

HANSYOG PRAKASH

(Union With Light)

 By

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Author's Preface

✧ It gives me great pleasure to declare that the sole aim of human life is to realize God. All Scriptures, saints and sages who had the True Knowledge of God have proclaimed this same Truth. ✧ Lord Krishna Himself said that the end result of all action is knowledge, and that there is nothing as holy as spiritual knowledge.

✧ Just as fire reduces fuel to ashes, the fire of Knowledge burns up the bondage of good and bad effects of actions. Lord Krishna said to Arjuna, if you receive this knowledge, you will be freed from attachment and delusion. You will see all beings within yourself and within Me. However, you must prostrate to the wise seers, and sincerely ask them for this knowledge, serve them, and those who know these mysteries will reveal them to you.

Without knowledge the mind cannot be concentrated. In the Gita, Arjuna said, O Krishna! This mind is very restless, powerful, obstinate and wilful. It seems to me, that to control it, is harder than trying to tie the air into a bundle. Then the Lord replied, undoubtedly the mind is restless and difficult to control, but through constant practice and disinterest in worldly things (Vairagya) it is possible. In his 'Yoga Aphorisms', Patanjali has written, The highest Yoga is prevention of the fluctuations of mind.

Lord Krishna also said, The realized seer and Yogi of action is superior to the ascetic, so, Arjuna, be a yogi. understand what is renunciation, for someone who does not

give up all desires and fantasies, cannot realize his soul.

To explain these mysteries, I have extracted the nectar-like essence from the flowers of the various scriptures of the world garden, and gathered them together in the hive of this small book. The spiritual Master uses the medicine of the "Holy Name" to neutralize the poison of the mind, in the same way as a skilled physician neutralizes poisons with his medicines. When the mind is still, you gain mental equilibrium.

There is an wasp called 'Bhringi' which turns a particular kind of insect into its own form by emitting a certain sound. The spiritual Master is like that Bhringi. By reading this book, which can be compared to the Bhringi's sound, and by digesting its ideas and putting them into practice, you can dissolve yourself in God.

What was the intention of writing this book? Lord Krishna said in the Gita, do not reveal my stories to anyone who has not made any sacrifice, or who has no devotion, or who has no desire to listen. He also said, He who propagates this supreme and secret Knowledge among My devotees, is dearest to Me, and will undoubtedly attain Me.

It is written in the scriptures that you should sit in a solitary place and meditate on God. If you must talk to anyone, then talk about God. This is the easy way to attain Him, but he cannot be realized by an impure mind. To purify the mind, this book recommends the Yoga of Devotion.

Liberation is not easily attainable by everyone. Only someone who has strong inherent tendencies in that direction, can achieve it. Firstly, He must remove the bad tendencies and impressions within himself, and purify his mind by

spiritual disciplines. Secondly, he must study the Scriptures and listen to the Spiritual Master's discourses, and reflect on their purport. Once he realizes what they are all about, he can quickly receive Knowledge, behold God face-to-face and attain perfect peace.

I humbly request my readers to use their powers of discrimination to reflect upon the substance of the scriptures which I, using my limited intellect, have collected. Excuse me if the language is not up to the mark. Please understand that the special quality of this book is that it glorifies God as He really is. I have not embellished it with clever words.

Someone who studies the scriptures and does not know what it mean is like a tree which is suffering from the weight of its own leaves, or like a beast which is suffering under a heavy load of valuable goods. On the other hand, someone who understands perfectly the meaning of the scriptures, can attain perfect bliss. Through knowledge and his own pious behaviour, he is freed from all sins, and at the time of his death, achieves perfect peace.

If you do not know the Almighty God Who is omnipresent and indestructible, Who is the truth of all scriptures and in Whom dwells the earth, sun and all the worlds, then what happiness can you get from merely reading scriptures? No happiness at all! If, however, after studying scriptures, an aspirant receives knowledge of the Soul and realizes it, he becomes stabilized in God. He attains liberation and the highest bliss. Therefore, I urge upon you to understand what you are reading and teaching.

Yours,
'Hans'

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The Cage of Misery

Once Shri Shankaracharya went to bathe in the Ganges at Benares. On the way he saw an aged Brahmin reciting the Sanskrit alphabets. Seeing such fruitless effort, the Master was filled with compassion. He thought , “Just look at him, reading grammar. If he were to read the scriptures and according to their instruction, take the shelter of the Master, he would have got true knowledge. He is about to die, so he should be meditating on God.” So he started preaching.

“O Brahmin, soon you will die, and still you are reciting alphabets! This will not protect you. Now you should be meditating only on God.

‘Day comes, followed by night. When you wake up you find that morning has come. Autumn and spring come and go. Death plays with souls. Life passes like this, But even now you have not given up your vacuous dreams. O dull-witted fellow! You should think only about God now.

‘Childhood is spent playing and youth is spent chasing women. Old age brings all kinds of miseries and diseases. This happens to everyone, but still nobody is inclined towards God. You crazy man ! The only thing that will benefit you now is meditation on God.

‘Every part of the body decays, and a foul smell comes from the mouth and nose. The ears lose their power to hear, the eyes water, and your teeth fall out. Your mouth sags and becomes hollow, your hair turns white, you become stooped

and have to walk with a stick, but you are so shameless that even then you do not give up your infatuation with this lump of desires and expectations. Idiot ! Even now you can meditate on the Name of God.

‘While a man is capable of earning money, he will be attached to his family. He devotes his all wealth to serving them. They are his God. However, when his body weakens and he no longer has the ability to earn, nobody in his family will even ask after him. So you should regard this world as illusory and superfluous and only meditate on God.

‘If you don’t, you will have to take many future births, die again and again, and suffer the burning heat of the womb. To be freed from all these troubles, pray to God and meditate on Him constantly.

‘Day follows night and night follows day. Days turn into weeks, and months pass. Seasons come and go, and the years roll by, but hopes and expectations never die. Every day they take new shapes and forms, making puppets of us. However, they do die when you meditate on God.

‘If a pool dries up, it won’t be called a pool any longer. When your money is spent, you’ll have no family to call your own. When you realize self, however, the world will look different to you, but this can happen only when you meditate on God.

‘Don’t get caught up in infatuation for a woman. You will go astray and not be able to find the way out. The body is only flesh. Think over this carefully and often, and resolve to meditate on God.

‘Think about it ! Who is really your friend, your wife, your son? To whom do you really belong in this weird

world? Where did you come from? O brother! Think about this and meditate on God.

‘Who are you? From where did you come into this world? Who is your mother and who is your father? Think about it carefully and form a reasonable opinion. Regard the world as a dream, renounce expectations and meditate on God.

‘You think that short-lived pleasures are the real things, so you indulge yourself in all kinds of pleasures. Then the body becomes prey to diseases. Although we see that Death swallows everybody, we don’t stop doing wrong. Where is the peace in this ? You can find the way back when you meditate on God.

‘While you have breath in your body, your loved ones will take care of you, but once life departs from the body, you become a useless burden to them. Therefore, don’t pin any hopes on those who relate only to your physical self. Know the body to be short lived and meditate on God.

‘When a person realizes that the world is nothing but composition of sufferings, he renounces it. He may do penances, bear the heat of the sun, pass cold nights with his head between his knees, eat only what he gets from begging and live under a tree. Even then he cannot be freed from the trap of expectations.

‘You should stop doing both good and evil. If you get something to eat, then eat it. If not then go hungry. You should not be upset by anything concerning yourself or others. Simply meditate on God.

‘You may live under a tree beside the Ganges with only the ground for a bed and a deerskin to wear. You may

renounce family and all such enjoyments, and even be unattached to them, but without meditation you cannot gain true happiness.

‘You may have matted hair or shave it all off. You may wear saffron robes and sit in different postures, but all this is just for show. Anyone who has done this knows that it does not bring spiritual peace. But we don’t understand the folly of this, as we don’t have the eyes to see. The only benefit lies in meditation.

‘People read scriptures and study thousands of names of God, but even then they don’t have the desire to know truth. They think that spiritual progress and benefit lie in study alone. They don’t know what God really is, nor do they meditate on Him. They don’t praise Him nor keep holy company. They don’t remove the suffering of others by giving money to the poor. O fool ! Meditate on God now !

‘If you read the Gita and give it a little discriminating thought, you would drink a few drops of the Ganges of satsang. The point is, you should keep the company of the holy and realize your soul. How can death have any power over you if you worship God? Unfortunate fellow ! Even now, it is not too late to meditate on God.

‘You may bathe at all the holy places, do all kinds of fasts and give alms, but without knowledge of God it is all useless. You will not be able to break the chains of worldly bondage, nor will you be freed from the cycle of birth and death, because the quintessence of everything is meditation on God. Therefore meditate and do your utmost to break out of this cage of misery’

—**Bhaj Govindam by Shri Shankaracharya**

What is the purpose of our life?

We are all busy in our individual activities. We may be doing something at all, but to what extent are we doing our duties properly? Generally, people do not work properly. Everyone has, to some extent or other, ignored his duty. Have people forgotten their real duty? Yes ! The vast majority have indeed forgotten.

Why are we alive? What is the purpose of our life? What is our prime duty? People's actions are usually governed by time and place, but the ultimate purpose of life can never be conditioned by these. A fish cannot do anything without water, because it cannot live out of water, Similarly, while we are living in this world, our objectives will be limited to those which can be fulfilled in the world.

Another point to consider is that the human race has been in existence for thousands of years, and is likely to continue for thousands more. So the true aim of life must be something which can be fulfilled at any point of time. It definitely cannot be something which is restricted by time and place and political upheavals.

So, taking all this into consideration, what, do you think, is the paramount aim of our life? What is our destiny? It may be said that this aim is purely temporal, such as making money, adorning oneself with all kinds of titles and degrees, or amassing honour and material prosperity. In the

worldly sense, this may indeed seem to be the case, and we see people labouring day and night to achieve it. Indeed, what else could they do?

However, if we give it a bit of careful thought, we will discover that the reality is something altogether different. It is a great mistake to think temporal activities could ever fulfill our life's ideal.

A place is regarded as appropriate or conducive for a certain activity if that activity can be completed there without too much interference. If there is a possibility of abandoning the work because of insurmountable obstacles, then we haven't found the right place for that action. This applies to working for worldly goals such as wealth and honour. Going after wealth, honour, titles and reputation will always bring hindrances, mental torments and worries in tow.

Firstly, just acquiring these things means facing great problems. Secondly, keeping a safe hold on them involves special worries. You can suffer financial loss and damage to your health, even to the point of death.

Just thinking about it is enough to scare person. These facts are no secret. Most of our titled and wealthy gentleman know it well.

The prime example of this is amassing wealth. Most people consider this to be their prime duty. But just see what physical, mental and spiritual strain is involved ! Even if all this can be endured, how many people actually succeed in getting rich ? Very few are able to get as much as they want. Moreover, after going through so much trouble to get it, you cannot keep it for very long. When you die, every-

thing turns to dust. A king today may be penniless tomorrow. A billionaire today may be begging door-to-door tomorrow.

The same goes for titles and honour. To acquire them involves all kinds of physical, mental and spiritual problems, often with damage to health and wealth. Even if you succeed, your life is spent worrying about how to maintain your prestige. In addition to this, social and political upheaval can break you. So after thinking over these things, we have to conclude that getting rich or going after name and fame can never be the aim of our life.

What can it be, then? Consider that whatever we do has a good or bad influence on us, irrespective of whether it furthers our purpose in life or not. Is there an ideal or objective which will not be affected by our actions? Is there something which is unaffected by actions? Such a thing has to be related to soul. As far as accumulating wealth, titles and honour are concerned, you may succeed or fail, but the method you employ to get them definitely uplifts or degrades your soul. Obviously, the principal aim of life is spiritual upliftment, which is something which the wheel of time or socio-political changes cannot obstruct.

Worldly activities are full of cares. Some actions cause financial loss, and some cause mental disturbances. Some people have reached their lowest ebb. Spiritual upliftment is the only objective which can give true peace and happiness.

Now you may ask that if spiritual upliftment is the true purpose of life and our real duty, and if it is not troublesome but, on the contrary, bestows maximum bliss, then

why did the great saints have to undergo such tremendous suffering? Weren't Socrates and Jesus Christ great Masters? Why was one poisoned and the other crucified ? Why did they had to endure them that they had to kill them?

They were highly elevated souls, whose ideas completely opposed those of their times, and they severely attacked contemporary society. For this they were put to death. However, bear it in mind that we shouldn't try to judge them from our limited viewpoint. Such extremely elevated souls were far ahead of their time. We can't imagine experiencing even in the distant future what they were experiencing all the time. What we consider painful or enjoyable is not so for them. Their sorrow or happiness is related to something else. A small child can experience only his own unhappiness, not other.' When he grows up, he comes to feel not only his own sadness, but that of his compatriots and society as a whole, as if it were his own. When we evolve spiritually, we automatically think about relieving the suffering of others.

The great souls have reached the pinnacle of spiritual evolution. They consider all mankind their own family. They don't care about their own personal joys and sorrows, but are totally involved in relieving the sufferings of others. They are even prepared to sacrifice their own lives for this cause. Thus they realize God, which gives a thousand times more pleasure than our short-lived pleasures. This experience is beyond the scope of our limited intelligence. The things which make us miserable don't affect them. It is a great mistake to think that the persecuted Masters were ever

in distress. Poison is a harmful and dreaded thing for us, but it was nectar for sages such as Socrates as they fulfilled their role in life. Such saints derive their joy from something else. Their minds are not as narrow and confined as ours. The characters of these great souls teach us that the most sacred work and the greatest aim of our life is to elevate and strengthen our spirit. This is the best way to achieve real happiness and perfect peace.

How King Janak received knowledge

The great sage King Janak had a dream in which he was starving and suffering greatly. He reflected, "Is my waking state of being a king is true, or is the dream state of being a beggar is true?" He considered both to be false, so he resolved to find out what is Truth.

He called all the scholars, philosophers, sages, saints and spiritual teachers of the time and asked, "What is Truth?" None could answer him satisfactorily.

There was a boy named Ashtavakra whose body was crooked in eight places. He came to King Janak's Court. When everyone saw his deformed limbs they started laughing, whereupon the boy said, "Today I have come into an assembly of cobblers!"

Of course, everyone took offence at that. How dare he call an assembly of learned philosophers a gathering of cobblers! The king asked him how he could be so rude. Ashtavakra said, "They only know about skin. If they knew about Soul they would not have laughed."

King Janak placed the child on the throne and humbly asked, "Sir, what is the soul? Please reveal Spiritual Knowledge to me."

Ashtavakra replied, "Your Majesty, none of these

philosophers can ever realize this Knowledge, even though they may try their whole life. So how can I tell you?”

The King said, “I call nothing my own, except my mind, which I now surrender to you.”

Ashtavakra was pleased at this, and revealed to the king the way to plunge his mind into meditation on the soul within.

The need of a 'Guru'

Every soul is destined to be perfect, and every being, in the end, will attain the state of perfection. What ever we are now, is the result of our acts and thoughts in the past, and what we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now. But this, the shaping of our own destinies, does not preclude our receiving help from outside; nay, in the vast majority of cases such help is absolutely necessary. When it comes, the higher powers and possibilities of the soul are quickened, spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end.

This quickening impulse cannot be derived from books. The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual, but in the end we find that we have not developed at all spiritually. It is not true that a high order of intellectual development always goes hand in hand with a proportionate development of the spiritual side in man. In studying books we are sometimes deluded into thinking that thereby we are being spiritually helped; but if we analyse the effect of the study of books on ourselves, we shall find that at the most, it is only our intellect that derives profit from such studies, and not our inner spirit. This inadequacy of books to quicken spiritual growth is the reason why, although almost everyone of us can speak most

wonderfully on spiritual matters, when it comes to action and the living of a truly spiritual life, we find ourselves so awfully deficient. To quicken the spirit, the impulse must come from another soul.

The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru, the teacher, and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the shishya, the student. To convey such an impulse to any soul in the first place, the soul from which it proceeds must possess the power of transmitting it as it were, to another; and, in the second place, the soul to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it. The seed must be a living seed, and the field must be ready and ploughed; and when both these conditions are fulfilled a wonderful growth of genuine religion takes place. The true preacher of religion has to be of wonderful capabilities and clever should his hearer be (“आश्चर्यो वक्ताकुशलोऽस्य लब्धा”) and when both of these are really wonderful and extraordinary, then there will be a splendid awakening, and not otherwise. Such alone are the real teachers, and such alone are also the real students, the real aspirants. All others are only playing with spirituality. They have just a little curiosity awakened, just a little intellectual aspiration kindled on them, but are merely standing on the outward fringe of the horizon of religion. There is, no doubt, some value even in that, as it may in course of time result in the awakening of a real thirst for religion; and it is a mysterious law of nature that, as soon as the field is ready, the seed must and does come. As soon as the soul earnestly desires to have religion, the transmitter of the religious force must and does appear to help

that soul. When the power that attracts the light of religion in the receiving soul is full and strong, the power which answers to that attraction and sends in light does come as a matter of course.

There are, however, certain great dangers in the way. There is, for instance, the danger to the receiving soul of its mistaking momentary emotions for real religious yearning. We may study that in ourselves. Many a time in our lives somebody dies whom we loved; we receive a blow; we feel that the world is slipping between our fingers, that we want something surer and higher, and that we must become religious. In a few days that wave of feeling passes away and we are left stranded just where we were before. All of us often mistaking such impulses for real thirst after religion; but as long as these momentary emotions are thus mistaken, that continuous, real craving of the soul for religion will not come, and we shall not find the true infuser of spirituality into our nature. So, wherever we are tempted to complain of our search after the truth for which we desire so much, proving vain, instead of so complaining, our first duty ought to be to look into our own souls, and find whether the craving in the heart is real. Then, in the vast majority of cases it would be discovered that we were not fit for receiving the truth, that there was no real thirst for spirituality.

There are still greater dangers in regard to the transmitter, the Guru. There are many who, though immersed in ignorance, yet in their pride, fancy that they know everything, and not only do they not stop there, but offer to take others on their shoulders and thus, the blind leading the

blind, both fall into the ditch. The Mundaka Upanishad (1.ii.8.) says, *Fools dwelling in darkness, wise in their own conceit, and puffed up with vain knowledge, go round and round staggering to and for, like blind men leading the blind.* The world is full of these. Everyone wants to be a teacher; every beggar wants to make a gift of a million dollars. Just as these beggars are ridiculous so are these teachers.

Qualifications of the aspirant and the Teacher

How are we to know a teacher then? The sun requires no torch to make it visible; we need not light a candle in order to see it. When the sun rises, we instinctively become aware of the fact, and when a teacher of men comes to help us, the soul will instinctively know that truth has already begun to shine upon it. Truth stands on its own evidence; it does not require any other testimony to prove it "true;" it is self-effulgent. It penetrates into the innermost corners of our nature, and in its presence the whole universe stands up and says. "This is truth." The teachers whose wisdom and truth shine like the light of the sun, are the very greatest the world has known, and they are worshipped as God by the major portion of mankind. But we may get help from comparatively lesser ones also; only we ourselves do not possess intuition enough to judge properly that man from whom we receive teaching and guidance; so there ought to be certain tests, certain conditions, for the teacher to satisfy as there are also for the taught.

The conditions necessary for the taught are purity, a real

thirst after knowledge, and perseverance. No impure soul can be really religious. Purity in thought, speech and deed is absolutely necessary for anyone to be religious. With regards to the thirst after knowledge, it is an old law that all of us get whatever we want. None of us can get anything other than what we fix our hearts upon. To truly pant for religion is a very difficult thing, and not at all as easy as we generally imagine. Hearing religious talks, reading religious books, is no proof of a real want felt in the heart; there must be a continuous struggle, a constant fight, an unremitting grappling with our lower nature, till the higher want is actually felt and the victory is achieved. It is not a question of one or two days, of years or of lives; the struggle may have to go on for hundred of lifetimes. The success sometimes may come immediately, but we must be ready to wait patiently even for what may look like an infinite length of time. The student who sets out with such a spirit of perseverance, will surely find success and realization.

In regard to the teacher, we must see that he knows the spirit of the scriptures. The whole world reads Bibles, Vedas and Korans, but they are only words, syntax, etymology, philology-the dry bones of religion. The teacher who deals too much in words and allows the mind to be carried by the force of words, loses the spirit. It is the knowledge of the spirit of the scriptures alone that constitutes the true religious teacher. The network of the words of the scriptures is like a huge forest, in which the human mind often loses itself and finds no way out. शब्दजालं माहरण्यं चित्तभ्रमणकारणं *The network of words is a big forest; it is the cause of more wandering of the mind*

(*Shankaracharya*). The various methods of joining words, the various methods of speaking in beautiful language, the various methods of explaining in the diction of the scriptures, are only for disputation of and enjoyment of the learned. They are not conducive to the development of spiritual perception.

Those who employ such methods to impart religion to others are only desirous to show off their learning, so that the world may praise them as great scholars. You will find that none of the great teachers of the world has ever went into these various explanations of the texts; there is no attempt with them at 'text-torturing', no eternal playing upon the meaning of words and their roots. Yet they taught nobly, while others, who have nothing to teach, have sometimes even taken up a single word and written a three-volume book on its origin, on the man who used it first, and on what that man was accustomed to eat, and how long he slept, and so on.

Shri Ramakrishna used to tell a story of some men who went into a mango orchard and busied themselves in counting the leaves, the twigs, and the branches, examining their colour, comparing their sizes and noting everything down most carefully and then starting a learned discussion on each of these topics, which were undoubtedly highly interesting to them. But one of them more sensible than the others, did not care for all these things, and instead began to eat the fruit itself. And was he not wise? So leave this counting of leaves and twigs and note-taking to others. This kind of work has its proper place, but not here in the spiritual

domain. You never see a strong spiritual man among these 'leaf-counters'. Religion, the highest aim, the highest glory of man, does not require as much labour as 'leaf-counting'. If you want to be a real devotee, it is not at all necessary for you to know whether Krishna was born in Mathura or in Vrija; what he was doing, or the exact date on which he pronounced the teaching of the Gita. You only require to feel the craving for the beautiful lessons of duty and love in the Gita. All the other particulars about it and its author are for the enjoyment of the learned. Let them have what they desire. Say "Santih Santih" to their learned controversies, and let us eat the mangoes !

The second condition necessary in the teacher is sinlessness. The question is often asked, "Why should we look into the character and personality of a teacher? We have only to judge what he says, and take that up." That is not right. If a man wants to teach me dynamics or chemistry, or any other physical science, he may be anything he likes, because what the physical sciences require is merely the intellectual equipment. However, in spiritual science it is impossible from first to last, that there can be any spiritual light in the soul which is impure. What religion can an impure man teach? The *sine qua non* of acquiring spiritual truth for oneself, or for imparting it to others, is purity of heart and soul. A vision of God, or a glimpse of the beyond, can never come until the soul is pure, and then alone comes the value of a teacher's words, because only then is he the true 'transmitter.' What can he transmit if he has no spiritual power in himself? There must be the worthy

vibration of spirituality in the mind of the teacher so that it may be sympathetically conveyed to the mind of the taught. The function of the teacher is indeed an affair of the transference of something and not one of mere stimulation of the existing intellectual or other faculties in the taught. Something real and appreciable as an influence comes from the teacher and goes to the taught. Therefore, the teacher must be pure.

The third condition is with regard to the motive. The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive, such as money, name or fame. His work must be simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted is love. Any selfish motive, such as the desire for gain or for name will immediately destroy this conveying medium. God is love and only he who has known God thus can be a teacher of godliness and God to man.

When you see that in your teacher all these conditions are fulfilled, you are safe; if they are not, it is unsafe to allow yourself to be taught by him, for there is a great danger that, if he cannot convey goodness to your heart, he may convey wickedness. You must guard yourself against this danger by all means. 'श्रोत्रियाऽवृजिनोऽकोमहतो यो ब्रह्मवित्तम्' *He who is learned in the scriptures, sinless, unpolluted by lust and is the greatest knower of Brahman is the real teacher.*

From what has been said, it naturally follows that not everyone can be taught to love, appreciate and assimilate religion everywhere. The '*sermons in the stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything*', may be all very

well as a poetical figure of speech, but no man can impart to another a single grain of truth unless the other has undeveloped or latent germs of it within himself. To whom do the stones and brooks preach sermons? To the human soul whose lotus of the inner holy shrine is already quick with life. And the light which causes the beautiful opening up of this lotus comes always from the good and wise teacher. When the heart has thus been opened, it becomes fit to receive teaching from the stones or the brooks, the stars or the sun or the moon or from anything which has its existence in our divine universe, but the unopened heart will see in them nothing but mere stones or mere brooks. A blind man may go to a museum, but he will not profit by it in any way. His eyes must be opened up first, and then alone he will be able to learn what the things in that museum can teach.

The person who opens the eyes of the aspirant is the teacher. Our relationship with the teacher, therefore, is the same as that between an ancestor and his descendant. Without faith, humility, submission and veneration in our hearts towards our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth of religion in us. It is a significant fact that, where this kind of relation between the teacher and the taught prevails, there alone spiritual giants are in the making, while in those countries which have neglected to keep up this kind of relationship, the religious teacher has become a mere lecturer, the teacher expecting his five dollars, and the person taught expecting his brain to be filled with the teacher's words and each going his own way after this much has been done. Under such circumstances spirituality becomes al-

most an unknown quantity. There is nobody to transmit it, and none to receive it. Religion for such people becomes business. They think they can get it with their dollars, but unfortunately it cannot be.

Religion, which is the highest knowledge and the highest wisdom, cannot be bought, nor can it be acquired from books. You may thrust your head into all the corners of the world; you may explore the Himalayas, the Alps and the Caucasus. You may sound the depths of the sea and pry into every nook of Tibet and the Gobi Desert, but you will not find it anywhere, until your heart is ready for receiving it and your teacher has come. And when that divinely-appointed teacher comes, serve him with childlike confidence and simplicity; freely open your heart to his influence and see in him God manifested. Those who seek Truth with such feeling of love and veneration are revealed the most wonderful things regarding Truth, Goodness and Beauty by the Lord of Truth Himself.

Incarnate Teachers and Incarnations

Wherever His Name is spoken, that very place is holy. How much holier is the man who speaks It, and with what veneration should we approach him, from whom spiritual truth comes to us ! Such great spiritual teachers are indeed very few in number, but the world is never altogether without them. They are always the fairest flowers of human life. 'अहेतुकदयासिन्धु' They are the ocean of mercy without any motive. 'आचार्य माँ विजानीयात्' '*Know the Guru to be Me*' says Lord Krishna in the Gita. The moment the world is absolutely bereft of these, it will become a hideous hell and

hasten on to its destruction.

Even higher and nobler than the ordinary ones are another set of Teachers, the Avatars of Ishvara. They can transmit spirituality with a thought, even with a mere wish. The lowest and most degraded characters within one second can become saints at their command. They are the Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship.

No man can really see God except through these human manifestations. If we try to see God otherwise, we make for ourselves a hideous caricature of Him and believe it to be no worse than the original. There is a story about an ignorant man who was asked to fashion an image of the god Shiva, and who, after days of hard struggle, manufactured only the image of a donkey. So whenever we try to think of God as He is, in His absolute perfection, we invariably meet with the most miserable failure; because as long as we are men we cannot conceive Him as anything higher than man. The time will come when we shall transcend our human nature and know Him as He is, but as long as we are bound by our human nature we must worship Him in man and as man. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man. You may deliver great intellectual discourses on God and on all things under the sun. You may become a great rationalist and prove to your satisfaction that all these accounts of the Avataras of God as man, are nonsense. But let us come for a moment to

practical common-sense. What is there behind this kind of remarkable intellect? Zero. Nothing. Only so much froth. When next you hear someone delivering a great intellectual lecture against worshipping the Avatars of God, get hold of him and ask him what his idea of God is and what he understands by the terms 'omnipotence' and 'omnipresence', and all similar terms, beyond the spelling of the words. He really means nothing by them; he cannot formulate as their meaning any idea unaffected by his own human nature. He is no better off in this matter than the man in the street who has not read a single book. That man in the street, however, at least does not disturb the peace of others; while this big talker creates disturbance and misery among mankind. Religion is, after all, realization, and we must make the sharpest distinction between talk and intuitive experience. What we experience in the depths of our souls is realization. Nothing indeed is so uncommon as common sense in regard to this matter.

By our present constitution we are limited and bound to see God as man. If, for instance, the buffaloes want to worship God, they will, in keeping with their own nature, see Him as a huge buffalo. If a fish wants to worship God, it will have to form an idea of Him as a big fish, and man has to think of Him as man. These various conceptions are not due to a morbidly active imagination. Man, the buffalo and the fish may be supposed to represent so many different vessels, so to say. All these vessels go to the sea of God to get filled with water, each according to its own shape and capacity. In the man, the water takes the shape of man, in the

buffalo the shape of a buffalo, and the fish the shape of a fish. In each of these vessel there is the same water of the sea of God. When men see him, they see him as a man, and the animals, if they have any conception of God at all, must see him as an animal, each according to its own ideal. So we cannot help seeing God as man, and, therefore, we are bound to worship Him as man. There is no other way.

Two kinds of men do not worship God as man: the human brute who has no religion, and the Paramhansa, who has risen beyond all the weakness of humanity and has transcended the limits of his own human nature. He alone can worship God as He is. To him all nature has become his own self.

Here too, as in all other cases, the two extremes meet. The extreme of ignorance and the other extreme of knowledge, neither of these go through acts of worship. The human brute does not worship because of his ignorance, and the 'jivanmuktas'(free souls) do not worship because they have realized God in themselves. Being between these two poles of existence, if anyone tells you that he is not going to worship God as man, kindly take care of that person. He is to say the least, an irresponsible talker, whose religion is for the unsound and empty brain.

God understands human failings and becomes man to do good to humanity.

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ।।
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ।।

'Whenever virtue subsides and wickedness prevails I manifest myself. To establish virtue, to destroy evil and to save the good, I come from Age to Age. Fools deride me who has assumed the human form, not knowing My real nature as the Lord of the Universe.' Such is Shri Krishna's declaration in the Gita on incarnation. "When a huge tidal wave comes," says Shri Ramakrishna, "all the little brooks and ditches become full to the brim without any effort of consciousness on their own part; so when an incarnation comes, a tidal wave of spirituality breaks upon the world, and people feel spirituality almost full in the air."

Arti

Hymn of Praise to the Living Master

Jai Gurudev, Maharaj Ji,

Your glory fills the whole world,

Protector of the weary and the weak,

You bring the death of attachment,

You bring the mind true detachment,

Save us from the ocean deep.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev

Creator, Preserver, Destroyer,

Bow their heads and pray to You,

All bow and pray to you,

Scriptures sing your glory,

Scriptures sing your sweet story,

Your virtues are ever true

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev

Chanting, fasting, charity austerity

Will never bring you knowledge of the Soul,

Will never reveal your Soul

Without the grace of Satguru,

Without the Knowledge of Satguru

Rites and rituals won't reach the goal.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.

In the river of bondage to Maya

All are swept out to sea,

All are sinking in the depths of the sea,

Guru's boat is the Holy Name,

Guru's ship is the Holy Word
 In seconds he has set us free.
 Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.
 Anger, desire, attachment rob us of eternal life.
 Take away our heavenly life,
 Satguru gives true Knowledge,
 Satguru is eternal Knowledge
 The sword that kills our problem life.
 Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.
 Religions harp their own glory
 And call me to follow their own path,
 Welcome me to follow their own way,
 The essence of all was revealed,
 The seed of all was revealed,
 I walk on the True Way today.
 Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.
 Nectar from Satguru's Feet is so holy
 And it cleans us of our sins,
 So sacred in cleaning us of sins,
 When he speaks, darkness flies away,
 When he speaks, darkness cannot stay,
 Doubts removed, new life then begins.
 Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.
 Mine, thine, wealth, health
 Give them to the Lotus Feet of Love,
 Give them to the Lotus Feet of the Love,
 Give yourself to Satguru,
 Sacrifice your all to Satguru,
 Be united with the blissful Truth.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.

Bible, Gita, the Koran sing the glory of your Name,
They all sing the glory of your Name,
Angels sing you glory,
Heavenly hosts sing your praises,
They find no end to your fame.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.

Desires have robbed me and left me
In the darkness of the night,
Trapped me in the darkness of the night
Guru gives Holy Name and Light,
Guru gives Holy Name and sight
Cross the ocean by his Love and Light.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.

Many past forms you have taken,
Now we have come in your control,
Again you have come to save the soul.
In this time of darkness,
To lead your devotees from darkness
You have come as 'Hansa' the Pure Soul.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.

So come to the shelter of Guru's grace,
Come with your heart and your soul,
Bring him your heart and your soul,
Cross the worldly ocean, cross it by your devotion,
And attain the supreme goal.

Jai Dev, Jai Satgurudev.

To The Master

I bow humbly in worship to the Lotus Feet of my Master, who is the Lord Himself.

The spiritual Master is the source of all happiness. He is the true personification of Knowledge. Like the omnipresent sky, he is beyond duality. He is the essence of everything. He is the ever present, all-merciful, unshaken, omniscient witness of the universe. He is beyond thought and above emotion. He is not bound by the three attributes of Nature—Sat (balance) Raj (excitation) and Tam (inertia).

O Satguru ! I bow to you !

I bow to the dust of my Master's Feet. Because of him, all my difficulties faded away, the Lord Himself appeared before me and my mind became pure.

I bow to the Lotus Feet of my Guru, who is the fountain of joy and good fortune. A man who is the humble servant of his spiritual Master crosses the ocean of delusion without difficulty.

Countless difficulties are removed simply by remembering the Master. That is why saints remember him before they begin any action.

The all-powerful Master shows the True Path to a person such as me, who is full of badness, totally lacking in virtue and whose mind is stubborn.

O my Master ! you are the Almighty Lord ! Please

hold my hand tightly and land me to the end of this Path. Please don't let go of me in midstream.

O Lord, please don't forsake us ! We are all drowning in the ocean of materialism. If you do not hold on to us, we will be swept away. The heart is like an ocean. It is very difficult to comprehend, as there are countless waves in it. Who else except the compassionate Master can help us to cross the ocean and safely reach the far shore?

I have made countless mistakes, and still have not grown tired of making them. Lord, Please, either forgive your servant, or let Death take me. I have been doing wrong ever since my birth. I am full of vices. Only you, the Merciful One, can remove my pain. Please take care of me.

My mind is not steeped in love for you. I do not behave properly. Still I don't understand why you allow me to live in your shelter.

I am ashamed of myself. How can I please you when I know that I am committing mistake right in front of you? How can I pray to you?

O Master, Lord of Lords ! I ask for nothing more than to serve you day and night. If only I might see you, I would tell you all my sufferings, and rest my head on your holy Feet.

I bow to the Lotus Feet of my Master, who has removed the darkness of ignorance with his injection of Knowledge. I bow to him, who has revealed to me the Knowledge. I bow to him, who has revealed to me the Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality which pervades the entire animate and inanimate universe.

I am in the shelter of the Master

Lord, I bow to your Lotus Feet. I have come to your shelter, my Master. Obeisance to you ! You cure the three types of suffering that one finds in the world, i.e. disease, disaster and spiritual ignorance.

You remove all our fears. You are the very embodiment of blessedness, and the source of bliss. You are Lord Shiva, the source from whom the endless Nectar flows.

You are the Generator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings. You reside within all beings. I do not have the capacity to remember you nor meditate on you.

You are concealed in the cave of the heart, yet you expand to fill the universe. You reveal yourself to be pure consciousness Itself. I bow before you.

You are the all-pervading Lord of all creatures, and the saviour of your devotees. You are unique, incomparable and beyond time. You are the one to whom all prayers are directed. You dwell within yet remain invisible to us. Through your Grace one can master all the Yogic powers. You reveal the highest Knowledge. You are the pinnacle of glory and splendour. I bow to you, my Master.

Dedication

I am extremely fortunate to have found my Master. He has removed all doubts from my mind. I have found within myself that which I was looking for in the external world. I have been shown the supreme Light of God which shines within all beings.

The bondage of many lifetimes is thus torn asunder, and the suffering of births in non-human species has been erased.

St. Brahmananda says that, someone who has dedicated himself at the Feet of his Master feels even more appreciation for the Master than for God.

Reflection

People talk a lot about Gurus, but only that person who can remove doubts from our minds can be called a Guru. There are many religious teachers in this world, who are able to relieve you of your money but not your sufferings.

First test the teacher, and only then receive initiation and become his disciple. Anyone who adopts a teacher without first scrutinizing him is sure to drown in the worldly ocean.

Even in a moment of forgetfulness, do not follow a teacher if he is a sinner, a hypocrite, an atheist, wicked, proud, critical, unsteady of mind, cunning, lustful, angry by nature, argumentative, greedy, unbalanced, given to partiality, or deceit. Keep well away from such a person.

How should a spiritual Master be?

He should have realized the secrets of the Ultimate Reality, and should help others without looking for any reward. He should teach the path of spirituality. He should be full of forgiveness, compassion and contentment, think the highest thoughts and be free from pride and worldliness.

If you find such a Master and serve him, all fears of birth and death will vanish.

Once upon a time there was a Spiritual Master called Dadu Ji. He was very old and wise, a woodcutter by trade. Many people came to him from all over the land to receive the practical Knowledge of the soul.

In that kingdom there lived a very rich man, who was nearing the end of his life. He thought to himself, "I haven't very long to live. I had better find myself a guru before it is too late." He had never looked for Truth in his life, but now that death was approaching, he thought of the scriptures and remembered that they all advised that one should follow a spiritual Master. He had heard that Dadu Ji was a great saint, and decided to find him and to ask for knowledge.

He mounted his horse and galloped off. When he came to the forest, he saw an old man cutting wood and decided to ask him the way.

"Tell me, old man, where can I find Dadu Ji? But the old man was hard of hearing and did not answer. The rich man

impatiently gave the old man a shove and galloped off.

At last he came to the house of an old woman. He asked her where he might find the great sage Dadu Ji.

"Why, didn't you see an old man back there, chopping wood? That was Dadu Ji himself !" she said.

The rich man was shocked. He returned to the wood-cutter as fast as he could. When he reached there, the old man was still chopping wood.

The rich man jumped off his horse and fell at the feet of Dadu Ji, weeping his heart out and begging for pardon.

Dadu Ji only smiled. "There, there, my son. It's perfectly alright." He said.

Then he explained, "When you go to market to buy a piece of crockery, you must first tap the piece soundly to see if it is made properly. If it rings true, you know it is safe to buy it. In the same way, before you accept someone as your master, it is good to test him. You pushed me to see how I was, so perhaps you can accept me now and follow my teaching."

A disciple should meditate with intense love in the region of the 'thousand-petalled lotus' on the Master, who is the Supreme Lord manifested to reveal Spiritual knowledge and who removes the obstacles on the disciple's path.

The only purpose of the Scriptures is to direct us to unite the soul with God. A disciple who serves his master devotedly is saturated in Divine Bliss. If this were not so, you could not recognize the Master.

Who is accomplished?

A person may be physically beautiful. He may have a

large number of relatives. He may be as rich as Croesus. He may have learned the Scriptures by heart. He may be an accomplished poet. He may be highly respected at home and abroad, and even royalty may bow to him. He may be tolerant, peace-loving and naturally of good character. He may be able to pass his nights in the company of beautiful women with his mind beyond attachment to worldly pleasures. Even though he possesses great wealth, high rank or even a kingdom, his mind may be steady. Living in a forest or town may be all the same to him.

However, even possessing all these virtues, if he cannot attach his mind to the holy feet of the Master and serve him, then he has achieved nothing. Nothing! Nothing!!

Anyone who reads and reflects upon this can derive great benefit. If he acts on these lines, his mind will definitely become attached to the Master's Feet.

The Greatness of the Spiritual Master

How can I describe the Spiritual Master? How can one like me as ignorant as I, possibly understand him who is beyond all illusion? How can my dull wits explain that greatness which is beyond comprehension? About him even the scriptures can only say, 'Not this, not this'. He is beyond my understanding, therefore I bow to him from afar.

O Master ! Please at least give me the strength to understand you. I had hoped to praise you and I wished to worship you within the limit of *maya*, but illusion is incapable of serving you, so what can I do? I have no faith left in illusion, so, Master, just be as you are.

People cannot imagine the Supreme Soul, so they have to contend with statues, Each person concentrates on God according to his personal taste. In the same way, I will have to utilize this illusion to sing the glory of my Master.

O Master ! All praise to you ! All glory to you ! O Lord of the Universe, Source of all creation, Supreme Personality, Bestower of salvation, Friend of the humble and poor ! Only our blessing can dispel this powerful illusion, as the sun's rays dispel darkness. The sun chases away the darkness which at night comes back. Our Master is not like that. He destroys forever the cycle of births and deaths, and uproots the darkness of ignorance once and for all.

A piece of gold can never be a piece of iron. In the same way, a true devotee can never become a victim of doubt. Any river which merges with the Ganges also takes the name 'Ganges'. It becomes the Ganges and can never be separated from it again. Only before it unites with the Ganges it has its another name.

The touchstone can turn iron into gold, but it cannot turn it into a touchstone like itself. However, through the initiation which he gives, the Master can turn others into Masters. The disciple can attain the position of Master. So there is a big difference between the Master and a touchstone. The touchstone can only turn iron into gold, whereas the Master unites the disciple with himself in knowledge.

We cannot compare the Master with Mount Olympus, for mountains are made of rock, whereas the Master is soft with mercy for his devotees.

We cannot say that he is like the sky, for he is infinitely more subtle.

Nor can we compare him with the earth, for one day the earth will be destroyed, but the Master's patience lasts forever. The sun, too, has its limits, but the Master is limitless. The Light of his knowledge is much greater than sunlight.

Nor can I compare the Master with Atlas, for Atlas carries the burden of the world on its shoulders, while the Master is free of burdens.

He cannot be compared with water, because eventually water will dry up.

Why should anyone who already has peace of mind need a Chintamani (a glittering jewel mentioned in the scriptures

which is supposed to take away all worries)? A person who has no desires has no need for a wish-fulfilling tree.

We cannot call the Master 'wealthy', because what need has he of worldly wealth, when at his command is wealth of liberation? Even the wealth of Heaven may perish, but the Master's blessing are everlasting.

The powers of creation, preservation and destruction may fail, but the Knowledge revealed by the Master is everlasting.

What is there to compare with him? Everything in this world is mortal. The Master is beyond the limits of creating and it is impossible to describe him.

My way to describe his glory is to say that his glory can never be described ! Only a person who has had inner personal experience can appreciate this dilemma.

My Master is the incarnate Lord of this time. I bow before him, the embodiment of Supreme Bliss, the Revealer of the meaning of the scriptures, and the Remover of ignorance.

There is no one greater than spiritual Master, the Giver of Knowledge. Parents give birth to body, but the Master gives us our second birth, into the spiritual Kingdom. This birth is divine, beyond death and eternal. Spiritual knowledge is always fresh and alive.

We have two fathers. One gives us physical birth, and the other gives us spiritual birth, through revealing to us the Knowledge of the Truth. The father who reveals such a Knowledge is far superior, for only God lasts forever, whereas the body dies.

All the riches of this world are nothing compared to the gift of the Holy Word. How can we repay the Master who gives it to us?

The spiritual Master is he who gives us the lamp of true knowledge. He is God incarnate. The folly of taking the Master to be an ordinary human being will render a person's life useless;

A disciple should never go against his Master, no matter what happens, for Master is like mother and father to him. He should never listen to criticism of the Master. He should turn a deaf ear and leave.

The saints say that one should always sit. If he is eating, you should stand afar. Never interrupt his conversation.

When receiving his commands, stand humbly before him, to show respect.

There are many scriptures, and many doubts. The Knowledge of the self is very subtle, and without the help of the Master no one can realize it.

An aspirant who wants to realize his own self should receive Knowledge. Prostrate at the feet of the wise, render them forms of service, and request them sincerely for knowledge. Those Seers of the Truth will reveal it to you.

In the ancient scriptures it is written that knowledge should not be given to a person of unsteady mind.

Only someone whose devotion for the Lord is equalled by his devotion to his Master can realize the Truth. When knowledge is given to someone like this, it will bear fruit.

Bow to the Spiritual Master as often as you can. He can make his devotees become just like him, in the same way as

the Bhringi wasp transforms other insects into its own shape.

The Master, in his mercy, has shown us things which our eyes could not see. His glory is endless. He is always helping us. He opens our eyes to infinity.

When Master and disciple meet, they mix together like rainfall and river.

Place the Master's Feet on your head, and obey him at all times. Someone who is a true servant of his Master has no fear of anything in the three worlds.

Suppose my Master and God are both standing before me. To whom should I bow first? I am overwhelmed by my Master's Grace, because he has shown me god, and allowed me to realize Him, therefore I should bow to him first.

We can call the Master, even when he is very far away, by means of the Holy word. Our call will reach him, for the Word is always on the move.

O Master ! Nobody can help me as you can, so why should I turn to someone else?

First the disciple offers his heart to the Master, who gives him the Holy Name as a reward. The Master is like a washerman, and the disciple is like a soiled cloth. When the cloth is washed on the scrubbing board of the Holy Name, it shines with dazzling radiance.

The Master is a potter and the disciple is the pot. To make the pot perfect, the potter supports the clay from inside with one hand and firmly slaps it from outside into shape with the other hand.

The Master builds his castle and decorates it with love. The Holy Word is its window, through which we can also

enjoy the presence of the Lord.

The Master and the Lord are one. Everything else exists on the plane of duality. Therefore, the devotee who worships the Master and dissolves himself in love and service, can meet God.

When you serve the Master, you find shelter. When you have knowledge, you experience the joy of true love, devotion, kindness and faith.

Anyone who thinks that the Master is an ordinary human being is blind. He will always be very unhappy in this world and even death will not relieve him of his sufferings.

It's common sense that Master is greater than God. People who merely think about God stay stuck in the world, but those who have realized what the Master really is, pass beyond suffering, and attain perfect freedom.

If you want to understand the mystery of what I am saying, surrender yourself to the Master. Many people went down the drain because of pride and arrogance.

There is no giver like the Master, and there is no beggar like his disciple. The Master gives his disciple the wealth of heaven and earth.

The root of meditation is the form of the master, and the root of worship is his holy feet. His word is the True Name of God. The beginning of Truth is to have pure and sincere love for the Master.

By coming and going according to the Master's orders, a disciple is freed from cares.

If you look for something in the wrong place you can never find it, but when you seek out the company of the

Master, you will find the Truth. The Path has existed since before time began, but the master shows it to you in a moment.

This body is full of poison, but the master is a well of Nectar, You should realize that to exchange your head for the privilege of following the Master is the best possible bargain, and very cheap at that price.

When the Master is pleased with me and speaks even a single word, a cloud of love showers joy upon me and I am completely drenched.

The Master is a perfect knight. He cuts you from top to bottom with firm strokes. The wounds are not visible externally, but inside, your ego is shattered.

If I shoot someone, he will die, but if the master shoots him with the arrow of the Holy Word, he becomes immortal. The dumb suddenly become eloquent, the deaf can hear and the lame find their legs, when pierced by the Master's arrow.

The Master tells us to go to a wise man, and the wise men tell us to worship the Master. This play allows me to realize the secret of the scriptures, which was otherwise beyond me. Millions of moons or even thousands of suns may rise together, but only by the mercy of the Master can an aspirant see the light which chases away the darkness of ignorance.

The word of the Master is like a ship. Rare are those who can understand this mystery. The ocean and the drop are one. How, then, can I tell the difference between them?

You may do many spiritual practices and make great

sacrifices. You may study many books, but without the Master's help you can never arrive at the Truth, no matter what you do.

Without the Knowledge of the Truth, even godly people and saints, let alone normal human beings, cannot be saved. The creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe also need the mercy of the Lord. What to speak of ordinary beings?

The Master is like sandalwood, and his perfume is the love of the Lord. He distributes it to all those who come to him.

The more time we spend in holy company, the deeper our devotion will become. Everyday our devotion will increase proportionately. There is no stopping it.

The Master gives us self-Knowledge. You should serve him with love and devotion, worship him and give him all your respect and attention.

Gurus who have many monasteries and who are greedy and proud are wicked. They look towards the throne and court the respect of the people. There is neither truth nor substance in them.

But their fruits you shall know them. The marks of a true Master are his self-control, love, discrimination, disinterest in worldliness and impartiality. He is not stubborn. He is peaceful, not given to anger, and treats all people equally. He is always absorbed in the Holy Word. He is love and affection personified. Such a Master is the ultimate destination of the pilgrim. Once you take a dip in his knowledge, all your religious obligations are fulfilled.

He is the true philosopher's stone. He fulfills all our desires by granting us the gift of devotion.

Master, you are all-powerful, and the only one who can guide us on the True Path. You have saved me from unreality, severed me from my lower nature and made me pure and high.

I was walking a long road. My Master appeared and led me by the hand. When I was tired and sweating, he cooled me, sheltering me with his own shadow.

When an aspirant takes the shelter of the Master, he finds satisfaction, and learns how to behave properly. When he enters the storehouse of knowledge, he finds penances and praises, confessions and chants, prayer, meditation and devotion all lying there.

After I had wandered in ignorance for a long time, my luck changed and I suddenly found my Master. That was the moment when all my fears and ignorance left me.

I was following my mind's guidance into the ditch, but my Master caught my hand and, showing me the Abode of the Lord, even took me with him.

Rare are those who can understand the glory of the Master. He dispels all ignorance and saves us from the results of our actions.

When a person is weary of the cycle of suffering, he can find rest at the feet of the Master. When he remembers the Holy Name, all his needs are fulfilled.

Worship the master and pray to him again and again. He takes us across the ocean of mortality in the boat of the Holy Name.

A Master should be free from selfishness. He should be engrossed in spiritual thought and deeds, helping others all the time.

Such a Master lives in the garden of the world but does not take a single leaf. He distributes the Love of the Lord to all, regardless of caste, colour or creed.

God is Formless, yet all attributes are His. Get the secret of the Holy Word from the Master. Knowledge helps you grow in purity, penance austerly and discipline, and from the Master you get love, devotion and grace to meditate.

Guru Nanak's Poem

Meditate on the Guru, within yourself. His Word controls the mind. Keep the Master's Feet enshrined in your heart. Always worship him as God.

The Guru brings those who have lost the way back to the path of Devotion. He does not abandon them, but rather he inspires them with devotion for the Lord.

He breaks the bonds of birth and death. A True Master deserves unlimited praise.

We should not let ourselves get entangled in this world of ignorance. However, no one can cross this ocean of ignorance without the help of the Master. True knowledge has only ever been available from the True Master.

The Master's gift expands the consciousness of the devotee, and where once there was darkness, now all illuminates light.

Guru is the doer, because only he is fit to do actions. He is and always will be the manifestation of God.

Make no mistake about it--without the Master there is

no salvation from this mortal world. The Master has made me realize this.

In the words of Saint Tulsidas

I bow to the Lotus Feet of my Master, who is the ocean of mercy and God in human form. His words are like the shining rays of the sun which banish the dark clouds of ignorance.

The Master is the Lord personified, the pure and auspicious giver of pure joy. He wipes the dirt and dust from the mirror of the mind.

Without the Master, no one can cross the ocean of this world, even though he be equal in power to the Creator (Brahma) and the Destroyer (Shiva)

No one can receive Knowledge except through the Master. A devotee who is attached to the world, cannot have Knowledge. All the Scriptures agree that without devotion to the Master, no one can enjoy peace of mind.

Can a discontented and dissatisfied man ever find rest? Without water a boat cannot move, no matter how much you try to force it.

Without faith there is no devotion, and the Lord is only pleased by devotion. Without the Grace and Mercy of the Lord, we cannot find peace, even in a dream.

In the words of the devotee Surdas

Inside myself, I see myself. The Word alone is there. The Light of the Self shines within me, which my master has revealed to me.

The musk deer cannot find the scent outside it is looking for, but if it could explore inside itself, it would find the

scent hidden there.

In the same way, the radiant Self lies within us, but we can never leave the darkness of ignorance and see the light until the True Master opens our eyes.

You will not find the jewels that you yourself are wearing, even if you search high and low for them. Until the Master comes and shows you your Soul, you are as good as blind.

A mother dreams that her child is dead. She awakes, terrified, and is relieved to find him by her side. Surdas smiles at this

A dumb man cannot express what sweetness is and in the same way a saint can find no words to express the perfection of the inner kingdom.

Anyone who goes empty-handed to visit a doctor, a Guru, his friends, or a king will never be successful in his venture.

Believe that the Master is greater than God, because God places us in this hell, while the Master causes all fear of it to vanish.

The Master is the embodiment of the three active powers of this universe (i.e. creative, preservative and destructive). He is the Supreme Lord, who take away the sufferings of the humble and the poor. Anyone who takes the shelter of the Master is freed from the wheel of suffering.

If even the most sinful of men comes to the Master, he will be protected from all pain and suffering. He who has faith in the word of the True Master can never go to hell.

No rites or rituals can help us without the Master.

Without him, we can never understand Holy Knowledge.

If a person has all the signs of a True Master, you can rest assured that his Knowledge will bear fruit. If the Guru fulfills all the obligations of this title, make him your Lord. Wise people who understand this secret will seize this perfect opportunity, knowing that the end may come at any moment.

He who does not realize what it means to serve the Master, and who does not worship his holy feet will be unsuccessful in all his spiritual endeavours.

Yoga postures, charity, chanting and bathing in holy rivers are all useless actions if you have not served the Master. Without service, the mind is dark and the light of knowledge can never shine there. Only he who is free from attraction and repulsion can save devotees.

My Master is a fearless warrior. He strikes with the Holy Word, throws the bomb of Love and destroys the bastions of ignorance.

When the Word of the Master takes effect, even a king forsakes his grandeur and luxury and enters into the Life Divine. When you are touched by the Word of the Master, you lose all taste for worldly pleasures. All identification with finite things vanishes and you become a true devotee, attached to the Feet of the Master.

If God is angry with you, you have nothing to fear, because the Master will save you. So respect your Master wholeheartedly and he will help you in every way.

The True Guru

It is the mercy of the True Guru

That has made me to know the unknown

I have learned from him

How to walk without feet,

To drink without mouth,

To fly without wings.

I have brought my love and my meditation into the land

Of no sun and moon, nor day and night.

Without eating, I have tasted the sweet Nectar,

Without water, I have quenched my thirst.

Where there is the response of delight,

There is the fullness of joy.

Before whom can that joy be uttered?

Kabir says : The true Guru is great beyond words,

And great is the disciple's good fortune.

He removes the veil and grants the true vision of God.

He reveals the worlds in Him.

He makes me to hear the Unstruck Music,

He shows joy and sorrow to be one.

He fills all utterance with love.

Verily the disciple has no fear,

Who has such a Guru to lead him to safety.

Swami Vivekananda described the foolproof way to recognize a True Master. Firstly, he must be able to reveal the spirit of the Scriptures. Secondly, he must be sinless. Thirdly, he must teach without any motive other than the spiritual upliftment of one and all, regardless of caste or creed.

Many will claim to reveal the same Knowledge which Christ, Buddha, Guru Nanak and Lord Rama revealed to

their devotees. But to what extent are they practising what they preach?

A drug dealer may not use drugs. A liquor retailer may not drink wine himself. A surgeon performs operations but first makes sure that he and his clothings are sterilized. However, a Spiritual Master cannot separate himself from the knowledge he reveals. He himself must be a living embodiment, a pure and noble manifestation of the Holy knowledge, otherwise his ability to lead his disciples to salvation is severely limited. That is why purity and righteousness must be the foremost characteristics of someone claiming to reveal True Knowledge.

'The root of meditation is the Guru, the root of worship is his Lotus Feet. His Word is the controller of the mind, and liberation is only by his Grace.'

If a devotee has faith and reverence, then by the Master's Grace he will attain salvation. Without the Grace of the Master, no one can cross the worldly ocean.

The Theory of Cause and Effect

The theory of cause and effect always holds true. It is the Divine Law that all soul must return to God, That all souls will reach perfection, yet, even so we must have a Master.

The way in which we have spent our past lives and the thoughts which we had, have resulted in our present life. Whatever we are doing or thinking now, will result in our future lives.

This is the law of Cause and Effect, and it is quite true. However, it does not imply that there is no use in accepting

help to uplift our soul.

There is a hidden power in the soul, which awakens when kindled by the power of a great soul. The truth of this can be understood if we consider that most people need outside help sometime or other.

You cannot receive spiritual energy from books. The soul can only receive it through another soul, There is no other way.

We may spend our entire life getting educated. We may become very intellectual, but in the end this will not help our spiritual progress. On the contrary, we may find that the more intellectual we become, the less we evolve spiritually.

Books may help us to develop our intellect, but they are unable to help our spiritual growth. This is a fact.

We study the Scriptures and other books, thinking that we are growing spiritually. However, although we may become more intellectual, we may not have affected our spiritual development to the least.

We may deliver fine lengthy lectures on religion, but remain quite unable to live a truly spiritual life. This is because the special power which we need for this does not come from books.

It is most necessary to receive this knowledge from a great soul. It will awaken and develop the dormant spirit within us, and we can then embark on the spiritual path.

The True Master is Self-Evident

How can we recognize the true spiritual Master? We do not need a lamp or a torch to see the sun. In the same way as

everyone knows when the sun has risen in the east, the sincere soul will realize when it has found the True Master.

Truth is self-evident. It needs no other method to prove itself. It is self-illuminating.

The Light of Truth touches the innermost part of our nature. Everyone runs for it and accepts it as Truth.

The Role of Reverence

We can realize Truth by following the advice of the spiritual Master with love and devotion, not by merely reading books.

An aspirant may roam the four corners of the earth, climb the Himalayas or the Alps, cross the Sahara or the Gobi Desert, or dive into the deepest ocean, but until he finds the Master, he will never get Spiritual Knowledge.

Once he has found his Master, the disciple should serve him as a son serves his father, opening his heart and regarding his Master as God personified.

Lord Krishna said, 'Know the Guru to be Myself, the Lord.' We should understand that Guru is a most powerful manifestation of the Lord. If we understand this, our minds will automatically turn to the Master before we start to do anything.

God reveals many hidden miracles to those who seek Truth with reverence and devotion.

In the Bible we read, 'Take off your shoes, for this is holy ground.' A place is holy, if the Holy Name is remembered there.

So imagine the holiness of those who remember the

Holy Name at all times, and the holiness of someone through whom we can realize spiritual truth! How much devotion and veneration we should have for him! We should receive his Knowledge with our hearts full of devotion.

This world cannot survive without him. The day it is bereft of the Master, it will fall into chaos and will be destroyed.

The Master is the flower on the tree of humanity. This world is functioning only because he is with us. It is only his power and energy which keeps society from disintegrating altogether.

We cannot see God except in Human Form.

Have we ever seen God anywhere? Even if we try, we will not see him. Why should we speak of seeing him, when we cannot even paint his picture without distorting Him?

As long as we are in human form, we will be unable to imagine anything higher than the human. The day will surely come when we will be able to rise above Nature and see the real form of God, but as long as we keep our human nature, we will have to worship him in human form.

Whatever you say, no matter how much you may try, you will not see God except in human form.

You may deliver long lectures, be a great debater and prove all the stories of the Scriptures to be myths, but, my brothers, try and understand that your learning is still quite useless. There is no substance to it at all.

Whenever you see someone who is speaking against worship of God, immediately stop him and ask, "How much do you know about God, apart from the fact that He

is omnipotent, omniscient and that his love is unlimited? You've heard people saying all these things, but do you understand what they mean? I find that such people don't know anything. They don't know if these words have any meaning or not.

A fool, who has never read a book in his life, is better off than these people, for at least he isn't disturbing the peace, while these people irritate and confuse others with their arguments. Atheists have no inclination for any kind of religion, yet both these persons are in the same position.

Direct experience of the soul is the true religion. We must differentiate between words and experience. Whatever your soul experiences, is true. We should ask those who pay lip-service to God, who or what they think He is. Have they seen him? Do they understand why he is called omnipresent?

People have no idea what the soul is. They can only imagine the Unmanifest one in terms of whatever they see around them, so they imagine him in terms of blue sky, open spaces, the ocean, etc. If we don't allow ourselves to think in these terms, how can we form any picture of God? We speak about a God Who is everywhere but actually we are thinking about the ocean ! Is God the ocean, then?

So throw away all these useless arguments. What we need is knowledge of God, pure and simple, but that is the most difficult thing in this world to find. All we hear are lengthy debates. One thing is for sure: in our present limited condition, we are bound to think of God as having human form.

How can we break the bonds of delusion?

Even if you try thousands of different ways, you cannot break the bonds of worldly attachment. Even if you were to burn a fire under a cauldron of oil for a hundred ages, the reflected moon will not burn. A snake living in the hollow of a tree is not killed by the tree's thorns. Similarly, the mind cannot be purified by unreasonable practices. If your mind is full of desires for worldly things, you can bathe at holy places all you like, but how will you kill that snake within you? St Tulsidas said that without the Grace of the Master, you cannot receive the Holy knowledge, and without that Knowledge you cannot cross the ocean of mortality.

There are two things: the eternal soul and the temporal world. The Guru is he who takes us from the temporal to the eternal, who introduces us to the Truth, who shows us the Light to Truth and who thereby removes the darkness of our ignorance.

'Gu' mean darkness, and 'ru' means light. Just as darkness vanishes before the sun, so the mere presence of the Satguru dispels the darkness of ignorance. Then the sun of knowledge shines. The Knowledge revealed by the Master is not like the sun which sets in the evening, bringing back the darkness. That knowledge is never darkened. The soul is never lost again.

The soul is not born, nor does it die. It is self-manifested and everlasting. Being a free entity, it knows neither birth nor death. Having no creator and no cause, it is birthless, eternal, and indestructible. Even when this body perishes, the soul does not.

O Lord! You alone know in which Name Your infinite Energy lies. We don't have to waste time chanting all the other names. Time and place is also no obstacle to the remembrance of the True Name, because all times are favourable and all places become pure. You are extremely approachable and compassionate, but it is our misfortune that we have no love for you.

Without satsang you cannot hear about God, without hearing about God you cannot be free of attachment, and without destroying attachment you cannot have love for the Lord. A wise and patient person, after considering all this, gives up all doubts and illogical arguments and constantly meditates on God.

The Lord, Who is all happiness, an ocean of compassion and the support of all, is won over by devotion. Until a person dispenses with egotism and pride and constantly meditates on God, he won't find peace and happiness even in a dream. He may be an expert in worldly knowledge, but without meditation on God he is just like an animal without horns and tail.

You may be able to churn water and extract ghee, or extract oil from sand, but without meditation on God you cannot cross the ocean of birth and death. This is an unchangeable fact.

God's Name is most holy, sweeter than honey and the bestower of all blessings. This entire world is illusory and false, just like dream. Only God's Name is True. He who teaches us how to meditate on the eternal Name of God is truly a Spiritual Master.

Without light you cannot dispel darkness, and without knowledge you cannot remove ignorance. Without the Master (who is the qualified form of God) you cannot see the Absolute and attributeless God.

The Scriptures cast a net of many words. If you don't know the right path, you will continue to wander in the forest. Without the Spiritual Master a person keeps on wandering further away from the path of devotion, caught up in this net of words.

The Scriptures talk of four types of sounds. Three have a physical source, so they have a beginning and an end. But the perfect sound, the fourth one, is continuous. It has no beginning and no end. Only by meditation on this perfect sound we can gain everything. We can become perfected Yogis. This sound is revealed only by the master.

By remembering the Holy Name, we receive all that we need in this world. We become fully realized. There are two conditions, however: the Master must be super-powerful, and the disciple must be the same.

The Holy Name is received from one who has in turn received it from his master, and who is the present living Master in the correct line of spiritual succession. From ancient times the Spiritual Master has channelized his power to his disciples. Since the Name is revealed through that same spiritual tradition, It is very powerful. He who reveals this name is called the Master, and he who receives it is called the disciple.

If a disciple practises this Name properly and regularly, he will have nothing more to do in the way of devotion. All

spiritual disciplines are included in the remembrance of the Holy Name.

St Kabir said that devotees know that nothing is more powerful than the Name.

The Master is like a farmer, and the disciple is the farm. The farmer prepares his land to perfection, manuring it and making it fertile. Then he sows the best seeds, hoping for a good harvest.

When the Master sows the seed of the Holy Name in his disciple, he also hopes that his disciple will progress and benefit spiritually. The Master never plants the seed in the hope that his disciple will not enjoy perfect peace. Just as a seed can only sprout after it has been planted, so the flower of Knowledge will not blossom until the disciple erases his selfishness completely. If the disciple is good, he will recoil from ego in the same way as sensitive grass draws back when it is touched. He then quickly realizes the Knowledge.

The path of devotion is very subtle and full of tiny holes. 'I'-ness and 'Thy'-ness cannot adjust together here. Sunlight disperses darkness, Knowledge disperses ignorance, sound intellect disperses greed and devotion disperses pride.

Just as a new cloth easily and quickly absorbs dye, so the disciple with a pure and guileless heart can quickly and easily absorb the Master's Knowledge.

The Master is the dyer, and he dyes the devotee's heart in the colours of love and devotion. The dye of love takes effect only in a pure heart. A disobedient one is never steeped in the colours of devotion.

The Master is not impressed by cleverness. He is pleased

only by a loving heart. Dirty clothes are cleaned by the washerman, and when a disciple comes to the shelter of the Master, he is cleaned of impure thoughts, completely purified, then dyed in the colour of devotion. The Master is the washerman who cleans the devotee, like a cloth, with the soap of Holy Name and the water of love. He makes him pure.

The Master and his servant should both have the same thoughts and feelings. They should be as one, and then the disciple can please his Master. The disciple should keep his mind attuned to the Master and wish only to please him.

A boatman ferries people across the water by means of his boat. Likewise, the Master ferries his disciple to the shore of knowledge in the boat of Holy Name. Using the sail of his Master's advice, the disciple crosses the river of this world, fording the waters of ignorance.

The Master is a jeweller who knows well the value of the Holy Name. In the same way a person who has been a jeweller for a long time is able to recognize precious jewels, the disciple who has been with his Master for some time begins to recognize the value of the Holy Name. The devotee who is connected to the Holy Name is immediately liberated from the bondage of this world. Only a rare disciple understands the subtle message which the Master is trying to convey.

Once there was a disciple who was on his way to see his Master. On his way he passed a shop in which there was a caged parrot. He stopped and asked the parrot where the shopkeeper was. The parrot answered that he was at home.

As the man turned to go, the parrot asked him where he was going, so the disciple told him that he was on his way to see his Spiritual Master. The parrot asked what trade Spiritual Masters follow, so the disciple replied that the Master frees his disciples from the cycle of birth and death. Then the parrot requested him to ask his Master how a parrot could be set free, and the disciple agreed to do this.

When he arrived at his Master's ashram, the disciple offered his gifts, and sat down. The Master enquired about his health and well-being, and offered him some refreshments. Then the devotee relayed the parrot's request. The Master immediately stretched himself out on his bed as if he were dead. The devotee was extremely worried and began to weep. When the Master at last became normal, the disciple did not dare to mention the parrot's request again.

He spent a few days at the ashram , and then took permission to go home. On his way he again passed near the shop where the parrot lived, and by chance, the shopkeeper again was elsewhere. The parrot asked him what answer the Master had given to his question. The disciple told him, "Brother, the moment he heard your request, my Master acted as though he were dead. I don't know what magic was in your question, but only after a long time did he revive, and I didn't dare ask again."

The parrot understood the hidden meaning of this cryptic answer, and immediately fell to the bottom of his cage as if dead. When the shopkeeper found him lying there, he thought he was dead, so he opened the cage and threw him away. At this point, the parrot flew away.

This is an example of how the master helps his disciple. If the devotee understand the meaning of the Master's words, he can free himself from the cage of his own ignorance.

There are many stars in the sky, but the darkness of night can only be removed by the sun. In the same way, we cannot remove the darkness of our ignorance without the help of the Master, even though we try a million times.

After a great deal of study, many people feel as if they have made some progress on the spiritual path. They even come to believe that they have received Spiritual Knowledge. They argue and debate and delude themselves that nobody is as Spiritually knowledgeable as they are.

However, if they use their discrimination, they will realize that although they have made some intellectual progress, yet they have not advanced on the path of self-realization at all. On the contrary, it seems that the more progress we make intellectually, the more we are retarded spiritually.

Those who think themselves to be wise and learned, but who are actually ignorant of the Truth, are fools, who will lose their path and end up going around and around in circles.

Many people never hear about the soul, and many do not understand even when they do hear about it. Without a doubt, who can explain to others about the mysteries of the soul is extraordinary. Someone who accepts his explanation is clever, and he who is trained by a wise Master is also exceptional.

The soul cannot be understood or explained properly except by a perfectly realized soul. You cannot understand

what the soul is, merely by thinking about it. However, when a wise man teaches you, you become established in the Spirit and become steady and strong. This is a very subtle thing, and cannot be proven.

The soul is realized only by directly experiencing it. This experience is a result of the knowledge revealed by the Master. Thus we should not dismiss this Truth with mere arguments. By the Grace of the Master, the Self can easily be realized. The Master is unique. He is the knower of the self, for only he who knows the Truth can reveal it.

Lord Krishna said to Arjun that the man of self-control has no pride or arrogance. He does no harm to anyone, and is filled with forgiveness and a simplicity which reveals itself in his mind and speech. He serves the Master with respect and devotion through body, mind and wealth. Pure both inside and out, his mind is steady and controlled. When he takes the shelter of the Master, he becomes steady in the spirit.

Therefore, Arjuna, leave other religions and rituals and come to Me, the embodiment of Truth, pure consciousness and Bliss--the supreme soul. I will free you from all your sins, don't worry.'

Complete surrender means to relinquish shame, fear, respect and fame, as well as one's worldly attachments and pride in oneself. It means to realize that the Master is the only shelter, the only way. He is the all-in-all of the devotee.

Contemplate upon the power and qualities of the Name of the Lord, and meditate on the Divine Light according to the Master's instructions with the utmost respect, devotion and love. Concentrate your mind and heart upon God. Do

this so that you can discharge your duties selflessly, according to the Master's orders, and for his sake alone.

Take refuge in the Master. Just as a clean piece of cloth quickly absorbs dye, someone who puts his mind aside completely and takes the shelter of his Master is merged in his Grace.

People who follow the Master but take the whole thing lightly can never understand what the Holy Name really is. They don't even know what the Master can give them.

If they hear a stirring and uplifting spiritual discourse, they may be overwhelmed for a short time. They may even change their ideas or their religion for the time being, on the pretext of being broad-minded. But this brings them no benefit, except that they satisfy their curiosity. For such people, the need to hear something new every day has become like an addiction. A new idea will give them a little excitement like a glass of wine, but after sometime they will look for something else. Religion has become an intoxicant for them, like opium, and that's as far as they go.

There is a type of oyster which floats on the sea with its shell open. When a certain drop of dew falls into its mouth, the oyster closes up its mouth and dives to the bottom of the sea. It does not come up again. When a diver at last retrieves it, he finds a pearl inside.

In the same way, the sincere seeker of Truth keeps an open mind in this world and waits for the Word of the Master. The moment he receives It, he dives deep into meditation. After this, every word he speaks is a precious pearl. His attention will never be diverted anywhere else.

The tiny banyan seed grows into a huge tree, bearing countless leaves, but if the land in which it is sown is infertile, it will never grow. In the same way, if a disciple's mind is full of hypocrisy and doubt, the knowledge cannot flourish in him.

A sick person goes to a doctor and tells him his problem. The doctor prescribes medicine, which the patient must take faithfully and regularly as prescribed until his disease is cured. In the same way, the seeker of Truth, who is suffering from the bondage of birth and death, approaches the Master, who gives him the medicine of Knowledge. If the disciple practises this knowledge as prescribed, he will be cured of ignorance.

If patient fails to take this medicine as prescribed, it cannot do him any good, and if a disciple does not follow his master's instructions he will never achieve the desired result.

One ounce of practice is worth one ton of talk. Simply repeating 'sugar, sugar,' will not bring a sweet taste to your mouth. If talking about something was enough to bring it to pass, we would have eradicated poverty long ago, because people are always talking about money. However, this is not enough to make them wealthy. People do all kinds of rituals and ceremonies to get rich, but in vain. Nothing happens by mere talk.

The Sign of a Great Soul

There are many gurus in this world who relieve others of their wealth, but not their miseries.

The Master is one who has no greed, attachment, pride or jealousy. He always speaks about spiritual matters and removes the jealousy, pain, doubts and worldly attachments of others. He takes his stand on perpetual Truth at all times.

His power is unlimited, and through his love and mercy for his devotees, he teaches them the proper and righteous path. He never feels anger or fear even in dreams, but speaks soft words full of love and wise counsel.

He removes our worries, awakens us, and gives us good advice. He shows what are truly right actions and which actions are wrong. He shows us what is virtue and what is sin, and thus he dispels all the suffering in our life. Take the shelter of such a Master. Offer him all that you have.

People are born into the sufferings of this world, into the cycle of birth and death, and are trapped in the web of illusion, but when the Master showers his Grace upon them, all the pain caused by the world, vanishes. Then you can enjoy eternal happiness, and live in the realm of Truth forever.

You can even attain the level of the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, but there is none greater than the Master. Can your friend, brother or even father and mother help you in the same way as the Master's Grace can?

No harm comes to someone whose Saviour is the Master. If God is angry, Guru is always there to save you but if Guru is angry with you, then you have no place to go.

All the Scriptures agree that without the Master, all is lost. Without him, you can never be purified to the very core of your being, even if you try a hundred thousand

different methods.

Without the Master we cannot receive Knowledge nor awaken true discrimination within ourselves. Without him, there is no salvation, for without his grace we are as good as dead. Without the Master, we are in the hands of death, wallowing in suffering and remorse.

Can doubt be removed without the Master's Grace? How else will we ever acquire discrimination? Without him we will remain in ignorance forever, and never find the True knowledge of God which leads to liberation.

You can study the scriptures to your heart's content; you may even live a peaceful life mentally, physically and spiritually, but grace comes only through the Master.

All the great saints served their respective Masters. Although you may sing the Master's glory thousands of times, it remains infinite.

Someone who criticizes his Master is the most wretched of men. The fate of one who even listens to such criticism is not good.

A disciple who leaves his Master for another, will suffer extreme poverty. Do not come before the Teacher without making an offering, such as fruit or flowers, Be very humble and full of love when you bow at his Feet. Whatever he commands should be accepted humbly as his gift.

When you are in the presence of the Master, your hands should be folded and your speech gentle and humble. Never stretch your legs in front of him, but keep them folded beneath you. Do not walk across in front of him. Never keep anything hidden from him, and never tell him a lie.

Accept all that he says without criticism, for his words are like Scripture. Offer him whatever nice things come your way. His power is so fantastic that whatever we offer him it comes back to us thousandfold.

Worshipping the Master properly and totally is your only duty. It cleanses you of all sins and fulfills all your desires.

The Grace and mercy of the Master is unlimited. Even the angels cannot praise him enough. One kind glance from him turns a beggar into a king.

His power and glory is the source of everything in this world. He is the source of all strength and power. He is the giver of the highest bliss and is our only refuge in times of danger and suffering. He even takes away the fear of death. Anyone who takes his shelter will find all the happiness in the world. Poverty will never touch such a devotee, and his life will be full of unexpected boons.

When you meet a worthy aspirant, tell him about the knowledge, which is the Supreme Secret.

Great is the place, great are the parents, great is the family and great are the friends of such a devotee.

Karma Yoga

The path of dedicated Action

If someone has an interest in learning a certain subject, he will be incapable of understanding it. Teaching such an unworthy student is like trying to get blood out of a stone. He will not benefit, and the teacher will also be wasting his time and effort. This is why Jaimini says at the beginning of his treatise that an aspirant should be keen to understand what is Dharma (true religion) and what is God. Only those who desire salvation and want to practise true religion should receive instruction, in the same way as a scientific discipline should only be taught to someone who is keen to learn it.

The root of the word 'karma' is 'kri' (कृ), which means 'action' or 'to do'. This is the general meaning given in the Gita. I say this because in other scriptures and systems of philosophy it is given a more limited meaning, and this may confuse readers. Take any religion---they all teach that some action or other must be done to realize God. The ancient Vedic religion taught that Yagyās were necessary and the Vādas described how these should be done. Yagya (a ceremony involving chants and consigning oblations to a sacred fire) is also accepted by the upanishads, but its value is considered less than that of spiritual knowledge. The Upanishads declare that Yagya is excellent for attaining

heaven, but not for liberation. For liberation, Knowledge is necessary.

The Bhagavad Gita says, in Chapter 3 verse 9: 'Except for Yagya, all actions create bondage.' The Laws of Manu and other Scriptures advocate other actions, necessary from the religious viewpoint, in addition to Yagya. These actions were systematically described first in the Vedas, therefore they are called 'Smriti.'

In addition there are other religious activities such as fasting and worship, which were first codified in the Puranas, so they are called 'Puranic Actions.' All activities were divided into:

- 1) Daily actions
- 2) Occasional actions (the result of some previous action)
- 3) Motivated actions

Bathing and prayers are daily action, by performing which, no special purpose is achieved, but neglecting which is deleterious.

Occasional actions ('Naimittik') are done because some occasion necessitating them has arisen. e.g. penance for a violent action, or appeasing malevolent forces. If there is no previous cause, it is not necessary to do this type of action.

Motivate actions are those religious activities which people do to fulfill a particular desire, e.g. performing a ritual to bring on rain or to have a child.

There is another category of actions which the scriptures call 'forbidden' actions, such as drinking intoxicants or eating flesh.

Which activities fall into these four categories? In brief, all action, whether physical, mental or verbal have been classified by the Gita in the above four categories. Action such as eating, laughing, playing, residing, standing, sitting, breathing, crying, seeing, talking, walking, giving, taking, dying, living, fighting, renouncing, contemplating, meditating, giving and receiving charity, doing rituals, farming, running a business, desiring, deciding, keeping silent, etc. have all been discussed in the Gita. Even remaining alive and dying are action, and the occasion can arise when someone must decide which of them is preferable. In the context of such a dilemma, the word 'karma' may also be understood to mean 'duty', or 'proper course of action.'

We have so far only considered the actions of human beings, 'Karma' is also applicable to the functions of the animate and inanimate creation and to unconscious things.

'Know which actions to perform, and which one not to; know which actions to abandon as wicked, for the secret of action is deep,' says Lord Krishna in the Gita.

Even more complicated in its meaning than the word 'karma' is the word 'yoga'. The current meaning is 'prevention of the arising of mental and sensual impulses by the control of breathing', or, 'meditation according to the system of Patanjali.' It is used in this sense in the Upanishads, but we should note that this limited connotation is not found in the Gita.

'Yoga' comes from the Sanskrit word 'yuj', which means to 'join', 'a state of union', 'combination', 'addition', 'co-existence' or 'staying together', It also came to mean the

device, means, or method necessary to achieve that state of union.

In astrology, the alignment of propitious or malevolent planets is called a favourable or adverse 'yog'(conjunction).

Referring to the state of liberation, 'Yoga' is used in the sense of 'attainment'.

Let us glance at some specialized uses of the word. In the time of the Mahabharata War, Lord Krishna observed the invincibility of His opponent, Dronacharya, and declared that there was 'only one Yog (device) for killing him'. Later on He also said that he had killed Jarasandha and other kings by 'Yoga' for the sake of protecting righteousness. In 'Udyog Parva' it is stated that as Bhishma carried off the maidens Ambika and Ambalika the other kings pursued him, shouting, "Yoga! Yoga!". Here the word yoga has been used to indicate a means of deception, and this meaning has also been used in other places in Mahabharata.

In the Gita, the word 'yoga' or its derivatives appears about 80 times, but only in four or five instances is it used in the sense of 'method', 'skilful means', or 'the thing to be done'. It is one of the most comprehensive words used in the Gita.

Still, it is not enough to use the word 'yoga' only in this general sense of method or means because there can be very different ideas about what these 'means' are. The 'method' can be that of a renunciate, that of action, of inaction, or liberation, or indeed, anything else. For example, in a few places in the Gita, 'Yoga' refers to the 'Divine skill' or 'unique power of God' in the context of creation of the

manifold perceptible universe, and God is thus referred to as 'Yogeshwar' (that which manifests Yoga). But this is not the principal meaning used in the Gita. It should be clearly understood that this is an exceptional meaning.

'Yogah karmesu kausalam' (Gita 2:50) refers to this special meaning. ('Yoga performed through spiritual insight is the means for breaking the bondage of actions'). Generally, there are several ways of doing any given action, but the best possible way of doing all is called the 'Yoga' of that action. Accumulating wealth is an action, and there are various ways of doing it, such as stealing, begging, borrowing, using cunning method, or applying one's own effort. Although, strictly speaking, the term 'yoga' could be applied to each of them, it is most appropriate to say that the earning of money by making effort without losing one's independence and spirituality is the 'yoga of acquiring wealth.'

When the Lord Himself has given a definitive and independent meaning to the word 'yoga', there should not be any doubts as to its primary meaning. However, commentators don't take any notice of the definition given by the Lord, and interpret it according to their own intellects. So, to clear any confusion, further elucidation of this word 'yoga' is necessary.

It first appears in Chapter 2 of Gita and its meaning is clearly defined. Lord Krishna justifies the war to Arjuna on the authority of the Sankhya philosophy, and then says, 'Now I will tell you the origin of action according to Yoga' (Gita 2:39).

He then says, 'Desirous people who are busy perform-

ing Yagyas, hoping for results, have restless and unsteady intellect.' He instructs Arjuna to keep his mind steady and abandon all ambitions concerning results, but not to force the mind to abandon action itself. He says, 'Still the mind and do your actions' (2:48). Here the meaning is also 'keeping the mind balanced in both success and failure is yoga'. Then He adds, that action done with desire for results is inferior to actions performed desirelessly (2:49). Only when someone does action with equanimity of mind is he free from the effects of karma.

Then immediately after this, He says that Yoga performed through spiritual insight is the means for attaining liberation (2:50). The way to succeed is to be unaffected by vice and virtue, and to perform actions with steady mind. This is the 'Yoga' of the Gita. Further on, the Lord explains how a man of Knowledge should live in the world: 'While enjoying the impermanent worldly pleasures, do meditation.

Before Shri Shankaracharya's time, there were two paths prevailing in the Vedic religion. The first was upon receiving Knowledge, to renounce all actions. The second path taught that if a person keeps on peacefully performing actions throughout his life with his mind in meditation, merit and demerit will not pose any obstacles for him.

In the Gita, these two paths are called the 'Yoga of Renunciation' and the 'Yoga of Action' (5:2). 'Sannyas' is called the path of renunciation while 'yoga' is associated with activity. The goal of both paths is Self-Knowledge or Realization, to which is given the name 'Sankhya Yoga'.

Chapter 6 talks about the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, but for whom? Not for the ascetic, but for the karma yogi, the person who wants to know the secret of action and practise it properly. It is to help him succeed. If not then why is it written that the Yogi is superior to the ascetic? Arjuna is instructed, 'Be a Yogi!' This cannot mean 'Practise Patanjali's Yoga!' It must have a more specific meaning.

The following passages endorse this:

Gita 2:49: 'Abandoning attachment to results and not worrying about success, do action.'

Gita 2:50: 'The Yoga performed through spiritual insight is the means for obtaining freedom from the bondage of action.'

Gita 4:42: That Yogi established in meditation, is not bound by his actions.'

So the proper interpretation of the term 'yoga' is, to know the correct way to work and be a Karma Yogi. This is Lord Krishna's instruction to Arjuna. He could not possibly have meant 'Take recourse to Patanjali Yoga and wage war.'

Just prior to that he says, 'Yogi refers to one who practises the Yoga of Action.' (3:3). In the Mahabharata it is stated that those who are truly religious do not abandon work, but know how to work properly and thus realize God. From this it becomes obvious that in the Gita the terms 'Yogi' and 'Karma Yogi' are synonymous, and mean 'one who knows the secret of action'. Rather than use the weighty word 'Karma Yogi', the shortened from 'Yogi' is used in both Gita and Mahabharata.

'I will reveal that Yoga, which I showed in the beginning to Vivaswan' (4:1) Vivaswan revealed it to Manu, and through the traditional lineage of Guru-disciple this secret Karma Yoga was passed on, but it *'became lost, so now I reveal it to you.'* This Knowledge is always revealed by the living Spiritual Master. In this context, the Lord uses the word 'yoga' three times, and at no time does He convey the meaning 'Patanjali Yoga.' But rather it denotes some special method of doing action. The narrator of the Gita, Sanjaya, uses the same connotation when speaking of the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna as 'Yoga.'

Shri Shankaracharya was himself a Sannyasi, or renunciate, but he talked about both paths of renunciation and action. Similarly, in the Mahabharata it is clearly written that Yoga means the Path of Action or externalization (*'Pravritti'*), while knowledge means the Path of Renunciation or internalization (*Nivritti'*). Therefore we can say that the ancient technical meaning of 'Sankhya' (*Nivritta*) and 'Yoga' (*Pravritti*) is given in both Gita and Mahabharat. Any doubts in this matter can be resolved by these quotes from the Gita:

'Yoga is the name given to equanimity.'

'The Yoga performed through spiritual wisdom is the means for attaining freedom from the bondage of actions.'

'Yogi refers to one who practises the Yoga of action.'

It should be clear now that in the Gita the word 'Yoga' is used to mean the Path of Action or Karma Yoga. 'Yoga' is also used with this connotation in the Pali Buddhist Scriptures and in the Sanskrit Vedas.

When King Janak was giving instruction to some brahmins

in the practice of Yoga, he assumed the role of Spiritual Master. This was an unusual event, because up till then, kings did not usually instruct the priestly class in the matters of religion. Here, the word 'Yoga' must be understood to mean the path of karma yoga, because the Gita and other texts emphatically declare that King Janak's life proved that he was the quintessential karma yogi. Ashvaghosh, in his 'Story of Buddha', uses the example of Janak to show that even while living as a householder, a person can attain liberation, and explains how this can be done.

The path illustrated by the life of King Janak is that of Yoga. The same path is expounded in the Buddhist Scriptures. This interpretation should also be applied to the Gita, as it too gives the example of King Janak: 'Janak and other God-realized persons attend the supreme goal while performing desireless actions, so you also can do action while seeing to the public interest.' (3:20)

Once it has been proven that the principle meaning of 'Yoga' in the Gita is 'Yoga of Action', and that the main meaning of 'karma yogi' is 'a person who does desireless action', there should be no further need to ask again what the central theme of the Gita is.

At the end of each chapter in the Gita is clearly stated that the subject matter of Gita is the Science of Yoga, but commentators do not pay any attention to what is implied by this. After the opening phrase 'Srimadhbhagavadgitasu upanishatsu' ('The Upanishad sung by the Lord') Come the words 'Brahmvidyayanyogashastru' ('The Yoga treatise which is one of the Brahmvidyas'). In other words, 'Karma Yoga is

the subject matter of the Gita.'

Brahmvidya or Brahmgyan means 'Knowledge of God'. After being initiated into knowledge, the aspirant has two paths open to him. The first is the Sankhya path of renunciation, following which he stays aloof from the world. The second is the path of Yoga (i.e. Karma Yoga), according to which he renounces motivated actions and works in such a way that nothing stands in the way of his achieving salvation. Another name for the first path is the path of pure reason or knowledge, which has been analyzed and explored by several sages in the upanishads and other scriptures. However, apart from Gita, no Scripture has fully dealt with the substance of Karma Yoga as being a part of Spiritual knowledge.

We are lucky, therefore, that the Lord Himself, the Founder of Yoga and the manifestation of it in all its aspects, has expounded this science for our benefit. He revealed this Yoga to Arjuna for the benefit of the mankind. The Light and knowledge which Lord Krishna showed to Arjuna can be shown to anyone through the perfect spiritual Master.

Of all the various paths called 'Yoga', which is the best and most beneficial way to practise action? Can this path be followed at all times, and if not, what are the exceptional circumstances in which it can't be practised? How do they arise? How can we be sure that the path we have chosen is the best? On what basis and through which method can we judge good and bad? What is the secret of good and bad action? The science which answers all these questions is the

science of Karma Yoga.

Good and bad are two very general words. Sometimes used synonymously are: benign-menacing, auspicious-inauspicious, beneficial-harmful, action-inaction, duty-non-duty, vice-virtue, righteousness-unrighteousness, justice-injustice, etc. Nevertheless, because the people who use these words have different concepts about religion and work, the interpretations of any particular Karma Yoga text will also be varied.

Take any science. Usually the subject matter falls into three stages. First comes the idea that inert matter is only as it appears to our senses and there is nothing beyond it. The process for formulating such a theory is called the materialistic or empirical analysis.

For example, scientists do not believe that the sun is a deity, but simply a globe of insentient matter, whose heat, magnetic field, light intensity, dimensions and distance can be measured. They only examine its properties and the laws governing them. This is called the empirical analysis of the sun.

Take a second example of a tree. If we ignore the power hidden in the tree which causes the shedding of leaves, blossoming and other arboreal functions, and only see things from an external point of view, we form the opinion that a seed is planted in the ground, a shoot emerges, it grows, and from it sprout leaves, flowers, branches etc. This is the physical analysis. Chemistry, physics and other modern sciences are of this type. Empiricists imagine that once they calculate the visible properties of any object, their

work is complete. And that it is useless to consider the matter any further.

The second step in the first example is to contemplate the origin of the sun. Are its behaviour and properties the result only of natural laws or are they based on some other phenomena? If something else is the cause, then the empirical analysis alone will not be sufficient. We have to go further. For example, to believe that in the sun resides a spirit or deity, because of whom this unconscious ball of matter exhibits certain characteristics and behaviour, is called the supernatural analysis of the sun. According to this theory, various deities exist in trees, air, water, etc. and they motivate and regulate the actions of these material things.

Then there is the spiritual analysis, which states that various deities do not, in fact, dwell within worldly phenomena, but that one imperceptible, conscious Energy motivates all the activities of the universe. This Energy resides in the human body in the form of the soul, and imparts to us all our knowledge of the universe. This spiritual theory teaches that not only the motion of the sun and moon, but even the rustling of leaves on a tree is due to the influence of this incomprehensible Energy. There are no hosts of independent deities living in the sun, moon, trees or anywhere else. These three theories, or methods of analysis, have been in use since ancient times, and they are also utilized by the Upanishads. The discussion of the nature of god at the end of Chapter 7 and beginning of Chapter 8 of the Gita is also based on them.

Lord Kirshna says, 'Of sciences I am Spiritual Knowl-

edge' (10:32), The spiritual analysis, of these three words--empirical, supernatural and spiritual--have somewhat changed.

The famous French philosopher Comte gave greater importance to the empirical point of view. He said, "It is useless to search for the basic phenomenon behind Creation, because it is unfathomable." It is neither feasible nor desirable to build a belief system on an imaginary foundation. In fact, it is impossible to understand the basic power behind Creation without the help of the spiritual Master or a knower of the Truth.

When primitive man first saw trees, clouds, volcanoes, etc. he innocently ascribed deities to all these things. Comte's thesis would call this the supernatural explanation. However, this fanciful idea was later questioned, as man began to understand that all these phenomena must be infused with some spiritual element. According to Comte, this is the second step in the growth of human knowledge. He called it metaphysical or spiritual. However, when actual practical scientific knowledge did not increase by considering the ways of the universe from this angle, people began to examine exclusively the empirical properties of worldly phenomena. Through the knowledge thus gained, man was able to exercise greater control over his environment. All modern inventions are the result of this method of analysis, which Comte called the materialistic consideration. He came to the conclusion that this was the most profitable way to study anything and should be employed in the scientific study of societies and social mores. Using this method he reviewed history and came to the conclusion that the prime dharm

(moral duty) of every human being is to work for the benefit of others with a loving heart. The English philosophers Mill and Spencer also shared this view. On the other hand, Hegel Schopenhauer and other German philosophers considered the materialist process inadequate for analysing ethics.

Everyone has his own way of expressing a particular concept, therefore different writers have used different words, e.g. moral immoral, permissible-impermissible, etc. in the sense of good or bad.

The question before Arjuna was whether it was proper to fight a war in which the patriarch Bhishma and the Guru Drona would be killed. A materialist would calculate the benefit or the effect on society as a whole, before deciding whether this war was justified or not. The reason for this is, that when a materialist academic judges the goodness or otherwise of an action, he considers the utilitarian effect or the tangible external result. Such people don't have faith in any other proof. However, such a conclusion would not have consoled Arjuna. His vision was much broader. He didn't care about any harm or advantage to himself, but he was definitely concerned about the adverse effect that the war might have on his soul in lives to come. There was no doubt in his mind that if he killed Bhishma, Drona and the other, a vast kingdom would come into his hands, thereby assuring him of worldly happiness. Also, the ordinary citizens would have been far happier under his rule than under the previous king's.

Thus it appears that whatever we do, can be classified as

righteous (dharm) or unrighteous (adharma), or as virtue or vice. The Gita and Mahabharata also examine action from this angle, or from the spiritual-metaphysical angle. Usually the words 'religion' (dharma) and 'Non-religion' (adharma) are used to indicate good and bad actions. However, because of their wide-ranging application, 'dharm' and its antonym 'adharma' sometimes give rise to confusion. So a thorough examination of the meaning of these words in the Karma Yoga texts is necessary. For everyday affairs, the word dharm is used, while 'moksha' (liberation) refers only to the superconscious state.

When we ask anyone, "What is your religion?" our intention is to find out if he believes in Vedic, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or Parsee doctrine, and he will answer accordingly. In Vedic times, people performed yagyas to attain heaven, and used the word 'dharm' in this sense also.

However, 'dharm' does not have only this restricted meaning. Dharm also includes the idea of one's duty or role in life, e.g. the duty of king, the duty of subjects, the duties of husband and wife towards each other etc. in relation to the social ethics of that time and community.

Spiritual or transcendental dharm is called 'moksha dharm' (i.e. the course of action necessary to attain liberation) or simply moksha'. The four aims of human life are said to be worldly enjoyment, proper action, righteousness and fulfilling one's role (dharm) and liberation. If dharm means the same as liberation, there would be no need to mention them separately. Dharm means the numerous ethical or moral duties which one has to do in this world.

Nowadays it may be called duty, role, morals, ethics or proper behaviour, but in the ancient Sanskrit Scriptures, 'niti' (ethics) referred especially to political ethics. Therefore in ancient times the general word for duty (dharm) or moral behaviour was not ethics but dharm. However, this semantic difference was not recognized by all the Sanskrit Scriptures. Therefore, here too, dharm, ethics and duty have been used synonymously. In referring to liberation, the words 'Spiritual Knowledge' and Devotion' are preferable.

In the Mahabharata the word 'karma' appears often, and in those places where the instruction is to 'work according to Dharm', the word dharm means duty or following the rules laid down by society. Whenever the context is welfare of the soul in the life to come, the word 'moksha dharm' is used.

Manu described the duties of the four classes of society (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra) using only the word 'dharm'. In the Gita the Lord says to Arjuna, 'There is no duty more holy for a warrior than to wage religious war.' (2:31) and, 'If you do not fight this religious battle you fail in your duty.' Arjuna was a warrior, and his duty was to protect religion.

The sages of ancient times divided labour into four groups or castes, so that the burden of all the duties would not fall on a particular person or group, and all sections of society would support and be supported properly. However, after some time, people became dependent on the system alone. They ignored their real duties and merely retained the caste names. Undoubtedly, in the beginning,

this institution was meant only for the maintenance of society. If one of the four caste were to abandon its duties, or if a caste were completely eradicated, its place could not be filled by anyone from the other castes. Society would be crippled and slowly destroyed. This is surely happening in India. It is true that in Western societies progress has not depended on casteism, but keeping it in mind that, whether or not there is rigid division by caste in these countries, there definitely are professional and social classes. In short, when we use 'dharm' from a socio-economic point of view, we are describing how society is held together and sustained.

The root of 'dharm' is the Sankrit word 'dhri (धृ)' which means 'to keep, to hold, or maintain.' Citizens in any state are bound by dharm, and that which protects them is also dharm. If this dharm is ignored, all the threads which bind a society together will be loosened, and we would see a situation comparable to that of the heavens without the force of gravity or a ship at sea without a rudder.

Realizing this, the sage Vyas said that if one desires fame and fortune, he should acquire it through dharm and not upturn society. If he wants to satisfy his whims and dreams he should do it according to dharmic processes. At the end of the Mahabharata the author says, "No one listen to what I have been saying. One's desires and social ambitions should be achieved only through the laws of dharm." So why aren't we behaving according to dharm?

There may be objections, however, to the above explanation. It may be said, "If you accept these principles of

social preservation or general welfare, there is no difference between your viewpoint and that of the Materialists, because both these your viewpoint and that of the sufficient to say that, although we accept the preservation of society as the chief external application of the laws of dharma, we must never lose sight of Liberation, which is the highest ideal according to all religions, and is the special point of our argument, too. If the external application of dharma stands in the way of our individual spiritual progress, then we don't need it. If even the ancient Indian medical texts (ayurveda) maintain that the medical science is useful only because it keeps the body in good condition so that the soul can work towards its liberation, then it is impossible that the religious scriptures would divorce the Karma Yoga texts (which are on the vitally important topic of how to perform worldly action) from Spiritual Knowledge and liberation. Therefore, we understand that we should act according to our dharma, or moral duty, whose merit is that it elevates our souls. We should abandon unrighteous, low and evil actions which degrade the soul. That is why I am using dharma and adharma in place of the word proper duty/improper duty, or good action/bad action, although I accept that there may be ambiguity in these words as well.

Therefore, although our main topic is 'How to conduct our worldly affairs', we must along with this always keep in mind the effect our actions will have on our souls.

If you ask a Utilitarian the question, "Why should I work for the welfare of others, even if it means giving up what is beneficial to me?", what answer can he give except,

"Well, it is just human nature!"

The ancient Greek philosophers advised that someone who desires the maximum benefit or the highest virtues should decide what is his ultimate goal, and then, using this as his frame of reference, ascertain what is good and bad action.

In his 'Ethics', Aristotle wrote that only spiritual evolution encompasses all other matters. So it is surprising that he did not place more emphasis on spirituality than he did.

The authors of the India Scriptures went much further. They declared that spiritual progress is the first and foremost aim of every human being. Nothing is more beneficial than this, so one should consider what is good and bad action accordingly. It is difficult to form such opinions, of course, if you don't have spiritual wisdom.

Even western philosophers have accepted the importance of spirituality. Kant wrote in his 'Critique of Pure Reason', and the English philosopher Green in the foreword of his book that the vital force which is the foundation of the entire universe is a spiritual force.

From the above discussion it should be clear as to why we apply the general word 'dharm' chiefly to social morality or to systems laid down for the maintenance of society. Not only the Sankrit Gita and Mahabharata, but also the vernacular works use the word 'dharm' to mean social duties or laws.

During the Mahabharata War, the wheel of Karna's chariot got stuck in the mud, so he alighted in order to extricate it. He saw Arjuna, totally despondent and ready to kill himself,

but instead of taking this opportunity to kill him, he said, "It is against the law to kill a defenceless enemy." Hearing this, Lord Krishna reminded him of some previous incidents, e.g. the disrobing of Draupadi and how young Abhimanyu's enemies banded together to kill him. The Lord then asked Karna, "Where was your code of righteousness then?" Why do you use the word 'dharma' here? On other occasions it is used in the sense that it is morally correct that a person be punished in the same way as he mistreated other. In short, throughout the Sanskrit scriptures as well as those of other languages, the word 'Dharm' is used for the morals and ethics which are formulated by superior persons from the spiritual reference point for the preservation of society, and accepted by all the members of that society. I have also used 'dharma' in this sense.

The Vedas and Mahabharata call correct moral behaviour the highest dharm. However, the science of Karma Yoga will say that we have not fully discussed the topic. We have to thoroughly consider the causes leading to the formulation of a particular code of conduct. There is yet another definition of 'dharm' in the ancient scriptures, viz. "Chonak lakshanartha dharmah", which means 'to follow the inspiration given by a superior person in doing or not doing a particular action.' So long as any such limitations are laid down, a person is free to do as he likes. This means that dharm originally came into being as the result of such limitations. This is dealt with in part by the philosopher Hobbs.

In the unrestrained or primitive condition, each person

acts according to the impulses of his mind. Later, when he realizes that such unrestrained behaviour is not beneficial on the whole, he concludes that it is in the best interests of everybody to lay down and observe certain restrictions on the instinctive reactions of the senses. In this way, everyone starts upholding the moral code.

When a person restrains his mind within the moral code and acts properly, that moral code becomes a decisive factor in controlling his behaviour. When the number of people following the same code of ethics increases, a written code of law is compiled.

Swetaketu codified the system of laws regarding marriage in ancient India. Sukracharya forbade the taking of intoxicants. Did these two saints get any personal benefit from setting up these codes? We must bear in mind that it was their duty to formulate these moral laws. 'Dharma' was already in existence, but its importance had to be brought to everyone's attention before they would put it into action. Eat, drink and be merry! Nobody has to be told to do this, because it is the instinctive activity of the senses.

Manu said that eating meat, taking intoxicants and enjoying sex are not transgressions against the natural laws. These are all instinctive desires, not only of humans but of animals as well. Morality consists of putting the necessary restraints on such behaviour for the sake of the general welfare and smooth running of society. This is 'dharma'. The Mahabharata says that eating, sleeping, fear and reproduction are equally instinctive activities for humans and animals. The difference between man and animal lies only in dharma.

A person who doesn't keep his instincts in check and within the moral code is no better than an animal.

In Gita Ch. 3 verse 34 the Lord says that each sense has certain objects to which it is automatically attracted and others for which it feels repulsion. This is natural, but we should not let this control us, because attraction and aversion are a trap. The Lord uses the word 'dharm' here to mean 'bringing the instincts under the restraints of the moral code.' The senses entice a man to act like an animal, while his wisdom and intellect pull him in the opposite direction. People who can sacrifice their lower nature, which permeates the whole body, into the fire of this conflict, are real performers of yagya and they are very fortunate.

So dharm can be defined as :

- 1) The influence of good character and wisdom in deciding actions.
- 2) Dharanat-the agreement between people which keeps society together.
- 3) Precepts which have been dictated by great souls.

No matter which definition you choose, you will find that none of them is much in use for coming to a definite conclusion, in cases of doubt, as to whether a particular action is dharmic or not. The first definition tells us only the basis of dharm. The second tells us how it is applied externally and the third tells us that moral restrictions are laid down by someone else. Not only is there much difference between customs of different communities, but one action can have several consequences. The precepts of the various sages are different, so when uncertainty arises, another way

of determining dharm must be found. What is it? Arguments are inconsistent, and all kinds of theories reside in the mind of an intellectual. The Vedas give various instructions and we cannot say that any one sage is more authoritative than the others. The origin of conventional 'dharm' is also shrouded in darkness, because the average person cannot understand it. So, in the light of all this confusion, it is best to follow the path trodden by the great souls. But who is a great soul? It cannot apply to the masses, because, in their ignorance, no uncertainty about dharm ever occurs to them. The Kathopanishad says, *'Fools steeped in ignorance, wise in their own conceit, and regarding themselves as learned, go staggering about like blind men leading the blind.'* (1-2-5)

Also, we even find inconsistencies in the actions of men of noble ideals and conduct. The sinless Lord Rama abandoned his wife because he was swayed by gossip, even though she had passed the ordeal of fire and thus proven her chastity. Parshuram, following his father's command, cut off his mother's head. Just see the five Pandavas ! They were all married to the same woman!

Take the mythological examples of the gods. One of them violated the virtue of Ahilya, the wife of the sage Gautama. Brahma, in the form of a deer, lusted after his own daughter ! There are also many examples in Greek and Roman mythology. That is why the Ramayana says that we shouldn't take too much notice of these venerable beings.

An English writer compiled a popular history of the devil and he wrote that in disputes between the devils and

angels, the former were often defeated by the angels' trickery. The Kaushitki Upanishad tells how Indra, the king of the gods, cut the ascetic Arunmukhi into pieces and fed him to the wolves, and how he killed Prahlad's relatives and friends after breaking several treaties. Yet, he says, that even after doing all this, "not a hair on my head has ever been touched."

You may say that we have no right to judge the actions of these Ancient Ones, but rather, as the Taittiriya Upanishad says, follow the example of their actions which will be good for us and forget about the rest. For example, you should obey your father, but not to the extent of killing your mother.

So now the question arises as to how we can differentiate between good and bad actions. The reason for the erratic behaviour of venerable persons may seem obscure, but a person finds the answers after diving into Spiritual Knowledge.

Apart from this, some people have prescribed an easy way to determine what is good and bad action. They say that we shouldn't try to augment a particular virtue, otherwise it will end up becoming a defect, e.g. generosity is definitely a good trait, but overdoing it can lead to trouble. Aristotle described how to determine what is good and bad action, and he clearly proved that too much of any good quality becomes the cause of one's undoing.

St Bhartrihari said that too much talking is the sign of a babbler, while too little is a sign of reticence. Too much spending is the sign of a spendthrift and too little is the sign

of a miser. Rushing into something is the sign of rashness and holding back is cowardice. Excessive insistence is obstinance, and lack of it is fickleness. Too much flattery degrades you while rigidity is a sign of conceit. But this rule of thumb cannot be taken too far. First it must be decided what is too much, and what is too little. So who will determine it and how? What on one occasion may seem to be too much may on another occasion seem to be too little. Therefore, when confusion arises about good and bad action, we must weigh the pros and cons of mutually opposing action and using our intellect, decide what is the right thing to do on that particular occasion. However, even this may not decide what is essentially good and bad action, because in real life, we see time and again that learned people interpret in so many ways what is essential and what is not. They arrive at several different conclusions concerning the morality of a single act.

So is there any way to determine for sure what is good and bad action? If there is such a way, what is it? If there are several ways, which one is the best? This is a scientific task, because the distinguishing feature of science is that it unravels and separates intermingled ideas which are not understood, then simply and clearly reveals the exact meaning to us.

By learning astronomy we can predict the occurrence of future eclipses, but in order to solve all the variables, we must first know what they are. So the method of both ancient and modern authors is, before defending any text, to first consider all sides of the question and see their flaws

and deficiencies.

Thus the method described by the Gita for determining what is good and bad action is laudable, but we should also consider the ideas of other scholars, not just for comparison's sake, but in order to understand the importance of the message of the Gita about karma yoga.

In Gita chapter 5 verse 18, it is said that a knower of God looks equally upon a priest, and untouchable, a cow, an elephant and a dog. So what will the learned pundits say if a cow's fodder is fed to a priest and the meal prepared for the priest is given to a cow? Ignorant and dull people won't understand the significance of this question, but the science of karma yoga does. The formidable question raised by the karma yoga texts is: How to live resolutely in a society of selfish people, keeping in mind what is truly good and bad action, and determining, according to time and place, how the order of things should be changed?

Shri Samarth Ramdas in the beginning of his book 'Das Bodh' describes Divine Knowledge and then discusses which types of activities should be done (in a spirit of non-attachment and desirelessness) for the sake of society. He also describes how a contented, resolute and noble person, living among ordinary people, can make them wise and realized in knowledge. He says in the 28th chapter that a sage is known by his good habits, conversation, way of doing things, explanations, exertion, arguments, shrewdness, cleverness, statesmanship, patience, faith, broad-mindedness, generosity, spiritual knowledge, devotion, concentration, non-involvement in worldliness and desires, non attachment, equi-

librium of mind, determination, self-discipline, impartiality and discrimination. But even such an exalted saint has to deal with greedy people. So Shri Ramdasji advises, that if someone attacks you, you should defend yourself in like manner; with churlish people you should be churlish, and with cunning people you must be cunning.

In Gita Chapter 4 verse 11, the Lord says, 'I remember a person according to how he remembers me. Wise people who understand this mystery live totally according to my instructions. Devotees think of me only with love, faith and devotion.'

Lakshman's discourse about Devotion

No one is a source of delight or pain to another. We all reap the harvest of our own actions.

Reacting to union and separation, pleasure and pain, friends or foes neutralise are all illusory traps.

Birth and death, prosperity and adversity, destiny and time and all illusory things such as land, house, town, family, heaven and hell; whatever is thought of, seen or heard with the mind has its root in ignorance. It is not the Supreme Truth.

If a beggar dreams that he has been crowned king, or the Lord of Paradise dreams that he is reduced to the state of a pauper, on waking the beggar has not gained anything and the Lord of Paradise has not lost anything. This is how you should look upon the world. Do not be angry or blame anyone.

Everyone sleeps in the darkness of delusion and attachment, dreaming all kinds of things. Only the Yogis who are

in quest of the highest Truth are awake and aloof from the world. A person should be regarded as awakened only when he develops indifference and an aversion to sensual pleasures.

Only through right understanding do attachment and confusion disappear from the mind. Then a person can love the Lord. The highest goal is to be devoted to the Lord in thought, word and deed.

The Lord is the Supreme Reality, unknown, imperceptible, eternal, incomparable, unchangeable and beyond all plurality. The Vedas speak of him as 'not this not this.'

For the sake of humanity and especially his devotees, the gracious Lord takes a human birth and plays out his drama. When you hear about his deeds, the snares of the world are torn asunder for you.

The formless God is easily perceived but it is very difficult to recognize his manifested form.

Some say that he is accessible, others say that he is not and these different ideas confuse the mind.

The Yoga of Devotion

(Bhakti Yoga)

So far, we have dealt with question of how the desireless realization of the identity of Soul in all beings is the foundation of Karma Yoga and Liberation. Desireless intellect is acquired through knowledge of God, and everyone should practise it throughout his life while performing his allotted duties.

However, just this much does not exhaust the subject matter of devotion as discussed in the Gita. Undoubtedly, Divine Knowledge alone is Truth, the Supreme Goal, and the holiest thing there is. (Gita 4:38). However, the attainment of Knowledge, and the accompanying equanimity of intellect, up to now has been discussed as being dependent on Reason, therefore ordinary people have reservations about it. If someone's intellect is not sharp enough to fully comprehend these concepts, should he just give up any hope of realizing God, and do nothing about it? Truly, such doubts are not unfounded. Ordinary people question their ability to understand this knowledge, as even great sages have said, 'It's not this it's not this,' when describing the Supreme God Who is clothed in the names and forms of Maya. They want an easy path, by which their limited power of comprehension can grasp this profound knowledge. Who

can blame them? The Gita (2:29) and Kathopanishad (2-7) say that many people hear about the soul with wonder, but still no one knows what it is.

There is a good illustration of this in the Vedas. Bashkali asked Bahwa, "Lord, please tell me what is God." Bahwa said nothing at all. Bashkali repeated his question but still Bahwa remained silent. After Bashkali had asked the same question four or five times, Bahwa said, "Now listen ! I have been answering your question But you don't understand. So what can I do? What God really is, can never be described in any way. So silence is a true sign of Knowledge."

The Kenopanishad (1-6) says that God cannot be seen with the ordinary eyes, but he makes the eyes see. He is normally beyond knowing, but he can be known. How can a person of average intellect realize him, and reach the highest state of mental equilibrium?

When someone experiences God's True Form and realizes him as He is, he comes to know that one spirit which pervades the animate and inanimate creation. If such spiritual attainment depended solely on a sharp intellect, then millions would have to abandon all hopes of God-realization and simply sit back and do nothing, because highly intelligent people are always few in numbers.

You may feel that simply having faith in the words of the wise is sufficient, but even they have differences of opinion.

If you say that faith can do anything, then you automatically establish faith and reverence as an alternative way to gain this profound knowledge. It is definitely true that with-

out faith you cannot realize the True Knowledge. It is merely academic arrogance to say that knowledge is acquired only through the intellect, without the help of any other mental faculty or emotion. People who talk like that have become hardened through studying logic all their lives. They themselves have no love and faith, so they cannot understand this mystery.

For example, let us take the proposition that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. We totally and firmly believe this. Why? Because we and our forefathers have witnessed it. But if we consider it a little further, we will discover that up till now, we and our ancestors have seen the sun rise every morning. That, however, cannot be the reason for tomorrow's sunrise. There must be some other reason. If our seeing the sun is not the reason for the sunrise, then what is the guarantee that there will be a sunrise tomorrow? It is also a type of faith to suppose that something will continue to happen in exactly the same ways as it always has without interference. This is called inference. We must keep it in mind that this inference does not have an intellectual basis, but is strictly rooted in faith.

The inference that sugar tastes sweet to one man therefore it must taste sweet to another, is in fact the same type of thing. Someone can say from his own experience that sugar is sweet, but he cannot go further and say that sugar tastes sweet to everyone without supplementing his reason with faith.

The geometrical theorem that two parallel lines will never meet, no matter how far they are extended, can be

understood only by going beyond our practical experience and taking the help of faith.

Behaviour is the result of faith, love and other such natural feelings. All that reason does is, control these feelings. Once the intellect has decided whether something is good or bad, this decision is put into action by the mind or feelings. To perfect the knowledge acquired by intellect, and to translate it into action, natural feelings such as love, faith, compassion and sense of duty are necessary. Any discipline which does not awaken and purify these feelings, and doesn't make use of them, should be regarded as dry, deficient, unfeeling, incomplete, barren and immature. You cannot fire a bullet without a gun and gunpowder, and similarly, knowledge acquired through reason without the help of love and faith will not redeem anyone.

The ancient sages knew this very well. Listen to this example from the Upanishads. One day, Shwetaketu's father, in order to illustrate the principle that the origin of the universe is the invisible God, told his son to bring a flower from a banyan tree and see what was inside it. Shwetaketu did as he was told, and answered that tiny seeds are inside the flower. His father told him to break open one seed, and tell him what was inside. Shwetaketu said, "There is nothing inside it" his father said, "What ! A huge banyan tree comes from nothing?" Then he advised his son not to accept anything on face value, but to go further and find out for himself. Faith is necessary for acquiring knowledge, but you must have internal realization also.

Travellers take shelter at an inn then resume their journey.

In the same way, to fully understand that the origin and foundation of the entire creation is something infinite, eternal, omnipresent, independent and all-conscious, we should first make use of reason and then go beyond it on the path of love and faith.

The Gita says (6:47) that of all Karma Yogis, the one who constantly meditates and does devotion is superior. Other Scriptures also say this. If something cannot be perceived by the senses, you should not rely only on logic to determine what it really is. If the only difficulty were that the attributeless God is hard for ordinary people to understand, then that difficulty could be overcome by having faith in the words of others. In the case of differences of opinion among reliable people, we would have to judge for ourselves who is the most authoritative, and trust what he says.

You can see from their behaviour that most people carry on their activities relying on the words of someone else whom they consider dependable. For example, why does 2×5 equal 10 and not 11? Writing 1 and 1 does not make 2. You'll find very few people who can explain the reason behind this. This world keeps on going because we believe such principles to be true. You'll meet very few people who can tell you from their actual experience whether the Himalayas are 5 or 10 miles high, but anyone can quote '30,000 feet' from their geography books.

Similarly, if you ask anyone, "What is God like?" he'll answer, "He is without form and attributes." The ordinary person's intellect may or may not be sharp enough to reason through the obstacles posed by this question, but there is no

lack of faith in the most ordinary people, either. Faith is not a quality possessed only by people of high intelligence. If people carry on their daily affairs relying largely on faith, then it is not surprising that they use this same faith to call God attributeless. History tells us that even before sages had the practical experiences which enabled them to declare that God is attributeless, the common people had been supposing on faith alone that behind the insentient creation's plurality of phenomena, there must be some infinite, immortal, independent, almighty and all-pervading power. From earliest times, people were worshipping this Entity in some form or another. It is true, though, that they could not explain the origin of this concept of theirs that God is attributeless. The logical series of events is first experience, then justification or explanation. Long before Newton formulated his law of gravity, everyone knew that apples fall from a tree to the ground below. Did apples fall from the tree to the sky before the discovery of the force of gravity? No, of course not! Apples have always fallen downwards, whether anyone noted this fact or not.

It is the job of the intellect to evaluate and find the origin of the concepts acquired by faith. However, even if you don't succeed in finding an adequate explanation, it doesn't mean that such knowledge is only a delusion and does not, in fact, exist.

If it were sufficient to believe that God is attributeless, then faith alone would be enough. However, merely believing is not enough. We have already said that the aim of human life is to realize the Divine, and for this, practice of

Spiritual Knowledge over a long period of time is necessary. By continual and sustained practice, this knowledge penetrates the mind and senses thoroughly, changing our behaviour. Then Divine wisdom becomes our very nature. The only way to do this is to first find that knowledge which can show us God as He really is, meditate with deep love upon it, and unite the mind with God. This path has been practised since ancient time and is called the path of devotion. The Shandilya Shastra says, 'Extreme love for God is called devotion.' The Bhagwat Purana says that this Love should be unselfish, desireless, and constant.

Reading , reading has turned you into a stone.

Writing, writing, has made you as thick as a brick.

You have not one drop of love within you.

If you read all the book in the world

You couldn't become wise.

But if you 'read' the One Word of God

You then could be said to be wise.

said the saint to the scholar. On the path of devotion you shouldn't desire anything. Asking is an obstacle to Love. If you don't have single-minded devotion, but perform external acts of piety in the hope that God will give you something in return, devotion becomes little more than a business, similar to the Vedic Yagyas which were done to fulfill desires. This is called rajasic, mercenary or motivated devotion, and it cannot purify the mind. If the mind is not totally pure, it becomes an obstacle to spiritual development. Scriptures have proven that only a completely desireless heart is an advantage on the path of devotion.

In the Gita, the Lord describes the four aspirations of a devotee : *release from suffering, obtaining objects for happiness, seeking knowledge, and after receiving it, devoting oneself to Me.*

A person does the first type of devotion to eradicate suffering. The second type he does for material gain and the third type for knowledge. Devotion done for getting anything at all is of an inferior type. The highest kind of devotee desires nothing for himself, because he already has spiritual insight. The Gita says that the best type of devotee has no selfish interest in anyone, but, just like Narad and other realized souls does devotion for its own sake.

According to the Bhagwat Purana, there are nine steps of devotion :

- 1) Listening to discourses about the Lord (shravan)
- 2) Kirtan-singing the praises of God
- 3) Meditation on God's Radiant Form and remembering the Holy Name.
- 4) Serving the Lord.
- 5) Worshipping Him humbly
- 6) Prostration and obeisance
- 7) Feeling oneself to be His slave
- 8) Regarding God as one's Friend.
- 9) Complete surrender to him.

Actually, if you practise the first eight, the ninth will happen automatically. These mysteries are treated in detail in 'Das Bodh' and other such devotional texts, but here we will deal with the ninefold path of devotion which Lord Rama expounded to Bhilni.

He said, Bhilni, I recognize only the relationship forged through

devotion. No matter what a person's caste, kinship, lineage, religion, reputation, wealth, physical strength, abilities and accomplishments may be, if he has no devotion he is like a cloud without rain.

Now I will tell you about the ninefold path of devotion. Listen carefully and cherish My words in your heart.

The first step in devotion is association with the holy, and the second is a fondness for hearing about me.

No matter how much wealth someone may accumulate, or how much profit he may make, he still has to reap the harvest of his actions after death when his soul transmigrates. However, just hearing a little satsang has immediate effects. True happiness and divine joy are found only in the company of saints. Saint Tulsidas said, *Associating with saints gives all kinds of joy. Saints are the living pilgrimage. He who has not stored up any spiritual capital cannot have the chance to hear satsang.*

A person who has no faith and reverence in his heart is far removed from holy company. People who have no yearning to see god and to be in his presence, can never understand the mystery of devotion. The saints have always been praised, everywhere, but those unfortunates who are victims of their own pride can never derive any benefit from the company of a saint.

Prayagraj, or Tirathraj, believed to be the holiest shrine for pilgrimage is near Allahabad. However, the saints say that even holier than that is the company of the holy. If you 'bathe' there, you'll get immediate results. A person who has a mean nature can be transformed.

Without satsang there is no discrimination, and no one can enjoy

satsang without the Grace of God said Tulsidas. Its effects are immediate. One dip in it changes crows into swans. Only a person who loves satsang is entitled to receive the boon of devotion. 'Devotion is independent of anything, and the fountain-head of joy, but no one can get it without satsang. Devotion is incomparable and is an ocean of bliss, but it can be attained only by the favour of a saint.'

Devotion is the treasury of all joys and good qualities. It is not dependent on chanting, rituals, study, recitations, sacrifices or pilgrimages. It is independent and incomparable. If a saint is pleased with you, he will reveal to you the knowledge of devotion. The person on whom rests the highest Grace of God, and to whom God wants to give the gift of devotion, will meet a saint. The saint teaches devotion, which puts an end to all worldly sufferings.

The third form of devotion is renouncing all pride, and serving the Master, and the fourth is glorifying me sincerely.

Until you follow a realized Master, you will not progress on the Path. If you want to follow him properly, you must serve him. If you follow your mind instead, you are like the blindfolded ox which has to turn a wheel all day. It doesn't go anywhere, although it thinks that it does. So let go of all your hypocrisy and insincerity, and praise God.

The fifth step in devotion is remembering My Name with firm faith. The sixth is practising self-control and virtue, and always adhering to the code of righteousness. He who practises the seventh step of devotion sees me everywhere without distinction, and regards the saints as being even greater than myself. The eighth step of devotion is contentment, and never seeing the faults of others, even in a dream.

The ninth step in devotion is being straight and honest in all one's dealings and having implicit faith in Me with neither undue joy nor sorrow.

A person who has reached any one of these nine stages is very dear to me. You, Bhilni, are blessed with all nine. That which is craved by Yogis and not easily available even to them is within your easy reach. The ultimate result of seeing me is that the soul regains its pure and natural state.

Whatever form his devotion may take, the fact remains that the devotee must have selfless and desireless love for God. He must stabilize his mind, and use it for devotion. The only job of the inner faculty called 'reason' or 'intellect' is to determine whether something is good or bad, righteous or unrighteous, a duty or an action to be avoided, and nothing else. Any other mental activity is done by mind.

The mind needs an object for devotion or worship. In the Upanishads the Cosmic or Absolute Form of God is described as being beyond the senses, formless, infinite and attributeless. You will find it difficult to use. It is your object of worship, because once you experience it, the mind no longer exists as a separate entity, and this separateness is necessary for devotion. In experiencing the Absolute Form of God, the worshipper and object of worship, the knower and the object of knowledge become one. The Absolute Form is the final goal; it is not the means. The Cosmic Form cannot be realized until the mind finds the method to achieve union with God.

Because of the distinction between the worshipper and the object of his worship, there exists a visible, qualified,

embodied form of God. In the Upanishads it is said that all qualities perceptible to the mind, e.g. taste, smell, activity, etc. are combined in God, whereas the Shandilya Shastra says that God should be worshipped as formless and imperceptible. Keep it in mind, however, that although God as described here has qualities, nevertheless He is formless and imperceptible as well.

However, man's natural make-up is such that it is very difficult for him to love, constantly remember or concentrate his mind on something that is imperceptible, i.e. that has no particular form, colour, etc. This is because the mind is naturally unstable. Therefore, until it has some visible reminder of God before it, it will forget over and over again.

So where can the mind be concentrated? Most people don't know. Concentration is difficult even for sages, not to mention ordinary people!

When we learn geometry, we are told to imagine a line which is infinite. It is incomprehensible, but it does have the quality of length. If we draw a section of such a line on the blackboard, its nature is brought to mind.

Ordinary people cannot merge their minds in the Infinite God, nor love him, even though he is the Doer of all actions, is omnipresent and omnipotent. They need some tangible representation. Without first seeing some visible reminder, they cannot imagine His imperceptible aspect.

For example, once we have seen the colours red and green, we can then perceive them in our imagination. They leave a mental impression. You can call it the shortcoming

of the mind or whatever you like, but until someone overcomes this, he needs to see the attributeless in a qualified form in order to worship it. There is no other way for the mind to comprehend the Infinite. That is why worship of the Embodied Form has been recommended by the saints. In the Gita the Lord says, *For those attached to worldliness, experiencing the unmanifest One causes much suffering.* (Gita, 12:5)

It is very difficult to concentrate on the Imperceptible, but it is easy to relate to the qualified, embodied form. This worshipping God through some tangible representative is called Bhakti Marg, the Path of Devotion.

There have been, and undoubtedly are, wise men who, having determined what is the true form of God on the strength of their reason alone, labour hard to concentrate their minds on this absolute form. As the Form of God on which they concentrate is essentially imperceptible and accessible only to the purified intellect, this path is usually referred to as Jnana Marg, the path of pure discrimination. However, we cannot escape the necessity of Love on this path, either, as the act of attaching the mind to the Imperceptible cannot be accomplished without a certain amount of Love and faith. Jnana Marg is also called the path of knowledge (gained through reason) but actually it is not the path of True knowledge, or direct perception of God. God's True Form, which is Divine Light, can be realized but it is extremely rare to reach this stage through Jnana Marg. Worship of the Universal God is like a sword's edge. The same sword that protects you can kill you also. It takes no time to deviate from the path of Jnana, because there is

nothing for the mind to fix itself upon. The practice of spiritual discrimination involves many difficulties. A termite doesn't know how to form letters, but letters may take shape as it is eating wood. Such is the situation of the traveller on the path of Jnana, until he reaches the stage of liberation. Those who think themselves to be God stay stuck in the mud of worldliness. Ego is the distinguishing feature of the path of Jnana Yoga while humility characterizes the path of devotion. A person lying on the ground has no fear of falling, but a falling person will sustain injuries according to the height from which he falls. If a person leaves the path of devotion, which is easy and direct, to follow the profound and tortuous path of Jnana Yoga, which is full of pitfalls, and then falls from his objective, how wretched will his position be !

Worshipping the Perceptible Form in place of the Imperceptible is called the Path of Devotion. However, these two paths lead to the same destination, and in the end, result in the same equanimity of intellect. You may use more than one ladder to reach a roof. To cater to different types of people, these two paths have existed since time immemorial. Even though the paths vary, the goal is the same. In the end you will have the same Knowledge of God. Salvation is the end result of both paths. For both paths the same principle is true, that, without direct perception of Soul, liberation is impossible. So what is the use of idle disputes about which is the better path? At the outset, they appear to be different, but ultimately are of the same value. The Gita calls both of them 'spiritual' (11:1). From the point of view of practice,

they are equally meritorious. Undoubtedly, devotion leads to the knowledge of God which comes from wisdom or from worshipping the invisible God (Gita 18:35). However, a person who is initiated into spiritual knowledge and then stops all worldly activities, being engrossed only in knowledge, is called 'Jnana Nishtha'. Until devotion is joined to knowledge, a person cannot attain his Object of Worship in its pure form. When a devotee is fixed in God, no other methods of devotion is Knowledge. Devotion is a way to knowledge. In short, from the point of view of worshipping the Unmanifested God, Knowledge is the means, while, from the point of view of union with God, the same knowledge is called Nishtha, the ultimate state of being merged with Perfection. When it is necessary to make this distinction clear, the words Jnana-Marg (path of knowledge or reason) and Jnana-Nishtha (ultimate stage of spiritual insight) are not used synonymously. The former indicates the preparatory stages of worship of the Imperceptible, whereas the latter refers to the ultimate stage of perfection, which means that after attaining perfect knowledge, the devotee stops all other activities and plunges into it.

This idea can also be applied to action (karma). According to the convention of the Scriptures, that work which is done to purify the mind is called sadhana (spiritual practice). First of all the mind is purified and finally Perfect Knowledge and peace are attained. However, even though he may not be merged in knowledge, anyone who, throughout his life, works calmly and desirelessly towards the Goal can be called 'Nishtha', because he is performing desireless actions

for attaining knowledge.

But this idea cannot be applied to devotion. It cannot be called 'Nishtha' because it is a means to acquire Knowledge.

In the beginning of the Gita, only the paths of Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga are called 'Nishtha'. Of the two, Karma Yoga is considered the best way to accomplish nishtha.

Since the earliest times, the worship of the Imperceptible and worship of the Visible Form of God have gone hand in hand. The Gita says that worship of the Imperceptible is fraught with dangers and problems, while the worship of the Embodied Lord is easy, and anyone can do it. The ancient Upanishads discussed the path of Jnana, while Shandilya and other Scriptures glorified devotion. But no other Scripture has differentiated between the path of Jnana and the path of Bhakti, according to the capacity of the practitioner, and then ultimately brought them together again, together with the path of Karma Yoga, as the Gita has done, and impartially, at that.

So how should a person use his faculties to get the genuine experience of the True Form of God? This absolute Form is eternal, infinite, unutterable, indescribable and incomprehensible. The Vedas speak of It as 'not this, not this'. Even though God is beyond all qualities, and is unconceivable and imperceptible, when one does realize Him, the duality of worshipper and worshipped no longer remains. Therefore, at the outset you cannot worship him directly, because that Cosmic Form is something to be

reached; It is the Goal. Worship is a means for acquiring that non-dualistic state and becoming identical with the Universal God.

Therefore, the object of worship must have qualities. The Divine Qualities are omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience and formlessness, but because He is imperceptible and accessible only to a purified intellect (not the senses), it is extremely difficult to worship him.

However, in every religion we find the apparent paradox that this incomprehensible, omnipresent, omnipotent God, Who is the vital force of the universe, also talks to us, loves us and shows us the path of the saints. We can call him 'ours'. He will share our joys and sorrows, forgive our misdeeds, and we can forge a relationship with him. We can say, "O God, I am yours, and you are mine !" He will protect us like a father and love us like a mother.

In Gita, 17:18, the Lord says, I am the unattainable God, the Witness of all, the Shelter; the Origin and Cause of dissolution; the abode and the imperishable Seed. In this context we can say, "Lord, You are my reason for being, so please cherish me. You are my Lord and my Witness, you are my Boat, You are my ultimate Support, You are my Companion." The Lord lovingly reveals his True Form to His children, with the intention of relieving them of all miseries. He is the ocean of mercy, tender and loving, the Holy of holies, the paragon of generosity, the Origin of all, the most beautiful, most worthy of worship, and the repository of all virtues. In short, someone can naturally adopt such a sympathetic, easily accessible, love-attained, percep-

tible and visible Lord for the purpose of devotion.

Why does the infinite Lord assume a finite form? The answer to this is provided by the famous Maharashtrian poet, Tukaram:

God is omnipresent, One and the Same for all, but for His devotees, He becomes small.

We also find this idea in the Vedantic texts. In the Upanishads, not only imperceptible phenomena and qualities, such as the vital energies, are mentioned for use in worshipping God, but tangible objects, such as fire, sun and moon, can be used also. God is the Lord and Sovereign of Nature, or Maya. The God with qualities is described in Gita, 10:3 as *beginningless, unborn, and Lord of all the worlds*. When someone realizes God, he is freed from all sin (Gita 9:2).

That object, having name and form, which is used as a symbol or representative of God is called **pratika**. The etymological meaning of this word is *prati* 'towards' and *ika*, 'that which faces us.' The side or part of any object which first becomes perceptible to us, and through which we subsequently find out something about it is called *pratika*. To find out about the absolute God, we first need some representative, some aspect or symbol of Him, which may be called *pratika*.

For example, in the Mahabharata there is a conversation between a Brahmin and a hunter. The hunter was talking about spiritual knowledge and then said, "come and see what my practical religion is." He took the brahmin to meet his aged parents and said, "They are my God in human

form. My practical religion is serving them as if I were serving God Himself.

Lord Krishna said (Gita 9:2): *This knowledge is the highest and purest of all knowledge, it is the king of all sciences and secrets.* He used the words 'Rajvidya' and 'Rajguhya'. These are compounds, and, according to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, 'Raj' is placed first. However, some scholars have twisted this to mean 'secrets (or cults) of kings' and 'knowledge of kings'. The path expounded in the Gita was traditionally followed by kings. It was revealed to Manu, Ikshvaku and the royal sages in succession, but Rajvidya and Rajguhya should not be taken to mean that this knowledge was the exclusive property of kings.

Although in the Gita these two words could be understood to refer to Jnana and not devotion, the chapter in which they appear is itself a treatise in support of the path of devotion. (Chapter 9, verses 19-31). In the Gita, nevertheless, the path of knowledge of the unmanifest is said to be accessible only to purified intellect, and therefore full of obstacles. It is not likely that the Lord would again refer to that same path as tangible and easy to follow. It follows, therefore, for the sake of consistency, and also because the words 'perceptible' (*pratyaksavagaim*) and 'easy to follow' (*kartumsuskham*) can apply wholly to the path of devotion, that the word 'Rajvidya' refers in this context to the path of devotion.

The word 'vidya' (Knowledge) refers not only to knowledge itself, but the means by which it is attained, from the Upanishads, we come to know that, in ancient times, this

knowledge was kept secret, and nobody except close disciples was initiated. Therefore, whatever the knowledge is, it is bound to be mystical.

Of all the existing ways to God-realization, the Gita claims that the path of devotion is best. Unlike the path of Jnana, devotion is not intangible but is within the reach of the devotee and can be followed easily.

The Gita (17:3) says that a person's faith determines what he becomes. The Lord said that those who worship deities go to deities, those who worship ancestors go to their ancestors, those who worship spirits and elemental go to them, and those who are the Lord's devotees go to Him. In chapter 4 verse 11 He says, *As other remember Me, so I remember them.* The Lord is the witness of all and rewards each person according to his actions. He knows each person's inner condition.

St Tukaram said that God is hungry for love, and does not take into account the images and symbols used by the devotee. A good devotee knows very well that he should not have the prejudice that the symbolic form of God that he worships is the only acceptable form of God and that all the others are false. Because his intellect is awakened and elevated, he considers that, no matter which symbols people use as a focus for their meditation and devotion, they will all ultimately merge in the same God.

The Lord said to Arjuna, *Those devotees endowed with faith, who, not knowing me as I really am, worship other deities, are actually worshipping Me, although their method is wrong* (Gita 9:23). The result gained from devotion through a substitute lies not in

the symbol itself, but in the love within the devotee, which is focused on that substitute. Therefore, it is useless to argue over symbols.

Krishna said to Arjuna, *Concentrate your mind on My perfect Form* (Gita 12:8), and then describes various ways to achieve this. In verses 9-11 He says, *If you cannot still your mind in meditation on Me, try again and again. If you cannot even practise meditation, then perform actions for me, which will purify your mind. If you can't do even this, then renounce all actions and their results, and by performing desireless actions, attain me.*

If a person's nature tends towards ignorance (Tamasic nature), he won't succeed in stalling his mind in the Pure Absolute Form of God in only one lifetime, but any effort made on the path of devotion is never wasted. The Lord Himself guarantees that if someone does something devotional only once, then, if not in this lifetime, then in the next, and if not in the next, then in a future life, he will receive the knowledge of the Absolute Form of God.

The entire Creation in itself is the externalization of God. In Gita 7:19 Krishna says, *At the end of many births, he who has attained the final stage of knowledge realizes that God is all and that without him there is nothing*. He achieves salvation. In reference to those practising Karma Yoga, Lord Krishna says, *A Yogi who makes effort attains the supreme goal.....the Yogi who attains liberation through the practice and perfection of Yoga in one lifetime is superior.*

A devotee should never slacken his efforts in practising spiritual knowledge. In short, no matter how someone's curiosity to practise Karma Yoga is awakened, he will auto-

matically be drawn towards perfection. Similarly, it is a fact of religion that if someone surrenders himself in devotion then God Himself increases his determination, and finally bestows perfect knowledge on him. Faith and reverence are essential on the path of devotion.

When a person endowed with faith and reverence gains control over his senses, and strives to attain knowledge, he will experience God's Oneness as an absolute reality. He will quickly attain perfect peace (Gita 4:39).

In Chapter 18 verse 55 the Lord says that knowledge is achieved through devotion, and someone who attains it merges in God and is liberated. There is no third way to gain perfect knowledge of God--only through Knowledge and devotion. It is clearly said in the Gita that if a person's intellect is not pure, and he has no faith, he will destroy himself. A person who has no faith and is full of doubts, perishes.

It has just been stated that Perfect Knowledge is finally attained only through devotion and faith. The final destination of both the path of Jnana and the path of devotion is the same. We should discuss this a bit further.

It is scriptural principle that within the body is nothing but soul, clothed in name and form. From the scriptural reference point, we can say that the same soul which is within us exists within all creatures.

Every part of sugar is sweet, and similarly God is the same from inside and out. The ocean is not separate from its waves. Tuka says, we are like that.

Lord Kirshna said, *I am within all beings, and all beings are*

in Me (6:29). Nothing exists without God. To gain Knowledge of God, the devotee must strive hard and elevate himself. A person who does illegitimate actions is his soul's worst enemy himself and a person who does good and pious deeds is his soul's best friend (Gita 6:5).

It is true that when someone, through devotion, realizes knowledge of God, nothing more remains for him to do in the way of salvation. On the path of devotion, positive emotions such as love, kindness, compassion and sense of duty are not erased. On the contrary, they are purified. In such a situation, the question of whether to do action or not cannot arise.

Unconditional love arises in the mind of a true devotee.

Someone who doesn't belong to anyone else becomes God's,

He gives to all the Light of Love,

God pervades all, and he accepts all,

And a person who is also like that is a real devotee.

The mind of such a person is naturally inclined towards meditation.

The riches of the saints are for everyone, and that is why, out of benevolence, they tolerated so many difficulties.

Action is of paramount importance in the path of devotion as discussed in the Gita. Devotion is not just puja or flowers or words, but it is doing desireless action for the sake of the soul, and everyone ought to do this puja.

Although, from the point of view of Karma Yoga, there is a complete fusion of the path of Jnana and the path of devotion, the really unique advantage which devotion

has over Jnana will now be discussed.

It has already been said that, because the path of Jnana is accessible only to high reason, it can give trouble to people of limited intelligence, but because the path of devotion is based on faith, is accessible to love and can be practised in a practical and tangible way, anyone can easily follow it. However, if it is assumed that everyone, irrespective of caste, creed or gender can attain liberation, then everyone should be told how to do it. In one Upanishad, the sage Vadracharya says that securing God's favour is one way. The Bhagwat Purana says that action, especially in the form of devotion, is the way to bring God's special favour on the soul. This is endorsed by the Gita and Mahabharata.

The Knowledge attained through the path of devotion and the knowledge of God described in the Upanishads is one and the same. Therefore, the devotee no longer sees any difference between man, woman, priest, warrior, merchant, the low-born or the outcaste. The Gita describes the special qualities of the path of devotion: *By taking refuge in Me, even harlots become pure, not to mention pious priests, royal sages and devotee-they all can reach the supreme state.*

In the Upanishads there is a conversation between a butcher and a hermit. The butcher describes how liberation can be achieved by doing one's allotted duties desirelessly. There are many such stories which show that a person is superior if he possesses equanimity of intellect, whether he be a goldsmith, carpenter, moneylender or butcher. It is not at all dependent on one's birth or occupation; it is entirely a matter of one's purity and feelings towards God.

So by opening the door of salvation to all member of a society, a remarkable awakening takes place. God loves everyone equally, whether man, woman, priest or outcaste. God is hungry for love ! He does not care about social status !!

St Tukaram expresses it in the following way :

What is brahmin? What is shudra?

Even a prostitute can meditate on God.

Untouchables also can become pure and holy

Through devotion and renunciation.

What more is there to be said ? A person may have committed the worst crimes, but, if at the time of death, he surrenders to God with all his heart, God will forgive him (Gita 9:30 and 8:5).

St Tukaram's example of the prostitute may have offended at the time the learned scholars who parade their purity, but in fact don't know what religion really is. Such examples occur not only Hindu but in Buddhist and Christian scriptures as well. There are the examples of the courtesan Ambipali and the Angulimal who used to cut the throat of people. Both were initiated by Lord Buddha. Mary Magdalene's life was changed by Lord Jesus. In the Bible it is written that, of the two thieves who were crucified alongside Christ, one surrendered to Him as he died and achieved salvation (St Luke 23:42-32). Jesus Himself said that anyone, even prostitutes and publicans, who believed in Him with full faith and devotion would be saved (St Matthew 21:31).

Although this fundamental point of religion is indisputable, how can someone who has misbehaved all his life

manage, right at the last moment, to remember God with deep devotion ? At this time, relying on scriptures and mechanically opening and closing your mouth to chant verses or mantras will not do much for you other than exercise your jaws !

Therefore, Lord Krishna declared unequivocally that not only at the time of death, but throughout your life, you should always remember him, and do your prescribed duties with an attitude of surrender to God. You may have to work within the confines of caste or class, but if you work desirelessly, you will achieve liberation (Gita 9:26). However, if you don't concentrate your mind with love and faith, you cannot acquire a sound spiritual intellect, which is necessary for any devotee, and without which the mind gets entangled in the intricacies of external religion and worship of symbols.

The Lord is not only speaking to Arjuna, but to all of us, when He says, O Arjuna ! Leave these religious practices and come to Me. I will free you from all sins, don't worry ! St Tukaram, having done just this, says,

*Burn knowledge, burn wisdom,
But may I always keep my mind on the one true God !
Burn all religious practices, burn contemplation,
But may my mind stay fixed in God !*

How should we love God ? We should unravel this mystery otherwise we cannot practise devotion at all.

Two kinds of concepts prevail in the world. In every country, no matter what its religion is, it is accepted that a human being is a combination of body and soul. But there

are differences of opinion from country to country in relation to the aim of human life. In the West, people mainly concentrate on the physical or material aspect, while in India the emphasis is on devotion and the teachers there emphasize on spiritual life. Between the extremes found in the East and the West, there are all kinds of variations. In England, if someone dies, they say, "He gave up the ghost," But Indians say "He gave up his body." The creeds of people who believe that man in reality is a physical being, and that soul is subordinate to body will concentrate on body. If you ask them, "What is the purpose of human life?" they will answer that the soul is used to enjoy sense pleasures; that it energizes the body so that the latter can enjoy itself. That's it ! That is the aim of human life. There is nothing more to be know ! *'Eat, drink and be merry ! This world is a carnival. Nobody knows what will be, so carry on !'*

People who think like this cannot even dream of understanding something supersensory and metaphysical. Their idea of an afterlife is to go on indulging in pleasures in the same way that they have been doing in this life, only without the obstacles. They even worship God with the motive of getting more enjoyment out of life. Somehow, they have the notion that there is a being who dishes out all these pleasures, so that's why they worship God.

However, there are people who believe that realization of God is the aim of our life, and there is nothing greater than God, so we should give up indulging in pleasures and forge ahead to realize him.

If sense pleasures were the be-all and end-all of life, and

there was nothing beyond this, then giving up pleasures would be intolerable. However, we can observe that if someone indulges less in sensuality, his life is correspondingly elevated and serene. Look at dogs ! Who can eat with the gusto and satisfaction that they do ! Look at hogs ! No human being can exhibit as much ecstasy while eating as they do ! The powers of sight, hearing and smell are much sharper in lower species. All their senses are very well-developed. Our senses are not as keen. Animals get intoxicated by sense-pleasures. The more degenerate a person becomes, the more he yearns to enjoy sensual pleasures. As he evolves, his thoughts become nobler and his heart is filled with love.

See for yourself. When your power of reason and feelings of Divine Love develop, you will be less able to indulge in sensual pleasures. If we accept that within us is a perfect power, which energizes body, mind and spirit, and can do anything, then there will be less need to depend on lesser powers. A wild animal's senses are much keener than a domesticated animal's. A tame animal is weaker, and if a wild animal is tamed, it also becomes weaker. Wild species are always physically superior. If we are always hankering after sensual pleasures, we should realize that we are desiring something that will turn us into animals. If a person wants an abundance of sensual pleasures, then he doesn't need a human body to live in, because he can get that type of enjoyment in animal bodies.

A pig never thinks that it is eating filth. That stuff is heavenly of him. Even if God Himself were to come before

that pig, it would not even notice, as it is totally engrossed in eating. People have forgotten God, and are wallowing in the mire of sensual cravings, just like pigs. They cannot imagine anything beyond this. Everyone should realize that there is something much higher than sensual pleasures, something which they don't yet know. Nowadays, people tend to be cynical. They don't give any importance to God, and distrust noble sentiments.

A devotee of God who has already set his sights on something high, believe in only the Truth. Atheists do not want to go to Heaven, because they do not believe that it exists, and a devotee also does not want to go there because he regards Heaven as mere child's play. He wants only God. What else but God could be the ultimate goal of his life? Noble, civilized people cannot conceive of anything higher than God, because God is Love. What greater happiness than true love could we desire? However, only completely selfless love is true Love, and we can only have this kind of love for God. But it is very difficult to achieve.

For Love of God, you must give up your wisdom, beauty, wealth and even pure desires. Understand that your well-being lies in being selfless.

Love is fathomless, peerless and immortal. It is like an ocean. Once it penetrates into the heart, it cannot be removed. God is Love, and Love is God. The two are one, like sun and sunshine.

I searched everywhere for a lover of God but found none. When two such lovers meet, they strengthen each other's devotion to the master.

What do worldly people know about love ? You'll meet hundreds of people who want worldly love, i.e. infatuation, but it is hard to find someone whose heart is filled with Divine Love. Even when people get all the paraphernalia necessary for luxury and indulgence, they still don't have the same peace that Love can give. People do not love their neighbour, yet cry loudly, "O Lord ! I love you !"

When a woman sheds a flood of tears, her husband expresses as much love as he can. However, as soon as he dies, she starts looking for the key to his safe ! She is only concerned with her future.

When a woman becomes ill, and her youth and beauty fade, her husband doesn't even want to look at her. Worldly 'love' is like this. It is insubstantial, hypocritical and selfish. It is all delusion and infatuation.

God Almighty, the supreme power, wants to love us, but we don't let him. Rather than experiencing his Love, we repeatedly let ourselves be deceived by the world. When we strive to catch hold of something, it slips through our fingers. Then we reach out for something else, and we again get deceived, but still we don't see the light ! Then we want to see God, but this is very difficult. To approach him you have to negotiate a very long road. Therefore, very few people realize him, and in hundreds of years, extremely few really merge in his love.

When the sun rises, the darkness completely vanishes, and, similarly, a whole land is purified by the existence of a few true devotees.

When we were small children, we loved our parents

more than anyone else. Later on, we regarded our playmates and then our classmates as our beloved ones. After marriage, a wife gives all her love to her husband and he to her. They are each other's all-in-all, but when a child is born, more than half of the wife's love is lavished on the offspring. This is the way it is with worldly love.

First, one star appears in the sky, and then countless stars are visible on the sky. The moon also rises, but when the sun rises, its light completely eclipses the light of all the other stars. God's Love alone is like the sun, and our worldly loves are like the stars. When the sun of Divine Love rises in a devotee, he becomes intoxicated. He who loves God is a real human being. He sees God in animals, birds, and all beings and he becomes like a wave on the ocean of Love. It is only by the Grace of God, however, that such a state of felicity can occur.

The Grace of the Lord

(From the Ramacharitamānas of St. Tulsidas)

The Grace of the Lord cures all ills if you follow his instructions. The Master is the doctor, so you must have faith in what he says, and the diet which he advises is indifference to worldly pleasures.

Devotion to the Lord is a life-giving herb, and a devout mind is the medium in which it is taken.

By this process all ailments will definitely be cured. On the other hand, all our efforts to cure ourselves will surely fail.

You can regard the mind as cured when your disinterest in the world is firmly rooted, when your appetite for good

deeds grows stronger every day and weakness in the form of sensual craving is gone.

Thus rid of all diseases, when the soul bathes in the pure water of wisdom, the heart is drenched with devotion for the Lord.

All saints agree that a person should cultivate devotion to the Lord.

It would be easier for hair to grow on the shell of a tortoise, or for the offspring of a barren woman to kill someone, or for flowers of every description to appear in the sky, than it would be for a person who is inimical to the Lord to be happy.

Sooner will one's thirst be quenched by drinking the water of a mirage; sooner will horns sprout on a hare's head, or sooner will darkness overcome the sun, than a person who has turned away from the Lord find happiness.

Sooner will fire come from ice, than an enemy of God be happy. Sooner will butter be churned from water, of oil be extracted from sand, than the worldly ocean be crossed without adoration for the Lord.

These are facts which cannot be ignored.

Thoughts

Abandon all scepticism and arguments and adore the all beautiful Lord, a fountain of mercy and the delight of devotees.

The Lord can elevate a mosquito to the position of Brahma, and degrade Brahma to a position lower than a mosquito. Realizing this, the wise discard all doubts and worship him.

The Lord can animate an inanimate objects, and de-animate a living being. Those who adore such an omnipotent Lord are indeed blessed.

The Vedas conclude that, forgetting all else, worship the Lord, and remember him alone.

The human body is a raft in which we can cross the worldly ocean. The Grace of God is the favourable wind, and the True Master is the helmsman, This combination is difficult to secure, but is made easily available by the Grace of God. Any person, after getting all these resources, who fails to cross the worldly ocean, is stupid and ungrateful.

The True Guru is one who having himself realized God is a perfect example of a Karma Yogi, whose behaviour is truthful and exalted. He can show you God face-to face. Those so-called gurus who put on a superficial facade, who can only whisper a mantra in your ear, and have no more knowledge than that, actually working against Truth. A true Guru loves his own Guru, and the Scriptures. Aspirants who truly desire liberation and God-realization should let go of pride and reverently take refuge in such a Master.

In the Gita, Lord Krishna advises the aspirant to prostrate before the Master, please him by rendering all kinds of services, and ask him with a sincere heart for the knowledge. Ask to know the secret of devotion. After knowing it, nothing remains to be known.

Searching for the Master

I had never met anyone who could give me knowledge of God. I was drowning in the worldly ocean until God pulled me out. I had never met anyone whom I wanted to

follow. Everyone is burning in fires of his own making.

I had never met anyone who had conquered his lower self. You must vanquish the five enemies-lust, anger, greed, pride and attachment-and stay in Holy Name.

I have burned my bridges, a flaming torch in my hand !
If you want to come with me, burn your bridges, too !

I had never met anyone who understood God's mysteries and who could make me understand them. Only a person who makes efforts can enter the realm of spiritual knowledge.

I never met anyone who could reveal to me all the techniques of Knowledge. You should constantly remember the one who dwells in inner space.

I wandered here and there, searching, but I didn't find anyone who could help me. God is beyond the three attributes of Nature, so you must dedicate yourself to the master.

I searched everywhere for a lover of God, but found none. When two such lovers meet, poison turns to Nectar.

A disciple should be prepared to give everything to the Master, but the True Master does not take anything from the disciple.

The key to unlock the door is in your hands. When the veil of ignorance within you is removed by the master, you will see God face-to face.

The fragrance of a flower spreads everywhere. You will never find God outside in the world, but only through associating with saints.

If a tree were to look for its seed, it would find it within

itself. If the soul searches for God, it finds him within itself. If the branch were to look for the root, it would find it within itself. Everyone has his own opinions that you are completely filled. I have no fear of coming back into the world.

The thing I wanted was in one place, while I was searching somewhere else, so how could I find it? If you want something, you must ask someone who knows where it is. Go to the Master. He will reveal to you the knowledge of God and the lessons of countless lives will bear fruit.

If you seek you will find, but you have to dive deep. I was afraid of drowning, so I was sitting on the shore. Only when I searched, did I find where God, the Lord of my soul, dwells. The drop merges with the ocean; everyone knows this, but only a rare person understands how the ocean merges with the drop. Where will you look for the drop after it has merged with the ocean?

Without the help of the Spiritual Master, you will never find the True Knowledge, no matter how hard you try. Serve the Master with your body and mind, and very soon you'll see God.

The Master is not impressed by cleverness or showing off. Now I have my chance, and I am serving my Master with all my might.

How should a Disciple be ?

The splendour of the sun is its light; the splendour of the moon is its silver radiance, of trees their flowers and fruits, and of a king his love of righteousness and justice. The crowning glory of a father is a worthy child, and of a mother a child who is brave, generous and devoted to God. Likewise, the crowning glory of a spiritual master is a true devotee.

Only flowing water can be called a river. If there is no water there is no river. Similarly, only someone who has himself been a disciple is entitled to be called a Master, is like the sandalwood tree, and the disciple is the breeze that spreads the sweet fragrance and transforms others into men of Knowledge.

Lakshman carried aloft the banner of Lord Rama's fame. The way in which he served is a lesson in true discipleship. Shivaji completely dedicated himself in service. He spread the glory of his Master, Shri Samarth Ramdas. It was due to Arjuna that the Gita's deep mysteries were revealed to the world. The devotee makes the Lord manifest.

The meeting of a real disciple and the true Master is a great event. But until a disciple regards his Guru as God Himself, the elevating Spiritual Knowledge will not reveal itself to him. When he regards his Master as the Lord, he comes to understand the significance of his Master's every

action. The Guru graces him according to his love, reverence and faith. Service is absolutely necessary for receiving Grace. Service without love will not yield the highest results.

The world is like a market where you can get anything you want. Something which you don't want does not have even a farthing's value for you. For heavenly and worldly happiness a man serves wife, children, relatives and deities, but if he could let go of his pride and worldly infatuation and render a little desireless service to the Spiritual Master, he would gain a lot.

The main aim of human life is said to be liberation or attaining the state of Cosmic Consciousness, which is the gateway to all felicity. All worldly pleasures put together cannot equate even a fraction of it. Even greater than this, however, is the joy which comes from serving the Master. Only a disciple understands this mystery. A person who is fortunate enough to be able to serve his Master is indeed blessed, and his human life has not been in vain. Everything associated with him-his family, his race, his country-is blessed. His birthplace becomes a shrine. The beloved disciple who dedicates his life in service is free from the dual bondage of merits and demerits, and is even greater than the gods. Such great and true disciples, who lose themselves in service, forgetting their own existence, have always come into the world and will keep on coming.

Human reason and wisdom is the highest faculty. A beast can be made to work, but the disciple is not forced to serve. He serves of his own free will. The average person serves family and society to fulfill his desires and to gratify

his ego, but only very few people serve the Master selflessly and desirelessly. A desireless devotee serves his Guru by body, mind and wealth, without any kind of thought for himself. No one can ever serve the world desirelessly. A person does not get confused if he has one and only one ideal of dedicating himself to his Master and making the Master the centre of his life. Thus he works towards the highest goal according to the Master's instructions.

Actions motivated by selfishness only result in passion and hatred, the most bitter fruit of which is birth and rebirth. This is the greatest suffering. Universal love is awakened by serving the great souls. Success is proportional to one's love and devotion.

So how should a disciple feel towards his Chosen Ideal, the Spiritual Master ? What type of service pleases the Master ? A disciple must know this.

If you ask anyone, "What do you want out of life ?" he will immediately answer, "Peace ! Perfect happiness !" So to get this everyone runs here and there, but worldly activities are not giving us peace of mind. The real source of peace is the Spiritual Master. Until you lose yourself in service to him you cannot get peace by any means.

Why did we come into this world ? What did we come to do ? What are we doing with our lives ? You can only answer these questions properly after taking refuge in the Master. Only a very fortunate person gets to meet the Master, and even then, not everyone can recognize Him for what He is. Even if you haven't yet realized who He is, you can still derive maximum benefit by serving Him.

There is no lack of gurus in the world today. People just read books and imagine themselves to be great souls. If you work it out, you will find that there are more masters than disciples ! These gurus teach various methods of devotion. Some stress puja. Some think that sacrificing dumb animals to God yields benefits. Others even advocate breaking statues as part of their rituals. Gurus are of various types and their methods are also varied. Some distribute some mantra or the other and call themselves gurus. But the Realized Seer reveals the Sacred Knowledge which is one and the same for everyone. There is a saying, "Twelve priests teach twelve different paths, but twelve carpenters all work the same way." Practical work is always done in the same way, but twelve academics will interpret something in twelve different ways, and further multiply their interpretations when explaining them to others ! Is this the way to safeguard religion and keep it alive ? Such people are not concerned with salvation. Whether their disciples go to heaven or hell is not their problem. They are busy consolidating their own gains and furthering their own ends. They talk about meditation on God but it doesn't mean any thing to them. You cannot have a relationship with God from a distance. God has to be seen.

If you say to them, "You have grown old worshipping and reading scriptures, so have you had a glimpse of God ?" those who are steeped in pride in their false religions will get angry, point to an idol and say, "Aren't you seeing God right in front of you?" However, we should reflect a little on the fact that if it is foolish to rely on a picture of a cow for milk,

how can you ever get bliss from a mere statue ? You don't meet your friend just by seeing his photo, so how can you meet God through an image or a picture ?

If a person is not dissolved in devotion to his Master, or if he has no love for God, then no matter how wise , learned or capable he might be, his knowledge is useless. First a person is a son, then he becomes a father. First a person must have the humble attitude of a servant, and then he'll meet his Master, How can someone who has never served a Master become a Master himself ? Saint Tulsidas felt bound to say, '*If a disciple does not serve, he cannot cross the worldly ocean. I definitely believe that God is the ocean and saints are the rainclouds; God is the sandalwood tree and the saints are the breeze that wafts the fragrance.*

The ocean has unlimited water, but its saltiness makes it unfit for drinking or irrigation. However when the rain cloud above the sea take out the saltiness and shower sweet water upon the earth, this same Water becomes beneficial for all creatures. In the same way, God is omnipresent. His Light shines in every heart. His Holy Name is all-pervading, but just knowing this is of little use to us. It is the case of the salty water.

God never says, "Here I am within you", therefore very few people realize the divine bliss that is within themselves, However, when the Master, like those rain clouds, comes and blesses us with the rain of satsang, we are revealed the Knowledge of God's Light (also called Bhargo, Chandna, Supreme Light, Noor-Ilahi or Divine Light) and the Holy Name (called Amrit Nam, Mahamantra, Satyanam or True

Name, Eternal or Secret Name, Hans Nam or Hans Yog). Once a disciple realizes this Knowledge, he grows in devotion, which is like fresh sweet water, and he experiences the highest rapture.

The sandalwood tree is full of fragrance, but it can't distribute this to anyone, even if it wanted to. But when the breeze blows, it takes the perfume from the tree and makes the whole forest smell of sandal. God is like that fragrance. He is within us all, but without knowledge, we can't perceive Him. When the Master, like the breeze, comes our way, he enables us to see God within. There are four types of gurus. One is like the touchstone, one is like the sandalwood tree, one is like a flame and one is like the Bhringi wasp.

The touchstone or philosopher's stone is supposed to be able to turn iron into gold, but it cannot impart this ability to anything else. A flame can light other lamps, but it itself lives in the darkness. You will never get anything from such gurus. There is fragrance in the sandalwood tree, but snakes cling to this tree. They don't lose their poison, even though they live in such close proximity to the wonderful fragrance.

There is a kind of wasp called Bhringi. It catches other insects and strikes them unconscious. It encloses the insect in a small cocoon and starts buzzing. After some time, that insect turns into a wasp, breaks out of the cocoon, and it too turns other insects into wasps. So the bhringi makes other insects like itself. The True Master can make any type of person become like himself, by his Word. Such a Master can truly benefit the soul.

Who can express the glory and importance of the Master ? Even the greatest saints feel themselves inadequate to the task. Who can adequately praise the wonder of his Grace ? The aspirant who becomes a true servant of the Master is really great. Knowledge yields fruit for him.

You may have heard the name of Eknath. He was a great saint. After receiving initiation himself, he helped many other souls to awaken.

He was born in a village in Maharashtra. He became orphan at a very early age. His grandparents reared him up lovingly, but due to his inherent tendencies and the loss of his parents, he lost all interest in worldly things, Longing for true happiness, he was disappointed in the world. He went to temples to worship the images of God and to listen to stories about him, but this did not satisfy his hunger, as time passed, his longing to see God increased. He had heard that God can be seen through devotion, and that the Spiritual Master shows the way. He also heard that a certain Janardan Swami was a very great and realized soul. He was the Prime Minister of the state of Devgarh. Although occupied with the affairs of the world, he was, in fact, aloof from them. Eknath longed to take refuge in him and follow his teaching, but knowing the grief that it would cause his grandparents, he didn't go. Eknath's distaste for worldly life disturbed his grandparents, but they also didn't want to discourage him from loving God.

Finally love of God triumphed over attachment and Eknath firmly resolved to go to find his Master. It was well past midnight and everyone was asleep. His grandparents

were also asleep, but Eknath was wide awake, When a person discovers that fire has broken out around his house, he won't sleep, but will try to get out of the house. This was Eknath's condition. He understood very well that the world is like a wooden house and the flames of desire are burning all around it, yet everyone has fallen asleep in the sleep of attachment, so they will die in the fires of lust, anger, greed, pride and infatuation. He who manages to escape from the house will be saved from the fire. Eknath wanted to escape from this fire and find true peace. So he was neither hungry nor sleepy. He was preoccupied with finding a favourable time to go to the Master, Janardan Swami, and surrender to him.

He slowly opened the door and left the house. It was dark all around. However, just as the stars twinkle in the sky, so the hope of finding his Master was shining like a lamp within him.

As he was walking along, a longing to see his grandparents and loved ones came into his mind, and his eyes filled with tears. But he drove away this weakness, quickened his pace, and left the village.

Even if it is hungry or thirsty, a bird will not be tempted to eat once it finds the door of its cage open. It'll just fly away. Eknath, escaping from the cage of attachment, was running in search of the Light, after finding which there is no more worldly misery. People don't care about the difficulties they encounter in their quest for worldly enjoyments and in the same way, Eknath didn't care about the difficulties in the dark. Sometimes he fell into a ditch or struck his

foot against a rock, thorns tore his clothes and scratched his feet, but he didn't mind these or any other troubles that befell him on the way. The cries of the jackals and owls made his heart thump, but this did not deter him. He wanted to reach his Lord as quickly as possible. He pressed onwards.

In the morning when his grandparents didn't find him, they went crying through the village, calling all the residents together. There was sadness in every house. Meanwhile, Eknath was sitting on a river bank, taking thorns out of his bleeding feet. He was weary from the journey, but he was getting a glimpse of divine peace. He thought, "Eknath, you have left the world and hope to find God. You are very lucky to even wish for the Master's love. If you didn't feel like that, you would've wasted your whole life chasing worldly love. You have to go now! See, the Master is already giving you worthless self Grace and love, and is opening up the lotus of your heart!"

To get rid of his fatigue, he washed his face and hands, drank some water, and turning in the direction of his village, stood up. Suddenly he remembered his relatives. He knew very well the misery he had caused by running away. His face grew grim and once again feelings of attachment seized him. Giving up one's loving family may be easy, but forgetting them is not so easy.

Remembrance of his home perturbed Eknath, and this was plainly visible on his face. Suddenly a finely-dressed, handsome man came riding up, stopped in front of him and asked, "My friend, what are you thinking about, standing

here so early in the morning ? Where are you going ?"

Eknath turned away from the direction of his village and looked at the road stretching out before him. He said, " I have far to go."

The gentleman said, "Did you decide where were you going before you left home ? People usually decide where they are going before they set out."

If we are in a strange place and someone asks sympathetically about our difficulties then he appears like a dear relative to us. Eknath had left behind him his home and family, and now was starting to regard the whole world as his family. Someone who has no selfishness bears no enmity towards anyone. Eknath was charmed by the stranger's sympathetic words, and turned to look at him. Very humbly he said, " I am going to find my Master."

The stranger asked, "He must be great master to have a disciple like you. Who is he?"

Eknath said, "Janardan Swami," with folded hands and bowed his head. He did not know that the Master himself was standing before him.

The stranger dismounted. He was very pleased with Eknath's love and devotion. He said, "You mean Janardan Swami who is the Prime Minister of Devgarh?"

Eknath again bowed his head in respect and love and said, "Yes, sir. He is my Master. He is a great realized soul, always bestowing Grace on the poor and humble. I look to him and to no one else. Does he ever let anyone see him ? He must be very tender-hearted. Just by seeing and talking to him once, a person couldn't help singing his praises."

The stranger said, "Yes ! I have been lucky enough to meet him several times. But I have heard that he has not, to date, accepted anyone as a disciple. I have never seen any disciple of his. I am very surprised to hear that he has made you his disciple."

Eknath said, " You are indeed blessed to have been in the presence of such a noble soul. He hasn't actually made me his disciple, but, from the bottom of my heart, I have made him my Master. I am completely sure that when he sees my distress, he will bestow his Grace upon me. When I see his Feet and he places his hand on my head, all my suffering gets over."

The stranger asked, " have you seen him yet?"

Eknath replied, "No, sir, So far I have not been lucky enough to have met him."

The stranger said. " But you are very young."

Eknath answered, "There is no guarantee that I will live long. Therefore, I am anxious to take refuge in the shelter of the Master, break the bonds of attachment, and know the Truth."

The stranger enquired, "Have you experienced anything of the world ?"

Eknath replied, "So far I have had neither worldly experience nor experience of the Ultimate Reality, but by the Grace of my Master, I will realize them both."

The stranger said, "Brother, the path is very difficult and intricate. Will you be able to make it?"

Eknath said, "But the Guru makes a difficult path easy. Someone who has the Grace of the Master can cross the

ocean in one leap."

The stranger laughed and said, "You are very courageous, but Devgarh is very far from here. How can you reach there on foot?"

Eknath said, "If you really want something, you are not aware of the distance or the difficulties of the path. The object of your desire may be ever so far, but it is always in your heart and before your eyes."

The stranger said, "Won't you ride there?"

Eknath said, "I am going to the shelter of my Master. For me there will be no turning back. So why shouldn't I go barefooted? Just by thinking of him, I will reach him easily. My only duty is to keep on going.

The stranger was very pleased with what Eknath said. He thought, "This boy has very much reverence, love, enthusiasm and devotion. If he can keep this up, he will definitely reach his goal." He said to Eknath, "My boy, I see your courage and single-mindedness, and my heart tells me that you will achieve your objective." Saying so, he went on his way.

The road was undoubtedly far, but this didn't concern Eknath the least. He was riding on the horse of desire to see his Master. He didn't stop to rest, and didn't notice the difficulties on the way. For days and nights together, he kept the same goal before him, and finally he reached Devgarh. When he saw the city from afar, his face started gleaming. Instantly all his weariness vanished. Why shouldn't he be happy? He had reached his destination.

He enquired of about the address of Shri Janardan

Swami and reached his office. At this time the Prime Minister was reading official documents. Eknath softly went inside, and the Minister did not know that he had arrived. With his heart full of love and devotion, Eknath prostrated himself, and, standing in a corner, gazed at the Prime Minister. When he looked up, Eknath's surprise knew no bounds. "Why, he is the same traveller whom I met on the river bank !" Eknath's whole body began to tremble, and his eyes filled with tears of love. "O Master !" he thought, "Even though you are so great, you conceal your nobility ! But how can the sweet fragrance of musk be hidden by a mere veil ?" He kept his thoughts to himself, however.

Suddenly the Prime Minister looked up, and, seeing Eknath standing before him, he began to smile. Eknath ran, threw himself at Janardan Swami's feet and wept bitterly, cleaning his Lord's feet in tears. They were not ordinary tears but tears of love. The River Ganges traverses the Himalayas, and after passing all types of obstacles, such as rocks and forests, reaches the sea, and merges in it. Eknath had overcome the obstacle of worldly bondage and had reached his Master. His tears were not tears, but flowers nurtured in the garden of his reverence and love. With these flowers he adorned the feet of his Lord.

The Minister lovingly patted him on the head and said, "So, you have finally arrived ! My son, the road must have been full of difficulties."

Eknath replied, "Perhaps, my Lord, but that is all over and done with. Now that I have come into your holy presence, I no longer feel any sorrow or weariness. All I

want now is to attach my mind and intellect forever to your Holy Feet."

The Prime Minister said, "But I am a family man. If you want to receive initiation from a guru, you should make some monk or hermit your master."

Eknath said, "To my mind, you are my saint and realized Master. You may be the lord of Devgarh, and a learned scholar, but you are also a Yogi of the highest order, a true renunciate, brave and benevolent. You are the Highest Master; you are everything. I see all these things in you, my Master. You are the epitome of justice and impartiality. He who sees no difference in others is a great soul, whether he wears monk's clothing or not. Everyone bows to such a Master, and all come begging to him. He is the Lord of Heaven, Earth and Hell, and all the deities sing his glory. If I leave such a Master to which penniless man should I go begging ? Someone who comes to your door yet returns empty handed is truly unfortunate. A person with a jaundiced eye sees everything yellow. However, if you Grace rests on someone, he comes to your shelter and cannot help but express his gratitude. Who says that you are a householder ? You are like the lotus which lives in the water yet remains above it. You are like the flower which attracts the bee, but not the blood-sucking leech, because a leech has no use for its beauty and fragrance. The veil of delusion has fallen over the eyes of a person who sees you as merely a family man. People who are themselves burning in the flames of lust, anger, jealousy and passion, see you as being caught in the same, just as people sitting in a boat think that they are

stationary and the world is moving past."

"Amazing!" said Janardan Swami. "Such faith and love alone have brought you here. But, my son, consider this. I am the Prime Minister of this kingdom. Guru is said to be all knowing, the in-dweller of all, but I am the Minister of a land which has borders. So how did you get the idea of making me your Guru? So far I haven't accepted a single disciple."

Eknath said, "Lord, in the eyes of others you may be King's Prime Minister, but to me you are the King of Kings! Guru is the Lord of the Universe. The hearts of all beings is his kingdom. You take various forms and manifestations to remind erring beings like myself of the eternal Truth. Someone who is the recipient of your Grace is revealed the Truth. You are completely free. Yet at the same time, you are under the thumb of the devotees who love you truly. You embody yourself because they want you to. You are the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe. Just as a spider spins its web and sits in the middle of it, you manifest yourself a body, yet remain absorbed in your self. O ruler of all! Those who let go of insincerity and deceit and take refuge in you see you as you really are. Apart from you, there is no other way to gain spiritual blessedness anywhere in the universe. I want to follow your commands and serve you, and thereby attain salvation. You may be anything, but you are my everything. I have no other support in the whole world. My place is at your Feet."

You cannot argue with humility, faith and love, but even then, the Prime Minister said, "Very well. If you want me to

initiate you, first of all you must prove yourself worthy of initiation. Are you prepared for a test?"

Eknath bowed his head and said, "How could I ever be fit to take a test? I will do whatever you want. I am like a puppet, and will dance on your pulling the strings." So saying, Eknath prostrated Himself at his Master's feet and then stood before him with folded hands.

This world is insubstantial, but people are deluded by ignorance and look for the substance in it. Led by the nose on the string of hope, people wander around and around. Only a courageous person can snap this string of hope and expectation. Although this string is very weak, a person must be strong to break it. The black wasp is strong enough to bore holes in wood but it is trapped by the sweet smell and soft feel of the lotus and forfeits its life without trying to escape. Similarly, because of delusion and infatuation, human being cannot loosen the bonds of hope and expectation.

One person in a million takes on the role of disciple, in order to get free. Accepting a guru is nothing so great, but continuing the discipleship until death means a lot. Many start on the path, but very few can continue their discipleship. People give donations of money, and think that they are great devotees. They make so much in business; they spend thousands on their children's weddings, and they themselves don't lack anything, but even while doing all this, they say that everything they have belongs to the Master.

Parents give birth to the body. He who serves and honours his mother pleases the angels and he who serves

and honours his father makes the Creator happy, but he who serves and pleases his Master makes the Lord of the Universe his own. After we get this body from our parents we suffer physical and mental troubles. Parents cannot save a son from reaping the fruits of his actions. When the Master gives Knowledge to his spiritual child, he gives him a spiritual birth, and frees him from karma and the wheel of birth and death. In our previous births, we had different parents, and we left them all, but the Master never leaves us. He is our true mother and father. If a person gets the highest birth, that of human body, and then forsakes his Master or turn against him, he will never find peace and happiness, and will never progress. spiritually.

By serving the Master, we please all the saints and angels. Service of the Master is the highest action one can do. It is the true religion, and the way to salvation. He who hates his parents will suffer hell, but he who is malicious to his Master will find no place in heaven, earth or hell. We can never repay the debt we owe to him.

Only a person who is devoted to his Master has the right to be called a disciple. A disciple who doesn't have the desire to serve and dedicate himself to the Master is not really disciple, although he may call himself one. There will never be a lack of disciples who give donations, but a disciple who totally surrenders his life to the Master is truly rare. You will find plenty of gurus who live off donations, but a guru who can bestow salvation is also truly rare.

If a student learns something yet doesn't respect the one who taught him, or if an aspirant receives spiritual Knowl-

edge and still doesn't try to please his Master by thought, word and deed, he will not get any happiness or benefit from initiation.

It is the Master's duty to give the True Knowledge and help the disciple advance along the Path of peace and realization. It is the disciple's duty to first and foremost renounce all worldly attachments, and try to please his Master by loving and faithful service. In this way he will be spiritually blessed.

Imagine that you are going to the market to buy something. If you don't pay the full price of the article, you won't be able to buy it. Similarly, only by dedicating wealth, mind and body can you make the Master your own. You are mistaken if you hold back yet think that the Master is yours. Only when you pay the full price can you buy something. Cheating goes on in the market, but the Master recognizes only sincerity. If it wasn't necessary to give your all, then it wouldn't be necessary to mention it, and there wouldn't be any need for the many references to it, found in the Scriptures. Service means to complete that work which has to be done. If one could become a disciple without doing service, why would it be necessary to talk about it?

Eknath had come to his Master after having broken all ties of previous attachments. He never thought of returning home. Three years passed, and he was so absorbed in service that he didn't notice the time passing. Day and night were the same to him. Would a hired servant ever work like that? However, Eknath had completely surrendered to his Master. He was constantly busy bringing water, washing

clothes, polishing pots, or feeding the Master's children. On top of all that, the Master put the whole burden of the office on Eknath's shoulders. He saw his capabilities and had no worries about his work. Everything was done according to the way Eknath wanted it to be done. All the employees took their orders only from him. They didn't have to ask the Prime Minister about anything, because Eknath's loving behaviour endeared him to one and all, and they were happy with his work. He listened attentively to the troubles of even the poorest people, and found the means to solve their problem as quickly as possible. Thus, in the hearts of the people, Eknath and the Prime Minister were equally loved. Eknath never let any complaint reach the Prime Minister. He was always ready to do the smallest task, yet he never left his own work to others. Everyone did their official duties according to their abilities, but Eknath's special quality was that, even though he had most important responsibilities, he never felt the least proud. He was always self-effacing, and felt that his Master was constantly testing him. He thought that if he passed the test then he would break forever the bonds of birth and death.

Everyone is afraid of exams. Even a student who studies most diligently for 365 days of the year is nervous at the exam time. When the exam is drawing near, the student gets butterflies in the stomach. Eknath's heart sank at the very thought of a test, but when he caught his Master's graceful glance, his courage revived. He had firm faith that no matter how difficult the test may be, he would surely pass. But that which we fear most, must surely come to pass, and the

day of Eknath's examination finally arrived.

It was early morning. Janardan Swami was alone in his room, meditating. Eknath was on duty, in front of the door, to stop anyone from entering the room.

Whether by chance or the Master's design, a man riding a horse reached Eknath. He had come a long way. Eknath became alert when he heard the sound of hooves. He signalled the rider to halt at a distance so that the sound would not disturb the Master. Eknath said softly to him, "Don't make a noise, and explain why you have come here."

The rider dismounted slowly, and handed over an envelope with the Royal Seal on it to Eknath. It was addressed to the Prime Minister. Eknath said, "When the Prime Minister has finished the work occupying him at present, he will come outside and then I will give him this envelope."

The cavalier said, "This is an urgent Royal matter. Please deliver it immediately."

Eknath said, "That is absolutely impossible. Not even Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva have the power to disturb my Master's meditation, to say nothing of me!"

Hearing this, the messenger turned pale, so Eknath asked, "Is this letter so urgent?"

The messenger said, "If it wasn't extremely urgent, would I be so crazy enough to insist that you disturbing the Prime Minister's meditation?"

Eknath turned the envelope this way and after looking at it said, "What is in it that cannot wait for even a little while?" At this the messenger trembled and said excitedly, "You must send this document to the Prime Minister. If you

persist in your refusal, I myself must go to him."

Eknath exclaimed, "What are you saying ? This is the King's document, but even if the King himself were to come, I couldn't let him in, either, because this is my Master's order. Being a disciple I cannot disobey his order, no matter how great a disaster is about to happen."

When the messenger saw that there was no way that Eknath would let him go to the Prime Minister, nor would he send the letter, he said softly, "Friend, the King has instructed me that no one but the Prime Minister must be told the contents of this letter. But now I have to tell you. Listen ! Our enemies have invaded the land, and their armies are even now approaching the capital. Because of a small error, the kingdom will fall into the hands of the enemy. Our armies are ready to fight, but they will not advance without the Minister's orders. So the King is calling for him urgently. You have wasted so much time talking. If he doesn't go, then just imagine what will happen ! It is vital that this letter reach him. I have done my duty. Now you do as you wish." So saying, he mounted his horse and galloped away.

His words were still ringing in Eknath's ears. The kingdom will fall to an enemy ! The city will be ruined ! What have I just heard !

He put the letter on the file of documents and sat at the door, but he was deeply worried. He was wondering whether to awake the Master from meditation or not. Then the thought came to him, "Eknath ! you are really stupid ! Everything belongs to the Master, so what is the existence

of one state to him ! "But this did not console him. The next idea that occurred to him was that the Master would be angry if his meditation was disturbed, and that would be the end of Eknath ! All the forgotten lesson would have to be drummed into his head again, and the Master might even say, "Eknath, how you have misused my teachings !"

He sat down, but conflicting thoughts disturbed his mind. "O Master ! What should I do? I can't figure it out, so please help me !" Then the idea came to him that everything will work out for the best, and, after all, nothing can obstruct the Master's work. So getting freed of anxiety he again sat down, but there was to be no relief. Troubled thoughts came flooding into his mind. He was oppressed by worries. He thought, "If any harm comes to the kingdom, the Master will say, 'Eknath, you didn't call me in time. You should have let me know about such an emergency. I was sitting in meditation while the kingdom was being destroyed. Is that your devotion ? In exchange you want the sacred and supreme Knowledge?'"

Eknath was feeling more and more depressed, and all the while the Master was sitting in deep meditation. Sometimes Eknath thought that it would be expedient to disturb him, but next moment he thought it best not to. Meanwhile, the all-knowing Master sat silently.

Eknath couldn't figure out what to do by bowing his head to the ground as it did not help him. He prayed to be shown which of the two alternatives to follow.

The sounds of artillery began to reach his ears. He stood up quickly, his face became pale. Time was running

out. In such an emergency, an ordinary servant would have waited to obey orders. Eknath turned once more to the room but his Master was meditating as deeply as before.

"All sense of self is lost when one merges in the one beyond self."

In such a situation, the soul is united with God, but the ego only disappears when all fluctuations of mind cease. He whose mind is directed to outwards, sees himself as the doer of action, and thus is bound by it and suffers. Many people do not check the fluctuations of their minds. They practise wrong methods, and are caught up in pride, think themselves to be liberated devotees. But they will never advance spiritually by doing this.

People praise peace, without knowing what it is. They praise hard work as being the greatest thing, and thus spend their whole lives carrying the burden of work with them. Some proclaim devotion to their country, or call themselves public servants, yet they don't do anything. But the Lord has said, "He who is a devotee of the Master is considered to be greatest devotee." A baby bird is dependent on its mother and doesn't worry about anything. Until it leaves the nest, its mother is its sole support. Similarly, for those in the shelter of the Master, the Lord Himself motivates all actions. If one has taken refuge in God, he doesn't fear making a mess of things. Pride dwells in selfish people, and they look only towards Maya, but those who want to do the highest work look only to the Lord. Passion and hatred arise from Maya, while the Master, the Lord, is the giver of supreme peace.

Thinking in this way, Eknath reflected that the Master

was telling him that the Lord does the devotee's work himself. If he disturbed the Master he would be angry. Suddenly an idea occurred to him. He stood up quickly, and went to the Master's room. He put on his Master's armour, mounted his Master's horse and set off in the direction of the gunfire.

After a short while, the army of Devgarh entered the capital city cheering the Prime Minister. Eknath returned as quickly as he had left. He hung up the armour on its hook, tethered the horse in the stable and again took up his position outside the door.

Soon after, the Prime Minister finished his meditation and came outside. From all sides he heard, "Hail to the Prime Minister ! All glory to the Prime Minister !"

All the citizens were discussing him. They were saying, "How capable the Prime Minister is ! Even though he is an old man, you should see how he wields a sword !" All were praising his bravery. "The enemy would have destroyed our city, but our Prime Minister foiled them completely. They all had to retreat !"

The Prime Minister listened quietly to all this, but he was very surprised. Who had wielded the sword? Who was retreated? Was this some kind of a joke?

As he walked on, he heard many people talking like this. He stood silently behind them and listened to what they were saying. One man said, "Today the Prime Minister was amazing with the sword ! I would never have believed that he could fight like that !"

Another said, "During the battle his appearance was different. It seemed as if a god had come among us, and all

he'd done was, change his clothes ! What feats of magic he performed ! After a little while, the enemy ran away from the battlefield, but true to the code of religion, he did not pursue them."

A third said, "You are talking like a child ! Our Prime Minister is a realized soul, the greatest devotee of God. What is there that a man cannot do, if the grace of God is upon him? Flying in the sky or making fire cool is easy for him. I have heard, that while he was seen fighting, he was also meditating in his private sanctuary."

As the Prime Minister was walking away, one man noticed him. He said, " Look ! The Prime Minister was standing there listening to our conversation ! Who knows how many disguises he uses in the course of running the state ! Really, a Yogi can do whatever he wants!"

Then the Minister understood that Eknath had done all this. He thought, "I was sitting in Samadhi and he did not disturb me. He put on my clothes and routed the enemy. What a promising boy ! Any ordinary servant would have thought, 'Let the town be destroyed, if that is what is to be,' but he takes every piece of state business to be service to me. Such devotees are very rare.

He went to the palace and embraced Eknath, saying, "My son ! You are lucky, your parents are lucky to have given birth to such a son and I am also lucky to have you as a disciple."

At his Master's sweet and loving words, Eknath's eyes filled with tears of joy. He said, "Lord, what are you saying ! How could I have the ability to defeat the enemy ! You did

it all. I was only the instrument for you to carry out your work. But I am guilty of desecrating your clothes. Now they are not fit for you to wear. All I can think of is, that I wore your clothes. I have no idea what else happened. When I took off your clothes, I realized what a great mistake I had made. I am ashamed to ask forgiveness, but, O Lord ! Please forgive me."

The Master was very happy with Eknath's devotion and humility. He said, "My boy, now I am old. You take over the Prime Ministership. You are young and capable. The citizens and employees love you very much. When I tell the king what had actually happened, he will be very pleased and ready to appoint you. My word will be enough. Tell me, do I have your permission to go ? I am ready."

Eknath fell at his Master's feet and started weeping. Again he begged forgiveness and said, "O Lord ! What are you saying ! What crime have I committed that makes you say like this ? Such a thought never entered my mind even in a dream. What is all this about the Prime Ministership? I don't want the kingship of the three worlds, if it means having to stop serving you. Let me stay at your feet ! I beg only this much of you."

Janardan Swami again embraced Eknath lovingly and said, "My boy, you have passed the first exam in my school, but only after testing you a second time will I initiate you."

Listen, all of you who are going astray if you want to do the highest work, if you want to make your life worthwhile, then like Eknath, you should follow the command of your Master. If a child stays close to his father, he can walk all

around a carnival or market and come back home again. In the same way, you will cross the worldly ocean. You should love your Master as Eknath loved his. Brothers ! Practise ! Practise!! Practise!!! Never think of turning away from your Master.

Time passed. In anticipation of his second examination, Eknath applied himself enthusiastically to his work. He was busy day and night.

One morning, after he had swept and finished polishing the utensils, he was about to draw water for his Master's bath. He wanted to finish this before the Master arrived, but suddenly the Minister appeared before him. Eknath was very happy to be able to see him so early, but at the same time, he was wondering why the Master had come so soon for his bath.

Immediately the Prime Minister said, "My boy, the new year starts tomorrow, but the accounts are not yet ready. Tomorrow the king must see them. Today and tonight it must be prepared. For such an able servant as you, this is not a difficult job. Forget my bath, and prepare the accounts. Today I'll bring the water for bath myself.

Eknath went to the office and started to do the accounts. The sun rose and set but Eknath did not raise his head once. The office boy lit the lights and left. Eknath felt neither hunger nor fatigue. He was so occupied in his work, that he was as still as a statue. His only aim was to finish the work before sunrise.

The clock struck midnight as Eknath finished his work. But, when he balanced the accounts he noticed a difference

of one paisa. He repeated the whole process of addition from start to finish, but could not find the reason for the difference. He was confused. He added again, and a third time, and by this time most of the night had passed. People were starting to wake up. But sleep had not even approached Eknath. He was busy balancing the books. With the passing of the night, he grew more and more anxious, wondering where the difference was.

The Prime Minister rose from his bed. His glance fell in the direction of the office, and he saw the light burning. He realized that Eknath was still at work. He quietly left his room and reached the office. The watchman was dozing at the door. The Minister peeped in the office and said softly, "Eknath, my boy !" He received no answer so he called a little louder, "Eknath !" but just as before, there was silence, as if Eknath were asleep. The Prime Minister entered the office. He stood in front of the light and his shadow fell on the accounts, but Eknath was not at all aware of his arrival. He continued to be completely absorbed in his figure work.

The Minister stood in that posture for one hour, but Eknath was not aware of anything except his books and figures. Suddenly he shouted, "I found it !" He had found the error of one paisa. He corrected the books and put them back in their proper places. When he looked up and saw the Prime Minister standing before him he was extremely surprised. He rose and prostrated at his Master's feet. The Master asked, "Are the account ready ?"

"Yes, Master. Today is my lucky day. I am seeing you so early in the morning. Usually I don't see you until much

later."

The Prime Minister said, "I've been standing here for more than an hour. I also called you several times, but you didn't hear me."

Eknath replied, "I heard nothing, Master."

The Master said, "My shadow fell on the books. Even then you could see the figures?"

"Lord, I really did not know that you were standing there. The figures seemed to be shining somehow." His Master's face showed his astonishment. The Prime Minister sat down and said, "Have you been busy like this since morning?"

Eknath said, "I was not aware of the passing of day or the coming of night."

"Didn't you feel hungry, thirsty or sleepy?"

"Not at all, Master."

"What have you been doing all this time? What did you find that made you so happy?"

"A difference of one paisa was outstanding. It had to be found."

"You went to so much trouble for one paisa? Why, that's no difference at all!"

"Difference is difference, Master, whether it is of one paisa or 100,000 rupees."

The Prime Minister's face really lit up. He laughed and said, "You have made me very happy, my boy. The test was difficult. People who imagine themselves to be great renunciates and monks could not have passed such a test. You have a real desire to know Truth, so you passed the test."