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EDITORIAL: THE GURU AND GOD

Concept of the Guru

When the Supreme Lord wished to create the universe, He first created Brahma and gave Him the Vedas—the knowledge—and urged Him to create the universe. Brahma, the first-born, created seven highly spiritual beings, known as the seven Rishis, Brhigu, etc. He created them and gave them spiritual knowledge so that they could uphold the spiritual knowledge in the universe. Then He created the Prajapatis; like Swambhu Manu, etc. They were responsible for creating different varieties of beings and also the sense objects. They were predominantly rajasic in nature. Brahma then created four wonderful beings— Sanak, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanatkumar. They are the famous four 'San' brothers—the mind-born children of Brahma.

These four brothers had both the sattva and rajas gunas. Hence, they were not completely liberated like the seven Rishis and were not completely bound by the sense objects. They had a desire to be liberated from the bondage of the sense objects because they knew that these created objects of the universe, though very attractive and apparently the source of happiness were in reality temporary and the cause of suffering. The four brothers, having the knowledge of spirituality and at the same time feeling the pull of the sense objects, got confused and wanted the help of their father, Brahma. They went to their father and asked Brahma to teach them the secret of yoga— how to disassociate the mind from the objects of the world.

Brahma, though capable of giving the answer, thought that his children should learn from the Supreme Being the true knowledge and the process of liberation—yoga. The 11th Canto, 13th Chapter of the Bhagavatam beautifully depicts the conversation between the Supreme Being and the four brothers. The Supreme Being, who in reality is without form, appeared before the 'San' brothers in

the form of a great swan. The four young men, following their father, Brahma, paid due respect to this Swan, but then, being confused because of the form of the Supreme Being, asked with great humility, "Who are you?"

The Supreme Being in the form of a swan gracefully told them, "Children, you are aware that there is only one being, so how can you ask the One, "Who are You?" Well, if you are directing the question to this body (the swan form), then also your question is invalid because the body is a composition of five different materials. Hence, your question should be in the plural and not in the singular. Then with great affection the Supreme Being taught them the secret of yoga—the secret of withdrawing the mind from sense objects. He taught them a very simple process, "Attach your mind to me, the Supreme Being, and you will automatically be free from the attraction of the senses, since they are created out of My power. Before leaving, the Supreme Being answered the question of the four brothers. "You wanted to know who I am. Know me as Vishnu—one which is all-pervading and which is the basis of everything."

The Supreme God is the Guru

The guru is one who removes ignorance by giving knowledge of the Self and also teaches how to apply that knowledge to remove ignorance. Hence, it is said, "The guru is the giver of jnana and the teacher of yoga." Without the guru one cannot go beyond bondage, and that is why the Upanishads say one should approach a qualified guru with great humility (Mandukya Upanishad 1/2/12).

The question may be raised, "If the guru is God, then what about the human gurus?" It is said in the scriptures that one who has realized Brahman becomes Brahman. One who has realized God becomes God Himself.

Shankaracharya in his famous treatise, Vivekacudmani, very clearly describes the qualities that a spiritual guru should have.

A teacher is one who is deeply versed in the scriptures, pure, free from lust, and a perfect knower of Brahman. He is established continually in Brahman, calm like the flame when its fuel is consumed, an ocean of the love that knows no ulterior motive and a friend to all good people who humbly entrust themselves to him. (Vivekachudamani, 33)

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna described in very simple terms the quality of a holy person. A holy person is one whose whole mind is dedicated to God. One who doesn't know anything but God is truly a holy person and fit to become a guru—a spiritual guide. How to judge whether a person is spiritual and holy? Two qualities will surely manifest in the character of a holy person: Pure

love for all and unselfishness.

What is the Necessity of a Guru

The guru is like a burning torch which can light innumerable other torches. The guru is the living embodiment of God. The guru not only attracts pure souls to the ultimate truth but also holds their hands, so to say, to take them to the other shore beyond misery and death. The guru not only inspires the disciples to lead a highly moral life but also transmits spiritual power through Mantra Diksha — spiritual initiation.

Ma Sarada Devi said, "The guru's spiritual power is transmitted to the disciple through the mantra...By repetition of the mantra given by the guru one becomes pure and fit to realize God." God stands as a bridge in the form of the guru to take pure minded people from darkness to light, from death to immortality.



An excerpt from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

The Master (Sri Ramakrishna) looked at the householder devotees seated around him and said with a smile:

Why shouldn't it be possible for a householder to give his mind to God? But the truth is that he no longer has his mind with him. If he had it, then he could certainly offer it to God. But, alas, the mind has been mortgaged -- mortgaged to kāma-kāñcana. So it is necessary for him constantly to live in the company of holy men. When, he gets back his own mind, then he can devote it to spiritual practice; but first it is necessary to live constantly with the guru, wait on him, and enjoy the company of spiritual people. Either he should think of God in solitude day and night, or he should live with holy men. The mind left to itself gradually dries up. Take a jar of water, for instance. If the jar is set aside, the water dries up little by little. But that will not happen if the jar is kept immersed in the Ganges.



WHAT IS BRAHMAN?

Swami Varadananda

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago



All sages are in agreement that Brahman can't be described. The closest they can come is Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). From the standpoint of Advaita Vedanta Brahman is the only thing that exists. The universe is a manifestation of that Reality.

We all experience that we exist, we are conscious, and we experience moments of happiness. Our existence, consciousness and bliss actually come from the presence of Brahman within us, but we are experiencing them through a body, mind and intellect. This creates an ego, which separates us from the One consciousness and causes us to experience the one reality as separate bodies and minds.

In Vedanta we speak of manifestation rather than creation. Manifestation isn't like the creation of a painter. The painting is a separate object from the painter and can be sold or given away. Manifestation is more like the creation of a novelist. He creates a whole world full of people and actions, but that world is not separate from the writer. It is contained within and pervaded by his consciousness. If the characters in the book began to search for their creator, they could examine every person and object in their world but would not find it. Yet, all the time their creator is right where they are because their world is contained within the mind of the writer.

It is like a dream. We experience a dream, but it is not ultimately real. When we wake up we realize that it was only an imagination and not actually

real. While we are asleep the dream seems real to us. It is only from the standpoint of another state of consciousness—the waking state—that we realize that it wasn't real.

Within the dream we are struggling along sometimes getting better and sometimes worse, making progress and falling back again. Spiritual practices don't produce the knowledge of Brahman, they only remove the obstacles that are blocking that knowledge. The sun is always shining, but if the clouds cover it, the world can seem dark and gloomy. God in all of Its glory is always present, but if we are not aware of It, we don't get the benefit of it. If we have a precious treasure buried in our back yard, but we don't know that it is there, it doesn't do us any good. Theoretically we possess the treasure, but we could be living in poverty because we haven't dug it up.

Suppose you are looking for your key. You rack your brain but can't remember where you put it. Then, fifteen minutes later you are not thinking of the key at all, but the knowledge suddenly flashes in your mind. All of your thinking didn't bring the knowledge, but if you hadn't been looking for the knowledge, it wouldn't have come. Our conscious practices don't produce God, but by constantly thinking about God we are preparing the ground for the flash of knowledge to occur.

Brahman cannot be experienced. The only way to know Brahman is to be Brahman. When you are Brahman, you are not a separate person, who can stand back and say, "Yes, that's Brahman." That is one reason no one has ever been able to describe Brahman.

When we are climbing up the mountain, doing meditation and spiritual practices, there is a lot of effort involved. We reach a good state of mind and then have to struggle to keep it. But, in realization there is no effort involved.

When you are awake, you are awake. It has become your natural state. Once it has become established there is no effort involved in keeping it.

When you are awake, there is no doubt about it. When Swami Vivekananda asked Sri Ramakrishna if he had seen God, Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, I see God just as clearly as I see you, only much more intimately." When the dream breaks, the Reality shines forth with absolute certainty and you are home at last.

The main obstacle to enlightenment is the ego. We set up an individual self with body and mind and then place barriers around it to keep it separate from God and the rest of the universe. We feel, "This is me", and we want to hold onto that me at any cost. Everybody can appreciate the idea of heaven. We go to a nice place where everything is pleasant and there are no problems. But to attain realization we need to go beyond that small limited self so that we can find our true Self. Most people think, "What is the good of that if 'I' am not there to enjoy it.

The 'I' that we think we are is actually the Chit or consciousness of Brahman. It gives us our sense that we exist, we are aware. It is using the body and mind to experience the world and play our role in it, but in the process we forget its true nature and become identified with the instruments. We become the small 'i'. "I am this body and mind; that is who I am." Our sense of identity is then based on the body and mind and what they experience, and we forget who we really are—the pure eternal presence of God.

Each wave in the ocean has its own particular size and shape, but in essence each wave is water. As water it is the same as the ocean, and it is the same as every other wave. When we go beyond our identification as the wave, we discover that we are one with God and with everything else.

The more we identify with the ego, the more limited we become. The more selfish we are, the smaller we become, our whole reality centers on

one particular individual, which we call "me". We see that me as separate from every other me, and all of our activities are focused on that me. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Contraction is death, expansion is life." All morality is based on the Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do to you." This is a recognition of the unity that underlies the diversity we experience. We experience a world made up of other people, each one separate and distinct from each other, but there is a unity underlying the diversity. As we recognize that unity, we are expanding our consciousness to become one with our true Self. As waves we are separate, but as ocean we are one with all the waves in the ocean.

To attain the knowledge of Brahman may seem very far off and meant only for those who have dedicated their whole life for it. It is important to remember that every step we take in the right direction will begin to unveil the hidden splendor that is within each of us. Every religion that speaks of God is firm in the belief that It is infinite and omnipresent. That means that God is always present right where we are. God is not lost but only forgotten. As we begin to remind ourselves of the actual presence of God in our life, it begins to transform our life from the hum-drum daily grind to the revelation of divine splendor.

The quality of our life is the result of our state of conscious. Whether we are happy or unhappy depends more on our mind than what other people are doing. As Swami Vivekananda said, "For the bad person, this world is hell. For the good person, this world is heaven. For the yogi this world is God Itself." We create our own heaven or hell, and we always have the possibility of discovering the presence of God even where we stand. God is always present and always available. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Don't seek God, see God!"

"From the unreal lead me to the real. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality." (Bhadaranyaka Up. 1.3.28)

THE GENESIS OF THE BHAGAVATA

The *Bhagavata Purana* is the most famous of the 18 Puranas, and its influence on the people is profound. Like the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavata Purana is a book of syntheses. It never teaches any narrowness.

The word 'Purana' means 'ancient'. At present there are 18 Puranas:

1. *Vayu Purana* 2. *Brahmanda* 3. *Markandeya*
4. *Vishnu* 5. *Bhagavata* 6. *Matsya* 7. *Kurma* 8. *Vamana*
9. *Linga* 10. *Varaha* 11. *Padma* 12. *Naradiya* 13. *Agni*
14. *Garuda* 15. *Brahma* 16. *Skanda* 17. *Bharishya*
18. *Brahmavairarta*

It is difficult to say how and when the Puranas first came into being, though their antiquity, many claim, is next only to that of the Vedas.

1. The earliest mention of the word 'Purana' is found in the Atharva Veda.

2. The Atharva Veda and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* both believed in the sacred origin of the Puranas and gave them a position almost equal to the Vedas.

3. The *Purana Samhitas* came into existence long before the beginning of the Christian Era (Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. 2, pg. 245).

4. In the Law Books of Manu and Yajnavalka, the word 'Purana' has been used.

5. The *Apastamba Dharma-Sutra* cites passages from the Puranas.

The Puranas play an important role in the life of the Hindus. Avoiding the academic subtleties and metaphysical profundity of the Vedas, the Puranas present the essential principles and doctrines of the Hindu religion in an attractive garb, which is easily assimilated.

Many of the beliefs and practices of the Hindus are based on the Puranas. Most of the Puranas are dedicated to a particular god; like Vishnu, Siva, Vayu, Shakti, etc. From this standpoint they might be considered sectarian, but in reality "One Being" is adored under different names and forms.



Features of the Puranas

According to the Bhagavata Purana (XII.7.9-10), in order for a scripture to be considered a Maha-Purana, the scripture should discuss and analyze ten topics: 1. *Sarga*: (The Primary Creation) — Evolution of the original undifferentiated *Prakriti* into *Ahamkara* (ego) and finally the gross elements.

1. *Visarga* (The Secondary Creation): Karma of creatures becoming manifest. Just like a seed, the latent tendencies sprout in time. Sentient and insentient beings get formed.

3. *Vritti* (Means of Sustenance): System by which living creatures maintain life.

4. *Raksha* (Protection): Account of the Incarnations of the Supreme Being and the establishment of spirituality and salvation.

5. *Manvantara* (Periods of Manus): The Manu's activities and the responsibilities of the Devas, the Sons of Manu, Indra, and the Rishis for the well-being of the creatures.

6. *Vamsa* (Genealogy): Lists of the royal and priestly lines descended from Brahma.

7. *Vamsanu-Charita* (Dynastic History): How the kings and their dynasties served the cause of devotion to God and the well-being of humanity.

8. *Samastha* (Dissolution) — The reduction of the manifested universe into a finer condition brought about by the influence of Time, Karma and the Gunas. There are four kinds of Dissolution or Pralaya:

a. *Prakrita-pralaya* = Total dissolution

b. *Naimittika* = Partial dissolution

c. *Nitya* = Daily dissolution (sleep)

d. *Ayantika* = Salvation of the person (*Nirodha* or *Mukti*)

9. Hetu (Purpose) — Root cause and significance of all creative activities. The Jiva, the individual soul, is the cause of Avidya, ignorance, and is the effect of Kama and Karma.

10. Apasraya (Ultimate Support) — God is the ultimate Being and the support of all. In Him and by Him all the processes of the world take place. In the Bhagavata discussions are used to generate devotion to God for the Mukti of the Jivas.

The Puranas also discuss matters relating to history, geography, astronomy, natural sciences, sociology, etc.

Bhagavata Purana: The Gospel of Bhakti

The Bhagavata preaches the highest form of Bhakti, which is unconditional and does not seek the fulfillment of any desire.

The Birth of the Bhagavata

The great Rishi, Veda Vyasa, the editor of the four Vedas, the writer of the Brahma-Sutras, the Mahabharata and many other Puranas, was sitting on the bank of the river Saraswati in front of his cottage — unhappy! He was unhappy because he was not able to ascertain what else he could do to get eternal peace and happiness.

Suddenly, there appeared a great sage, Narada, famous for his wisdom.

"O, great sage, please tell me why my mind is not at rest, not getting peace", asked Vyasa.

In reply Narada said, "You have not adequately described the glory of the Supreme Lord. I consider as imperfect those philosophies which fail to please the Lord because of their lack of devotional exuberance, which alone can give full satisfaction to Him. O Vyasa," said Narada, "You are the master of scriptures! Engage yourself in the description of His unique glories, which alone can satisfy the questions of spiritual aspirants. There is no other panacea for the woes with which men are suffering again and again in this world."

The Bhagavata Purana is divided into 12 Skandas (chapters) and contains about 18,000 slokas (verses).

It is narrated by Shuka, the great sannyasin, the son of Vyasa, to King Pariksit, the grandson of Arjuna, in answer to the king's question as to what a man should do when about to die.

The Bhagavata Purana specializes in Vishnu's incarnations. As many as forty incarnations are mentioned, together with the statement that Avatars are innumerable.

The tenth Skanda or chapter of the Bhagavata contains the life of Sri Krishna—the Cult god of the Bhagavata. Many Vaishnava sects have developed from the teachings of the Bhagavata.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Bhagavata

In the Sadhaka Bhava chapter of "Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master", Swami Saradanandaji stated, "One day Sri Ramakrishna was listening to the Bhagavata on the veranda of the Vishnu Temple at Dakshineswar. Suddenly he saw a divine ray emanating from Sri Krishna and touching the scripture and also Sri Ramakrishna—making a triangle. From then onwards Sri Ramakrishna realized that Bhagavat (scripture), Bhakta (devotee) and Bhagavan (God) are one and the same.

Beginning of Bhagavata

All the sacred texts of the Hindus begin with an invocation of the Supreme Being. The Bhagavata Purana begins with: *He from whom the Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution take place. He who is both the material and instrumental cause. He who is omniscient; Who is the only one having self-mastery, being one independent entity; Who illumined the mind of Brahma with the Vedic revelation; Whose wisdom is the wonder of even the greatest of sages; in Whom the worlds, the manifestation of the three Gunas, subsist in reality without affecting Him just as the combination of material elements like fire, water, and earth subsist in their causes without changing their elemental nature; in Whose light of Consciousness there is no place for anything false — on that Supreme Truth we meditate.*

Inspired by Narada, the great Veda Vyasa started writing about the divine life of Sri Krishna. But Vyasa began with the creation of the universe.

In order to describe Sri Krishna, a personal god, Vyasa said, "We (Vyasa and his disciples) meditate on the Truth Supreme (*Satyam Param Dhimahi*)." The Supreme Truth is universal. The Bhagavata is not for any narrow cult.

In Indian Logic there are two types of proof:

Those anomalies that specify the object by separating it from other things is called *Tatastha Lakshana*. God is the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the universe. No one else does this work. Hence these qualities separate God from others, but at the same time they do not stick to the object — God.

The anomalies that separate the object (God) from others but stick to the object are known as *Swarupa Lakshana*. *Sat-Chit-Ananda* are special qualities, which only God can have and no other. Hence, this system is known as *Swarupa Lakshana*. These qualities are special to God and they remain with God.

Who is Krishna? The Supreme Truth, Brahman, which Vyasa had mentioned.

In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (3/1/1) it has been said that it is from Brahman that everything is born, everything is sustained, and into Which everything merges at the time of dissolution,

Vyasa also indicated that the same Truth had taken human form, but how to prove it through *Swarupa Lakshana* and *Tatastha Lakshana*. Vyasa used another word, *Anwaya-adi-itarata*.

Since there is nothing but the all-pervading Brahman, hence It is the cause of creation, and yet It never changes. How then did the creation happen? Through *Pradhan* or *Prakriti*?

Okay, then should we meditate on *Prakriti* because it has been said by Vyasa, "From Whom this creation began — we meditate on that!"

In reply it is said "no" because in the Veda it is clearly stated, The source of creation must be a conscious being (*Jnanaban*). In the *Brahma-Sutras* (1/1/5) also we find *Prakriti* is not conscious and cannot be the cause of creation.

Another Argument — *Jiva*. The individual soul is conscious. Can it be considered as the source of creation and be meditated upon?

No. The Creator is *Swarata* (one who has natural

knowledge, not acquired knowledge). The Creator should be *Swata-Siddha-Jnanaban*.

As a last argument it is said, the scripture calls Brahman the Creator — should we then meditate on Brahman?

In reply, it is said by Vyasa in the very first sloka of the *Bhagavata* that Brahman created Brahman and placed the Vedas or knowledge in his heart so that he could create. It was not Brahman's original knowledge.

One day, while the Rishis were taking a little rest after performing their regular meditations and pujas, they heard someone singing a very melodious song. They found that the singer was *Ugrashrava*, the son of *Lomaharshana*. *Ugrashrava* was a *Suta*, a title he received because of his photographic memory. His name became *Ugra* (very eager) to *Shrava* (hear). Vyasa chose him and taught him. Although he was low born, his excellent intelligence made him respected among the learned Rishis. *Ugrashrava* learned the *Bhagavata* by hearing it from *Shuka*, the pure son of Vyasa, in the assembly of King *Parikshit*.

Having *Ugrashrava* among them, the Rishis were very happy. They gave him due respect by offering him a seat and food and praising him with the words, "O Pure One, you have studied history, the puranas and religious scriptures." The Rishis then asked him 6 questions:

1. Tell us those qualities, which are essential for a human being to attain liberation.
2. Tell us the essence of the vast and varied scriptural texts.
3. Why and for what purpose did the Supreme Lord take birth as the son of *Vasudeva* by his wife, *Devaki*?
4. How did God descend as an Incarnation? Please tell us that.
5. What were His noble deeds, performed in His special manifestation as *Brahma-Vishnu-Maheshwara* for the purpose of Creation, Preservation and Dissolution?
6. From where did *Dharma* (spirituality) gain support?

The genesis of the *Bhagavata* began with the answers to these questions.

Introduction to the Cover Page: Eternal Guru, Eternal Teachings

Br. Panchatapa

This issue of the eZine is going to be published a few weeks later than that its expected date of release. That brought us an opportunity to look at our eternal guru, the eternal teachings and eternal relationship with the disciples -- just before Guru Purnima. The full moon night of 5th July in 2020 is dedicated to our teachers; to be more specific, our spiritual teachers, who show us the way to reach the Light that is existing within us eternally beyond darkness of ignorance.

Here we shall revisit stories of the Upanishads and see the eternity of their teachings.

The very first story is from one of the ancient Upanishads, Kathopanishad. It was composed thousands of years ago. This Upanishad started with the story of Nachiketa, a young disciple of Yama. Yama is the controller of time. This story of Nachiketa was very dear to Swami Vivekananda. The story goes like this: Nachiketa, a small child of Vājashrava, found one day that his father is making some donations to holy people desiring heaven. Nachiketa additionally noticed that his father is donating only useless things. Nachiketa felt it is not right and wanting the best for his father's rite, repeatedly asked: "I too am yours, to whom will you offer me?" After hearing the same question for the third time angrily Vājashrava answered, "I give you to the god of Death (Yama)".

When Nachiketa reached Yama's home he was out, and Nachiketa waited there for his return for three days without any food or water. Upon return, to compensate, Yama offered three boons to Nachiketa. Nachiketa first asked for peace for his father. Yama agreed. Next, Nachiketa wished to learn the sacred fire sacrifice that leads one to heaven. Yama elaborated this also. For his third boon, Nachiketa wanted to learn the mystery of what comes after death. This question is related to Eternity, Brahman. He basically wanted to have

Brahma-jnana, knowledge of the Self. Yama was reluctant to answer this question and requested Nachiketa to ask for some other boon, and offered many attractive material achievements and wealth.

But Nachiketa did not get tempted with wealth or any other boon. Yama was pleased with the disciple's sincerity, and elaborated on the nature of the true Self, which persists beyond death. Nachiketa realized that this Self is inseparable from Brahman; the sound 'OM' represents the supreme Brahman; Brahman is smaller than the smallest and larger than the largest; the Soul is formless and all-pervading. After death, it is the Atma that remains; the Atman is immortal. One who realizes Brahman gets free from the cycle of rebirths and attains liberation. Being bestowed with the immediate experience of Brahman from Yama, Nachiketa became free.

Now let us come to 1884. Only about 136 years ago. A young man of 21 years, Narendranath Dutta, was sincerely trying find God and just met Sri Ramakrishna, who assured him, "I have seen God and you can see Him too." On a lighter note: This "N" similarity in initials (Nachiketa and Narendra) is just mere coincidence only. Anyway, soon after this meeting Narendra's father passed away suddenly leaving behind immense debt. Narendra was looking for a job to earn some money. He earned some money by working here and there for a short time but could not succeed in getting a permanent job. Thus, he failed to make any reasonable arrangement of provisions for his family. One day, he thought, God listens to Sri Ramakrishna's prayers, so he would ask Sri Ramakrishna to pray for relieving his family's hardships. He also thought Sri Ramakrishna will never refuse this request. Thinking thus he went to Sri Ramakrishna. However, Sri Ramakrishna said that he could not ask the Divine Mother (Kali) for

such a trifling thing but he inspired his dear Naren to pray to the Mother directly about it. Narendranath at the beginning had hesitation as he thought he did not know Mother! Sri Ramakrishna further motivated him by saying, "today is Tuesday". In Hinduism Tuesday is considered auspicious for the worship of Divine Mother. On this night if one pays obeisance to Her, She will give whatever one asks for. Divine Mother has given birth to the Universe. What is impossible for Her if She desires!

Understanding thus Narendra became sure that all the problems would definitely get solved once he prayed to the Mother. Accordingly Naren went to the Kali temple. As he was entering the temple, he experienced a kind of trance. He had a strong belief that he would be able to see the Mother and hear Her voice. That faith made him forget about his worldly need. After entering the temple, he saw that the Mother was really Divine, alive, and the source of love and beauty. His heart was full with devotion and love. He repeatedly paid obeisance to Mother and said: O Mother, grant me the boon of discernment (Viveka) between real and unreal, detachment, spiritual knowledge, devotion, and see to it that I always get Your vision without any hindrance. The whole world disappeared but Mother alone occupied his heart. He was overwhelmed with joy and peace.

Narendra returned to Sri Ramakrishna and when he started to report he realized that he totally forgot to ask for which purpose he went to the temple! As per Sri Ramakrishna's instruction he went again and again to pray to Her. But similar things happened for two more times and he was overwhelmed due to Mother's Divine Energy when he stood before Her.

For all these three times he prayed to the Mother only for Knowledge and devotion and nothing else. Finally Sri Ramakrishna blessed him by saying that his family would never face hardship in getting simple food and clothing.

As Nachiketa asked for the peace of his father for the very first boon, Naren also asked for the

peace of his mother and family at the very outset. But finally both of them craved for the absolute knowledge only.

Sri Ramakrishna is none but Mother Kali Herself. Kali is that One who devours time (*kāla*), as was Yama in the case of Nachiketa. Both conquered time and Nachiketa of then and Narendra of the present time became *Brahmajnani* through their sincere search for the Truth.

Through the Bhagavad Gita we receive another series of inspired talks that took place between the guru Sri Krishna and his dear disciple Arjuna. Arjuna humbly requested spiritual instructions by saying, "I am your disciple, and am surrendered to you, *śiṣhyaste 'haṁ śhādhi māṁ tvām prapannam*".

Being pleased with the combination of sincerity and humility, Sri Krishna told him the royal path bestowed by the Knowledge of Brahman. And, that is: *tadviddhi praṇipātēna paripraśnēna sēvayā* – learn thou this by discipleship, by investigation, by service.

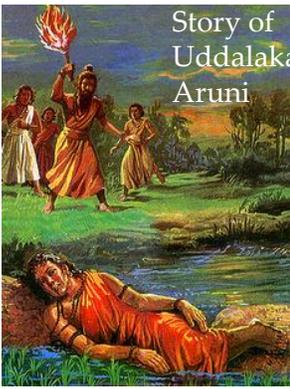
Viddhi – know; tat -- That by approaching teachers *praṇipātēna*, through prostration; *pariprasnena*, through inquiry, and *sevaya*, through the service of the guru.

What is discipleship? Though in general the term "disciple" means *one who engages in learning through instruction from another; pupil, apprentice*, yet in religious contexts, especially from the Biblical viewpoint it means *one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views; disciple, adherent*. Clearly it is very different from the common usage of the English word "student". The word "adherent" requires special attention. A disciple does not merely attend lectures or read books, but they interact with and imitate a real living person. A disciple would literally follow, be it person or principle, with hopes of eventually becoming what his guru is. A disciple of Christ becomes Christ through the "Imitation of Christ". May it be as person or principle.

In devotional scriptures there are different kinds of liberation, like, *sālokya* (after material

liberation one is promoted to the planet where aspirant's chosen ideal, *Ishta* resides), *sāmīpya* (remaining an associate of the *Ishta*), *sārūpya* (attaining the form exactly like that of the *Ishta*). Sri Ramakrishna's disciple and spiritual son Swami Brahmananda sometimes looked like Sri Ramakrishna himself! When a disciple accepts Sat-chit-ananda Brahman as Guru, he becomes Brahman only.

Both Nachiketa and Swami Vivekananda showed that self-surrender is an absolute necessity to attain the knowledge of Brahman.



Swami Trigunatitananda

An unparalleled example of service with complete offering of body-mind can be found in Chhandogya Upanishad. This Upanishad came from the Sama Veda and was also composed thousands of years ago.

The story goes like this: Aruni of Panchala, son of Aruna Aupavesi Gautama, had his early education under the famous teacher Ayoda-Dhaumya. Aruni's classmates were Upamanyu and Veda. In the Mahabharata they narrated this story that epitomizes Aruni's sense of dedication and sincerity to the work assigned to him.

On one rainy night the teacher Ayoda-Dhaumya asked Aruni to supervise water flowing through a certain field. When Aruni went there, he found the dyke had breached and the water was seeping out. Aruni tried to plug the breach and to stop the leak, but was not successful. Aruni then lay down on the breach; stopping the water flow with his body. He lay there the entire night. The next morning, the teacher along with other students came in search of Aruni and found the boy stretched out along the dyke trying to stop the

outflow of water. Dhaumya was deeply impressed with Aruni's dedication and sincerity. On seeing his teacher, Aruni stood up. And, as he did so, the water began to flow out. The highly pleased teacher named Aruni "Uddalaka" -- as in getting up from the dyke he opened the water-course. He also said, because Aruni obeyed his teacher's bidding so sincerely, he would master all the Vedas and other scriptures.

Later, Aruni gained great fame as Uddalaka Aruni and one of the great dictums That Thou Art, (*Tat Tvam Asi* mahavakya) came from him.

Let us fly forward to around years 1900-01. Saradaprasanna a disciple of Sri Sarada Devi was her personal attendant. Once Sarada Devi was returning from Kolkata to Jayrambati via a bullock cart. It was night and Mother was sleeping. Saradaprasanna was walking with the cart. They all reached a small river bed, that was partly dried up. It was necessary to check the tracks before taking the cart over it. The cart driver got off the seat and found one side of the track is okay but there was dip on the other side. This would make the move uneven. Saradaprasanna said right away, that is not a problem. He would go and lie down in the dip with his face touching the river bed and the driver can cross the river by slowly driving one wheel of the cart over his back.

Ma Sarada woke up from her slumber due to sudden halt of the cart and the soft noise of conversation. Upon inquiry she came to know from the cart driver about this plan. Immediately she announced, she would simply cross the river on foot. She asked to take the cart on the other side where she would be getting into the cart. Though she apparently scolded Saradaprasanna but definitely was pleased with such exemplary devotion of that young monk!

It is only through her blessings Saradaprasanna became truly Swami Trigunatitananda, the bliss beyond the three gunas or qualities that are associated with this world of illusion. In 1899 Swami Vivekananda started *Udbodhan*, the only Bengali publication of the Ramakrishna Math and

Mission. With him Swami Trigunatitananda served as its founding editor. He is the one who founded the very first Hindu Temple in the United States in 1906. Soon after this a monastery in San Francisco was set up with about ten monks, and a convent. In 1909 the Swami started a monthly magazine called the "Voice of Freedom", which was produced for seven years, based on the ideals of Vedanta. Before that Devotion to guru and to serve the guru whole heartedly – are the keys to attain the highest Knowledge in Vedanta.

These stories showed the amazing dispassion of the disciples to their body identities! "Dispassion" is an essential quality to regain our Real nature. Sri Rama was Vasishtha's disciple and Guru Vasishtha's spiritual instructions are recorded in the text Yoga Vasishtha. Inspiring his disciple he said, "O dutiful one, the instructions, which the guru confers on the worthy disciple, who is endowed with dispassion, surely that is the true knowledge, that is verily the real meaning of the scriptures and that is indeed the uninterrupted experience of Knowledge".

Having faith in guru's instructions: In Chapter IV of the Chhandogya Upanishad we find the story of Satyakama Jabala. He was a young boy, and later became a Vedic sage. In order to get admission in sage Haridrumata Gautama's school he enquired about his father from his mother. His mother Jabala, told him that she did not know the name his father.

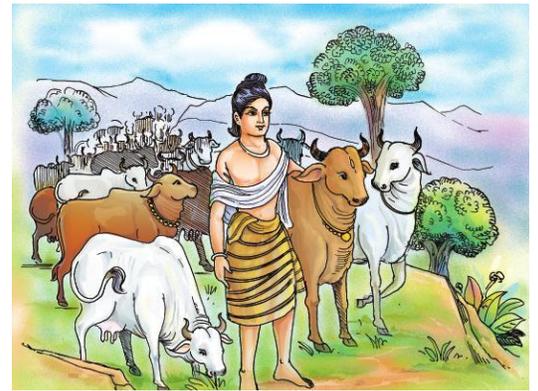
When he went to the school for Brahmacharya, being asked by the teacher what family he was from, Satyakama truthfully said his mother did not know who the father is. The sage declares that the boy's honesty is the mark of a "Brahmin, true seeker of the knowledge of the Brahman" and accepted him as a student in his school.

However, instead of giving him the lessons in Vedanta keeping him near, the sage sent Satyakama to tend four hundred cows, and to return only when they multiply into a thousand. By following his guru's instructions he served the cows and gradually his intellect became very fine.

He could converse with a bull, a fire, a swan, and a diver bird, which respectively symbolize Vayu, Agni, Āditya and Prāṇa.

Satyakama then learned from these creatures that the form of Brahman is in all cardinal directions (north, south, east, west), world-bodies (earth, atmosphere, sky, and ocean), sources of light (fire, sun, moon, lightning), and in man (breath, eye, ear, and mind). Satyakama returned to his teacher with a thousand cows, and humbly learns the rest: the nature of Brahman (metaphysical, ultimate reality).

After graduation Satyakama became a celebrated sage. A Vedic school is named after him,



as is the influential ancient text Jabala Upanishad – a treatise on Sannyasa.

We see a repetition of this story we see on 1898 when a 24 year old man named Dakshinaranjan Guha came to Swami Vivekananda to dedicate his life for God realization. Dakshinaranjan was the only child of his widow mother. His father passed away when he was very young and needless to mention he was the apple of the eye of the family. But being inspired by the ideals of leading a selfless life and service to poor, he took refuge at the feet of Swami Vivekananda. To test the disciple's sincerity Swamiji asked him, "Well, suppose I need some money, and for that I sell you off as a tea-garden coolie. Will you be ready for



Swami Kalyanananda

that?" Without any hesitation Dakshina agreed. Swamiji blessed him with Sannyasa initiation and named him Kalyanananda – the bliss of doing good to others.

In those days, for simple things, people from the Math had to go to 5 miles to Kolkata either by ferry or by walk. Once when Swamiji was unwell while at the Math, Kalyanananda was asked to bring some ice for his guru and he carried 44 pounds of ice from Kolkata to Belur Math on foot. This extraordinary stamina and devotion pleased Swamiji very much and he said, "A day will come when Kalyanananda will be blessed by the attainment of the state of a *Paramahansa*". The day, in fact, did arrive in the later part of Kalyanananda's life, when looking at him one could feel Swamiji's blessings have come true". [Monastic disciples of Swami Vivekananda, by Swami Abjayananda, p 242]

This devotion was not only to serve guru physically but to carry on guru's instructions. In 1901 Swamiji returned to Belur Math from West and Kalyanananda met him there. Vivekananda witnessed to the plight of the people in Uttarakhand area due to the absence of any healthcare facility and instructed Kalyanananda to work for the sick and ailing monks around the Rishikesh-Haridwar region. Exactly like Satyakama, Kalyanananda took the responsibility of nurturing the poor and sick per guru's word with great joy.

Kalyanananda started his service to Lord Narayana who came to him in the forms of all poorest of the poor and dying patients. His place of service was renowned as "Sevashrama". His brother disciple Swami Nishchayananda was his assistant.

The Sevashrama at Kankhal is the embodiment of Swami Vivekananda's concept of "Practical Vedanta" that came into reality through Kalyanananda's total dedicated service.

Again and again Sri Ramakrishna told, one must have "Faith in the guru's words" and "should depend on his instruction" as guru is "none other than Satchidananda". According to him, "When the disciple has the vision of the Ishta,

through the guru's grace, he finds the guru merging in Him".

All Gurus are one and are fragments and radiations of God, the Universal Guru. Therefore, the disciple should hear the essence of the scriptures from his guru; then he should practice austerity and devotion. That is exactly what Kalyanananda did.

Austerity is the key word in one's spiritual life. Without austerity it is impossible to understand the guru, who is the embodiment of penance, as:

tapasā cīyate brahma tapasā sriyate jagat,

tapasā eva āpyate śreyastapaḥ toāṁ samupāśraye.

Brahman is attained by asceticism; the world is created by asceticism; the highest good is obtained by asceticism only; I take refuge in you, O penance!

This cover story began with the prayer of Narendranath, who was later renowned as *Shiva Guru* and *Sachchhidananda Guru*. Let us conclude with his chanting from the *Guru Gita*. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* it is described that Narendra sang these verses in his melodious voice, "the minds of the devotees became steady, like a candle-flame in a windless place".

There is none, higher than the Guru, none better than the Guru; This is what Siva has declared. I shall sing of the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman; I shall worship the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman; I shall meditate on the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman; I shall bow down to the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman.



*Nachiketa & Yama
a painting by
Nandalal Bose*

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