

Editorial

Is Scripture to Blame?

One issue that arises from the terrible events of September 11 is the use of scripture to justify violent aggression and the taking of innocent lives. Christians have a saying that the Devil can quote scripture for his own ends. Sri Ramakrishna said, “Books—I mean the scriptures—contain a mixture of sand and sugar. The *sadhu* (holy person) takes the sugar, leaving aside the sand. He takes only the essence.”

There are two relevant ideas here. First, taking the Devil to mean our own unspiritual thoughts and feelings, individual or group, when we use scripture as a guide to action we must examine our motives. Are we trying, as Prophet Mohammed urges us, to “be free from malice, from morning till night, from night till morning?” Second, some parts of scripture are more valuable than others. Will even the most literal-minded Christian claim that “the begats” (long lists of generational succession) are as important as the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount or Corinthians 1:13? Will even the most orthodox Hindu say that the Bhagavad Gita is no more important than any other part of the Mahabharata?

The American College Dictionary defines religion primarily as “the quest for the values of the ideal life, involving three phases: the ideal, the practices for attaining the values of the ideal, and the theology or worldview relating the quest to the environing universe.” When people misuse scripture to justify acting out their hatred, resentment or lust for power, the result is toxic—to the victim, to the perpetrator, and to the religion professed. Why has religion, historically, been involved in so much bloodshed and oppression? Because its outer expression through scripture and tradition has been used by the evil tendencies within us to justify even the most horrible actions.

From one standpoint, religion—spiritual values clothed in sometimes rough cultural garments—can be seen as a powerful tool. Like science or art, this tool can be used either to uplift and ennoble or to degrade and pervert. Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj) once said that there is no religion that cannot be perverted. To ensure that we use religion for our own good and for the good of others, we must have some way to discriminate between its core spiritual values and practices and its surrounding time- and culture-bound expressions.

How do we do this? How can we be sure we are using the power of religion for good? To answer these questions it is useful to keep three things in mind.

First, we need to appreciate the great power in our hands. Religions give us total worldviews that make sense of our existential suffering and weakness.

These worldviews are expressed through myths, images and resonant accounts of great lives and events. Scriptures also convey spiritual values in historical-cum-mythical narratives that people identify with powerfully. Take, for example, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt or the accounts of the early Christian and Muslim communities overcoming persecution and emerging triumphant. Identification with these narratives enables individuals and communities to perform almost superhuman feats of courage, endurance and sacrifice. Unfortunately, they also give us a very graphic us-versus-them view of the world which easily overshadows more abstract teachings of universal love and the divine presence in all people.

Second, there are aspects of each religion, embodied in its scripture, that can be interpreted as encouraging offensive and sometimes seriously hurtful behavior. Without going into details, it seems fair to suggest that in Christianity some particular dangers are anti-Semitism and proselytization; in Islam, war against infidels and a God-given right to rule over non-Muslims, even if tolerantly; in Hinduism and Buddhism, hard-heartedness due to a selfish interpretation of karma—"Their suffering is their own fault and no concern of ours"; in Vedanta, pride that we have the superior understanding and so include or subsume all other religions.

Third, we should consider the place of religion's outer garment. Clothing can be a good thing. Ramakrishna taught that we have to begin where we are, in our own time and culture and the nature of our own minds. Clothing is not the same thing as sand, which must be avoided. Each of us needs a path, a particular worldview, particular concepts and images that are helpful to our growth. But we must remember that the path is not the goal. The great teachers give a maximum of kernel and a minimum of husk, but even they cannot dispense with husk altogether. They have to communicate with people at a particular time and place. But the husk must change with time and culture, or at least be reinterpreted to be relevant to changing circumstances. While we cannot altogether dispense with the garment, we must be aware of its limitations and dangers.

Finally, what is the sugar, the essence of religion? What is it that all the great mystics teach in common? Swami Vivekananda said that if all religious teachings were lost except Jesus' one saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," that alone would be enough to save humanity. To this let us add Holy Mother's last message: "No one is a stranger, my child. This whole world is your own." If we try to regard all other persons as our own, and strive continually to gain purity of heart, so that we may realize God or Truth, we at least stand a much better chance of achieving spiritual fulfillment, of not doing violence to ourselves and others, and of not dishonoring our religions.

—John Schlenck

The Scandal of Exclusivism

Beatrice Bruteau

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The great idea that Pentecost represents is all too often contradicted by the practices of those who celebrate it. At Pentecost, when the Spirit of God spoke—and still speaks—everyone, from whatever nation, could hear the universal message, each in that person's own familiar language (Acts 2. 7-11). The revolutionary idea behind the feast is that there is no limit to the loving gift by which the Divine Life is poured out for all.

But how is this great idea celebrated? Special groups gather, segregated from one another by their allegiances to particular views and practices. They engage in ceremonies representing the great idea, but they take great care not to permit others to participate fully in them. Are not the various communions, both large and small, implicitly saying that the reason why other believers cannot be admitted is because there is only one true religion—ours—and these others do not belong?

Who is My Neighbor?

Surely the great ideas which celebrate the unity of the human race, an expansion of the notion of what constitutes one's neighbor, and the need for universal sisterhood and brotherhood, were not promulgated in order that they might become the foundation for yet another set of sects that will divide humanity. They were not proposed to justify the institution of new exclusive groupings but were aimed at exploding exclusivism. To make these ideas the unique possession of a particular tradition, over against all other traditions, is to vitiate the very core of their message. This is a common mistake, one often repeated in human history: An inspired Prophet arises who preaches universal friendship and a way of salvation readily available to all. In a very short time, the Prophet's followers turn attention away from the content of the preaching in order to exalt the Prophet as a person. This is the first step.

Next, the inspired words of the Teacher are enshrined in documents that acquire legal status, in songs, customs, costumes, and shrines, many of them stressing the exclusivism of the group. Eventually, the devotees set up an organization, ostensibly to preserve the great ideas of the original Prophet, but more narrowly concerned with promoting the claim that it alone has the proper understanding of the message. The focus is then less on the substance

of the Prophet's teaching and more on propositions *about* the Teacher and the Institution's mandate to be the unique spokesperson for the Teacher.

Finally, within the community, the machinery of the organization is centralized in the hands of a few who have long since removed from center stage the application in practice of the Prophet's inspired ideas. Almost from the beginning great stress is laid upon the distinction between those who belong and are enlightened and saved and those who do not belong and are lost. Entrance into the community is contingent upon submission to the doctrines, practices and authority structure of the community.

Schism

Before long, disputes arise over the fine points of doctrinal interpretation, over the right to membership, and over the question of who has the authority to define doctrine and qualifications for membership. At about this point in the development of the movement the politics of 'us against them' completely overshadows the vision of the founding Prophet and the content of the original message. The community then splinters into sects that are all the more hostile toward one another by the very fact that what separates them may be, from the point of view of the external observer, all but indiscernible, though for the adherents these differences are of the greatest moment.

Does anyone think the kind of exclusivism described above is a peculiarly Christian phenomenon? Far from it! All one has to do is read the history of the divisions within Islam, from the inbred hostility between the Shia sect and the Sunni majority to that between Islamic orthodoxy and the Sufi movement, not to mention the systematic persecution of the Baha'is in Iran. As for Hinduism with its profession of openness to all faiths: let a true seeker, for instance a Westerner who has taken *sannyasa* (final monastic vows), try to enter the more sacred Hindu temples, and he will soon learn that a foreigner is not welcome regardless of the goodwill such a visit might carry with it. And, of course, it goes without saying that the institution of the caste system in India, while it is a larger social matter, is backed by religious taboos that are an embarrassment to the more noble side of high Hinduism.

Would the founding Teacher of the Christian faith wish to exclude from his Holy Communion people of different denominations at the Last Supper, even those who are firm believers in the meaning of his action and who seek in their personal lives to live according to the teachings of Jesus? Is that what he wanted? This exclusivism is so hurtful that one is tempted to say that those who practice closed communion by refusing to share the Table with those they consider not to have 'valid' sacraments have already invalidated their own sacrament; for their practice denies the unlimited love which is the central meaning of the Eucharist.

The supreme irony of the situation comes full circle when members of one or other of the mutually exclusive denominations recognize fully that the Teacher's original intention has been ignored but still remain obedient to their particular ecclesiastical authority, rather than to the mind of Jesus himself. What we need are those who can hear the voice of the Teacher and arise from their graves to the authentic life contained in the original message. [Jn. 5:25]

The Importance of Diversity

The same message has been preached many times and there have been many Preachers. Most of them suffered the fate outlined above. Maybe that is why more of them keep coming. There is nothing wrong with many Preachers coming, nothing wrong with their putting the great ideas in different forms and languages, using different approaches to try to awaken people. The Reality itself cannot be captured in any finite language or form, so it is entirely proper to use many different pointers to indicate It. Diversity in itself is enriching, stimulating, productive of evolutionary advance. Our mistake lies in not seeing the correct, enlivening relation of diversity to unity. We tend to gather into small clumps of unity inside which diversity is severely limited, and to accent the separation of one unified clump from others. We might say that we have it exactly backwards. What we need is a vision of overall unity (instead of overall diversity) within which there is a celebration of diversity (instead of a suppression of it). Swami Vivekananda writing on 'Universal Religion' declares:

You cannot make all conform to the same ideas: that is a fact, and I thank God that it is so. I am not against any sect. I am glad that sects exist, and I only wish they may go on multiplying more and more. Why? Simply because of this: If you and I and all who are present here were to think exactly the same thoughts, there would be no thoughts for us to think. . . . When religions are dead, there will be no more sects. . . . But so long as mankind thinks, there will be sects. Variation is the sign of life, and it must be there. I pray that they may multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings, and each one will have his own method, his individual method of thought in religion. ¹

These variations are not contradictions of one another; they are merely different ways of getting at the same thing. That is why they are to be welcomed and celebrated and nurtured. They should be encouraged rather than suppressed, for who knows what great new insight and revelation may arise from one of these variants? Something from which we can all benefit.

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 2*, 12th edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971), pp 363-364.

Meanwhile, let all the variants live within the same family. How can we dare to turn any from our door, as though we alone had the sole truth in our particular variation on the great theme? Especially if the great theme itself calls for universality and inclusion of all in the same body. But we persist in claiming that the desired universality and inclusion may be had only on the terms laid down in our particular variation.

The alternative view to this territorial exclusivism is a fruitful inclusivism. Instead of regarding the variants as enemies who contradict one another, may we not see them as friends and relations who complete one another? Swami Vivekananda says:

Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must be added to ideals. And this is the march of humanity. . . Now, there is a meaning, certainly, to this; . . . had it been the will of an All-wise and All-merciful Creator that one of these religions should exist and the rest should die, it would have become a fact long, long ago. If it were a fact that only one of these religions is true and all the rest are false, by this time it would have covered the whole ground. But this is not so; not one has gained all the ground.²

Breakthrough Realizations of the Founders

Some have the mistaken idea that in order to protect the honor and glory of their religion and its sacred persons, it is necessary to put all others under their feet; that one must deny that others have anything to say that one's own belief system has not said better. But all this defensiveness is unnecessary and dissonant when compared with the tremendous breakthrough realizations and revelations of the holy Founders themselves. All those who have *seen* easily recognize all others who have also *seen* as 'other selves,' as their own heart and soul in another dress. They do not exclude one another, or even vie among themselves as to who shall include all the others as 'special cases' of that one's most comprehensive salvation. They are too secure in truth and reality to descend to such nonsense. It is only we petty people, eager to establish islands of in-groups belonging to ourselves, who take possession of the icons of the Founders, of the Preachers of the Universal Family, and make them into idols around which to rally while we exclude those who have adopted other icons.

2. Op. Cit., pp. 365, 362.

What is causing this, fundamentally, is the notion that we cannot know who we are, cannot secure ourselves in being, unless we can distinguish ourselves from others. The contrast is what gives us a sense of clarity, of outline, of form, or definition, and we identify that with reality. This is the mistake that the Preachers and Prophets, the great Founders, have seen through. It is not necessary to exclude others in order to establish oneself. Quite the contrary: one's true self is established only by *including* all and by turning oneself inside out for the sake of others. This is the mystical realization, and it is also the way of rationality.

Openness to the Other

Rationality seeks unity in truth, some single vision which will make sense of everything. To some extent the exclusivism of the sects is motivated by this ideal. But they close the door too soon, mistaking the nature of unity, and they reckon without understanding the nature of finite, evolving rationality itself. "The highest perfection of human reason," as Richard H. Jones points out, "is radical openness to whatever in its initial appearance may seem to be absolutely other." Applying this to the instance of religious traditions, it may be said that:

A tradition is rational to the extent that it is open to the influences of other traditions. While we always operate from within a particular tradition, it does not follow that we are necessarily imprisoned within its particular perspective. The rationality of any tradition may be defined, at least in part, by the ability of that tradition to *transcend its own particularity*. . . Human reason is a creative and self-transcending drive towards *greater inclusiveness*. (Italics added.)

Self-transcending, or self-emptying, is the great key preached by the world religions. If we believe this, we must take care to practice it with regard to the particularity of our tradition itself. We cannot be faithful to our tradition unless we transcend its particularity and enlarge it to include more and more other traditions. This is what needs to be seen: faithfulness precisely requires forsaking exclusivism and embracing ever-expanding inclusivism, the kind of inclusivism that accepts and rejoices in the other, not by converting the other into our particularity but by delighting in and learning from the other's particularity, and all the time seeing that these particularities are but complementary variations on one great theme, epitomized in the universal preaching that we all belong to a single family. As Swami Vivekananda says:

Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy . . . Toleration means that I think you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are

allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all. . . Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? . . . We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future.³ □

Self

Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi

[This chapter from The Work of the Kabbalist is reprinted by permission of the publisher, Red Wheel/Weiser LLC.]

It is the aim of all mystics to know The Holy One. In Kabbalah this is a primal objective. Such an experience often places the mystic apart from the main orthodox body of opinion and custom, because having tasted the reality of the Divine, he finds it difficult to be encumbered by ritual actions, devotional forms, or indeed even metaphysical ideas. However, while consciousness of God is possible without these modes, few mystics dispense with them, because they are necessary to help comprehend and express the experience to themselves and others in their tradition. This is why Kabbalah operates within the context of Judaism, although the degree of identification with time-honored practices varies according to period, place and individual inclination. This fact may be difficult for the conventionally minded to accept, but one must differentiate between following ancient custom for its own sake and worshipping God.

The Difference Is Only in Method

The life and work of the Kabbalist set out in this book can be practiced deep within the orthodoxy or on the margin between the religious way and the method of occultism, both of which are part of the traditional Judaism, as the line of Baal Shemie, or Masters of the Names, well illustrates. At the present time there are thousands of seekers of esoteric knowledge who hover somewhere between two apparent extremes. The difference, however, is only in the matter of method, provided the aim is the same. Thus, the unorthodox Kabbalist can have the same spiritual experience as the Hassidic rabbi because

3. Op. cit., pp. 373-4.

they share the same objectives as the mystics of Christianity, Islam and all the other great religious traditions. It cannot be any other way, or the Universal Teaching found everywhere makes no sense, and we have every reason to believe this is not so.

There can be only one pivot to every true and complete Teaching, one focus to all rituals, devotions and contemplations. There is only one reality that the mystic can contact, and that is the Absolute. Now the Name of God is known in every language spoken by the human race. It may be this and it may be that, or it might not be anything that can be named. The Holy One is and is not, is remote and yet at the heart of all. This is the mystery of God.

When the Kabbalist touches and is touched by the Divine, then it is said that he is known by name. The meaning of this is profound when you consider that a name is the acknowledgement of a particular being by themselves or others. To possess a name is to become individual, to be quite separate from others who might be quite similar to oneself. And yet this is another mystery: in this very uniqueness is an intimate solitude that can only be known by that self. This self is a spark of Divine consciousness. It is in this state of isolation because it was divided out from Adam Kadmon so that it might experience separation from the Divine and so be able to look back at its own reflection. Thus each self is a photon of Divine Light removed from its normal habitat in the World of Emanation and embodied in the lower Worlds of Creation, Formation and Action. When an individual comes to know and be known by the Holy One, then something Divine begins to manifest and this dissolves the sense of isolation that many people feel, but know not why. To be known by name is the prelude to acquaintanceship, then love, and eventually union.

God Beholding God

The human self is an atom of Divinity. It is a miniature image containing in its nature the dynamics, structure and consciousness of the Divine SELF that permeates all Existence. Thus as an individual becomes increasingly aware of the mirrored relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, so a human atom's consciousness expands above and below, without and within. In this way, the Divine starts to see Itself in ITSELF. This process of acquaintanceship is the beginning of a long and complex courtship that extends over all the Days of Creation. Gradually every level of Existence is involved and every creature takes part in the process that leads up to the Holy Marriage of God beholding God. However, as said, only mankind, wherever it appears in the universe, can encompass the totality of what is involved, and even then only a few human beings at a time can climb the ladder of consciousness and file through the one place where each person realizes Whose image they are.

Fortunately, such moments are not as rare as imagined, for when sufficient consciousness has been accumulated, then the Divine can manifest in the most unusual settings. For instance, it has not been unknown for Divine consciousness to become present in the consciousness of an individual sitting in a room or walking down the street. There are many cases of this type of experience. Those nearby the person may not be aware of what is going on, but this is because they are not conscious enough to perceive what is Self-evident. The word 'Self-evident' is used because in such an instant only the SELF can be aware of ITSELF and vice versa. This is the ultimate moment of reflection as I AM THAT I AM beholds I AM THAT I AM within the confines of the flesh, soul and spirit. Such a moment is a turning point in anyone's life. After that nothing can be seen in the same way any more.

In Kabbalah, the term *Devekut* meaning 'to cleave unto' is used to describe a state of inward holding and communion with the Divine. This condition is not reserved just for the Sabbath or for the daily cycle of ritual, but is sought and performed in every moment of the day. In some traditions it is called "to be in constant recollection." Others call it "Self-remembering," but we have to remind ourselves Who it is remembering WHOM. Such a realization can change our whole relationship to life and the world at large, for we begin to perceive that the consciousness that looks out of and into our being is the same as that which looks down at us from the frontier of the universe and up from the edge of the atomic world. There is nowhere where God is not, and yet, as the ancient rabbis noted, God is not the world, which is but a reflection.

The mystery of the Immanence and Transcendence of God has puzzled many for centuries, but for those who have experienced the *Shekhinah* or the Divine Presence, there is no problem. I AM THAT I AM is also that which has no Name and is therefore in Kabbalah called both EN SOF, which means 'without End' and EN, which means 'Nothing.' As all these Names are but forms, they themselves are no more than ciphers for human intelligence to grasp. However, when a person moves beyond the range of the senses, the sensitivity of the psyche and the scope of the spirit, then the 'I' of the self encounters the THOU of the Holy One.

Profound and Continuous Dialogue

When this relationship between the Creator and the creature becomes apparent, there emerges between what is in manifestation and that which is beyond, a profound dialogue which is continuous, as long as consciousness is sought. From this conversation is established a connection that many mystics have spoken of, if only by hint, for not a few have been persecuted by the orthodox of their religion who do not know what it means to have such an experience. This is because direct experience is always a threat to a priesthood

that has no real spiritual connection and is concerned only with preserving the social form of a tradition and its own status.

Generally speaking, Kabbalists never speak of these matters to anyone except those who know, and even then such conversations are limited, because it is not possible to describe the indescribable. It has been said that the Holy One enjoys good company and especially yearns for intercourse with human beings, who are the only creatures capable of perceiving the grand design of Existence. This is because they can extend their being both below and above the level they are born into, which gives them a special place and particular access to the Divine. As yet most of the human race is insufficiently evolved to be able to recognize this possibility, and therefore those who have reached the stage where they recognize their potential bear a considerable burden. They must not only seek to communicate with the Divine and assist in the unfolding of the Cosmic Plan, but teach those who follow, as well as aid the millions of people who as yet do not even suspect what the universe is all about.

Returning Down the Ladder to Share What Has Been Received

According to another kabbalistic tradition, the *Shekhinah* is in exile. This goes back to the fall of Adam and Eve, who descended from a state of Grace in the Garden of Yetzirah and put on coats of flesh, which we acquire on being born. The Lord-God having compassion upon us, tradition says, came with mankind into exile in order to be a comfort to those who realize they are imprisoned in matter. However, the aim behind this act of Divine Love was also to assist these sparks of Adam embedded in the elemental world, and help them return to what they were, even before the Garden of Eden. Thus, as an individual comes into the awareness that he or she is not alone, so a hidden radiance awakens and seeks to unite with Itself. This concealed Light illuminates everything about it, although only those with a degree of SELF-awareness may detect it. The effect of this consciousness of SELF upon the Earth is crucial, because there is only a small amount of such knowledge at present on the planet. The implication of this is vast, because it reveals not only the starting point of the Earth's spiritual evolution, but the reason for the third of the four journeys through Existence. Thus, having made contact with the Crown of Creation, an evolving human being must turn back down Jacob's Ladder, in order to impart what has been received. This is vital for the universe, for without everyone's consciousness parts of Existence will remain dark and unknown to Adam Kadmon. The Work of Unification is the concern of the Companions of the Light whatever their earthly tradition might be. In this Labor of Love there is no differentiation, even as there is no difference between the SELF in one human being and another. All is One, say the mystics, and the One is in All. □

Spiritual Ways To Cope With Terrorism

Michael S. Isaacs

In the aftermath of September 11, many question how spiritual awareness can help us deal with such emotional effects as fear, helplessness, confusion, anger, grief, and guilt. This article includes some of my thoughts on the subject. They have given me some measure of comfort. I would like to share them with you.

Realize that this human life is a divine gift that can be taken away in an instant. The spiritual life—called by various names such as Soul, Life Eternal, Immortality, Self, Absolute, Brahman, Father Within, Father-Mother God, Neshima, Buddhahood, or Great Spirit—lives on.

In a human sense, we all experienced a physical death on September 11. We do not “own” human life, but have a God-given lease only. Accordingly a growth in spiritual life can take place if we move toward relying more on spirit than matter. Like the great sages and mystics, we can practice less attachment to the things of this world. We can move more in the direction of Spirit, with its immortal and eternal virtues such as love, compassion, and peace.

Pray and Meditate More

As a way of implementing Spirit, if you pray and meditate, pray and meditate more. Pray for self, victims, survivors, governments, the enemy, and world peace. Pray that “God Bless the World,” not only that “God Bless America.” Do selfless service for neighbor, community, government, and institutions where you see a need and find a way to contribute your unique talents.

Do whatever brings you inner peace (peace being an aspect of the divine) such as yoga, meditation, tai chi, and involvement with nature. For those who are open to practicing deep breathing techniques, this modality can be a very quick route to body calm and inner peace. If you are familiar with yoga breathing (*pranayama*), alternative nostril breathing is a very effective way to balance the physical and nervous systems. Soothing music, and particularly religious and/or spiritual music, is another quick route to calm the mind.

Remove hatred and vengeance from your heart. This does not mean shirking the defense of self or nation, by force if necessary. Righteous anger and duty can be a correct and necessary response to evil. But we need to view evildoers as ignorant of their true nature as children of God—our brothers and sisters, and inherently good. The truth is that we are all one and not

separate from each other. Let us move towards love, forgiveness, and compassion in our hearts.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his essay "Compensation":

There is always some leveling circumstance that puts down the overbearing. . . Though no checks to a new evil appear, the checks exist, and will appear. . . The dice of God are always loaded.

This means that whenever evil arises it is checked and balanced by the rise of good which ultimately defeats it. The American mystic Joel S. Goldsmith, in his 1963 book, *The Contemplative Life*, commented on Emerson's essay:

Think back to Caesar who governed with an iron hand, to Genghis Khan, to Alexander the Great, and we come to more modern days, think of the Czars of Russia, think of Mussolini, Stalin, and Hitler. Call to mind the all-powerful ones who could not be conquered... Think! Go back in history and you will find dozens of other illustrations. . . Even though at the moment there appears to be nothing to stop the onward march of tyranny, of evil in one form or another, these checks appear and become manifest.

There Is More Love than Evil

There is much more love in the world than evil. Indeed, trite as it may sound, "love makes the world go around." Witness the love kindled by Americans and citizens of other nations pouring out loving assistance in response to the tragedy.

The preponderance of love in general is reflected in local free community newspapers. Their columns reflect the truth as to what really happens in every community, which is about care, service, and kindness to others. Over and over again we read about local heroic actions; volunteer groups such as Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Elks; and special interest associations such as boy and girl scout troops, police and firemen benevolent associations, parent-teachers associations, and women's clubs. Contrast the coverage of these benevolent organizations with the excessive and highly disproportionate coverage of the mass media to misbehavior, crime, and tragedy. Highlighting evil events by the mass media may be riveting and may sell more papers, but it is a distorted view of the human condition which is largely about caring and loving acts.

In addition to the love aroused in individuals and nations by evil acts, there is another checking counter-force to evil. That is, the appearance on the scene of great political and religious leaders to stem the tide of danger and fear. In politics, times of major crisis have led to the emergence of the likes of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. In religion, spiritual wayshowers such as Lord Krishna, Buddha, Moses, the

Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Mohammed, Shankara, Ramakrishna, Lao-Tzu, and others have appeared to inspire millions to follow the path of oneness and love of God and man. In the Hindu classic, the Bhagavad Gita (the Song of God) Chapter 4 verses 7 and 8, Lord Krishna says:

Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Arjuna, . . .then I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.

Remember God's Love and Protection

Fear can be contained by bringing to consciousness as often as possible thoughts and feelings assuring us of God's love and protection. Scriptures are rife with examples of protection and safety for those that have an awareness of God's goodness and protection. Examples of this are Daniel, Elijah, Moses, and Joseph in the Bible. Even for those that die, if thoughts are on God at this time, there is peace. So, a religious Jew is to remember at the moment of death the Sh'ma: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

There are beautiful scriptural passages that illustrate the protection, safety, and guidance that can be found through faith in the divine presence. They are in all religions. The ones I cite are due to my particular experience.

In the 23rd psalm:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of death I will fear no evil,
for Thou art with me...

And, in the 91st psalm:

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand,
but it shall not come nigh thee.

Then there is the prayer of protection by the Christian metaphysician and poet James Dillet Freeman. This poem can be brought to mind in times of fear, whether the threat is in the mind or real:

The light of good surrounds me
The love of good enfolds me
The power of good protects me
The presence of good watches over me
Wherever I am, good is.

Additional Techniques

In addition to calling our attention to the divine presence through scripture, affirmations, prayers and poems, here are three techniques to deal with imminent fear and dread. You might find them particularly useful before

and during travel by car, plane, or train or upon entering or being in a high-rise building.

First, divert the mind to the breath. Breathe deeply and/or meditate on its rhythmic quiet, peaceful, and flowing movement. Focusing on the breath in this way can distract the mind from fear in a positive manner.

Second, do grounding imagery. For example, visualize that from your feet are growing giant roots that reach down through the earth to its center. There the roots come into contact with hot lava which contains great energy and power. As you inhale, draw this power up through the roots filling you with stability, courage, and fearlessness. Imagery drawing light into the body can be equally effective.

Third, prior to embarking on a trip or entering a building, pause. Go inward to achieve a sense of communion and inner peace. This can be done by meditation, breathing awareness, prayer, or whatever other method works for you. Then visualize that same inner peace at your place of destination. Make this connection with conviction. Once you arrive safely at your destination, remember back to the time of departure. Remember that same peace that you had felt at point of departure. This tracing will increase your awareness of the oneness of Mind and the connection that buoys and protects when we consciously become aware of it.

In conclusion, in the wake of this tragedy, spiritual truths can comfort us. They can guide, soothe, and help us deal with fear. These truths can be found within us through meditation or other peace inducing techniques. We can find solace in the words of the great religious and spiritual sages and in holy scriptures. □

Swami Vivekananda's Teaching in the West: Yoga as a Science

Sister Gayatriprana

*[A lecture given at the Vivekananda Centre, London, March 31, 2001.
Continued from the previous issue.]*

3. Two Sides of Swami Vivekananda's Message to Be Considered in Discussing Any Theme

If we can get behind the scheme I have just gone through, even provisionally, I would like to go on to my next suggestion: each and every theme can be looked at in two ways: 1. logical and 2. experiential. By *logical* I mean systematic, amenable to being put into words, dealing with things

sequentially and insisting on quantitative validation, what we often loosely refer to as “left brain.” *Experiential*, on the other hand, refers to what we experience non-linearly behind words, that which contains everything all at once and which emphasizes qualitative unity, what we might call “right brain.” I believe that we find both sides in Swami Vivekananda’s work and furthermore, that the logical side is emphasized more in his message to India, while in the West the experiential side is stressed. I will try to illustrate this idea in the next table, in which we see the five themes in the central column, the Indian teachings on the left and the Western on the right. Let us look at how each theme can be thought of as taking two forms:

INDIAN TEACHING	THEME	WESTERN TEACHING
HUMANISTIC VEDANTA	I. HUMANISM	SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY
YOGA AS AN APPLIED SCIENCE	II. YOGA	YOGA AS A PURE SCIENCE
MAYA AS A METHOD OF ACTION	III. MAYA	MAYA AS AN ATTITUDE OF MIND
INVOLUTION	IV. HOLOVOLUTION	EVOLUTION
ALL IS GOD	V. HOLISM	GOD OR REALITY IS ALL THERE IS

With respect to humanism, in India Swami Vivekananda emphasized *humanistic Vedanta*, introducing into the long established and deeply experiential, esoteric tradition of Vedanta the explicit and systematic human perspective which is the very basis of the logical approach outlined above. In the West he took up the prevailing ideal of democracy which emanates from the conviction of the reality and importance of the concrete, human individual, and introduced into it the need to experience Spirit, which transcends all human categories, and to make Spirit the guiding force in all activities of life. In short, a *spiritual democracy*. One might say that these two agendas are mirror images of each other.

Yoga: Applied Science / Pure Science

In the domain of yoga as a science, Swami Vivekananda’s emphasis in India was on a *science of application*, i.e. applying to the crying needs of Indian society the power of the Self, to realize which the whole Indian

tradition had been geared for millennia. In the West, *yoga as a pure science* means an emphasis on working from social concerns such as democracy itself, to the direct experience of Spirit and ultimately setting this process up as a valid and active paradigm for the West. Clearly, these two sides of the theme are directly related to each other. I would suggest that, overall, they fulfill each other.

The theme of maya breaks down, in India, into *maya as a method of action* and in the West to *maya as an attitude of mind*. This formulation presents maya as a subject totally within the realm of human concern. It also carries forward the theme of yoga to a new level of content. Looking at the Indian side, in *applying principle scientifically*, our task is to find the most effective way of doing so and to overcome the obstacles to accomplishing the task, a project which often is extremely demanding and arduous. *Maya as an attitude of mind* refers to the necessity of radically changing the way we think to the extent of transcending the mind itself. Only in this way can we penetrate through to deeper dimensions of experience, the domain of yoga as a pure science. Finally, I suggest that here the Indian and Western sides of the theme of maya are cognate, i.e. allied with each other in the deeper reality of human understanding and experience of the Self.

Involution / Evolution

At holovolution, we see that the emphasis in India is on *involution* and in the West on *evolution*. These two words are really just shorthand ways of saying all that we have said already. The word *involution* refers to the process of Spirit involving in the human world through reworked Vedanta, through the yoga of manifestation and the development of effective methods of changing the material human world in the struggle with maya. *Evolution* compresses the idea that we can move from our humanistic concerns to a yoga of realization, to a quantum jump in our thinking (or transcendence of maya) to experience the Self directly. At this level of explanation we can see quite clearly how interwoven the teachings for India and the West really are.

Finally, at the level of holism, we find in India *All is God*. The contents of the universe—all of it, without exception: hadrons, heptachlors, herbivores, hippies, holograms—are all divine and must be treated in that light. The divinity that is the driving force of Vedanta must now be seen in the infinite forms of the universe and served as the Spirit itself. Similarly, the teaching *God or Reality is all there is*, given in the West, absorbs the entire universe, known and unknown, into the all-encompassing experience of the Divine, which saturates whatever we see. At this level, the difference between the teachings for East and West has been so attenuated that one can say that they have become almost embodiments of each other.

I hope that this glance at the possible relationship between the Indian and Western teachings of Swami Vivekananda has at least suggested, if not demonstrated, how closely tied in with each other they are and how they are, overall, opposite sides of the same coin working together to create a whole picture. I feel we should always bear these relationships in mind when talking about Swami Vivekananda's teaching. He himself responded to India and the West from the unity of his own personality. If we separate the two sides, we will not get the full measure of his Vedanta, or of Swami Vivekananda himself.

Having said that, however, it is also true to say that India and the West do have their own particular purview, and it is natural and necessary to focus on one or the other according to one's concern and need. Here, too, I should also mention that, when you really get down to it, India and the West do not have to be thought of as geographical locations, even as cultures or traditions. The scheme I have just presented deals with India and the West in terms of whether one is engaged in manifestation or in realization of the Spirit. From that standpoint, India and the West can be considered as two aspects of the same project, centered on the human condition or, even more specifically, within the mind of every one of us. For us, as for Swami Vivekananda, external conditions do not have to count for very much; if we grasp the principle or working formula, everything can be worked out.

4. Swami Vivekananda's Presentation of Yoga in the West

We have now looked at the idea that yoga is a science purporting to take us to the depth dimension of all aspects of human activity; we have tried to place it in the overall perspective of Swami Vivekananda's teachings, and we have looked at how those teachings have two distinct, but deeply interconnected sides. Let us now put ourselves in a definite position: as potential yogis interested in working on self-realization or on the discovery and mastery of five levels of experience for increasing integrative power, beginning with matter and ending with Spirit. This is what we have been calling "the Western side" of Swami Vivekananda's work.

Let us position ourselves even more specifically. We are Western followers of Swami Vivekananda, eager to get the whole picture of what he has to say, and able to tap into his teachings throughout the nearly four years he taught in the West. In order to orient ourselves here, let's take a look at Table 3. Here we see, on the left hand side, what Swami Vivekananda taught to his Indian students, i.e. the yoga of self-manifestation; and, on the right, his teachings on self-realization, so specially needed in the West. We, of course, are going to concentrate on the right hand side. Here you see five rows, each of them pegged to a specific location at a specific time and containing teachings which he gave specifically then and there.

Before looking at the teachings themselves, I should explain and recapitulate a bit in order to be very clear what I think we are looking at. First, the selection of the quotes. These quotes were selected from major lectures in which Swami Vivekananda laid out his teachings almost in the form of manifestoes. Systematic study of the work he did in each of the five periods I am presenting here has demonstrated to me that these quotes contain the essence of what he was saying at the time. Secondly, each quote was selected because it expresses the idea of yoga, i.e. the subject of self-realization. Thirdly, the quotes are organized in chronological sequence from top to bottom, creating a vertical time line.

INDIAN TEACHING <i>Yoga as an Applied Science</i> <i>(Self-manifestation)</i>		WESTERN TEACHING <i>Yoga as Pure Science</i> <i>(Self-realization)</i>	
MADRAS NOTES, 1892-93	Let each man take of God what is suitable to him	Universal religion is centered in aiding humanity to realize its divinity	CHICAGO, 1893
REPLY TO MADRAS ADDRESS, 1894	Different forms of yoga merge in realizing or becoming God; this is the end of the Vedas	Become harmoniously balanced in all four yogas	NEW YORK, 1895-96
FROM COLOMBO TO ALMORA, 1897	Man-making assimilation of ideas and faith in the eternal power lodged in every soul	Feel your own nature at one with the universe	HARVARD UNIVERSITY 1896
LAHORE, Nov., 1897	Bring advaita down to the material world	Change matter into Spirit by the force of love	LONDON, Nov., 1896
INDIA, 1901	Spontaneous revelation of Vedic truth	Let us see ourselves in everything	NEW YORK, 1900

Let's look at the quotes and see if what I am saying holds water. The quote in the first row is from Swami Vivekananda's Paper on Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago of 1893. There he said, *Universal religion is centered in aiding humanity to realize its divinity.*¹ To my mind, this is a manifesto or position statement of yoga for the West. In 1893 the notion that humanity has a divine dimension was, to say the least, something that had more or less been obscured in Western traditions. To add to that, the idea that such divinity could not only be realized but that such realization is the *sine qua non* of any universal religion was revolutionary. Finally, *aiding humanity to realize* implies a methodology and therefore a science. How totally unprepared the West was for this is indicated by the rejection of any such idea by such luminaries of the spiritual realm as Tolstoy, Richard Bucke and William James, all contemporaries of Swami Vivekananda, sympathetic to "depth religion" and familiar with his work. To a greater or lesser degree they clung to the idea that experience of higher states of consciousness is an arbitrary affair and not subject to systematic methodology. One can just imagine what the reactions of ordinary people, who had not even grasped the idea of higher states of consciousness, would have been. In this first statement by Swami Vivekananda, therefore, we find condensed the presuppositions of yoga, a statement of its universal purview and the proposal to work it through with definite methods.

Balanced in All Four Yogas

Moving to the second row we find *Become harmoniously balanced in all four yogas.*² This is a dominant idea in Swami Vivekananda's teaching in New York from 1895-1896, which presupposes an acceptance of the workability of yoga which we have just discussed. The idea is that we must develop *all* of our faculties in such a way as to experience the divine through them. In the West, work and devotion had tended to prevail in religious tradition, and in Vedanta, meditation and discrimination between the real and the unreal. Swami Vivekananda, however, presented all four paths and categorically stated that, if one took up any one of them, intent on realizing Reality or Truth, one would indeed do so. One calls to mind, for example, his striking statement in *Karma-Yoga: Through work alone men get to where Buddha got, largely through meditation or Christ by prayer.*³

1. from "Paper on Hinduism," *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial Edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), I: 19 (adapted).

2. "The Ideal of a Universal Religion," C.W., II: 388.

3. Karma-Yoga, Chapter III: "The Secret of Work," C.W., I: 55.

However, although Swami Vivekananda brought out that full realization was possible in any path, each represents a methodology for only *one* human faculty. Swami Vivekananda wanted to see full development of all human faculties and so propounded the ideal we are discussing here. The advantage of such “broad spectrum” yoga is that, by experiencing all four dimensions, it becomes easier to see how they hang together and therefore to harmonize them within ourselves and in our relationships with others. We can work with the karma-yogi, sing and dance with the bhakta, meditate with the raja-yogi and see the spiritual gestalt through the eyes of the jnani. All of that, without losing our balance in the slightest. An analogy that might underscore this ideal is that physics, chemistry, biology and psychology can all be equally mastered and integrated with each other. And, in addition, experience shows that if we look at something from many different angles and work with it in many ways, we acquire a deeper understanding and a more permanent grasp of what it is really all about.

The third idea is one that Swami Vivekananda unveiled at Harvard University in 1896: *Feel your own nature... at one with the universe.*⁴ This idea can readily be seen as a generalization from what we have just discussed. Through our work in the five laboratories of yoga, we arrive at the idea that there is an underlying unity which holds everything together and supports it. In terms of Western yoga, we directly perceive the spiritual dimension of our makeup, the Self, the divine as it exists in our inner core. And the Self, we learn and realize, is the same in every human soul. In Swami Vivekananda’s characteristic blend of knowledge and love we find that we can actually *feel* our own nature at one with the universe. At this point I think it’s clear that Swami Vivekananda is taking us to deeper and deeper dimensions of what is meant by yoga. By developing and following yogic methods, as in step 1, and by integrating them in a common project, as in step 2, we can actually *experience* our own depth dimension and understand the universality of that experience. After such an experience, I think it is obvious that our whole view of the world is going to change radically. When we have experienced Spirit and the unity that goes with it, it becomes simply impossible to keep up the barriers of thought that we normally maintain with such effort and to such unfortunate ends.

From Matter to Spirit through Love

From that it is a simple step to the fourth teaching, which was given to Sister Nivedita in 1897 but, in my view, is the leitmotif of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings in London in November, 1896, just before he left

4. “The Vedanta Philosophy,” C.W., I: 364-365 (adapted).

for India. The statement, *Change matter into Spirit through the force of love*,⁵ though very counterintuitive to our everyday minds, can also be seen as the logical outcome of establishment in the experience of the Self. When we experience the unifying ground, it becomes possible to open up communication between things and events that previously seemed poles apart. The spiritual purview is, of course, matter and Spirit. At this stage they assume to each other a relationship of evolution, i.e. matter evolving to Spirit through the catalyzing power of love.

This idea is inspiring to people who like the idea of evolution, but a bit of a stumbling block to people who insist that matter and Spirit are eternally separate categories of Reality. Can Swami Vivekananda really mean that matter can become Spirit? Well, I think the answer lies in all that I've tried to build up thus far. The Vedantic position, *God is all there is*⁶ is balanced by the idea that our human minds see that Reality in many different ways; as far as we are concerned, we create reality. And, as far as yoga is concerned, we can consciously and systematically change the way we see and create reality. And as and when we do so, we understand that our minds are evolving, that is, moving to deeper and deeper, more and more integrative and integrated ways of thinking about, understanding and experiencing reality. When we become established in the Self, we acquire, in addition, the power to see quite clearly the whole evolutionary process and to work with it systematically. In our view of Western yoga, the evolutionary project is precisely to transform matter into Spirit, a coherent and sequential process which runs best on the fuel of love, that unifying energy that is present in superabundance, if we only knew it. I think it is clear that, at this point, we have arrived at a formula, as it were, for Western yoga. This is the central key to Swami Vivekananda's idea of the transformative process of yoga as it applies to the needs of the West.

Seeing Ourselves in Everything

Finally, in New York in 1900, we arrive at: *Let us see ourselves in everything*,⁷ which to me is a précis of Swami Vivekananda's work in California in the same period as the New York lecture. Here the link between matter and Spirit, which is forged by yoga, has become total. Quite simply, we have transformed ourselves so completely that our understanding of Reality is at its maximum. There are no longer any barriers whatsoever—not even as in evolution, which in a way is also a constraint. We quite simply *see*

5. Letter to Sister Nivedita from Srinagar, October 1, 1897, C.W., VII: 429.

6. "What Is Religion?," C.W., VIII: 341.

7. Ibid.

that the Reality which we ourselves are is present to the same degree in every object and event of the universe, and we respond directly to that divinity, Spirit worshipping Spirit, as Swami Vivekananda put it.⁸

At this point, as things stand at the moment, we can go no further in yoga. We have unified matter and Spirit, human and divine, completely. We have arrived at the most integrative of the levels of consciousness available to humanity.

As we have been going through these teachings, we have seen that there is an expansion of the meaning of yoga as we go along the time line, and a greater and greater depth of content. I also suggest that this stepwise development of the theme of yoga is actually an analog of the progression from theme to theme in the total picture of Swami Vivekananda's teaching.

Was Swami Vivekananda himself "expanding" over time? You could look at it that way, if you are looking at him as an objectified personality. There is also the possibility that he was giving more and more advanced "classes" to his students, an interesting subject that can't be developed here. For our purposes we do have a whole gamut of insights into the meaning of yoga which, I hope, serves to illustrate greater and greater possibilities for our own development as well as more and more expanded meanings of yoga itself.

5. What Does All of This Mean for Us?

I have packed a lot of ideas into one subject in a very short period of time. Are some of them unfamiliar or difficult? What, if anything, is their practical value for us as yogis or would-be yogis?

First, the notion of yoga as a science—however we define or develop it—is, I believe, extremely liberating. Though it may seem a bit dry to take up one's life as a scientific experiment, a bit too systematic, without what people call "poetry and romance," the fact is that it is only through such work that we break through to the underlying Reality and can actually reproduce, over and over again, that experience—*because we know how we got there*. Pink clouds descending on us and opening our cosmic consciousness are great, but if we can't summon them up, more or less at will, and ultimately live in them permanently, then their value is much more limited than if we scientifically set about the whole project. As a humanist, Swami Vivekananda invests us with the power to work out our own destiny with the very tools forged by the Western humanist tradition and therefore to be in control of our lives and not dependent on any god or gods other than our own direct experience.

8. "Formal Worship," C.W., VI: 59.

Now, if we can see this empowering science in the overall context of Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta, we are more likely to avoid the problem of idolatry or spiritual scientism. Can you imagine such an oxymoron as *spiritual scientism*? But the truth is, we do get so hung up on our yoga practices that we tend to forget we are human beings with responsibility to other human beings, not to mention the whole universe. If we bear in mind that yoga, though a truly great and powerful science with the whole of human experience as its domain, is simply a methodology in an even larger and more powerful paradigm, we are less likely to inflate ourselves and our yoga. This phenomenon, one often feels, is a besetting problem with the New Age as it is popularly presented. Therefore, I believe it is valuable to contemplate *all* of the levels of Swami Vivekananda's teaching and to constantly try to integrate our yoga with it. If we keep our science within such a perspective, it will not overstep its bounds, but rather become the vehicle to carry us forward to the other, equally vital aspects of our Vedanta.

Bridging East and West in Vivekananda's Vedanta

We always should bear in mind that there are two aspects to every proposition. In our Vedanta, the main historical ones are East and West, as embedded in Swami Vivekananda's works. There is also, of course, North and South, young and old, men and women, etc. We all know how easy it is to take only one side and to alienate the other. Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta, I believe, is a powerful antidote to any such tendencies. I do think that, at the moment, there is tendency for separation between India and the West, even within our own movement. We are busy playing in our separate and dissimilar sandboxes, especially of yoga. But if we are consciously and systematically bringing out to ourselves the Indian and Western sides of our Vedanta, we shall be obliged to look for ways to reconcile them and make them synergistic, no matter what domain we are working in. What I have presented, so superficially, is merely one attempt to do so.

Then again, if we can develop an evolutionary perspective on all of this, we really are getting a handle of major proportions on the whole subject. As I said, we are arriving at a formula or algorithm, as it were. My idea is that we can trace such a perspective over the time-line of Swami Vivekananda's work, and I have tried to demonstrate it in the realm of Western yoga specifically. Does the idea work? Can we improve it?

Finally, there is only one empirical test of all of this: *what do you think?* These ideas are valid only if they have meaning, only if they empower, only if they can be *used*. What do you think? That's what I want to know. □

In Memoriam

Erik Johns: American Vedantist (1927-2001)

Erik Johns, Vice-President of the Vedanta Society of New York, trustee of Vedanta West Communications and an editor of this journal from its inception, was killed in a fire that consumed his house in East Fishkill, New York on December 11.

A native of Los Angeles, Erik first came in touch with Vedanta at the Hollywood Temple of the Vedanta Society of Southern California while a high school student. A man of many talents, he embarked on a career in modern dance after finishing high school and soon began parallel careers as an artist and writer. His dance career was cut short due to a knee injury. As a writer, he is best known for his collaboration with composer Aaron Copland on the opera *The Tender Land*, Copland's only full-length opera (1952-1954). The year after the opera was completed and received its premiere, Erik, now living in New York, first came to the Vedanta Society of New York. He very quickly became a close member of the Center and a student of Swami Pavitrananda, the Center's leader. From that time until his death he remained a strong supporter of the Center and served it in many capacities. He was a resident of the Center for five years.

Service to His Teacher

Erik's personal service to Swami Pavitrananda was particularly remarkable. When the swami was hospitalized, Erik often stayed with him overnight, sleeping in a chair when no bed was available. The natural, loving, spontaneous way he served his teacher was greatly admired by fellow members of the Center. He often took the swami to his country home for rest and relaxation.

In 1958, Erik and fellow devotee Jack Kelly purchased 50 acres of former farm land in Dutchess County, New York. From the beginning, they hoped that the property, known as Moss Hill Farms, would develop into a retreat for the Center. At first there were no structures on the property. Gradually, cabins and then houses were built. Erik and Jack, inspired by the Vivekananda July 4th celebrations at the Southern California Center's monastery in Trabuco Canyon, began similar celebrations on their property in 1962 under the auspices of the New York Vedanta Society, before the property had electricity or running water. What began informally grew into a regular annual function of the Center, over the years attended by many guest swamis, devotees and friends. Last summer marked the 40th year the festival was celebrated. In

addition to the considerable work involved in hosting the festivals, Erik collaborated with fellow devotee John Schlenck, music director of the Center, composing lyrics and librettos for songs, cantatas and oratorios on the life of Swami Vivekananda.

In October, 1994, celebrating the centenary of the Center's founding by Swami Vivekananda, Erik's and John's oratorio on Vivekananda's work in America, *Mission to the World*, was performed at Lincoln Center by the New York Concert Singers and orchestra led by Judith Clurman and with Martin Bookspan as narrator.

Erik and Jack were partners in several businesses, in particular, Party Decorators from the late 50's to the late 70's. In this capacity they decorated the inaugural dinner of President Kennedy in 1961 and the inaugural balls of President Carter in 1977.

Friend and Host of Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda

Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda, founder and first head of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta, came to the U.S. for two extended stays. During his first stay, sponsored by the U.S. State Department during the Kennedy years, Erik and Jack came to know him intimately, drove him many places and also hosted him at Moss Hill. Their friendship with the swami continued over the years and through several trips to India. In 1987, they sponsored the swami's second trip to the U.S. The swami, now mostly retired, enjoyed a leisurely 14 months as their guest and also visited the Vedanta centers in America. Shelley Brown's recent two-volume work on Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda's life and thought, *Centred in Truth*, is much indebted to Erik's records and reminiscences.

Erik was known among his wide circle of friends for his sympathetic and generous spirit. He had a unique ability to enter into the world of each person he met and relate to that person on his or her own terms. That ability extended to his work as an editor: he was always careful not to interfere with the style of the writer whose work he was editing. To the tenants who rented houses on Moss Hill, he was generous to a fault, permitting them to stay on even when they had no money for rent, finding some work for them on the property or in his house in lieu of payment. He also permitted friends and children of friends to stay with him for extended periods when they were in difficulty.

Twenty acres of the Moss Hill property, with several houses, was willed to the Vedanta Society of New York, with an ongoing wish that the Center develop it into a retreat.

—AV Staff

Some Timely Thoughts on the Harmony of Religions

Steven F. Walker

It occurred to me the other day (well after September 11, that is) that there is a potential problem with using the idea of the Harmony of Religions to dignify any and all religious positions, on the grounds that there must be something good in all of them—something universal that “harmonizes” with the deepest truths of religious experience. While there is no doubt in my mind that the editors were right to reaffirm in the last issue of *American Vedantist* that “for Vedantists, respect for the religious beliefs and practices of others is a central pillar of our religious identity,” I feel that such a profession of faith in the Harmony of Religions raises a question: ought we to respect all religious beliefs and practices? Could an optimistic expectation of finding “good in everything” lead to a naïve overestimation of the value of religious conservatism and an equally naïve underestimation of the dangers of politically oriented religious fundamentalism? Perhaps nobody is really so naïve, perhaps I am just setting up a straw man—the thought did occur to me. But still the question nagged at me: has “the harmony of religions” lost something by becoming an article of faith for American Vedantists rather than a call for careful analysis and critical appraisal? Let us remember Vivekananda’s warning in *Jnana-Yoga*: “Religions, having tremendous power in them, have often done more injury to the world than good, simply on account of their narrowness and their limitations.”

Superman as Ishtam?

Another big question also bothered me: when Ramakrishna said “jatho math, tatho path” (“so many minds, so many spiritual paths”), was he implying that individuals get to choose their religion from a short list of traditionally accepted religious paths, or was he implying that each individual is free to develop his or her own idiosyncratic path, in effect, to create his or her own religion? I had just read a story in *The New Yorker* about a young Indian American boy who was worshipping a little statue of Superman at his family’s shrine—much to his mother’s dismay, but she let him get away with it anyhow. Is her decision in the spirit of “jatho math, tatho path?”

I decided to look into *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to see what the Master had to say about the question. I began by checking the index under “religion: all religions are paths” in the new red letter edition that makes it so easy to spot his actual words. (This wonderful red letter edition of Nikhilananda’s translation, published by “The President, Sri Ramakrishna

Math, Chennai, on the occasion of the Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna Consecration Ceremony, 7 February 2000,” is apparently not yet readily available in America—or so I gather from the sentence “export of this book outside of India is expressly prohibited” that appears on the reverse side of the title page.) The results were at first a little disappointing. Ramakrishna did not seem to be speaking for an individual approach to religion—the boy’s religion of Superman, for example—but rather for the idea that an already established path might be good for one individual but not for another.

In America we tend to think of a fairly limited number of religious options: Protestant Christianity (much the same thing in spite of sectarian differences), Roman or Anglican Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox Church, a few other variations on the Christian theme (the Quakers, the Unitarians, etc.), Judaism, and a few major Oriental religions (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.) which look, at a distance, as though each one, taken individually, presents a united front. Hardly enough choices (maybe, given some sectarian variety, a hundred at best) for millions and millions of modern individuals! Of course, in addition to world religions, there are still many surviving tribal religions, but it is probably necessary to be a member of a tribe to get the benefit of them. So, unless you want to go tribal, there are not all that many choices.

But then I thought for a moment: in the actual context of nineteenth-century India, the actual number of “established paths” was enormous! Hinduism (even present-day Hinduism) as a loose conglomeration of faiths presents an almost infinite variety, and Ramakrishna was well aware of this fact. There were quite enough options around to satisfy a wide range of religious tastes and temperaments in Ramakrishna’s world, and his words on religious toleration simply clarified and amplified an already existing social and philosophical toleration even for the most bizarre-sounding choices. And then I thought of Ramakrishna’s advice to a grandmother who had trouble meditating on God to think of her little grandson as God—following that type of advice, presumably the choices of worship would be nearly infinite! I can imagine Ramakrishna saying to the young boy in *The New Yorker* story: “So Superman is your *ishta*? Well then, my boy, go ahead and worship him as the divine lord of the universe!”

Suicide Cults? Jihads?

That solved the problem, for me at least, as to whether individuals should be free to create their own individually tailored religion, however strange, however alien it might appear to others. But still: given this type of freedom, what utter nonsense—even dangerous nonsense—might people dream up? Superman may be fairly innocuous, but that may be just the tip of the iceberg: think of how much utter nonsense established religions have dreamed up already! Think of the monstrosities created by the human

religious imagination working overtime: apocalyptic cults, cargo cults, suicide cults, crusades, jihads, miracles, snake-handling, speaking in tongues, levitation, human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing using religion as its justification—and the list goes on and on. To how much of this must Vedantists give the Harmony of Religions official stamp of approval? To all of it—just to be fair and unprejudiced? To some of it—but where to draw the line? Let’s see what Ramakrishna actually had to say about this very perplexing issue.

“Mother, everyone says, ‘My watch alone is right.’ The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Mussalmans, all say, ‘My religion alone is true.’ But, Mother, the fact is that nobody’s watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path” (p. 93).

Let’s underline the two really challenging ideas here: no religion is right! (Including Vedanta.) And the second idea, which seems almost a contradiction of the first, until you think about it: with a yearning heart, by divine grace, any path leads to the divine! (Suicide cults included: remember how Ramakrishna’s sudden attempt at suicide was interrupted by the divine vision of the Mother?) Anyone offended by these ideas or my interpretation of them is free to prefer Ramakrishna’s other formulation of them on page 111: “God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true.” But Ramakrishna adds immediately: “Every religion has errors” (p. 112).

In another conversation Ramakrishna said that “all religions and all paths call upon their followers to pray to one and the same God. Therefore one should not show disrespect to any religion or religious opinion” (p. 306). In the present set of circumstances this is a very hard saying. Should we not show “disrespect” and even disapproval, for example, towards a suicide cult that highjacks planes and kills innocent people? If not, what should be our attitude towards it as a religious path (assuming that it is one, and deliberately picking the most problematic example to which one might seek to apply Ramakrishna’s advice). Ramakrishna did assert that all religious paths have “errors,” although one suspects that some have more errors—and more grievous errors—than others. Still, a religious path is a religious path, no matter how bizarre, misguided and heinous it appears to other people. So how does the Harmony of Religions idea face up to this worst of all recent examples of religious madness?

“If One Is Sincere. . . God Will Correct These Errors”

During the first day of a Durga festival Ramakrishna addressed the issue as follows: “It is not good to feel that my religion alone is good and other religions are false. The correct attitude is this: My religion is right, but I do

not know whether other religions are right or wrong, true or false. I say this because one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him. . . . If there are errors in other religions, that is none of our business. God, to whom the world belongs, takes care of that” (pp. 558-9). And finally, he also said: “Suppose there are errors in the religion that one has accepted; if one is sincere and earnest, then God Himself will correct these errors” (p. 559).

For my part, I feel that no further commentary is needed. I would conclude that we are not obliged, as Vedantists (as opposed to being citizens of a particular country or ethically oriented social beings), to set ourselves up as judges as to the relative value or lack of value of this or that religious path: “that is none of our business.” □

Reviews

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, Volume I
Translated by Dharma Pal Gupta
Sri Ma Trust, Chandigarh, India
522 pp. hard cover \$12.95 2001

Before beginning this review of the recently published English translation of M’s Kathamrita, I should confess to being a relatively unobjective reviewer with an unabashed bias toward Swami Nikhilananda’s 1942 translation, known throughout the world as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I, along with countless other non-Bengali speakers, practically grew up with this edition, and it is hard sometimes to think of it as any less authentic than the original. When I first began studying Bengali, the Kathamrita was my constant companion and my main aid in learning the language. I would often read portions of the Bengali and, just for fun, imagine the translation I would give. After checking with Swami Nikhilananda’s translation, I invariably found that my own failed to capture Sri Ramakrishna’s ideas as clearly and as beautifully as Swami Nikhilananda’s had. So, whenever I heard of a new translation of the Kathamrita, I always upheld the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as the standard to which it must be judged. And I also asked myself, what does the new translation add to our knowledge and understanding of Sri Ramakrishna’s words that justifies its inclusion in the body of literature surrounding him?

Does Accurate Mean Literal?

We get several clues as to why the publishers of the present volume felt it necessary to retranslate the Kathamrita. The first is found on the cover itself: “Word by Word Translation of Original Bengali Edition.” This brings me to

one of my pet peeves: the great myth that a translation must be “word-by-word” or “literal” for it to be accurate and reliable. Actually nothing could be farther from the truth. Certain texts or portions of texts can be translated word-by-word, while others must be phrase-by-phrase or even idea-by-idea. Corresponding images and examples in different cultures often capture the essence of a teaching far better than the literal translation ever could. Conversely, a word-by-word reading can often give not only an unclear meaning, but often a distorted meaning.

Unfortunately, the word-by-word format followed in this translation results in a very stilted, unidiomatic type of English. I am hesitant to use the phrase “Indian English” because it has a certain colonial and elitist sound to me that I don’t like. But it clearly does not read like an original English language text, which should be the final test for any good translation. In fact, there are some examples of fairly mangled grammar, non-agreement of subject and verb, double negatives etc., in addition to a decidedly unnatural pattern of speech that make the text difficult to read at times.

Regrettably, we are told very little about the translator himself. We may be sure that English is not his mother tongue, and it also seems clear that no native English speaker edited the text. We may surmise from his name that he was not a Bengali by birth, and we know that he lived in Chandigarh, in the state of Panjab. The short reference to him and his translation in the Publisher’s Note is also very confusing. It seems highly possible from what is written there that he did not even work from the original Bengali but rather from a Hindi translation. If that is true, two of the basic rules of translation have been broken, namely that the translator either be translating into his own language or have an editor (as Swami Nikhilananda did) who has that language as his or her native tongue; and the translator be working from the original text.

Material Missing from Nikhilananda’s Translation

The second unspoken critique of Swami Nikhilananda’s translation is that, not only is it not “word-by-word,” it also has certain missing paragraphs or lines. This is no doubt true, and much fuss has been made in recent years about the untranslated portions of the Gospel. A careful reading of the original Bengali alongside the English translation reveals a total of a mere handful of statements of Sri Ramakrishna along with a few descriptive portions by M left untranslated. The missing remarks of Sri Ramakrishna were generally statements made about some of his mystical experiences which, it was felt in 1942, were so out of sync with Western cultural mores of the day that they were better left untranslated. Whether it was Swami Nikhilananda’s own idea or whether it was under the advice of his Western editors that these were left out is difficult to say. Clearly, however, a new translation that

included these untranslated portions would be welcomed by many. It should be remembered, however, that M himself did not record each and every statement he heard from Sri Ramakrishna. Who among us, for example, would not like to know Sri Ramakrishna's actual words when M simply tells us that the Master told a few off-color jokes and had his young male disciples in stitches!

Unfortunately, most of the omitted, "juicy" portions are from the fourth volume of the Kathamrita, so it is impossible to know from Volume One just how they will be (or have been) translated. I should add that I was greatly surprised when I did a random comparison of portions in both Dharm Pal Gupta's and Swami Nikhilananda's translations and found a line omitted in the so-called "word-by-word" translation which was present in Swami Nikhilananda's. Since I have not gone through long sections of the two translations side-by-side, it is difficult to say if this was a single oversight or a more or less common pattern.

The third unspoken criticism of Swami Nikhilananda's work (and possibly the real reason for the present translation) is the fact that he translated the five-volume Kathamrita in chronological order, while the original had each of the five volumes in chronological order. That means that readers of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* have no way of knowing which portions of the text are from which of the five volumes, written many years apart. Now, we have to ask ourselves what is gained by translating the text into English in the original order of M's Kathamrita. For one thing, M, as far as we know, never planned on writing five volumes. After the first, he went back to his notes and found more things to add. Perhaps some were considered by him to be less important, or, on the other hand, too secret to be included in the earlier volumes.

The Development of M's Mind

If we read the Publisher's Note of Dharm Pal Gupta's translation we find that this was a major consideration in the present translation project. The publisher writes, "The five volumes of Kathamrita in Bengali saw the light of day in the years 1902, 1904, 1908, 1910 and 1932. While you read all the five volumes, you can see. . . the development of M.'s mind: from intellectual to intellectual-spiritual, from intellectual-spiritual to spiritual-intellectual, and from spiritual-intellectual to pure spiritual and then the practical pure spiritual state." I have no idea if any of this is true. It no doubt would be an interesting study to analyze the different volumes and try to see how they reflect the growth of M's mind or his understanding of what was important for the public to know about Sri Ramakrishna. But the downside of this is that we lose the continuity of Sri Ramakrishna's own growth, development, method of teaching, etc. as well as that of all the characters in his divine play. For those

of us who are more interested in the workings of Sri Ramakrishna's mind than M's, the tradeoff of rearranging the five volumes into one is surely worth what we lose in our knowledge of M's personal growth and development. This is precisely why current editions of the Bengali version of the Kathamrita have combined all five versions and placed the entirety in chronological order.

All of this is not to say that there is no need for a volume-by-volume translation of the Kathamrita. But it is of real interest mainly to those with a special devotion to M himself. This is no coincidence, because the present volume is published by Sri Ma Trust (Sri Ma meaning "M"), under the guidance of Swami Nityatmananda, who was supremely devoted to M. So clearly one of the main reasons for the new translation was to keep the original scheme of five volumes intact, just as they were written and published by M.

Such a translation may also provide insight to those seeking to understand the writers of scripture and how their own personality and development influenced their recording of events and teachings. While M was unusually accurate, what he wrote nevertheless came through the prism of his own mind.

Summary of Pros and Cons

In summary, the present volume is far less readable than the original *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and far less convenient in terms of the mixed chronology. On the positive side, however, it may prove to be of interest with regard to the few previously untranslated portions, though they will be hard to locate without reading the two translations side-by-side. There may also be some minor interest in seeing how M gave headings and subheadings to some sections, quoted a Sanskrit verse here and there, put some statements in boldface type, etc., all of which are reproduced in Dharm Pal Gupta's version. Additionally, the "thee's" and "thou's" have been eliminated, a source of great consternation to a handful of Western readers, and the songs translated in a far more simple and straightforward manner. For these reasons, this new translation may serve a useful purpose for some devotees and scholars of Sri Ramakrishna and his movement.

A far more appealing prospect (to this reviewer, at least) would be a revised edition of Swami Nikhilananda's great work that modernizes some of the outdated language, fills in some of the missing gaps, and is a little less gender specific. And most importantly a new look should be taken at the difficult phrase, *kamini-kancana*, so that a translation other than "woman and gold" can be found which captures both the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching on this critical subject as well as his great reverence for women.

—Swami Atmajnanananda

Parabola: Myth, Tradition, and the Search for Meaning
Volume 26, number 4: Winter, 2001 (“The Heart”)
143 pp. New York City \$7.50 U.S., \$9.50 Canada

Parabola: Myth, Tradition and the Search for Meaning is a quarterly journal that deserves to be brought to the attention of readers of *American Vedantist*, if only because Vedanta, especially in its prestigious nondualist form, has traditionally had a problem with myths and images, and because doctrinaire nondualists generally might benefit from learning to appreciate their value for the spiritual seeker. In the old quarrel of “God with form” and “God without form,” devotional Hinduism has come down again and again on the side of “God with form,” to the point where the proliferation of images of the divine (and their corresponding divine names) can appear quite disconcerting to the outside viewer, especially one whose mental habits have been conditioned by Western monotheism (“One God Without Form”), whether Christian, Jewish or Islamic. Vedanta has proved congenial to such a mentality, because it too affirms the unity of the Divine, called Brahman in its external manifestation, and Atman in its internal manifestation. It is, in a word, a kind of monotheism. But historically Vedanta developed in the context of Hinduism, which is anything but monotheistic. For Ramakrishna, of course, “God with form is just as true as God without form,” as M was surprised to hear him say in the course of his second visit to Dakshineswar. But, although many American Vedantists see in the life of Ramakrishna the ultimate manifestation of Vedantic mysticism in modern times, not all are ready to appreciate fully the value of his worship of sacred images of “God with form”: the monkey god Hanuman, the child Rama, Krishna the Lover, and Kali the Mother, not to mention the many other images and symbols of the divine within traditional Hinduism that he revered. Vedantists share, in other words, the traditional Vedantic suspicion that myths and mythic images are somehow not really kosher.

Exploring Myths and Symbols of Universal Importance

This is where *Parabola* can provide some inspiration and enlightenment. In each quarterly issue the magazine explores some myth or symbol of universal importance—in the case of the issue at hand, the Heart. Many of the essays seem to be specially commissioned, but some are reprints from texts published elsewhere, such as a lovely page by Henri Corbin, the renowned scholar of Islamic mysticism, on the heart as “A Subtle Organ,” or an intriguing African folktale “Only Brotherliness Can Warm a Cold Heart.” There is an interview with Sheikh ‘Ali Jum’a by Shems Friedlander in which we learn that Sufi mysticism considers the heart as one of the levels of mystical awareness, where “man feels something of the revelations of secrets,

disclosures, and lights.” This sounds to me like the description of the heart chakra in kundalini yoga, and of course Sufi mysticism must have learned a good bit from the yoga teachers of India. Another essay is a very personal statement by Marvin Barrett on “Living with the Threat of Coronary Failure”: “Its failure, my heart tells me, will be the victory of God.” Sheri Ritchlin provides an account of “The Myth of Quetzalcoatl: the ultimate sacrifice of the human heart,” and this essay, like the others, is well illustrated—apt illustrations, some of them full page, are one of the delightful features of *Parabola*. An excellent article by James Shapiro on the symbol of the heart in Vedanta sets the anthology off to a good start. Two pages of short quotations, one from Ramakrishna (unfortunately, in my opinion, from Lex Hixon’s paraphrase), round out the issue, and one from Angelus Silesius that especially moved me:

The light of splendor shines in the middle of the night.
Who can see it? A heart which has eyes and watches.

What a Vedantist Can Gain

This is what I think a meditation on sacred symbols and myths, of the sort that *Parabola* encourages, can do for the Vedantist: it can awaken “a heart which has eyes and watches.” The problem that Vedanta has always had with images, symbols and myths is that in nondualist terms they are not really real, and that they may distract the seeker from seeking the light of the Truth in the depths of the soul. But there is, I think, another way of framing the relationship between images and Truth. The light of the Truth lies in the depths of the soul, but what lies in between? Modern psychology, especially Jungian psychology, would say that shining images of great power and potential for meaning move about in the ocean of the Unconscious. But what makes these images shine so entrancingly? It is the light of the Self, shining up from the very depths of the soul, that “backlights” them, so to speak. With this analogy in mind the Vedantist can enjoy them but not be distracted from seeking the source of their light.

—Steven F. Walker

Letters

Genuine Interest Needed

I was interested in the article in Vol. 7, #3 (Fall 2001) by William Page regarding the way to explain to others just what Vedanta is and how it is practiced.

He describes an amusing situation in which he is asked about Buddhism. He knows his friend, I guess, and says the friend was sincere. I have found that anyone who asks about religion in a social situation, or other inappropriate situation, is not sincerely interested. Good manners ask that we discuss what the other person is most interested in. Actually, it further requires that we be genuinely interested. In my experience, the person who asks is simply making conversation and is not interested at all. Sometimes the askers don't even wait for a reply. If they do, they immediately change the subject, so naturally one learns to reply as briefly and honestly as possible and let it go at that.

Years ago I simply memorized the pertinent statement made on the back of the program given out at the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Pretty much what Mr. Page said: "Each soul is potentially divine. The purpose of life is to manifest that divinity already within." That's the way I remembered it.

I appreciated Mr. Page's giving Swami Vivekananda's statement. It's quite complete.

And who knows where it will all end? One does one's best and lets go of the results. Sometimes they come back with another question at some future date. I keep my answers to about 30 seconds—that's about the limit of my husband's attention span on such subjects, and it works for others, too. Doesn't the Mother have fun with us!

My affection to all my fellow spiritual companions,

Betty Zimmer
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