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Editor: Swami Ishatmananda
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
14630 Lemont Road, Homer Glen. 60491
email: ezine@chicagovedanta.org
chicagovedanta.org

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EDITORIAL // Sri Rama-Sri Krishna-Sri Ramakrishna

The Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism believes that the Supreme Being who is all-pervading, and all-powerful, decided to create this universe, and he created this universe with his unique power that is Maya. After the creation, He disassociated Himself and remained separate. In the Bhagavata, the details of these descriptions are there. After the completion of the creation, the Supreme being who is known as Paramatma, Brahman, or Bhagavan created Dharma, Righteousness. Why did he create Righteousness? Because, the ultimate refuge of the beings, particularly the best of all beings, humans is God who can be realized through Righteousness. The history of the spiritual world proves that to teach this Righteousness, the Supreme Being manifested Himself in different forms at different times.

The whole creation was divided into four time zones as it were. And these four divisions are known as Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga, and Kali Yuga. In the first time zone, Satya Yuga, everything was good. Those who were created were created mainly by the pure thought of Brahma, the First-Born. Brahma created the universe with three qualities, Satva, Raja and Tama. In Satya-Yuga, the Satva quality was prevailing hence it was not necessary for the supreme Lord to send teachers to guide the beings.

Things started changing from Treta Yuga. In this time zone, the Brahma used all the three qualities in different proportions, which is why we find great personalities like Sri Rama, at the same time Ravana, the embodiment of ego. Though Ravana was having qualities like intellectual, meditative, and physical power, he was arrogant and egotistic, which are the signs of Raja and Tama. There were personalities like Bali, the famous monkey king, who was also like Ravana having more Raja and Tama qualities than Satva. This is the time when it was necessary for the Supreme Being to take human form to guide humanity into the path of righteousness.

In this age, the Lord manifested Himself as Sri Rama, the son of King Dasharatha. Sri Rama was the embodiment of a perfect human being (Purushottama). He taught through his life, what should be the dharma of a son, of a brother, of a husband, of a king, and that became the norms of the human society.



We find the Valmiki, the great sage, lamenting and asking questions to Sri Narada – the son of Brahma:

- (1) Who in the world today is a great personage endowed with all virtues, who is courageous, who knows the secret of Dharma, who is grateful, who is ever truthful and who is established in sacred observances?
- (2) Who has great family traditions, who has got sympathy for all creatures, who is most learned, who is skillful, and whose outlook is ever kindly?
- (3) Who is courageous, who has subdued anger, who is endowed with splendor, who is free from jealousy, who when angry in the field of battle is a terror even to the Devas. And all these qualities we find in the character of Sri Rama.

In the Dwapara Yuga, we find egotistic, selfish, ruthless kings in big numbers. It was necessary for the lord to manifest and this time he came in the form of Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna also guided humanity on the path of righteousness, but, in his action, he punished the evil doers and protected the righteous people. As Sri Krishna, the supreme Lord, taught human beings about the Atman – the

supreme goal, and how to realize that, Atman. He narrated four spiritual practices – Jnana (knowledge path), Dhyana (meditation), Bhakti (devotion), and Karma (selfless service). Any human being following these paths, either one or combined will go back to the source, which is Bliss. He organized a great war, famous as Mahabharata Yuddha. He taught that one should perform one's own duty (*Swa-dharma*) diligently. Like, the *kshatriyas* (military caste) should fight against those people who are doing irreligious things and acting based on their egos. They may be your close relatives, but you should not hesitate to punish them.

He taught, that whatever work one does, must be done while remembering God constantly. This he expressed in a very poetical way to Arjuna the Mahabharata hero – Maam Anusmara Yuddha Cha – meaning, you must remember me constantly while you are performing your duties. Sri Krishna gave stress on Swa-Dharma – one's own duty. In human society, there are four types of actions, Intellectuals, Protectors, Business, and physical labor. According to the capacity and aptitude one maybe– Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra. One must perform one's duties diligently while remembering God. This practice will help them to be free from this circle of birth and death.

The last phase, Kali Yuga, is the darkest phase for human society. Greed, Anger, Ego, Physical comfort, and all bad things prevail in this age. So, it was necessary for the Supreme Being to come and guide again the righteous people, to protect them from the influence of Kali. This time the supreme Lord came in the form of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. In previous incarnations, as Sri Rama and as Sri Krishna, the supreme being took birth in the Kshatriya, military caste. This time as Sri Ramakrishna he took birth in the highest class, Brahmana.

If we study carefully, we will notice in Treta and Dwapara yuga corruption came in the military class, but in Kali Yuga, it was the higher caste – the leader of the society got corrupted. So, the lord took birth in the Brahmana family, as if to put the society on the right track. This time he didn't kill or punish physically as he did in his previous incarnations, but transformed the minds of the people. The main teaching in Sri Ramakrishna's incarnation is ego lessness – “be free from ego and you will enjoy eternal bliss”. It is a unique teaching and when we try to understand the ego which is the root cause of every suffering, we never find that anywhere in our life. When we say “I”, which “I” do we mean? If it is the body, then it is constantly changing. When egotistically we say mind, then the mind is also constantly changing. So which part of the mind is “I”? Still the ego is there, and everyone thinks that he is correct than others. Here lies the cause of suffering. Me and Mine, Thou and Thine are misnomer terms. The Supreme Lord in his Sri Ramakrishna form teaches humanity to be free from the ego and go back to the source of eternity. If you remove the ego, you are nothing but God yourself.

The Supreme Being created this universe out of his own. Hence, every being experiences three things – no one wants to die, everyone wants to know, and everyone wants to be happy. Why this? Because the creator is Eternal, the creator is the source of Knowledge, and the creator is the embodiment of Bliss. As the 'cause and effect' theory of the Samkhya, we can say our creator is Sat (eternal), Chit (source of knowledge) and Ananda (bliss eternal) Swarupa (embodiment). We too are the same, hence, we must try to go back to our source and the supreme Lord, the creator, the sustainer, and the dissolver who has come in this modern age as Sri Ramakrishna giving us the clue – be free from your ego.





Sri Ramakrishna and His Gospel

Swami Balabhadrananda

Assistant General Secretary,
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,
Belur Math, India

This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered during the Swami's visit to VVSC in August 2023.

Good evening. I offer my pranams to Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Bhagwan Buddha Dev, Bhagwan Jesus, and Raja Maharajji. The topic of this evening's discussion is Sri Ramakrishna and his unique Gospel. There is a wonderful book written by Swami Ghananandaji entitled *"Sri Ramakrishna and his unique message."* Its preface is written by the famous British historian, Arnold Toynbee. He writes in that preface that *"Hinduism is unique among the major historical religions of the world in that, of all the religions, only Hinduism says that neither Hinduism nor any other religion is the only representation of God or Supreme spiritual truth and that every religion is a path leading to the same truth"*. After that he says: To know this theoretically is good but that is not enough, because *"Religion is something which is not a matter of intellectual study. It is something which has to be lived and experienced and it is in this regard that Sri Ramakrishna has expressed his uniqueness."* Sri Ramakrishna went through various paths within Hinduism and in some major non-Hindu religions also and experienced at first hand that the same spiritual Truth could be reached through all of them. Only after that he proclaimed this great message: *"As many faiths, so many paths."* Toynbee says, *"Herein lies the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna."*

When we study Sri Ramakrishna's life and the lives of other personalities who played definite roles in his Divine sports or divine mission, we become most amazed by Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda more than anyone. Along with Sri Ramakrishna, they constitute whom we call our Holy Trio and of them, we hold Sarada Devi, only Sarada Devi, at par with Sri

Ramakrishna in spiritual stature. Naturally, we reckon with great importance whatever Sarada Devi said about Sri Ramakrishna. Let us here consider two of her sayings with respect to what we have just quoted from Arnold Toynbee. Holy Mother passed away in 1920 and Arnold Toynbee made this remark much later, probably in the 1960s. So there is no question of Holy Mother being influenced anyway by Toynbee's abovementioned comment. But strangely, we find the same idea echoed in this simple remark of Holy Mother in Bengali, *'Thakur chilen ekta dekha lok'*, meaning that the Master was a person who had "seen" or experienced the spiritual truths at first hand. We see that this perfectly tallies with what Toynbee said about Sri Ramakrishna that he had always stood on the strength of his own realizations of spiritual truths. He always talked of his own spiritual experiences. Very rarely he said anything quoting from other seers' experiences or from scriptures. And whenever he did that, he did that only because the scriptural statements or experiences of other seers matched with his own experiences.

Nivedita has written a beautiful introduction to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda wherein she describes exactly this uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna. She says that Swami Vivekananda was made of three factors: one is our eternal scriptures, the next is Sri Ramakrishna and the third one is India, his motherland. Before coming to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda acquired an intellectual comprehension of the truths described in our scriptures. But his heart longed for a recent verification of the scriptures, of

the truths contained in our ancient scriptures. That verification he found in Sri Ramakrishna, in whom he found the key to life. In the exact words of Nivedita, *"In his Master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa... Swami Vivekananda, "Naren" as he then was -- found that verification which his heart and his reason had demanded."* Here was a person whose mind was always swinging from the many to the one. Here was a person to whom Samadhi was a constant mode of knowledge. What she wanted to mean is this: Narendranath found that whatever Sri Ramakrishna would say would be on the basis of what he was experiencing continuously in the depth of Samadhi, This was the strength of Sri Ramakrishna -- he always stood on direct perception of spiritual knowledge and in this regard Toynbee and Holy Mother are of the same view.

But regarding Sri Ramakrishna's practice of various religious faiths and paths, the Holy Mother does not agree that the Master did that with any conscious plan of establishing religious harmony in the world. Yes, this message has tremendous significance in the present day world. In fact, that is the need of the hour. Arnold Toynbee has said that in this supremely dangerous period of present history when men are armed with devastating weapons but have not learnt yet to love each other, only alternative to our self-annihilation lies in Ashoka and Gandhi's message of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony. But the Holy Mother points out to the fact that whatever good might come out of Sri Ramakrishna's practices of various religious faiths, within Hinduism as well as of his practicing some of the major non-Hindu religions, he did not do that with any conscious motive of gifting a noble message to the world. It came out automatically, as if like a bye product, from his God-centered life. The Holy Mother said that he did not know anything other than God, which is why he could not remain at peace even after attaining the Supreme state of Kali worship. Mother Kali first appeared before him as an all-pervading formless Consciousness

and then as a living existence with a form, talking and sporting with him just as a human being. Sri Ramakrishna also would often say, addressing the devotees: *"You are busy with so many things of the world. I have kept myself busy only with one thing, that is, God."* He did not learn anything other than that. That is why even after having constant vision of Mother Kali, he could not remain contented. He kept on moving from one spiritual path to another, trying every path and reaching God through all of them. He could not talk also anything other than God and he did not talk anything other than his own spiritual experiences. He talked his experiences and we received there from this wonderful message that all religions are true.

At Dakshineswar, Sadhus of various sects and denominations would come to him. He went to pilgrimage also and there also he came across many sadhus. Everywhere he could find religious intolerance. Even very advanced souls, or those who already had attained realization following their respective paths, would not see eye to eye with each other. Swami Saradanandaji, in his famous biography on Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali, has written that Sri Ramakrishna used to be surprised at that time to note that so much conflict and intolerance are there *"outside"*, that is, among the spiritual aspirants and sadhus and total absence of such intolerance *"within himself"*. He could not reconcile between the two and sometimes wondered who could be right: He, or they, the other sadhus and spiritual aspirants? Swami Saradanandaji explains in his book why this doubt arose in Sri Ramakrishna. Not only in case of Sri Ramakrishna, similar doubts happen with every Avatara or Divine Incarnation. It is because they do not understand from the beginning of their lives that they are Divine Incarnations. This ignorance of their Divine self is imposed on them by themselves only -- for the good of humankind, so that their sadhanas and struggles for God-realization become genuine and new avenues of spiritual progress suited to the age are set before the humankind from the examples of

their sadhanas. As it is said of Sri Chaitanya Deva in one of his biographies, in Bengali, *Hari hoye bolche hari* -- though he himself is Hari or Krishna, still he is chanting the name of Hari. Seeing his example, we realized how much yearning one should have to have the vision or grace of Hari. In fact, Divine Incarnations are always the *sadhya bastu*, the goal after which the spiritual aspirants in every religion always strive. They are never the sadhaka or a spiritual aspirant. Still they behave like sadhakas to help the humanity. In case of Sri Ramakrishna also, when he passed away Holy Mother spontaneously cried out, "Mother Kali, where have you gone leaving me behind?" Mathur Babu also once saw him as Kali. That means, though he was the Mother Kali himself, Sri Ramakrishna performed all sorts of spiritual practices to have the vision of Kali, so that people of the world could understand how much tapasya, struggle and longing is required to have the vision of Kali. But as it is needed, in the interest of the humankind, that a Divine Incarnation should forget his divine identity for some time, it is also needed for the world that at a particular time, chosen by him only as the appropriate time, he should discover and disclose his Divine Identity to all.

For Sri Ramakrishna, that 'appropriate time' began from the middle of 1872, when he worshipped the Holy Mother as the Goddess Shodashi and put an end to all his formal spiritual practices. After this only he realized that he was not a common sadhaka. He was actually an Avatara, Divine incarnation, God himself in human form and for the good of humanity, he had this time some definite purposes to fulfill, one of which we have already discussed: To make people aware of the truth that all religions, however different they might seem on the way, lead to the same ultimate goal which is God and were therefore true, which he put in this phrase: "As many faiths, so many paths". The same idea was there in Rigveda also (*ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*, 1.146.46), but never was this idea elaborated, explained and stressed upon and spread among the people at large with an urge to

be practiced by them. So this is one of the unique messages that Sri Ramakrishna had to offer in this age and for the ages to come.

An Avatara is called Yuga-Avatara --- a divine incarnation for the age. He comes not only for the few years he lives on the earth. He comes for the entire age that starts with his advent. Sri Ramakrishna surely could foresee the present globalized world. The whole world has now shrunk to our homes. Now we cannot but be influenced by others. And the reverse perhaps is also true that we cannot live without influencing others. So various religions cannot now remain in isolation from each other or at loggerheads with each other. They must shake hands with one another in amity. So the truth that all religious faiths lead to the same goal was necessary to be discovered and needed to stay in the world for being believed and practiced. Sri Ramakrishna did exactly this. He discovered this truth and repeatedly stressed its practice as it is evident in the pages of Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

But it should also be remembered that any faith that goes in the name of religion should not be indiscriminately considered a valid religious path. A faith is a valid religious path and therefore leads to the same spiritual goal so long as it does not compromise certain basic spiritual requisites like purity, morality, empathy, etc. Some 30 to 35 years ago news of a gruesome incident appeared in both the weeklies Newsweek and Time in the issues of the same week with the headline: 'a cult of death'. A self styled spiritual leader used to preach 'Cult of death'. So one day he called some 1000 devotees of his and made all of them along with their families to take poison. As they took poison along with their spouses and children and died one by one, he remain seated in a chair calmly watching them die. He himself had supplied the poison. When he was sure that all had died, he also took poison and died. So you cannot surely say that this is a valid religious path and this will also lead to the same goal which is God. No. Faiths or paths which are based on certain universally understood noble qualities like purity, morality, empathy are only valid paths leading to the same

spiritual goal. These qualities should be there in a spiritual aspirant all through his journey along that particular path and when he has reached his goal following that path, these qualities will be more prominent in him as a spontaneous outcome of his spiritual attainment. We start our spiritual journey knowing that these qualities are good and as we proceed onward, we consciously try to acquire these qualities more and more. And, finally when we reach the goal, those qualities become natural characteristics of our personality.

But there is one central idea which underlies whatever Sri Ramakrishna has said and stood for, including even his message of religious harmony. That is: Potential Divinity of man. Ramakrishna gave us all a divine identity and a divine basis and purpose of life. Once Nivedita asked Swamiji: What is your life's mission? In reply, Swami Vivekananda mentioned just these two things: *to preach unto mankind their divinity and to show them how to manifest that divinity at every movement of life.* Swamiji here actually echoes what he had learnt from Sri Ramakrishna. Many of us has an erroneous notion that Swamiji was an Advaitin from the beginning and Sri Ramakrishna was a bhakta, therefore dualist. In fact Swamiji was initially a dualist believing in a formless God with attributes. He used to then shudder to think that every being and everything is Brahman, which Sri Ramakrishna would then try to impress upon him knowing that he had to be in future an ardent advocate of Advaitic truths.

In Bengali, the word 'man' is called *maanush*. Sri Ramakrishna would break the word '*maanush*' into '*maan*' and '*hush*' and say that a real man was he who was "*maan*" plus "*hush*". 'Maan' means dignity or respect and '*hush*' means awareness. He wanted to mean that a real man is he who is aware of his dignity. Our real dignity lies in knowing ourselves as a Divine being. The purport of what he uttered on 1 January 1886 at Cossipore in a spiritually ecstatic mood, which is considered as his blessings to the whole humanity, was also the same: *Tomader Chaitanya hok*, meaning, let you all

have the awareness that you are divine. Everybody has some awareness of his identity or dignity but real dignity is one which is some way related to God or the Divine. Either I am God or I belong to God. Either I am Divinity itself or I am related to the Divinity. This Divine identity of ours is our real dignity. As this divinity can be attained through multifarious paths, he said, "*As many faiths, so many paths.*" This divine identity is his unique Gospel on which are based his other ideals.

Sri Ramakrishna said that this Divinity within man can be attained by most people through the path of bhakti or devotion and for a few people, through the path of Jnana or Knowledge. The Vedanta that is preached by Ramakrishna Order is not only Advaita Vedanta. It accommodates Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita as well. Even bhakti is Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda told Swami Turiyanandaji to preach only Vedanta in Shanti Ashrama. But, along with Vedanta, Turyiananda will teach his disciples devotion also. Very often he would talk about the Divine Mother and ask his disciples to depend on Her in all matters. The Holy Mother said, Sri Ramakrishna was an Advaitin. But his Advaita has room for Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita also. According to him, Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita were not contradictory but complementary and these three stages come one by one in the same spiritual personality as various stages of spiritual growth. In every age it is true that the majority of the people cannot comprehend God as a formless, impersonal, Advaitic principle. That is why God sometimes comes on this earth assuming human form. That there happens occasional appearance of Avatars in the spiritual history of humankind is only for this reason that without Avatars most people cannot comprehend the ultimate Advaitic truth. Surely the impersonal Advaita is the ultimate Truth, but most people have to go to Advaita through God with forms and an Avatars is the nearest and most perfect expression of Advaitic truths in the realm of name and form.

Sri Ramakrishna has said again and again that in the present age, the path of devotion is the most suitable for the majority of people. But devotion or Bhakti has this danger that it may turn into dogmatism. As a safeguard to this, Sri Ramakrishna prescribed *Jnana-mishra-bhakti*. Devotion should have a mixture of discrimination or knowledge also. This means, the devotee should know that even though he is a worshipper of, for example, Krishna, it is his Krishna who has assumed various names and forms as various chosen ideals (Ishta) of various devotees. Swami Shivanandaji, the second president of the Ramakrishna Order is an ideal example of this attitude. Suppose he is going to visit Varanasi, he would write to others giving the information: "*Now Sri Ramakrishna, our Lord, is calling me in the form of Vishwanath.*" He will be going to Puri, he will say, "*the Master is calling me in the form of Jagannath.*" So this is *jnana-mishra-bhakti* -- devotion to Sri Ramakrishna but at the same time I am aware that my Sri Ramakrishna has been other gods and other incarnations also. So this attitude should be there among the followers of Sri Ramakrishna.

As for the daily spiritual practices, what Sri Ramakrishna prescribed mostly was japa and meditation, company of the holy and love. He put very much emphasis on love as a means to proceed God-ward. Not only this. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see love in his disciples also. Sri Ramakrishna once asked one of his future monastic disciples, "*Whom do you love?*" He boldly said, because he would be a monk, "*I do not love anybody.*" But Sri Ramakrishna was not happy. He said, "*So dry hearted you are!*" Spiritually does not mean you will throttle your heart. No, You have to love more, only without any expectation of return and considering the loved ones to be your chosen ideal. When he uttered those immortal words, *Shiva-jnane Jeeve Seva*, serve all creatures considering them as the Lord Shiva, he meant that only. Not to hate or discard anyone, but to accept every one as a living god. Among those who were present there, only Swami Vivekananda could understand the great significance of this utterance of Sri Ramakrishna. Coming out of the room,

Swami Vivekananda said, "*What a great light I found today in these words of the Master. So far I used to think that if you resolve to follow the path of spirituality, the first thing you have to do is to make your heart hard. You have to be stone hearted. You have to have no feeling for the people you used to love so far. But from the Master's words that I heard just now, I realized that this must not be so. I will continue to love whom I am loving. but only I would think that those whom I am loving are but various forms of my God.*"

So this is the thing that love should be there in our spiritual life.. Holy mother used to say: *The Master's family is built on love (bhalobasay tanr sansar gade utheche)*. Swami Vivekananda said, "*love is vedanta.*" Vedanta means, Advaita vedanta. Advaita unifies. I feel that I am one with all and that is the truth. Swami Vivekananda says, love also unifies, that is why love is Vedanta. So this love should be always there in our heart, if we follow Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Vivekananda in our life.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: If you repeat God's name, gradually love for God will dawn in your heart. If we are real devotees of God, there is only one love for us, love of God is love of God and the love of my near and dear ones, love of human beings is also love of God. Sri Ramakrishna says, in Hinduism, in the same manner you show respect to God as well as to human beings. We offer pranams to the respected ones with folded hands or touching their feet. In the same manner we offer our respects to God in the temple also. So this is ingrained in Hinduism that God is present in human beings. So love should be there. This is a major characteristic of the way of spiritual life that the Holy trio spoke about or which emanated from the examples of their lives. Advaita Vedanta is the Pinnacle, the Gomukh and love is Advaita Vedanta in flow, the Ganga.

Anybody would come to see Ramakrishna, the first thing they would feel is love -- so much love that they did not experience even among their family members. The same is true with the Holy Mother. Whoever would come to her, would

say: *Yes, we had our mothers at home, we had our sisters at home, they also used to love us, but when we would come to Holy Mother, their love would seem futile.* There are instances that one did not bother much about his or her mother. Coming to Holy Mother and enjoying her love, he or she began to love their mother. They learned the worth of his or her biological mother after coming to the Holy Mother. True love will always educate you for the better. So this love should be cultivated always --- not in a petty sense, but as a spiritual quality, as a unifying quality. We all know that Swami Vivekananda was once asked by his brother-disciples to write a biography of Ramakrishna, because he understood Sri Ramakrishna the most. But Swamiji said to them: *"No, I am not competent. So vast he was that I won't be able to do justice to him. I might end up making a caricature of Him. I can say only this much about him: He was L-O-V-E personified."* In the famous hymn to Sri Ramakrishna composed by Swamiji which is daily sung during the vesper services, Swamiji had mentioned Sri Ramakrishna as *"Chira-unmada-prema-pather"*, meaning an ocean of love which is ever surging for the humankind.

I will end quoting from Nivedita and Lex Hixon, first about Sri Ramakrishna's universality and then about Sri Ramakrishna's love. Nivedita writes: *"It is true that in no other country could he have occurred."* She probably said this because in the very structure of Hinduism lies the spirit of acceptance. Hinduism has accepted for ages, though within its fold, many godheads, many saints and seers and many religious faiths. So it is possible only for someone imbued in the broad spirit of Hinduism to accept other non-Hindu religions also as true. That is why she felt that the prophet of Harmony could not have been born in any other country other than India. But in the very next sentence she says, *"But it is not true that he represents Indian mind only, not even chiefly. We cannot say even this that Sri Ramakrishna was chiefly Indian. No, not even that. And Sri Ramakrishna, the worshiper of Kali, represents humanity"* writes

Nivedita .

Mr Lex Hixon also in his famous book entitled "Great Swan" finds the same universality in Ramakrishna. He writes: *"The atmosphere that surrounds the sage (of Dakshineswar) is intensely Indian, completely non-European, yet Ramakrishna mysteriously provides a master key that opens all cultures and all hearts."*

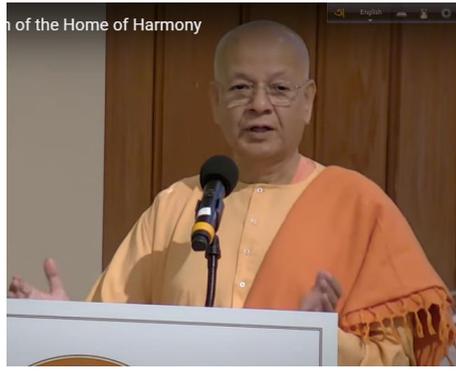
And he also writes that you often call Sri Ramakrishna illiterate but he was not so. He was almost illiterate but never all ignorant. He writes, *"(Ramakrishna) was emphatically not an unsophisticated village man, although he have sometimes appeared that way. Ramakrishna was constantly operating at the highest level of philosophical and religious refinement and universality. He remembered every Sanskrit scripture he heard chanted, even once, as well as every mystic hymn in Bengali and Hindi. In secular Western terms, he was a genius."* He concludes with these words: *"Ramakrishna is not a quaint person from an ancient culture, representing a particular religious background, but an Einstein of the planetary civilization of the near future."* And *"the universal message of the blissful sage of Bengal -- a message of love, harmony and freedom."*

In conclusion, about Sri Ramakrishna's love, I will quote Nivedita : *"In this man's love there was no limitation anywhere. Let one be sincere and neither race nor history nor stage of development could cut him off. His longing was for the salvation of every soul in a whole world. A universe from which one most insignificant was missed could not have seemed perfect in his eyes. Love such as this carries all heart at last. Only such love deserves the name God -- the mother."*

According to Nivedita, the love we find in Sri Ramakrishna is a motherly love. She writes to the Holy Mother on 11 December 1910 from the west: Sri Ramakrishna has left us but he has left behind his love for us in you. You are Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of his love for the world.

So, in Holy Mother, we find an indiscriminate motherly love ready to engulf whole humanity and that motherly love, according to Nivedita, is the motherly love of Sri Ramakrishna.





Bhakta Bhava

Swami Kripamayananda
Head, Vedanta Society of Toronto

This article is prepared based on the lectures that was delivered at the of the Home of Harmony during its first year anniversary celebration.

In the Gita, Sri Krishna says, '*Tasmad Yogi Bhava Arjuna*'. That is similar to the idea of 'Bhakta Bhava' where Lord Krishna says, '*Manmanah bhava mad bhakto, mad yaji mam namas kuru*' (BG 9. 34 So, we find Krishna repeatedly propounds similar teachings throughout the Gita such as in 9th, 16th and 18th chapters respectively. He says, '*Yogi bhava*' also '*Bhakta brava*'.

Swami Vivekananda quotes from the BG 4:33, '*Sarvam karma akhilam partha jnane pari samapyate*' and from BG 4:38, '*Nahi jnanena sadrisham pavitram iha vidyate*'. So much praise, so much gratification, so much glory of Jnana! Therefore, all these paths are equally valid and inclusive to take us to the highest realization as a devotee. We often address, 'Friends and devotees'. We didn't say 'Friends and Jnanis', nor 'Friends and Yogis'! So, being a devotee is something that glorifies us. We want to be devotees of God. Even the Jnani is a devotee of God. Even a Yogi is a devotee of God. Even a Karma Yogi is a devotee of God. So "devotee" is a very venerated and noble address. When someone says 'He's a devotee', it is more revered than being a person of high societal name, fame, wealth, status, position etc. It is much more respected to be addressed as a devotee of God than any other salutations. Very glorified indeed!

Who is a devotee? A devotee is a person whose heart is purified. A devotee is a person who can feel the whole world to be his or her own. A devotee is a person who can make everyone his or her own and can find oneness with everyone. A devotee who has surrendered his body, mind and soul to God. Those are the signs of a devotee. A devotee's heart is given to God -- who is One and

only made of All Souls. God is *Paramatman*. We are all Atmans, souls. God is the culmination, the unity of all souls. When we are called devotees, we get connected with that Oneness. We become one with all. That's why it is such a glorified reference to be called a 'devotee'. We should always feel humbly honored when we are addressed as 'devotees' and our goal is to become a true devotee. When we are true devotees, we can attain the Highest Spiritual Goal by God's grace.

Sri Ramakrishna was once said: The greatest is the place where God dwells. It is the heart of a devotee! The heart of a devotee is greater than God. So, be a devotee: '*Bhakta Bhava*'.

How to become a devotee? How can we make our hearts pure? How can I find Oneness with all? How can be friendly with everyone and how can I love everyone? I love God. Then God is the sum total of all souls. When we love God, we love all. Our goal is to love everyone. For the devotee every human being is an object of love. 'By devotion, you can know Me truly who and what I am'. God as ultimate Truth is Sat Chit Ananda or *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*. God is beauty, God is existence, God is consciousness, God is auspiciousness. Such God we realize when we become devotee.

It is said, God himself was One. He wanted to become many. He said '*Eko aham bahu syama*.' And this whole universe was created out of God himself. It is created by God himself. The whole creation is God. God the Creator may be more logically thought of as the Divine Mother. God feels Oneness with this universe. When we become devoted to God, we can raise ourselves to that level.

Now the question comes: how to become a real devotee? How to transform our limited identity of

a human being based on gender, sex, religion etc. to a level that I am a devotee of God. How do we do that?

In the BG 9:27, it is said '*Yat karosi yad asnasi yat juhosi dadasi yat.....*' Whenever and whatever you do, bring God into that. Whatever you do, do it for God. Whatever you eat, you offer to God. Don't eat for your sense gratification, but eat as an offering to God that resides in your heart. Whatever you offer in fire worship and whatever you offer is sacrifice, you do it for God and God alone.

It is a common practice among the devotees to offer the fruits of their daily spiritual practice to their Chosen Ideal. You don't want any result of your action. You want only one thing that is to please your Ishta, your God. When we rise to that level, then we are devotees. That's why '*Yat tapasyasi kaunteya*', whatever you do austerity, fasting, pilgrimage- whatever you do, offer that to your chosen ideal. '*Whatever merit I got by doing the parikrama of Arunachala, by visiting Kailasha, by going to Bethlehem- if there is merit in that, O Lord, I offer all merits to Thee! I want nothing. I want only Thee*'. That is what the bhakta does.

A bhakta gets qualities described in the first three verses of the 16th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. It says. He attains fearlessness. All fear is gone. We are always living in fear. What will happen to my job? I am growing old, am I going to have some disease? Someone here got cancer. Will I have cancer, TB, pneumonia, how will I die? I don't want to suffer. Like this. Whoever is born lives in fear. The devotee is not afraid of anything. Devotee says, '*Whatsoever way my God wants me to die, I will die that way. I don't have any worry for my death*'. He becomes free from all fear of disease, old age and death. He is secured in the hands of God. We do insurance. For something they say do insurance. Even for our funeral they ask us to do insurance! Who cares for the

funeral? After you are gone, what does matter to you? Whatever remains is the material thing of your body. It is made from this pancha bhuta, made from this earth, nothing else. So, why do you worry for what will happen after that? So you become fearless. '*Abhayam!*' How this fearlessness comes? From the '*sattva samsuddhi*'! *Sattva Samsuddhi* is purification of the heart. Heart When heart is purified, it become free from all envy, jealousy, greed, anger- all are gone. Bhakta is that whose heart is purified. How will it happen? It will happen by being devoted to God.

Sri Ramakrishna has given five commandments for a bhakta:

1. Assume a definite attitude towards God. One must think of God as one's father or mother or child and so forth. We all have experienced love for all these earthly relations and how the same love is to be directed towards God.

2. Repeat God's name and sing his glories. Always try to repeat God's name. It purifies heart.

3. Keep holy company and now and then visit God's devotees and holy persons. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities. So that is what bhakti yoga. Think of God and have the holy company. What the holy company does is it inspires you to think about God.

4. Always discern between the real and unreal. God alone is real, the eternal substance. All else is unreal, that is impermanent. By discriminating thus one should shake off attachment to the impermanent objects from the mind.

5. Never forget that the realization of God is the only goal of human life.

'Bhakta Bhava' - Be a devotee, is not only a command of the World Teacher but is also a great blessing of God for everyone: Be a devotee and realize God!



BHAGAVATA (19): CONVERSATION BETWEEN KING PRITHU & GREAT KUMARA *Swami Ishatmananda*

When King Dhruva, the great devotee of Lord Vishnu, passed away, his son Utkala succeeded.

Utkala was a knower of Brahman. He realized the Atman pervading the whole universe. Most of the time, he was indrawn and was unable to perform his kingly duties.

The Ministers then selected his brother Vatsara as the king. In this lineage came King Anga & his wife, Sunita. Their son is Vena (The Tyrant)

Unfortunately, in the lineage of the great Dhruva, a very cruel personality like Vena was born.

After King Anga, Vena inherited the throne. He tortured everyone, from ordinary subjects to even highly respected & educated people. A group of venerable Rishis went to his court to advise him to rectify, "behave like a just king, O Vena" they said. Instead of listening to their words, proud Vena tried to punish them. Hence, the Rishis, using their yogic power, killed Vena.

Unfortunately, there was no one else to rule the kingdom. Hence, the Rishis, like Bhrigu, applied their spiritual power, and from Vena came out a male PRITHU- the incarnation of Maha Vishnu. And a female- ARCHI- the incarnation of Maha- Lakshmi.

King Prithu was the upholder of Dharma, a Lokapala (custodian deities protecting the world), impartial to all, and full of sympathy.

This great king came to know from the Rishis that he would receive spiritual instructions from the four holy Kumaras - Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatan, and Sanat-Kumar, and would get the realization of the Supreme Brahman.

In Skand 4, chapter 22 we find the graphic description of how the group of the four famous kumaras suddenly appeared in the court of King Prithu, and the King said:

स्वागतं वो द्विजश्रेष्ठा यदब्रतानि मुमुक्षुवः
चरन्ति श्रद्धया धीरा वाला एव बृहन्ति च॥ 4/22/12

O great Brahmanas, Welcome to You. You are completely ego-less like children. You care only for Divine life and live austere lives.

The scripture teaches that the holy people should be served with proper spiritual questions. So, the King asked,

(4/22/13) O honored one! Can there be any happiness

for house-holders who by mistake accepted the sense-objects as the supreme goal- due to past karma?

(4/22/15) I am aware of your spiritual knowledge and sympathy for the suffering people. Therefore asking, O Sir, Please tell me.

सम्पृच्छे भव दत्तस्मिन् क्षेमः केनाज्जसा भवेत्।

How can a person work out his welfare quickly in this cycle of birth and death?

Sanat Kumara, one of the Four Kumaras, replied- You, O great king, verily know the answer but still asking for the good of all, I appreciate.

Then, the great sage teaches the spiritual disciplines that one should practice to realize Brahman- (4/21/21-23)

1. Detachment from Material, Delight in Brahman
2. Firm Faith in the existence of God, Practice of Dharma, Philosophical Discrimination, Practice of Concentration,
3. Association of holy people, avoiding the company of selfish people, also should avoid places where sensuous enjoyments happen

4. One should lovingly practice Non-injury, Self-control, Devotion to the Lord, and Avoid criticizing.

These spiritual practices develop power. This power burns self-centered individuality, which is composed of Five aspects of Ignorance:

Avidya (Ignorance), Asmita (Egoism), Raga (Aversion), Dvesha (Attachment), and Abhinivesa (desire to live).

दग्धाशयो मुक्तसमस्ततद्गुणो नैवत्मनो बहिरन्तर्विच्छिद्यते।
परात्मनोर्यद व्यधानं पुरस्तात् स्वप्ने यथा पुरुषस्तद्विनाशे ॥
(4/22/27)

When one wakes up from sleep, all the experiences of the dream vanish. Similarly, when Linga-Sharira (subtle body consisting of the three sheaths of mind, vital force, and knowledge), in short, anything associated with the Ego is destroyed. Ego, which is the barrier between the Individual Self (Jivatma) and the Supreme Self (Paramatma) vanishes, and the experience of Oneness only remains.

This can be achieved through both paths: Knowledge (Jnana Marga) or Devotion (Bhakti Marga). Among the four goals of human life (Dharma, Artha, Kaama, and Moksha). Moksha alone should be accepted- for Liberation.

Introduction to the Cover Page :: Towards the Infinite

*Brahmacharini Jagaddhatri
Sarada Convent
Vedanta Society of Southern California*

This year, according to the lunar calendar, devotees around the world celebrated the birthday of Sri Krishna in September. Sri Krishna is Infinite, beyond all names and forms (nirguna nirākāra), the creator God Himself (saguna, nirākāra), and at the same time, He is God incarnate (saguna, sākāra) too. Sri Ramakrishna says, "*The jnanis think of God without form. They don't accept the Divine Incarnation. Praising Sri Krishna, Arjuna said, 'Thou art Brahman Absolute.' Sri Krishna replied, 'Follow Me, and you will know whether or not I am Brahman Absolute.' So saying, Sri Krishna led Arjuna to a certain place and asked him what he saw there. 'I see a huge tree,' said Arjuna, 'and on it I notice fruits hanging like clusters of blackberries.' Then Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Come nearer and you will find that these are not clusters of blackberries, but clusters of innumerable Krishnas like Me, hanging from the tree.' In other words, Divine Incarnations without number appear and disappear on the tree of the Absolute Brahman.*"

Though in the Vedas, both mathematical and philosophical concepts of infinity are present, yet the philosophical aspect is discussed more. In his article "Infinity in Classical Indian Mathematics" Avinash Sathaye, Emeritus Professor, Mathematics informed that the ideas about infinity were mentioned in the works of Brahmagupta in sixth century and Bhāskarāchārya (II) in the twelfth century. Sathaye wrote, "The ancient Indian Mathematics texts are mainly religious or philosophical, but often carry a healthy amount of serious mathematics. They seem to introduce formal concepts of finite or enumerable, innumerable (very large but still finite) and infinite. They even classify multidimensional concepts for infinity." Bhāskarāchārya noted in his books: Bijaganita (Algebra) and Līlāvātī (a book on

Arithmetic): "If a zero becomes a multiplier and a number turns into zero, it should (really) be considered as unchanged if it is again divided by zero! Similarly, if a zero is subtracted off and added in (a number is considered unchanged.) He also recorded in bīja ganita

śūnye guṇake jāte khaṁ hāraścet punastadā rāsiḥ.

And in Līlāvātī (47):

avikṛta eva jñeyastathaiva khenonitaśca yutaḥ.

Bhāskarāchārya proposed two special terms to be called *khaguṇa* and *khahara*. *Khahara* can be represented by the infinite symbol as his explicit description. (bīja. 2.20) says:

asmin vikāraḥ khahare na rāsāvapi praviṣṭeṣvapi niḥsrteṣu, bahuṣvapi syāllayasrṣṭikāle'nante'cyute bhūtagaṇeṣu yadvat.

There is no change in this *khahara* by adding or subtracting quantities, just like the infinite immutable, which does not have any effect when living beings enter or leave it at the time of dissolution or creation of the world, respectively.. However, it is important to remember that ancient Indian mathematicians did not use any symbol for infinity. This is probably because philosophically, infinity can't be limited to any symbol.

Ancient Greek mathematicians, such as Zeno of Elea, explored ideas related to infinity, and later mathematicians like Archimedes also dealt with the concept of infinity and its treatment before the formal introduction of the symbol.

Arabic mathematics, which significantly contributed to the development of mathematics during the Middle Ages, mainly focused on practical calculations, algebra, and geometry. The abstract concept of infinity was not explicitly represented using a symbol in ancient Arabic mathematical writings.

It was the English mathematician John Wallis who introduced the symbol for infinity (∞) in 1655 in his work "On Conic Sections." The formal symbol provided a more compact and convenient way to represent this concept in mathematical notation. He used the symbol to represent the concept of a quantity that is unbounded or limitless. The reason behind selecting this symbol was its resemblance to the Roman numeral for a thousand (M), which suggested a large and unbounded quantity.

The relationship between the number eight and infinity is not direct or intrinsic in mathematical terms. Mathematically, the concept of infinity is an abstract concept and represents the idea of boundlessness or unboundedness, while the number eight is a specific finite number. The number eight (8) is often associated with infinity (∞) due to its visual resemblance to an abstract representation of an unbounded quantity or a never-ending loop. In some cultural and artistic contexts, the number eight might be used to symbolize infinite or unending cycles. For example, in Numerology, 8 symbolizes a constant flow of power and energy, or in other words, the number 8 represents everything that makes up the universe, which is infinite: love, time, and energy. It is noteworthy that this representation of infinity is not a formally accepted mathematical convention.

However, this cover story is still an attempt to see how the "eight" teachings indicate the same infinity. Philosophically speaking, Vedanta uses the term Ananta in the phrase "anadi (beginningless) ananta (endless) akhanda (unbroken) satcitananda (being-consciousness-bliss)" to refer to the Infinite, the single non-dual reality.

Hilbert's paradox of the grand hotel mathematically illustrates infinity and its properties in a popular way. Suppose Hilbert's hotel has an infinite number of rooms, and an infinite number of guests are booked into the hotel. Common sense would tell us that the hotel is fully

booked. However, infinite sets defy logic. Suppose another guest wanted to stay in the hotel; then the hotel staff would just shift the guest in room number 1 to the next, the guest in room number two to the third, and so on. By this logic, $\infty + 1 = \infty$.

Similarly, by removing the guest from room number 1 and shifting the remaining guests to the predecessor of their room numbers, there will still be an infinite number of guests. Therefore, $\infty - 1 = \infty$. Applying the same logic, it stands that $\infty - \infty = 0$.

Again, if the guests who are present in the rooms having odd numbers (1, 3, 5...) are removed, there will still be an infinite number of guests, and it can be written as: $\infty - \infty = \infty$.

However, if all the guests are removed except the ones present in the first 50 rooms; then $\infty - \infty = 50$. Therefore, it can be concluded simply that $\infty - \infty$ is indeterminable. In Sri Ramakrishna's words, "*The nature of Brahman cannot be described. About it one remains silent. Who can explain the Infinite in words? However high a bird may soar, there are regions higher still.*"

There are infinite ways to attain the infinite. Here, keeping this concept as a nodal point, the teachings of Patanjali and Buddha (Before Christ) and of Jesus and Sri Chaitanya (post-Christ) can be revisited. Whatever the path, a spiritual aspirant must have a guru to guide them through the path, which scriptures call "like a razor's edge."

Five world teachers deliberated on the teachings of set eight at different timelines of human civilization. According to the majority of historians, the time of sage Patanjali was around the second century BC. He formulated aphorisms to free one's mind from societal programming and the base psychology that we all are imprinted with at birth. Patanjali's aphorisms were developed over a couple of centuries. Around the same time, Gautama the Buddha taught a parallel path, covering much of the same ground and leading to the same end.

The goal of Patanjali is to attain nirvikalpa samadhi, while Buddha's teachings emphasize nirvana as the ultimate goal that helps to break

free from the endless cycles of birth and death.

To be born means to become confined within a body-mind complex. With birth begins the suffering of being limited. All causes of suffering dwell in the mind, as it is the powerhouse of all desires. Therefore, the way to escape suffering is to transcend the mind, which is a limited entity.

Both the Aphorisms of Patanjali and the Eightfold Path of Buddha originated in India. It is beyond the scope of this story to go into detail about the similarities and differences in the two approaches. Self-effort to build the right character is the first step; without it, nothing is possible. However, some good research articles are available e.g. vedanet.com/yoga-and-buddhism-similarities-and-differences, by Dr. Frawley.

Self-effort to build a right character is the first step, without that nothing possible. Swami Brahmananda, Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual son, used to tell the monks to be, "Be a gentleman first". Yama (restraints) and niyama (observances) are the good point to start. Practices of restraints cover: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-coveting, and celibacy while five observances are study, purification, contentment, asceticism, and dedication to God. Basically, right speech, right

conduct and right livelihood, which are the three paths of Eight Noble Path, necessary to live a moral life.

As the primary cause of suffering is not external but internal, the end of suffering is not found in fulfilling needs, as the problem lies in I-centered thinking. Right viewing comes in here. Gradually, right resolve, right effort, and right mindfulness culminate in right samadhi. It is only at the later stages of consciousness development that self-determinism and free will truly become possible.

The Eightfold Path in Buddhism focuses on the practical aspects of living a virtuous and enlightened life, encompassing ethical conduct, mental development, and meditation. It provides a comprehensive framework for leading a morally upright life through spiritual wisdom. However, to enjoy the sweetness of Divine companionship, one must struggle to develop love for the Lord by practicing recollectedness of Him, through prayer, worship, and meditation.

About six hundred years after Buddha, Christ presented 'Nirvana' as a state of supreme happiness or 'Beatitude'. Eight Beatitudes mark the opening of the Sermon on the Mount. They too emphasize the inner attitudes and qualities of

Paths of Patanjali and Buddha can be summarized in a the threefold way: wisdom, ethics, and meditation		
Shila, Morality or Code of Ethical Conduct	Right Speech (<i>vaca</i>) Right Conduct (<i>kammanta</i>) Right Livelihood (<i>ajiva</i>)	Yama (abstinence) and Niyama (observances)
Wisdom	Right View (<i>drishti</i>) Right Resolve (<i>sankalpa</i>)	Synopsis of Afflictions Purification of Intentions Asana (yoga postures) Pranayama (breath control)
Concentration (Mental Disciplines)	Right Effort (<i>vayama</i>) Right Mindfulness (<i>kaya, vedana, chitta</i>) (<i>samma sati</i>) Right Samadhi (<i>concentration</i>)	Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) Dharana (concentration) Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (absorption)
	4 noble truth temporary fulfillment of suffering	There is a possibility of Purusha to get caught by Prakriti

individuals, such as, humility, compassion, righteousness, and the pursuit of peace as essential virtues for leading a blessed and spiritually fulfilling life. As the Eightfold Path in Buddhism aims at achieving Nirvana, the cessation of suffering, and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Samsara), so are the Beatitudes. They provide a spiritual path for followers of Jesus, a call for profound transformation of the heart and mind, promoting a life lived in accordance with God's will. The ultimate goal of the Beatitudes is to guide individuals toward a state of blessedness, happiness, and spiritual well-being. Unlike the previous two, the historical and cultural context of the Beatitudes is rooted in significant expectations of 1st-century Jewish society in the regions of Judea and Galilee, the Roman occupation of the region, and the socio-economic challenges faced by many in the population.

It is also important to note that despite the existence of parallels, the Beatitudes and the Noble Eightfold Path are distinct teachings from different spiritual traditions. The interpretations of these teachings can vary based on individual beliefs and the specific philosophical context within which they are understood. And, again, quite a few well-thought articles are available which show the Eight Beatitudes from the Christian tradition can be related to the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism.

The Eight Beatitudes are recorded in the New Testament of the Christian Bible (Matthew 5:3-10) and the Gospel of Luke. Four of them are in a slightly different form from each other.

The very first Beatitude says, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* A spiritual aspirant must be humble. In Sri Ramakrishna's words, *"One cannot attain divine knowledge till one gets rid of pride. Water does not stay on the top of a mound; but into low land it flows in torrents from all sides."* A "Right Perspective" (as Buddhists call it), which is by seeing the world with an eye of wisdom and acknowledging the impermanent nature of material things like learning, wealth, beauty, or lineage, can help

achieve this spirit. There are three blessings: poverty, abjection, and subjection, which are called the passive virtues.

About 1500 years after Jesus, the world again received the same instruction from Sri Chaitanya. In his Shiksha-astakam (Eight Teachings), it is instructed, *"Be humbler than a blade of grass, Be patient and forbearing like the tree, Take no honor to thyself, Give honor to all..."*

Here, we can briefly discuss the context. Sri Chaitanya is the propounder of the 'Achintya-Bheda-Abheda' philosophy. Based on this dualistic Hindu Philosophy, Gauriya Vaishnavism developed. It is the mother of the Bhakti movement in 16th-century India that focuses on the cultivation of pure devotion to the Divine.

Out of Sri Chaitanya's other writings, Shikshashtakam serves as a source of inspiration for those seeking a deep and loving relationship with a personal God as the ultimate goal. Eight verses outline a spiritual path centered on humility, prayer, surrender, and the chanting of the Lord's holy names.

When Jesus says, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,"* the message comes with different wordings from Buddha or Chaitanya. This mourning or sincere yearning begets 'Right Intention' in devotees' minds. At the beginning of the spiritual practices, it is about cultivating intentions of non-harming, compassion, and detachment, leading to inner peace and contentment that finally matures into the final state of bliss. The same yearning for the vision of God was heard in Shiksha-astakam as Sri Chaitanya prayed, *"Ah, how I long for the day! When an instant's separation from Thee, O Govinda, Will be as a thousand years...."* In Sri Ramakrishna words, *"... if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path."*

The third teaching of Jesus is, *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"*. Both the words poor and meek have the same root in Hebrew. Meek means bending oneself down, being humble, and gentle. Gentle in action, gentle in speaking.

One must practice 'Right Speech' as the Buddhists say — truthful, kind, and non-harming speech, leading to harmonious relationships and a sense of belonging. Meekness is to live in self-surrender to God, remaining free from the sense of 'me' and 'mine'. The attitude of Sri Chaitanya is: *"A drowning man in this world's fearful ocean, Is Thy servant, O sweet One. In Thy mercy Consider him as dust beneath Thy feet."* In the path of devotion, meekness is a special requirement. To get rid of "I-ness", Sri Ramakrishna suggested one *"should rather cherish the idea 'I am God's servant; I am His devotee.'*

Swami Prabhavananda in his book 'The Sermon on the Mount according to Vedanta' appropriately connected this beatitude with the yoga aphorisms of Patanjali. One of the Yoga Aphorisms says, *'The man who is confirmed in non-stealing becomes the master of all riches. "What is meant by 'non-stealing'?" It means that we must give up the egotistic delusion that we can possess things, that anything can belong exclusively to us as individuals.'*

In one's spiritual journey, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"*. It is through the practice of spiritual disciplines that the slight desire to realize Truth gets intensified, gradually becoming a raging hunger and a burning thirst for God Himself. One of the paths out of the Eight, Buddha said, is "Right Action". This results in a sense of fulfillment. Sri Chaitanya wept and prayed to attain such a feeling. Sri Chaitanya wept and prayed to attain such feeling: *"O Lord and soul of the universe, Mine is no prayer for wealth or retinue, The playthings of lust or the toys of fame; As many times as I may be reborn, Grant me, O Lord, a steadfast love for thee."* In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna the Master, too, has demonstrated how to pray to the Divine Mother, many times. He said, *"I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I don't want name and fame I don't want the eight occult powers. I don't want a hundred occult powers Mother, I have no desire for creature comforts. Please, Mother, grant me the boon that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet."*

And, mercy! *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy"*. Living a merciful life is nothing but 'Right Livelihood.' It is to choose an occupation or livelihood that does not harm others and is in line with ethical principles, leading to positive karmic outcomes. Sri Sarada Devi also alerted her disciples, *"One must live carefully. Every action produces its results. It is not good to use harsh words towards others or be responsible for their suffering."* The universal weaknesses, envy, jealousy, and hatred, are linked to our ego-sense. According to Patanjali, one of the ways to be merciful is to attain undisturbed calmness *"by cultivating friendliness towards the happy, mercy and compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and indifference towards the wicked."*

Mercy or *"Compassion springs from satva"* says Sri Ramakrishna. The Master adds, *"Compassion, love of God, and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge."* To be compassionate does not at all mean to be attached. He clarified further, *"Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' toward one's relatives. ... Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality. If you see anywhere an instance of compassion, ..., know that it is due to the grace of God. Through compassion one serves all beings."*

It is interesting to note that right after this discussion on mercy, Sri Ramakrishna is saying, *"God cannot be realized without purity of heart."* And Jesus, too, in the very next Beatitude, says, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* According to biblical terminology, 'cleanness of heart' cannot exclusively be found in interior chastity, nor even in general purity of conscience. One should exert 'Right Effort' to cultivate wholesome qualities, purify the mind, and develop mindfulness, leading to clarity of perception. It is the simple and sincere good intention that is required in the works of mercy. The very first verse of the Shiksha-ashtakam says, *"Chant the name of the Lord and His glory unceasingly; That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean."* Sri Ramakrishna, too, prescribed the same, *"Purify body, mind, and tongue*

by chanting his name. The more you move towards the light, the farther you will be from darkness."

It is important to understand that both the goal and the means have to be pure. The ultimate aim of all spiritual practices is the purest One; therefore, the means for Its attainment (which is the mind here) has to be pure too. Latent impressions are called the impurities of the mind. Patanjali listed five of them: ignorance, a sense of ego, attachment, aversion, and fear of death. All are associated with desire, or *tanha* as the Buddha called it. As soon as the heart becomes pure, one does not 'seek' God anymore but continuously 'sees' God Himself.

The peace lies there. Therefore, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*" The "peacemakers" are those who not only live in peace with others but, moreover, do their best to preserve peace and friendship among mankind and between God and man, and to restore it when it has been disturbed. In the Bhagavata, there is a description of a great soul: '*He in whose heart God has become manifest brings peace, and cheer, and delight everywhere he goes.*' They are the "peacemakers." The minds and hearts of the desirous people get transformed. Cultivation of one's present-moment awareness through 'Right Mindfulness' helps in generating inner peace, which in turn brings harmony. An 'unripe' ego, as termed by Sri Ramakrishna, feels the urge to retaliate when it gets hurt. A person with a 'ripe' ego lives in a state of God-consciousness and does not try to resist evil but prays for all.

By inclusion, the eighth blessing completes the whole set and cycles back to the first and the second – as if an endless loop of eight. The eighth Beatitude says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" This blessing highlights the importance of seeking God's kingdom and righteousness above worldly concerns. A true Buddhist knows this condition as "Right Concentration," which develops deep states of focused meditation that, in turn, step by step leads to insight, liberation, and

spiritual awakening. Milkmaids of Vrindavan experienced this state of being in 'the kingdom of heaven' in Krishna's presence while they appeared to be persecuted by society. Attainment of this state is possible through the practice of a "*long period of uninterrupted (regular) time, with love and respect,*" says Patanjali. In the last and eighth verse, Sri Chaitanya describes this state in a poetic form, "*Do with me what Thou wilt; For Thou art my heart's beloved, Thou and Thou alone.*"

The write-up could end here with a summary like this: The teachings of Patanjali and Buddha provide a systematic approach to ethical living and mental development on the path to enlightenment. The principles and values of the teachings of both Jesus and Chaitanya are timeless and have universal applicability. They provide a roadmap for living a life of virtue, compassion, and righteousness, with the goal of finding spiritual fulfillment and happiness in one's relationship with God. All these teachings are forever open to interpretations and are very much subjective. The more one contemplates and tries to incorporate them into daily life, the more one would grow spiritually. Through the loop of eight, one will reach infinity and become infinite.

Most recently, that infinite was embodied as Sri Ramakrishna in 19th century Bengal. In an ecstatic state, he proclaimed, "*The spiritual experiences of this person (meaning himself) have gone beyond those recorded in the Vedas and Vedantas.*" [The Great Master, Swami Saradananda]. It is difficult to pick up eight aphorisms or teachings from the vast ocean of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. The focus of the Aphorisms of Sri Ramakrishna is on the existence of the Divine, the path of devotion, the universality of all religions, and the significance of a guru in spiritual life, emphasizing that God realization is the ultimate goal of human life. Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are rooted in both the bhakti (dualistic) and Advaita (non-dualistic) philosophies..

Swami Harshananda, a revered monk of the Ramakrishna Order, compiled a collection of eight

aphorisms (Vedanta Kesari, December 2011) that reflect the core teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Following is an excerpt from the published article.

1. *God verily exists. He alone is the Truth.*

Sri Ramakrishna explained, one "cannot see God during the days of your ignorance, just as you cannot see the stars in the sky during day-time, even though they do exist." Therefore, not only does he exist he is the only truth that exists! All else are transitory.

2. *It is possible to see him, to know him, nay, even to talk with him.*

In Sri Ramakrishna's words: 'Really, God can be seen, my boys. As we are sitting and talking together, in the very same way, God can be seen and conversed with. Truly and sincerely I say so'. However, he also declares that the physical body is transformed into a body of divine love, by which alone God is seen.

3. *To see him, to realise him, is the goal of life.*

The Kenopanishad declares that by realising God, there is fulfilment in human life. If not, the loss is great. It also proclaims that by realising God, man transcends death.

4. *By seeing him, by realizing him, everything is achieved, everything is gained.*

The Taittiriyanopanishad solemnly declares that one who realises Brahman or God will attain all desires. This is because whatever exists is verily Brahman. There is a popular hymn that echoes the same sentiment more explicitly: 'When he is pleased, the whole world is pleased'.

5. *For this, a guru is necessary.*

Sri Ramakrishna asks: 'If to see a new place, a guide is necessary, is it not even more necessary to have one, when you venture into unknown avenues?'

6. *Renunciation of lust and greed is the main discipline.*

Since God and mammon cannot go together, mammon has to be given up to attain or retain God.

7. *And also truth.*

Sri Ramakrishna declares that for this Kaliyuga or Iron age, Satya or truth is the necessary and sufficient discipline. Satya has two aspects: Satyavachana (speaking the truth) and Vachanasatya (keeping up the word once given). We find that both these aspects of satya had been fully manifested in his life. At the end of his sadhanas or practice of spiritual disciplines, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother offering all

the pairs of opposites like knowledge and ignorance or purity and impurity. But he could not offer truth and untruth, because, there would then be nothing to hold on to in life!

8. *God can be realised through intense longing also. The scriptures of bhakti or devotion describe prapatti or total surrender to God as an easier method. The Yoga-sutras of Patanjali admits that by devotion to God one can get even samadhi or the highest superconscious state.*

This issue was scheduled to be published in September. According to the lunar calendar, Sri Krishna, the 8th child of Devaki and Vasudeva, was born on the 8th day of the waning half of Bhadra. As mentioned at the beginning, Janmashtami was celebrated last month. However, due to various reasons, the publication got delayed, and by the time it is coming out, it happens to be the 8th day of Autumn Navaratri (Maha-Ashtami). According to Hindu mythologies, Divine Mother Durga killed the buffalo demon, and Lord Rama conquered King Ravana and freed Mother Sita. At the end of the 8th day comes the bliss of freedom.

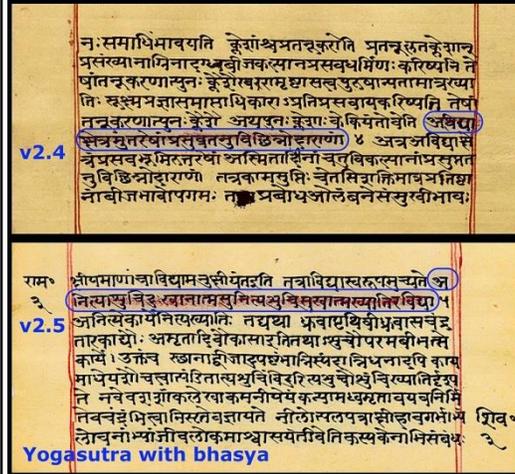
During a spiritual journey, any aspirant has to face the bondage of Ashta Siddhi (occult powers) and Ashta Pasha (fetters). The Master addressed both of these issues. To a tantrik sadhaka, he says, To a t antrik s adhaka the says: "In genuine love of God there is no desire. Only through such love does one speedily realize God. Attainment of supernatural powers and so on -- these are desires. Krishna once said to Arjuna: 'Friend, you cannot realize God if you acquire even one of the eight supernatural powers. They will only add a little to your power.'"

"There are eight fetters. Shame, hatred, fear, caste, lineage, good conduct, grief, and secretiveness-these are the eight fetters." Sri Ramakrishna continues, "And they cannot be unfastened without the help of a guru." He had a mystic vision in Varanasi, where Shiva Guru was giving a mantra to all dead bodies, and only then the Divine Mother was untying the knots of worldliness.

Eight sets of teachings from world teachers of different traditions are summarized in a table for the convenience of those who aim to attain infinity.

Sage Patanjali

1. Yama (abstinence)
2. Niyama (observances)
3. Asana (yoga postures)
4. Pranayama (breath control)
5. Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses)
6. Dharana (concentration)
7. Dhyana (meditation)
8. Samadhi (absorption)

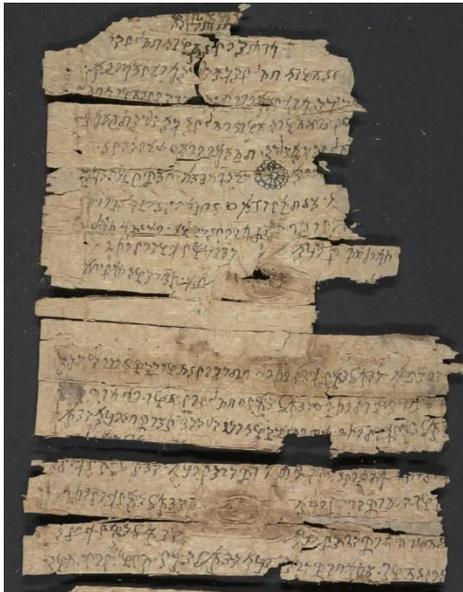


Credit: Wikipedia

Jesus Christ

Blessed are

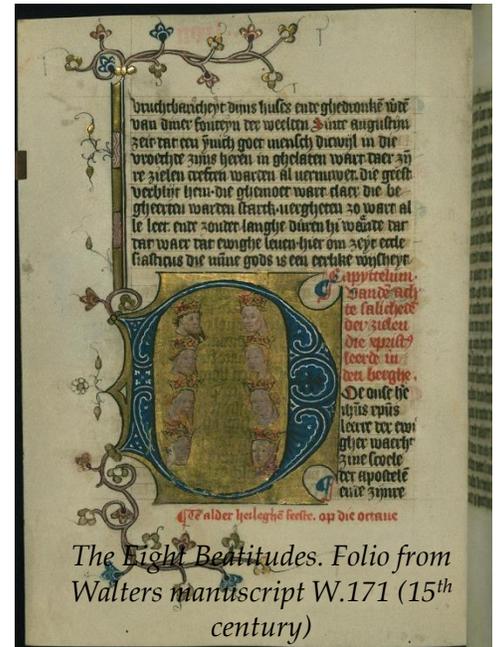
1. the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
2. those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
3. the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
4. those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
5. the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
6. the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
7. the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
8. those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



Buddhist text on the Gandhara scroll.
Credit: Library of Congress

Sri Ramakrishna

1. God verily exists. He alone is the Truth.
2. It is possible to see him, to know him, nay, even to talk with him.
3. To see him, to realise him, is the goal of life.
4. By seeing him, by realizing him, everything is achieved, everything is gained.
5. For this, a guru is necessary.
6. Renunciation of lust and greed is the main discipline.
7. And also truth.
8. God can be realised through intense longing also.



The Eight Beatitudes. Folio from Walters manuscript W.171 (15th century)

Lord Buddha

1. Right View (Understanding)
2. Right Intention (Thought)
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration (Meditation)



Handwriting of Sri Chaitanya.
Image credit: ISCON

Sri Chaitanya

1. Chant the name of the Lord & His glories unceasingly (various are the names of God and His power dwells in every name).
2. Be humble, patient & forbearing.
3. Take no honor to yourself & give honor to all, even to the lowly.
4. Do not seek wealth or retinue, lust or fame.
5. Have steadfast love for God.
6. Take the attitude of a servant toward God & remain prostrate at His feet.
7. Always yearn for God, neither imploring His embrace nor bewailing His withdrawal.
8. Surrender completely to God.

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