

## Editorial Essay

### *Non-Monastic Spirituality*

There is a perceived bias in Vedanta toward monasticism. If you are serious about spiritual life, it is thought that you will want to renounce family and social ties and devote yourself full time to spiritual pursuits. Being a “householder” is thought to be second best. Only monastics are fit to become bona fide spiritual teachers.

This attitude can be traced back to Buddha. Before Buddha, there was no organized monasticism. The accepted pattern was the four stages of life: student, householder, retired life, and final renunciation. Complete renunciation came at the end of life. Before that, one was expected to support the social structure by marrying, having children, practicing righteousness, and contributing to the community. Most of the sages of the Upanishads were married. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are mostly about spirituality in a social context. The Gita is set on a battlefield, and Krishna upbraids Arjuna for wanting to renounce his worldly duty. Buddhism and Jainism emphasized the monastic ideal, and later on so did Hinduism. Shankara was a monk from childhood. Ramanuja and Chaitanya renounced their families and became monks. Whereas the Vedic word for householder—*grihastha*—implied respect, the word used later—*samsari*—meant one who was bound in *samsara*, the relative world.

#### **Advantages or Disadvantages?**

Since the vast majority of spiritual aspirants are not monastics, it seems relevant to examine spirituality in a non-monastic context. Are there advantages and opportunities in non-monastic life that may not be present in the life of the renunciate? Are there genuine disadvantages to the householder state? What do our great exemplars tell us?

First of all, we suggest that the dichotomy between “householder” and “monastic” is simplistic. There are varieties within each of these categories, and there are also many who don’t fit into either category. Monastics 1) may be hermits, 2) may live in cloistered communities, or 3) may live singly or in community doing active work in a social context. Swami Vivekananda championed a monasticism that was concerned with “the good of the world.” Simply to seek one’s own liberation without regard or concern for others was regarded by him as selfish. Further, monastics should be concerned not only for the spiritual welfare of others but also for their material welfare. We need to remember that “world” is not the opposite or the absence of “God,” especially for Swamiji. World, for him, is precisely the available, the visible God, the holy field of karma yoga.

Then we need to distinguish between remaining single, being continent, and being chaste. Celibacy means remaining single *and* continent. Many people, particularly in modern times, remain single without practicing continence. And there are some married people who practice continence to a greater or lesser extent. Chastity means sexual abstinence for the unmarried and remaining faithful to one's spouse for the married. By monasticism do we simply mean celibacy? Do we mean austerity? Some monasteries become wealthy and their members live more comfortable lives than many householders. On the other hand, parents practice a great deal of austerity for the sake of their children.

And what about the increasingly common pattern of life partnering, either heterosexual or homosexual, outside of marriage? Some people following this pattern are in fact serious spiritual aspirants. How can they utilize their situation to their spiritual advantage? Perhaps classification with respect to sexual behavior is not the only or the best way to make distinctions.

According to Swami Vivekananda, unselfishness is God. From this standpoint, it may be that family life has built-in advantages. Opportunities to practice unselfishness abound in family life. The self-sacrifice and austerity required of parents can make the arbitrary austerity of monastics seem tame.

Then there is the discipline of living together, whether in a monastic community or in a family or in any committed relationship. In fact, it is the experience of many monastics that living in community is the hardest of all disciplines.

### **The Real Distractions**

It is common for aspirants to find the demands of family and earning a living a distraction. They sometimes think that if only they could be free of these distractions they could be more intense in their spiritual lives. This arises from a misunderstanding of what constitutes "spiritual life" and what constitutes "distraction." If spiritual life means not identifying with one's ego and its desire for recognition and honor, "temptation" and "distractions" can arise and become troublesome perhaps even more in a monastic setting, where trifles are easily magnified. The real distractions come from within our own minds. As the Beatles' song goes, "Wherever you go, there you are." Sometimes we make better use of our time and develop greater spiritual yearning when our time for contemplative practices is limited. Most people, in fact, are not able to use unlimited time productively, either for external or internal pursuits. Too much time, too few obstacles, can result in laziness.

But what about the need to protect the mind from temptation and unholy thoughts of greed, sex and pride? It would seem that a controlled, monastic environment affords better protection. One is to a great extent shielded from the constant bombardment of sensual stimuli and the everyday trash and trivia that

constitute a large part of the mental diet of many people. In reply, it could be said that no amount of external protection will suffice if one's mind craves honor and sense-gratification. It can also be pointed out that a protected environment may give one a false sense of security. For lack of stimuli, one may think one has overcome attachment and desire, and so let down one's guard; then, on emerging from the monastic cocoon, one may be overwhelmed by temptation. A daily exposure to temptation and the need to resist it may serve as a kind of inoculation.

### **Making Our Circumstances Work for Us**

The real point is: do we *want* to develop spiritually? If we do, we can make our circumstances work for us. Take a committed love relationship between two people. If they truly learn to value the happiness of the beloved as integral to their own happiness, they can grow in ways that a hermit cannot. Holy Mother very much appreciated the Christian marriage vow: "To have and to hold, to love and to cherish, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." If any two lovers, whether married or not, can take this vow, with or without legal sanction, and stick to it, they can make great strides. True love and mere infatuation will be sorted out.

What do we find in the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna and Holy Mother? Both remained sexually abstinent throughout their lives. But they were not monastics in the usual sense. They lived together as husband and wife and undertook many of the responsibilities of family life. They had no children of the flesh but many of the spirit. They looked on their disciples not merely as students but as children and sacrificed their own comfort and convenience for the sake of these children. Before the disciples came, both yearned for spiritual children. And when the disciples came, they felt immense joy and satisfaction and spared no effort to help them grow to spiritual maturity. Their teachings were adapted to the individual needs of the disciples. To those who were married and with families they taught a spirituality suitable for their situation. To those with monastic potentiality, they taught a spirituality suitable for them. Both taught that God-realization was the goal of life for all, whatever their station in life. Later on, some of the householder disciples became sources of great inspiration to many monastics.

Bearing all this in mind, we suggest that it is not the outward life pattern that is important but the inner yearning, the inner growth. We invite our readers to send us their thoughts on spirituality as it relates to their own life situation. We can learn much from each other.

—The Editors

# *Can Householders Realize God?*

**William Page**

Many years ago, when I was a young college student, I wanted to become a monk. I went to Swami Akhilananda, the head of the Boston center, and told him so.

Swami Akhilananda was noncommittal. “Come see me after you graduate, and we’ll talk about it,” he said.

In the interim, I thought I might want to try out the monastic life. In the summer after my junior year I went out to California and got permission from Swami Prabhavananda to spend a month at the Ramakrishna Monastery in Trabuco Canyon. It turned out to be one of the most worthwhile experiences of my life. Now, over forty years later, I am still grateful to Swami Prabhavananda for providing it.

During my last year of college, I came to realize that I would have a problem if I became a monk. The problem was lust. It bothered me all the time, and I knew I couldn’t be a monk if lust was always knocking me off the Razor’s Edge.

I asked my father about it. “It bothers you less as you get older,” he said. That was a big help! I wasn’t older, and it wasn’t bothering me less. I was a 21-year-old kid with raging hormones, and I figured that by the time they stopped raging I’d be 96 years old and it would be too late to become a monk.

I had asked Swami Prabhavananda about it, too, when I was at Trabuco. “Swami, how do you conquer lust?” I asked him. Swami Prabhavananda shrugged. “Just conquer it, that’s all,” he said. That was a big help, too!

## **Encouragement to Marry**

By the time I graduated I realized I wasn’t going to make the grade as a monk. So I went to Swami Akhilananda and said, “Swami, I’ve decided I’d better become a householder.”

Swami Akhilananda was enthusiastic. “Wonderful!” he exclaimed. “And if you meet a nice girl, bring her here and I shall marry you.”

I was taken aback by his enthusiasm, but it was quite possible that he knew me better than I knew myself. As a consolation prize, he initiated me as a householder.

Swami Akhilananda's enthusiasm for marriage had been brought up at one point during the after-dinner discussions we sometimes had in the big living room at Trabuco. I forget the exact context, but I remember Swami Prabhavananda saying, in a pained tone of voice, "Swami Akhilananda marries people. He has a license."

The young monks were shocked. "He MARRIES people, Swami?" one of them cried.

Swami Prabhavananda shook his head glumly. "Left and right," he said.

Obviously there was a difference of opinion between the two swamis. Swami Prabhavananda tended to encourage the people who came to him to become monastics. Swami Akhilananda tended to encourage them to become householders.

I am not privy to the innermost thinking of these two great swamis, both, unfortunately, no longer with us. But I have a feeling that Swami Prabhavananda's thinking may have gone something like this: "These young people want to become monastics. All right. Let them try. Maybe in time they will become great saints. Or maybe they will find that they are unsuited to monastic life and will drop out. That's okay too. They will have learned something about themselves, and who knows? They may gain some spiritual benefits from the experience. Maybe those benefits will lie dormant for some time but will come back later in life to enrich them."

### **Most People Are Not Suited for Monastic Life**

Swami Akhilananda specialized in the study of psychology. My feeling is that his thinking may have gone like this: "Most people are not suited for monastic life. Even in India, out of our huge population only a small percentage even want to become monks, despite coming from a deeply religious culture that extols monastic life and glorifies its heroes. Of those who do become monks, many fail and many more become charlatans.

"The situation of the Americans is infinitely worse. Their secular culture not only discourages monasticism; it is saturated with materialism and sensuality. From the time they are born, Americans are bombarded with materialistic and sensory stimuli that render them completely unfit for monastic life. There may be a few rare Americans who might make good monks, but it is unlikely that I shall meet them in this lifetime. If I were to encourage Americans to become monks, and if they were later to break their monastic vows, they would be guilty of a great sin. And it would be my fault for having encouraged them."

That may or may not sum up the thinking of those two great swamis, and Swami Prabhavananda is certainly to be praised for the compassion he showed toward monastic aspirants. But while both viewpoints are valid, I have a feeling that the view I have attributed to Swami Akhilananda shows the greater insight into the American psyche.

If that's the case, there's a problem. Vedanta glorifies the monastic life; and while there have been great householder saints, the vast majority of Hindu saints, at least in recent centuries, have been monks. If the aim of life is to realize God, it's for sure that it is easier to do so as a monk than as a householder. The monk has no job or family responsibilities, so he can focus all his time and energy on the quest for realization. Society encourages, and even requires, him to do so. If he is lazy or wastes his time on frivolities, he is bound to get a scolding sooner or later. In short, while the monastic life does not guarantee God-realization, it certainly facilitates it.

The householder, on the other hand, has obligations to his job and family. If he tries to pursue the spiritual quest, he will be crippled from the beginning by the distractions inherent in his role as a householder. The more he focuses on his spiritual practices, the more he will neglect his job and family. The more he focuses on his job and family, the more he will neglect his spiritual practices. He will be a divided being, with one foot in one boat and one foot in another. Thus torn, he may very well fail in both endeavors. Realizing God is a full-time job.

That is why Sri Ramakrishna's householder disciples often came to him discouraged, complaining that their obligations prevented them from practicing religious disciplines. "Can householders realize God at all?" they asked. Sri Ramakrishna assured them that they could. God, he told them, was within them always.

But the average householder, despondent at all the burdens that weigh him down, may be forgiven if he secretly thinks, "If God is within me, he is so far within me he might as well not be there at all."

### **Encouragement for the Householder**

What encouragement can we give to the despondent householder? In his superb little book *Spiritual Life for the Householder*, Swami Ranganathananda notes that Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother both were householders.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Swami Ranganathananda, *Spiritual Life of the Householder* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 2000), 10.

“Incarnations arrive to give *grihasthas* [householders] self-confidence, prestige, and strength,” the swami says. “Even the incarnations are born in *grihastha* families. The entire world, the entire society, depends upon the *grihastha*.”<sup>2</sup> Quoting from the *Manu Smriti*, he adds, “The *grihastha ashrama* is the greatest among the ashramas, because it is only the *grihastha* who provides food and education to the people of the other three ashramas.”<sup>3</sup>

“Well,” the householder may say, “that is all very fine and good, but the question is, is it possible for householders to realize God? In the early history of the Ramakrishna movement, there is only one householder disciple who may be said to have realized God. That was Durgacharan Nag. And he lived such an ascetic life that he can hardly be considered a householder at all. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, too, may have been householders in name, but in practice they lived purely monastic lives. Can a householder realize God if he doesn’t live like a monk?”

The short answer is probably no. In such a situation, the householder can be forgiven if he throws up his hands in despair and says, “Well, since I’m never going to realize God, why bother trying? Let me give up these vain spiritual practices. They’ll never get me anywhere, and life is too short. Let me use the time and energy I’ve been devoting to them to work harder at my job and provide better for my family.”

### **No Effort Goes in Vain**

The householder has made a pretty good case for abandoning the spiritual quest, but there are four considerations that ought to give him pause:

1. Most Vedantists believe in reincarnation and the law of karma. According to this mode of thinking, a householder who practices religious discipline may not realize God in this life, but he establishes spiritual tendencies within himself and builds up good karma which will enable him to do so in a later life. So the householder should not despair. His efforts to realize God will eventually bear fruit.
2. Even if one does not realize God in this life, spiritual practice brings joy and fulfillment that non-practitioners can’t imagine. Sometimes, it is true, prayer and meditation are dry and unrewarding, and God seems

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2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 12.

far away. But at other times, one attains beautiful insights, great happiness arises, and God seems very close. So spiritual practice in itself brings rewards that make it worthwhile.

3. It may be that God-realization is not solely a state of being that one realizes in a single leap at a single moment. It may also be an incremental continuum that one can experience by degrees over a long period of time. It is true that most saints realize God in a single cathartic experience that changes them forever: Buddha under the bo tree, Sri Ramakrishna ready to kill himself in the Kali temple, Sri Ramana Maharshi lying down on the floor and imagining himself dead. These are spectacular examples of sudden realization.

But it is also possible that God-realization can be an incremental process, a slow build-up of spirituality that takes place almost unnoticed, and results in a gradual transformation of character. We all know of swamis, and even householder devotees, who would never claim to have realized God, but who by constant spiritual practice over a lifetime have attained a sweetness of character, a serenity of outlook, and a joyous demeanor that are the mark of a God-realized soul. In such cases, they may have realized God and not even know it.

### **The Grace of God**

Why might a God-realized person not know that he has realized God? Because the minute he thinks, “Ah, I have realized God!” the ego may rise up and his God-realization may fly away. God, who gives enlightenment, may yet keep the enlightened soul in ignorance of his own enlightenment, that his enlightenment may endure and bring benefit to others.

4. The wild card in the deck of spiritual striving is the grace of God. A householder devotee might be struggling to keep up his prayer and meditation, but despite his best efforts is always being distracted by various crises, problems, and responsibilities. He might despair of ever realizing God. But then, in an unexpected act of mercy, God might take pity on his distress, break all the rules, and come flooding into his consciousness, inundating him with bliss.

If there is one thing we know about spiritual life, it is that it can be unpredictable. And the grace of God is the most unpredictable thing of all. If it were predictable, it would not be the grace of God. □



## *Are You Out of This World?*

**Edith D. Tipple**

Swami Brahmananda was once asked, “Is it possible to realize God in the world?” He answered, “Is anyone outside the world?”<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna advises that whether one is a householder or a monastic depends on the will of God and that one can only surrender everything to God and then perform those duties which come. “What else,” he asks, “can you do?”<sup>2</sup>

Regarding a spiritual search, no matter what one’s nature or proclivity, there are three stages of growth that must be negotiated. To come to an initial determination that such a search is of engrossing interest, study is necessary—a looking here and there to figure out exactly what it is you want. From that a bare understanding fuels entrance to the second stage, which can be called The Grand Experiment. It involves the fitting together of all the nuts and bolts one has uncovered—working with them intellectually, psychologically, and emotionally. It can be long, and it can be difficult, but it eventually leads to a third stage of growth in which your ship catches a breeze and sails forward in the ocean of your aspiration. You have not reached illumination—and yet you have moved far enough into your aspiration to sail confidently onward.

### **How to Escape Suffering**

Because of an inherent desire to escape suffering and the conundrums of life, one may think, “Ah, if I can take the protection of a monastery or convent or of a cave, my problems will be solved.” But the mind follows us wherever we go—monastery, convent, cave, or family home. Duties face that very mind we have taken with us. And there are problems concerning the duties which evolve and grow and change, but they are always there before us—until we can smelt that mind into gold, which will reflect the glow of divinity every place we look; or until that mind is dissolved into absolute oneness and there is no place to look. It is the same for absolutely every spiritual aspirant.

Ramakrishna said: “I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind toward God... Do your duty

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, 3rd edition (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1970), 259.

<sup>2</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), 649:b. (The letter after the number refers to the paragraph.)

with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, be *in* the world but not *of* it. Also, Maharaj said that we need only twenty-five percent of our minds for the world if seventy-five percent is directed towards God.<sup>4</sup> That is, a steady mind is able to direct the same energy for worldly tasks with twenty-five percent that a scattered, passion-ridden, and excited mind needs one hundred percent to accomplish.

Swami Trigunatitananda once remarked: “According to some, the stage of family life is considered to be the highest of the four stages of life. It is a most sacred stage; it is not meant for people leading a beastly life, but for those who have purified themselves by passing through an earlier stage of continence and purity of heart...”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the sage Vasishtha, when trying to talk Rama out of renouncing the world, said: “The homes of householders who have well governed minds and have banished their sense of egotism are as good as solitary forests, cool caves or peaceful woods....”<sup>6</sup>

Swami Saradananda said: “Many people think that if one gets married and has a family, it is almost impossible for him to practice self-control. This is utterly wrong. What stands in the way of a householder controlling his senses? Sri Ramakrishna used to say: ‘Make your mind and speech one and you will attain everything. Do not limit it to restraining the senses.’”<sup>7</sup> But “spiritual practice is extremely necessary.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Dissolving Obstacles**

Obstacles are clear and evident: attachment to people and things, desire for love and approval, desire for success in what we set out to do. Swami Nirmalatmananda, head swami of the four Vedanta centers in Brazil, speaks of a point in time when he realized that he seemed always to be dwelling in negativity on the obstacles to spiritualizing life. He felt he must somehow turn that negativity around. He came to understand that if he thought of obstacles as challenges, a positive energy was exerted and life became a joy instead of a

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 137:g.

<sup>4</sup> *The Eternal Companion*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> *The Apostles of Ramakrishna*, 2nd edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), 347.

<sup>6</sup> Hari Prasad Shastri, tr., *The World Within the Mind (Yoga Vasishtha)*, 3rd edition (London: Shanti Sadan, 1952), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Swami Aseshananda, *Glimpses of a Great Soul*, 1st edition (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1982), 132.

<sup>8</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 154:f.

dread. We can all take this to heart, no matter how often we despair of making progress.

### **Time for Spiritual Practice**

There is the saying, “If you want something done, ask the busiest person you know to do it.” That there is no time for spiritual practice is an excuse, not a reason. It is not a question of time, but of what you want to do with your life. When I was first married and became bored with endless, repetitive household chores, I read an article in *The Ladies Home Journal* written by a mother of six whose house was always immaculate. Her primary rule was to put away immediately anything she was not using. A person working outside the home could take this to mean the taking care of tasks as they come, and not stacking them in tomorrow’s bin. Incidentally, The National Association of Professional Organizers says that getting rid of clutter in the home cuts housework by an average of 40 percent. How many hours of meditation would that equal for those who think they have no time!

From personal experience I know that three hours of meditation a day is possible for a busy householder. And during lengthy periods of crisis, when the alarm rings before dawn and one collapses exhausted into bed late at night, there may be no time for formal, structured spiritual practice—but trying to see the divine everywhere and being a channel for divine energy are disciplines that anyone can practice. It is a matter of becoming established in the practice. The same is true of making japam continuously: eventually the mantram wells up spontaneously, between thoughts, and you realize that it is supporting your every breath.

It is far more difficult to get through the day without a period of grounding (meditation) to begin it. But it is possible to keep the mind aspiring to the highest, even while performing the most mundane duties, for, as Ramakrishna tells us over and over, the key to God-realization is longing. That longing of the soul can underlie any circumstance.

### **21st Century Cave Dwellers**

Those who live alone might be considered 21st century cave or forest dwellers. A friend who left convent life after 30 years exclaimed: “I have learned to admire so very much those who live all alone: they see themselves coming and going!” It can be devastatingly lonely, and this can probably never be overcome until we understand what Swami Prabhavananda told us with such loving compassion: “I know it’s hard to hear but, as I have repeated many times over the years, there is absolutely no one who is your own but the Lord.”

It is true that in living alone, with no one to reflect oneself back to oneself, no one to share joys, vicissitudes, and attitudes on a daily basis, one can easily become self-absorbed. But unselfishness and love expand in spiritual life, and this naturally ameliorates a tendency to self-absorption.

In the realm of public life, a problem which appears more prevalent today than ever before is a veritable lust for wealth and fame. How many business owners take to heart Buddha's admonition for right livelihood? That is, how many are ready to earn less and, as a consequence, be considered a person of less importance in the eyes of society? If they took Buddha seriously, how many could outsource the jobs of their workers simply for a company's profit? Maharaj said: "Do not allow high worldly ambitions any place in your mind. You have the means of maintaining yourself modestly. Be content with that."<sup>9</sup>

### Householder Jnanis

Ramakrishna agreed with Shankara that through unflagging devotion to truth alone, a householder can realize God.<sup>10</sup> It involves the very discrimination and dispassion Ramakrishna often spoke of: "You may swim in the black ocean of the world, but your body should not be stained... You should live in the world in a spirit of detachment."<sup>11</sup> If that is accomplished, [the householder jnani] "is like a person living in a glass house. He can see both inside and outside."<sup>12</sup> Ramakrishna likened that person to a man with a carbuncle on his back who carries out his duties proficiently, even though his mind is always on the carbuncle. We are taught to cover everything with God, to aim for constant and uninterrupted recollection of God. Swami Prabhavananda would often stop by someone at work and whisper, "Are you thinking of the Lord?"

When we speak of spiritual life, we are speaking of the whole reason for existence. We have come to understand that there is no other use in life but to find true and abiding joy, to discover what "I" really am. We cannot be satisfied until a floodlight of illumination overcomes us. All the great teachers of the world have assured us that this is open to every single person on this earth. That is the allure, it is the test, and it is the goal. The question is not, "Where do you reside, in a monastic community or in your own home?" but, "What—do—you—want?" □

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<sup>9</sup> Swami Vividishananda, *A Man of God*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1968), 244.

<sup>10</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 418:k.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 747:m.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 956:i.

# *Spiritual Partnership in Marriage: A Hindu Perspective*

**Uma Majmudar**

In Hinduism, “spiritual partnership” is the sine qua non and the ultimate goal of marriage, described as an eternal union of man and woman, “walking together through the gates of eternity!” One may question, however, how this lofty ideal of marriage can be translated into the everyday reality of American life? The question is valid; however, the ideals and examples narrated here are beyond the constriction of time, place, culture, and religion, and therefore are not obsolete. One may or may not accept the mythological stories or details, but the principles behind them can be universally applicable. Particularly, the Upanishadic examples of spiritually minded couples like Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi can inspire couples even today, who aspire to a deeper, more spiritual relationship in marriage.

The Hindu concept of spiritual partnership in marriage is best represented in the Divine union of Shiva and Parvati, who come together not as two separate individuals but as two indivisible halves of a single entity. Shiva is called the “*ardhanarishvara*” (*ardha*: half; *nari*: woman, and *Ishvara*: God), or God who is “half-woman and half-man.” Shiva and Shakti are symbols of the eternal union of male and female in a sacred marriage; if Shiva is pure cosmic consciousness in repose, Shakti is pure cosmic energy in motion or creation. Whether Divine or human, husband and wife are meant to fulfill and complete each other; neither is superior or inferior to the other. Both are equally esteemed in marriage, though their gender roles, responsibilities, and individual attributes may be different. There cannot be a more dynamic example of a divine duo who efficiently operate the entire universe on the principle of cooperation rather than competition; each recognizing the other’s strength, they make the marriage chime in perfect harmony. A tall ideal indeed, but worth emulating, for it is functional as well as spiritual!

## **Let Me Dwell in Your Heart**

In the Hindu scriptures, a wife is called her husband’s *sahadharmacharini* (*saha*: together; *dharma*: religion, and *charini*: participant); she is his assistant and participant in any religious activity such as a *puja* (ritual worship), a *yajna* (fire-ceremony), a *yajnopavitam* (sacred thread ceremony), or a wedding. A husband must not perform any religious ritual without his wife at his side. That is why, when Lord Rama was once required to perform a *yajna* without his wife Sita, he decided to install a golden image of her at his side.

In the Atharvaveda, husband and wife say to each other: “let our eyes be like nectar; let our mouths unite in agreeable words and attitude; you hold me dear in

your heart so that we speak the same mind. May we not only make a life together, but bring harmony wherever we go” (7.36.1). In the Chhandogya Upanishad, bride and groom say, “Let me dwell in your heart; let your heart be mine; let us be wholly devoted to each other.”

Spirituality is an integral part of a Hindu marriage; it is woven into a developing, maturing relationship between husband and wife. Women who scrupulously follow their wifely dharma are glorified in the *Dharmasastras* (scriptures) such as *Manusmriti* or *The Laws of Manu*: “Where women are honored, the gods are pleased: where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards” (III: 56). Moreover, regarding the husband-wife relationship, *Manusmriti* says: “In that family where the husband is pleased with his wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly be lasting” (Ibid., III: 60). Can there be a more down-to-earth approach to make a marriage work? On the lighter side, I heard a happily married man say to another about to be married, “keep your wife happy, because a happy wife means a happy life!”

In classical Sanskrit literature, the love between husband and wife is described to be pure, sacred, self-giving and eternal. The poet Kalidasa depicted such ideal love between Shiva and Parvati in his “*Kumarasambhavam*,” and the poet Bhavabhuti, in his play *Uttararamacharitam*, described the rare “*advaita*” (undivided love) between Rama and Sita, united in body, mind, and spirit.

### **Spiritual Kinship and Spiritual Self-Search**

In a Vedic Hindu wedding ceremony, the “seven sacred vows” are designed to prepare the couple for a gradual spiritual kinship in the years ahead, leading ultimately to the goal of “Self-realization.” Although as husband and wife they may enjoy all the worldly pleasures and treasures including wealth, children, name, fame, property and all, they should gradually develop a spirit of detachment from all to be able to retire finally from the world and devote themselves fully to spiritual Self-search. This is best illustrated in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in a dialogue between the sage Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi. As Yajnavalkya was about to retire to a forest for the ultimate goal of Self-realization, he wanted to make a final settlement of his property between his two wives—Katyayani, and Maitreyi. Katyayani opted for the riches of the world, whereas Maitreyi asked:

“If now, sir, this whole earth filled with wealth were mine, would I be immortal thereby?” “No,” said Yajnavalkya. “As the life of the rich, even so would your life be. Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth.”

Then said Maitreyi: “What should I do with that through which I may not be immortal? What you know, sir—that, indeed, tell me!” (Radhakrishnan, 80).

Yajnavalkya then expounds the whole philosophy of “the love for the Self” as the only underlying principle behind all other “human loves and relationships.” He says: “Lo, verily, not for love of the husband is a husband dear, but for love of the Self (*Atman*) a husband is dear. . . Not for love of the wife is a wife dear, but for love of the Self a wife is dear.” In the same vein, the sage continues to explain that one holds dear children, wealth, priestly power, the three worlds, the gods, and even the Whole, out of love for the Self.

Ironically, those who are not familiar with the Vedantic view of “the Self” as “Atman” (the indwelling spirit or the Divine essence of one’s being), are most likely to interpret “Self” in its narrow sense of the “ego self.” As Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita (5: 5), “He really sees who sees!” And who but some rare realized souls like Sri Ramakrishna or Vivekananda or Ramana Maharshi can “see” the Atman as Brahman—the One Absolute Reality without forms or attributes, beyond mind, body and senses, beyond space and time, the indestructible, unchanging Unity of all that exists!

The sacred Sanskrit literature—the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Manusmriti, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Puranas—all extol the ideal of spiritual partnership, not only among the human but also the divine couples. The Hindu deities who usually appear in pairs are: Shiva-Parvati, Sita-Rama, Lakshmi-Narayana, and others. There are only two exceptions: one, Radha and Krishna, who, though not married, epitomized the ideal of “spiritual love.” Still another is the historical example of the 16th century Saint-poetess, Queen Mirabai, who ardently loved Krishna as her “mentally wedded husband!”

These ideals are still current. I recently attended an art exhibit of paintings called the “Inner Expressions of Eternal Light,” by a visiting Bengali Indian artist, Mona Ghosh. Inspired by a classical book of lyric poetry called the *Vaishnab Padabali*, she had depicted the various moods of love, joy, and the anguish of separation as experienced by the divine pair, Radha and Krishna, or *Prakriti* (Primordial Feminine Energy) and *Purusha* (the Primal Man).

### **Womanhood and Motherhood**

As we saw earlier, a woman as a “devoted wife” is highly praised in the Hindu scriptures and society, but a woman who is also a “mother,” is even more venerated as the “Mother of the Universe!” As we know, Sri Ramakrishna worshiped his wife Saradamani, as the very incarnation of *Shakti* or *Prakriti*, who brings forth the entire material universe out of *Purusha* (the Cosmic spirit in the Samkhya system). Thus, Indian culture, society, and the Hindu religion glorify the motherhood of a woman far more than her womanhood; a woman is not reduced to being “a sexual object,” because the soul has no sex or gender.

Interestingly, the Hindu concept of spiritual search does not shun marriage or sexuality, nor is spirituality reserved for monastics only. Even a *samsari* (one living in the world) can seriously pursue a spiritual path, although it may be as

difficult as climbing up a steep hill! There are solid examples of spiritual seekers like Sri Ramakrishna, Srimad Rajchandra (Gandhi's spiritual guide), and the saint-poets Kabir and Narsinh Mehta, who were married, yet totally dedicated to God. We also find examples of forest-dwelling sages like Yajnavalkya and Vashishtha who, despite being married, walked undeterred on the path of Self-realization. And sometimes a wife like Maitreyi chose to go along with her husband on the journey to eternity!

As Dr. Gautam Patel, a Vedic Sanskrit scholar and author, observes in his Gujarati book, *Vedno Vaibhav* (24), that in the earlier Vedic times, both boys and girls were allowed to stay and study at a guru's ashram; just like boys, girls were also given the "sacred-thread initiation." Not only were girls equally eligible for receiving the highest spiritual teaching from their gurus, but after finishing their studies they could freely decide whether to marry or not. Those who opted for marriage, were called "*sadyodvahas*" (those who marry as soon as their studies are finished), whereas those who decided to stay single to dedicate their whole life to spiritual pursuits, were called "*Brahmavadinis*" or "*rishikas*" (women seers). It seems the idea of "women's liberation" was not a modern invention after all; it was a reality or a norm in ancient India! Then again, there were married women like Maitreyi and Ubhaybharati (Pandit Mandanamishra's wife), who became true spiritual partners of their husbands.

According to Patel, it was only later, because of the monopolization of the Sanskrit language and scriptures by the Brahmin priestly class in the post-Vedic period (Smriti literature: Dharmasastras, between 500-600 B.C. to A.D. 200), that women were deprived of their right to study both Sanskrit and the Vedic scriptures.

### **Sexuality and Spirituality in Marriage**

Thus, in the Hindu view, marriage is not incompatible with spiritual sadhana. But having accepted that, a few questions arise which need to be addressed concerning "spiritual partnership in marriage." One, if husband and wife remain sexually active, can they still claim to be "spiritual?" This leads to the rather complicated role of "sexuality" and "spirituality" in marriage. Should the latter cancel out sexuality or sexual relations with one's marital partner? In other words, for a spiritually committed couple, is "sex" a hindrance? a taboo? a disruptive distraction? Let us discuss.

In the history of Indian art, music, literature, and in the Hindu temple-sculptures and cave-paintings (Ajanta and Ellora), we see graphic sexual poses of divine couples in embrace, not to speak of kings, courtesans and others. Such depictions are confusing, even bewildering to many a Western eye. If sexuality is considered to be "a forbidden subject" in Indian society and religion (except in Tantrism), how can one reconcile this sexually explicit art with the Hindu ideal of "spirituality?" Three responses seem to be logically appealing.



One, Indian history being so ancient (dating back to at least 2000 B.C.), and Indian society being so multi-ethnic, there have been intermittent periods when different kinds of hedonistic, materialistic, and sexually permissive trends and practices prevailed. We can compare it to similar periods in European history, even with the unprecedented technological, material and sexual explosion of modern times. It is possible that during such affluent or materialistic periods, all kinds of excesses and experiments in art, literature, social and moral norms, and sexual practices prevailed.

Second, though sexuality may have been present, or even necessary in the earlier stages of marriage for the purpose of progeny, it was advised that the human sex-drive be gradually curtailed. Sexual energy was ultimately to be transformed into spiritual energy; it was to be sublimated to the higher plane of a non-sexual, spiritual union.

Third, “sexuality” and “spirituality” may not only co-exist, but physical intimacy itself may become a vehicle of spiritual intimacy between husband and wife in holy matrimony. A peak sexual experience in a loving marriage may be comparable to an “ecstatic union” of the human soul with the Divine, as in a mystical experience.

### **The Inner Eye Remains Focused**

All the above variations in the complicated relationship between sexuality and spirituality have existed at different times and periods in various cultures and religions. As far as the Hindu perspective on marriage is concerned, we may conclude by saying that it has always remained open to allow sexuality to play a leading role in marriage, at least in the earlier years of a couple’s preoccupation with child-bearing, child-nurturing, house-holding, and during the performance of their *samsara-dharma* (worldly duties). Through all the stages, however, the inner eye remains focused on the ultimate goal of seeking *moksha* or spiritual liberation. Hindu married couples are advised to gradually outgrow their physical attraction and sexual passion, in order to grow together in establishing a deeper, serene spiritual relationship. Earthly love may then translate into divine love, and sexuality into spirituality. This is an ideal that modern couples can emulate.

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# *Walking the Dog: Yoga for Householders and Their Canine Companions*

**Steven F. Walker**

One of Vivekananda's early students, later known as Sister Devamata, left a record of some of the meetings the swami held in New York City in the late 1890s. The following anecdote can serve us as a lead-in to the subject of this essay, which otherwise might seem a bit outlandish (and perhaps will anyway!):

“We recognized in him [Vivekananda] a power that no other teacher possessed. It was he alone who was shaping our thought and conviction. Even my dog—an Irish setter—felt this. He would stand perfectly still and a quiver would run through his body whenever Swamiji would lay his hand on his head and tell him that he was a true *yogi*.” (*Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Fourth Edition, 2004)

And this anecdote leads us to . . . *Dog Whisperer with Cesar Millan: the Complete First Season* (Screen Media DVD, 2006), a set of DVDs where training dogs and training minds meet, and thanks to which you may discover that your mind and your dog have more in common than you ever realized!

## **What Your Dog Looks For in You**

Cesar Millan, the onetime impoverished Mexican immigrant who became the subject of a recent *New Yorker* portrait (May 22, 2006), is the host, if that is the right word, of a National Geographic television series on dealing with difficult dogs. He repeatedly states that the first thing to remember when attempting to deal with your problem dog, is that your dog may seem to be your *friend* (even your *best* friend) as far as you are concerned, but you are most emphatically not your dog's friend, as far as the dog is concerned. What the dog is looking for in you, and will become very anxious and disturbed if he does not find, is not a friend but a *pack leader*. Calm authority on the part of the owner, calm submission to that authority on the part of the dog—that is the secret. Being treated primarily as a friend is puzzling to the dog, since the dog's innate sense of pack hierarchy requires that *someone* be pack leader. If the owner fails to play this role, then either the dog will have to become it himself, or else suffer from the anxiety and disorientation of being in a leaderless pack. This misreading of dog psychology can become a tragic misunderstanding, and is the primary cause, according to Milan, of the problem of out-of-control aggressive, anxious,

undisciplined, phobic, neurotic or just plain nasty dogs, Pit Bulls and Rottweilers included. Try to be your dog's *friend*, and you are in for trouble. Be his *pack leader*, and you'll have a friend for life.

There is a companion book (*Cesar's Way*) that complements the TV series, but I would really recommend the DVD set (either the first four episodes or the complete first season for real enthusiasts) because of the way you can see, hear and almost *smell* the way agitated dogs respond to gestures communicating firm and calm authority on the part of their would-be friends and owners. Whether he deals with Nunu, the ferocious Chihuahua, or Maya (yes!) the Pit Bull, or many other misbehaving canines, Cesar Millan adjusts his specific advice and training to each particular case. Each dog is different. For example, Kane the Great Dane developed a phobia that had made him into an out-of-control dog whenever he was about to step onto a shiny surface. He developed this fear of shiny surfaces after a traumatic experience of crashing into a plate glass door and knocking himself out. In this filmed sequence Cesar starts out, as he often does, by teaching the dog to go for a proper walk. Placing the collar high above the dog's neck and holding the leash fairly tightly, he takes the dog for a walk, keeping the dog a pace behind him. By the end of the sequence, after many days of training and rehabilitation, Kane is fine and can accompany his owner anywhere. In *Dog Whisperer* the variety of situations and problems is staggering. But in each case the owner's ability to learn to communicate to the dog an attitude of calm assertion of benevolent authority is the key to success.

### **A Trained Mind Is Your Best Friend**

Now to the Big Question: how is all this relevant to householders practicing yoga? Readers have probably already seen the analogy, but I will spell it out anyway. Not everyone has a dog at home (I don't), but every householder has a mind, and the mind needs training. A trained and disciplined mind is the best of friends, says the Bhagavad Gita (VI.6), but an uncontrolled mind can turn into the worst of enemies—a real Rottweiler at its worst, full of fear and hostility, always attacking others, constantly on edge, never able to relax except in sleep. So the paradoxical nature of the mind, potentially both the best of friends and the worst of enemies, can be seen as represented vividly in the *Dog Whisperer* series as the ultimate paradox of the dog: Man's Best Friend if rightly trained, the Hound from Hell if not.

So may we conclude, on the basis of the comparison, that making one's mind into the best of friends, paradoxically, does not so much involve treating it as a friend, but rather . . . as a dog? After all, if Saint Francis could call his body "Brother Ass," why can't I call my mind "My Dog"? Part of Cesar Millan's basic training for dogs and dog owners is taking the dog for daily walks, during which

time the owner needs to walk slightly ahead of the dog with a posture that suggests firmness and calm, keeping a tight leash, jerking the leash or even giving the dog a slight kick if it begins to resist or gets agitated. This exercise gradually establishes the dominance of the owner over the dog. Although it may initially seem coercive, it is really what the dog wants. One mistake dog owners and mind owners both frequently make is to confuse happiness and freedom with excitement and obsession. But an excited dog is not a happy dog, says Cesar Millan, and the images of happily submissive dogs at the end of most of the sequences seem to demonstrate the wonderful long-term effects of yoga for dogs.

### **Giving the Mind Care and Discipline**

The mind, too, basically wants to be happy—that is, it wants unconsciously, instinctually, to be in a situation where it is calm and serene, but, like so many dogs, it has developed a number of bad habits, and thus is unable on its own to discipline itself and take proper care of itself. A householder-yogi tries to provide the mind with that care and discipline, even though the mind, like the dog, initially will resist, often fiercely. But with time and consistent training, the mind will learn to submit—not to brutal punitive control, but to calmly asserted benevolent authority. Taking the dog for walks brings it back to its true nature; the mind too needs regular meditation in order for it to find again its proper relationship with the Higher Self, which is one of calm submission. Major religions have stressed this ultimately natural relationship of the mind to its master, in a variety of ways, some theistic, some non-theistic, but it all comes down to the mind finally realizing that it can only be peaceful and happy through its submission to a higher power. As Dante puts it in the *Paradiso* (Canto III) “in submission to His will lies our peace.” Or as Saint Augustine phrases it in his *Confessions* (Book I), “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” As long as that submission is not attained, the mind will remain one hell of a problem dog.

So far, so good. But I have a confession to make. In my initial enthusiasm for Cesar Millan’s Dog Yoga, I thought I had found a new, improved way of tricking my mind into meditating better by saying to it (calmly but assertively, of course): “Now you are my dog! So let’s go for a walk.” But a few days later I discovered to my chagrin that my mind is actually a lot cleverer than a dog. At first it seemed to like the role of nice obedient dog—after all, the mind always loves new games. But after a few days it had figured everything out, and suddenly said to me: “So now you think I am your dog? Well, watch this!” And with that it broke the leash, disappeared and was nowhere to be found—who knows where it went! So I must conclude that the human mind is a lot harder to control than a dog, although I still think that the comparison is worth something. □

# *The Labyrinth as a Metaphor for The Spiritual Life of the Householder*

**By Juliette Seelye Karow**

For the spiritual seeker, the labyrinth may be used as a tool for awakening and deepening spiritual understanding. There is something magical and sacred about walking the labyrinth. This is my story:

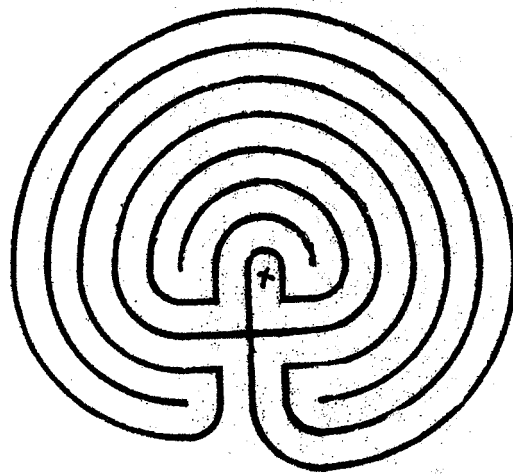
When I lived in Virginia, our study group explored many different consciousness-expanding processes. In the 1990's labyrinths were being popularized by a priest in California, Dr Lauren Artress. Her book, *Walking the Sacred Path*, was the focus of our study for several weeks. She goes into great detail about the history of the labyrinth. There is evidence for its existence and use as long as 3500 years ago. It has taken many forms: created as a path in the turf; laid out with care as stepping-stones; carved in rock, etc. The most famous labyrinth is in the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France. It was built in the Middle Ages. The original uses and meanings have been lost in antiquity. Some think there are astrological connections symbolized by the paths. Others find vibration and musical note relationships. During the Crusades it may have been walked symbolically as a search for the Holy Grail. The most accepted meaning today is as a meditation tool and a way to deepen our awareness of the meaning of life.

Our study group, searching for the real experience of walking the labyrinth, found one at the Episcopal Church in Yorktown, Virginia. It was painted, according to Dr. Artress's instructions, on a huge canvas that filled the general purpose hall, about 30 feet square. It could be rolled up and stored when not in use.

## **“This Is My Life”**

A short orientation lecture was given. We were advised that each person's experience would be unique and that we should enter and proceed with an open mind. About twenty people expectantly lined up to enter the dimly lit room. Candles were burning in strategic locations around the periphery of the labyrinth. The instructor told us we could remain in the center for a while to contemplate the experience. The center is a dead end. There are no other dead ends (as there may be in a maze). There is only one way in and one way out. When the experiencer is ready, he/she may follow the same path out. We were not given a hint as to the possibilities. There is something, indeed, about making all those sharp turns and going in circles that is disorienting, magical, mystical, and puts one in a special state of mind. I can only tell you what happened to me. Others had their own experiences. You surely will want to try it for yourself (See

diagram) On entering the labyrinth I am walking straight toward the goal, so I am thinking, “This is a piece of cake—no problem.” However, almost immediately, there is a sharp, left, 90-degree turn. This takes me around semi-circles and two 180-degree turns, out to the outermost path. I get dizzy very easily, so this certainly slowed me down into a more thoughtful, contemplative mood. I started out walking at a fairly rapid pace, (my usual approach to life). But suddenly, of necessity, I changed my pace and realized, “This is my life.” How true it is. We think we are living a spiritual life, but quickly and easily problems absorb our thought and change our directions entirely. I remember in college being so shattered by worldly knowledge and material involvements that I questioned, “Is there really a God?” But suddenly in the labyrinth there are two right angle turns that bring me closer to center. It was as if I was being called, and I became very active in Church once more. The Labyrinth proceeded rather easily—slow curves. Oh!! Almost into the center.



But no! Two more 180 degree turns. My life nearly fell apart. Husband walked out; can't pay bills; child disappears; cancer. When I thought God had abandoned me, a most amazing thing happened, when I least expected it; a friend brought me a book about Sri Ramakrishna—the Incarnation for the modern world. In the person of Sri Ramakrishna, I found the manifestation of God in man. He taught that everyone and everything is a part of the Ultimate Reality. There is no place where God is not. I found the Truth of my Self. One more right angle turn of the labyrinth and I was in the center. I had reached the Goal.

I rested momentarily in the small space representing the cave of my own heart. Others also were coming into the center, each having his or her own experience. Some were in meditation, some in exaltation, others deep in thought. But the urge to expand into the greater Reality gradually overtook us. One by one we thoughtfully left the security of the Center and retraced our steps.

Yes, I continue to have ups and downs in life but I now retain my deep awareness of spirituality guiding, protecting and sustaining me. I experience the assurance that all life is a series of teachings. When the lesson has been learned, the exercise is over, and I find contentment. As I exit the labyrinth, I repeat the same 90 degree and 180 degree turns and the big and small circular paths. But it all goes much faster and easier. Everyone experienced this altered sense of time. It seemed to take forever to get to the Center, but only a short time to get out.

Finally, on exiting, I felt expansive. My inner Self expanded into the ocean of transcendence. It was a moment of sheer Bliss, (*Ananda*). I felt a oneness with All There Is—everyone and everything.

Since my first experience, I have walked labyrinths at the Edgar Cayce Foundation in Virginia Beach, Virginia; at Unity Village in Missouri; and in Vermont at a dowsers' convention. In most big cities today you can find a labyrinth to walk. Or, of course, you can make one of your own. The one in Vermont was made with chalk drawn on the grass. At Unity Village it was drawn on the concrete of an old parking lot. I have seen labyrinthine gardens. One can use a finger labyrinth. They are for sale, made of wood. Or you can use the diagram with this article. In a meditative mood, the experience may be quite profound.

Principles I learned while walking the labyrinth:

- 1) There are always problems in life but they are temporary.
- 2) Everyone has a spiritual center and one's God Self is always there. We are all the same. We are not alone.
- 3) There are more good times than bad times.
- 4) We learn to be compassionate through our own suffering.
- 5) We grow stronger spiritually by seeking to learn the lesson and being grateful.
- 6) Our spiritual purpose is to serve, love, expand into the world, learn, and teach. As the Taittiriya Upanishad says (in summary—I paraphrase): Be righteous. . . learn and teach, control your senses and your mind. . . do your duty. . . speak truth. . . be humane. . . serve family and guests. . . educate your children. . . learn and teach.

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Sig Lonegren, *Labyrinth, Ancient Myths and Modern Uses* (U.K.: Gothic Image Publications, 1991).

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## **To My Son Who Does Not Know How to Pray**

First, you need to listen, dear—  
Cock your ear to the sound of crows cawing  
warnings, cries, rebukes.

Let the spring wind work its way under  
and in. Let it unthread your bones.  
Unhinge them.

Hear the groaning of trees,  
bare branches in hard labor  
straining to bear soft buds.

Stones too have something to say.  
Find one that calls. Hold it.  
Refrain from casting it.

Do not ignore the snake on your path.  
Its body shapes the question  
you fear to ask.

Fast moving clouds speak in tongues  
of light and dark. White fire,  
black and blue believers.

Breathe, my love. Listen to your breath,  
each one bearing you closer  
to the far shore.

—Laura Bernstein



# *Philip Glass's Passion of Ramakrishna*

## **Sister Gayatriprana**

When we first heard that the two-day grand opening of the Renee and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa, Orange County, California, would feature, among other offerings, a new work by Philip Glass entitled *The Passion of Ramakrishna*, our first reaction was a double take. The Passion of Ramakrishna! At the upscale new home of the Orange County Symphony? We wondered: Why Ramakrishna? Why *the passion*? Was this, perhaps, going to be a re-casting of Ramakrishna in the mold of suffering, pain, and vicarious atonement, as in some forms of Christianity?

We learned that “Philip Glass is one of the most prolific and best-known avant-garde composers in the United States. His symphonies, operas, and film scores have made him known for his repetitive tonal techniques and his innovation within musical genres.” For these works he has won Obie, Golden Globe, and Cannes International Film Festival Awards, and received an Academy Award nomination.<sup>1</sup>

## **Apprentice to Ravi Shankar**

The biographical encyclopedia *Contemporary Musicians* tells us that, “Glass traveled extensively through India, Tibet, and North Africa, and in 1965 he became a working assistant to the virtuoso sitar player, Ravi Shankar. Through notating his music for Western musicians and studying tabla with the well-known Indian percussionist, Allah Rakha, Glass gained an understanding of the modular-form style of Indian music. Shortly thereafter he completely rejected his earlier compositional style and began to rely solely on the Eastern principle of cyclic rhythm to organize his pieces. Harmony and modulation were added later, but these typically consisted only of a few static chords . . . Before 1966 Glass had composed 80 pieces. Now they all seemed irrelevant. He essentially started anew.”<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime I had learned from other sources that Philip Glass has been a devoted follower of the Dalai Lama since 1972, and, in addition, he has been reading the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* for about four decades and is very inspired by it. This information, of course, whetted our interest, but still did not explain the *passion* aspect of his work.

Just before the performance, the local classical music channel KMZ interviewed Philip Glass and the librettist Kusumita Pederson, a member of the Sri Chinmoy movement and the department chair of religious studies at St.

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<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 171 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> *Contemporary Musicians*, Vol. 47 (Detroit, Gale Research, 2004).

Francis College in Brooklyn, New York. When the two got together to work on *The Passion*, Philip told Kusumita, “It will be our portrait of one of the greatest mystics of modern times. And, of course, we will fail. But that will be what we can do.” Philip shared with the interviewer that what had interested him in Sri Ramakrishna especially was “the suffering and transformation at the time of his death. My instinct—and I don’t know that I am right about this—is that the great men and women, the people who are beyond. . . are not ordinary people. Through their life and work they have risen way, way beyond what most of us can be. So their death is different. It is a powerful teaching.” So here at last we got a clue as to what the work was about. To this, Kusumita added that, besides introducing Sri Ramakrishna, she wanted to introduce “Kali, a form of the Mother.”

### **Kali at the Center of the Performance**

Those of us who were present at the performance were not aware of these comments as they were being made, of course; but as the Pacific Symphony and mixed Pacific Chorale of about two hundred voices, with Carl St. Clair conducting, launched into the *Prologue* from the poem by Kamalakanta, “Who is this woman who lights the field of battle? Her body gleams darker than even the darkest storm-cloud . . .” there could be no doubt whatsoever that Mother Kali was at the center of the performance. Through a strong, rhythmic beat as if Kali were dancing right there in Orange County, “shaking the universe” and laughing through the sounds of brass and woodwind, the voices sounded like the bees buzzing in her hair, zigging rapidly in one direction and then zagging in another. A very stirring and uncompromising beginning! There was total silence when this rousing piece came to an end.

Four more parts followed, with very exciting orchestration. These dealt with some of the more powerful experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, such as “God can be seen. One can talk to Him, as I am talking to you . . .” A quieter mood with throbbing deep strings and syncopated keyboard ushers in the men’s voices: “The image was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness . . .” Joined by the women, the litany proceeds to its climax, sung more slowly and quietly and ecstatically: “Whatever I saw, I worshipped. Men, animals and other living beings—all pure Consciousness.” This is just a taste of the very, very direct and powerful experiences given voice in this work.

As we had seen the libretto about two weeks before the performance, I was more or less aware of what was coming, but still quite unprepared for the actual music. We have become so used to sweet Indian *bhajans* (devotional songs) and thinking of Sri Ramakrishna as a lovable eccentric, that the strong, rhythmic, masculine quality of the music was quite an awakening experience. My own feeling was that Philip Glass’s own intense involvement in the truths being presented conveyed itself in the thrilling music, which was washing over us like a tsunami. In addition, the convention of having a mixed choir sing Sri

Ramakrishna's lines struck me as quite wonderful, as Sri Ramakrishna himself would indicate that he had completely transcended gender.

Other parts of the work dealt with dialog between Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, sung by the soprano Cynthia Haymon-Coleman, in which he urges her to take care of the suffering world. When she objects, "I am a woman, what can I do?" he insists that that she must do the work and that she will find "That He who resides within your heart resides in the hearts of all others as well." This part concludes with Sarada Devi's own last words, "Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger. The whole world is your own."

### **Sri Ramakrishna's Illness and Death**

The remainder of the thirty-minute work is a description of Sri Ramakrishna's illness and death, described mostly by M, sung by Christòpheren Nomura, with interjections from Dr. Sarkar, sung by Nathan Berg, bass-baritone. Here the orchestration is more subdued and repetitive, while the singing is largely recitative, though extremely moving, if only because of the pathetic image of the Master dying of such a terrible disease. I noted that the libretto includes the passage where M, educated by the Christian British, asks himself, "Is this another crucifixion, the sacrificing of the body for the sake of the devotees?" This gives us a direct link to the thinking of the composer in his selection of the title for the work.

M describes Ramakrishna's farewell to Narendranath and then how he lay down for the last time. Then comes a building crescendo of strings, percussion, piano, and brass leading up to M's description of Ramakrishna's final samadhi. The orchestral part here began to assume some of the heavier rhythmic motifs associated with Kali, as Sri Ramakrishna cries out her name as he passes into final ecstasy.

The Epilogue which concludes the work is a song by Girish Ghosh:

O Mother, who has offered these red hibiscus flowers at Your feet?  
I beg of You, O Mother, place one or two upon my head.  
Then I shall cry aloud to You, "O Mother, Mother!"  
And I shall dance around You and clap my hands for joy,  
And You will look at me and laugh, and tie the flowers in my hair.

This lyrical piece, repeated several times, created an atmosphere of the most intense childlike joy and happiness. Then came minor chords in decrescendo, as the chorus twice intoned, "Om, Om," fading into a silence that was perhaps even more thrilling than the music itself. The conductor, orchestra, choir and audience remained totally still for what seemed like an eternity, then applause burst forth like waves on the shore. Philip Glass, the symphony, chorale and soloists received a standing ovation and six curtain calls.

It is, of course, not possible to give a comprehensive explanation for this rapturous reception of the piece. One reason might well have been its

appreciation of an apparent evolution in the work of Philip Glass. In the words of Timothy Mangan, the reviewer for the *Orange County Register* on Monday, September 18th, “The subject matter . . . seems to have genuinely inspired and revived the composer out of his old formulas to write something fresh.”

### **Impact of the Work**

For those of us who are devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, the big question is: Was the audience’s enthusiasm related in any way to the impact of the transcendental message that was being conveyed through the work? It is too soon to say just how much of Sri Ramakrishna’s message permeated the minds of the audience, but we can get some indication from the comments of Timothy Mangan, who described the work as a “winner.” “It is direct, moving . . . Ramakrishna speaks through the choir, giving his words and wisdom an extra-human quality. The words of his wife and devotees are given to solo singers, thus creating a fascinating dialog between the terrestrial and the celestial.”

More direct expressions of the work’s impact on at least the performers emerged after the performance. Cynthia Haymon-Coleman, the soloist who sang the part of Sarada Devi, told some of our monks that singing the role had affected her deeply, and she inquired where she could find out more about Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. Ms. Vina Williams, a soprano with the Pacific Chorale, sent a message to Philip Glass’s website on September 30, 2006, saying, “This morning I listened to the live recording twice. While I had gradually fallen in love with this work while rehearsing it, I was moved almost to tears (certainly put into a meditative state) as I listened to the performance. This is a deeply spiritual work which I hope will find its place long-term in the classical repertoire. Thank you, thank you, for transporting me to the Divine through this beautiful piece!”

We learned from Philip Glass himself that he plans to enlarge the work to as long as eighty minutes, to be performed again in Orange County, probably in a couple of years. For the moment, we feel he has indeed cut through thick layers of ice in the American scene, using his already formidable reputation, but also his obvious love of Sri Ramakrishna and all that the latter represented.

Perhaps to return us to empirical reality, the *Los Angeles Times* later reported a minor fracas that broke out on the way the broadcasting of the performances had been handled. Although broadcast live on KMZT, it was not streamed on the Internet, as the *Los Angeles Times* reviewer said, “for the rest of the world.” As a rather amusing and perhaps meaningful commentary, he added: “Greedy orchestra musicians, heedless of Ramakrishna’s message, wouldn’t permit it.” Apparently, an impression had been made!

The work will be performed in Nashville, Tennessee at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center from February 15 to 17, 2007, by the Nashville Symphony, co-commissioners of the piece. □

# *Composing an Oratorio on Sri Ramakrishna*

**John Schlenck**

The recent premiere of Philip Glass's *The Passion of Ramakrishna* in Orange County, California, to an enthusiastic audience and enthusiastic reviews, has generated a lot of interest in the Vedanta community in the United States. Perhaps most people had never thought about presenting Ramakrishna's life and teachings to a concert audience. Music, of course, has been an important vehicle for communicating spiritual ideals and for generating religious devotion for thousands of years. In the West, religious music has been part of the concert repertory, as distinct from liturgical use in churches, for about 300 years. At the beginning there was some resistance to the idea. When Handel's *Messiah* (1738) was first performed, in Dublin and then in London, some people were shocked at the idea of presenting the holy life of Jesus in a public theater. Our attitudes have changed since then. The question now, when the worldview of concertgoers is more secular, is whether a concert audience will be interested in new music with a spiritual theme. If the Glass premiere is any indication, the answer is a resounding "yes."

In India and in the West, music in the Ramakrishna Vedanta tradition has usually been in the form of individual devotional songs or sets of hymns such as the Arati hymns and Ram-Nam. Is there any advantage in creating longer, more complex works for non-liturgical use?

## **The Advantage of Longer Compositions**

Indirectly, an answer can be found in stage plays. Longer works enable more extended meditation on the part of performers and audience and also allow scope for psychological development through the telling of a story with character development. Dramas on religious themes are an ancient tradition. Classical Greek tragedies, which had liturgical roots, enabled an audience to meditate profoundly on the human condition and to experience "catharsis" or purification of the emotions. Ramakrishna participated in folk religious dramas as a child, and later on very much appreciated the religious plays of his disciple, Girish Ghosh.

Singing may be regarded as a kind of heightened speech, intensifying the emotional content of the spoken word. Operas are dramas in which most or all of the text is sung. Parallel to opera, there developed in Europe during the Baroque period (c. 1600-1750) extended vocal compositions with dramatic content but without stage action. These are known as cantatas (from *cantare*, to sing) and oratorios (term derived from musical services in the Church of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Rome). The two forms are similar, except that oratorios are longer, usually more than one hour. The greatest examples of this form are the religious cantatas, oratorios and Passions (referring to the Passion, or final suffering, of Jesus) of J.S. Bach and the oratorios of G.F. Handel.

How does a composer go about creating an extended work with a spiritual theme? Let us suppose that a composer wanted to celebrate Ramakrishna's life and teaching through an extended composition of this type. Where would he start?

### **What Does the Composer Want to Communicate?**

First, he would decide what he wanted to communicate. In the case of Philip Glass, he wanted to compose something on the death of a great person. Having read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* several times over a period of forty years, he was much drawn to Ramakrishna and decided to compose something about his last illness and death. (Hence the title, *The Passion of Ramakrishna*.) He found an enthusiastic collaborator in Kusumita Pederson, who had also been moved and influenced by the Ramakrishna *Gospel*.

My own attempt along these lines began with the need for music for a special occasion. The Vedanta Society of New York, like some other Vedanta Societies in America, celebrates an annual Swami Vivekananda July 4<sup>th</sup> Festival. As music director of the Society, I have the responsibility of getting together a mostly musical program for the occasion. In early 1987 I began work on a composition that would be performed at that year's festival. Having already composed extended works on Vivekananda, on the Upanishads and Shankara, and on the Bhagavad Gita, I chose the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as my theme. Performing resources were limited to an amateur choir with synthesizer accompaniment.

One thing that is emphasized in Vedanta is principle before person. It is above all the transpersonal ideal that we are striving toward. That ideal is expressed through the lives of saints and prophets, and we derive great inspiration from their lives; but we are to realize the ideal ourselves, or, as Vivekananda said, bring the Upanishads out of ourselves.

### **The Breadth of Ramakrishna's Teachings**

Keeping in mind "principle before person," I decided to begin with the main teachings of Ramakrishna as I understood them. It seemed appropriate to open with the Vedic dictum, *ekam sat vipraa bahudhaa vadanti*: Truth is One; sages call it by various names. Since my first trip to India in 1971 I had been impressed by the rhythmic vigor of Vedic chanting. I wanted to set the Sanskrit words in that style. These would form a foundation, and the English translation of the words would be sung in counterpoint above the Sanskrit chant. What was the next step? This foundational chant moved naturally into the different names of God in the various traditions. Then, after some time, the chanting of the names of God became a joyous dance, returning at the end to a final ecstatic utterance of the Vedic verse.

To further illustrate the catholicity of Ramakrishna's teaching, I decided to use next the common prayers of five major religions, in their traditional languages and in English. From a rabbi friend I got the principal Jewish prayer in Hebrew. "Hear, O Israel, the Eternal is our God; the Eternal is One." This "One" (*echad* in Hebrew) resonated nicely with *ekam*—"one" in Sanskrit. One of my friends had Muslim co-workers in his office. He was able to tape-record one of them saying the first two verses of the Koran in Arabic; these are recited five times daily by observant Muslims. The Buddhist "buddham sharanam gacchaami" (I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha) I already knew, as I did the Christian "Our Father," and I had memorized the Gayatri Mantra years earlier in order to gain entrance to a temple associated with Ramakrishna's birth. So I presented these five prayers separately and then merged them into a composite prayer. As this prayer ends, I introduced as a violin obbligato part of the melody of the first of the Ramakrishna vesper hymns (*khandana bhava bandhana*). This became a signature theme which would appear now and then in the succeeding sections.

### Depth and Intensity

Having presented Ramakrishna's breadth of vision, I wanted to present his depth and intensity: the goal of human life is to realize God, to be spiritually transformed. The third movement presents universal teachings of truth, freedom and compassion using quotations from different scriptures, such as Jesus's "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and the Koranic verse, "Wherever you turn, there is Allah's countenance." The movement ends with the Sanskrit verse from the Gita, "Who sees the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self..." These first three movements form a musical unit, *The Universal Gospel*. This excerpt was later performed separately as part of the New York Vedanta Society's centenary celebrations.

The fourth movement is a lively hymn to the prophets of all traditions, beginning with the Latin *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The words are then sung in English, followed by teachings from the Gospel of John. St. John had intended the words to be about Christ, but they seem equally appropriate for other prophets and saviors. The movement is rounded out by a recurring refrain: "Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Chaitanya, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Shankara, Ramakrishna."

With the fifth movement, the story of Ramakrishna's life begins. First is a nativity hymn in the style of a Christmas carol. Latin, Hebrew, Bengali and Sanskrit words are interspersed with English, celebrating the universal significance of Ramakrishna's advent.

The sixth movement presents various incidents in Ramakrishna's childhood, beginning with the love and joy all the villagers experience in his company, continuing through his first ecstasy, the death of his father, his companionship

with holy men, his breaking of caste rules through acceptance of alms from his godmother, Dhani Kumarni, his aversion to study, etc., and ending with his mother's reluctant agreement to his going to Kolkata to live with his older brother.

### **Spiritual Yearning and the First Vision**

The seventh and longest movement describes Ramakrishna's spiritual yearning and his first vision of the Divine Mother. It takes place in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. Deep bells convey the sense of awe pervading the temple and are used later to invoke the presence of Kali. The chorus, in a spoken chant reflecting his thoughts, asks, "Is God Real, or is She only a stone image?" Ramakrishna sings a song of Ramprasad. Here I used the original Ramprasad tune with an English translation of the words. The mood gradually intensifies, with quotations of yearning from Muslim saint Rabi'a, the Hebrew Bible and Ramakrishna's own words. A rhythmic section, with the chorus chanting in Sanskrit underneath and Ramakrishna crying with increasing yearning, builds to a high pitch of intensity, then breaks off, as Ramakrishna speaks the words, "Shall I never realize Her?" Then he sees the sword of Kali and is about to end his life, when waves of light engulf him in his first vision. Waves of light are represented by a repeated pattern in the upper organ register and underneath the first full statement of the *khandana* theme. The end of the movement is serene: his thirst for realization is quenched and he is filled with bliss.

This was as far as I got in 1987, and it concludes Part I. It was performed at our July 4<sup>th</sup> Festival that year. I always thought I would continue the oratorio to cover Ramakrishna's entire life, but for many years the work lay untouched, largely because of uncertainty about how to proceed with the text. Finally, in 2003, I decided to take courage in both hands to try to continue. Ideas began to come.

Part Two (the eighth movement) begins with the temple staff scandalized at Ramakrishna's unorthodox behavior. Ramakrishna, not yet certain of himself, prays to the Divine Mother to grant him her continuous vision. The temple staff protests to Mathur Babu, the temple manager; but Mathur, seeing Ramakrishna at worship, senses his greatness and rejoices that the Deity is "awakened"—that is, tangibly present. He warns the staff not to interfere.

### **Marriage and Spiritual Practice**

Movement nine begins with Ramakrishna's mother and brother anxious at reports of his madness. They decide to bring him back to his village, hoping to restore his sanity. They find that he is not insane but has no interest in the world. So they decide that perhaps marriage will bring his mind down. Their efforts to



find a bride are unsuccessful, but Ramakrishna himself tells them where to look for the bride he is destined to wed.

The tenth movement brings back the nativity hymn music, this time celebrating the nativity of Holy Mother Sarada and her marriage to Ramakrishna.

Movements 11 through 14 describe Ramakrishna's various spiritual practices, beginning with Tantra, proceeding through devotional paths, the realization of Brahman through Vedanta, and finally going beyond his own tradition into Islam and Christianity. Here I brought back the chanting of the first two verses of the Koran and the Our Father. At the end of his spiritual practices, Ramakrishna realizes that all paths lead to the same goal. The opening chant, *ekam sat. . . Truth Is One. . .* returns and again goes into an ecstatic dance. Themes from the third movement (the Goal is to realize God) are also echoed. Ramakrishna has now realized these truths in his own life. This movement, and Part Two, end with a return of the Sanskrit verse from the Gita, "Seeing the Self in all beings..."

Part Three begins with Sarada in her village. She and her mother are pitied by the village women because Sarada is married to a madman. Instead of feeling sorry for herself, Sarada wants to go to Kolkata to comfort and serve her husband. But how can she go alone? Her father agrees to go with her. On the way she becomes sick and has a vision of the Divine Mother assuring her that she will recover and reach her destination. Ramakrishna receives her lovingly, but asks if she wants to drag his mind down to ordinary life. She replies that she only wants to help him in his chosen path. He worships her as an embodiment of the Divine Mother, and prays that her latent divinity be awakened for the good of all. During this movement earlier themes, of the marriage music and of Tantra practice, are brought back.

### **The Disciples Come**

In the next (16th) movement, Ramakrishna yearns for the coming of his disciples. They do come and Ramakrishna joyously shares with them his love and wisdom. Some teachings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are presented here.

In the 17th movement, the young disciples come, those who will later become monks and apostles of their master. Most of the movement is about Narendra and the training given to him by Ramakrishna.

The 18th movement, "Three Disciples," tells of the Master's training of Rakhal, who will become Brahmananda, head of the Order founded in his master's name; Gauri Ma, who will devote her life to the service of women; and M., who will bring forth a new Veda, "his Master's gospel of harmony among religions and God-union for all people." With this, themes of *The Universal Gospel* are reprised.

## Passing the Torch

The 19th and final movement is a somber meditation on Ramakrishna's last illness, the passing of his torch to Sarada and Narendra, and his death. The oratorio concludes with a brief, serene recapitulation of the universal truths he embodied and a final salutation to him.

The composition was completed in November 2005 and recorded the following spring in New York with seventeen singers and eight instrumentalists. It has been a richly rewarding experience for me to meditate on Ramakrishna's sublime life and teachings and to try to convey them through music.

*[The recording will be released on November 30, 2006 on Vedanta West Communications' music label, Vedantic Arts Recordings. Information about ordering the recording is given on the enclosed slip. It may also be ordered online at [www.vedantawest.org](http://www.vedantawest.org) and from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).]*

## Book Review

### **It's a Meaningful Life—It Just Takes Practice**

**Bo Lozoff**

**Viking, New York**

**288 pp. Hardcover Appendices Index \$23.95 2000**

Bo and Sita Lozoff are in the Hanuman Tradition from Neem Karoli Baba and began their spiritual practice/service by taking music and meditation into prisons. They now have a fairly extensive property outside Durham, NC, with several buildings (built by Bo himself) and gardens, where a few people live and still more can stay for a while. Bo has written several books and given lectures around the world. Chicago Theological gave him an honorary doctorate, he received the Temple Award for Creative Altruism, and Utne Reader named him one of America's 100 Spiritual Visionaries. And furthermore, I know him (slightly, from visiting the place) and can say that he's a very nice person, friendly, good-humored, dedicated (obviously), devoted to his family and endlessly generous. A good guy. Go there if you get a chance. It's a kind of monastery/retreat house run by a family.

Vedantists will appreciate the earnestness with which Bo Lozoff insists on regular spiritual practice. Better to be short but regular, over a long period of time—like years. He gives very explicit and detailed instructions in this book for various practice methods. For instance: Sit as steady and immovable as a mountain. Be with the continuously flowing breeze of your breath. Outside disturbances and distractions have no effect on the stability of the mountain or

the flowing of the wind. Feel the strength and security of your reality. Persist. Be patient. There is nothing to do and nothing to stop doing. Great, isn't it? Enjoy it. Do it every day at the time and for the time you committed yourself to doing. Regardless. This is the way he starts people off, and the way this book talks to you.

He tells personal experiences to encourage others. A terrible automobile accident tore up his whole body when he was eighteen. He says he's held together still by wire and staples. But the experience was transforming. He could have gone into bitterness, but "by some unseen grace" he "softened into humility rather than hardening into defeat," a difference he calls "one of the most important life lessons." It seems wrong to call the matter "an accident," because he was now "on a journey to a meaningful life." [73-75]

He tells about the meeting he and his wife had with the Dalai Lama, who had invited them to come tell him about their work with prisoners (His Holiness contributed a foreword to this book). Bo looks at the Dalai Lama and thinks, How can he do all this? Keep his mind, give his heart, not give up? Answer: He's "full-time. He never stops" being who he really is in the real world full of other realities. He and other saints can go into a filling station "and see a Precious Child of God taking their Divine Credit Card for the Sacred Gas, and they don't hide it!" They know they are living in Love, and so is the gas station attendant, so it's in Love that they meet each other. Where else is there to be? [109]

Bo reminds us that "spirituality is not optional." We all have to do it somehow, sooner or later, and we can, we can do even hard things. He recommends putting muscle and teeth into our practice by making vows (small enough that we can keep them, but they have to be kept without excuse).

### **A Spirituality for Living in the World**

After a hundred pages on sitting, breathing, mantram and prayer, virtue and perception, he turns to community service. His is a spirituality for living in the world, with spouse and children, elderly parents, people who share your work, people whom you serve, people whom you admire and learn from, people whom you advise and guide, even organizations and institutions, and a world of things, which he also treats with respect: starting with Earth, then buildings, machines, food, clothing, hi-tech, the Internet, the world that is and the world to come. And he urges the rest of us: Hang in there with the rest of the saints. It's everybody's vocation, and it all gets back to Kindness. (Hence their Human Kindness Foundation.) Don't think you can't, and don't give up. You can be as holy as anybody else. It just takes faithful practice.

There's a lot of helpful information in the back of the book: little descriptive paragraphs on other holy people, resources in various media-books, newsletters, audiotapes, videotapes, websites, lists of ways to do community service. Their

own materials and some others can be found in Human Kindness Foundation Catalog, P.O. Box 2900, Durham, NC 27715. Phone (919) 304-2220. Website [www.humankindness.org](http://www.humankindness.org).

I don't want to fail to mention the unusual way this book is bound. The hardcover is bound with a slick paper photographic close-up of leaves in shades of green, by the photographer Shinichi Eguchi @ Photonica, and covered by a jacket in heavy translucent plastic, on which the print material is carried. Pleasing. Jack Kornfield, Joan Halifax, Vicki Robin, and Rami Shapiro all recommend this book, and so do I.

—Beatrice Bruteau

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