

*This*

---

*or*

*That*

Joginder Singh

# **THIS OR THAT**

**JOGINDER SINGH**

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***DEDICATED TO  
BABA GURBACHAN SINGH JI  
IN THE PERSONAGE OF  
BABA HARDEV SINGH JI***

## Submission

Rev Joginder Singh Ji is well-known for his long association with the Sant Nirankari Mission's monthly magazine 'Sant Nirankari' (English) as its Editor. Our readers appreciate his command over the language and his deep knowledge of the Mission's philosophy.

The present book '*This or That*' too manifests these two qualities of the author, more than vividly. Take any chapter, his forceful presentation of the topic will not allow you to leave it before you finish. Truly speaking, it may not always be difficult to deliver a discourse or sermon others, but it does require a perfect skill to create the desired impact. And this comes from the conviction of the author himself.

Rev. Joginder Singh Ji treats 'This' as knowledge as well as the present, the reality, the truth and 'That' as ignorance, falsehood, illusion and unreal. He is most reluctant to endorse 'That' being used for God. This is ignorance and must be removed by the kind grace of the True Master, he says. It is he who will transform this 'That' into 'This'. It's he who will reveal the Ultimate Reality, the Ultimate Truth i.e., God.

Everybody acknowledges that God is omnipresent. Then why address Him as 'That'? Why not 'This'? If God exists everywhere, we should be able to perceive Him just in front and all around. And the author explains the truth of this divine phenomenon chapter after chapter.

On 'seeing' God, the learned author explains that it is purely a spiritual experience. God can be 'seen' not with the fleshy eyes, nor by performing religious practices and rituals, as is generally believed, but with the spiritual vision, spiritual eye or the 'third eye', bestowed upon an aspirant by a Spiritual Preceptor or True Master.

God-knowledge, rather God-realisation, the learned author says, is not a mere information or knowledge, it is something basic and fundamental that makes life meaningful,

successful, blissful. It reveals the fundamental unity of the mankind and promotes the spirit of universal brotherhood, which in turn ushers in peace, love and compassion. The author convinces us how God-knowledge can turn the negative into positive, destructive into productive.

It is, therefore, hoped that the book '*This or That*' will be found useful by everyone interested in spirituality as a way of living. The author has certainly succeeded to strengthen our faith in God and trust in True Master.

On behalf of the Publications Department and on my own behalf, I congratulate Rev Joginder Singh Ji on this very successful attempt and a powerful presentation of the subject – so subtle, so sublime. I thank him for this valuable contribution to the Mission's literature. I pray to His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj to bless Rev Joginder Singh Ji with ability and strength to serve the Mission in general and its literature in particular, with greater and greater spirit of devotion and dedication.

I must also express my gratitude to Rev Dr. Regina Clarke from USA who has very kindly contributed her note 'About the Book' and explained the significance of every chapter of its contents to enable the reader to comprehend the essence and appreciate the beauty of its presentation.

Delhi,  
October 01, 2010

**Kirpa Sagar**  
Member Incharge Publications

## Writer's Note

Incidentally, *The Last Sermon* by V.N. Kakar (*Times of India*, Mumbai, March 29, 1999) attracted the writer's attention. Shri Kakar, recalling his memories of, paid glowing tributes to, late Professor S.P. Kanal. The news of the demise of the Professor shocked and saddened the writer. Professor Kanal was his teacher at the Punjab University (Camp) College, Delhi. Some years after his postgraduation, the writer went to meet the Professor at his residence in New Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi. Sitting in a chair, he was completely absorbed in studying a book. Seeking blessings, the writer bowed at his feet, and after exchanging pleasantries, enquired, out of curiosity, "Sir, what book is this?" He smiled and handed over the book to the writer. To the writer's astonishment, it was *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* by W.T. Stace, a text book when he (the writer) was his student. Practically, throughout his career, Professor Kanal had been teaching the Greek Philosophy. Even after his retirement as a Reader from the Delhi University, he used to take classes as a Guest Professor. Meekly, but in a lighter vein, the writer said, "Sir, by now you must be remembering its contents by heart," to which he responded, smilingly, "Yes, you are right to a great extent. Yet, I make it a point to study before taking a class." After keeping quiet for a while, as if he was contemplating, he threw a philosophical glance at the writer and added, "Dear, learning is a lifelong process. Each successive *study* gives me a new thought."

His concluding words, "Each successive study gives me a new thought," are ringing in the writer's ears, even today. Those words reflected a teacher's commitment to his job. Whatever be the subject—art, science or religion—teaching was not a profession merely for making money, but a sacred mission: dedication to, and identification with, students' overall and lifelong well-being. A teacher was a role model. He commanded the highest respect and deepest reverence not only of the student community but also of the society. His

very presence charged the environment and surcharged the students. With rapt attention they would heed each word of wisdom uttered by him. Even his silence spoke eloquently to those who were in tune with him. It is not without a reason that a teacher of Truth has been accorded the status that of God, as is testified by certain scriptures. But alas, now such teachers seem to be a vanishing species.

“Each successive study gives me a new thought.” One and the same thought influences different persons differently and the same person differently in different situations, depending upon his/her age, knowledge, level of understanding, training, taste, temperament and aptitude. This explains the continuous, unabating and absorbing interest evinced by the people in what the holy and the wise uttered ages ago. Numerous volumes, treatises and theses have been and will be written, and countless sermons, discourses and talks have been and will be delivered, bringing to light new ideas, new thoughts, new interpretations, unravelling new mysteries in their mystic utterances. If we ponder over the teachings of the holy and the wise, objectively and diligently, with a student’s eagerness to understand more and more, surely, each study thereof will help us in having a clearer and deeper understanding of their essence and import, opening new vistas of spiritual awakening and enlightenment.

The thoughts being presented in this book are of the holy and the wise, read or heard by the writer over the years, who has simply ventured to arrange these topic-wise. Of course, a humble attempt has been made to bring to the fore the vital spiritual aspect, so often missed or/and overlooked. The attempt, at the most, may be regarded as peripheral or rudimentary. The writer is fully conscious of the unfathomable depth and infinite vastness of each topic to which justice can be done only by mature, experienced, scholarly and illumined minds. In case this book inspires even a single soul to realise his/her spiritual self, the writer shall feel amply rewarded, but the credit for this must go to the holy and the wise.

A word about the profuse reproduction of excerpts and quotations from several publications and scriptures. This has been done with the firm conviction that utterances of the holy and the wise are not fictional but mirror their personal mystic experience and realisation. These enshrine the pristine wisdom and holiness, capable of transforming and sublimating our lives. And, by reiterating or copying their teachings, in a way, we are expressing our deep gratitude to, and eulogising, them for the invaluable and inexhaustible spiritual heritage bequeathed by them to mankind:

It is an honour and a duty to copy—if what is copied is Truth; it were a disgrace to be original—if what is originated be False. And there can be ‘originality’ in only the ‘fleeting’, therefore the False. There can be no originality in Truth; for only the Eternal can be the Truth; and it can only be, and ought to be, copied, in the large sense, diligently; there can be no ‘copy-right’ in Truth. But there is no need to ‘copy’, ‘in the small sense’. The River of Life is ever flowing; whoever feels thirsty can dip his bucket directly into it. The same Truth wells up independently in the heart of Seer after Seer, Seeker after Seeker.

— *The Essential Unity of All Religions*, p. vii

Justin Martyr has gone a step further, when he stated:

Everything good and beautiful taught by thinkers and poets is ours.

— *The Brahma Sutra*, p. 171

The writer expresses his deep gratitude to Revs. Hardev Singh “Almast” and S.K. “Nirmal” Joshi for inspiring him to take to writing, and Revs. K.L. Nagpal and Des Raj Ahuja, a venerable colleague and Associate Editor, *Sant Nirankari* (English), for lessoning him in the art of writing. Rev. Ahuja has the rare knack of transforming raw ideas into refined expressions. No exaggeration to submit, *de facto* Rev. Ahuja is the writer of the book.

The writer also pays his reverential regards to Dr. Regina Clarke for her chiseled constructive suggestions as also for appending a Note to the book. He is also grateful to another fellow devotee, Mrs. Aruna Chandra Yadav from Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) for her filial prompting over the years for the publication of the book. Besides, he is indebted to Rev. Man Singh “Mann” and Col. (Retd.) Dr. Karam Singh for resuscitating and resurrecting his often shaking and sinking faith.

Above all, the writer prays for Baba Hardev Singh Ji's supernal grace for stabilizing and firming up his faith for serving his spiritual mission as a humble devotee.

New Delhi

**Joginder Singh**

## About the Book

It is my privilege to provide a few comments on the beautiful book written herein, *This or That*. For the last thirty years I have had an intermittent correspondence with Joginder Singh Ji in his role as Editor of the journal, *Sant Nirankari* (English). His dedication to the integrity of the journal and his communication on the themes of the Nirankari Mission are things, therefore, that I have come to know firsthand. I count him as a most valued friend.

How do we perceive the spiritual journey? How do we live it? These are the questions this saint asks throughout *This or That*. He offers his thoughts and meditations on how to reach toward the true self and how to manifest our knowledge of God from day-to-day. There is no presumption, no absolutism, in these pages, only heartfelt reflections after a lifetime of observation and experience within the human condition. Joginder Singh Ji has allowed his studies to range far afield into all schools of thought that explore the mystery of the soul's journey. He has done this to explain the immense diversity of human beings, and, at the same time, to demonstrate how much we are alike, because we all seek to know God, however various our approach and customs may be.

An example of the range of his curiosity and willingness to embrace all sources of perception was brought home to me when I lived in Santa Rosa, California, in the 1990s. Joginder Singh Ji asked in a letter whether I was familiar with a book titled *The Training of the Human Plant* by Luther Burbank. I was not and so looked it up. To my astonishment I learned the town I lived in was famous for Burbank's cultivation of roses and that the book *The Training of the Human Plant* was a remarkable study in how to raise children in a spiritual way. Joginder Singh Ji had already been acquainted with this formative book for many years! That was my first realization of the depth of his dedication to exploring the many paths by

which knowledge could be achieved and its spiritual agency welcomed.

In the chapters of *This or That*, he reveals these paths through quotations collected from voices of wisdom all over the world and down through the centuries. The effect is to bring into focus the powerful message that has been repeated to humankind over and over again about the healing effect of tolerance and love. In the chapter on “Universal Brotherhood”, Joginder Singh Ji cautions us to remember that the attaining of God-knowledge is just the beginning and not the end of our spiritual quest. He explains that for each of us our evolution as a spiritual being depends on our ability to perceive that God dwells in everyone, and that we must let go of the illusions and delusions prompted by differences and fear. The divine spark is what we are, who we are. We are meant to recognize this and see it in everyone we meet.

In the chapter “Name and Named”, he gives us the distinction between the abstract word assigned to a substance and the substance itself as a real thing. He shows how our recitation of noble ideas in words only, whether in prayer or to evoke and proselytize an idea, carries little weight. People use different words to name the same idea, most especially their concept of God, and most often the words sow only the seeds of conflict and turmoil. The truth lies elsewhere. What we must listen to, he reminds us, is the inner voice, the inner, substantive realization of God, who is nameless.

I would like to spend some time on the chapter “The Answer”, for its message engendered much thought when I read it. Joginder Singh ji gives us a list of questions that are, in everyday terms unanswerable. Of particular emphasis, he cites the age-old cry of despair: “Why is a human being inhuman towards fellow human beings, inflicting pain and suffering and causing death and destruction?” Our history-the world's history-is replete with that inhumanity across millennia. Someone said to me just recently that they felt the

20<sup>th</sup> century had been the real Dark Age of mankind, a mere hundred years in which over 100,000,000 people were killed because others wanted power, or rejected a particular race or religion or ethnic group. This same person felt that the 21<sup>st</sup> century was already working up to be a fair imitation of its predecessor, as well. In the face of such information and despair, *what then must we do?*

Joginder Singh Ji tells us what we already know, that our “maladies warrant a spiritual therapy”. But he doesn't recommend the panacea of religious conversion, for that has never worked. He tells us that our deliverance lies in the “Spiritual transformation of the inner self”. We must be more than the words we speak and we must understand the power of our thoughts as well as our actions. We need to understand the effect of anything negative we do to others, however slight it may be, and recognize our inevitable responsibility to each other. For All is One, and what we do to each other, we do to ourselves. We can turn aside from the evidence of our own hearts, he explains, but that evidence is there nonetheless. “The seeker's soul”, he writes, “is kindled by the light of God-knowledge,” in feeling the “immediate presence of God, the all-pervading Formless, everywhere, at all moments”. This is what informs us, and must guide us.

The chapter “What Matters Most” challenges our ready willingness to blame material reality for our problems. Not so, suggests Joginder Singh Ji. In and of itself, he says, material reality is neutral. *We* are the prime movers of matter, by the choices we make every day. We are meant to revere our human form and identity, not to reject it. We are physical beings as well as spiritual. Our material reality is equally a gift from God. But also, “the whole of material creation is inherently transitory.” If this is so, we need to regard it as a sacred time, and use the gift of our presence on this earth more wisely, and with greater compassion. It is always our choices that define our outcomes and our impact on others. We control our own destinies, and shape our own realities.

Matter, then, is not inherently evil, this saint informs us. But our soul is defined in the actions we take in material reality and the motivations we let govern those actions. “The same hands faithfully move to feed one or pick a pocket”, writes Joginder Singh Ji, and “the same tongue hurls abuses or showers blessings. The same intellect is at our command to create or solve problems...the same nuclear power can be made use of as a weapon of mass destruction or as an instrument of service to humanity.” Do we act with God in our hearts, he asks, or do we act in the absence of God-knowledge? We cannot underestimate the power of the choices we make. The real power lies in the willingness of each of us to establish “a holy communion between the individual soul and the Universal Soul or God.”

In the title chapter “This or That”, Joginder Singh Ji reveals how our references to God need the personal element, the apprehension of God's Presence right here and now, the “This” God, not a distant, third-person “That”. In the experience of such nearness lies our joy, and we are “Blessed with the divine vision (God-knowledge) by the grace of a True Master. We understand that “This is everywhere!” and “This “alone is!!!”.

To encounter this book is to become aware of just how much we all belong to the Formless One, how much we are alike, and how long we have been seeking the Way. It reminds us that there is nothing more vital for us to do than to continue that journey.

**Dr. Regina Clarke, Ph.D. (U.S.A.)**

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# **THIS OR THAT**

**Joginder Singh**

## THIS OR THAT

*This denotes knowledge, while That denotes ignorance.*

— Baba Gurbachan Singh

‘It is all due to the grace of *that* God.’

‘We should bow to *Him* and none else.’

‘Life and death are in *His* hand.’

‘Let’s pray to *that* Saviour of all.’

‘*He* is merciful.’

**This** is how most of us, generally, refer to God Almighty. We profess and proclaim that God is omnipresent. Yet, we use words such as ‘That’, ‘He’, ‘His’, ‘Him’, that is, the ‘third person’, instead of the ‘second person’, that is, ‘You’, ‘Your’, etc. for God, staring us right in the face. The reason may be, that we think God to be a distant entity!

In fact, ‘that’, ‘he’, ‘him’, etc., that is, the ‘third person’ is used for a person, who is away, or is not present. Again, a person is also referred to in the ‘third person’ when he is present, but is not known to us. For example, we are told to meet Mr. Harjeet Paul, working in a certain office as an accountant, who was awarded a prize the previous day. We go to that office. Mr. Paul is present in the office, and may be sitting in front of us, but is not known to us. We, therefore, contact someone in the office and enquire: ‘Sir, which is *that* (Mr.) Harjeet Paul, who was awarded a prize yesterday?’ The latter leads us to and introduces Mr. Paul to us, saying, ‘*This* is Mr. Harjeet Paul.’ It is only after the introduction that we address Mr. Paul in the ‘second person’, that is, ‘you’ ‘your’: ‘Mr. Paul, do you remember your promise....’ And the latter responds ‘Yes, I do...’ The mere fact that we knew that Mr. Paul worked in a particular office was not sufficient to identify him, even though he was (physically) present there. It was only when we were guided by the one, who knew Mr. Paul, that we could identify, and converse with, him in the ‘second person’. So is the case with God. Though omnipresent, we can identify and know God only when a person knowing God (True Master) *introduces* God to us.

Now the question arises: why is there sometimes a reference in the scriptures and holy books to the omnipresent God in the 'third person', that is, 'He', 'His', 'Him' or 'That'? The reason is that such words are used to *introduce* God to the ignorant, who are used to such words, or because the rule of grammar, or the context, so demands. Holy Masters, being primarily concerned with the Liberation of humanity, have been quite conscious of the fact that human nature being what it is, it takes time to re-condition the mind conditioned to the prolonged use of the conventional words such as 'He', 'His', 'Him' or 'That' for the omnipresent God. Accordingly, in their anxiety to carry the people along, they will prefer not to be meticulous about the language and ignore such common errors and grammatical niceties.

Souls not yet sufficiently experienced and advanced, are apt to be repelled, even greatly angered, on hearing such statements...Such spiritual declarations must not be pressed upon them. For them, the 'Third Person', 'He', is enough; later on, they will turn to the 'First Person', 'I' (or the 'second person', that is, you).

— *The Essential Unity Of All Religions*, p. 150.

In the excerpt above, the 'I' denotes the individual self that has realised its true identity, origin and ultimate abode, that is, the Self in one and all—the Universal Self. Qualitatively, there is no difference between a drop of water and an ocean: these are one. However, only on merging in the ocean can the drop realise this oneness and express it in the first person, that is, 'I am the ocean.' In the like manner, the individual self and the Universal Self are intrinsically one. However, only when the individual self completely identifies with, and merges itself in, the Universal Self, can it attain the state of the Universal Self—the highest state. Total shedding of one's individual self or ego, and surrendering of the individual will to the Universal Will—emergence of a constituent in the Whole—, an essential prerequisite for attaining the highest state, is not easy. Only a few attain it. And the fortunate few who do so, express the innate oneness in the first person, that is, 'I'm God' (*Aham Brahmo Asmi* or *Ana-al-Haque!*), though, out of utter humility, they call themselves the humble servants of God. However,

before attaining such an exalted state, one usually passes through the state of the 'second person', that is, 'You'. 'Your'. Therefore:

We should not disturb those who act under the impulsion of nature. They should be slowly delivered from the false identification of the self with the ego subject to nature. The true self is the divine, eternally free and self-aware.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 144

It is perhaps for this very reason that Lord Krishna counsels:

Those who know more should not shake the minds and faiths of those who know less, too violently.

— Gita, 3:26

This course is also upheld by Prophet Mohammad:

People should be spoken to and taught according to the measure of their intelligence.

— Hadis

(*The Essential Unity of All Religions*, p. 447)

Philosopher Baruch Spinoza, too, has expressed similar views:

All Scripture was written primarily for an entire people, and secondarily for the whole human race; consequently its contents must necessarily be adapted, as far as possible, to the understanding of the masses.

By now it would be clear that the use of 'that' or the 'third person' for someone, who is present right before us and is also known to us, is not appropriate. If we still use 'That' for, or refer to, the omnipresent God, in the 'third person', that is, 'He', 'His', 'Him' and not in the 'second person', that is, 'You', 'Your', obviously, we do not know but merely believe in the existence of God. Until we have known and realised God, we remain in the realm of 'That'. As already discussed, 'that' denotes an object or a person, which/who is unknown, absent or distant. On the other hand, 'this' signifies an object or a person, which/who is present right before us and is also known to us. God being omnipresent, ought to be referred to as 'This'. Ramakrishna

Paramahansa has stated this very truth in his characteristic style:

As long as a man feels that God is 'there', he is ignorant.  
But he attains knowledge when he feels that God is 'here'.

Now we are confronted with the pertinent question: Can God, who is formless, though omnipresent, be known and realised? The answer is yes. God can be known and realised, not merely by reciting the scriptures or performing rituals but by the grace and guidance of a Spiritual Guide or True Master, as is evident from the following scriptural quotations:

Neither by study of Vedas, nor by penance, nor by charity,  
nor by ritual can I be seen in *this* form, as you have seen Me.  
— Gita: 11:53

How can God be found from anywhere except from the  
Teacher (Guru), who is able to say, "This is."  
— Kath Upanishada 2:6:12

Listen to the Word of the True Master and behold God by  
your side.

— Adi Granth, p. 295

I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the  
Father, but by me.

— Bible (John 14:6)

Now ask the Wise concerning God.

— Quran 25:59

The moment we are blessed with the God-vision (God-  
knowledge), the word 'That' that we had been using (in  
ignorance) for the Omnipresent God, changes into 'This':

*This* Lord is the best refuge;  
*This* Lord is the supreme refuge.

— Kath Upanishada 1:2:17

*This* is God, your Lord.

— Quran 6 : 103, 10 : 3, 35 : 13, 40 : 62

For *this* God is our God for ever and ever.

— Bible (Psalms 48: 14)

*This* Entity cannot be forsaken. Bear it ever in mind.

— Adi Granth, p. 1429

There is, O Monks, an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed. Were there not, O Monks, *this* unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed, there would be no escape from the world of the born, originated, created, formed.

— Lord Buddha

(*The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 67)

*This* form of Mine which you have seen is exceedingly difficult to perceive. Even the gods are always eager to behold *this* Form.

— Gita, 11:52

He who embraces *this* Tao  
Guards against being over-full.  
Because he guards against being over-full,  
He is beyond wearing out and renewal.

— Laotse

(*The Wisdom of China*, p. 38)

Blessed with the divine vision (God-knowledge) by the grace of a True Master, the blessee perceives God all around and ecstatically exclaims:

This is here,  
This is there,  
This is everywhere!

This!  
This!!  
This alone is!!!!

## THE INVALUABLE

*Invaluable is God-knowledge.*

— Baba Avtar Singh

**H**ave you attained the invaluable boon and bonanza of human life? If not, please give it top priority. It is so simple, yet so sublime—God-communion or God-realisation. But how is it invaluable?

The guiding factor for assessing the worth of an article is, surely, not its price but its value. Hence, the price, high or low, commanded by an article is, certainly, not the index of its value. For example, a book has all the value for a student, but is worthless for an illiterate. A jeweller, who actually knows the value of a diamond, is willing to pay lakhs of rupees for it. A layman, however, hesitates to pay even a few rupees for it, because for him it is no more than a shining stone. The price of a sword may be only fifty rupees. However, for Netaji Subhash Chander Bose's sword, as a relic, we would pay any price, even millions of rupees, because we cherish this particular sword for its tremendous sentimental and historical value. Again, salt is so cheap, but as an ingredient of food, it is so invaluable: a little salt added to an insipid dish makes it tasty. The price of the salt so added may be just a few paise as against the total amount spent on the dish, but the value of the pinch of salt added is far greater than its cost.

Again, high price in itself is, by no means, the sole criterion of the value of an object. For instance, air is indispensable for breathing: without air, we cannot survive even for a moment. It is so invaluable. Yet, it is a free gift of God. We realise its real value only when, due to suffocation, we gasp for a whiff of fresh air and are prepared to pay any price for it. Will it not be the height of folly to regard air and, for that matter, other invaluable gifts of God such as rain, moonlight and sunlight of little value simply because these have been available free and freely since time immemorial? This is also true of the higher values such as

love and humility, kindness and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, service and sacrifice, amity and goodwill, patience and perseverance, contentment and gratitude, justice and equality and human dignity and freedom of conscience. These values are invaluable because these can neither be produced in factories nor can these be purchased at a price. These values have been evolved over the ages due to the care and concern of the holy and the wise for human well-being and redemption. These are the outcome of the single-minded attention and dedication, deep contemplation and meditation, and the spirit of selfless service, self-sacrifice and self-abnegation on the part of such noble souls as also their firm commitment to the moral and spiritual elevation of humanity. So invaluable these values have been for them that they sacrificed their all to uphold these. But for these values, man would have been a savage.

Man is a bundle of desires and needs, essentially material. Besides these, he also embodies a soul, which is divine in nature. That is why, consciously or unconsciously, he longs to realise the divine, that is, God.

We should not be conscious of finiteness if we did not have the idea of infinity in us

— Descartes

Religious guides know this very well and are out to exploit this faith. They extract a high price from an unwary seeker on the pretext of imparting God-knowledge. The seeker willingly pays the price demanded, because he attaches great value to God-knowledge or God-realisation. Since those, who claim to impart God-knowledge, themselves woefully lack it, they yoke the seeker to endless hollow and arduous rituals such as recitation of the scriptures and incantations, pilgrimage, holy bath, penance, and even self-mortification. Interestingly, they even set a price on washing off a sin. Above all, they succeed in creating an impression that the more exacting the rituals, the more their value; the higher the 'investment', the higher the return. Thus, in the fond hope of God-realisation, the naive seeker wastes his precious time, money and energy on rituals for years together, overlooking the fact that all the Holy Masters

roundly discount rituals as a substitute for, or a means to, God-realisation. God-realisation, the cherished goal of human life, thus, remains a far cry and a distant dream for an aspirant. Consequently, despite performing rigorous rituals and undergoing exacting penance for long, he remains bereft of the divine communion, bliss and beatitude. What a price to pay!

God is eternal, omnipresent and all-pervading, as we all believe and profess. Therefore, God-vision cannot be just a flash or a momentary glimpse, as is generally believed. Rather, it is an abiding celestial experience. Having been introduced to the bridegroom once, the bride becomes aware of him forever. Very similarly, the moment God is *introduced* to one by a True Master, one develops an abiding awareness of His immediate presence, all around and forever.

Such a mystic and supernal experience (God-realisation), which elevates, sublimate and immortalises a mortal, while in flesh and blood, can be bestowed only by a God-realised personage, that is, a True Master. A True Master does not demand any price for God-knowledge because God-knowledge is not a commodity for sale; it is priceless. He bestows it out of sheer grace, benevolence and magnanimity, and as the mission of his life—human salvation. Far from demanding any price for the invaluable celestial boon of God-knowledge, he does not bother what the aspirant's antecedents, religion, caste and culture are. Nor does he require the aspirant to renounce his household and become a recluse, mendicant or parasite.

In short, God-knowledge, so invaluable and so indispensable for a spiritual life, bliss and beatitude, has no tangible price. Yet, it immeasurably enhances one's value as a human being, created in God's own image—a mini God, as it were!

## NAME AND NAMED

*Not the name but the named serves the purpose.*

— Baba Hardev Singh

**N**ames, written or spoken, are mere words, expressions or terms. Each name, however, signifies a distinct person, place or substance. For instance, the name, that is, 'sugar', denotes a particular substance that is sweet to taste. However, not the name, that is, 'sugar', but the named substance, that is, sugar, sweetens our dishes and drinks. For a thirsty person, utterance of the bare name, that is, 'water' is of no avail. His thirst can be quenched only by drinking the named substance, that is, water. A hungry person may repeat the name, that is, 'bread', any number of times, but the pangs of his hunger can be relieved only by eating the named substance, that is, bread. The bald name, that is, 'clothes', cannot cover a body. Likewise the mere name, that is, 'house', cannot provide shelter. Actually, it is not the name but the named person, place or substance that serves the purpose.

It is, therefore, really amazing that in the religious realm, most of us feel fully satisfied with mere names. The mere names such as 'God', 'Allah', 'Paramatma', 'Tao', 'Ahura Mazada' and 'Jehovah' have become not only the foundation of our faith but also all-important for us, so much so that we are emotionally attached to them. We seem to have totally forgotten that these names connote a distinct entity, that is, God. These names are just a mirage if not sustained by the hard core of reality — God.

As already stated, what actually matters is the person, the place or the substance, and not the mere name. Even one and the same substance or person may have several names. For instance, water is called Jal in Hindi, Paani in Urdu and Aab in Persian. Similarly, a child may have a pet name, a nickname and a real name, and an ignorant person may think that these three different names signify three different children, and may pick up a quarrel on this score. This equally applies to God.

The particular names of God such as 'Paramatma', 'Allah'

and ‘Ahura Mazada’ have not only been identified with particular religions but have also become sectarian in practice.

The spiritually immature are unwilling to recognise other gods than their own. Their attachment to their creed makes them blind to the larger unity of the Godhead.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 160

Unfortunately, exclusive and emotional identification with, and rigid adherence to, different names of one and the same God, often land the followers of different religions into conflicts and clashes. Let us elucidate this point through The *Parable of the Grapes*.

Once four persons—an Arab, a Turk, a Persian and a Greek—agreed to meet together to eat a fruit. When they met, they began to discuss which one they should eat. The Turk proposed Azum; the Arab, Aneb, the Persian, Anghur, while the Greek insisted on Slaphylion. While they were thus disputing, they beheld a cart laden with grapes. They at once sprang to their feet, each pointing his finger at the purple substance: ‘See Azum,’ shouted the Turk; ‘My Aneb, it is,’ cried the Arab; ‘Anghur, the heavenly fruit,’ exclaimed the Persian and the Greek said, ‘This is my Slaphylion.’ They then bought grapes and ate them in peace and pleasure. The dispute among them centred solely around the name of the fruit, which was named differently in their different languages. But once the fruit was sighted, the dispute was resolved, automatically. Similarly, in utter ignorance of the identity of the named entity, that is, God, people often fight over His diverse names, which can come to an end as soon as God is revealed.

The demands of the physical body are limited to things material, but the craving of the indwelling divine soul is spiritual, that is, realisation of the Super Soul or God. Just as not the mere name, that is, ‘bread’, but the named substance, that is, bread, can satisfy our bodily hunger, the soul’s spiritual longing can be satiated not by merely uttering the name but by realising the named spiritual entity, that is, God. To repeat, like any other name, the name ‘God’, signifies a distinct entity. Mere repetition and recitation of the scriptures or the name, that is ‘God’,

without actually knowing and realising the named God, is of little avail. It is like posting a letter without the address.

Recitation of the scriptures and God's Name may bestow momentary solace. But abiding peace, bliss and beatitude can be experienced only by knowing and realising the named entity, that is, God. Glorification of the *known* God is a rare and ineffable experience, indeed.

Now we come to the most vital question: Can God, who is formless though all-pervading and omnipresent, be seen, known and realised, at all? Initially, a task may seem extremely difficult, rather impossible. If, however, we approach a competent guide with full faith and act on his instructions, we can learn a skill or an art. This also holds good with regard to God-knowledge. By the grace and guidance of a Spiritual Guide or True Master, we can easily see, know and realise the unseen, unknown and formless God, named and remembered differently by different names such as 'Satnaam', 'Paramatma', 'Allah', 'Tao', 'Ahura Mazda', 'Yehovah' and 'Nirankar'.

## THE ANSWER

*Only a knower can answer the questions.*

— Prof. J. S. Puri

“I have all the comforts of life at my disposal. Yet, I have no real peace and contentment,” laments one.

Is it not a folly to seek abiding peace and happiness in material possessions, which are intrinsically transitory, and therefore capable of imparting only passing satisfaction?

“I am blessed with everything. However, in silent moments, I still crave for ‘something else’,” sighs another.

Does not this clearly mean that there is ‘something else’ besides the worldly wealth and possessions?

Do you know what this ‘something else’ is?

Like humans, lower creatures, too, struggle for food and security and procreate. But, while, humans, the crown creation, are endowed with rare faculties such as superior intelligence, imagination and discrimination, lower creatures are not so fortunate. Further, while lower creatures are conscious to a degree, human beings are not only highly conscious but also self-conscious. As such, there must be a higher purpose of human life.

Do you know that purpose?  
Have you achieved it?

“Not for a day have I missed to say prayers and worship God. Yet, I have never experienced a living communion with God,” bewails still another.

Do you *know* the God you worship?

Do not the scriptures and holy books enjoin that one should *first* know and then worship God?

Despite their divergent, even irreconcilable faiths and beliefs, people do agree on the basic point that God is one, formless, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, beyond all limitations of time and space and change.

But, in actual practice, are not they engaged in worshipping the material creation, that is, signs, symbols, idols, images, mountains, rivers, etc., all within the limitations of time and space and hence subject to change, decay, disintegration and dissolution in their respective elements?

How do they reconcile their belief in the One without form with their worship of the many with form?

Is there not a wide, rather an unbridgeable gap, between what they profess and what they practise?

We all believe that God is all-pervading and omnipresent. All the scriptures also uphold this fundamental truth.

Then:

Is it right for us to leave our hearths and homes in search of the all-pervading and omnipresent God?

Should not we seek and realise God, right here and now?

All saints, sages, seers, messengers and prophets hold that religion is a cementing force and lay stress on love, compassion, tolerance, fellowship, harmony, amity and brotherhood.

Then:

Why is this world riddled with enmity, hatred, jealousy, arrogance, intolerance, casteism, communalism, sectarianism, racialism, lingual disputes and narrow nationalism?

Why is a human being inhuman towards fellow human beings, inflicting pain and suffering and causing death and destruction?

Is there no way to restore human dignity and equality and establish human brotherhood?

Is it not a fact that, at one time or another, human mind is assailed by such vexing questions?

Is not man's plight pitiable?

Does not he feel forlorn, miserable and frustrated?

Is not the malady deep-rooted, rather chronic?

At the same time:

Are not religious preachers and guides exploiting the religious sentiments of the devout, at times, inciting communal conflicts and clashes, leading to bloodshed?

Are not the communalists rubbing the communal salt into the wounds inflicted by themselves?

Are not the politicians simply dressing the wounds of the masses with their own brand of bandage?

While:

Man in anguish and agony is moaning and groaning.

However:

Is it not a fact that man is himself to blame for his sad plight for knocking at the wrong door, or playing into the hands of quacks who yoke him to the grind of rigorous rituals throughout his life in the fond hope of God-realisation?

Unless man realises his *real self*, the principal purpose of human life, he can neither get rid of his ignorance, ego, superstition, nor the feelings of hatred, jealousy, arrogance nor animosity. Nor can he be at peace with himself nor with fellow beings. These maladies warrant a spiritual therapy. Only a Spiritual Guide can cure these maladies. A Spiritual Guide is an embodiment of divine traits, has a universal outlook and identifies himself with the whole of the suffering humanity. For him, a human as such is important and all humans are members of one human family. He is not for a change of the label, but of the content, that is, human thinking. Awakening a human to his real or spiritual self, he dispels his ignorance by knowledge, hatred by love and ill will by goodwill. By revealing the One, he makes humans realise that spiritually they are one, despite the diversity of faith, caste, creed, race and nationality as well as of physical appearance, diet, dress, colour, custom, culture, etc., which are bound to vary from region to region due to varying climatic, geographical and other factors.

Again, for a Spiritual Guide, all religions are basically identical and, therefore, he does not believe in religious

conversion but believes in spiritual transformation. He brings about this transformation not through rites and rituals, but by establishing a holy communion between the individual soul and the Universal Soul or God. Thus, the seeker's soul is kindled with the Light of God-knowledge and he perceives and feels the immediate presence of God, the all-pervading Formless, everywhere, at all moments.

Does the spiritual transformation bring about a change in one's way of thinking and attitude towards life?

Does the purposeless life become purposeful?

Does one rise above sectarian feelings, narrow-mindedness, superstitions, rites and rituals, social prejudices and religious taboos?

Does one experience real peace, bliss and equanimity, even while discharging one's worldly obligations?

You might wonder whether all this is really possible!

Brethren, you need not be sceptical. Even in this dark age and pervasive gloom, there is a ray of hope, provided you approach a contemporary Spiritual Guide, who, on a humble bow and earnest supplication, blesses a seeker, without any distinction or discrimination whatsoever, with an abiding vision of the all-pervading God Almighty and you get answers to the above and such other baffling questions:

- What is man really?
- What is his primary source and ultimate abode?
- What is real peace, bliss and happiness?
- What is 'something else' <sup>\*</sup> ?
- How to perceive and achieve unity in diversity?
- How to establish Universal Brotherhood?

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\* Mankind is engaged in an eternal quest for that "something else" he hopes will bring him happiness, complete and unending. For those individual souls, who have sought and found God, the search is over: He is that "Something Else".

— Sri Sri Parmahansa Yogananda  
(Man's Eternal Quest, p. XIV)

## HOW KNOWLEDGE ABIDES

*All men by nature desire to know.*

— Aristotle

A question, and a crucial one, arises as to how knowledge abides, even after one's death. But before attempting an answer, let us know what knowledge is. Knowledge has been defined as information, practical skill, familiarity gathered by experience, instruction, cognition, organised body of knowledge on different subjects. In short, all that a person knows, learns, experiences and understands is his/her knowledge.

Knowledge may be put into two broad categories—material and spiritual. Spiritual knowledge relates to Soul or Spirit. Since Soul or Spirit ever abides, spiritual knowledge, too, abides for ever. On the contrary, material knowledge is related to matter. As matter is undergoing ceaseless change, material knowledge is subject to modifications. Of course, the number of modifications varies from subject to subject. For instance, there have been only a few modifications in mathematics, while scientific knowledge abounds in modifications. Yet scientific knowledge as such abides. This holds good whatever be the subject.

Coming to the specific question as to how knowledge abides, it is a well-known fact that whatever is material or gross or a compound, is subject to the law of change: birth, growth, bloom, blossom, decay, disintegration and ultimate dissolution of the constituents into its respective element. This is also true of a human body. However, the operation of the law of change slows down in proportion to the decrease in the grossness of an entity, and the law ceases to operate when an entity is rid of the last trace of its grossness. In other words, what is not material, gross or a compound, is not subject to the law of change, and hence it abides. Unlike the gross body, knowledge is subtle, not governed by the law of change and therefore it abides even after one's death. Death of a doctor does not mean death of medical knowledge. Knowledge (ever) abides. Another person equipped

with medical knowledge takes his place. This holds good for God-knowledge, as well.

Another related factor. A person acquires knowledge, of course, in accordance with his/her keenness, capability and capacity. In other words, knowledge is an acquired asset and not a constituent of a physical being. Therefore, it abides, whether one is alive or dead. It is for this reason that knowledge is said to be abiding.

There is yet another way how knowledge abides. A human being has been blessed with a wonderful mechanism, called mind, the repository of knowledge. Here, mind also includes intellect, wisdom, understanding, thought, etc. Mind has the rare ability to observe, learn, understand, retain and recall the stored knowledge, at will. Not only this, it has the amazing capability to communicate to others what it has learnt. At the higher level, it has the marvellous capacity of imagining, reasoning, discriminating, segregating and co-ordinating facts and factors into new formulations, leading to discoveries and inventions. At the highest level, it has the unique quality of concentration, introspection, meditation and intuition<sup>\*</sup>, arousing an urge for searching an answer to the core question of the real role and goal of human life. This self-enquiry leads to Self-realisation for fulfilling the chief aim of human life. It will not be wrong to presume that this has been the case ever since humanity was born and, sure enough, it will be so in future, as well, and thus knowledge continues to abide.

The storage capacity of the mind has been enormously supplemented by manual and sophisticated mechanical and electrical means and mediums. Starting with rudimentary signs, symbols and figures, now we have books, computers, audio and video cassettes, tapes, compact discs (CDs), etc., facilitating storage and recollection of the stored knowledge, even after

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\* Strictly speaking, intuition is a spiritual or supramental phenomenon in which the mind plays the role of a conveyor only.

centuries. Yet, the role of human mind remains supreme: there is no substitute for the mind. Even to study, understand, interpret and follow what has already been said, written or recorded, including the sacred scriptures and holy books, the mind is indispensable. Thus the mind is the medium to learn, understand and communicate. In other words, it is the mind which keeps the stream of knowledge flowing, swelling and surging forth.

Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds.

— Emerson

Knowledge abides because mind abides.

— Baba Hardev Singh

It will be relevant to consider here the outlook and approach of advocates of material and spiritual knowledges. For our consideration, let science represent all material knowledge. Scientists are open-minded, liberal and rational in their outlook and approach. They ascribe no sanctity or finality to their findings. Rather, they ceaselessly and diligently put these to close observation and rigorous tests and are ever ready to discard what proves to be wrong or wanting, warranting a new look, a new formulation and a new theory to cope with the new facts coming to light which, interestingly, have again to pass through the same gridding process to further improve and update the knowledge. They regard each new finding as a step towards unravelling new mysteries of the creation. This is the hallmark of science, also called scientific temper, owing to which science has made astounding progress.

In the latter category, we have religionists and spiritualists, upholders of knowledge of God. They are close kin: both believe in the existence of God. Yet, they seem to be poles apart in their outlook and approach towards God. While religionists feel content with mere belief in the existence of God, spiritualists quest for God—the highest stage in religion.

History bears witness that, by and large, religionists tend to be rigid, conservative and dogmatic. They are not only

concerned more with outfit, religious practices and rituals but also regard these an end in themselves. This, in turn, often turns them into closed minds, orthodox and bigots. Rarely do they feel the need of comprehending the underlying spirit of the religious practices and rituals and seem to be practically unconcerned with the soul, the quintessence of religion. Spiritualists, on the other hand, are rational, open-minded and liberal. For them, the soul is all-important, irrespective of the outfit, culture, faith, social status, etc. of a person. They articulate their views on religion freely and uninhibitedly. With an open mind, they discuss among themselves and with others, and dilate on, the teachings of the holy and the wise, in order to understand their intrinsic and deeper meanings to supplement and update their knowledge:

They who seek truth with fervour are ever open to new evidence—ever ready to consider, reinvestigate the opinion they hold. They deem none irrevocably fixed. They are tolerant of new views and explore with candour the grounds on which they are supported.

— Anonymous

Not only this, the more one understands, one finds that there is still much more to understand.

So long as we live, we must share our thoughts with each other.

— Adi Granth, p. 661

And, as rightly said:

Great learning brings great humility. As our knowledge increases, we become increasingly aware of the encircling darkness.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 181

Heed what Socrates, one of the wisest men who walked on this earth, says:

I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance.

Let us also heed what the world-renowned scientist Sir Issac Newton has to say in this regard:

I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me.

Spiritualists are fully alive to the truth that spiritual knowledge is an ocean full of spiritual pearls. How many one is able to pick up, depends upon one's earnestness, patience, perseverance and will to dive deep in. They are conscious of the fact that a finite human being is incapable of understanding the Infinite, fully, even in several lives. This, however, does not deter one from striving. Rather, this spurs one to continue striving with added zeal and fervour to understand and imbibe as much as is possible in one's short life-span. Therefore, instead of reading and reciting the scriptures and holy books mechanically, a spiritualist earnestly and diligently studies these as also religious and philosophical literature, and ponders and pores over each word for catching and imbibing its spirit and import:

Every word is endowed with a spirit.

— Bahu'llah

The Word is well said to be omnipotent in the world.

— Thomas Carlyle

Truth and virtue are the realities behind words.

— Chow Tun Yi

Word are meant to convey the truth (Tao)

— *The Book of Universality*, p. 54

It is not the word that counts...It is what vibrates in the word. And to that even a beast is susceptible.

— *The Book of Mirdad*, p. 110

It will be seen that, imbued with the spirit of enquiry, scientists and spiritualists are closer to each other than are religionists and spiritualists to each other. The spirit of enquiry leads to exploration, opening new vistas of, and adding to, human knowledge and understanding

The important thing is not to stop questioning.

— Albert Einstein

May you be endowed with the spirit of enquiry till you rest in the infinite God, so that all your delusions might come to an end and you may attain highest fruit.

— Yoga Vaasistha

No exaggeration to say that it is the spirit of enquiry that keeps one's knowledge growing, replenishing, updating and abiding. As such, there is a need for upholding the spirit of enquiry by advocates of all branches of knowledge for human progress and prosperity and sublimation of mind and redemption.

A word about the significance of spiritual knowledge or God-knowledge. As truthfulness is the measure of a person's reliability, so is the case with knowledge. Truth is not truth if it was truth in the Satya Yuga (Golden Age), in December or on Sunday but is not so in Kali Yuga (Iron Age), in January, on Monday, or even in the following moment. Truth ever abides. For this reason, knowledge is regarded as true as it is near the truth, and so is our faith in it. Two plus two made four not only in the ancient times, but it is true even today. We rely on it not only on reading this in books or on hearsay, but on the basis of our day-to-day experience. However, this cannot be said of a weather forecast. Contrary to this, God is ever true:

True in the beginning,  
True in the Primeval age,  
True He is, and  
True He shall be.

— Adi Granth, p. 1

God, being eternally true, is also called Truth, and so is God-knowledge. God-realised or spiritually enlightened beings, on the basis of their personal realisation and experience, repose firm faith in and full reliance on God, terming God as the highest truth, nay truth *per se*, and God-knowledge as the highest knowledge and its attainment as the highest attainment.

## SEEING GOD

*Anyone who hath seen me  
hath seen the Father.*

— Bible (John 14:9)

**I**n the chapter “Name and Named”, it has been stated that God can be seen, known and realised. At times, the expression see/seeing God creates a doubt: Can one see God who is formless? A question arises if God cannot be seen, why it has been stated:

Spiritual reality is a matter of perception, not of proof.

— Peter Marshall

How can one praise God without seeing Him. Such praise is meaningless.

— Adi Granth, p. 646

To Naren's (Swami Vivekananda) question, “Sir, have you seen God?”, the Master (Ramakrishna Paramahansa) replied, “Yes, I have seen God.”

— *Saints of India*, p. 81

In fact, such statements/queries point to a seeker's urge for the firsthand knowledge or direct perception of God.

However, before attempting to resolve the apparent enigma, a word about the term see/seeing.

The difficulty lies in human helplessness to explain a spiritual phenomenon in material terms, or to stick to the latter's literal meanings.

Let us bear in mind that apart from seeing an object through the agency of physical eyes, the term see/seeing has several other connotations such as ‘to understand’, ‘to perceive mentally’, ‘to form a mental picture’, ‘to experience’, ‘to realise’, ‘to visualise’, ‘to envision’, ‘to caution’, ‘to command’ and ‘to express disappointment’, as illustrated below:

- \* 'As I see it.'
- \* 'I see what you mean.'
- \* 'He could not see the joke.'
- \* 'I see things differently now.'
- \* 'Cannot you see that he is deceiving you?'
- \* 'Try to see the matter from his point of view.'
- \* 'I see through the little game being played by him.'
- \* 'I see no point in discussing this topic with you.'
- \* 'See that this job is finished by Sunday evening positively.'

Now reverting to the original question 'Can one see God who is formless?' let us ponder: will it be wise to pass a judgement that anything which cannot be seen with the physical eyes does not exist? Is it not a fact that there exists a world of microbes which are not visible to the gross eyes? Not only this, there are many abstract, subtle and intangible existences that cannot be seen with the fleshy eyes. Yet, we can comprehend these, as for example, thought, love, sympathy, compassion, anger, hatred, etc. Also, heat and cold are invisible, as such. Yet, their existence can be experienced by "Skin," which, in the words of Paul Brand, "is like the eye, a window to the world outside as well as within." Again, on hearing gunshots, we infer that a battle is going on somewhere, though sound waves cannot be seen. We can even visualise the battle if we have ever fought one, or have seen it depicted in paintings, or projected on a cinema/television screen, or even read or heard its description. In a similar manner, God or Divinity, who is formless, can be 'seen' not with the physical vision but with the divine vision. About the divine vision, let it be clearly understood:

The vision is not a mental construction but the disclosure of a truth from beyond the finite mind.

– *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 272

Also:

The vision is not a myth or a legend but spiritual experience.

(ibid., p. 270)

The Divine or True Masters have been fully alive to the limitations of human understanding. Accordingly, for the benefit of humanity, at large, they have endeavoured that:

The abstract metaphysical truth should be given visible reality.

(ibid., p. 270)

To this end, they speak in the language of the common man to convey the message. This very concept has been expounded by Vice-Principal Narain Singh in the following excerpt:

O dear friend, the record of thy deeds cannot be effaced; remember, these deeds are recorded by the Lord i.e. by His Will, or by the Law of the Lord.

— Adi Granth, p. 937

Again:

Who can erase the writ of my Karma<sup>1</sup>? What do I know as to what will be my lot, in the Yond?

— Adi Granth, p. 154

But, it should be remembered that this recording is not to be interpreted, in the narrow sense of any external agency, having been deputed for the task, nor is the Law of Karma<sup>2</sup> to be interpreted, in the sense of material rewards and punishments. True, there are references in the Guru Nanak's hymns, about Heaven and Hell, the Dharam Raj<sup>3</sup>, the Chitra

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1 Karma: past deeds.

2 Law of Karma: Law of Cause and Effect.

3 Dharam Raj: The god of justice.

and the Gupta<sup>1</sup>, the Yamas<sup>2</sup>, and the Israel, etc.; but these references are there, to make ideas intelligible, by stimulating our understanding. When, for instance, it is desired to emphasise, that good actions promote happiness and bad actions result in misery and suffering, the same are expressed, in terms of Heaven and Hell. But these should not be taken too literally. The so-called Heaven and Hell are not perpetual abodes of happiness and misery, but mental states that are to be identified, with virtue and vice, and not with physical pain or pleasure. The Guru, here, speaks, as all great men do, in the language, which people can best understand. According to him, coming in tune with the Lord or His Will<sup>\*</sup>, is to be in Heaven and remaining in disharmony with Him, is to be in Hell. Whatever the technique he employs, to express his ideas, he invariably stresses the point that one must work out one's salvation, through the law of self-effacement. The traditional beliefs and the mythological references are requisitioned, only to concretise ideas, so as to become graspable. Chitra and Gupta are likewise, to be interpreted as one's own actions, conscious or unconscious, that perpetually get recorded in one's character, as the literal meanings of the terms also indicate...

— *Guru Nanak Dev's View of Life Amplified*, pp. 463-64

Referring to the Bible, Baruch Spinoza, a renowned philosopher, has expressed similar views:

The language of the Bible is, deliberately, metaphorical or allegorical. It adapts to the capacity of the popular mind and

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1 The Chitra and the Gupta: Recorders of deeds.

2 Yamas: The Messengers of death.

\* cf. Vain is the search for Heaven, and vain is the evasion of Hell so long as Man is held by his shadow. For both Heaven and Hell are states inherent in Duality. Except Man becomes single of mind, single of heart and single of body; except he be shadowless and single of Will, he shall always have one foot in Heaven and another in Hell. And that is Hell indeed.

(*The Book of Mirdad*, p. 124)

talks in their language. Certain things are stated merely as concessions, to the understanding of the people, and their imperfect knowledge.

— (ibid., p. 464)

In elaboration, Spinoza says:

All Scriptures are written primarily for an entire people, and secondarily for the whole human race; consequently, its contents must necessarily be adapted, as far as possible, to the understanding of the masses.

George Santayana has also put the same notion thus:

The idea that religion contains a literal and not symbolic representation of truth, is an impossible idea. We should rather honour the piety and understand the poetry, embodied in the fables.

— *Guru Nanak Dev's View of Life Amplified*, p. 464

This is what Swami Rama Teertha has to say in this regard:

Unless a religious scripture meets the spiritual wants of the people, it cannot live, and as the people grow in the course of Evolution, the interpretation of the religious Scriptures of theirs must advance with them.

— *Preachings of Ram*, p. 45

The sacred Scriptures of all the worlds should be taken in the same spirit as we study Chemistry, holding our own experience for ultimate authority.

— ibid., p. 46

This concept has been further affirmed by Thomas Browne:

Unspeakable mysteries in the Scriptures are often delivered in a vulgar and illustrative way; and being written unto man, are delivered, not as they truly are, but as they may be understood.

Now coming back to the implication and underlying spirit of

the term 'seeing' God, as already stated, 'seeing' God is purely a spiritual experience. God can be 'seen' not with the fleshy eyes, nor by performing religious practices and rituals, as is generally believed, but with the spiritual vision, spiritual eye or the 'third eye', bestowed upon an aspirant by a Spiritual Preceptor or True Master.

The nature of one Reality must be known by one's own clear spiritual perception; it cannot be known through a pandit (learned man).

— Shankara

Let us bear in mind that God is ever manifest:

Beyond the ken of the Vedas and Semitic Texts, yea, the whole world.

Yet, the Master of Nanak is so manifest all over.

— Adi Granth, p. 397

But:

Neither by study of Vedas, nor by penance, nor by charity, nor by ritual, can I be seen in this form.

— Gita 11:53

Because:

Those eyes are different, O Nanak, with which one See-eth one's Loved Lord.

— Adi Granth, p. 577

Therefore:

Surely you cannot see Me with these gross eyes of yours; therefore, I vouchsafe to you the divine eye. With this you behold My power of Yoga.

— Gita 11:8

And the Unseen, the Imperceptible, Unknowable, Immaculate—Him the eyes See by the Guru's Grace.

— Adi Granth, p. 87

No matter how many theological arguments man may hear or propound, truth is known when it is beheld through the hidden spiritual eye of wisdom.

— Sri Sri Paramahansa Yoganada  
(*Wine of the Mystics: The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam; A Spiritual Interpretation*, p. 131)

In the circumstances, grace and guidance of a contemporary True Master is indispensable to 'see' God. And, when a True Master reveals God and the seeker finds the characteristics such as formlessness, boundlessness, eternalness, changelessness, all-pervasiveness, self-sustenance, etc., tallying with those described in the scriptures, the latter exclaims: Oh! now I 'see' God, here, there and everywhere.

Spiritual reality is a matter of perception, not of proof.  
— Peter Marshall

When words come up fresh and breathless from the embrace of Reality, they carry power and authority.  
— *The Brahma Sutra*, p. 247

Only spiritual experience can provide us with the proofs of the existence of Spirit.  
— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 20

The truth that God can be 'seen' is testified by the following affirmations:

To whichever direction I turn my eye, I perceive God.  
— Guru Nanak  
(*Adi Granth*, p. 1343)

That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, and in case you fail to see Him, then pray (with this idea in mind) that (at least) He is seeing you.  
— Prophet Mohammad  
— *Hadis (Sahih Muslim, Vol. I, p. 6)*

After seeing this universal form, which I have never seen

before, I am gladdened.

— Gita, 11:45

Again:

This form of Mine which is indeed very hard to see, thou hast seen. Even the gods are eager to see this form.

— Gita, 11:52

Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.

— Bible (John,6:46)

Further:

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

— Bible (Matthew, 5:8)

We shall see Him face to face, if we now see Him by faith.

— St. Augustine

I see God as I see you (Vivekananda) here, only more clearly. God can be seen.

— Ramakrishna Paramahansa  
(*The Saints of India*, p. 81)

Now I see God who is to be seen by all.

— Rig Veda

In spiritual parlance, 'see'/'seeing' denotes the divine vision or the 'third eye', bestowed by a True Master upon a seeker to 'see', and, for that matter, to perceive, behold, realise, comprehend or envision the Formless—Nirankar. It is in this sense that the term 'see'/'seeing' needs to be understood, instead of sticking to its literal meaning. To reiterate, for spiritual evolvment and advancement, what is important is to catch and comprehend the spirit—spiritual import—instead of clinging to the letter—literal meaning—, as is stated by Baba Gurbachan Singh:

While elucidating a spiritual phenomenon, we give material

illustrations. We should, however, follow their spirit and not the letter.

— *Precious Pearls*, p. 52

Those who are vouchsafed the vision of truth convey it through symbols to ordinary people who cannot look upon its naked intensity. Name and form are used to reach the Formless.

— S. Radhakrishnan  
(*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 158)

It may not be wrong to state that there have always been preachers who have themselves not realised God. Yet, with their spell-binding oratory, they captivate the hearts of the devotees, sermonising on the imperative necessity of God-realisation for fulfilling the prime purpose of human life and attaining liberation from repeated births and deaths. Having themselves not realised God, evidently, they cannot reveal God. Yet, to maintain their stranglehold on the credulous devotees, they create an impression, nay succeed in convincing the latter that God-revelation is well-nigh impossible and that they (devotees) should be content with performance of religious practices and rituals. This assertion of theirs, being a total contradiction and negation of the spiritual teachings, has been refuted by the Holy Masters who walked on this earth, from time to time.

In the circumstances, Holy Masters, Saints and Sages have, as ever, taken great pains to dispel and rid the humanity of the widespread and well-entrenched misconception that God cannot be seen. The *Adi Granth*, the latest scripture, is replete with testimonies that God can be 'seen':

'Tis the Guru who makes me see (Thee) and then I see Thee wherever I see.

— Guru Nanak  
(*Adi Granth*, p. 55)

Wherever I See, I See no one but God.

— Guru Nanak  
(*Adi Granth*, p. 1343)

The True Guru Revealed the One God to me and my body  
and mind were comforted.

— Guru Angad  
(Adi Granth, p. 788)

Without His vision how may He be lauded?

— Guru Amar Das  
(Adi Granth, p. 646)

I am filled with ecstasy when I see Thy Sight.

— Guru Ram Das  
(Adi Granth, p. 370)

Seeing Him I become enamoured of Him.

— Guru Arjun Dev  
(Adi Granth, p. 397)

As I look around, God I find my succour.

— Saint Sheikh Farid  
(Adi Granth, p. 794)

I am wholly rid of my Doubt, now that I have Seen the  
Detached God, in all.

— Saint Kabir  
(Adi Granth, p. 1350)

Seeing the Lord's Vision, they are freed of Vice, and attain  
all they seek;

Yea, they involve themselves with naught else, for, they See  
ever the Glorious Presence of God.

— Saint Surdas  
(Adi Granth, p. 1253)

Without Seeing (the God), the desire (to see Him) welleteth up  
not.

— Saint Ravidas  
(Adi Granth, p. 1167)

The One Lord is also Manifested as many, and wherever I See, I see Him Pervading all.

— Saint Namdev  
(Adi Granth, p. 485)

Both my eyes are now content, for wherever I see, I See the One Lord alone.

— Saint Bhikhan  
(Adi Granth, p. 659)

The Lord to him manifested Himself—  
Such was Dhanna's good fortune.

— Saint Dhanna  
(Adi Granth, p. 488)

## ATHEISTS, THEISTS AND KNOWERS

*The knower (of God) is also a devotee and the best of them.*

— S. Radhakrishnan

**T**he existence of both, atheists and theists, seems to date back to the commencement of human history. It also seems that there was never a time when the whole of the humanity comprised either atheists or theists. However, it sounds quite plausible that, as it is today, a great majority has always been of theists. This being the position for ages, division of humanity into theists and atheists is regarded as a natural one. It is perhaps for this reason that we are instinctively driven to brand a person as a theist or an atheist.

Generally speaking, a person is said to be a theist if he believes in the existence of God and aspires for God-realisation, which is also called Self-realisation. On the contrary, anyone, who denies the very existence of God, is known as an atheist.

For an atheist, material existence is all-important. He, accordingly, explains everything, including life, in terms of physical, chemical or biological changes. A theist, on the other hand, attaches little importance to the material existence, which itself is the creation of Supreme Creator — God. However, what is interesting is that a theist blames the materialistic outlook and an atheist equally blames the religious outlook for all the ills of our present-day world.

The belief that God exists has been an article of faith for a theist. For him, it has always been a matter of great consolation and immense solace. It instills in him virtues such as love, humility, compassion, tolerance, contentment, self-surrender, self-sacrifice, selfless service and fellow-feeling. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the belief in God changes the very attitude of the theists towards life. The meek turn brave. They

not only brave all odds but also stake their all and even sacrifice their lives with grace and cheer for a noble cause. This, in turn, changes the very course of human history and gives life a new meaning. An atheist, on the other hand, questions: How does his denial of the existence of God thwart imbibing of such virtues? He asserts that man as such is all-important and, therefore, man ought to be loved, served and respected. As for the virtues, these sprout as a natural consequence of this concept. To drive home this truth, an atheist also cites numerous examples of love, service, sacrifice, perseverance, valour and noble conduct set by his tribe. If a theist subscribes to philanthropic service or amelioration of the lot of the less fortunate and less gifted, as a religious duty, an atheist does not lag behind in rendering such service to humanity, but without bringing in Divinity.

A theist asserts that God is one, boundless, all-pervading, eternal, absolute, and formless and, that God-realisation is the foremost aim of human life. He also contends that, as stated in the scriptures, realisation of God entails no time-lag and, in support, narrates how King Janaka is said to have realised God 'in the span of time it takes to mount a horse when one foot is already in the stirrup.' In other words, a mere hint by a God-realised personage or True Master is all that is needed to realise God. However, in actual practice, a theist invokes God by recitation of the scriptures, performance of rites and rituals, pilgrimage, charity, idolatry, telling the beads and worshipping the creation such as sun, moon, mountains, rivers, trees and even animals. Some of such religious deeds and practices may help in keeping the body fit and the mind calm, alert, sharp and discriminative and inspire one for altruism and God-devotion. However, in course of time such practices often turn a devotee superstitious, dogmatic, egocentric and of closed mind but, certainly, cannot lead him and, for that matter, anyone, to God !

An atheist is surprised to find that generally a theist is not only totally given to mechanical performance of religious practices and rituals but also regards these as the very end, contrary to the scriptural teachings. He also mocks at the multiplicity of Gods, at times, at loggerheads with one another, and none of whom, even according to theist's own criterion, can

be regarded as God, the omnipresent, the omnipotent, the omniscient, the eternal, the infinite and the formless.

An atheist further contends that he, too, loves to study books, including scriptures, but for the knowledge enshrined in them. He also loves and admires idols, images, paintings portraying holy shrines, holy beings and related events, but only as an expression of human creativity and for their artistic value and the like. Besides, he also visits holy places for their historical importance, architectural grandeur, scenic beauty and tranquil, blissful and supernal environment\*, but not in quest of or for devotion to God.

A theist is amazed at the totally materialistic outlook of an atheist and feels pity at his inability to get beyond matter. To resolve the seeming contradiction in his (theist's) worship of the material objects, rightly falling in the category of the creation, rather than the Creator, he wants an atheist to bear in mind that there is also a reality behind the material objects. When, for instance, he meditates on such objects, it is not the object of meditation but the Bhavana or faith underlying his meditation that matters, and, he claims, that his mind is always focused on God, everything, including the object of meditation or worship!

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\* Much more than the climatic and geographical factors, pious and sublime thoughts, articulated or otherwise, emanating from the core of heart, solemn prayers offered in utter humility and devotion and soulful eulogies in praise of the Lord, sublimate the environment at the holy places, turning these into groves of peace, bliss and tranquility. Since such ennobling and elevating thoughts saturate the environment at holy places, these equally influence the head and heart of the visitors—atheists as well as theists.

Practically, similar is the impact of thoughts prevailing at any other place. On entering a place of worship, a person is imbued with devotional, altruistic and charitable thoughts, and even doles out alms, liberally, to the poor and needy, but, on entering a market, he begins to haggle deliberately over the price of the vegetable he wishes to purchase, knowing full well that the quoted price is fair, and at his own grocery store, he bargains hard to maximize his profit; at a monument, he admires its architecture and thinks of the royalty of the rulers of the olden times; at a public rally, he is enthused by patriotic fervour, and on

*(Contd. on page37)*

An atheist concedes that the contention of a theist may be partially correct but asks: Does not a theist's worship of God consist of mere recitation, vocal or silent, of a name, term or word such as 'God', 'Paramatma', 'Allah' or 'Satnam', as heard or read? As already discussed in chapter 4, a question arises: Does not each name, term or expression signify the existence of a distinct person, entity or substance who/which should be known and/or acquired? For a person, who is thirsty, repeated utterance of the word 'water' is of no avail. His thirst can be quenched only when he drinks the named substance, that is, water. What is important is the substance and not the name, word or term used to signify it, which may even differ from place to place. For example water is also named as Paani in Urdu, Jal in Hindi, Vellam in Malayalam, Thannir in Tamil, Neeru in Telegu, Aab in Persian, Voda in Russian, Wasser in German and L'eau in French. Similarly, there ought to be an entity, named variously as 'God', 'Paramatma', 'Allah' or 'Satnam'. Further, this Entity must have all the characteristics attributed to it such as omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, eternalness, infiniteness, formlessness, oneness and peerlessness, and the uncaused cause of everything: 'What was, what is and what shall be.' In fact, it is the realisation of this entity which is called God-realisation and, sure enough, there is no substitute for God or God-realisation.

A naive theist perhaps honestly feels such as 'God', 'Paramatma' or 'Allah', and content with mere recitation of a name performance of rituals. In course of time,

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reaching home, he is assailed by the thoughts of his domestic problems. And, interestingly, all this and much more can happen to him on the same day.

Thoughts, expressed or otherwise, continue to arise and abide, vibrate and pulsate, in the cosmos in the form of waves. No wonder, some day, Lord Krishna's divine sermon delivered to his devotee Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, may be picked up by us! Thought is also the basis of telepathy, prayer, goodwill and blessings and explains how thoughts of the ancient, the holy and the wise continue to influence, guide and inspire us even today. This also explains how an earnest prayer of a devotee to his True Master, sitting thousands of miles away from him, is answered.

*(Contd.. on page38)*

he comes to nurture an illusion that he has realised God. However, he gets a severe jolt, which also shatters his dream-world of spiritual attainment and arouses in him a feeling that all is lost, when an atheist elicits from him the candid confession 'Not yet' to the straight and pertinent question: 'Have you realised God?' He is crestfallen, totally disarmed and disenchanted. The realisation of his being still remote from God, not to speak of realising Him, arouses in him a feeling of remorse and repentance.

Recovering from the shock administered by an atheist's query, the theist appreciates the former's concept that a human such is important and therefore a human ought to be loved, respected and served, but asks: Is it not a fact that this lofty concept about a human exists only in theory, because, in actual practice, there exist impenetrable barriers of 'isms,, sectarian thinking and man-made distinctions of high and low, black and white, master and servant, one frowning at the other? And, is it not so because a human is considered as a mere physical entity?

Again, can an atheist deny that there are moments in life when the worldly possessions no more tempt a human? Rather, with all the material affluence at his disposal, a human still feels disillusioned, desolate and bewildered. At times, he even questions himself: Is material affluence an end in itself? Does not a human crave for 'something else' at such moments?

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It must be millions of years ago when a thought arose, for the first time, in human mind: Is a human being merely a physical entity? And with this started the search for an answer about his true identity or real self, which was to change human destiny and eventual achievement of the cherished goal of realisation of his real or spiritual self. The inestimably long intervening period in no way dampened or diminished the impact of the thought, rather, with the advancement of human knowledge and understanding, it continued to evolve, crystalise and strengthen. As already stated, thoughts continue to pulsate and vibrate in the cosmos, and a human being is what his thoughts are:

We are made of such stuff as thoughts are.

— William Shakespeare

*(Contd.. on page 39)*

Everyone, including an atheist, daily uses expressions such as 'This is my hand', 'This is my foot', 'I have injured my arm', 'I am sad', 'My mind is upset' or 'I cannot forgive myself for slapping instead of admonishing him'. Has an atheist ever given thought to the deeper implication of these simple expressions? Does not each of these expressions clearly imply that there is an entity which lays claim to the organs—hand, foot, arm or mind? Does not the 'I'/'My' which lays claim to the organs as its own or complains of the injury or expresses sadness or regret, testify to the existence of an entity, conscious and distinct from the physical body? Should not an atheist also know the entity for which this 'I' or 'My' stands? The physical body, even at its best, divested of this 'I', is merely a lump of flesh and bones. This perplexes an atheist, nay renders him non-plussed.

Sensing an atheist's predicament and perplexity, a theist comes to his rescue and explains that a human is not a mere physical entity, as contended by the former; he has also a spirit or soul—the life-force—which is fully conscious. It is this life-force, which pulsates in all matter; it is divine. While matter can satisfy demands of the physical body, it cannot satiate the craving of the divine spirit or soul.

An atheist, no doubt, denies the existence of God, but, in his heart of hearts, he, too, admits that there must be a supreme

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All that we are is the result of what we have thought.

— Dhammapada

Evidently, no thought goes waste:

Beautiful it is to understand that a  
Thought did never yet die.

— Thomas Carlyle

Rather, each thought reacts:

No thought, no wish, no deed go sterile in the world, but all beget after  
their kind and nature.

— *The Book of Mirdad*, p. 60

In the circumstances, if a person thinks of causing harm to or wishes ill of another, he may or may not succeed in his design but, for sure, he cannot escape the impact of his negative thinking on himself:

(Contd.. on page 40)

power, which has created and governs the established Order. However, he prefers to call it Nature. Obviously, by Nature he, too, does not mean the material creation, which itself is undergoing ceaseless change and is finite, but a cosmic conscious power, which has created, sustains and regulates the universe.

One simply wonders at the infinite variety in the creation and the sequential regularity in the natural phenomena such as day following night, cycle of seasons and majestic orderly movement of the countless heavenly bodies like stars—galaxies, nebulas, constellations—and planets.

As to the expanse of the universe, human mind is simply awe-struck even to think of it. Just to give a rough idea of the immensity of the vastness of the universe, it is stated:

Scientists estimate that there are about 10 billion trillion stars in the universe...

In spite of their (tiny) appearance, stars are enormous objects. The sun is only a medium-sized star, but its diameter is more than 100 times the diameter of the earth. The largest star would more than fill the space between the earth and the sun. Such stars have a diameter that is about 1,000 times as large as the sun's...

The nearest star—other than the sun—is more than 40 million million kilometres away. The fastest jet would take a million years to fly that far. But even this great distance is only one-billionth the distance to the farthest stars.

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Do not will of any man a pleasure that is to him a pain, lest your pleasure pain you more than pain.

— *ibid.*, p. 102

For he that but conceives a crime in thought  
Contracts the danger of actual fault.

Dryden

The holy and the wise, therefore, advise a human to always think of doing good to and wishing well of all, which will benefit him, too. Herein lies the significance of attending the holy congregation and keeping company of the good, the holy and the wise.

(The) nearest star excluding the sun...(is) 4.3 light-years<sup>\*</sup> away.

— *The World Book Encyclopedia*

And hold your breath, it is said that there are stars whose light has not as yet reached the earth! It is for this reason that scientists hold that the universe is expanding.

Let it be borne in mind that none of the heavenly bodies is stationary or fixed, rather all are floating and moving: some changing their position, some revolving and some going round in the 'allotted' orbits. Yet, there is perfect harmony in the movement between these mighty bodies.

Evidently, this marvellous and grand Order cannot be the handiwork of a human, a material force or evolution. On the contrary, everything testifies to the existence of a cosmic conscious power, which has not only created but also sustains the whole Order harmoniously:

He (Aristotle) agrees with Socrates and Plato that the order observed in nature cannot be explained without a first intelligent source of order.

*The Concept of Man*, p. 81

The existence of a Being endowed with intelligence and wisdom is a necessary inference from a study of celestial mechanics.

Isaac Newton

I find in the universe so many forms of order, organization, system, law, and adjustment of means to ends, that I believe in a cosmic intelligence and I conceive God as the life, mind, order, and law of the world.

— Will Durant

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\* Astronomers measure the distance of and between stars, including the planet earth, in units called light-years. Light travels at a speed of 299,792 kilometres per second. Thus, a light-year is equivalent to the distance travelled by light during one year, that is, 9,460,000,000,000 kilometres.

Order does not emerge out of chaos nor higher forms emerge from lower by pure chance. Except upon the basis of a controlling, creative Mind—God—the ordered law and ascending life of the universe are utterly inexplicable.

— Francis B. Sayre

The infinite expanse of the universe, its growth through immeasurable periods of time, the boundless range of its changes, and the rational order that pervades it all, seems to demand an infinite intelligence behind its manifestations.

— David Starr Jordan

The entire universe, as I see it, is the outward manifestation of Mind Energy, of spirit, or to use the older and better word, of God.

— Milton Steinberg

As a matter of fact, it is this cosmic intelligence, consciousness or power which a theist terms as God but an atheist prefers to call it Nature!

I believe in God, only I spell it N-a-t-u-r-e.

— Frank L. Wright

We cannot ignore the material progress, which has immensely added to human knowledge and welfare. The person behind this progress may not be a theist, but an atheist, hungry for material knowledge. He had perhaps no faith in worshipping or praying. However, his ceaseless and selfless efforts won him enough applause from mankind in general and scientists' fraternity in particular. His was a life of meticulous experimentation, keen observation and logical inference, all requiring limitless patience and the highest degree of single-minded dedication. We can rightly call him a harbinger of the material progress.

Equally great has been the contribution of a theist to human spiritual evolvment. He, too, must have laboured hard and suffered greatly to evolve, uphold and preserve higher values, without which human society would have remained primitive

and uncivilised, and humans barbaric and brute. He has been acting as a living check on demoniac and destructive human impulses such as vengeance, pride, prejudice, hatred, greed, jealousy, envy and lust for power and pelf. As a matter of fact, he has been a true guardian of the higher values, without which material progress would taste like a dish without salt.

All the same, human salvation lies in reconciling these two extreme stands through a dialogue. Theists and atheists should sit together, understand and appreciate each other's viewpoint and, above all, join hands to contribute to human well-being. And, interestingly, an initiative for such a dialogue has generally been taken by holy beings, human well-being being uppermost in their head and heart, which both theists and atheists also claim as their objective.

In fact, holy beings have been the personages who could equally love theists and atheists as also saints and sinners. Owing to their universal vision and mission, they do not belong to any particular community or country, but to humankind as a whole. Here it needs to be borne in mind that holy beings recognise the role of the mortal physical body as well as of the immortal divine soul, giving each due importance and place. In truth, such individuals are institutions in themselves. They synthesize material progress with spiritual advancement of humanity.

A Holy Being or Holy Master thus stands as a true guide at the crossroads of spiritual and material human well-being. He is conscious of the human weakness to sacrifice the soul for physical comforts or to sacrifice physical comforts in the vague hope of experiencing the intangible spiritual bliss. He proclaims the truth that a human is a happy blend of both, matter and spirit. He also explains that, no doubt, all material creation is transitory. Yet, so long as it exists, it can be modified and adapted for human need, convenience and comfort. However, he makes it clear that God, being the creator and soul of the universe, is its true and sole Lord and Master. He not only proclaims this but also reveals God, whence the blessee perpetually perceives the Lord and the Master of the universe. For a theist, it is a fulfilment of his long cherished dream of

God-realisation, while for an atheist, a unique experience of the supreme conscious power, the creator and sustainer of the universe, which he has been terming as Nature. In other words, each—theist as well as atheist—will be a realised being—a knower!

God-knowledge, properly understood, assimilated and lived up to, brings about a radical change in one's way of thinking and attitude towards life. One is awakened to the truth that, in reality, there is no conflict between materialistic and religious approaches; these are mutually complementary. The conflict is of our own making. It is the result of the wrong notion that either of these must be rejected to uphold the other, ignoring the fundamental truth that in this world there is nothing without a purpose. If religious or spiritual knowledge is essential for fulfilment of the soul's craving, material knowledge is equally indispensable for satisfaction of the needs of the body, even if these be the barest minimum. There is nothing wrong in enjoying the bounties of Nature, but the trouble starts when amassing of material possessions becomes the be-all and end-all of life. In fact, material possessions should also be regarded as a divine boon. With such an attitude, one cultivates an attitude of detachment and humility: dissatisfaction and restlessness give way to contentment and serenity. One's mental horizon broadens and one transcends social, political, economic and religious barriers, enjoying material comforts as also spiritual bliss.

It will, thus, be seen that the division of humanity into atheists and theists has no logical or solid basis. We may, however, say that there are the knowers, who have been blessed with the realisation of the supreme consciousness, that is, God or Nature, and others, who have yet to attain this realisation, the non-knowers, may they be atheists or theists.

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

*But beneath the crude shell of materialism there lies in most men an innate longing for the spiritual and eternal.*

John La Farge

**I**t is almost a fashion with the religionists to brand Matter as the root cause of all ills, so much so that outright deprecation of matter has become their hallmark. Let us examine what matter is, its role in our day-to-day life, and if it is really the bane of human life.

In general, all that can be 'perceived' by our senses is matter. It may have a gross form as of the earth, moon, mountain, river, tree, human, animal or bird, or a subtle form like that of sound, heat, cold or air.

Broadly speaking, the whole of the material creation, organic or inorganic, animate or inanimate, gross or subtle, visible or invisible, is constituted of the five basic elements, that is, earth, water, fire, air and *Akasa* (Ether), though the number of these elements may vary from entity to entity. How interesting that as we move from the gross to the subtle<sup>\*</sup>, the number of the elements decreases, whereas their expanse and power increase! Let us briefly discuss these elements, one by one.

### Earth

Firstly, the earth, the grossest of the basic elements. The earth means and includes the soil and all that sprouts from, and lies underneath, it, including ores, minerals, petroleum products, etc. On its bosom are studded vast deserts, sprawling green fields, fascinating valleys and meadows, rocking oceans, rolling swirly rivers, creeping rippling streams and resting drowsy lakes, dense

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\* Strictly speaking, in whole of the creation nothing is absolutely subtle, rather everything is relatively so.

forests and rising mountain ranges sprinkled with lofty snow-capped peaks. Out of it grow lush green grass, plants and flowers of countless fascinating forms, bewitching colours, exuding sweet fragrance, which perfumes the environment.

The earth also provides us food and material for our day-to-day requirements, comforts and conveniences, right from the cradle to the grave. Is not the title Mother Earth apt and befitting for all her bountifulness?

### **Water**

Coming to water, we find that it may have several forms such as snow, ice, moisture, mist and steam. From our daily experience we know that water is needed by a human, animal and plant to quench their thirst and provide nourishment. Till recently, waterways were the only and are perhaps still the cheapest means of promoting trade, culture and civilisation amongst the peoples of different countries and continents. For ages, water has served the human race in many ways. Yet, most of the enormous under-water wealth is still lying unexplored.

### **Fire**

Thirdly, let us consider fire, which also includes light, warmth, heat and energy of which the sun is the main source. It may be in the form of solids, liquids or gases.

All that grows out of the earth—trees, plants, grass, grain, etc.—is potentially fire. So are vast reserves of combustible material—diesel, petrol, kerosene, coal, etc.—lying under the surface of the earth. In a way, fire indwells and envelops whole of the planet earth!

As is well known, man has been making use of fire for cooking, warming, etc. right from the primitive time.

Fire, as warmth is indispensable for the very existence and growth, mobility and activity of human animal and plant life. So long as there is fire in the form of warmth in an organism, it is alive and active. But the moment it ceases to be warm, it turns cold and inert and pronounced as dead. Thus, warmth is identified with love and life, and coldness with apathy and death.

Perhaps we have not paid due attention to the role of fire as energy. But for it, running of industries, plants and means of transport would come to a stop, pushing human back into the times when he was leading an isolated, lonely, monotonous and arduous—primitive—life. With the conventional sources of energy fast depleting, efforts are now on to devise ways and means to tap the solar energy.

The importance of the sun in our day-to-day life is self-evident. If there were no sun, there would be neither clouds, nor rain, nor crops, nor vegetables, nor fruits, nor vegetation, nor greenery, rendering the earth a bald, barren, rocky planet. The sun constitutes the single largest factor that helps in ripening of crops, vegetables and fruits, and purification of environment. It also lends fragrance and colour to the plant kingdom and complexion to the human skin.

Besides, but for the sun there would be neither twilight, nor mellow and silvery moonlight that lends lustre to and makes Nature all the more alluring, a source of joy and solace for one and all. In the absence of the sun, there would have been no colourful and rapturous sights such as the dawn, the dusk, the overcast sky and the rainbow that charm the young and the old, alike. Above all, the sun draws the dividing line between day and night.

No exaggeration to say that if there were no sun, the whole solar system, which includes the colourful earth, would be plunged into pitch dark and human beings condemned to live like crawling and creeping creatures, the very thought of which is so revolting; nay the whole of the solar system would have collapsed with catastrophic consequences. In darkness, even a rope appears to be a snake, while a ray of light is sufficient to dispel such an illusion. In light, we can see not only objects at hand but also distant ones. Thus, light guides and helps us in discriminating objects as they really are. In fact, this is also the function of knowledge. It is for this reason that light is regarded as a synonym of knowledge and darkness of ignorance. God being all-wisdom and all-knowledge, is also termed as Light. In short, if there were no sun, there would be no life, but an inanimate existence and all round frightening dense darkness.

## Air

And, now air. One may be able to withstand the pangs of hunger for a number of days, or may go without water for a day or two, but without air one cannot survive for more than a few moment. For breathing and, for that matter, for a healthy environment, air is indispensable. And, for this very reason, it is even called the life-principle for humans, animals and plants.

Since movement is inherent in air, it is a great purifier and carrier of clouds and moisture, hot and cold waves, storms and cyclones, fragrance and stink, and a force to propel windmills to generate cheap and clean power. When it blows, the leaves rustle and the branches swing. Air thus 'provides' exercise to plants, so essential for them to bloom and blossom.

## Akasa

Lastly, we come to *Akasa*, the subtlest of the five basic elements. It is difficult to find an exact English equivalent for *Akasa*; the nearest one is Ether.

Nothing definite can be said about *Akasa*. It is assumed to be a subtle elastic medium filling all space through which light and electromagnetic waves pulsate and sound is its characteristic. It is, thus, the base for all modes of communication—mechanical, electrical or any other. It is the medium through which sound from a whisper to an explosion is conveyed between two persons, whether they are face to face or otherwise. Again, because of the existence of *Akasa*, a person on this earth can not only watch events taking place in distant lands but can also listen to and communicate with persons in other countries, on the moon, or in / with a satellite, manned or remotely controlled, soaring towards still distant planets. *Akasa* is, thus, indispensable for hearing sweet music, sobs of a child, anguished cry of an injured one, a call for prayer, or even to converse with one another. But for *Akasa*, we would have been virtually deaf and dumb beings, lost in the devouring silence of wilderness.

At times, owing to its expanse, formlessness and subtlety,

*Akasa* is taken for God. This is not correct. In the first place, *Akasa* may fill all space, but it cannot permeate solids. On the contrary, God not only pervades everywhere but also permeates everything, however big or small, hard or soft, gross or subtle, animate or inanimate, visible or invisible. Not only this, *Akasa's* pervasiveness can be dented and its operation hindered, weakened, even stalled, by solids such as mountains, hills, walls, barriers and scientific devices. For instance, when a war of propaganda is unleashed by a hostile country, its signals are jammed by the affected country lest the latter's nationals should fall a prey to the misinformation and disinformation spread by the enemy. Again, if a person is shut up in a room and another outside it shouts even at the top of his voice, the former cannot make out what the latter is saying. The walls of the room between the two render the voice feeble or inaudible. Secondly, while *Akasa* may be the subtlest of the five basic elements, God is subtleness *per se*. Lastly, though formless, subtle and filling all space, *Akasa* is not conscious, whereas God is consciousness *per se*, an essential prerequisite for the creation, operation and sustenance of the cosmos.

### **The Sixth**

Though almost identical in appearance, even in size, a date tree does not bear coconut, nor does a duck lay eggs to hatch chicken. Similarly, teakwood does not possess the fragrance of sandalwood, nor does jasmine exude the rose-smell. Again, rice and wheat are both foodgrains. However, the type of soil, humidity and abundant water, conducive for the growth of rice, are detrimental to the growth of wheat.

Human mind wonders at the remarkable regularity of the seasons, the bright day gliding into the sprawling embrace of the dense darkness of the night for respite and enjoyment of its stillness and again unfolding its glow at dawn, as also the harmonious movements of the heavenly bodies. One is simply amazed to learn that there are countless planets, stars and galaxies, some of which are hundreds of thousands times larger than the earth. Yet there appears no tangible support to keep them operating and in position!

We are familiar with the terrible death and destruction that is wrought when wind or water is in 'fury', or when an earthquake shakes the earth, or when a fire breaks out, though each such accident is a microscopic local occurrence in relation to our planet, the earth. One, therefore, shudders even at the very thought of the awesome consequences if any of these five elements, wholly, turns 'furious' or goes on 'strike'. It will, surely, spell the total annihilation of this colourful world—man and matter. Yet, there is a perfect balance and harmony amongst these mighty elements!

From the foregoing discussion it would be evident that apart from the five basic elements, constituting the body of the universe, there is also the Sixth, the supreme conscious power, the spirit, its soul. Interestingly, it is the only non-material entity, though it always manifests and expresses itself through matter! It is this very entity which endows life and intelligence to the otherwise inert matter. At the highest evolved stage of matter, that is, human form, these five (basic) elements, animated by the Sixth, bloom and come into full play, whence a human is physically active, mentally awake, rational, intelligent, imaginative, conscious and, above all, self-conscious. Thus, the whole of the creation is a wonderful harmonious blend of matter and spirit. Even saints, seers, messengers and prophets, deemed to be divine beings, are no exception to this law. In truth, this supreme consciousness has not only created but also regulates and sustains the marvellous cosmos. Perfect order, superb harmony, matchless balance and majestic working of the cosmic order testify to the existence of the Sixth, the Presiding Element.

It will, thus, be seen that, on the one hand, there is the Creator, and, on the other, the (material) creation. However, there is a clear distinction between the Creator and the creation: whereas the creation is subject to the limitations of cause and effect and time and space, the Creator is above all limitations. Yet, what is remarkable, rather amazing, is that the Creator uniformly reflects Himself in the whole of the creation of which He Himself is the source and ultimate resort, and is still distinct from it. In other words, ceaseless change is the distinctive characteristic, nay the very essence of the material creation, and

changelessness of the Creator, though it may sound paradoxical.

As is well-known, change is the law of Nature: nothing but change endures:

All is flux, nothing stays still.

— Heraclitus

Every thing flows onward. All things are brought into being with a changing nature; the ages themselves glide by in constant movement.

— Ovid

Everything flows and not stops.

— Plato

You cannot step twice in the same river.

— Heraclitus

The law of change perpetually operates throughout the material creation, whether or not it is perceptible. For example, in the case of a flower, change is perceptible because it (flower) passes through the stages of sprouting, budding, blooming, blossoming and fading away within its short span of life of a few days. Contrary to this, change in the case of mighty mountains, hills and rocks may not be perceptible because their life-span extends over millions of years.

No doubt, the whole of the material creation is inherently transitory. Yet, even the transitory existence is also an existence: it is valid, at least, for the duration it exists. For this very reason, we cannot deny the existence even of the objects undergoing moment to moment change. Even while in a state of being and becoming, these serve our needs. We all know that satisfaction derived from a meal may be for a few hours, a shirt may last for some months and a house for a number of years. However, it is also a fact that till it lasts, a meal relieves the pangs of hunger, a shirt protects the body from heat and cold and a house provides shelter. And these happen to be the minimum basic necessities of all human beings, rich or poor.

Now the question arises: Is it really possible for anyone, rich or poor, saint or sinner, householder or hermit, to totally discard the transitory matter which is not only indispensable to feed and keep one alive but also constitutes one's physical being? Obviously, the answer is no. We know well the hardships one has to face if one is blind, or mentally retarded, or simply hard of hearing. Imagine for a moment the world in which human beings are devoid of the faculties of touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing, feeling or thinking, or have no use whatsoever of skin, tongue, nose, eyes, ears, brain or mind, all basically material. Will it not be virtually an inert world, inhabited by the inanimate?

Coming to those, who preach outright deprecation of matter, we find that material progress was the worst victim of such a thinking. Sustained propagation of the notion that life is a dream, matter transitory and the world an illusion, made the human mind disenchanted and cynical. Accordingly, life seemed to be aimless. Instead of living, say for seventy years, a human thought that he was condemned to exist somehow for that long, till he was relieved of the burden of life by the merciful call of death. He, thus, brooded over his fate, and waited for over half a century for his ultimate end, constantly dogged by the question: 'Why and for what should I sweat and toil?' And he became disinterested in scientific and technological progress. Instead of seven yards of cloth, required for a full dress, he felt content with half a yard for a loin-cloth. This misconceived notion gave a fillip to asceticism, creating an army of parasites, who, ironically, had again to knock at the door of a householder, whose life they had despised as unworthy and accordingly renounced. This perverse mentality at the community level has been responsible for the backwardness of certain segments of society.

Let us examine this proposition from another angle. Is everything material, inherently, evil? We know from our daily experience that the same legs obediently run to rescue or to injure someone. The same hands faithfully move to feed one or pick a pocket. The same tongue hurls abuses or showers blessings. The same intellect is at our command to create or

solve problems. Similarly, with the same knife we can cut fruit or kill a person, with the same money we can buy sweets or poison, and the same nuclear power can be made use of as a weapon of mass destruction or as an instrument of service to the humanity. In fact, matter in itself is not evil. Rather, it is a human, the 'image of God', possessing the highest degree of intelligence, faculty of discrimination, freedom to choose and will to act, who actually puts it to a wrong use and then gives it a bad name! It was perhaps such a state of affairs that provoked the renowned French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to remark: God made all things good; man meddled with them and they became evil.

However, this is not the end of human tragedy. A human goes a step further. Knowing his body to be composed of matter, he, at times, under the influence of pseudo religious preachings, considers it to be an obstacle to spiritual attainment: peace, bliss and redemption. Accordingly, he resorts to self-mortification. Some so-called saints and sadhus torture their bodies, say by standing in the scorching heat, or in the biting cold, or on one leg, or hanging upside down. Some go to the extent of disabling certain limbs of their bodies. Evidently, this is done with the sole motive to impress and attract the credulous devout by such antics called 'miracles' :

The habitual practice of asceticism or self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable, ought not to be followed.

Gautama Buddha

The methods of self-torture undertaken by some for purposes of display such as

wearing hair-shirts, or piercing the body with sharp spikes, are here (Gita, XVII:6) condemned. Bodily weakness sometimes produces hallucinations which are mistaken for spiritual visions. Self-discipline is not to be confused with bodily torture.

S. Radhkrishnan  
(*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 344)

This is sheer self-deception, rather an insult to, and an abuse of, the greatest gift of the Lord, because human form is the sole vehicle to realise God, who has created all matter. Above all, human form is the only medium through which God manifests Himself and 'speaks' to humankind!

Let us not forget that in the creation there is nothing without a purpose, though we may not be aware of it, at the moment. Matter constitutes our physical being. It also sustains life and provides us with all comforts and conveniences and also serves our needs, even if these are the barest minimum. Hence, there is nothing wrong in its usage as such. The trouble, actually, begins when one gets totally attached to matter and thinks that all that matters is matter. Accordingly, one blindly runs after material gains, temptation for which is, undoubtedly, tremendous. A human being with such a mentality is reduced to a mechanical being and matter, created to serve as his handmaid, becomes his master.

It is an open secret that in the materially advanced and affluent countries, cases of disturbed mind and split personality are multiplying fast. Excessive material comforts there have made a human uncomfortable and robbed him of his happiness and peace of mind. He is, by and large, shaken and shattered. Amidst abundance and multitude, he feels empty and forlorn, forgotten and frustrated. To him, life seems purposeless. His overindulgence in sensual pleasures and excessive dependence on liquor and intoxicants, in a desperate bid to dilute, if not totally drown his boredom and frustration, and to retrieve the lost and elusive happiness, have proved futile. Hippyism is a glaring symptom of the disgust with, and revolt against, excessive material prosperity.

All this negates the notion that material riches can by themselves bring real happiness. It is so because a human is not a mere material (physical) entity. Not being a product solely of the material elements but a rare amalgam of matter and spirit, he cannot feel content with matter alone. Besides, a human has unlimited desires but a limited span of life and limited means, with the result that fulfilment of all his desires is not at all possible. Even satisfaction derived from fulfilment of certain

desires is not lasting because, in the first instance, desires are ever multiplying and shifting. Secondly, the source of their satisfaction, that is, matter, is intrinsically transitory. Since desires are inherent in a human being, their total extinction is not possible. At the same time, suppression of desires is also not desirable, rather it is dangerous, because suppressed desires may ultimately raise their head in an ugly form. It is for this reason that stress is laid on that desires need to be curtailed, rationalised and sublimated to mitigate human pain and misery.

A Spiritual Guide brings about a synthesis between these two not only extreme but also antagonistic approaches, viz. all that matters is matter, as advocated by materialists, and matter matters not, as propagated by religionists. He asserts that it is incorrect and irrational to consider matter and spirit as rivals. In fact, all matter is the concrete manifestation of the subtle Spirit. In other words, matter and spirit are the two sides of the coin of life. As such, due importance ought to be given to each.

The noble traits such as love, humility, compassion, tolerance, contentment, fellowship, courage, harmony, amity and reverence for life, are much more precious than the material riches. A person, possessing these traits but no material wealth, is surely richer than a millionaire, bereft of such traits. On the other hand, a multimillionaire, possessing no such noble traits, is simply a pauper. One should, therefore, guard against being dazzled by the glare and glamour of matter. However, this does not imply total rejection of things material, as such.

We know well that water, which has the capacity to quench thirst or to generate electricity, has also the potential to drown us. Similarly, fire, which is essential to cook meals or run transport, plants, industries, etc., can also cause devastating destruction and reduce anything to ashes. However, we should also remember that it is the Cosmic Consciousness which has endowed us with intelligence to make use of these material powers (elements) for our benefit as also to save ourselves from their destructive impact. While material scientists have invented ways and means to get light and heat from electric power as well as ways and means to save us from electrocution, spiritual scientists have taught us how to make use of the material

creation and elements and, at the same time, enlist the protection of the spiritual umbrella of the All-pervading Cosmic Consciousness to save ourselves from their ill effects. Whereas, a material scientist's field is confined to his respective subject, a spiritual scientist's field is the whole of the conscious world.

A spiritual scientist unveils the basic and vital truth that, besides the five basic elements, there is also the Sixth—the Spirit. It is the Sixth which endows life upon the inert matter. No doubt, life pulsates in all material creation, but in human form, it is endowed with subtle intellectual faculties, capable of realising the very source of the material creation—Universal Spirit or God. It is for this reason that spirit (soul) and not matter (body) is the real human. Is it not surprising, rather shocking, that a human should be so intensely aware of the needs and aspirations of his physical self, and tirelessly toil, day and night, for their fulfilment, but totally neglect realisation of his real or spiritual self, the most precious boon? Self-realisation or God-realisation bestows upon one a new awareness, which can bring about a marked change in one's way of thinking and attitude towards life, and make one realise that matter exists for a human and not vice versa.

We have already seen that, in itself, matter is neither harmful nor evil. The real cause of our trouble and tension is our exclusive attachment to matter. But, if one has really realised one's real or spiritual self, one becomes aware of its eternalness and transitoriness of matter, constituting one's physical self, and attachment to matter gives way to detached attachment. Consequently, one's attitude towards material assets undergoes a change: one considers one's material possessions as a trust from the Lord and oneself a humble trustee, rather than an undisputed master, as is usually the case. However, this does not turn one pessimist or fatalist, rather optimist and action-oriented, yet not conceited or self-centred.

Like an astute general, who is even prepared to lose a battle in order to win a war, a scientist is not disheartened if an experiment fails. Rather, he analyses the causes of the failure and, with single-minded dedication and profound patience, goes on experimenting till he achieves a tangible result. In the same

way, a spiritualist is not discouraged by setbacks in his spirit pursuit. He takes these not as a full stop but a mere comma to pause, to ponder, to weed out the causes thereof and to strive again to achieve his objective. He keeps himself engaged in exploring, discovering and unravelling the mysteries of the Spirit for the benefit of the entire humankind. He is a spiritualist who recognises the role of science and its vital contribution to making life happier. He is also a scientist who is alive to the significance and role of the Spirit, the real life-force. He is, thus, a scientist in his thinking and disposition as well as a spiritualist in his feelings and dealings. His scientific head functions in unison with his spiritual heart. For such a personage, redemption of the real self (spirit or soul) is the end, and matter (body), the means.

Knowing full well that in this world there is nothing without a purpose, a spiritually awakened being considers it his sacred duty to regard life as a rare opportunity to contribute his mite to making the society happier, healthier and harmonious. He, too, joins the struggle for existence, but does not get lost in it. He upholds the truth that outright rejection of matter, though sounding a sort of 'religious attainment', is a practical impossibility, nay a sheer illusion. For real peace, bliss and happiness, one has to realise the significance of and relationship between matter and spirit, and to give due place to each. Like a lotus, which grows in mud and yet maintains its purity and bloom, a truly spiritually awakened being discharges his worldly obligations and yet remains free from worldly taint and attachment. With such a pragmatic disposition, even during his limited life-span, he does not merely exist but *lives*, enjoying both material happiness and spiritual bliss. And for this what he actually renounces is not the world and his social obligations, but attachment to the world, the real cause of all pain and misery and worry and anxiety. In truth, this is the true renunciation.

By now it would be clear beyond doubt that matter is an integral part of our very being as well as of our day-to-day living, howsoever luxurious or simple it may be. A Spiritual Guide, who is fully alive to the harsh realities of life and its deeper implications, asserts that outright rejection of, or total

identification with, matter can at best be a self-deception, but certainly not a means to real peace, bliss and happiness. Such an outlook is not only rigid and extreme, but also wrong and illogical and, therefore, needs to be discarded.

It is apprehended that the extremists in their mad zeal to uphold and exalt their respective concepts become oblivious of the constitution, basic needs and obligations of a human (whose well-being may be at their heart), and split a human into matter and spirit. And, in doing so, they, unconsciously, split human personality, nay destroy it, ignoring the fundamental fact that a human is an integral entity, a unique fusion of both, matter and spirit.

In truth, for all living creatures, matter also matters. However, for real happiness and peace of mind, what matters more than matter is the spiritual control to tame and harness the material elements and powers, so that these may serve a human, but neither push him into pain and misery nor hamper evolvment and blooming of his spiritual potential for fulfilling the prime purpose of human life. Let us bear in mind that this spiritual control can be exercised only by the one, who has realised, and is conscious of, one's spiritual base as well as of the supremacy of the spirit over matter, as intensely as one is conscious of one's body and its (material) needs. This, in turn, is possible when one is blessed with spiritual enlightenment by a Spiritual Guide.

In the ultimate analysis, we find that, no doubt, matter also matters for all living beings, but for spiritual peace, bliss and redemption, the cherished goal of every human being, what matters most is the Spirit and its realisation.

## rites and rituals

*It needs to be emphasized that ritual is not religion.*

— Herold Scott

**N**o exaggeration to say that, in the religious realm, rites and rituals have gained not only prominence but also dominance. These are regarded not only important but also as the religion, though the Holy Masters have clearly deprecated such a notion. Let us ponder over their role and significance.

For religious preachers recitation and adoration of the holy books, worship of idols, signs and symbols, and performance of rites and rituals in the prescribed manner, are an end in themselves. To strengthen their stranglehold on the innocent devotees, they even interpret the scriptures in a manner that suits their design. Their directives are expected to be obeyed strictly as divine commandments and adhered to rigidly as a matter of faith by the devotees, even if these may not conform to the scriptural teachings. Obviously, for this very reason, any query by a devotee in this regard is not relished and, therefore, not explained but explained away. For instance, they would melodiously sing:

God is not a sound or form, nor an object of touch or taste or smell.

— Kath Upanishad 1:3:15

The Lord is beyond form, feature and hue.  
The three qualities transcending,  
To such grants realisation as have His pleasure.

— Adi Granth, p. 283

I bow to my teacher who is the Supreme Spirit, who is eternal and benign; who is beyond sound, line and art.  
Salutations to Him.

— *Guru Geeta*

Yet, for God-realisation, they would ask the devotees to close and gently press their eyes to see the Divine Light or plug

their ears to hear the Cosmic Sound, though the above quotes sound a clear warning that any object of touch, taste, smell, form, or light seen, or sound heard, internally or externally, is not God.

Or, such folk may fervently recite:

Nanak's God is manifest.

Adi Granth, p. 397

God will uplift those of you who believe, and those to whom "the Knowledge" is given, to lofty grades!

— Quran 58:11

O ye who believe! fear God.  
Desire union with God.

Quran 5:35

Now I see God who is to be seen by all.

Rig Veda

Ye worship ye know not what;  
we know what we worship.

Bible (John 4:22)

Ye neither know me, nor my Father;  
if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.

Bible (John 8:19)

Or, they would feelingly narrate:

They (six persons) from Yasrib (old name of Medina) conveyed the good news to one and all: The Prophet (Mohammad) whom the world has been awaiting, has now appeared; we have heard his divine word with our own ears, we have seen him with our own eyes and he has bestowed on us the holy communion with the Living God. Now life and death have no meaning for us.

— *Rahmatullilaalmin*, Part I, pp. 76-77

Or, they would charge the emotions of the audience by soulfully narrating how King Janaka was blessed with God-knowledge by Sage Asktavakra in an instant.

Now, if a devotee, spurred by a sermon, expresses a wish to see God or know the Father, though rarely such a request is made, it hurts the pride of such a self-styled guide and perplexes him. He is taken aback by such a sudden and totally unexpected demand, though quite legitimate and genuine. His perplexity and anger betray his ignorance. He is, indeed on the horns of a dilemma: he can neither answer in the affirmative, as he himself has not realised God, nor can he reply in the negative, as that would expose his spiritual pretence. However, before long, he gathers his wits and again assumes a facade of serenity. Lest the request for God-revelation should be repeated, the aspirant is politely but firmly discouraged and, at times, even admonished, for asking such eccentric questions, as if he had committed a sin! Unable to reveal God, as prayed for, he advises the aspirant to go on reciting the scriptures and performing rituals regularly and rigidly with firm faith and devotion and that a day will come when he will discover 'That' — God.

As already discussed in the first chapter, 'that' denotes an entity or a person who is unknown, absent or distant. On the other hand, 'this' signifies a person or power who/which is present, proximate and known. In other words, 'that' signifies ignorance, while 'this', knowledge. God being all-pervading and everpresent, ought to be referred to as 'This'.

Yet, such guides work covertly to achieve their selfish motive: they exploit the faith of the credulous aspirant so that he remains mired in rituals and superstitions and they may continue to prey upon him. How they succeed in their design, is explained as under:

Because man clings to form, being himself naught else than God incarnate in a form, and finds it difficult to turn at once to the Formless, therefore all religions try to take him, step by step, from outer worship to the Inner Worship. But religion becomes ruthless priestcraft, when, instead of leading the people on from lower step to higher step,

endeavour is assiduously made to stultify their intelligence, and fill it with irrational and debasing superstitions and fears, and keep them fixed to the lowest step for ever, in order that they may be preyed upon the more easily.

*(The Essential Unity of All Religions,  
p. 446)*

Preying upon the innocence and faith of naive devouts, such guides succeed in keeping them confused and yoked to the performance of rites and rituals, which cast their own spell. They, therefore, lay the whole emphasis on the observance of religious practices and rituals as the very end, without explaining their real significance.

Rites and rituals may inspire one to be altruistic and charitable and imbibe moral and ethical values, or inculcate an attitude of detachment, though these virtues are not the exclusive privilege and possession of ritualists. Rarely, do these arouse an urge in a devotee to know and realise God, the prime purpose of human life.

### **Aids**

At the most, rites and rituals may be termed as aids<sup>\*</sup>, helpful only at and up to a certain stage. For example, a child in his infancy may need some support to maintain his body's balance,

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\* The forms we worship are aids to help us to become conscious of our deepest selves.

*The Bhagavadgita, p. 158*

All religious symbols are intended as means or as aids for promoting moral and spiritual development. But they are not an end in themselves, nor have they any inherent efficacy in them. When they cease to fulfil the purpose for which they were symbols, they become lifeless for those who adopt them.

— *Our Heritage, p. 216*

It needs to be emphasized that ritual is not religion, but only a recognition of the importance of religion, and an aid to the formal observance of it,—a technique of organised religion.

— Harold Scott

or may hold his mother's finger just to stand up, or use a walker to pace a few steps. However, when the same child grows up, he does not require any such aid. Now if we offer him one, he may resent and retort: 'Am I still a child in need of an aid?' Similarly, when once a devout has understood the fundamental truth that God-realisation is the prime purpose of human life, which can be fulfilled by the grace of a True Master, he realises that he no longer needs the aid of rites and rituals.

The deluded fools, believing the rites inculcated by the Vedas and the Smritis to be the highest, do not understand the other thing (that leads to) liberation. They, having enjoyed (the fruits of actions) in the abode of pleasure on the heights of heaven, enter this world or an inferior one.

— Mundaka Upanishad, 1:2:10

Just as one who gets water from the river does not attach importance to a well, so the wise do not attach any importance to ritual action.

— Mahabharata, Santiparva, 240, 10

For those of illumined consciousness, ritual observances are of little value.

*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 119

Sri Shankara believes that Vedic rites are meant for those who are lost in ignorance and desire. The aspirants for salvation should renounce the performance of ritual works.

— *ibid.*, p. 17

Now the question surging uppermost in his mind should be: 'How and where to find a True Master to realise God to be truly a man of God, not of gods?'

I prostrate not to the gods. One who is beyond all gods does not salute a god. After that stage, one does no prescribed act. I prostrate again and again to my own 'Self' which is the root of all endeavour.

— Sankara

...Outward forms, symbols or ceremonies...have their value only if they promoted spiritual development. When they were looked upon as ends in themselves they retarded growth and produced morbidity.

— *Our Heritage*, p. 26

Is it not a fact that it was God-knowledge bestowed upon him by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa that transformed the life  
\*  
of Narendranath Dutta, an ardent spiritual seeker, into Swami Vivekananda, a renowned spiritual stalwart? In case the devout is still not seized of the most vital need of God-realisation, we may not be wrong in concluding that either he is yet to be convinced that God-realisation is really the principal purpose of human life, or he is a simpleton and has been misguided to be content with mechanical performance of rites and rituals. Let the ritualist pause and ponder over the following scriptural injunction:

Without the Lord, all pious deeds (enjoined by religion) are illusions. Recitations, austerities, disciplines, actions all are robbed away here (and are not carried beyond). Fasting, rules of conduct, and observance of religious discipline are not worth half a penny. Hereafter i.e. after death, the valuation of things is different and therefore these things do not count there. Bathing at holy places and wandering about on the earth can ensure no place hereafter.

This way avails not there and at best may satisfy men of this world. Reciting from memory the four Vedas will not secure God's presence in the next world. If a man did not know the one Nectar-Word, all the rest he knows is nonsensical prattle. Nanak expresses the view that the Guru should be served, the Name dwelt upon and the ego of the mind shed off. Whoever practises this view will cross the sea of life.

— *Adi Granth*, p. 216

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\* Real name of Swami Vivekananda.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.  
Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image,  
or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that  
is in the earth beneath,  
or that is in the water under the earth:  
Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them,  
nor serve them.

— Bible (Exodus, 20:3-5)

Enough of pilgrimages, vigils, vows,  
Porings o'er books, and Yoga-practices.  
Put by all sacrificial rituals,  
Have done with philosophic arguments -  
Give all thy heart, give all thy love, to God;  
So only from all fear wilt thou win free.

— Bhagavata-Mahatmya

The wise see in their heart the face of God  
And not in images of stones and clod!  
Who in themselves, alas!, see Him not.  
They seek to find Him in some outer spot.

— Tasawwuf

It is a fool really who sees God or purity in a place of  
pilgrimage, almsgiving, meditation, sacrifice, wooden or  
stone images, while the real God or purity dwells in his own  
body.

— Jabala Darshanopanishad IV:57

In sum, the significance, if any, of rites and rituals lies in  
that these may help in keeping the body fit and the mind  
disciplined and calm and devoted to God. But, certainly, in  
themselves, these cannot lead to God-realisation, of which they  
are supposed to be the means. Yet, such deeds and practices are  
propagated as the very end in themselves—sacred, holy and  
sacrosanct. Even a little departure from or negligence in their  
observance and performance strictly in the prescribed manner, or  
questioning their significance, is regarded as a sacrilegious act,  
nay a sin, threatened with dire consequences, if not in this, then  
in the next life! In the circumstances, it is no surprise that a

seeker is driven to fear and superstition, so much so that certain days or moments are considered by him even as ominous. Thus, in the false but fond hope of God-realisation, he remains caught in the cobweb of religious practices and rituals. What an irony!

In this situation, a question, naturally, arises: how come people are given to rites and rituals? It is our daily experience that repetition or routine performance of an act, physical or mental, requires minimal effort and is, therefore, comparatively, easy to perform and more satisfying. So also is the case with performance of rites and rituals. In the hazy religious regime, however, such a satisfaction or solace is deemed as an attainment and the seeker remains tied down to and content with ritual routine. In course of time, he begins to nurture an illusion that he has realised God!

Deities were created by way of symbols as aids in the search for Him. But gradually the symbol was supposed to actually possess power that really belonged to God and this led to idol worship due to narrowness of vision and resulted in mental debasement...The power of redemption cannot come to be possessed by the mere symbol, whatever it may be. It comes from the All-pervading One that alone can redeem.

*Our Heritage*, p. 113

## RELIGION

*Religion is a personal relationship with God.*

— William Temple

**I**n general, religion means faith in an unseen higher controlling power coupled with a pious life. Thus religion has two main aspects: spiritual and social. The former being spirituality—God-realisation and firm faith in God—and the latter, faith, devotion and discipline — a Code of Conduct. We cannot rule out variations in the latter as it depends upon several factors such as climatic and geographical conditions as also level of understanding of the people, customs, traditions and culture prevailing at the time the religion was founded. This explains the differences amongst the Codes of Conduct of different religions and, for that matter, the existence of a multiplicity of the Codes. Practically, every religion or sect has evolved a Code of Conduct for its followers for forging unity and amity, affinity and fellowship, among them. However, with the passage of time, the vested interests and the orthodox at the helm of affairs, reduce the Code to a set of rituals and practices, taboos and dogmas, and make it the very religion, which the followers are required to adhere to rigidly as an article of faith:

Little by little the barrier grows, and “religion” become a rule of life, not life itself.

— Michel Fairless

In the circumstances, it is no surprise that religion stands divided and sub-divided into sects and factions and reduced to rituals—yogic feats, mode of worship, reading and reciting of holy books and scriptures, worship of the creation, right from an ant to the sun, instead of the Creator Himself. It will be interesting to note that each such practice is propagated as a path to God-realisation who can actually be realised by attaining God-knowledge by the grace and guidance of a True Master\*:

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\* The One Supreme Lord is realisable through the Guru's grace.

Adi Granth

Divine knowledge is not possible without the Guru.

— Tulsi Ramayana

there is no substitute for God-realisation. Yet, rituals have so tightly gripped our mind that we have totally forgotten realisation of God. What a pity!

This is not the end of spiritual ignorance. We consider ourselves superior simply because we happen to profess a particular religion and look down upon other religions and treat their followers as inferior beings. Consumed by communal frenzy, we have even communalised God and do not like invoking God by a name different from the one in vogue in the religion we profess. Such a negative thinking and biased attitude is responsible for mutual hatred, tension and communal clashes, and even 'holy wars', claiming countless precious human lives. Mass massacre of young and old, men, women and children, witnessed on the partition of India, is still fresh in our memory. It was the direct result of a perverted communal mentality, putting a big question mark on the role and goal of religion.

Theoretically, religion wishes to make men serene and inwardly peaceful by reaching a loving and forgiving God. But, in practice, there is too much undissolved wrath and punishment in most religions.

— Joshua Loth Liebman

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.

— Jonathan Swift

Man will wrangle for religion; fight for it; die for it, anything but—live for it.

— C.C. Colton

In the circumstances, out of frustration and bewilderment, even earnest devouts, especially the young ones, are being alienated from religion because they feel:

It is better to be of no Church than to be bitter for any.

— William Penn

‘Abdul’l Baha has gone a step further when he stated:

If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act. Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion.

As already discussed, different religions were founded at different times and places and therefore variations in their social aspect are natural. Even then, the spiritual aspect of all religions has been, and shall ever be, one and the same because it is directly related to the Supreme Spirit, which is one and the same in all humans and religions. It is in this sense that true saints, sages, seers, messengers and prophets unanimously proclaim: One God, One Race, One Religion, and that human salvation is the cardinal objective of all religions. Therefore, all religions should inspire a human to realise the One, which actually means realising one’s true identity or real self, and leading a pious life for enjoying spiritual bliss and beatitude and promoting peace and harmony, universal welfare and brotherhood.

All religions preach that all humans are equal without any discrimination on any ground:

Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinction. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, uplifted.

— Sri Aurobindo

The aim of religion is to spiritualize society, to establish a brotherhood on earth.

— S. Radhakrishnan

No doubt, religious preachers preach such gospels and the faithful profess the same, but they may be doing so more in profession than in practice because, in actual practice, conformity to the Code of Conduct has become all-important, so much so that we feel greatly agitated at any departure from it. This, at times, even inflames communal passions, leading to

conflicts and clashes. It is an irony that appearance in a peculiar fashion and performance of set rituals and religious practices without any regard to spirituality and humanism, the foundation of religion, has come to be regarded as religion, as such:

Religion does not consist in turning unceasingly towards the veiled stone, nor in approaching all the altars, nor in throwing oneself prostrate on the ground, nor in raising the hands before the habitations of gods, nor in deluging the temples with the blood of beasts, nor in heaping vows upon vows, but in beholding all with a peaceful soul.

— Lucretius

No surprise, that those, who have scant regard for, may hesitate not to violate elementary human values, pass for religious persons; the more hard-liner a person is, the more religious he is considered to be— the root cause of religious fanaticism. Thus the social aspect—Code of Conduct—, though of secondary importance, overshadows the primary spiritual aspect—spirituality. In the circumstances, a Holy Master of the time, as ever, restores primacy to spirituality, the quintessence of religion, by establishing a holy communion between the devotee and God by bestowing God-knowledge. To reiterate, the primary function of religion is to inspire a human being to realise the God whom he believes in and worships but does not know:

Religion is primarily and at heart the personal meeting of the soul with God and conscious communion with Him.

— Rufus M. Jones

True religion is the actual experience of God.

— Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda

— *Wine of the Mystic: The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, A Spiritual Interpretation*, p. 111

Realisation is the real religion; all the rest is only preparation.

— Swami Vivekananda

God-realisation is the true religion. God ought to permeate and pulsate in one's whole being for one to be a truly religious person.

— Baba Hardev Singh

To reiterate :

Religion...is God revealed by man and not man by God.

— John Haynes Holmes

Religion is not a matter of dialectic but a fact of experience.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 203

Only spiritual experience can provide us with the proof of the existence of Spirit.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 20

Therefore:

For where there is no certain knowledge of God, there is no religion.

— John Calvin

God-realisation is a supernal thread that knits together all humans into a brotherhood and inculcates in them higher values such as love and humility, compassion and kindness, selflessness and self-sacrifice, and to be rational, open-minded and large-hearted enough to understand and appreciate others' viewpoints. In other words, a truly religious person imbibes religiousness instead of flaunting religiosity. Above all, perceiving God dwelling in all, he equally loves and honours all, whatever their socio-economic status, belief, faith, culture, race and nationality may be, a virtue so essential for fostering unity in diversity and establishing a happy harmonious order.

Let us examine religion from another angle. There is a famous saying by Empedocles: "God is a circle whose centre is everywhere but circumference is nowhere." With God as the centre, let the concentric circles around it represent different religions. These religions function smoothly because of the

Common Centre. However, when deflecting from the Common Centre, religions draw circles with the compass of their own rites and rituals and taboos and dogmas, these are sure to intersect and clash with one another. Not only this, having deviated from the Centre, when each such religion claims to be great and belittles other religions, mutual distrust, ill will and alienation between the followers of different religions are inevitable. Again, generally, the greatness of such a religion is reckoned in terms of the expanse of its circle and the number of its followers, regardless of spirituality, the bedrock of religion. That is to say, an 'eccentric circle' comes to be regarded as religion—organised religion.

However, this is not the case with religions with God as the Common Centre. As already stated, there can be a number of concentric circles, 'peacefully' co-existing, symbolising perfect harmony, grace and grandeur of the cosmos. Here the emphasis is on the Common Centre. Here the greatness of a religion is not reckoned in terms of the expanse of its circle or the number of its followers, but on spirituality. The faith of the followers in spirituality is strengthened as more and more divine mysteries are unravelled and they comprehend and practise the spiritual teachings, more and more.

To recapitulate, to begin with spirituality—realising God and perceiving Him in everyone, in everything and everywhere—is religion but, in course of time, it gets degenerated into ritualism at the hands of the vested interests. While the former transforms the followers into awakened and rational beings and acts as a unifying force, the latter turns the followers superstitious and closed minds and creates alienation and divides and divisions, whereas the primary purpose of religion is to transform ritualists into truly religious or spiritual beings, inculcating amity, harmony and fellowship, as stated by S. Radhakrishnan:

The aim of religion is to spiritualize society to establish a brotherhood on earth.

— *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. 139

Human salvation, therefore, lies in spiritualising religion, that is, ridding religion of rituals for restoring its intrinsic purity, piety and sanctity, so that the followers lead the life of the Spirit. In other words, to be truly religious, one has to follow the religion of God by knowing, realising and identifying oneself with God:

By great good fortune one comes to have God's religion.

— Adi Granth, p. 360

## SCRIPTURES

*Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit.*

– John Calvin

**T**here are several misconceptions about Scriptures, reverently called Holy Books by men of faith. People appear to harbour a wrong and rigid notion that the scripture, which they revere and follow, is the only true one. The reason for such a narrow and rigid outlook may be that, either they have not studied other scriptures, or have not grasped the essence of their own scripture. This has been, indeed, one of the major causes of a great deal of misunderstanding, leading to communal prejudice and alienation amongst the followers of different religious groups.

As a matter of fact, scriptures enshrine the description and attributes of God and the mark of a True Master, who can reveal God, as described therein. These are the written accounts of the realisation and personal mystic experiences of saints, sages, seers, messengers and prophets, which show the path to the same sublime state. These are compiled either during their lifetime or after they have cast off their mortal coil.

There could not be an exact identity of teachings amongst different scriptures because, in the first instance, the Divine Beings, whose utterances are enshrined therein, manifested at different times and places. Secondly, they had to preach in different circumstances and face different situations. For this reason, they had to advance different arguments, narrate different parables, cite different similies, depending on the level of understanding of the people, their culture, habits, customs, traditions, beliefs, local environment and geographical conditions to convey the Message. As such, one should not be swayed by the letter but try to catch and follow the underlying spirit of the scriptures.

For example, we know that keeping a fast, practised practically in all religions, is beneficial for the physical, mental

and spiritual health of a person. It may also be resorted to to tide over food scarcity. Again, fasting endows strength and endurance to withstand hunger when such a situation arises, as also to adapt oneself to the local conditions.

Besides, one may keep a fast as an act of penance, self-purification, self-elevation and self-sublimation as well as to experience the pangs of hunger and realise the intensity of agony and suffering of those who have to go without food. This, in turn, inculcates in one the filial feelings of love and affection, compassion and kindness, sympathy and generosity and care and concern, and inspires one to be modest, benevolent and charitable.

Further, to keep a fast is a step towards self-control to overcome human temptations and instincts such as lust, anger, attachment, greed, pride, ill will, jealousy, enmity and hatred.

Above all, fasting provides an opportunity to introspect and contemplate on and come closer to the Supreme Creator and marvel at His majesty, magnanimity and grandeur, as also the wonderful and colourful creation, manifesting in countless forms, and express gratitude for His boundless bounties and blessings.

But, if one does not regulate and sublimate one's life and imbibe higher values, mere fasting is of little avail. Therefore, all faiths eloquently stress that keeping a fast is a means and not an end in itself. It is perhaps for this reason that Holy Masters have not been rigid as to how such a fast be broken.

For instance, to break the Ramzan fast, the fruit date was the natural choice for the obvious reason that it was the cheapest and freely available eatable in Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, though any eatable or substance like juice or even plain water could serve the purpose. However, in India, due to a wide variety of soil and climatic conditions, locally produced fruit or grain, within the reach of a common man, or just water, freely available, was opted for breaking a fast. Nevertheless, despite all such differences, all the religions are unanimous so far as adherence to the spirit behind fasting is concerned.

From our day-to-day experience we know that similarity, if any, in medical books, written by different authors, in different periods and even in different languages, can be discerned only by a physician, for the simple reason that he is the person who is conversant with the medical science. Likewise, only a God-realised being knows and can pronounce that, notwithstanding the apparent differences, the spiritual essence of various scriptures is one and the same in that all these point to the ONE. It is again for this reason that God-realised beings do not discriminate between one scripture and another.

Again, a non-medico may take reverential care of medical books. Yet, he cannot benefit by these. A physician, on the other hand, can take full advantage of such books. So is the case with the scriptures, a rare treasure trove of invaluable prescriptions for spiritual ailments and health. Evidently, a God-realised personage, who actually knows and follows the substance and essence of the scriptures, can benefit from these and also guide others in understanding and following the same for spiritual health and evolverment.

The Prophets are the physicians of the diseases of the soul.

— Al-Ghazali

Satguru is the perfect physician who cures the five diseases<sup>\*</sup>.

— Varan Bhai Gurdas, 26/19

And what medicine is prescribed by him for these ailments?  
Naam or Lord's Name!

The Name is the medicine for all ailments.

— Adi Granth, p. 274

Naam or Lord's Name means remembering God and God-remembrance implies knowing God because one cannot remember an entity one does not know.

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\* Lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego.

Let us bear in mind that an ailing person can be cured of his ailment only if he takes the medicine and the precautions, as prescribed by the physician, and not by mere repeated recitation of the prescription. Exactly in the same manner, one can get rid of one's spiritual ailments, chiefly the suffering of the birth-death cycle, and be redeemed, not by merely reciting the scriptures, again and again, and regarding it as an end in itself, but only by studying them deeply and following their teachings, in letter and spirit:

False are not the Scriptures but the one who does not pore the same.

— Adi Granth, p. 1350

In other words, not mere recitation or conventional adoration but an objective and thoughtful study of, and, above all, living up to their teachings, constitute real veneration of the scriptures as well as the Holy Masters:

He who has no personal knowledge but has only heard of many things cannot understand the meaning of scriptures even as a spoon has no idea of the taste of the soup.

— Mahabhartā, II, 55, 1

The scriptures cannot help a person who has not been blessed with God-knowledge by a True Master. For such a one the scriptures are like a mirror to a blind person.

— Chanakya Neeti

In the circumstances, it may not be wrong to say that persons with the knowledge and realisation of God can truly follow the holy books and scriptures.

Now let us examine this matter from another angle. Man, by and large, is ease loving. However, to keep his body and soul together, he has to toil, day and night. He suffers from a real or an imaginary fear of want and insecurity and is thus driven to seek refuge in the (unknown) supreme power, that is, God, the great giver, and the source of strength to the weak and solace to the distressed, disturbed and distracted.

Man will always believe in God, because the idea of power united with perfection satisfies and stimulates the soul; it is pleasant to be friends with omnipotence.

*The Pleasures of Philosophy*, p. 379

Though an atheist, I do not believe that God can be snatched out of a heart that feels the need of His presence.

— A.S.R. Chari

*(Memoirs of An Unrepentant Communist*, p. 9)

Religious preachers are ever ready to prescribe for the seekers short cuts to the coveted heaven. They know well that the devout may have a belief in the (unknown) God, but they have firm faith in and unbounded reverence for the (known) scriptures. To maintain their stranglehold on a devout, they resort to dilatory and diversionary tactics, making the scriptures the starting point. As already stated, exploiting the devout's faith in the scripture, they assert that the scripture which he reveres is the only true one, ignoring the fundamental fact that the spiritual essence of all the scriptures is one and the same:

All the Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

— Bible (2 Timothy 3:16)

They who possess the Scriptures may be certain of the truth of the Quran, and that they who believe may increase their faith.

Quran 74:31

Yet, contrary to the scriptural teachings, that scriptures are meant to be studied in depth to have faith in, and realise, God, the devout, often, tend to regard routine recitation of the scriptures as the very end. True, the scriptures describe God, but it is equally true that these do not reveal God, realisation of whom is an imperative prerequisite for fulfilling the principal purpose of human life. Certainly, the scriptures enshrine experiences and teachings of the Holy Masters and are, therefore, invaluable guides worthy of reverence, but it is equally certain that God-realisation or Salvation can be attained

only by living up to their teachings and not by their mere recitation and adoration. No doubt, the devout read and recite the scriptures, but very few of them seem to be inclined to a thoughtful study thereof to comprehend and follow their essence, the key to which vests in a True Master:

The Divine Word is the divine treasure, the key to which is with a Saint.

— Adi Granth, p. 893

A True Master is, therefore, indispensable to reveal God or bestow God-knowledge on and teach the humanity how to lead the life of the Spirit. It is rightly said:

The Scriptures are Guru's shoppe by whose (Guru's) grace alone can one attain salvation; unless the Guru manifests, one cannot realise God.

— Varan Bhai Gurdas, I/17

Says Nanak, without the Master one cannot realise God who is close to one and all.

— Adi Granth, p. 924

How can God be found from anywhere except through the teacher or Guru who is able to say, 'This is'.

— Kath Upanishad, p. 2:6:12

You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me! Yet, you are not willing to come to me in order to have life.

— Bible (John 5:39-40)

If the people of the Book had believed, it had surely been better for them.

— Quran 3:110

And ask anyone informed concerning God.

— Quran 25:69

# TRUE MASTER

## Mark

*The true Guru (True Master) is he who hath realised the True One.*

— Guru Arjun Dev

**A** True Master (Guru or Satguru) holds a pivotal position in the spiritual realm. However, as in the case of scriptures, there are many a misconception about the mark and manifestation of a True Master. The subject being of utmost importance, warrants an objective treatment. Let us first take the mark of a True Master.

It is our daily experience that people, at large, regard a person in rags, or naked, or smeared with ashes, or attired in a peculiar fashion, or with matted hair or a forehead mark or a rosary, to be a holy being. Religious preachers have managed to delude the masses in believing these to be the marks of a holy being. It is perhaps for this reason that, at all times, there have been quite a large number of persons posing themselves as holy beings— saints, gurus, true masters, messenger and prophets.

An illiterate person does not turn a doctor merely by donning a doctor's apron. The one, who heals, is a healer, irrespective of his attire or nomenclature—Hakim, Vaid, Tabeeb, physician or doctor. For a patient what really matters is the knowledge of medicine. However, if the doctor's own son is deficient in mathematics, his medical knowledge is of no avail; he is unable to make up his son's deficiency in mathematics. He shall have to approach a tutor to help and guide his son in the subject. Again, a judge's son can be come a judge only if he acquires legal knowledge. The mark of a teacher, judge, doctor or True Master is not his attire, caste, colour, lineage, race or nationality, but his (specialised) knowledge. In fact, knowledge is the real teacher, judge, physician, guru or True Master. Accordingly, those, who teach mathematics, are the teachers of mathematics. Physically, they may be many but, knowledgeably, they are one. Very similarly, those, who are fully identified with

and firmly established in God and bestow God-knowledge, are the True Masters. Physically, they may be several but, spiritually, they are one.

Shankara looks upon this reference to plurality as conventional. He argues that the plural number is used with reference to the bodies that are different and not with regard to the Universal Self.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 103

To reiterate:

The Word is the Guru;  
The Guru is the Word.

— Adi Granth, p. 982

And so is the case with a disciple:

The Word is the True Master and the mind attuned (to the Word) the disciple.

Adi Granth, p. 943

In short, a True Master is not a physical body but the divine knowledge: the body is perishable but the knowledge is imperishable and, therefore, it ever abides.

Since knowledge is imparted and acquired through the medium of a tangible entity, we identify it with the apparent source. This explains why on acquiring medical knowledge, Mr. John Peter is known as Dr. John Peter. Even after his death, he is remembered as Dr. John Peter. Thus, knowledge bestows not only identity but also immortality upon a mortal. What actually dies is the body and not the knowledge. Knowledge ever abides. To reiterate, death of a doctor does not mean death of medical knowledge. Another person equipped with medical knowledge takes his place. This also hold good in the case of a dispenser of God-knowledge—True Master.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that, the one, who is totally identified with and firmly established in God, is a True Master. The seeker is concerned with the knowledge and not the unrelated factors such as outfit, caste, colour, race or nationality of a True Master. By bestowing God-knowledge, a True Master

makes the seeker realise his real or spiritual self—a constituent of the Universal Self. This can be a turning-point in the latter's thinking: he is blessed with a new awakening and a new vision to be ever God-conscious to perceive God dwelling in all, to own all and love all.

Another mark of a True Master. A True Master being an upholder of Truth, does not believe in blind faith but in firm faith. Therefore, he encourages the devout not only to listen with rapt attention and understand what is being preached and revealed but also tally the same with the scriptural teachings for their authenticity and truthfulness. A True Master knows that once a devout is so satisfied, his blind faith would turn into firm faith and his illusions and delusions, superstitions and misconceptions would be dispelled, an essential prerequisite for spiritual advancement and sublimation. A devout should, therefore, be ever awake and alert.

For example, the chief objective of religion is to function as a unifying force—uniting man with man, children of Father God, worthy of equal love, respect and regard, and man with God—, and to uphold the sanctity of oneness, formlessness and all-pervasiveness of God, known and remembered by several names. Yet, exploiting the religious sentiments of the innocent devout, the vested interests provoke them to kill each other in the name of religion or a particular name of God. No exaggeration to say that the largest number of precious human lives have been sacrificed at the Altar of Religion. Not to speak of uniting man with God, today religion has alienated man from man. Consequently, instead of being perfumed by the fragrance of love and harmony, amity and fellowship, the environment, the world over, is surcharged with the stink of religious / communal conflicts and clashes, violence and vengeance. Hence the imperative need for the devout to be ever alert and awake not to be exploited by the vested interests is advocated by Baba Avtar Singh when in his characteristic candid style he says:

Hear with ears,  
Behold with eyes,  
Only then believe.

— Avtar Bani, Hymn 330

Lord Buddha is frank enough to uphold this attitude when he says:

Do not believe something merely because your elders, the wise or even the Buddha have said it. Accept as truth only what you discover through experience to be beneficial to all and harmful to none.

Kalma Sutra

Swami Rama Teertha is rather blunt in this regard :

Accept a religion and believe in a religion on its own merits. Examine it yourself. Sell not your liberty to Buddha, Jesus, Mohammad, or Krishna... Be free in soul, be free in spirit. Be free, free to look at everything by your own light.

Believe not in any dogmas for their own sake. Believe not in any ideal howsoever lofty...Obey only the dictates of your conscience, the promptings of your own inner voice. Judge for yourself...

... No blind faith, Reason out thread-bare.

— Swami Rama Teertha  
(*Swami Rama Tirtha, pp. 93-94*)

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher, also supports this outlook:

The knowledge of Brahman (God) is not a matter of faith but the result of enquiry.

—*The Brahma Sutra*, p. 230

It may be reiterated that for spiritual evolvment, a devout needs to repose firm faith in the True Master. The purpose of the above cited quotations is that, at the same time, he should be alert and awake not to be misled by the vested interests.

As already discussed, human beings differ from one another in their belief, diet, dress, temperament, likes and dislikes, lifestyle, etc. In fact, these are one's personal concerns, and everyone wishes to maintain his/her individuality. As such, there was never nor shall there ever be a dead uniformity in such matters, nay in the entire material creation. A True Master is fully alive to this fact but he also firmly believes in the oneness of

the Spirit. Baba Hardev Singh regards this diversity as a boon—the key to beauty in the material creation— when he says:

The diversity in the material creation ought to be taken as a divine boon of the Divine which lends beauty to it.

And, for a harmonious social order, he fervently works for fostering unity in diversity, as is the case with a musician, who produces a melodious symphony by different musical instruments, each emitting a peculiar sound. He knits together ‘flowers’ of different shades and fragrances and diverse shapes and sizes, with the thread of Fatherhood of God into an all-embracing garland of Human Brotherhood. Further, for a True Master all saints, seers, sages, savants, messengers and prophets are worthy of equal honour and reverence. Above all, he believes in spiritual transformation and not in religious conversion. And this he brings about not through rites and rituals but by establishing a direct and abiding communion between the seeker and the sought, that is, God. This may sound to be a time-consuming process, but it is not so. We all accept that God is all-pervading and omnipresent. Therefore, as stated in the holy books and scriptures, a mere hint by a True Master is sufficient to reveal God and ‘integrate’ the aspirant with Him. And, if he grasps the hint, from that very blessed moment, the blessee perceives God here, there and everywhere! Establishing a direct and an abiding holy communion between the aspirant and the Lord is, indeed, the hallmark of a True Master.

### **Miracle**

It will be relevant to mention here that people, at large, are impressed more by supernatural/occult powers and miracles\*

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\* God people are ashamed of indulging in the unholy trade of displaying super-natural achievements.

— Guru Gobind Singh

The aspirant for spiritual life is warned about the attraction of the supernatural powers. They may lead us to worldly advancement but are not directed to saintliness. They are spiritually meaningless and irrelevant.

*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 58

(Contd.. on page85)

than by God-knowledge. They even regard the former, and not the latter, as the mark of a True Master. Let us again go back to the illustration of a physician. Apparently, cure is the real repute of a physician. But, in reality, it is his medical knowledge which is the real power behind his medical miracles. Though the patients term the cure as a miracle, a true physician does not boast of it, rather says, 'I treat, He cures.' Similarly, when a devotee is in a serious trouble, he prays with full and firm faith to the True Master who, in turn, prays to Almighty God; being spiritually one with God, whatever a True Master prays for, spontaneously, is granted. On being relieved of the trouble, the devotee terms it as a miracle by the True Master, but the latter attributes it to God's grace:

I can do naught; nor do aught;  
for, what indeed can I do?  
I know not what my God hath done that  
I'm acclaimed all over.

— Saint Kabir  
(Adi Granth, p. 1367)

Whenever the Prophet (Mohammad) visited someone who was ailing, or someone ill was brought to him, the Prophet would invoke blessings and peace upon the patient and say, "Take away the ill and heal, O God, for You are the Healer. There is no cure but Your cure, a cure that leaves no sickness."

— *The Wisdom of the Prophet*, p. 84

A True Master or, for that matter, a holy being neither boasts of performing miracles, nor to possess supernatural/ occult powers, nor the power nor the will to defy or interfere with the

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Spiritual leaders act on us not by physical violence, miracle-mongering or spell-binding. A true teacher does not assume a false responsibility. Even if the pupil takes a wrong turn, he would only counsel but not compel him to turn back.

— *ibid.*, p. 376

To aim to convert a man by miracles is a profanation of the soul.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

operation of the natural laws:

O dear Yogi! I have nothing to exhibit; no supernatural power to display; for I depend on nothing beyond the holy congregation and the Word of the Lord.

— Guru Nanak  
(Varan Bhai Gurdas, 1/42)

Listen dear Nath, listen to my word. I am telling you the truth. I have no miracle to exhibit except the miracle of True Name.

— Guru Nanak  
(Varan Bhai Gurdas, 1/43)

Even divine souls, though inwardly free, obey outwardly the laws of the cosmos.

— Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda

*(The Wine of the Mystic: The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam; A Spiritual Interpretation, p. 61)*

Rather, he firmly believes that whatever happens is the will of God; God's will is supreme and it reigns in whole of the creation.

But what is a miracle? \* Simply put, any natural event which defies explanation is regarded as a miracle:

(A miracle) signifies nothing more than an event, a phenomenon, the cause of which cannot be explained by another familiar instance, or in any case, which the narrator is unable to explain.

— Baruch Spinoza

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\* Let us bear in mind that, as stated by Goethe, "Mysteries are not necessarily miracles." With the advancement of human knowledge and understanding, several phenomena, once believed to be mysteries/miracles, turned out to be natural occurrences.

*(Contd.. on page 87)*

Miracles are not contrary to nature, but only contrary to what we know about nature.

— Saint Augustine

However, for a person, who carefully observes and studies Nature, each natural phenomenon, may it be sprouting of a small seed into a colourful blooming flower perfuming the environment with its sweet fragrance, or existence of an oasis or growing up of a tall majestic date tree in a desolate desert, or misty valleys, or snow-draped mountain ranges, or the sight of a tiny firefly or butterfly, or a huge elephant, or a roaring lion, or a timid deer, or a dancing peacock, or the boundless blue sky, or a sprawling simmering sea, or the crimson sun, or the moon playing hide and seek on a cloudy night, or twinkling of stars, nay the whole of the cosmos is a wonder or miracle.

All is miracle. The stupendous order of nature, the revolution of a hundred millions of worlds around a million of suns, the activity of light, the life of animals, all are grand and perpetual miracles.

— Voltaire

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man.

— Sophocles

No wonder, beholding natural phenomena in wonderment, an enlightened being eulogises the Supreme Creator.

Let us also bear in mind that an unexpected occurrence is termed as a miracle if it proves to be beneficial, otherwise a disaster. During a drought, rainfall is regarded as a miracle, but an incessant rainfall a disaster. The former is looked upon as a

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The mechanisms of industry teach men the mechanisms of the universe, and the notion of invariable sequences in cause and effect; exact investigation of natural causes replaces the easy resort to supernatural explanation.

*The Story of Philosophy*, p. 381

boon, while the latter as a curse. However, a True Master regards even what people call a miracle, as a normal occurrence. To vindicate his firm faith in, and total surrender to, God's Will, he carries on his mission of spiritual enlightenment and human redemption, maintaining poise even in the face of heavy odds. History testifies that, given the choice between performing miracles and facing death, holy beings chose the latter. The scriptures, especially, the word of a True Master, always attach primary importance to God-knowledge, rather than to miracles. Unless we catch the spirit, we may not be able to comprehend the letter of the scriptures, and may be misled.

### **Son of God**

A True Master is also regarded as the Son of God. Manifestation of the Son of God is purely a spiritual phenomenon. God is a spirit. Whenever God manifests Himself in a person, it is in spirit. It is a spiritual manifestation and not a physical transformation, and the blessed personage is called a Prophet, Messenger, True Master or Son of God.

For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

— Bible (Roman 8:14)

An analogy: A True Master bestows spiritual knowledge upon his followers and, whosoever imbibes, assimilates and lives up to his teachings and follows his directives, in letter and spirit, is regarded as his spiritual child. Likewise, the one, who totally identifies oneself with God and surrenders to His will, is regarded as a Son of God; of course, in the spiritual and not in the biological sense. This is how the spiritual progeny is born and multiplies:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

- Bible (John 1:12)

Another exposition of the term “Son of God” by Vice-Principal Narain Singh:

There is hidden in every soul the Divine Spark, which when kindled, becomes a flame that burns out the self or the ego, resulting in union with the Supreme, and this can take place at any time. When it actually happens, unity with Him is attained and then the inner voice becomes the Voice of God.

Whosoever is thus led by the Spirit of God<sup>\*</sup>, is the Son of God or is His Prophet or His Messenger. It is in this sense that the Supreme Spirit is incarnated in holy men and this same Spirit was made concrete and personal in Guru Gobind Singh too. This is what may also be called spiritual transformation. But it does not connote ceasing to be human, in any way. Of course, then, the values of life are not earthly or ephemeral goods, like money, power, reputation or prestige but the invisible Treasure of the Eternal Spirit. The things of time and space are renounced, so that there is neither the fear of death nor the fear of the power of the tyrants. There can then be no hatred left for any one, for, all begin to appear as belonging to the Kingdom of God. Every atom appears illuminated with His Light and, in fact, the whole creation seems flooded with love in the one sea of life, as the Guru himself says:

Wherever I look I find Him manifest, in the form of love.

— Guru Gobind Singh

The soul gets enriched, through love and reverence, for the poor, the needy and the forlorn. It is hate that destroys but love creates, builds and triumphs.

— *Guru Gobind Singh Re-told*, pp. 43-44

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\* The first Son of Man who pierced the shell of Time and crossed the bourn of Space is rightly called the Son of God. His understanding of his godhood is fitly called the Holy Spirit. But be assured that you also are sons of God, and in you also is the Holy Spirit working his way. Work with him and never against him.

(*The Book of Mirdad*, p. 168)

A True Master is also known as God incarnate\*. Here we should neither be scared of nor misled by the suffix 'incarnate'. It simply means a human being as an embodiment of divine attributes. As already stated, it is entirely a spiritual manifestation and not a physical transformation. He, no doubt, remains a physical being, like others, but is a divine character. He embraces all, regardless of their caste, colour, creed, faith, past, etc., for his sole mission is spiritual elevation and sublimation of human beings. He is an illumined mind. With the light of God-knowledge, he dispels the darkness of spiritual ignorance, misconceptions, superstitions, dogmas and rituals. Thus, he liberates the devout from such bonds, and, above all, the bondage of repeated births and deaths. For this reason a True Master is also called a Bondage-breaker. A True Master is known as a Divine Messenger, too. We all know that a messenger is one who carries a message to the intended person. What is important is the message, and not the physical appearance or attire of a messenger. Similarly, the one, who conveys the Divine Message, is a Divine Messenger. Since the Divine is eternal, it necessarily implies that the Divine Message is also eternal, and so is a Divine Messenger or a True Master,

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\* The purpose of incarnation is not simply to uphold the world order but also to help human beings to become perfected in their nature. The freed soul becomes on earth a living image of the Infinite. The ascent of man into Godhead is also the purpose of the descent of God into humanity...

(He) helps us to become what we potentially are.

(He) points out the way by which men can rise from their animal to a spiritual mode of existence by providing us with an example of spiritual life...

By his teaching and example, he shows how a human being can raise himself to a higher grade of life.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, pp. 157-158, 157, 156, 155

God is never born in the ordinary sense. Processes of birth and incarnation which imply limitation do not apply to Him. When the Lord is said to manifest Himself at a particular time, on a particular occasion, it only means that it takes places with reference to a finite being.

— *ibid.*, p. 31-32

manifesting in different human bodies, at different places, to convey the (Divine) Message.

### **Manifestation**

Now let us consider the latter part of the core twin question of the mark and manifestation of a True Master.

It seems here also prevails a widespread and deep-rooted belief that, unlike the multitude, a True Master manifests only in an age in which there is a decline of Truth and erosion of higher values. Let us objectively examine how far this belief is tenable.

The Fundamental Truths and Teachings remain ever the same, but the frame-works in which they manifest, decay and lose vitality, over and over again, in race after race, age after age, clime after clime, tongue after tongue. The words, the forms, become hackneyed, with the lapse of centuries; and human hearts respond to them no longer, vividly and actively. The new spiritual impulse, the new descent of the divine fire of life, that is needed to vivify afresh those Truths and Teachings, and give them a new birth in the living frame of a new language and new forms, in a new generation, or a new race, new place, new epoch—such divine afflatus can be given only by such Supermen. They incarnate as Founders of Religions; and, by the fire and fervour of their Love divine and universal..., the ardent flame of their compassion for mankind, fed constantly by the fuel of their deeds of self-sacrifice—by such *tapas* (penance)-fire in their own hearts, they set aflame the hearts of other human beings, all around, with similar love of God and of mankind. Thus they give a new life-time, of a whole great era, to the Eternal Truths, and so give birth to a new civilisation. This is their supreme work — of bringing into the world afresh, a great influx of spiritual, moral, emotional force. The intellectual work, also indispensable, of re-proclaiming the basic eternal truths is also done by them; but that of expounding and reconciling their teachings, is done afterwards by studious followers, lesser persons. While these latter remain true servants of the Spirit, and well-wishers of

mankind, the religion flourishes. When they become false, selfish, aggressive, proud, malevolent, then they begin to divide instead of reconciling and uniting; sects arise and multiply; decay begins.

— *The Essential Unity of all Religions*, pp. 219-220

It would thus be wrong to presume that the phenomenon of decline of Truth or erosion of higher values—evil—remained confined to a particular age: it has prevailed in all ages. So has been the case with the existence of good.

Evil, in a realistic sense, can only exist in relation to good, and in particular, in relation to God, the Supreme Good.

— Pope John Paul II  
(*Memory and Identity*)

No evil could exist where no good exists.

— St. Augustine

Where there is good, there must be evil.

— Lu Wang

The good cannot endure without the bad;  
the bad can strike no roots save the good.

— *The Book of Mirad*, p. 182

Unless one knows in addition that good and evil are constant realities in human life, all one's other intellectual acquisitions are valueless. The consciousness of this truth turns the trifler into a responsible personality.

— Lewis Mumford

Life is one eternal struggle between the forces of Good and Evil.

— Zarathushtra

Evidently, both good and evil have always existed, though, generally, human mind is swayed by evil, warranting manifestation of a True Master for upholding good, as is

revealed by the study of the scriptures, holy books, history and lives of the holy and the wise. For instance, during the Satya Yuga (Golden Age), regarded as an age of all virtues, the wicked King Hiranyakashyapu made several attempts to liquidate his own son Prahlada whose only 'sin' was that he was a devotee of God and refused to accept and worship Hiranyakashyapu as God, as ordained by the latter. In the Treta Yuga (Silver Age), Lord Rama, revered as Maryada Purushottam (an ideal personage), had to wage a war against King Ravana, a rank egoist, for violating and trampling upon social and moral values. In the Dwapar Yuga (Bronze Age), Lord Krishna was hounded by the tyrant King Kansa, his maternal uncle, who, according to a prophecy, was to be killed at the hands of the former. In the Kali Yuga (Iron Age), Lord Jesus Christ, the Messenger of Love and Peace, was crucified at the instance of the fundamentalists and Prophet Mohammad had to migrate to Madina from Mecca, due to the opposition of the infidels. Again, for upholding Truth, Guru Nanak Dev was put behind the bars and made to rotate a millstone and Guru Tegh Bahadur publically beheaded by the bigot Mughal rulers.

### **Age**

A word about an age. An age is said to be a period of history with special characteristics, events and personalities. Here three points need to be kept in view. First, the duration of an age is variable. For instance, while the Victorian Age spanned over 64 years, the Mauryan Age lasted for about 89 years and the Middle Ages extended for nearly 450 years. Second, it is the related events and personalities that make an age memorable, as is the case with the Dwapar Yuga (Bronze Age), remembered for the manifestation of Lord Krishna and the War of Mahabhart. Third, whichever the age, the mission of the divine beings has always been one and the same: stemming the decline of Truth and higher values and their re-surrection and re-establishment. However, since they had to work at different times and places and in different situations, some have been active and famous, while others modest and worked quietly.

All the same, every period, long or short, forms an integral part of an age, and Truth and higher values also erode in every

age, as already discussed. Does it not imply the imperative inevitability of manifestation of a True Master in every age for re-surrection and re-establishment of higher values as well as for restoration of the pristine supremacy, glory and grandeur of Truth, and, above all, for an uninterrupted passage of God-knowledge from person to person, for the redemption of the people of the time? In the circumstances, phrases/words such as 'from time to time', 'from age to age', 'when' and 'whenever' there is a decline of Truth or erosion of higher values, need to be viewed as a manner of expression and not to be taken literally:

When there is great impurity in the world, Incarnations take birth.

— Guru Gobind Singh  
(*Light of Universe*, p. 305)

Arjuna, whenever there is decline of righteousness, and unrighteousness is in ascendant, then I body Myself forth. For the protection of virtuous, for the destruction of evil-doers, and for establishing Dharma (righteousness) on a firm footing. I am born from age to age.

— Gita, 4:7

Whenever chaos and confusion arise Ahura Mazda sends His special messengers to guide humanity along the path of Divinity.

— Zarathushtra  
(*Thus Spake Zarathushtra*, p. 23)

The fact remains:

There is a constant desire to see such a God who is Attributeless, Indivisible and Eternal. The Spiritual Personages always Envision Him.

— Ram Charit Manas (Balkand)

Therefore, as an explanation of verse 68, chapter 18 of the Gita, S. Radhakrishnan says:

It is the duty of those who are previously initiated to initiate their uninitiated brethren.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 379

Those who have experienced the truth are expected to guide us. The seers owe a duty to their less fortunate brethren and guide them to the attainment of illumination which they have reached.

— *ibid.*, p. 170

If you have knowledge, let others light their candles at it.

— Margaret Fuller

There is yet another reason for the manifestation of a True Master in every age. Times without number it is asserted and propagated that God-realisation is the foremost aim of human life. In other words, to realise God is an obligation as also a birthright, nay a divine right, of every human being, in whichever age he or she is born. Since God can be realised by the grace of a True Master, is it logical that there should not be a True Master in any age? Those, who contend or propagate that manifestation of a True Master is a rare phenomenon, should honestly search their hearts and ponder over the gravity of the consequence of their contention. Are not they depriving the teeming millions of an opportunity to discharge their most sacred obligation and exercise their birthright to realise God and thereby fulfil the chief aim of human life and be redeemed? In other words, are not they, wittingly or unwittingly, denying them their divine right?

Spiritually, a True Master is said to be a manifestation of Formless (God) in form. In other words, God is the True Master:

The Eternal One, who is ever there, is my True Master.

Guru Gobind Singh

My Master is One,  
One alone,  
One-in-One.

— *Adi Granth*, p. 350

I bow to my teacher who is the Supreme Spirit, who is eternal and benign.

— Guru Geeta

That is to say, Formless manifests in a human form for dispensing God-knowledge for human redemption. As Formless is eternal, so are a True Master and God-knowledge. In other words, a True Master is not an individual but an institution, ever existent, ever abiding.

Anyone and everyone cannot be a Guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals, as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him. Therefore, in every age, God incarnates Himself as the Guru to teach humanity. Sachidnanda (God) alone is the Guru.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa

He (Lord Krishna) is not a hero who once trod the earth and has now left it, having spoken to His favourite friend and disciple, but is everywhere and in every one of us, as ready to speak to us now as He ever was to any one else. He is not a bygone personality but the indwelling spirit, an object for our spiritual consciousness.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 31

As an individual, Krishna is one of millions of forms through which the Universal Spirit manifests Itself.

— *ibid.*, p. 32

Mystics of other religions and some leading thinkers tend to adopt an attitude of respect for other forms of worship than their own. The Word came and dwelt among us, not for the first and last time at Bethlehem, but from the moment man was born into the world in the likeness of the divine image and as such distinct from other creatures. As Eternal Wisdom it was and is before all creation in its pure creativeness. For many Christian mystics, Christ is not limited to the historic personality of Jesus. He is the eternal

Logos who comes to birth in men whenever they are inwardly united with God.

Justin Martyr in his *Apologia* and *Dialogue with Trypho* presents God as the Primordial Cause of the world, eternal, unchangeable and accessible to reason. Before all creation, from the undefinable Father and Lord of the universe a force emanated called Logos which means Word and Reason. This Logos is the Son generated before all creation, the divine wisdom of Proverbs viii. He spoke through the Prophets and manifested his action also outside Israel.

*The Brahma Sutra*, p. 171

Baruch Spinoza distinguishes between the historical Jesus and the ideal Christ:

It is not in the least needful for salvation to know Christ according to the flesh; but concerning that so-called eternal Son of God, that is, God's eternal wisdom, which is manifested in all things, and chiefly in the mind of man, and most particularly in Christ Jesus, the case is far otherwise..."

*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 37

Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Bible (Hebrews 13:8)

The truth that a True Master—Formless in form—is ever there is upheld practically by all religions:

### **Christianity**

Jesus says:

As long as I am in the world. I am the light of the world.

Bible (John 9:5)

Nevertheless I tell you the truth;  
It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away,  
the Comforter will not come unto you.

— Bible (John 16:7)

I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.

Bible (John 14:18)

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter; that he may abide with you for ever.

— Bible (John 14:16)

Verily, verily, I say unto you,  
Before Abraham was, I am.

— Bible (John 8: 58)

## Islam

According to Islamic belief, there is an essential faith revealed directly to all the peoples of the world through a prophet or messenger. Logically, every such messenger has to be the last; he cannot declare his revelation to be incomplete or ask his people to wait for another messenger. Belief in one God is the essence of this universal, basic faith.

So far as Islam is concerned, he (Guru Nanak) made this clear in his reply to Mian Mitha:

“The first name is that of God;  
how many prophets are at His gate!”\*

This is not a denial of any prophet; in fact, it is a confirmation of the Islamic doctrine that prophets have been sent to all the peoples of the world.

— Dr. M. Mujeeb

(*Guru Nanak, His Life, Time and Teachings*, pp. 115, 117)

O Children of Adam! there shall come to you Apostles from among yourselves.

— Quran 7:35

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\* The first name, indeed, is that of God. Prophets are many and they are serving as the gate-keepers at His gate. You will find acceptance, O sheikh, in His court only if you will cherish good intentions and do virtuous deeds.

*Janamsakhi, Puratan*, pp. 78-79  
(*Sayings of Guru Nanak*, p. 97)

To every race great Teachers have been sent.  
God hath not left any community without a prophet,  
warner and true guide.  
He sendeth Prophets to the ignorant  
And those misguided into evil ways.  
Raising these Prophets up from 'amongst themselves' to  
purify them, and teach to them His signs and wisdom and  
philosophy.

— Quran 13:7, 35; 24, 16; 36,62; 2

## **Buddhism**

Lord Buddha has stated this truth more than once:

Whenever there is impiety in the world, the Buddha is born  
to teach piety to men. Many a Buddha was born and has  
gone before me and many more will come thereafter.

— *Light of Universe*, p. 305

I am not the first Buddha who came upon earth, nor shall I  
be the last. In due time, another Buddha will arise in the  
world...He will be known as Metteya, which means, 'he  
whose name is kindness.'

— *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 196

The Buddhas who have been and who shall be;  
Of these am I and what they did, I do,  
And this, which now befalls, so fell before  
That at his gate a king in warrior mail  
Should meet his son, a prince in hermit weeds.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 152

Know Vasettha, that from time to time a Tathagata is born  
into the world, a fully enlightened one, blessed and worthy,  
abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy with the  
knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to erring  
mortals, a teacher of gods and men, a Blessed Buddha. He

proclaims the truth both in its letter and in its spirit, lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation...

Tevijja Sutta  
(*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 157)

### **Hinduism**

Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we all shall cease to be.

— Gita: II: 12

Explaining verse 4, chapter 3 of the Gita, S. Radhakrishnan says:

Thou art My devotee and My friend. Revelation is never closed. So long as the human heart has qualities of devotion and friendship, God will disclose His secrets to them. Divine self-communication is possible wherever we have sincerity and a sense of need. Religious revelation is not a past event; it is that which continues to be. It is possible for all beings and not the privilege of a few. "Every one that is of the Truth heareth my voice," said Jesus to Pilate.

*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 152

### **Taoism**

The High Emperor of the Sombre Heavens descends to earth...hundreds...(upon) hundreds (of) times, to become the companion of the common people and teach them the truth,...to heal the sick,...to endure the suffering patiently and give his life again and again, that his pain may be a spring of joy and righteousness to many hearts.

— *The Essential Unity of All Religions*, p. 215

### **Sikhism**

The Name remains, the saints remain and the Guru-God remains eternally,

Says Nanak, rare is the one, who reflects over the Guru's Word, in this world.

— Adi Granth, p. 1429

My true Guru ever is.

— Adi Granth, p. 759

The true Guru is born in every age.

— Varan Bhai Gurdas, 1/48

By now it would be clear that the phenomenon of manifestation of a True Master is not related to any particular age, period or time, but to human redemption, attainable through a contemporary True Master. Therefore, so long as humanity survives, there shall remain the imperative need of an unbroken chain of True Masters:

Some contend that after the exit of a particular Great Master, no more Great Master would manifest. Their contention, apparently, arises from their utmost reverence and regard for their own Great Master. They, however, forget that so long mankind survives, there shall be a need for the Great Masters to redeem it.

— Baba Gurbachan Singh  
(*Precious Pearls*, p. 42)

The Book of God is not closed. The coming generations are not disinherited...Revelation, which is, as Lessing says, the education of the human race, descends continuously from God to man.

— Giuseppe Mazzini

Salutations to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future.

— Swami Vivekananda  
(*Saints of India*, p. iv)

It is noteworthy that, unlike the followers, who often extol and exalt only their own Holy Master/s as true and great, the

latter are free from such discrimination and regard only their mission of service to and redemption of humanity as great and themselves as humble servants of God. Since their mission and message is one and the same, in essence, their teachings complement and supplement one another:

The great teachers do not lay claim to originality but affirm that they are expounding the ancient truth which is the final norm by which all teachings are judged, the eternal source of all religions and philosophies, the *philosophia perennis*, the *sanatana dharma*, what Augustine calls the “wisdom that was not made; but is at this present, as it hath ever been and so shall ever be.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 152

Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

— Bible (Matthew 5:17)

Do not consider me better than Moses.

— Prophet Mohammad  
(*The Wisdom of the Prophet*, p. 37)

I am the closest of all people to Jesus, son of Mary, in this world and the Hereafter; for all prophets are brothers, with different mothers but one religion.

— *ibid.*, p. 37

Holy Masters are embodiments of higher values—selflessness and self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and selfless service—and totally dedicated to human spiritual awakening and evolvment and liberation from the painful birth-death cycle for which human incarnation alone offers an opportunity. Their single-minded contemplation, deep meditation and concentration on the Supreme Spirit or God unravel new mysteries and new secrets of the Spirit. The process of sharing their intuitive knowledge and mystic experience continues from person to person to ensure that the truths being enunciated and expounded are true to the core, universal and eternal, as is the Spirit or God.

The underlying spirit is not earning of name and fame for their individual invaluable contributions but upholding and propagation of the pristine Truth. It is perhaps for this reason that some of the world famous scriptures such as the Vedas do not carry the name(s) of their writer(s) / conveyor(s) which is not only an unparalleled example of self-effacement but also the summit of their care and concern for human well-being and Liberation.

All eulogy, discourse, postulation, elaboration, elucidation, exposition and interpretation of the Spirit, Truth or God, has a single objective, that is, a clearer and deeper understanding of the Holy Word for self-sublimation and to inspire a human to see beyond his/ her physical self and realise his/her spiritual or real self. To this end, revelation of God or bestowal of God-knowledge is the mission of every True Master, enabling an aspirant to realise his/her real or spiritual self for an existence of God-consciousness and equipoise, even amidst worldly trials and tribulations.

It may never be possible for humankind to repay the debt it owes to the True Masters except by understanding, assimilating and living up to their teachings, in letter and spirit:

Arise, awake and acquire True Knowledge by approaching the best teachers.

— Kath Upanishad, 1:3:14

## ILLUSION AND REALITY ILLUSION

### Illusion

*Spirit is the only reality.*

— Hegel

**I**t is our daily experience to see people stretching their hands towards the sky while offering prayers, or invoking, or referring to, God. A question arises: if God is all-pervading and omnipresent, as we all believe and profess, why do we point upwards, as if God abides in the high heavens? Does it not indicate that we suffer from an illusion that God is a finite corporeal being who dwells in some specific celestial region? Evidently, this illusion is the result of our ignorance of the reality.

The inferior devotee says, ‘God exists, but He is very far off, up there in heaven.’ The mediocre devotee says, ‘God exists in all beings as life and consciousness.’ The superior devotee says, ‘It is God Himself who has become everything: whatever I see is only a form of God. It is He alone who has become *Maya*, the universe, and all living beings. Nothing exists but God.’

— Ramakrishna Paramahansa

God...is not a transcendent being living in a distant heaven whence from time to time he intervenes in the affairs of the earth. He is an ever-present spirit guiding all that happens to a wise and holy end.

— David Hume

Again, it is a natural law that whatever is physical/material, may it be human, animal, plant, mountain, water, fire, air or sound, undergoes change—birth, bloom, decay, disintegration and ultimate mergence in its respective basic element. God, being eternal, is, however, beyond any change:

God must not be thought of as a physical being, or as having any kind of body. He is pure mind. He moves and acts

without needing any corporeal space, or size, or form, or color, or any other property of matter.

— Origen

God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love.

— Mary Baker Eddy

The pervasive confusion and illusion about the nature of God is the result of regarding God to be a finite corporeal entity. However, the scriptures and the teachings of the Holy Masters categorically affirm that God is a Spirit—formless, infinite, eternal, all-pervading, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient — as illustrated by the following scriptural quotations:

God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

— Bible (John 4:24)

The wise one does not grieve, having known the Formless, All-pervading Supreme Spirit who dwells in (all) impermanent bodies.

— Kath Upanishad, 1:2:22

O Formless, Thou art eternal.

— Adi Granth, (Jap. M.I). p. 3

Do not be inclined to forms: eliminate them all because the Beloved (God) has no colour and no form.

— *Ziaus Salook*

The Absolute is Spirit.

— Hegel

Only a Spirit can be almighty, eternal, all-pervading, absolute, constant and one without a peer. Yet, it is a human weakness to fancy God to be a human being, though superhuman, endowed with human traits, and who can be pleased or propitiated like human beings.

They (people) take God to be exactly of their own kind, Who loved flattery and when pleased would concede to them whatever they desired in the same way as any self-willed person among them would concede, when pleased through flattery.

— *Our Heritage*, p. 135

Of course, the pattern of God/gods so conceived, changes with the development of human understanding and knowledge. The issue being of paramount importance, calls for a deeper scrutiny in the light of what the holy and the wise have stated in this regard:

Men according to different understandings have given different descriptions of thee, O Lord.

— Guru Gobind Singh

As one fancies, so is God for him.

— Tulsidas  
(Ram Chrit Manas)

Man creates God just as he creates himself, and he creates God in his own image, often as he aspires to be, often as he in reality is.

— M.F. Ashley Montagu

Every one shapes God in the likeness of his longing. For the dying, He is everlasting life, for those who grope in the dark, He is the light. Even as the horizon remains at a level with our eyes, however high we may climb, the nature of God cannot be higher than the level of our consciousness. In the lower stages we pray for wealth and life and the Divine is regarded as the provider of material needs. Later it is meditation where we identify ourselves with the good cause which is God's cause. In the highest stages, God is the final satisfaction.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 64

The child-soul's gods abide in wood and stone;  
Of average man, in holy lakes and streams;  
Of the intelligent, in heavenly orbs;  
The wise man's God is his Immortal Self.

— Agni Purana

...Mankind's conception of God is always changing...Every people in every epoch has reinterpreted God after its own fashion, and has been willing to die, or at least to kill, in defence of that passing conception...The adulterous, thieving, and lying gods of the early Greeks were formed by men to whom such behaviour seemed legitimate; it was an age of piracy, rape and war; and the gods were conceived as ideal experts in these ancient accomplishments. It was the progress of moral refinement that made these villainous deities repulsive to the spirit of Xenophanes and Plato. So with all the gods; the picture formed of them in early ages repels the finer feelings of the later minds. It is the misfortune of every civilisation that it inherits barbaric gods.

- *The Pleasures of Philosophy*, pp. 378-80

Xenophanes, the Greek sceptic, said, 600 years before Christ:

Men imagine gods to be born, and to have raiment and voice and body, like themselves...Even so the gods of the Ethiopians are swarthy and flat-nosed, and the gods of the Thracians are fair-haired and blue-eyed...Even so Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all that is a shame and reproach among men—theft, adultery, deceit and other lawless acts...Even so oxen, lions and horses, if they had hands wherewith to grave images, would fashion gods after their own shapes, and make them bodies like to their own.

— *The Pleasures of Philosophy*, p. 379

Baruch Spinoza, a sixteenth century philosopher, called “the God-intoxicated man”, observed:

There are those who imagine God to be like a man, composed of body and soul and subject to passions; but it is

clear enough from what has already been demonstrated how far off men who believe this are from the true knowledge of God. But these I dismiss, for all men who have in any way looked into the divine nature deny that God is corporeal. That He cannot be so they conclusively prove by showing that by “body” we understand a certain quantity possessing length, breadth and depth, limited by some fixed form; and that to attribute these to God, a being absolutely infinite, is the greatest absurdity.

— *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, pp. 125-26

### **Conception and Elevation of God**

Probably, firstly, fear created God:

If we go back to the beginning, we shall find that ignorance and fear created the gods; that fancy, enthusiasm or deceit adorned or disfigured them; that weakness worships them; that credulity preserves them; and that custom respects and tyranny supports them in order to make the blindness of men serve its own interests.

— Baron d'Holbach

It was fear that first made the gods.

— George Santayana

And its justification:

Since the masses of the people are inconsistent, full of unruly desires, passionate, and reckless of consequence, they must be filled with fears to keep them in order. The ancients did well, therefore, to invent gods, and the belief in punishment after death.

— Polybius

Principal Balwant Singh Anand explains how gods started evolving:

Magic was the religion of the primitive man and ritual was

its most important constituent.

When man emerged from the primitive state and led his life as a member of the agrarian society, new gods came to be created. The process of evolution applies both to men and gods. A stable form of life is reflected in the growth of man—his inner life. Vague ghosts and demons of the primitive age gave place to refined gods with specialised interests. The result was polytheism of the Vedic Age—with Indra, Usha, Surya, Agni, Varuna and Soma as the new gods. The Vedic gods represented natural phenomena in personified forms, and like the Homeric gods they were magnified human beings with the same passions, jealousies and demands. They could, however, be propitiated and invoked to bestow the gifts of life such as prosperity, longevity and happiness.

— *Guru Nanak, His Life, Time and Teachings*, pp. 159-160

Vice-Principal Narain Singh has explained this phenomenon in an elaborate manner:

The different pictures of God that man can give, must flow out of his own range of vision and imagination. Man is a self-conscious being that emanated from One without blemish. But due to his own imperfections, he cannot conceive of the Real as It actually is. He gives God a conscious personality like himself in as good a form as could be conceived by him. He is expressing his own frame of mind, related to his own notions and needs and in accordance with the stage of his development. The origin and the progress of religion provides interesting material for study. The Primitive man was ignorant of the workings of nature and its laws. On the one hand, he was without resources necessary for his comforts and needs and, on the other, he was beset with a thousand dangers. Violence and disease visited him unawares and carried him off before he became old naturally. When he could neither understand the natural phenomena nor control them, he personified their causes and from the analogy of his own being supposed that a spirit dwelt in every natural object. Fire provided warmth and enabled him to cook his food, and was therefore

accepted as a kind of god to be loved and worshipped. The inclemency and the fury of the elements, however, was supposed to hide a malignant god behind, that needed to be appeased. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to avert their wrath and to win their favour. As civilisation progressed and gifts of nature in the form of crops, etc. through rains multiplied, his gods changed and evolved. Deities always arise in terms of human needs and they get all the homage and adoration that poetic fancy can imagine. Worship of stars, mountains, woods, spirits, giants, dwarfs, and fairies, has gone on. It was, in fact, always fear that had made gods for man and it was to enlist them to his aid that he propitiated them and offered them flattery to make them listen to his supplications. In the Barbaric Age, an African Tribe had carved out on a piece of wood an image of God glaring with a frightful face. This God must have been born out of fear. *Lingam* and *Yoni* and even soil were worshipped as procreative spirits. Then was born magic. To bring rain in a drought, or a child to a barren woman, or to find a cure for diseases, or to win victories over enemies, magic was freely employed. Many prayers are up to this day, of the nature of magic formulas mumbled over and over again with faith in repetition for their efficacy and effect. Then the appearance of the dead in dreams and the fright they caused produced first ancestral worship and then the deification of kings and strong men. But later these human gods were further humanised so that not strong men but good men began to be adored. As the horizon of man's vision further extended, a more exalted concept of the Divinity was adopted. He could not then be given a human form, for, that would put a limit to His Omnipotence and Omnipresence; nor could He be supposed to be subject to human passions of jealousy, wrath, revenge, praise or adoration. So the new god was supposed to be diffused through all matter. This was pantheism, but this also could not satisfy the needs of human soul, as it was too abstract and cold to provide solace and comfort which a Personal God could. But the personal aspect of God, too, in whatever form one may consider, has always gone on evolving, depending on the level of understanding of the

human race, its prejudices and prepossessions. Man does not know God as He is, but as he imagines Him to be. It can be said with a good deal of truth that man creates God in his own image, which sometimes may be mere hallucination or the figment of his own imagination. Persons in tune with the Infinite could alone give the most correct picture of the Personal aspect.

— *Our Heritage*, pp. 106-108)

Edward Norbeck throws more light on the subject:

Religion is regarded as the creation of man that has arisen, by whatever psychological processes, from man's experiences of daily life and serves for him various functions. It constitutes an attempt to formulate symbolic answers to questions and problems that confront man. Gods, demons, evil spirits, witches, souls, taboos and other supernatural sanctions governing behaviour, rites at critical times during the life-span, mythology, and other religious beliefs and acts are seen as the casting into concrete and comprehensible form of the fears, hopes, wishes, dreams, and animosities of man. Once man has put his problems in these forms, he can deal with them by acts analogous with those of his ordinary experience with objects of nature and with his fellow men. Man has then created gods and religion in his own image and in the image of the world of his experience, and his religious beliefs and acts are functional responses to circumstances of life.

As the foregoing sentences imply, religion is regarded not as the mainspring of culture or social life but rather as a derivative of more fundamental factors, especially ways of gaining a livelihood and the closely associated manner of ordering society. As simple examples of the correlation between religion and other aspects of culture, we may note that the religions of agricultural people lack gods of the sea but include prominently acts and supernatural beings relating to agriculture, and that the traditional Christian conception of God as a father is congruous with the familial organisation of Christian societies but...incongruous in

various other societies and does not exist in their beliefs.

— *Religion in Philosophical and Cultural Perspective*,  
pp. 419-42

Will Durant, a great historian and thinker, has made this very point in the following words:

Religion is at first the worship of a multitude of gods and spirits, more or less alike in every nation; and the development of religion comes through the notion of a central and omnipotent deity subordinating the others, and co-ordinating them into their hierarchy of special roles. The first gods were probably suggested by dreams and ghosts. The word *spirit* was, and is, applied equally to ghosts and gods...(With) the development of industrial societies...superstitious religions give way to liberal creeds whose focus of effort is the amelioration and ennoblement of human life and character on this earth. The mechanisms of industry teach men the mechanisms of the universe, and the notion of invariable sequences in cause and effect; exact investigation of natural causes replaces the easy resort to supernatural explanation.

— *The Story of Philosophy*, pp. 378, 80, 81

This truth is beautifully expressed in the following lines by Baruch Spinoza:

When you say that if I allow not in God the operations of seeing, hearing, observing, willing, and the like...you know not what sort of God mine is, I thence conjecture that you believe there is no greater perfection than such as can be explained by the attributes aforesaid. I do not wonder at it; for I believe that a triangle, if it could speak, would in like manner say that God is eminently triangular, and a circle that the divine nature is eminently circular; and thus would every one ascribe his own attributes to God...neither intellect nor will pertains to the nature of God (in the usual sense in which these human qualities are attributed to the Deity; but rather the will of God is the sum of all causes and all laws, and the intellect of God is sum of all mind). The mind of

God is all the mentality that is scattered over space and time, the diffused consciousness that animates the world...All things, in however diverse degree, are animated.

— *The Story of Philosophy*, p. 175

This very fact is also upheld by Anaxagoras, a Greek philosopher:

If the birds imagined a God, he would have wings: the God of horses would run upon four legs. The vulgar conceive God as a king who holds his bed of justice in his court. Tender hearts represent him to themselves as a father who takes care of his children. The wise attribute to him no human affection. They recognise a power, necessary, eternal, which animates all nature, and they resign themselves.

— *Life of Voltaire*, pp. 430-431

Thus:

The anthropomorphic God of the ancient world, the God of human passions, frailties, caprices, and whims is gone...The new God is the God of law and order, the new duty to know that order and to get into harmony with it.

— Robert A. Millikan

The tribal God gradually became the God of the earth and the God of the earth has now become the God of the universe, perhaps only one of many universes. It is inconceivable that the Supreme is concerned only with one part of the smallest of planets.

— *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 34

This is just a glimpse of how, with the evolvement of human knowledge and understanding, the anthropomorphic God evolved into the Universal God. Yet, ironically, in actual practice, God has been 'reduced' to the status of gods and goddesses, so much so that God's creation—sun, moon, mountains, rivers, trees, fire, and even animals—is worshipped

as if it is God. The material creation, actually, meant to serve man, has thus become the master and man, the crown creation, its slave! He has accordingly turned narrow-minded, self-centred and bigot, especially, in his outlook and approach towards God and religion:

The greatest of the temptations we must overcome is to think that our own religion is the only true religion, our own vision of Reality is the only authentic vision, that we alone have received a revelation and we are the chosen people, the children of light and the rest of the human race live in darkness. The saints do not believe that God is the exclusive property of any human being or a group of human beings.

— S. Radhakrishnan  
(*Guru Nanak*, p. 194)

It is unfortunate, indeed, that under strict religious regimentation, man is completely given to fanaticism. This, in turn, generates in him intolerance, hatred and animosity towards those who profess a different faith or belief, or whose diet, dress or culture is at variance with his own. At times, emotions are so worked up that even for a slight deviation from the set Code of Conduct, or non-performance of a religious practice, such people do not hesitate even to shed blood, apparently, to show off their dedication to, or to defend their, religion, or to propitiate ‘their’ God/Deity. Ironically, at times, such acts of fanaticism are committed right in the places of worship. It may sound strange but it is a stark fact that the largest number of human lives has been ‘sacrificed’ at the altar of religion:

The crimes committed in the name of religion are such that the worst crimes blush before them.

— Guru Gobind Singh

The acceptance of God as a finite corporeal being leads to yet another grave consequence. It gives rise to an illusion that, like humans, God is also endowed with base human impulses such as intolerance, anger, hatred, jealousy and vengeance, and the followers have no compunction in acting likewise:

Men take after whom they worship.

— Adi Granth, pp. 549

They (people) are thinking of God as a being like themselves who desires ends and uses means to secure these ends.

— C.D. Broad

Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man.

— Thomas Paine

The god of the cannibals will be a cannibal, of the crusaders a crusader, and of the merchants a merchant.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Men show no mercy and expect no mercy, when honour calls, or when they fight for their idols or their gods.

— Friedrich Schiller

It was perhaps such a sickening state of affairs which prompted the great philosopher, Bertrand Russel, to remark:

Men tend to have the beliefs that suit their passions. Cruel men believe in a cruel God and use their belief to excuse their cruelty. Only kindly men believe in a kindly God and they would be kindly in any case.

It will be no exaggeration to say that the concept of God being a finite corporeal being, is as old as the human history, though it has been repudiated, from time to time, by the Holy Masters, who enlightened the people that God is a Spirit-conscious and almighty, all-pervading and formless. But with the departure of a Holy Master from the scene, the aforesaid illusion about God reasserts itself. All this is so ironical, rather amazing. Such a situation has always been a heyday for religious preachers to prey upon and confound credulous devouts and exploit their faith, again and again, by keeping them stuck in the mire of spiritual ignorance and turning them ritualistic and dogmatic, all through.

## Reality

By now it would be amply clear that the belief that God is a finite corporeal being is an illusion and therefore conceived, imagined and presented differently by different people, even though all religions testify that God is a Spirit — formless, omnipresent omnipotent and omniscient. Yet, in order to promote their vested interests, religious guides seem to be totally unconcerned that their irrational approach negates and undermines the most sacred and fundamental fact of the oneness of God—Monotheism. It also sows the seeds of polytheism, sectarianism, cultism, ritualism, yielding a rich crop of superstitions and misconceptions, bigotry and blind faith, and thereby drives the naive devotees away from the cherished goal of God-realisation. It is no surprise, therefore, that humanity is being consumed by the fire of strife, intolerance, hatred, fanaticism, factionalism and fundamentalism. The present generation, especially the youth, may regret that they are unfortunate to have been born in an age bereft of a True Master, Prophet, Messenger, Guru or Avtar who could reveal God. Instead of falling a prey to religious taboos, dogmas, complexities, and even absurdities woven by such guides to yoke the innocent God-seekers to the wheel of ritualism, they would prefer to be dubbed as infidels, though in their heart of hearts they, too, nurse an irrepressible urge to know and realise God. Napoleon Bonaparte's following words aptly depict the state of such people:

We believe in God because everything around us testifies to his existence. I have never doubted the existence of God, for, even if my reason were incompetent to grasp him, my inner feelings would convince me of this reality. My temperament has always been in harmony with this feeling.

— *Napoleon*, pp. 558-559

However, mere belief in the existence of God is not enough, as already discussed. The foremost aim of human life is to realise God. This is so because, of all the creation, a human is not only conscious but also fully conscious; others are merely conscious to a degree. God-realisation is, therefore, possible

only in human life, the span of which is not only short but its end is also unpredictable.

A seeker need not be dismayed, provided he is earnest in his yearning to know and realise God. Since God is all-pervading and omnipresent, there is no need to retire to a forest, mountain or cave, or undergo prolonged arduous and torturous religious rituals and practices, to realise God. At the same time, he will be perfectly justified in not accepting or being content with anything short of God-revelation like Swami Vivekananda, who used to put the straight and pertinent question to everyone: ‘Sir, have you seen God?’ He repeated this question till, at last, he met Ramakrishna Paramahansa who revealed God to him (Vivekananda). Below is given an account of the momentous encounter between the two:

Naren\* asked the Master, “Sir, have you seen God?”  
Without a moment’s hesitation came the reply: “Yes, I have seen God. I see Him as I see you here, only more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to Him. But who cares for God? People shed torrents of tears for their wives, children, wealth and property, but who weeps for the vision of God?”

— *Saints of India*, pp. 81-82

Similarly, to satiate his longing for an abiding vision of God, the seeker should also in all humility approach and beseech the grace of a contemporary Spiritual Guide or True Master.

Here, one must not forget that God being all-pervading and omnipresent, God-revelation takes no time: it is like introducing one person to another:

Ask, and it shall be given you;  
seek, and ye shall find;  
knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

— Bible (Matthew 7:7)

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\* Short original name of Swami Vivekananda.

Says the Lord, if you come to me walking, I shall run to (receive) you.

— Hadis

Sit in faith (before the Master) for a moment and you will realise the All-pervading.

— Adi Granth, p. 727

Realisation of God takes time much shorter than that required to crush a flower.

— *Yog Vaaishisht*

These quotes are quite significant and serve as a clear pointer that a knower of God or True Master alone can enable one to realise one's real or spiritual self, a constituent of the Supreme Self or God, the sole Reality, whom he reveals by a mere hint sans rites and rituals and taboos and dogmas.

He who understands and realises his self, come to know the Reality.

Guru Nanak  
(Adi Granth, p. 224)

Spiritual reality is a matter of perception, not of proof.

— Peter Marshall

God or Spirit is the only independent reality, and any other being or event is but a dependent “phase”, “state” or “product” of this activity.

— Charles E. Garman

A True Master's hint is so potent and unique. It dispels all one's illusions and delusions about God and God-realisation and one behold the Real, as He really is, most proximate; here, there and everywhere, and at all times.

## UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

*Let universal brotherhood be the highest aspiration of your religious order.*

— Guru Nanak

“**Man** was born free but everywhere he is in chains,” is a famous quotation of the French Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Though made in a political context, it aptly describes man’s state in other spheres, too. Cool thinking will convince any rational mind that restraints are indispensable not only for the progress of human society, but also for its very survival. Imagine for a moment the chaotic state of affairs, resulting from people not observing even ordinary traffic regulations, or not reporting for duty on time, or not honouring their commitments. We know that vitamins are vital for the health and growth of any organism. Nevertheless, their excessive intake can impair our health. In the like manner, though excessive restraints are sure to stifle ‘social health’, some restraints are imperative. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it is restraints which save the society from relapsing into the state of savagery.

The foregoing analysis concerns man as a physical entity. But is man a mere physical entity? No. He also enshrines in himself a more vital divine entity, that is, the soul. The soul is the life-energy that activate the otherwise inert physical body. A radio set in perfect working order is practically dead without the (electric) power. Likewise, without the soul, a body, even in the best of form, is simply a mass of flesh and bones. This life-energy is not mechanical: it is a conscious and dynamic energy, which not only creates and operates but also regulates the whole human system, nay the entire material creation. ‘This consciousness is sleeping in plants, waking in animals, but awake in man.’ Therefore, of all the creation, man is not only highly conscious but also self-conscious. And, this distinct characteristic enables man to satiate his soul’s sole and innate yearning to realise his true identity or real self, known as Self-realisation or God-realisation, and human life alone offers an opportunity to accomplish this primary task.

Let us now consider the main characteristics of the physical body, as also of the divine spark or the soul, in man. We all know that whatever is physical or material, is always subject to change and ultimately perishes. But the soul, being of the nature of the Super Soul or God, is immutable and imperishable. Again, the body has a form, but the soul is formless. Further, the soul is not subject to physical laws, whereas the body is. This makes it crystal clear that what is really important is the soul.

As already stated, the soul is the real entity and its inherent quest is for its origin—Universal Soul or God. Contrary to this, the demands of the body are material. Isn't it, therefore, an irony that instead of realising God, too, we should spend our entire life in pursuit of bodily needs and comforts? We go a step further and even make the physical/material factors the very basis of dividing humanity. Ignorance of the role of the physical/material factors in human life as also their bearing on the divine soul is the real cause of mutual hatred, ill will and alienation between man and man. Let us examine some of the factors responsible for conflict and alienation in the society owing to a lack of understanding of their underlying spirit and thereby eating into its very vitals, and how Universal Brotherhood can be promoted by their rational understanding and application.

### **Material Possessions**

At heart, almost everyone knows and feels that material possessions are intrinsically transitory. It is amazing, therefore, that man should still blindly race for their exclusive possession. This ravenous craving causes endless troubles, for there is no end to such a race. We all know that when we get one thing, we aspire for another, and on getting it, we crave for yet another, and so on till the very end of our life. On the contrary, a spiritually enlightened person, blessed with the divine vision and wisdom, takes everything he owns, including his own being, as a sacred trust of the Supreme Master, who can take back any or all of these, any moment. Conscious of his obligations as a trustee and fully alive to the transitory nature of these possessions, he is neither elated by their possession nor depressed by their absence or deprivation. He enjoys the bounties of God, as others do. Yet, unlike them, he is free from their attachment. He faces every

situation as a challenge, but accepts the consequences as the divine will and willingly surrenders to it. Content with his lot, he is not jealous of those who are more prosperous than he. Similarly, he does not look down upon those who are still lagging behind, rather prays for their welfare. Persons with such disposition continue to strive and, overlooking the distinction between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, and the like, contribute to the development of a harmonious social order, free from arrogance and hatred, ill will and jealousy.

### **Race**

Racial prejudice is another factor responsible for the divisions in the humanity, though race merely denotes ancestry. At times, racial prejudices and passions ran so high that these generated hatred and even sparked off bloody wars for the extermination of one race at the hands of another. Some races considered the people of other races as inferior beings and assigned to themselves the 'sacred task' not only of exploiting but also subjecting them (other races) to social discrimination, political subjugation and even religious persecution. History bears ample testimony to such a perverted mentality.

In our own time, Adolf Hitler prided himself on being an Aryan and therefore superior, destined to rule others! His intense hatred for the Jews robbed him of reason. He poisoned the German mind against them, dubbing them not only as inferior but also despicable beings. The very word "Jew" became so hateful that even distinguished Jewish scientists, philosophers, scholars, theologians, intellectuals, medicos, musicians, artistes and artists were not spared. In such an environment, surcharged with bigotry, it was natural for the Germans to consider extermination of the Jews as a sacred task. Accordingly, Hitler regimented the Germans as 'superior Aryans', and inflicted untold and inhuman sufferings and tortures on the innocent Jews, men, women and children, and put millions of them to death. His brutal persecution of the Jews on the racial ground was irrational and inhuman, indeed. In the circumstances, it is puzzling how the German mind resolved the glaring contradiction between hatred for and prejudice against the "inferior Jews", on the one hand, and of acceptance of Lord

Jesus Christ, a Jew, as the Messenger of Love and Peace, and the Saviour, on the other.

It is really a matter of profound regret and unfortunate that we should be completely swayed by narrow racial prejudice and stoop so low as not to perceive 'man' in others. It is high time to pause and ponder:

- Is race a valid ground for anyone to be considered and treated an inferior or a superior being?
- Is it not a fact that many saints, sages, seers, messengers, prophets, philosophers, thinkers, scholars and pioneers in several fields, belonged to the so-called inferior races, but wholeheartedly served the whole of the mankind, without any distinction or discrimination, for which they are revered and honoured even today?

### **Caste and Colour**

Caste prejudice, which is quite common, especially in the East, is responsible in a big way for driving a wedge between man and man. Coming to our own sub-continent, caste prejudice has acquired such a firm hold on our mind that there is a hierarchy of castes and sub-castes even amongst the people professing the same religion. This, in turn, sets in motion a chain-reaction of social and religious prejudices: the higher castes looking down upon the lower ones, and consequent mutual hatred and hostility.

But the worst consequence of the caste prejudice has been that it pushed millions of our brethren to subhuman level. They were denied social justice for centuries. In actual practice, they had no dignity and right worth the name. Perhaps for this reason, they were entrusted with all odd, menial and repugnant jobs, which the higher castes would not even think of touching.

Saints and sages like Namdev, a calico-printer, Ravidas, a cobbler, Sadana, a butcher, Kabir, a weaver, Valmiki, a dacoit and Sain, a barber, all belonging to the so-called low castes, occupy a place of honour in the spiritual realm. Their psalms and hymns are enshrined in the holy books and scriptures and are recited reverently and devotionally. Yet, persons of low castes

were generally considered as untouchable, so much so that even their entry into the 'Homes of God'—places of worship—was considered to be a sacrilege. They were considered destined to exist simply to serve the higher castes and to suffer. In short, poverty and deprivation was their 'food', abuse their 'fruit', serving the higher castes their lot and suffering their badge. What a pity!

It may come as a surprise, perhaps a rude shock, to some, that the caste system, attributed to Sage Manu, was not what it is considered today. What Manu actually enunciated was simply a classification of the people according to their respective vocations. It was purely a vocational division, based on the principle of division of labour and individual's skill, that is:

*Brahmanas*: Their field was science, medicine, education and other intellectual and religious pursuits.

*Kshatriyas*: They were a ruling and warrior class, responsible for the maintenance of law and order and defence of the country.

*Vaishas*: They were a class of entrepreneurs, looking after agriculture, industry, trade and commerce.

*Shudras*: This was the category of artisans, craftsmen, workers, etc., rendering specialised services to the society.

The sole aim of this division was that, according to one's merit and aptitude, one should be assigned a duty for which one was most suited to contribute one's best to the general good. Precisely, for this very reason, according to Manu, a person born in a Shudra family but possessing talent, calibre and culture of a Brahmana, Kshatriya or Vaisha, could rise to be a Brahmana, a Kshatriya or a Vaisha, as the case may be. Similarly, a person born in a higher caste but lacking the requisite capabilities of a Brahmana, Kshatriya or Vaisha, could be demoted to the rank of a Shudra. It would be interesting to note here that even in the same family, its members could belong to these four different categories.

However, with the passage of time, the vested interests, who

held privileged positions, changed the very pattern of this classification and reduced it to the prevailing caste system. Birth, instead of worth, became the basis of one's caste, without any regard to one's skill and talent. Gradually, it became an irrevocable and watertight compartmentalisation, giving rise to segregation, isolation and ostracization of the lower castes and consequent bickering and mutual hatred.

The position in regard to colour prejudice is no less horrifying, though we very well know that colour or complexion is beyond human control. In our time, a prominent victim of such prejudice was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Negro pacifist. It is an irony that the sane and inspiring voice of the one, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace and the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for his dedication to the cause of non-violence and human equality, who fought for human dignity and self-respect, and brought about a new awakening among the neglected and the oppressed, was silenced by a bullet, simply on account of his dark complexion. His cold-blooded murder came as a rude shock to all humanity. It was, in fact, a murder of the conscience of humankind!

Is it not unfortunate that we do not pause and question ourselves:

- Is a human to be judged simply by the colour of his skin?
- Who has vested a person, with a particular complexion, the authority to arrogate to himself the right to treat others of a different colour with scorn and contempt?
- Did not Ghalib and Tagore, the renowned poets, Paul Robinson, the golden-voiced Negro singer, Gandhi, an apostle of truth and non-violence, Patrice Lumumba, the patriot, Srinivasa Ramanujam, the mathematician, Jagdish Chander Bose, the scientist, Aurobindo Ghose, the Yogi, Buddha, the Compassionate, Vivekananda, the Patriot-saint and a galaxy of savants, saints, sages, seers, messengers and prophets, belonging to coloured races, leave an indelible imprint on human history?
- Does a human cease to be human, simply because he is

born to parents 'labelled' as low caste, even though he may be otherwise talented or great?

- Should one's caste determine the type of treatment one deserves?
- Is it not a fact that society's survival as also its peace, progress and prosperity, rest upon the corporate performance of all its members, each contributing his mite?

### **Diet and Dress**

It is our daily experience to notice persons holding strong, rather inflexible views, in matters regarding food. For instance, there are persons who will not take a meal which contains onion, but freely consume garlic. For others, the very smell of garlic is repugnant, though onion may be an ingredient of their daily meal. Even for some non-vegetarians, meat of a certain bird or animal may be a social or religious taboo. There are some who relish coffee, whereas for others it tastes unsavoury. Similar is the case with respect to other hard and soft drinks. Again, there are persons who crave for things sweet, while others prefer salty ones. It would be alright if such preferences and prejudices were confined to oneself. But the misfortune is that nearly every individual considers his own choice as the only right one. And, perhaps under such an illusion, everyone is tempted to impose his pet choice upon others 'for their good', as if others have no choice or opinion of their own. Obviously, such a rigid attitude is sure to be resented and reacted to by others, giving rise to mutual hatred and alienation.

As in the case of diet, we also hold rigid views in matter of dress, and even ridicule others on this count.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that our diet and dress depend, primarily, upon geographical and climatic conditions, which vary, sometimes quite sharply, from region to region, even in the same country. This explains the variation and varieties of crops and eatables produced even in the same region or country. For example, in India, wheat is produced in abundance in the North, whereas, in the South, the soil and climate are conducive for rice. So, it is natural that people in the

North to have wheat as their staple diet, while those in the South to take rice.

People living in the cold regions, apart from requiring food which warms up the body, need woolen clothes, while for those in hot regions, cotton clothes and food imparting coolness, are ideally suited. Besides, even amongst the varieties that are available, what one actually eats, drinks or wears, is purely a matter of one's personal choice, taste and preference. It also depends upon one's constitution and temperament. Hence the proverb: What is meat for one, may be poison for another. Since such conditions and factors vary from region to region, place to place, even from person to person, it is not prudent to impose our choice upon others, or even to think that those, who take a particular type of diet or dress in a particular fashion, are doomed. Above all, such factors have nothing to do with God-realisation, the sole concern of the soul. Such a realisation is bound to remove much of the prevailing hatred and bitterness amongst different people on account of their misconceived notions about such factors.

### **Domestic Life**

The vested interests, especially religious preachers, have been able, through centuries of rubbing, to surcharge our minds with a strong misgiving that God-realisation is not possible so long as one does not break worldly bonds. They further contend that the material world has no charm for a seeker of God. In other words, a God-seeker should give up his material possessions and craving therefor and renounce the world and retire to far-off mountains, caves or forests, for realising God, believed and professed to be all-pervading and omnipresent! In support, they may advance several arguments, and even give a twisted interpretation of the scriptures to suit their design. There is nothing surprising in what they preach, because they very well understand how difficult, nay impossible, it is to renounce the material world, to which they themselves cling fast! Innocent devouts, no doubt, derive momentary solace from their sermons, and, in their helplessness and self-pity, resort to the next best course, that is, performance of rites and rituals, prescribed as a means to God-realisation, but, in course of time, they begin to

regard it as the very end. In this manner, the vested interests succeed in achieving their aim of maintaining their stranglehold on the devotees and keeping them yoked to the wheel of rites and rituals, whole of their lives, in the vain but fond hope of God-realisation. What is surprising is that we should be totally oblivious of the stark fact that Holy Masters like Rama, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Nanak, Kabir and Ramakrishna, to name a few, whom we revere and accept as holy mentors and role models, did not renounce the world, rather they gave due importance to domestic life. Evidently, they never wanted us to renounce the world and become parasites, and thereby be a burden on the society. On the other hand, we daily see the so-called saints and sadhus wandering about in the (material) world, which they are supposed to have renounced, and knocking at the doors of the householders, whose life they described as a materialistic mire – an impediment to Liberation.

If Holy Masters and Saints like Kabir, Ravidas and many others could realise God and, at the same time, lead a domestic life, why cannot we? Renunciation of the family life in the name of God-realisation has been responsible for creating an army of parasites and disrupting happy homes. Such a renunciation can at best be a self-deception but, certainly, not a prerequisite for God-realisation. On the contrary, God-realisation awakens one, and an awakened being does not shirk his domestic and social duties and obligations. Rather, he discharges the same, but without attachment to the world. This is renunciation in the real sense.

### **Key**

It will not be out of context to mention here that a (worldly) father loves his children even if they desert, nay even disown him, his belief, faith and religion and/or embrace a new religion. Very similarly, the (divine) Father loves all humans—His children—, whether or not they are devoted to Him, express their gratitude to Him for what they have or curse Him for what they have not, as also for their suffering and misery and, above all, even if they deny His very existence, forgetting that their and, for that matter, of the entire humanity's denial, can in no way affect or efface the fact of God's existence. Yet, out of

compassion, and kindness, Father God forgives them for their follies; the diversity in the creation—physical, mental and material—, being His own law — Will.

A question and a vital one arises: Can a human being imbibe such godly disposition for fostering human brotherhood? Let us consider it.

The very thought of his father's embrace bestows joy and solace upon a child, but the joy of being in his father's warm embrace is inexpressible. In the like manner, if the mere thought that all humans are brothers, being children of Father God, whom they have not known as yet, could be so comforting and ennobling to bring them closer, what a joy and wonder it would be to be in the blissful embrace of the *known* Father! Realisation of Father God in itself would knit humans into a brotherhood: Human Brotherhood through Fatherhood of God:

Humanity is the son of God.

— Theodore Parker

As stated in the holy books, though all-pervading and omnipresent but formless, God can be known and realised by the grace of a True Master. When an earnest seeker approaches a True Master, the latter blesses the former with God-knowledge by revealing God, whom he begins to perceive everywhere, in everyone, and at all times.

A note of caution. The blessee should bear in mind that attaining of God-knowledge is just the beginning and not the end of his spiritual journey. He has yet to go a long way to evolve as a spiritual being, and the path is said to be narrower than the breadth of a hair and sharper than the edge of a sword. In other words, discipleship is like walking on a razor's edge:

There are two rules on the spiritual path: Begin and Continue.

— A Sufi saying

He should also bear and mind that as diversity is the essential characteristic of the material creation, so is oneness of the

Divine Creator. And for a happy blend of these two, we need the alchemy of Love for ushering in a happy and harmonious social order.

A True Master's grace and guidance is always there, but, for spiritual evolvment, a blessee has to understand, assimilate and live up to God-knowledge, be intensely conscious of God's eternal presence and adhere to the True Master's teachings, in letter and spirit, in order to cultivate the godly disposition, unmindful of the diversity of factors such as faith, social status, culture, caste, colour, community, race and nationality. And perceiving God dwelling in every one, to equally love and respect all and live in peace and harmony with all, unity in diversity being the essence of human brotherhood.

By now it would be amply clear that giving primary importance to, or identifying ourselves with, factors such as material possessions, diet, dress, caste, colour, creed, faith, race or nationality and, for that matter, regarding a True Master a physical body instead of Divine Knowledge, or sticking to the letter instead of catching and following the spirit of the scriptures, have often been responsible for creating misconception, misunderstanding, misbelief, mistrust, illusion and delusion and, above all, pride, arrogance, hatred, ill will, tension, strife, bloodshed and consequent divides and divisions. Also we have seen that when objectively analysed, such factors are, in reality, not divisive. However, they do prove divisive and breed alienation and antagonism when we take into consideration only the physical self of man. Swayed by such factors, we totally forget that neither there was nor there shall ever be a dead uniformity in such matters even among members of the same family, not to speak of mankind as a whole. We further forget that had God Almighty so willed, there would have been only one type of soil, climate, crop, food, etc. in the entire world. For this very reason, all the people would have had similar needs and requirements, likes and dislikes, temperament and disposition, complexion and size, even the same faith. The very fact that the creation displays countless varieties in every sphere, should serve as an eye-opener that dead uniformity was never ordained, nor even intended by the Supreme Lord. Should

not we, therefore, pose to ourselves the crucial question: Is man, an insignificant creature, mightier than the Almighty, to undo what He has 'done'? Obviously, the answer is No. However, in view of the divisive and damaging role played by such factors, we are confronted with yet another pertinent question: Is humanity doomed to destruction at the hands of such factors? The answer is again No. Man is not merely what he appears to be: he is not a mere physical entity; there is also the divine spark—spirit or soul—in man, which is much more vital than the physical frame. This, in fact, is the real man. It is this 'man' who is said to be an image of God:

So God created man in his own image.

— Bible (Genesis, 1:27)

I am Consciousness,  
I am Bliss,  
I am Self.

— Shirdi Sai Baba

Every man is divinity in disguise.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

The real man, the true man, is the Divinity, God, nothing else but God.

— Swami Rama Teertha

The moment one 'sees' this 'man', a transformation begins to take place in one's perception: all physical aspects, along with their attributes, start paling into insignificance, and oneself evolving into a spiritual being, that one really is:

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

— Teilard de Chardin

One no longer remains a self-centred individual. Rather, identifying oneself with the Universal Father, one begins to evolve into a universal being, a member of Universal Brotherhood.

I am not an Athenian, nor a Greek,

but a citizen of the world.

— Socrates

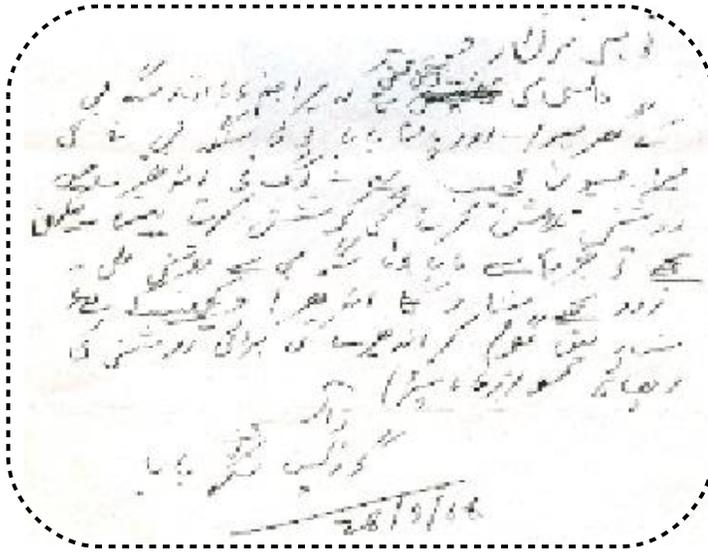
The world is my country,  
all mankind my brethren,  
to do good my religion

— Thomas Paine

All that needs to be done is that man should evolve himself into a spiritual being. This evolvment is possible when, regardless of the physical facets and factors, a True Master reveals and introduces the Universal Father to man, as already discussed. The holy communion between man and God fosters unity in diversity, the key to Universal Brotherhood. To this end, the Sant Nirankari Mission, under the benign patronage of the Nirankari Baba, has formulated five simple pledges which an aspirant has to take at the time of his initiation. These may be stated as follows:

- Not to regard one's assets—physical, mental and material—as one's own but a trust of God.
- Not to boast of one's caste, colour or creed.
- Not to hate anyone on account of one's culture, including diet and dress.
- Not to renounce the world and turn a fake saint but to lead a domestic self-reliant life.
- Not to disclose God-knowledge without the permission of the True Master.

## PRECIOUS MEMORIES



**The** real test of a personality is when one is face to face with some serious crisis. The seventies were a trying time for the Nirankari Mission, in general, and its then head, Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji, in particular, whose very life was at stake.

Baba Ji had an unflinching faith in God Almighty and he never wavered in his mission to preach and propagate Truth and to establish universal brotherhood. He had full faith in man's inherent goodness, and was blessed with rare patience and unbounded compassion and inexhaustible forgiveness to rekindle the same in the erring humanity. Like true saints, prophets and messengers, he gave primary importance to the essence of religion: God is one and we are all His children; the prime purpose of human life is to know and realise the Creator; one should always be good and do good to others. Instead of religious conversion, so dear to the religious leaders, Baba Ji believed in spiritual transformation. He had full respect and regard for all religions, Holy Masters and scriptures but always emphasised that we should follow the spirit behind the letter. He attached no importance to diet and dress, rites and rituals, since

these had nothing to do with the immortal spirit but pertained solely to the mortal body. Above all, such things depend upon several factors, historical, cultural, geographical and climatic, which vary from time to time and place to place. As such, these can never be the basis for unity among mankind. Unfortunately, such factors have become all-important for the religious leaders and consequent ill will, hatred and tension, not only between people of different religions but also between different sects of the same religion. This makes the people rigid, intolerant and closed-minded, and the task of the Spiritual Guide not only hard but also fraught with peril. It is nothing short of a miracle to bring together such people. But Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji did it. He brought about a revolutionary change in one's way of thinking and attitude towards life through spiritual awakening by establishing a holy communion between man and his Creator. With this, the walls of caste, colour, creed, faith, nationality, etc., crumble and man wakes up to the basic reality that with God as our Supreme Father, we are all members of the one and same human family; all are equally worthy of love, respect and regard; WE ARE ONE!

Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji maintained his magnificent poise even during the most critical times and, at the same time, always had at his heart the good of one and all. Even in the worst case, he never wished ill of others, nor uttered a word against even those who opposed him and his mission. For him they were also 'our own, though misguided, and it is our sacred duty to retrieve them and win them over by love, humility and understanding.'

Baba Ji was not a run-away saint, passing his days away from the worldly ups and downs. On the contrary, like the Great Masters, he remained in the thick of the world, discharging his social obligations. In fact, one of the five pledges of the Mission that one has to take at the time of initiation is: Not to renounce the household to become a recluse and parasite, rather one should lead a normal life, earning one's livelihood to support oneself as also to serve others.

Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji had a magnetic personality. His mere presence evoked not only spontaneous reverence and regard but in his company one also experienced a kind of

security, warmth, solace and bliss, which defy description. All that can be said is that in his presence one simply felt elated and blissful as if in a heaven!

The Master was always soft-spoken and an embodiment of love and humility. His face always wore a benign smile. Everybody had a direct and free access to him. He believed in personal contact. He paid attention to each individual and his welfare, so much so that of the lakhs of his devotees all over the globe, he knew thousands by their names or faces. He would not only listen to their problems and bless them with his healing touch, soothing words and sagacious advice but would also identify himself with their problems. It was for this reason that once they had opened their heart to Baba Ji, the devotees felt relieved of the worry, uncertainty and tension, as if their problems had been solved! It was, no doubt, the end of the devotees' anxiety but the beginning of Baba Ji's ordeal because he would not rest till a satisfactory solution was found out. It was not uncommon that even after a lapse of years Baba Ji would enquire from the devotees about the problems which they themselves might have forgotten! One simply wonders at the rare perseverance, limitless patience and magnanimity of Baba Ji's heart and his deep concern for his devotees when one learns that there was always an endless stream of devotees coming to the benign Master with their problems but leaving carefree. And they were quite right to do so because what people call miracles, were common happenings with the devotees who had full faith in, and unconditionally surrendered to, Baba Ji and acted on his advice. All this may sound incredible but it is a fact that Baba Ji himself always discouraged personality cult and discounted miracles.

I do not claim to have had much proximity to Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji, though I nurtured an ardent wish to see him from close quarters and was fortunate enough to get a few such opportunities, which along with the related episodes, I wish to share with the esteemed readers.

Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji had just returned from a foreign missionary tour. Along with Rev. "Nirmal" Joshi, I was standing in the porch of the Satsang Bhawan, Delhi. With his ever

smiling face and beaming grace Baba Ji beckoned me and after I had paid obeisance to him, he said, “*This or That\**, in America, one of your friends met us.” I mistook America for Africa and submitted, “Baba Ji, I have no friend there.” With his characteristic smile, he again said, “No! No!! He made a mention of you and also that you were instrumental in introducing him to the Mission.” I again made a humble submission, “Baba Ji, I am still unable to recollect the friend.” I stood lost and perplexed as I could not recall the friend to whom Baba Ji referred. However, noticing my perplexity, Baba Ji reassured me about the friend and walked ahead saying, “It is alright! It is alright!!”

I was deeply moved and tears welled up in my eyes at the benevolence of the Master who thought of me in distant lands. He not only carried the memory of the meeting all the way from America to India but was gracious enough to convey the same to me, personally.

People may describe all this as a memory feat of Baba Ji. No doubt, Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji had a remarkable memory. Yet, this gracious gesture was a sign of his tender care and affection for each one of his countless devotees, including an insignificant and humble one like me.

After a few years, my friend from America came to India and related to me his meeting Baba Ji. The whole episode flashed back in my mind and I could once again visualise Baba Ji beckoning me and saying in his sweet and soft voice, “This or That’, in America one of your friends met us.”

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\* 'This or That' was the title of a pamphlet written by me. Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji always addressed me by this 'name', which later on became my identity.

Recalling the names of those who have been associated with the publication of the Mission's periodicals in several languages, while addressing the Editors on May 02, 2008, at Delhi, Baba Hardev Singh Ji said: “Joginder Singh Ji is one of them. However, a few know him by his real name, Joginder Singh; he is widely known as 'This or That'.” Hearing this, perplexed and bewildered, I was sinking in my seat because till Baba Ji had assumed mentorship of the Mission, I had had no occasion to interact with or speak to him. Thence it dawned upon me that he is none else but Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji speaking through the person of Baba Hardev Singh Ji !

On another occasion in winter, it had rained the previous night. On my way to the Bhawan I was attracted by the aroma of hot parched gram. I bought some for Baba Ji and placed the same in several paper folds to keep it warm. However, when I reached there, I was feeling rather hesitant to make this lowly offering to the Master. At last, I mustered courage and offered the packet to Baba Ji. He smiled and enquired, “What is this?” On my telling him that it was parched gram, he felt immensely pleased and exclaimed, “Parched gram! Good.” He not only himself took some but also distributed the rest among other devotees present there saying, “It is still so warm. It is really delicious. I am taking parched gram after many years. It is really tasty.”

My joy knew no bounds as I saw the Master not only accepting but also admiring such a humble offering—mere parched gram!

Janab Syed Ahmad, popularly called Syed Sahib, was blessed with God-realisation. He was bubbling with joy. However, after a few days he wanted to meet Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji. At his request, Rev. Moti Ram Saraf, a senior devotee, and myself accompanied him to the Bhawan. Baba Ji greeted us with his characteristic smile. After an exchange of pleasantries, Syed Sahib told the Master, “Baba Ji, the vision of God with which I have been blessed quite tallies with the scriptures. However, there is a problem. During a prayer (*namaz*), a Muslim is enjoined not to think of any mortal, not even the person of the Holy Prophet. But when I pray, I feel I am surrounded by your image, your presence. This is disturbing me.” Baba Ji smiled and gave an illustration which was so simple, yet so convincing. “Syed Sahib, when you are thirsty, you ask for water. A tumbler of water is offered to you. You drink the water and return the tumbler. Actually, you need water to quench your thirst and the tumbler is only a medium. Its role is over the moment you have drunk the water. Similarly, your soul craved for God-realisation. Das’s\* only and humble role was that of a medium—to establish

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\* In his conversation and discourses, Baba Ji always called himself a 'Das', meaning a humble servant.

a holy communion between man and his Creator. Now since the all-pervading God has been revealed to you, you should always remain in *direct* communion with the Supreme Lord, pray to Him and sing His praises.”

Syed Sahib was fully satisfied and all praise for Baba Ji.

Long back I had a problem which tormented me a lot. I thought that the same was not being solved because, possibly, I did not know how to pray from the heart.

One afternoon, Revs. Prof. Joginder Singh Puri, Barq Sehbai, Hardev Singh “Almast”, “Nirmal” Joshi and I were at the Santokh Sarovar Complex. coincidentally, Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji also arrived there. After all had paid obeisance to the Master, I submitted, “Baba Ji, I have a question to ask.” He smiled and said, “You are already in the company of intellectuals and still you want to put the question to me?” My humble submission was, “Yes, Baba Ji, you alone can help me.” He again smiled and said, “Alright, what is the question?”

I humbly submitted, “Baba Ji, what is a prayer from the heart, is it always answered and how the Lord God answers it?”

Baba Ji looked at us and calmly answered, “As far as Das understands, a prayer springs direct from the core of the heart when one feels that he has no other support except that of Nirankar (God Formless). Further, it should be just and not meant to cause harm to anyone else. For example, it would not be a just prayer if one prays: God, may the wall of my neighbour crumble down so that I may get sunshine!

“As for the second part, all saints and scriptures testify that God always answers a prayer from the heart. Das's experience has also been the same.

“Coming to the last part, frankly speaking, Das cannot say the precise way how a prayer is answered by God who has mysterious ways to accomplish things. We all know that if a government wants to help someone, it can do so in so many ways. Well, when it is difficult to make out in what precise way

a government, having limited means and powers, helps one, what can be said about God Almighty who eternally governs the universe and has unlimited powers and ways and means to do it! However, rest assured, a prayer, just and from the heart, is always answered. God never forsakes his true devotees.”

All of us wondered how unassuming and modest was Baba Ji in his confession of his ‘ignorance’ about the precise way in which God Almighty works. A fake saint would have thought it a fit occasion to show off his knowledge.

It is my hobby that while going through a book or newspaper, whenever I find words of wisdom or a useful quotation or some unusual happening or some unique event, I note down it in a notebook. I had opened another notebook with a view to request the devotees to record in their own hand how they were attracted to the Mission as also their first reaction to God-realisation. However, I wished to begin it with Baba Ji himself.

On September 28, 2068, on his way to a holy congregation, Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji accompanied by his spouse Rajmata Kulwant Kaur Ji was to sanctify the home of my friend Barq Sehbai at the Kishenganj Railway Colony, Delhi. Mrs. Barq had made all the preparations with devotion and loving care to receive them. Since Baba Ji was to stay there for some time, I thought of availing myself of the opportunity.

After Baba Ji had taken tea, I humbly unfolded my plan to him. Baba Ji smiled and said, “You know Das is not a writer. You had better ask these Mahapurshas (pointing towards Revs. Prof. Joginder Singh Puri, Hardev Singh “Almast”, “Nirmal” Joshi and Barq Sehbai) for it. They are not only scholars but also poets.” I humbly submitted, “Baba Ji, I will surely request them also after you have ‘inaugurated’ it.” At this he took over the notebook and enquired smilingly, “Alright, what should Das write?” “Whatever you wish, Baba Ji,” was my submission.

Below is given the English translation of what Baba Ji recorded in Urdu, appearing in the beginning of the chapter.

One Thou Formless!

Das is fortunate to have been born to Baba Avtar Singh Ji and nursed by Baba Boota Singh Ji. People try to search for the light in the darkness but Das was blessed with the light by Baba Boota Singh Ji from the very childhood and had to roam about in the world to test badness of the darkness and goodness of the light.

Gurbachan Singh  
Baba  
28.9.68

The notebook is now my proud possession.

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## Acknowledgement

(A number of the excerpts and quotations cited in the book have been taken from my notebook and therefore errors and omissions therein are regretted).

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