only when the mind has a deep-

rooted feeling of such experience. The spiritual attainment of a person is bound to be expressed in his behaviour. He will surely detach himself from household life and achieve 'vairâgya'. Many persons say that they had God-vision in a dream, but in practical life, they seem almost always attached to their family and other worldly desires. Here the so-called 'darshan' is nothing but a dream only; and it is also as untrue as a dream.

A spiritual aspirant keeps himself detached from the world and clings to spiritual devotion after he/she experiences *savikalpa samadhi*; but true renunciation comes after he attains *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Only the *Isawkotis* can retain their human form and live in this world with the 'eternal self' or '*paka ami*'. The whole world appears to them as living entity—full of consciousness. For them, anger is like the burnt rope which vanishes at one breath. Just as a sword made of gold does not cut or injure, they do not have any animosity. They possess only a continuous flow of love in their heart. Swamiji was such a person. He would flare up quickly, all of a sudden; and calm down the next moment. His anger or scolding was always meant for the good of his devotees. Such *Isawkoti purushas* immerse in *samadhi* every now and then; and the next moment they speak like ordinary human beings. Nobody except the *Isawkotis* can retain the *paka ami*.

Since the ego cannot be destroyed completely, it is best to remain as God's servant, and imagine oneself as His *dasa*, His *bhakta* or His own child. In order to feel *dasa bhava*, one has to wait at the Master's door like His pet dog

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and obey His orders. And this attitude of the devotee makes everything good.

**Is it true that those who die at the age of 3 or 4 do not have to be born again? They die so early—is it because they have come to the end of worldly enjoyment?**

Maharaj: No, it is not so. They die because they finish their role in this life. It does not mean that he won't be born again. Enjoyment of the *prarabdha* ends with this life; but a man has rebirth for enjoying the results of the accumulated karma of the previous birth. A person attains liberation only after *iswar-darshan* or God-realization and then he won't have to be born again.

**How does work lead to realization?**

Maharaj: One has to go on doing work, and it is through such work that man achieves self-realisation and gains the knowledge about his own self. Swamiji asked us to sacrifice our life for serving all beings, because mere ritualistic activities do not enable us to perform all our duties properly. Instead of indulging in idleness and wasting our life in useless activities, we should open centres within the country and abroad, and thus the *bhava* (tradition) of Gurudev will overflow like flood and overwhelm all. This will be the right attitude of showing respect to Thakur, who is guiding us all in our activities. We all have taken shelter in Him and our main goal is to serve and do good to others.

**Should one emulate the lives of Avatars and great saints?**

Maharaj: You have to emulate the ideals of the lives of the Avatars and great personalities in order to make progress in spiritual life. Wherever there is an object, there is reflection, which may be many. But the being is always one. For instance, the sun may have ten reflections in ten pots containing water, but when the pots are broken, the sun alone remains—that means Oneness is present in all.

## God's Vision and Care

**When does one get the vision of God?**

Maharaj: You will not get any results, if you cannot concentrate your mind on the 'Ishta' or Ishtamantra, during 'japa'. The love for God will grow through practising *japa* and simultaneously, the mind will become focussed and absorbed in it. Our main aim in life is to inculcate the 'love of God' in our hearts. Once you grow to love God material things will no longer attract you. The nature of a person who achieves true 'darshan', expresses itself in his conduct and not through ostentatious words. If one who claims to have had 'darshan', has even the least attachment to household life, then his claim is only false pretension. Often one finds the object of one's thoughts appearing in a dream, or as a 'hallucination'. True darshan is achieved only when one's heart is full of love and He reveals Himself to our feelings. This is when one can say 'Brahman is Truth and the world is false.' Thakur has said: 'Japam' means chanting His name silently in solitude. If one chants His name with full devotion and absorption, then one may have His 'darshan' and meet Him.

**Does God take complete care of a devotee?**

Maharaj: Just as a rich man's son does not have any want of food or clothing a true devotee too is properly taken care of by God Himself who provides everything he needs. That is why Sri Krishna has mentioned about 'yoga-kshema' in the Gita.

## JUST FOR TODAY

*Just for today, I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself.*

—KENNETH L. HOLMES



# On Spiritual Life

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

## Can God be realized through our mind?

Maharaj: Thakur says that God can be seen with a pure and innocent mind. A mind attached to lust and lucre can never have this vision. The mind is like a cloth for a washerman to clean. If a particular person has turned bad, it means his mind is coloured with bad hues.

You can make out from this that the vision of God or 'Iswar Darshan' happens in the mind, and not by the eyes. Any feeling or visualisation is reflected in the mind which is free from any attachment to lust and lucre, and from any egoistic feeling; until such a state is attained, we imagine God in the light of our own mental colouring. It is He who colours us with that, but He Himself retains His original appearance. A coloured glass makes a thing look different; similarly, God makes His love appear in the same shade of colour which tinges the mind of a particular devotee. He is sitting with a tub full of colour. Here God Himself is the painter, the pot represents the world and the colouring agent is the various moods of God. He is covering our mind with Maya, which includes both *vidyâ* and *avidyâ*. *Jnâna*, *bhakti*, *viveka*, *vairâgya*—all these come under *vidyâ-maya*; and the worldly attachments are *avidyâ-maya*, which should be replaced by *vidyâ-maya*. Later on, you have to renounce both, and only then can you realise God.

## Who is competent to teach?

Maharaj: Thakur says that one should have a command to spread teachings, after one has had the vision of God. Otherwise, however

much you go on talking, the people will listen to you for a while, and then will forget everything.

Herein lies the defect of learning. Mere learning cannot give rise to the feeling about the existence of God; and without this perception a learned person cannot have sufficient force of speech, and all goes wrong.


## How does God's grace descend?

Maharaj: Thakur has said (answering Bankim's question on doing good to the world): One has to perform all deeds knowing that God is omnipresent; and work should be done without any ulterior motive, as 'Karma Yoga'.

You cannot do anything without God's grace. Truth, wisdom, joy—all these qualities are appraised by 'Sachchidananda'; there is no other scale for assessing these qualities; everything is apparent, transitory, and mixed together.

Thakur has said that the less the worldly fame, the nearer He comes to you; just as water cannot accumulate on high land, ego too cannot exist in God's beloved; it perishes by His grace. It is best to have humility in front of Him. Here title or honour means the mind, intellect and ego. Both the guru and the disciple should possess pure and clean minds, i.e., they have to get rid of the ego.

**Maharaj, I should not expect results even after much japa and meditation. One has to be up and doing in order to understand Thakur fully. But I cannot realise how it is possible while leading a household life.**

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Maharaj: You must always remember Thakur in all your household work. Change the direction of your deeds and do everything in the name of Thakur and surrender all the worldly duties at the lotus feet of Thakur. He is residing in everybody, and in the heart of all people. Thus whatever you do for anybody, is a service to God. Pray to Thakur sincerely, and say, 'Thakur, kindly make my mind steadfast in your lotus feet.' You should always remember Thakur in the beginning as well as in the midst of your tasks. Try heart and soul to keep Him in your heart with full devotion, since you have chosen this path. For example, during a ceremony, people try to finish their daily chores like taking bath and food, within a very short time, because the main responsibility is to organise the whole function properly and see to the completion of the ceremony. Similarly, you should somehow manage the household show, and devote yourself completely to the worship of Thakur and other spiritual practices, thinking of Him deeply through japam and meditation. You must always direct your attention to Thakur, even in the midst of various worldly duties. You have to really try your best.

### **How do we eliminate ego and progress in spiritual life?**

Maharaj: If you sincerely perform your spiritual practices, you can gradually reach Nitya (Truth) and get rid of the ego. You have to try again and again, till you are free from the egoistic attitude. Love is both the beginning and end of religion. It is very difficult to love God, but this feeling should be brought about through continuous endeavour. Thakur and Swamiji had different types of attitudes which merged into one later on. The immature ego was transformed into the mature ego. Thakur offered Swamiji (then Naren) to goddess Kali and Swamiji was relieved of the long-drawn doubt and confusion of his mind. His faith in the Divine Mother gradually became strong and his love for Thakur grew more and more. One day, Naren was present in Thakur's room along

with other devotees, who were surprised at a particular expression of love for Naren on Thakur's part. This is an example of the wonderful love of Thakur for Naren. Heroism doesn't mean the hero fighting with a sword. A person who has self-control is sure to be victorious. Everyone should possess and maintain self-control.

### **How can we eliminate the ego?**

Maharaj: You cannot reach real dharma until you develop love for God, by continuous performance of various rituals, worship and other spiritual practices. According to Vedanta, Brahman is real and the material world false. The physical world, an expression of God's play, does not stand the test of time. But this can never be realised if one's egoism remains in the least. That is why, the more you curb your ego, the more you advance towards spiritual realisation, and the shortest route to eliminate ego is to love God. We want so many things from God, but do we want to have Him with us at anytime?

## **Seeing the Applause!**

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827) was deaf. This deaf man poured out some of the most glorious music ever penned. It was a triumph of the spirit over adversity that made him great. Usually after his musical performance there used to be a crashing wave of applause. But the man at the piano would make no movement. He would sit there, crouched and unaware of it all. The applause would grow louder, and become almost frantic. Then an attendant would approach the immovable figure and turn him round that he might see his audience; place him so that he might see the applause. He would look at the shouting people with pathos of nobility; his lips moved, that was all.

# On Spiritual Life

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

**Maharaj, I cannot concentrate properly. What should I do?**

Maharaj: Remember, how long and how hard did you concentrate in your studies. And how little is your endeavour now, compared to that? If you try sincerely, your mind will surely become steady during *japa* and meditation. If you cannot concentrate even after that, then think of me, think of your *Ishta* (chosen deity). Thakur used to say, 'Have *sâdhu-sanga*.' This does not mean merely to sit by a *sâdhu* quietly. You have to ask him about various things that arise in your mind and try to know the answers—only then do you enjoy *sâdhu-sanga* (holy company). *Bhakti* does not mean that you have to perform such and such things. It denotes love which enables a person to sacrifice many things for the sake of love. You must think of Thakur with profound love and devotion, which actually is *bhakti*. At the same time, you must remember how deep Thakur's love for us is.

**It is difficult to discipline the mind. How should one proceed to get away from bad thoughts?**


Maharaj: Don't suppress your original nature or inner mood. It is not right to forcibly restrain one's *samskâras* which are sure to come out at last. It cannot be controlled within a moment, but only slowly and gradually, with counting of Thakur's name. You should never force yourself to suppress your likes and dislikes because desires can never be conquered by force. Thakur himself told us, 'Once I thought that I have conquered the desires, but soon after,

the force of desire overpowered me, and I told the Divine Mother, "I will never say again that I have conquered all desires" because the body usually has a bit of physical hankering.' Don't try to get rid of it by force, or be afraid of worldly desires. There is nothing to be scared of. Rather, you should concentrate on reading books on Thakur during such times and do a little bit of meditation and other spiritual practices. That is all you are supposed to do, and after some time it will disappear automatically.

All these spiritual practices which you do, is your rampart—it is from here that you will be able to fight and fend for yourselves. All these will gradually lose their power with regular *japa* and meditation. Always think of Thakur's face, what a wonderful and compassionate look he has! Continuous thinking of his benign face will inspire you to love him deeply and enable you to concentrate on your spiritual practices more.

**Can we get concentration from *Japa*?**

Maharaj: While counting His names, if the mind goes astray, immediately concentrate on the *Ista Mantra*, and you will regain stability of your mind. This is the way to reach your goal, and you need great patience for this. You must be very calm. There are many disturbances in household life and the mind is bound to travel in different directions. Don't take notice of them, but try and stick to your own mood patiently. There are many barriers and hindrances in family life. In spite of all these, you should always try to hold on to your

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own spiritual mood, and all will be set right later. After this, you won't face any difficulty.

### **What is the right method of japa?**

Maharaj: Sorrow and happiness are inseparable. One attains Brahmajnana when one has no difference in feeling in both joys and sufferings. Thakur came only recently; how will you entertain any thought other than his? You should try to remember him always. Otherwise, who will suffer except you? Love Thakur as your own parent, and cast aside the joys and sorrows of the household life. This will enable you to lead an ideal life. Read the books on Thakur and Swamiji. Make a habit of reading. This habit will help you in your meditation also. Keep him in your heart always, from morning till evening. It is a great boon that you are born as a human being. Try to utilise this existence properly. Try to be compassionate and sympathetic to the suffering. While counting His name, you should feel the vibration within and that is an indication of the right method of japa. Purification comes with surrendering all your *punyaphala* (results of meritorious deeds) to God. It is only then that you can see God, through love. You will achieve nothing without the spirit of surrender. If you cannot remember Thakur while counting his name, then what is the use of japa?

Do plenty of japa, continue to do this even in the midst of your work. All bad thoughts will disappear through this process. Never stay away from Thakur; hold on to him and pray, 'Thakur, I am weak; give me strength so that I can always remain with you.' Weep before him with an open mind. Sit alone, and weep and pray to him without any pretension. He understands everything, real and unreal.

### **How should I pray to Thakur?**

Maharaj: You must think of Thakur as your dearest one. Call him with sincere love and devotion, and tell him everything that comes to your mind. Remember Thakur in solitude. Try to build up a relationship with

him. Do vigorous japa and try to do it as many times as you can. Try to rectify your habits from now. Try and form your ideas while reading and think deeply about those ideas during leisure. You won't be able to do all these unless you practise them now onwards.

We have to pray for Sri Sri Thakur's grace so that we can be free from the bondage of Mahamaya. We can get rid of all kinds of bindings except that particular bondage, which can be overcome only with the help of Thakur's grace and compassion. We have to pray like this: 'Thakur, we are *sharanâgata* (we have come to take shelter under you), be kind to us. O Mother, O Mother of the world, be good to us.'

### **THE CEASELESS SEARCH FOR 'ONENESS'**

Pure solemn darkness covers  
The canvas of the sky.

Terrorism, violence, aggression,  
And vandalism everywhere!  
Let us search the meaning of peace,  
The nectar of love in our own world.

The stars shine in the sky  
With flowers competing with them,  
It seems to be divine children  
Glowing in the beauty of selflessness.  
The self-forgetting nature enters  
Into the consciousness of the universe.

The raindrops dance incessantly  
In ascetic rhythm,  
Like the shower of Grace on us,  
The drowning mass.

Sudden burst of silvery lightning  
Spreads over the broken clouds,  
We, the illumined humanity, are starting  
Our journey towards 'ONENESS'.

—DR BARNALI DAS

## Spiritual Life

**What is the necessity of going on pilgrimages?**

Maharaj: Travel to all the holy places as long as your age permits. But know that wherever you go, to Pashupatinath or anywhere else, Thakur Himself is present there in some other form. Be respectful, do pranam and count Ishta Mantra; keep some coins with you and offer them to the *pandas*. For you are supposed to give something to the *tirthagurus*, according to your ability. Whatever distance you travel, always think of Thakur and keep Him in the centre of your mind. Whatever you do, you must concentrate on Thakur only. Take for example a circle. You must place Thakur in the centre, so that all the radii will go to Thakur. If you can spend your life in this manner, nothing else is necessary.

**Maharaj, madguru is called jagatguru. Hence it should be all right if I tell you everything.**

Maharaj: No, my dear, Thakur is the Chief Guru. So, you should express all your problems to Him. I am nothing but one of His instruments. But it is through the grace of Guru



**HOW TO GET RID OF IMPURE THOUGHTS?**

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

that God comes to us. So, you should not judge your Guru by ordinary human intellect. Guru should be identified with our Ista. Remember Thakur day and night, and try to build up an association with Him. Recapitulate and discuss the incidents of His life you like best; keep them in your mind in a picturesque form. In this way, you can enjoy His association—this will give you added strength and devotion as well. Count His name as many times as you can. Remember Him always in this manner; that will do.

And if this gross body (pointing towards himself) persists, come here and ask me, if you have any doubt in your mind. There will be various thoughts arising in your mind; hold on and stick only to those which

concerns Him; don't pay any attention to any other ideas, rather try to get rid of them. You have to differentiate between good and bad, and pray with great yearning, 'O God, please don't allow me to forget you by your world-bewitching magic.' You have to pray and weep repeatedly, so that you do not possess any desire for worldly wealth and worldly aspirations. You have to be very careful about

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kâma. Why should you care so much for this body which stinks with perspiration, etc.

### What are the schools of Vedantic thought?

Maharaj: If one has sufficient strength and sincerity of purpose, any work can be accomplished properly and commendably. Swamiji asked his brother disciples to read his letters with special emphasis on dualism, qualified-monism and advaita. A dualist says, 'After death, the soul goes first to Aditya-loka, then to Chandra-loka and finally to Vidyut-loka. There a *purusha* comes and takes him to Brahma-loka.' According to this school, God and Prakriti are eternally separate entities. The universe and Prakriti are always controlled by God. This school holds that there is difference between the living beings and God.

An advaitin says, 'The soul does not come and go. All these different levels and spheres of the universe are produced by the various amalgamations of heaven and world. It is nothing but imagining the differences, because the One who is eternal and omnipresent always remains the same, whether in the past, present or future. A person is beyond all thoughts of differentiation only when he sees and feels the existence of the one Self all around. The last word here is *tattvamasi*—'that thou art'—there is no feeling of separate existence in it; *sarvam khalvidam brahma*.

According to qualified monism, God, Prakriti and soul are present, but Prakriti and soul are like the body of God. There is a difference between God and an *Avatâra*, just as there is a difference between fire and its spark. All these are actually parts of God who controls creation, life and destruction. But He Himself is completely free from everything. So, we should try to be one with the eternal soul, whom we have to realise in the form of *Nitya-Satya* (eternal truth), *Buddha* (wise), *Mukta* (free) and *Sacchidânanda-Swarupa*.

### Maharaj, how to know whether I am going the right direction?

Maharaj: Know that whatever I tell you is exactly what I have practised and what I have realised from reading the sastras. Do your work without thinking about the results. The more you do your duties, the more you get the desired effects. You yourself will be able to determine whether you are doing the right thing or not. Do you need a torch to see the sun? All other attachments will grow less as your love for Him grows more and more. It is then that you will feel that you are going in the right direction.

### How to get rid of impure thoughts?

Imagine your mind as the Ganges, which has many dirty things floating on it, with clear water flowing underneath, and becoming visible now and then. The mind behaves in the same fashion—various impure thoughts come up and go in quick succession, yielding place to pure and holy thoughts. How can anybody remain impure after taking shelter in that lotus feet from where the Ganges flows? You will surely feel serene and holy while remembering any part of His divine body.

॥ AS IT IS ॥

It's not a flight to some realm high above  
Nor a descent of the divine to here on earth;  
Dissolving individuality in the ocean of love  
It's a transformation and indeed a new birth.

A perpetual process of merging of the mind  
An all round folding up of the wings of thoughts  
And rising of the urge that's within enshrined  
Breaking with the world all the knots.

Awareness comes in a flash revealing divinity  
Spreading around soothing rays of peace and bliss;  
A certitude settles within mysteriously  
And hence the inner state ever remains AS IT IS.

—m.p. jain

**How do I ensure that I follow Swamiji's teachings?**

Maharaj: One has to obey the following directions in order to follow the ideal and teachings of Swamiji in one's own life:

- a) obedience
- b) sincerity of purpose
- c) to be always ready to do something

Nothing will displace a person if he practises all these disciplines.

**What is creation?**

Maharaj: According to the scientists, there are numerous constellations spread all over the universe. All these will end; those again will burst like fireworks, and spread all over. The whole universe is moving in this way from time immemorial, and will continue to do so. This expression is known as 'creation'.

There are two theories regarding the spheres of the universe. One is known as *shaktivarga* (the sphere of power) and the other as *jadavarga* (the sphere of the inanimates). *Shaktivarga* and *jadavarga* have become united with the strength of living beings and with the material world of *akâsha* respectively. Vedanta is what is real, and has truth in it. *Brahma-sattva* is omnipresent, eternal, i.e., what remained in the past, lives in the present, and will exist in the future.

**What is anganyâsa?**

Maharaj: To make the body appear as non-existent, as it is done during worship, meditation, etc. The group of six lotuses within the physical body can be aroused temporarily by chanting mantras or doing *anganyâsa*. This is what is known as going from the physical body to the fine body. Spiritually advanced persons can travel with the fine body.



**God is Light, not darkness.**

**God is Love, not hate**

**God is Truth, not untruth.**

**God alone is great.**

**Is varnashrama based on birth alone?**

Casteism, *varnashrama*, is rooted in birth, but may vary according to the nature also. For example, brahmins can be kshatriya and vaisya varna, the kshatriyas can be of vipra varna and the sudras may also be of kshatriya varna. But the caste system was based on birth only for social convenience.

**What were Swamiji's views on freedom of thought?**

Maharaj: To deliver a lecture after writing it down was against Swamiji's nature. He had a powerful and spontaneous way of oratory, and the subject matters were the result of very deep thinking. He assessed the value of freedom of thought for spirituality and said, 'Complete freedom is necessary for spirituality. The sum and substance of religion is establishing the theory that man is not a machine, and he should have freedom of thought, and a continuous process of deep thinking is the only way to bring out the principles of religion, and for this, the first thing necessary is freedom of thought for each and every person. It will be fruitless if we bring it down to the level of mechanical discipline, like other activities. The result will be "ito nashta, tato bhrasta (Losing both here and hereafter)".'

**Is it necessary to understand Swamiji before we try to understand Sri Ramakrishna?**

Maharaj: It is almost impossible to touch Him, to think of Him, or to have any idea or the least amount of knowledge about Sri Ramakrishna unless we proceed with the help of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji has said, 'Wisdom (*jnana*) is equal to "eye", the spirit of sacrifice without expectation of results is happiness, and quest for knowledge is sorrow there is nothing else in this world.'

*Concluded*