

# Naumi Guru Vivekanandam

## Swami Chetanananda

Swami Vivekananda was truly amazing. When we look at his pictures and read his words, we wonder how it was possible for a person to accomplish so many things in such a short life. He was born 150 years ago and lived in this world for only 39 years, 5 months, and 24 days, although he did most of his public work within 8 years. He once remarked: 'I have given enough for 1,500 years.'<sup>1</sup> Sometimes he would say: 'I feel myself to be the man born after many centuries.'<sup>2</sup>

Sister Christine wrote that Swamiji was 'ancient but not aged, rather ageless and wise with the wisdom of all times. Sometimes he said, "I feel 300 years old."<sup>3</sup> In 1896 Vivekananda delivered a lecture in London entitled Maya and Illusion: 'It was said of me in America that I was a man who came out of a land that had been dead and buried for 5,000 years, and talked of renunciation.'<sup>4</sup> When we read these statements we feel that Swamiji was ageless and that he had conquered time.

According to Vedanta a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman, transcending space, time, and causation. Swamiji was a knower of Brahman. He existed in the past, he exists now, and he will continue to exist in the future. Although Swamiji did not initiate us, he gave us a mantra in our life breath and in our heart. He is our supreme guru. Gu

means darkness and ru means destroyer. He has literally removed the darkness of ignorance from our hearts by lighting the lamp of wisdom.

As one lamp can light thousands of lamps without diminishing its own light, so Swamiji wanted to spread his ideal and power throughout humankind. He wrote to Swami Brahmananda in 1895: 'Through Mother's grace, I alone have become equal to a hundred thousand now and will be two million.'<sup>5</sup> Truly speaking, Swamiji is now dwelling in the realm of ideas of millions and millions of people all over the world. On the occasion of his auspicious 150th birth anniversary, we bow down to him: naumi guru Vivekanandam.

God is satyam, shivam, sundaram (truth, auspiciousness, and beauty). Swamiji was a handsome person. It is the nature of human beings to admire something beautiful. Once a young woman in America told me, 'I love Vivekananda more than Ramakrishna.'

'Why?'

'Because he is handsome.'

When we read reminiscences of Swamiji, we observe that each one of the writers mentions Swamiji's beauty and his fascinating large eyes. Once Ramakrishna said to Swamiji: 'Your eyes show that you are not a dry jnani. Rather, they are like the eyes of a loving devotee.' Externally Swamiji was an uncompromising Vedantic sannyasin, devoid of maya, but internally his heart overflowed with love and devotion. Swamiji wrote in the vesper song of Ramakrishna: Jnānānjana vimala-nayana vikshane moha jāi. (Thine eyes are purified by the collyrium of knowledge: at their glance delusion

disappears.) This statement is equally applicable to Swamiji. One can banish delusion, weakness, and impurities by looking at Swamiji's eyes.

Those who think of God or great souls have a calm face and bright eyes, while those who think evil thoughts have dull faces and lifeless eyes. According to yoga scriptures, yogis develop concentration by staring at a beautiful divine form, or beautiful scenery, without blinking. This kind of absorption, called *trataka vidya*, calms the mind.

In her reminiscences, Lillian Montgomery related: 'His eyes were very beautiful, and they looked within -- that was something entirely different -- entirely new to a Western person. They were very limpid. And in some things you read, they speak of his eyes as bulging. They weren't at all bulging. It's a terrible expression to use, because they were normal eyes, but they were very large and very limpid, and you felt that the vision was within. And they were full of beauty.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1963 during Swamiji's birth centenary I met an elderly man at Advaita Ashrama who had bought 71 photographs of Swamiji and hung them on every wall of his room. He told me: 'I cannot sit for meditation, so I stand one minute in front of each picture of Swamiji and thus I get 71 minutes of meditation. Swamiji is the object of my meditation.' A true devotee of Swamiji, indeed!

Swamiji lived at Belur Math for 1 year, 6 months, and 26 days. Towards the end, he loved to work in the garden. Romain Rolland wrote about Swamiji's beautiful lifestyle: 'Like the ascetics of Shakuntala he was surrounded by his favourite animals: the dog Bagha, the she-goat Hansi, the kid Matru, with collar of little bells, with whom he ran and played like

a child, an antelope, a stork, ducks and geese, cows and sheep. He walked about as in an ecstasy, singing in his beautiful, rich, deep voice.’<sup>7</sup> Swami Nirlepananda wrote: One day a college student saw Swamiji's legs at Balaram's house in Calcutta and remarked: ‘Swamiji, your muscles are really beautiful.’ Swamiji humbly replied: ‘Look, it must be. The Master was fond of seeing me.’ Swamiji was beauty personified -- so his form, qualities, conversations, lectures, singing, playing of musical instruments, movements, work, laughter, tears, compassion for the poor, and meditation were beautiful. Everything about Swamiji was beautiful -- even his humour and scoldings.

‘Did Swamiji ever scold you?’ Swami Ashokananda asked Mrs. Alice Hansbrough.

‘Oh yes, often,’ she replied. ‘He was constantly finding fault and sometimes could be very rough. “Mother brings me fools to work with!” he would say. Or, “I have to associate with fools!” This was a favourite word in his vocabulary of scolding. And though he himself said, “I never apologize,” he would nevertheless come after the scolding was over to find me, and say in a voice so gentle and with a manner so cool that butter and honey would not melt in his mouth, “What are you doing?” It was clear that he was seeking to make amends for the scolding. He used to say, “The people I love most, I scold most,” and I remember thinking he was making a poor kind of apology!’<sup>8</sup>

It is mentioned in the Guru Gita: Dhyānamulam gurormurtih pujāmulam guroh padam. Mantramulam gurorvākyaṃ mokshamulam guroh kripā. (Meditate on the form of the guru. Worship the guru's feet.

Practise the words of the guru like a mantra. And one gets liberation only by the grace of the guru.) Now we shall explore the life and message of our supreme guru Vivekananda in the light of this verse.

*Dhyānamulam gurormurtih* (Meditate on the form of the guru.)

Vivekananda was one of the seven sages who are eternally immersed in meditation, and Ramakrishna brought him to this world to spread his message. The Master told his devotees: 'Narendra is the ancient sage Nara -- the incarnation of Narayana. He is a great soul perfect in meditation.' But now Swamiji is in the realm of meditation and one can reach him only through meditation. He is deathless -- immortal. But human beings can make him alive in their hearts through their imagination and meditation.

Fifteen years after Swamiji's passing away, Mrs. Charlotte Sevier was living in the Mayavati Ashrama, in a remote part of the Himalayas, and she was continuing the work of her guru. One day Josephine MacLeod asked her, 'Do you not get bored?' Mrs. Sevier simply replied: 'I think of him [Vivekananda].' On another occasion she said to a monk, 'I repeat the name of Vivekananda.' This is real love for the guru. Whoever we love we cherish in our hearts.

We have not seen Swamiji with our physical eyes, but we have seen all 95 photographs of him. He often looks different in different photos. When we look at those photos, we become curious to know what exactly he looked like, so that we can meditate on his form. Here are some eyewitnesses' accounts:

Swami Nirlepananda wrote: 'If you want to love Swamiji, meditate on his form -- a shaven-headed monk with a loincloth, well-built body, fair complexion, a lively beautiful face, and lotus-shaped eyes. One day when asked about Swamiji's appearance, Swami Saradananda kept quiet, commenting this much about Swamiji's eyes: "How can I express Swamiji's fascinating eyes? Only this much can be said: Namah pankajanetrāya (Salutations to the lotus-eyed One)." Another person said: "When Swamiji slept at Balaram's house, I observed that his eyes were not fully closed. His eyelids would not touch each other. In fact they were Shiva-netra -- like the eyes of Lord Shiva.'"<sup>9</sup>

Swamiji's brother Mahendranath Datta wrote: 'Once at Girish's house at Baghbazar, an astrologer checked the sole of Narendra's right foot and commented, "This young man has the signs of the conch, wheel, mace, and lotus on his feet, which are not visible on ordinary men's feet." Narendra's feet were well proportioned, neither long nor short. He had tapering fingers, and the shape of his nails were half-crescent and not flat, indicating a self-confident, determined mind. His movements were neither fast nor slow. When he was absorbed in deep thought, he walked like a hero expecting sure victory. During his lectures, his thoughts would manifest through the movements of his hands, fingers, and face. So the American people remarked: "He is an orator by divine right."<sup>10</sup>

Sister Nivedita wrote: 'He was immensely proud, in his physiognomy, of what he called his "Mongolian Jaw," regarding it as a sign of "bull-dog tenacity of purpose."<sup>11</sup> She further mentioned: 'Mr. Tata told me that when

Swamiji was in Japan, everyone who saw him was immediately struck by his likeness to Buddha.<sup>12</sup>

Thomas Allan of California said: 'The beauty of Swamiji nobody can imagine. His face, his hands, his feet, all were beautiful. Swami Trigunatita later said that Swamiji's hands were far more beautiful than any woman's. Swamiji's colour would seem to change, some days being darker and some days lighter, but usually there was about it what can best be described as a golden glow.'<sup>13</sup>

Romain Rolland learned about Swamiji from his followers and then described him in this manner: 'His athletic form was the opposite of the fragile and tender, yet wiry body of Ramakrishna. He was tall (five feet, eight and a half inches), square-shouldered, broad-chested, stout, rather heavily built; his arms were muscular and trained to all kinds of sports. He weighed 170 pounds. He had an olive complexion, a full face, vast forehead, strong jaw, a pair of magnificent eyes, large, dark and rather prominent, with heavy lids, whose shape recalled the classic comparison to a lotus petal. Nothing escaped the magic of his glance, capable equally of embracing in its irresistible charm, or of sparkling with wit, irony, or kindness, of losing itself in ecstasy, or of plunging imperiously to the very depths of consciousness and of withering with its fury. But his pre-eminent characteristic was kingliness. He was a born king and nobody ever came near him either in India or America without paying homage to his majesty.'<sup>14</sup>

Betty Leggett said: 'I have met two men of striking personality persons in my life: One was the German Kaiser, and the other was Swami Vivekananda.'<sup>15</sup>

These eyewitness accounts will help us meditate on the Guru Vivekananda. We should not limit our meditation to his form only: the more we meditate on his life and message, the more his power will penetrate our minds and awaken our inner consciousness.

### **Pujāmulam guroh padam (Worship the feet of the guru)**

In India, it is customary to worship God, the guru, or religious personalities. Hindus always adore the great teachers of religion. In 1900, in Pasadena, California, Swamiji said in a lecture entitled *Buddhistic India*: 'Why, the Hindus, they are dying to worship somebody. You will find, if you live long enough, I will be worshipped by our people. If you go there to teach them something, before you die you will be worshipped.'<sup>16</sup> In 1900 Swamiji said to Mrs. Hansbrough in San Francisco: 'Within ten years of my death, I will be worshipped as a god.'<sup>17</sup>

Swamiji's words came true even before then. In 1898 the Ramakrishna monastery was at Nilambar Babu's garden house in Belur. Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty, a disciple of Swamiji, formally worshipped the feet of his guru with dhatara flowers, thinking of him as Lord Shiva. When the worship was over, Swamiji said to him: 'Well, your worship is finished, but Premananda will be in a rage at your sacrilegious act of worshipping my feet in the flower tray meant for Sri Ramakrishna's worship.' Before he had finished speaking, Swami Premananda arrived. Swamiji told him: 'See,



what a sacrilege he has committed! With the requisites of Sri Ramakrishna's worship, he has worshipped me!' Swami Premananda smiled and said: 'Well done! Are you and Sri Ramakrishna different?'<sup>18</sup>

Swami Achalananda, a disciple of Swamiji, reminisced: 'One day Swamiji was seated on the veranda below the shrine in a grave mood, and Swami Brahmananda was behind him. I was passing through the courtyard. Seeing me, Swamiji said: "Come here, and bring some flowers." I picked some flowers and returned. Then he said to me, "Offer the flowers at my feet and worship me every day." Again he said, "Go and bring some more flowers." When I returned with the flowers he said: "Now worship the President of the Ramakrishna Order [Swami Brahmananda]. Remember, the guru and the president are one. Henceforth worship the President every day." Thus Swamiji taught us in various ways.'<sup>19</sup>

Swamiji also taught his disciples how to worship Ramakrishna. Swami Achalananda recounted: 'One day Swami Premananda went to perform worship in the shrine of Belur Math. Swamiji also went there and asked Swami Premananda to leave the seat, and he began to do the worship himself. He offered flowers a couple of times at Sri Ramakrishna's feet, and then he began to put flowers on his own head. After this he became absorbed in deep meditation. What a sight it was when he came out of the shrine! His face was shining with devotion. We all bowed down to him.'<sup>20</sup>

Swamiji's mode of worship was unique. Meditation was worship to him. When he would come out of the shrine, his face was seen to be reddish. Swamiji was then in an exalted mood. Bodhananda, a disciple of Vivekananda, recalled: 'Once Swamiji said that he would do the worship of

Sri Ramakrishna that day. So all of us went to watch Swamiji do it. We were curious to see how he would perform the ritual. First, he took his seat as the worshipper in the usual way and meditated. We meditated too. After a pretty long time we sensed that someone was moving around us. I opened my eyes to see who it was. It was Swamiji. He got up and took the tray of flowers meant to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna. But instead of placing them before the Lord, he came to us, dabbed the flowers with sandal paste, and placed one on the head of each disciple.’<sup>21</sup>

Bodhananda later explained the significance of Swamiji’s actions: ‘Swamiji was not actually worshipping the disciples. In placing a flower on each of our heads, he was really offering each flower at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna in each disciple. Thereby he awakened his presence in us. That presence took different aspects in each disciple. Some were devotional; others had the jnana [knowledge] aspect predominant. By his act of worship, Swamiji awakened the Divine in us. The remaining flowers were not in any way defiled. The same divine presence that Swamiji saw in the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna on the altar, he also saw in his disciples; and at the altar he offered the remaining flowers.’<sup>22</sup>

According to Vedanta, God dwells in all beings, so Swamiji taught his disciples to worship God within humanity. Flowers and ingredients of worship differ from deity to deity, and that is why Swamiji instructed his disciples to worship human beings according to their need. For example, one should worship the illiterate with education, the hungry with food, the sick with medicine and a proper diet, and the rich with spirituality. In 1897 Swamiji said to Kalyandev in Khetri: ‘If you want to see God, go to the hut

of the poor. And if you want to attain God, then serve the poor, the helpless, the downtrodden, and the miserable.'<sup>23</sup>

The Taittiriya Upanishad says: 'Adore the mother as God, the father as God, the guest as God, and the teacher as God.' But Swamiji added more: daridradevo bhava (worship the poor as God). He made this clear in one of his letters: 'May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls -- and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.'<sup>24</sup>

Swamiji did not come to destroy any tradition. For this reason he also introduced Durga Puja, Kali Puja, and Lakshmi Puja at Belur Math. But he made it clear what supreme worship really is when he said: 'He who is in you and is outside of you, who works through every hand, who walks through every foot, whose body you are, Him worship, and break all other idols.

'He who is the high and the low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent, break all other idols.

'Ay, fools, neglecting the living gods and His infinite reflection with which the world is full, and running after imaginary shadows! Him worship, the only visible, and break all other idols.'<sup>25</sup>

What shall we do now? Should we take up hammers and start to destroy images in temples? Of course not. This is not what Swamiji meant. One should try to understand a teaching according to its context. Swamiji

meant that for those who have just started their religious life, image worship is essential; and for those who are advanced and established in the Self, supreme worship is recommended. He was a world teacher, so he instructed each person according to his or her aptitude. As there is a difference between students in kindergarten and those in the university, so there is a difference among various spiritual aspirants.

Swamiji wanted his followers to translate his teachings into action rather than being satisfied with performing rituals. Once he joked with his disciples: 'After my death, if you make me an avatar and wave an oil lamp in front of my photo, I shall become a ghost and break your necks.'<sup>26</sup>

Compared to infinite time, this 150th anniversary of Vivekananda's birth is nothing. Rather, this is just the beginning. Eventually millions of people will worship Vivekananda, for he was a rishi, a seer of truth. He himself prophesied: 'You will see, after 200 years people will desperately cry for a hair of Vivekananda.'<sup>27</sup>

Swamiji returned to Belur Math from his second visit to the West in December 1900. The next morning he asked a barber to shave his head. This time his thick hair had grown quite long. Swamiji sat on a chair on the courtyard near the eastern veranda of the Math building. When the shaving was done, Swamiji noticed that the barber threw his hair in a corner of the courtyard. Smiling, Swamiji remarked: 'You have thrown away the hair! Later you will see, people will clamour for a single strand of Vivekananda's hair.'<sup>28</sup>

**Mantramulam gurorvākyam (Follow the guru's words like a mantra)**

M., the recorder of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, said: 'Every word of Sri Ramakrishna is a mantra.' Swamiji is the best commentator on the Master's words. He himself said: 'All the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his [Ramakrishna's] ideas.' But Swamiji also awakened consciousness in those mantras by practising sadhana, and for that reason there is tremendous power behind his words. And whoever heard him, in the East or the West, admitted this.

Swami Turiyananda said: 'Listening to Swamiji's words, even a dying person would jump up and say, "Wait, wait! I am definitely dying, but before that let me hear him once." There was so much power behind his words that his ideas and language would penetrate into the inmost hearts of the audience. People would forget time and even their own existence. Swamiji truly had the power to raise people's minds to a higher realm of ideas.'<sup>29</sup>

Josephine MacLeod described Swamiji's voice to Romain Rolland: 'He had a beautiful voice like a violoncello, grave without violent contrasts, but with deep vibrations that filled both hall and hearts. Once his audience was held he could make it sink to an intense piano piercing his hearers to the soul. Emma Calvé, who knew him, described it as "an admirable baritone, having the vibrations of a Chinese gong."<sup>30</sup>

Alice Hansbrough said: 'His voice I should say was baritone -- certainly nearer to bass than tenor; and it was the most musical voice I have ever heard. At the end of the lecture he closed with that chant, "I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute." Everyone was enchanted with his talk.'<sup>31</sup>

Lillian Montgomery also described Swamiji's voice: 'It was a mellow voice, but it had great resonance and great purity. It came from a plane of consciousness that was so far beyond the physical awareness, but nevertheless it was crystal clear and that's what cleared the mind, because it penetrated.'<sup>32</sup>

Like his guru Ramakrishna, Swamiji formally initiated very few people. He was not an ordinary guru who initiates with a mantra. He initiated people through shambhavi and shakti methods, transmitting power with a look or a touch. According to the Tantra, Shakti is verily the mantra -- and the mantra has the power to liberate human beings from the thralldom of maya.

Priyanath Sinha, a classmate of Swamiji, interviewed him at Balaram's house in Calcutta after his return from the West.

Question: Well, Swamiji, how many disciples have you in the West?

Swamiji: A good many

Q.: Two or four thousand?

Swamiji: Maybe more than that.

Q.: Are they all initiated by you with mantras?

Swamiji: Yes.

Q.: What kind of mantra? Is it connected with Pranava [Om]?

Swamiji: Yes, with Pranava.

Q.: It is said that shudras have no right to utter Pranava, and moreover the Westerners are all Mlechhas [barbarians]. How can you give them permission to utter the Pranava mantra? None except brahmins has the right to utter Pranava.

Swamiji: How do you know that those whom I have initiated are not brahmins?

Q.: All countries, except India, belong to the Yavanas [Muslims] and Mlechhas. How did you get brahmins among them?

Swamiji: Those I have given the mantra, they are all brahmins. It is true, one cannot be a recipient of Pranava without becoming a brahmin. But the son of a brahmin is not necessarily always a brahmin; though there is every possibility of his being one, he may not become so. Did you not hear that the nephew of Aghore Chakrabarty of Baghbazar became a sweeper? Although he is a brahmin, he does all menial services of his adopted caste.

Q.: Brother, how did you get a brahmin in America and England?

Swamiji: The brahmin caste and the brahminical qualities are two distinct things. In India, one is held to be a brahmin by one's caste, but in the West, one should be known as such by one's brahminical qualities. As you know there are three qualities -- sattva, rajas, and tamas; so there are qualities which show a man to be a brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, or a shudra. In India at present the kshatriya and brahminical qualities are almost extinct, but in the West now the people are moving from kshatriyahood to brahminhood.

Q.: Do you mean to say that people of sattvic nature in the West are brahmins?

Swamiji: That is true.<sup>33</sup>

One day someone asked Swami Shuddhananda, 'What was the view of Swamiji regarding diksha, initiation?'

Shuddhananda: 'Swamiji did not put much emphasis on initiation. His

aim was sannyasa. He would say: "Thousands of young boys will come, and I shall shave their heads; and their parents will come and cry that I like to see.' A shaven head indicates receiving the vows of sannyasa, or monastic life.'<sup>34</sup>

In 1949 when I was in the seventh grade I read Swamiji's Swadesh Mantra for the first time. This is the mantra that awoke Modern India: 'O India! Forget not that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget not that the God thou worshippes is the great Ascetic of ascetics, the allrenouncing Shankara, the Lord of Uma; forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense pleasure, are not for thy individual personal happiness; forget not that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar; forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Motherhood; forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim, "I am an Indian; every Indian is my brother."<sup>35</sup>

Our nature is to forget the most important things in life because our brains are weak, so Swamiji reminded us by repeating 'forget not' six times.

It is customary to repeat a sankalpa mantra before initiation, so Swamiji gave his would-be disciples these instructions: 'Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim, "I am an Indian; every Indian is my brother." Say, "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother." Thou ... proudly proclaim at the top of thy voice: "The Indian is



my brother; the Indian is my life; India's gods and goddesses are my God. India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age." Say, brother, "The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good."<sup>36</sup>

We are not aware of any other Indian having so much love for his or her motherland as Swamiji.

After the initiation ceremony, Swamiji taught his new disciples how to pray: 'Pray day and night, "O Thou Lord of Gauri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me! O Thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and make me a Man!"'<sup>37</sup>

After being initiated by Swamiji, Nivedita wrote: 'I saw him almost daily; the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed. True, he was a worker at foundations. He neither used the word "nationality," nor proclaimed an era of "nation-making." "Man-making," he said, was his own task. But he was born a lover, and the queen of his adoration was his Motherland.'<sup>38</sup>

It is customary to offer dakshina (a gift) to the guru. What kind of dakshina did Swamiji ask from his disciples? He said: 'Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad; then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy.... I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed.'<sup>39</sup>

Swamiji's physical form is no longer with us, but his voice is a constant inspiration. He himself said, 'I am a voice without a form.' The living

presence of Swamiji is always vibrating in his lectures, letters, poems, and conversations. Now and then on Sunday in the 1970s, Christopher Isherwood would read and comment on Swamiji's lectures in the Hollywood or Santa Barbara temples. Regarding this experience, he wrote in the introduction of *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom*: 'Vivekananda's living presence often becomes powerfully evident behind his words. Like all others, no doubt, who have read them aloud in public, I have often felt aware that I was sharing that presence with my listeners. Even if you try reading Vivekananda alone to yourself, alone in your room, you will probably have an experience of the same kind.'<sup>40</sup>

### **Mokshamulam guroh kripā (Guru's grace gives liberation)**

Generally *kripa*, or grace, is said to be of four kinds: grace of the self, of the scriptures, of the guru, and of God. A spiritual aspirant's self-effort is called *atma-kripa*, self-grace. It is said that 'one may receive the grace of the guru, God, and the devotees, but one goes nowhere without the grace of one's own self.' The essence of the scriptures becomes manifest to a seeker of liberation through his or her *shraddha* (faith), strength, and love. This is the grace of the scriptures. Pleased with the disciple's devotion and service, the guru imparts the knowledge of God. This is the guru's grace. Self-grace leads to God's grace. One needs humility, lack of ego, regular spiritual disciplines, and intense longing for God's grace. God and the guru are always ready to bestow their grace.

One day Manmatha Nath Gangopadhyay asked Swamiji: 'Does the guru give liberation to a man or does he achieve it by practising sadhana?'

Swamiji: 'A man is bound by his own will and that is the reason he has become a jiva, an individual soul. He achieved his individuality by separating himself from the indivisible Brahman and began to think himself separated from Brahman. How did it happen? There is no answer. If you say it has happened by an unseen power and not by his own will, then that power is called maya. It is the power of maya, which makes him feel separated. The power of maya flows eternally. Compared to maya's power, the jiva's little power is like a drop in the ocean. What can a jiva do alone? He begins to play with maya and forgets the source of his origin. Brahman (the true nature of the jiva) then begins to cry, being trapped by maya.

'Have you not seen the children turn about holding a pillar? Likewise, the jiva struggles to escape from the net of maya and shouts, "Save me." If a child says, "Remove my hand", the elderly people laugh and watch the fun. Holding the power of maya, the jiva enjoys and says to maya, "Get out." Will God then come to rescue that jiva? Rather, He will watch the fun. The little child withdraws its hands when its desire to revolve ends. Liberation of a jiva depends on giving up desires. Renunciation of desires leads to liberation.

Manmatha: 'Then what does the guru do? Why do we seek grace then?'

Swamiji: 'The jiva itself cannot see the path and begins to search for the means to escape. Then he resorts to a pathfinder (guru) who knows the way out. He shows the way to the seeker of liberation. If the individual being follows the instruction precisely, he finds the path of liberation. This is truly the grace of the guru. What else?'<sup>41</sup>

Most people sit idly expecting grace to appear. They do not realize that grace does not fall from a tree. Swamiji said to one of his disciples: 'Those who are pure always in body, mind, and speech, who have strong devotion, who discriminate between the real and the unreal, who persevere in meditation and contemplation -- upon them alone the grace of the Lord descends.'

Disciple: 'But of what necessity is grace to him who can control himself in thought, word, and deed? For then he would be able to develop himself in the path of spirituality by means of his own exertions!'

Swamiji: 'The Lord is very merciful to him whom He sees struggling heart and soul for realization. But remain idle, without any struggle, and you will see that His grace will never come.'<sup>42</sup>

Swamiji was an ever-free soul and a knower of Brahman. He always encouraged his disciples to sacrifice their lives for the good of others. He said: 'What will you do with individual salvation? That is sheer selfishness. Throw aside your meditation; throw away your salvation and such things! Put your whole heart and soul in the work to which I have consecrated myself... As you have come into this world, leave some mark behind.'<sup>43</sup>

Swamiji was a sad-guru, a siddha-guru. It must have been fascinating to see Swamiji when he was in the mood of a guru. One day he said to Swami Swarupananda: 'Look, Swarup. He on whose head I have placed my hand will not have to worry about anything. Know it for certain.' Another time, Swamiji said to Premananda: 'If my disciples go to hell a thousand times, I shall lift them up a thousand times. If this is not true, then Sri Ramakrishna is false.'<sup>44</sup> Only a sad- or siddha-guru can give such an assurance.

Sometimes the disciples were amazed by Swamiji's power as a guru. Swamiji was unique in that his divine influence empowered his disciples and made them great. He would transmit power to them sometimes through shaking their hands, sometimes with a look, or sometimes by a scolding. Whoever came within his spiritual orbit received Swamiji's grace.

In California in 1900 Swamiji told Mrs. Hansbrough two stories that he had heard from Ramakrishna. She recorded them in her memoir:

The first was a story of an old water-demon who lived in a pool. She had long hair, which was capable of infinite extension. When people would come to bathe in the pool, sometimes she would devour them if she was hungry. With others, however, she would twine a hair around one of their toes. When they went home, the hair, invisible, would just stretch and stretch; and when the old demon became hungry she would just start pulling on the hair until the victim came back to the pool once more, to be eaten up.

'You have bathed in the pool where my Mother dwells,' Swamiji said to me at the end. 'Go back home if you wish; but her hair is twined round your toe and you will have to come back to the pool in the end.'

The other story was of a man who was wading down a stream. Suddenly he was bitten by a snake. He looked down, and thought the snake was a harmless water snake and that he was safe. Actually it was a cobra. Swamiji then said to me: 'You have been bitten by the cobra. Don't ever think you can escape!'<sup>45</sup>

Has Swamiji's power ended with his handful of disciples? No, it cannot be. Swamiji was a great soul -- a conqueror of time. People from all over the world have been nourished by his ideas and teachings, and have accepted him as their guru. And so it will be in the future. The real guru is God, but God's power is often transmitted through great souls.

A week before his passing away, Swamiji said to one of his favourite disciples: 'Be possessed of shraddha (faith), of virya (courage); attain to the knowledge of the Atman, and sacrifice your life for the good of others -- this is my wish and blessing.'<sup>46</sup>

O readers, may Swamiji's blessing be showered on all of us on this auspicious occasion of Swamiji's 150th anniversary.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Vivekananda, Eastern and Western Disciples* (Advaita Ashrama: 1981), 2:590

<sup>2</sup> *Complete Works of Nivedita*, 1:48

<sup>3</sup> *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama: 1964), 168

<sup>4</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 2:100

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:315

<sup>6</sup> *Vivekananda as the Turning Point* (Advaita Ashrama: 2013), 471

<sup>7</sup> *Life of Vivekananda*, Romain Rolland (Advaita Ashrama, 1931), 184

<sup>8</sup> *Mrs. Hansbrough's Reminiscences*

<sup>9</sup> *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Jivanaloke*, Swami Nirlepananda, 115

<sup>10</sup> *Vivekananda Jivaner Ghatanavali*, Mahendra Nath Datta, 1:248-52

<sup>11</sup> *CWN*, 1:154

<sup>12</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata*, November 1936

<sup>13</sup> *Vedanta and the West*, 160:56

- 14 *Life of Vivekananda*, Romain Rolland, 4-5
- 15 *Josephine MacLeod and Vivekananda's Mission*, Linda Prugh, 32-33
- 16 *CWSV*, 3:527
- 17 *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Marie Louise Burke, 6:51
- 18 *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, 173
- 19 *Vedanta Kesari*, 1989:335
- 20 *Ibid.*, 1989:335
- 21 *God Lived with Them*, Swami Chetanananda, 66
- 22 *Ibid.*, 66-67
- 23 *Prabuddha Bharata*, 2005:287
- 24 *CWSV*, 5:137
- 25 *CWSV*, 5:137
- 26 *Jivanaloke*, 225
- 27 *VK*, 1989:335
- 28 *Yugadishari Vivekananda* (Udbodhan, 2001), 340
- 29 *Smritir Aloy Swamiji* (Udbodhan: 1994), 10
- 30 *Life of SV*, RR, 6
- 31 *Mrs. Hansbrough's Reminiscences*
- 32 *Vivekananda as the Turning Point*, 471
- 33 *Smritir Aloy*, 149-50
- 34 *Udbodhan*, 54 year 12 issue
- 35 *CWSV*, 4:479-80
- 36 *Ibid.*, 480
- 37 *Ibid.*, 480
- 38 *CWN*, 1:45
- 39 *CWSV*, 4:367, 5:16
- 40 *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom* (Vedanta Society of St. Louis: 1986), 8

<sup>41</sup> *Smritir Aloy*, 120-21

<sup>42</sup> *Talks with Vivekananda*, 57, 247

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, 223

<sup>44</sup> *Vedanta Kesari*, 1989:335

<sup>45</sup> *Mrs. Hansbrough's Reminiscences*

<sup>46</sup> *Talks with Vivekananda*, 408