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## IX. Brahman-God Realization

### 1. Worshiping Brahman-God

Indian: “Having realized Atman, the seer becomes satisfied with that Knowledge. Their souls are established in the Supreme Self, they are free from passions and they are tranquil in mind. Such calm souls, ever devoted to the Self, behold everywhere the omnipresent Brahman and in the end enter into It, which is all this. Having well ascertained the Self, the goal of the Vedantic knowledge, and having purified their minds through the practice of sannyas, the seers, never relaxing their efforts, enjoy here supreme Immortality and at the time of the great end attain complete freedom in Brahman” (Mun. Up. 3:2.5-6). “Ever glorifying Me [Lord Krishna] ... remaining firm in their vows, bowing before me, they worship Me with love and unwavering steadiness” (BG 9:14; cf. 4:11; 6:47; 9:22, 33; 11:54; 12:20). “The wise know this and worship Me with all their heart. With their thought fixed on Me, with their life absorbed in Me, enlightening one another about Me, and always conversing about Me, they derive satisfaction and delight” (BG 10:8-9; cf. 13:10).

Old and New Testament: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt. 6:5; cf. 6:13. 10:12, 20; 11:1, 13, 22; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; 1 Sam. 2:1; Mt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27). “You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45; cf. 19:2; 20:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:16). New Testament: “We are all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). “That Christ may dwell in your hearts thorough faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to

comprehend with all the saints and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19; cf. Jn. 4:23). “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24; cf. 1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:4).

Divine Eye. Indian: “I give you a Divine eye; behold now, My sovereign yoga power” (BG 11:8). New Testament: “If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light” (Mt. 6:22).

Spiritual encounters with God and angels are found in the Old Testament. They include: God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17-18) and his experience on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22); Jacob’s dreams at Bethel (Gen. 28, 31); Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3) and on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19, 34); the Lord spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11); the angelic visitations of Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15), Israel (Judg. 2:1-5), Gideon (Judg. 6:11-24), and Manoah (Judg. 13:2-25); Elijah and the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11-18); God speaking to Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38-42); and the visions of Isaiah (Is. 6), Ezekiel (Eze. 1; 3:16-27), and Daniel (Dan. 10:1-9).

The point made by Sri Ramakrishna is, “All doubts disappear when one sees God. It is one thing to hear of God, but quite a different thing to see Him.” “You see, sin flies away when love of God grows in a man’s heart.” “The other day I told you the meaning of bhakti. It is to adore God with body, mind, and words. ‘With body’ means to serve and worship God with one’s hands, go to holy places with one’s feet, hear the chanting of the name and glories of God with one’s ears, and behold the Divine image with one’s eye. ‘With mind’ means to contemplate and meditate on God constantly and to remember and think of His lila [Divine play]. ‘With words’ means to sing hymns to Him and chant His name and glories.”<sup>1</sup> “Bhakti is single-minded devotion to God, like the devotion a wife feels for her husband.... Then comes bhava, intense love. Through bhava a man becomes speechless.” “Mahabhava is a Divine ecstasy; it shakes the body and mind to their very foundation. It is like a huge elephant entering a small hut.” “But prema, ecstatic love, is an extremely rare thing. Chaitanya had that love. When one has prema, one forgets all outer things. One forgets the world. One even forgets one’s own body, which is so dear to a man.” Moved by a variety of blissful feelings, the realized soul will sometimes laugh, weep, dance and sing in praise of the Lord they adore.<sup>2</sup> “To know by one’s inner experience that God exists is jnana. But to talk to Him, to

enjoy Him as a Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is vijnana.”<sup>3</sup> “Attaining this love, the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness. The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love.” “How infinitely superior is the joy of God to the pleasure of ‘lust and greed.’” “One should rather feel joyous and ecstatic as one chant’s Gods name.” “Through the practice of discipline one gradually obtains Divine joy.” “Worship Him through the bliss of your love and devotion.... God, whose very nature is Joy and Bliss.”<sup>4</sup> This is a concrete face-to-face religious experience rather than abstract intellectual theology.

One argument against mystical experiences is that they cannot be crosschecked like sensory experiences.<sup>5</sup> This is of course due to the fact that so few people have the skill to perceive divine things. Sri Ramakrishna gives two examples where he and another mystic had similar mystical experiences with the same entity. The wondering monk Jatadhari carried an image of Ramlala the baby Rama wherever he went. Often in a blissful state he would see the form of the luminous child Rama accepting his service like feeding him. They were constant companions. Jatadhari told no one about his spiritual experiences, but when he came to Dakshineswar Ramakrishna immediately knew what was happening. After seeing the image Ramakrishna developed a spiritual love for Ramlala who would follow him wherever he went. At first it bothered Jatadhari that the baby Rama left him so he could be with Ramakrishna. Later Jatadhari became blissful realizing that Ramlala was very happy being with Ramakrishna.<sup>6</sup>

Another example of yogic confirmation follows. During the night Ramakrishna would meditate under the Panchavati tree. When Tota Puri his nondualistic guru was meditating under the Panchavati tree the branches of the tree began to shake and a tall man came down from the tree. He said I am a Bhairava a demigod, “I dwell in the tree to protect this holy place.” The following morning Tota told Sri Ramakrishna about the incident. Ramakrishna replied, “Yes, it is true he lives there. I’ve seen him many times. Sometimes he foretells events.”<sup>7</sup>

When Narendra (the young Swami Vivekananda) first met Ramakrishna he asked him, “Sir have you seen God?” The instant reply was, “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.”<sup>8</sup> What did Ramakrishna mean by “more clearly?” A clear Divine perception is more: 1) forceful and vigorous producing powerful feelings; 2) vivid producing clear images in the mind; 3) firm-solid having an almost unyielding surface or structure;

4) steady, persistent, continuing to exist or endure over a prolonged period; and 5) distinctive being recognizably different in nature from something else.<sup>9</sup>

In agreement with Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) considered spiritual realization to be a direct and immediate awareness of a person's true inner nature, which transcends intellectual understanding and sense perception. Holiness is the result of an intuitive consciousness of our own spirituality, of an internal communion with the higher realm. First attain to spiritual realization and then philosophical conceptions will fall into place and all doubts will be removed. "Divine love brings a cessation of all sorrow, suffering and pain; it lifts the soul above all bondage; breaks the fetters of selfish attachment and worldliness. All selfishness vanishes and the soul enters into the bode of absolute freedom and everlasting happiness.... Divine Love brings the highest ecstatic or superconscious state in which the individual soul eternally communes with God, the Universal Spirit. In this state of ecstasy the Soul of a Bhakta becomes intoxicated"<sup>10</sup> Selfless love of Brahman-God, seeks no material return, is accompanied by nonattachment to worldly pleasures, is fearless, accepts all life events as being under the control of the Divine Will, purifies and humbles an aspirant, and leads to the ecstatic superconscious state of existence. "In that highest state, there is no sorrow, no pain and no sufferings of birth or death, but absolute peace and happiness remain in the soul.... all desires are fulfilled, all doubts cease forever, all the questionings of the mind are answered.... In that state of God-realization, the individual soul, tracing the source of the individual will to the Divine will, resigns itself and lets the Divine will work through the individual will, making of it God's instrument. Self-resignation comes to the soul who has realized the eternal Truth. And in that self-realization he does not lose anything but gains infinite power. Then he in is infinitely stronger in his will than he was before. In that state of revelation the Divine inspiration comes to the soul. The knowledge of the higher truths comes down."<sup>11</sup>

Many characteristics of the intuitive mystical experience are provided by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975). "When we experience the illumination of a new knowledge, the ecstasy of poetry, the subordination of self to something greater; family or nation, the self-abandonment of falling in love, we have faint glimpses of mystic moods."<sup>12</sup> Religious experience is "an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man's nature but his whole being seems to find itself. It is a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one another, boundaries are broken, and ordinary distinctions transcended. Past and present fade away in a sense of timeless being.

Consciousness and being are not there different from each other. All being is consciousness and all consciousness being. Thought and reality coalesce and a creative merging of subject and object results. Life grows conscious of its incredible depths. In this fullness of felt life and freedom, the distinction of the knower and the known disappears.... The experience itself is felt to be sufficient and complete.... It does not look beyond itself for meaning or validity. It does not appeal to external standards of logic or metaphysics. It is its own cause and explanation. It is sovereign in its own rights and carries its own credentials. It is self-established, self-evidencing, self-luminous. It does not argue or explain but it knows and is.... Doubt and disbelief are no more possible. He speaks without hesitation and with the calm accents of finality.”<sup>13</sup> “This intuitive knowledge arises from an intimate fusion of mind with reality. It is knowledge by being and not by sense or by symbols. It is awareness of the truth of things by identity. We become one with the truth, one with the object of knowledge. The object known is seen not as an object outside the self, but as a part of the self. What intuition reveals is not so much a doctrine as consciousness; it is a state of mind and not a definition of the object.... the Creative Spirit is ever ready to reveal Himself to the seeking soul provided the search is genuine and the effort intense.”<sup>14</sup> “Though mystical theologies of the East and the West differ widely—though the ideal of life which they hold out to the soul differ too—yet in the experience of the saint this conflict is seen to be transcended. When the love of God is reached, divergences become impossible, for the soul has passed beyond the sphere of the manifold and is immersed in the one Reality.”

As explained by Bishop Gregory of Nyssa (modern-day Turkey, c. 330-95), that the soul gradually progresses through three ascending stages. Purification is the first stage in the soul’s struggle to become a spiritual being. This phase involves cultivating moral virtues that remove sin and error. Moral Purification from passions and thoughts of the flesh is also necessary. Next is the stage of acquiring theoretical virtues, which is the wisdom conferred by illumination. Through the sanctification of the purified soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, one gains intimate knowledge and love of God’s presence in the soul. “The soul that is led by the hand through such concepts to the grasp of what is incomprehensible, must by faith alone bring that Nature which is above all comprehension to dwell in him.” “Those who draw near to God must leave behind the knowledge about God which they have derived from reason as not rising to the object of one’s desire, and use

faith; there is no other way to draw near to God than that faith act as mediator and by itself join the mind in its quest to the incomprehensible nature.”<sup>15</sup> First “comes a closer awareness of hidden things, and by this the soul is guided through sense phenomena to the world of the invisible.... Next the soul makes progress through all these stages and goes on higher, and as she leaves below all that human nature can attain, she enters within the secret chamber of the Divine knowledge, and here she is cut off on all sides by the Divine darkness. Now she leaves outside all that can be grasped by sense or by reason, and the only thing left for her contemplation is the invisible and the incomprehensible. And here God is.” The soul “leaves all surface appearances, not only those that can be grasped by the senses but also those which the mind itself seems to see, and it keeps on going deeper until by the operation of the spirit it penetrates the invisible and incomprehensible, and it is there that it sees God.”<sup>16</sup> He contemplates the “intelligible Beauty by participation in which all beautiful things are beautiful.” “The beauty (of the Beatific Vision) reveals itself with ever-increasing clarity, the Divine majesty exceeds more and more as the soul advances, and the perpetual discovery of new delights in the transcendent realm makes each seem the beginning of a fresh ascent.”<sup>17</sup>

Augustine (354-430) wrote of seven hieratical stages: the first three being the vegetative, sensitive, and rational levels of human life; fourth is that of purification, fifth is that of tranquility due to the control of the passions, sixth is entry into the divine light (the illuminative stage), and the seventh is the indwelling or unitive stage of truly mystical contemplation.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) stressed “Then, shall we see God face to face, in the sense that we shall see Him without a medium, as is true when we see a man face to face. In this vision, of course, we become most like unto God, and we are partakers in His happiness. For God Himself understands His own substance through His own essence; and this is His felicity. Hence it is said: ‘When He shall appear, we shall be like unto Him, because we shall see Him as He is’ (I John 3:2).”<sup>19</sup>

Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) explained it this way, “Whoever has God in mind, simply and solely God, in all things, such a man carries God with him into all his works and into all places, and God alone does all his works. He seeks nothing but God, nothing seems good to him but God. He becomes one with God in every thought.”<sup>20</sup> “The highest attainment in this life is to remain still and let God act and speak in us.” Angelus Silesius revealed “Christ may be born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but if he is not born anew within your own heart you will remain eternally forlorn.”<sup>21</sup>

In England the mystics William Law (1686-1761) stressed the necessity of religious experience, “To find or know God in reality by any outward proofs, or by anything but by God Himself made manifest and self-evident in you, will never be your case either here or hereafter. For neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, nor the devil, nor the flesh, can be any otherwise knowable in you or by you but by their own existence and manifestation in you. And all pretended knowledge of any of these things, beyond and without this self-evident sensibility of their birth within you, is only such knowledge of them as the blind man hath of the light that hath never entered into him.”<sup>22</sup>

Robert Gimello considers the basic characteristics of mystical experience to be: “A feeling of oneness or unity, variously defined. A strong confidence in the 'reality' or 'objectivity' of the experience, i.e. a conviction that it is somehow revelatory of 'the truth.' A sense of the final inapplicability to the experience of conventional language, i.e. a sense that the experience is ineffable. A cessation of normal intellectual operations (e.g., deduction, discrimination, ratiocination, speculation, etc.) or the substitution for them of some 'higher' or qualitatively different mode of intellect (e.g., intuition). A sense of the coincidence of opposites, of various kinds (paradoxically). An extraordinarily strong affective tone, again of various kinds (e.g., sublime joy, utter serenity, great fear, incomparable pleasure, etc. often an unusual combination of such as these).” Unity can be defined as a union or integration of a diversity of things or as a unitary vision where there is no multiplicity.<sup>23</sup>

The goal of Raja, Bhakti, and Jnana Yoga is too temporarily not think of people, activities, the body, and intellectual ideas and to concentrate on the Divine. This is a very difficult thing to do. Sri Ramakrishna did this when he had the visitation of the Divine Mother. Remembrance of the Lord (Smarana) turns the mind away from sense-objects and destroys worldly samskaras. It is enhanced by talking about Brahman-God and reading and hearing stories pertaining to Him/Her. Remembrance is of equal value as meditation.<sup>24</sup>

A mudra is a gesture used in Hindu worship for the purpose of connecting external actions with spiritual ideas that serve as an aid in concentrating the mind on Brahman-God. It can be a hand position or it can encompass the entire body. Their purpose is to connect the individual's pranic force with the universal or cosmic force. Mudras have an effect on a person's moods, attitudes, and perspectives. In the photo of Sri Ramakrishna standing next to a pillar on his right

hand his index finger, little finger, and thumb are extended downward, while the two middle fingers are bent inward. This hand gesture is a symbol for "I love you" in the American Sign Language. It resembles the Karana Mudra that is used to remove obstacles and the Western "sign of the horns," except in the former the thumb does not hold down the middle and ring finger.<sup>25</sup> The sign of the horns is a hand gesture with a many meanings and uses in various cultures. It is widely used in Buddhism, found on depictions of the Buddha, and on the Song dynasty statue of Lao Tzu the founder of Taoism on Mount Qingyuan, China. The Jnana Mudra is used during meditation practice by touching the tips of the thumb and the index finger together, forming a circle. The other three fingers are extended. The hand is held with the palm facing upward or inward toward the heart. These mudras are used to attain spiritual enlightenment in the religions of Indian origin.<sup>26</sup> When they pray Christians often join their fingers together.

Being a religious philosopher or theologian is good, yielding an external comprehension of Brahman-God. But mysticism is preferable since it gives us an internal understanding of Brahman-God. There is no better way to feel the love of Brahman-God than through a religious experience. Advanced mediation involves having one's mind on no object other than Brahman-God, not an absolute emptiness of content. This direct intuitive experience is coherent, not contrary to reason, producing a sense of certainty. It is both a state of feeling and of knowledge. In this way one can develop a pure mind that reflects the Divine Mind. A spiritual experience is its own proof unlike an intellectual conception that other people might challenge.

For Ramakrishna it is more important to have intense love for Brahman-God than holding the right doctrinal religious beliefs. If the liberated soul is in error, Brahman-God will explain the matter to them. He said, "The sum and substance of the whole matter is that a man must love God, must be restless for Him. It doesn't matter whether you believe in God with form or in God without form. You may or may not believe that God incarnates Himself as man. But you will realize Him if you have that yearning. Then He Himself will let you know what He is like."<sup>27</sup>

Preliminary religious experiences motivate the aspiring devotee, providing incentive to continue on with their practice. It gives them the confidence that they are making some progress.

Is realizing Brahman-God like a radio? You turn the knob and get one station, turn it again and you get another station. Mind in one state of vibration make contact with Sri Ramakrishna, in another state with Jesus Christ.



For more on this subject see: *Swami Vivekananda on Religious, Ethical, and Psychological Practices*, Ch. II. Striving to Realize Brahman-God, Section 1. Brahman-God Realization.

## 2. Striving to Realize Brahman-God (Adoration)

Indian: “Turn the senses and the mind inward to the lotus of the heart. Meditate on Brahman” (Svet. Up.\* 2:8; cf. BG 13:24). “Without meditation, where is peace? Without peace, where is happiness?” (BG\* 2:66, p. 49). “Therefore you must remember me at all times, and do your duty. If your mind and heart are set upon me constantly, you will come to me” (BG\* 8:7, p. 95; cf. 3:12; 6:12; Kat. Up. 2:2.1; Svet. Up. 2:10).

New Testament: “I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15; cf. Jude 20). “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you” (Col. 1:3). “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; and pray for us also” (Col. 4:2-3; cf. 2 Thes. 1:11). “Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thes. 5:17-18; cf. Mt. 5:44; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18).

Pray in Solitude. Indian: “Practice austerity and meditation in solitude” (Mun. Up.\* 1:2.11). “A yogi should try to concentrate his mind, retiring into solitude and living alone” (BG 6:10). New Testament: “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Mt. 6:6).

Seek and you will find God. Indian: “He who worships Him [Brahman-Atman], and puts his trust in Him, shall surely attain Him” (Ch. Up.\* 3:14.4, p. 103). “Give me your whole heart, love and adore me, worship me always, bow to me only, and you shall find me” (BG\* 18:65, p. 172; cf. 9:34, p. 109). New Testament: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt. 7:7-8; cf. Mk. 11:24; Lk. 11:9-10; Jn. 15:7; 16:23; Rom. 10:13; 1 Jn. 3:22).

God in the heart. Indian: “Yet again is that Self [Atman], within the lotus of my heart, greater than the earth, greater than the heavens, yea, greater than all the worlds” (Ch. Up.\* 3:14.3, p. 102). “The Lord dwells in the heart of all beings” (BG 18:6; cf. 10:20; 15:15; Br. Up. 4:4.22; Ch. Up. 8:3.1, 3; Kat. Up. 2:3.17; Mait. Up. 6:27; Mun. Up. 2:2.1; 3:1.7; Svet. Up. 3:11, 13). “There is no purifier as great as this knowledge ... he knows its truth within his heart” (BG\* 4:38, p. 66). “As

knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge, It [Brahman] is set firm in the hearts of all” (BG 13:17). New Testament: God “who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6). “That we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal. 4:5-6). “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17).

The sage Vyasa in his commentary on Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* remarked that a successful yogi must develop one-pointedness of the mind, while concentrating on their inner mental stream of consciousness. Jadunath Sinha discussed Vyasa’s view, “Distractions can be overcome by cultivating the habit of focusing the mind on one object. The mind should be frequently withdrawn from irrelevant and undesirable objects and focused on relevant and desirable objects.... Transparency and one-pointedness of the mind can be achieved by cultivating love for all happy persons, compassion for all distressed persons, joy for all virtuous persons, and indifference to all vicious persons.... Stability of the mind can be achieved by concentrating it on the beautiful image of a Deity that flashes in it in a dream, or on the dream-image of a saint, or on the happiness that emerges in dreamless sleep in which sattva predominates. The habit of fixation of the mind can be easily formed by the repeated muttering of the mystic sound 'Aum' or 'Om' and meditating on God represented by it. Stability of the mind can be achieved by cultivating dispassion for all object of pleasure. Dispassion can be acquired by discerning faults of these objects, which consist in the fact that they ultimately yield pain and hinder the attainment of the highest good.” When meditating, concentrate the mind on an external image or picture; or on an internal mental image of the Lord, a deity or an illumined soul. It is best to repeatedly chant a mantram while meditating on the Lord.<sup>28</sup>

In detail, Jiva Goswami (c. 1511-96) explained the eleven stages of Vaidhi-bhakti for the purpose of establishing devotion for Bhagavat (God). They are: 1) seeking Bhagavat as the only refuge, fixing the mind on what is agreeable to Him, and forsaking those things that displease Him. “God delivers a person from distress, who takes refuge in Him”; 2) serving the guru; 3) listening to accounts of Bhagavat’s names, qualities and actions as given in the scriptures. “The repeated hearing of God’s qualities destroys all evils and produces pure devotion”; 4) chanting aloud the Lord’s name and the accounts of His activities. “Chant the name of God in all conditions, while sitting, or walking, waking or sleeping”; 5) thinking

about the name, form or activities of the Lord. “Recollection in general consists in withdrawing the mind from the other distracting objects and focusing it on the thought of God”; 6) feeling devotion for an image of Bhagavat (God). “The supreme Reality or God and His spiritual body are merged in the physical body of the Image”; 7) worshipping the Lord according to the methods taught by the guru and the religious books; 8) acts of homage like humbly lying prostrate before the Lord; 9) adoring Bhagavat as His servant. “Bowing to God with body, speech and mind wholeheartedly, has a right to the status of liberation”; 10) being a friend of the Lord. “Those who look upon God as their dear friend, quickly attain to His spiritual abode”; and lastly 11) total self-surrender of one’s body, mind and soul to the will of the Lord. “The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve to the Divine.... The offering of the self is the supreme offering.”<sup>29</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna taught many paths to Brahman-God, so each person should follow the yoga best suited to their nature. Concerning the majority of people he often stated, “In the Kaliyuga the life of man depends on food. The path of devotion prescribed by Narada is best for this age.”<sup>30</sup> He added, “He is born in vain, who, having attained a human birth ... does not attempt to realize God in this very life.” “As a devotee cannot live without God, so also God cannot live without His devotee.... It is the Godhead that has become these two in order to enjoy its own Bliss. That is the significance of the episode of Radha and Krishna.” “If you meditate on an ideal you will acquire its nature. If you think of God day and night, you will acquire the nature of God.”<sup>31</sup> “To reach the Almighty Lord and obtain His grace, one must practice much devotion, serve many devotees, and keep for long the company of the wise. Do not let worldly thoughts and anxieties disrupt your mind.” The omnipresent and omniscient Lord hears all of our prayers. Have faith that you will realize God by His grace. Ask for love, devotion, and self-surrender, and not for worldly possessions.<sup>32</sup> “It is not possible to develop ecstatic love of God unless you love Him very deeply and regard Him as your very own.” “God will certainly reveal Himself to you if you pray to Him with sincerity,” where there is no incongruity between your thoughts and speech.” “By meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion.” Go into solitude now and then, apart from the world and meditate on the Lord. You must meditate regularly on a daily basis, in order to sustain your spiritual life. A devotee should strive to have a part of their mind on the Lord at all times.”<sup>33</sup> “Do you know how intense our love of God should be? The love that a devoted wife possesses for her beloved husband, the attachment that a miser feels for his hoarded wealth, and the clinging desire

that the worldly minded foster for the things of the world—when the intensity of your heart's longing for the Lord is equal to the sum of these three, then you will attain Him.” “So long as God seems to be outside and far away, there is ignorance. But when God is realized within, there is true knowledge.”<sup>34</sup>

A monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) ascertained, “First, have faith in God, that he is. Be firmly convinced that to realize Him is the only purpose of life. By knowing Him man reaches eternal life and infinite happiness, and all the problems of his life are solved.” “Try to meditate within the shrine of your own heart. What that shrine is will be revealed to you as you continue the practice.” “When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation it will direct you from within.... Have intense love for God and the mind will remain always tranquil and pure.... The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment.... Spiritual food consists of meditation, prayer, contemplation, and japam.”<sup>35</sup> “Devotion, self-surrender, and all other virtues will grow from within as you practice meditation.” “If you wish to realize God, practice the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance.”<sup>36</sup> “The time best suited for contemplation is when night passes into day, and when day passes into night.” “Set apart a room or some place for daily worship; retire there every morning and evening. Perform japam and meditation and prayer regularly for as long as you can. The more you devote yourself to the contemplation of God, the more fruitful your life will become.” “In the beginning, take care that you do not overtax your brain. Go slowly, then gradually intensify your effort.”<sup>37</sup> “After meditating sit quietly for at least half an hour; for during meditation itself the desired effect may not be produced, it may come later.”<sup>38</sup>

Brahmananda added, remove all undesirable thoughts when you begin to meditate. “The worship of God with prayer and japam. By this means the aspirant prays and chants and meditates upon the shining form of his Chosen Ideal [Ishta Devata, that aspect of the Deity that you worship] within his own heart.” “As you meditate on your Chosen Ideal, think of Him as bright and effulgent, and that everything shines because of His light. Think of Him as living and conscious.” Then “it will be easy to remember God and become absorbed in Him. As your mind becomes absorbed in meditation, a fountain of joy will spring up within you.” “Repeat His name and call upon Him. He is very near, and He is dear to all. Why should He not reveal Himself? Open your heart to Him. He will guide you along the right path. There is nothing more purifying than His name and meditation upon Him. He is your very own. He easily becomes revealed to us.”<sup>39</sup> “Cultivate the habit of

constantly remembering God, whether you are idle or engaged in work.” “The more the mind is absorbed within, the greater will be the joy of meditation ... when the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed in real meditation.... Spiritual disciplines are practiced to bring purity and tranquility to the mind.”<sup>40</sup>

According to J. T. Muckle, C.S.B, “St. Gregory [of Nyssa (c. 330-95)] teaches ... a more intimate knowledge of God, a deeper penetration into all we are taught of God by faith is gained from contemplating Him as He is united to us and dwells in us in the image of our own soul wherein we can behold the reflections of His Divine attributes and in that sense the deity itself.” To have awareness of God and to feel His presence within oneself through the practice of mystical contemplation (theoria) is the goal. “The soul cannot be brought into contact and conjunction with the incorruptible God unless it itself becomes as far as possible pure, that like may apprehend like, and as a mirror place itself beneath the purity of God and thereby take on the form in herself of the archetypal beauty by her communion with it and by her manifestation of it.”<sup>41</sup>

According to the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the purpose and goal of Christian life is to attain Theosis, or deification. It is a process of transformation whereby one seeks likeness to or union with God. Theosis is attained by katharsis (purification of mind and body) and by theoria (experience of God). By following the teachings and practice of Jesus Christ and by uniting our will, thoughts, and actions to that of God’s, one can become holy and saintly. There are three stages to the process: first, purification (katharsis) by obeying the commandments of God, practicing spiritual disciplines, and by contemplative prayer; second, illumination, the vision of God (theoria) that is achieved by the pure in heart who are not subject to the passions; and third, sainthood (theosis) where one shares in the divine nature while participating in the life of God.<sup>42</sup>

Theosis in Western (Latin) Christianity is the understanding that we can be united with God and participate in His Divine nature. It emphasizes that humans realize their true nature to the degree that they are raised up toward God and united with Him. This is a supernatural gift by which a person's mind becomes totally centered on God. The experience occurs through grace when God’s divine power works in us. The *New Testament* tells us that God “has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you ... become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).<sup>43</sup>

In a profound mystical experience in 1224, Francis of Assisi (c. 1182-1226) received the stigmata of the crucified wounds of Jesus. Under Francis' encouragement the devotional "mysticism of the historical event" has developed that concentrates on scenes from the life of Jesus. Ewert Cousins indicates, "Under the impetus of Francis, it developed a specific form of meditation which became the characteristic form of Christian meditative prayer for centuries. In this form of prayer, one imagines the physical setting of the event - the place, the persons, the circumstances, for example the birth of Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, with Mary and Joseph, an ox and an ass. However one does not remain a detached spectator, but enters into the event as an actor in the drama, singing with the angels and worshipping the infant with the shepherds." Francis also practiced nature mysticism where, "Our union with nature becomes a mode of God's communication of Himself to us through His creation and of our union with him by perceiving His presence in the physical world."<sup>44</sup>

A lay Discalced Carmelite Brother and French mystic, Brother Lawrence (c. 1611-91) devoted his life to "The Practice of the Presence of God." He stressed, "We must establish ourselves in the presence of God by continually conversing with Him.... We must nourish our soul with a lofty idea of God, and in this way we can take great joy in belonging to Him.... We must give ourselves entirely and in complete abandonment to God, both in temporal and in spiritual matters. We must find our contentment in the execution of His will."<sup>45</sup> One should be guided by love through faith and humility, independent of any self-interest. Put all of your trust in God, do nothing that would displease Him and think of Him as much as possible. "All we must do is recognize God's intimate presence within us and speak to Him every moment, asking Him for His help." "To become truly spiritual the heart must be empty of all other things, since God desires to be its only Master.... There is no manner of life in the world more sweet or more delicious than continual conversation with God."<sup>46</sup> "By practicing the presence of God, we have reached our goal of being with Him.... we should continue our love relationship with Him, remaining in His holy presence at times by acts of adoration, or praise." "I have no other will than that of God, which I endeavor to accomplish in all things." "Become accustomed to His Divine company, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly in our hearts with Him at all times, and at every moment."<sup>47</sup> "We ought to stop for a short moment, as frequently as we can, to adore God deep within our heart and take pleasure in Him ... why not stop from time to time, whatever you are doing—even if you are praying aloud—to adore Him inwardly, to praise Him, to

beseech Him, to offer your heart to Him and to thank Him?... Adoration must be done in faith, believing that in truth God is in our hearts, that we must worship, love and serve Him in spirit and truth.”<sup>48</sup> “This conversation with God is done in the depth and at the center of the soul.... in a state of great and profound peace.” Once established these practices produce continual inner joy.<sup>49</sup> At the age of 24, Brother Lawrence became a lay monk in the Order of Discalced Carmelites in Paris and remained there the rest of his life. He lived a life of obedience, humility, and concern for others. A gentle and humble man, who despite his lack of education radiated holiness. He considered all work as valuable to God and that one need not accomplish great things to please Him.<sup>50</sup>

The German-American theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) profoundly informs us, “It is comfortable to live on the surface so long as it remains unshaken. It is painful to break away from it and to descend into an unknown ground. The tremendous resistance against that act in every human being and the many pretexts invented to avoid the road into the depth are natural. The pain of looking into one’s own depth is too intense for most people. They would rather return to the shaken and devastated surface of their former lives and thoughts.” The Catholic and Reformation Protestant Churches “were suspicious of mysticism because it offered men the possibility of immediate unity with the Divine apart from the mediation of the church.”<sup>51</sup>

Expanding on the ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Transcendental Thomists, W. Norris





he spiritual world is approached by turning to the God-with-us and within-us, a journey into the depths of our own deeper self. There in the depths of our knowing and willing, God is discovered to be already present as the necessary ultimate ground of the inner life of our being. He is existentially and efficaciously drawing us to Himself, though this is not yet recognized by us. This is an interior journey, not a journey outward through the senses and intellectual reasoning to locate God somewhere in the external world. Divine Being is somehow present dimly veiled to the mind of man as a kind of innate idea or a created Light. The process of bringing this implicit awareness into explicit, reflectively self-conscious and rationally grounded affirmation will take time.<sup>52</sup>

For more on this subject see: *Swami Vivekananda on Religious, Ethical, and Psychological Practices*, Ch. II. Striving to Realize Brahman-God, Section 1. Brahman-God Realization.

### 3. Brahman-God is Working Through Us

Sri Ramakrishna realized to become one with the Highest Reality the proper attitude is, "But do you know the attitude of one who has realized God? He feels: 'I am the machine, and Thou, O Lord, art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the chariot and Thou art the Driver. I move as Thou movest me; I speak as Thou makest me speak.'" God no doubt exists in all beings as the All-pervading Spirit, but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings."<sup>53</sup>

Swami Vivekananda expressed it this way, "But the great ancient evolutionist, Patanjali, declares that the true secret of evolution is the manifestation of the perfection which is already in every being; that this perfection has been barred and the infinite tide behind is struggling to express itself.... In the animal the man was suppressed, but as soon as the door was opened, out rushed man. So in man there is the potential god, kept in by the locks and bars of ignorance. When knowledge breaks these bars, the god becomes manifest."<sup>54</sup>

For Aristotle the Good-Itself (God) is a first principle, existing separately from all other things that are good. Good-Itself means "that to which it belongs both to be first among goods, and to be by its presence the cause to the others of their being good." "The cause of all goods is the Good-Itself." It is the best of all things

and the source of diminished goodness in everything else. There is no Hot-itself, Gold-itself, etc., but there is a separately existing Good-Itself, by relation to which the many things become good in a lesser degree. Plato identifies the Good-Itself with the Form or Idea of the good and Aristotle with the final cause. If there is some one ultimate final cause, it will satisfy the criteria of being the best and the cause of goodness in other things. God the final cause is essentially good and all other things are good because of their relation to It.<sup>55</sup>

The more we participate in the Good-Itself the better we become. We can think of Good-Itself as the Perfect-Itself (or Perfection-Itself), which a religious person calls God. But how do we participate with the Perfect-Itself? Paul Tillich adds, our “knowledge of God is the knowledge God has of Himself.” “Man's love of God is the love with which God loves himself. This is an expression of the truth that God is a subject even where He seems to be an object.” “God can never be an object, unless He is a subject at the same time. We can only pray to the God who prays to Himself through us.” “Mystical theology, inside and outside Christian theology, speaks of God’s recognizing and loving Himself through man. This means that if God becomes an object, nevertheless He remains a subject.”<sup>56</sup> “Agape is first of all the love God has toward the creature and through the creature toward Himself.” “God is neither alongside things nor even ‘above’ them; he is nearer to them than they are to themselves.... He stands against the world, in so far as the world stands against Him, and He stands for the world, thereby causing it to stand for Him.” “If we speak, as we must, of the ego-Thou relation between God and man, the Thou embraces the ego and consequently the entire relation. If it were otherwise, if the ego-Thou relation with God was proper rather than symbolic, the ego could withdraw from the relation. But there is no place to which man can withdraw from the Divine Thou, because It includes the ego and is nearer to the ego than the ego to itself.”<sup>57</sup>

Because of the ego which we all are subject to, we think of ourselves as a separate self-willed individual beings. By participating in the Perfect-Itself (through action, knowledge, or feeling) we become a better person. But Tillich is pointing out that it is the Perfect-Itself (God) who is working through us, yet we think (due to the ego) we are working toward God through our own effort. Brahman-God is Perfection-Itself, not something that participates in a perfection that is separate from Itself. In this process whenever we do good, Brahman-God the Perfect-Itself is working through us to varying degrees, though we often do not realize this. When we do harm we are operating independent of the Perfect-Itself. The more we open

ourself to the Perfect-Itself that is our source, the more spiritual, rational, and happy we will be. We should try to open ourself to this Reality that is our source. An atheist or agnostic can think of the Higher Reality as the Perfect-Itself (or Perfect), as the impersonal Origin of all existence rather than a Personal Brahman-God. They can think of It as a Power or Principle rather than a Person, yet It is all three.

#### 4. Feeling and Devotion

According to Ramakrishna through love and feeling one realizes Brahman-God and attains spiritual understanding. “You may learn a great deal from books; but it is all futile if you have no love for God and no desire to realize Him.” “One cannot get true feeling about God from the study of books. This feeling is something very different from book-learning.” “One is able to realize God just through love. Ecstasy of feeling, devotion, love and faith--these are the means.” “It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him.” “You must cultivate intense zeal for God. You must feel love for Him and be attracted to Him.” “It is good to have the feeling, ‘I am a lover of God.’”<sup>58</sup> “God cannot be realized without love and longing.” Unless one has learnt to love God, one cannot realize Him.” “It is good to have the feeling, ‘I am the servant of God, His son, His devotee.’” “As is a mans feeling of love, so is his gain... Verily, the Lord looks into a man’s heart and does not judge him by what he does or where he lives. Krishna accepts a devotee’s inner feeling of love.” “For you it is good to deepen your feeling toward your own Ideal. From the worshippers of the Personal God you should learn their yearning—for instance, Sri Krishna's attraction for Radha. You should learn from the worshippers of the Personal God their love for their Chosen Ideal. When the believers in the Personal God worship the images of Kali and Durga, with what feeling they cry from the depths of their souls, 'Mother! O Mother!' How much they love the Deity! You should accept that feeling.”<sup>59</sup> “One must become mad with love in order to realize God.” “The thing is that one must love God. Through intense love one attains the vision of Him. The attraction of the husband for the chaste wife, the attraction of the child for its mother, the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man--when a man can blend these three into one, and direct it all to God, then he gets the vision of God.” “The essential thing is bhakti, loving devotion to God.... A man should practice sadhana and pray to God with a longing heart for love of His lotus feet.” “If a man loves God, even the

slightest thing kindles spiritual feeling in him.” “Prahlada sometimes realized, 'I am He'; sometimes he felt that he was the servant of God. How can such a person live without love of God? That is why he must accept the relationship of master and servant, feeling that God is the Master and himself the servant. This enables him to enjoy the Bliss of Hari [God]. In this attitude he feels that God is the Bliss and he himself is the enjoyer.” “Wherein is the strength of a devotee? He is a child of God, and his devotional tears are his mightiest weapon.”<sup>60</sup>

As Ramakrishna stated, “For the Kaliyuga the path of devotion is the easiest. This is indeed the path for this age.”<sup>61</sup> Because of the problems in the Kaliyuga people are more apt to reflect on the meaning of life.

The *Bhagavata Purana* teaches nine forms of bhakti sadhana which are, (1) listening to the scriptural stories (shravaṇa), (2) devotional group singing (kīrtana), (3) fixing the mind on the Lord (smaraṇa), (4) rendering service (pāda-sevana), (5) worshipping an image (arcana), (6) offering gratitude for the blessings received (vandana), (7) serving the Lord (dāsya), (8) friendship (sākhyā), and (9) complete self-surrender (ātma-nivedana).<sup>62</sup>

In opposition to this idea the rationalist position was expressed by F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) of Oxford University, “But, if we leave this error and return once more to feeling, in the sense of that which comes undifferentiated, we are forced to see that it cannot give the knowledge which we seek. It is an apprehension too defective to lay hold on reality. In the first place, its content and its form are not in agreement; and this is manifest when feeling changes from moment to moment.... But the form of feeling is not above, but is below, the level of relations; and it therefore cannot possibly express them or explain them. Hence it is idle to suppose, given relational matter as the object to be understood, that feeling will supply any way of understanding it.... Feeling can be, therefore, no solution of the puzzles which, so far, have proved to be insoluble.... Thus mere feeling has no power to justify the self's reality, and naturally none to solve the problems of the universe at large.”<sup>63</sup>

The Sanskrit word bhakti is derived from the root bhaj, meaning “to adore or worship God.” Bhakti yoga is practiced through meditating and concentrating on a deity, chanting a mantra, performing rituals like puja and arati ceremonies, devotional songs, listening to lectures, reading holy books including religious scripture, and offering service.<sup>64</sup>

Many Westerners do not understand the importance of feeling as compared to reasoning in acquiring spiritual knowledge. The power of feeling goes far beyond the limited idea of subjective emotion as Ramakrishna points out. We must feel for the Divine. Love of Brahman-God translates into love of people.

## 5. Religious Experience and Contextualization

Contextualists (aka constructivism, social constructionists) like Steven Katz the American philosopher believe that all mystical experiences are mediated, shaped, and constituted by the doctrinal beliefs, language, expectation, and practices of the religious tradition the adherent belongs to. Both the experience and its interpretation are culturally and socially conditioned. “The experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience.” “All experience becomes interpreted experiences, while all interpretation is mediated by [prior] experience.” For example, the Christian mystics experienced a Christian, not a Hindu, Buddhistic, or Islamic world. Contextualists reject the idea of an unconditioned and unmediated “pure experience” of reality.

In opposition to the contextualists-social constructionists, they are unable to explain: 1) The similarities of the religious experiences from mystics of widely different religious backgrounds. We have mystics of different traditions performing different practices and adhering to different ideologies, yet having similar religious experiences. 2) Why some mystics teach unorthodox religious ideas that went against their own traditional beliefs (e.g., Buddha, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, Isaac Luria). Their religious experience went far beyond the religious doctrines they had been taught and in some cases contradicted them. 3) Why at times the unexpected sometimes occurs in religious experiences, the religious occurrence conveys new creative information that they had not previously known. Just as in everyday life, so also in the mystical experience, one conceptual framework is open to a wide variety of experiences and emotions.<sup>65</sup> 4) Many Perennialist (who support the Western Vedantist Aldous Huxley’s (1894-1963) Perennial Philosophy) hold to an unmediated cross-cultural “pure consciousness experience” that is nonconceptual in nature such as nirvikalpa samadhi. This type of mysticism represents a deconditioning of socially learned conceptual schemes and cognitive structure. If all knowledge is constructed then so is the contextualist’s thesis.<sup>66</sup> 5)

Ramakrishna mentioned that “God reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most. His love for the devotee knows no bounds.”<sup>67</sup>

According to the Indian conception of lokas there are many different realms in the Divine World. For example there is a Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish heaven. So when the mystic enters these spheres the experiences differ in themselves, they are not different interpretations of the same experience. Ramakrishna concentrated on a certain aspect of Brahman-God that propelled his mind to that realm. As Jesus stated, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions” (KJ, Jn. 14:2). Differing views of the Divine World presented in the various religions of the world are not conflicting since they represent different aspects and areas of the one complex Reality.

The one Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) manifests as the Personal Brahman-God (with qualities-attributes) and through numerous aspects of Brahman-God such as Kali, Shiva, the Christian Trinity, and their Personal manifestations as Avatars—Divine Incarnations. It is possible to have spiritual experiences of these manifestations of Brahman-God. In the first Section of Chapter I, the details of Ramakrishna’s visitations of Jesus Christ are described. It mentions, “When he observed that his inborn Hindu impressions were vanishing from his mind and that different ones were arising, he tried to control himself by resisting them in various ways. He entreated the Divine Mother, saying, ‘Mother, what are You doing to me?’ But the onslaught continued. The waves of those impressions rose forcefully and completely submerged the Hindu bent of his mind. The Master’s love and devotion for Hindu gods and goddesses disappeared and his heart was filled with faith in and reverence for Jesus and his religion.” Being a perfected yogi with total concentration his mind remained continuously on the thought of Jesus. What followed was a visitation of Jesus.<sup>68</sup>

We notice that when Ramakrishna experienced the presence of Jesus, his Hindu mental impressions were replaced by a Christ consciousness. In order to have spiritual experience of a particular objective spiritual realm, be it Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Jewish; it is absolutely necessary that the vibrations in the mystic’s mind be congruent with the realm he/she is seeking. In order to receive the visitation of Jesus, Ramakrishna thoroughly prepared himself for the task. These practices took his mind to the Jesus Christ Loka (World-Heaven) where he received his visitation. There he saw Jesus to some extent differently than he had previously thought of him. In these mystic experiences unexpected, unanticipated things occur. Ramakrishna noticed that Jesus’ “nose was slightly flattened at the

tip.” Years later they learned that according to one Christian version the tip of Jesus’ nose was a little flat.<sup>69</sup>

These realms exist objectively independent of our thinking about them; they are not subjective projections as some people mistakenly think. They are objectively known and grasped by the mystic through a congruent mind, which is in most cases is shaped too some extent by doctrinal beliefs, practices, and expectations of their particular spiritual tradition. Through rigorous practice Ramakrishna was able to condition his mind so that at different times he could experience the higher reality from a nondualistic, panentheistic, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu viewpoint. This included both Brahman-God as female and as male; a deity who had incarnated on earth like Rama or Krishna, and who had not incarnated like Shiva. All mystics do not have the same experience, because they proceed to different realms (Lokas) in the spiritual world.

As Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) pointed out, perceptual experiences combine the subject (the perceptual apparatus and conceptual categories of the mind) and the object (thing-in-itself). Since what we perceive combines subject and object, it is wrong to deny either one of them as some philosophers have done. Subject and object are not independent but are interrelated.

Ramakrishna experienced Jesus Christ to the fullest, and had some acquaintance with the *New Testament*, but it is not known if he knew much of his teachings, or of the Christian religion and its doctrines. We do not know if he practiced Christian ritual such as Baptism or Eucharist-Communion. Apparently, he had no interest in the theological commentaries of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, etc.

Nirguna Brahman (the Essence of God), both transcend and is the substratum of all forms of human existence including thought. Brahman is a single Ultimate Reality open to extremely rare mystics of all major religious traditions. Being totally separate from the realm of the human intellect, this religious experience (nirvikalpa samadhi) by definition is completely unaffected and not mediated by any doctrinal beliefs, soteriological expectations, language, conceptual schemes, cognitive structure, or historical and cultural constraints. Thus, Brahman being ontologically beyond words and thought cannot be described. Ramakrishna mentioned, “When the ‘I’ disappears, what is remains. This cannot be described in words.”<sup>70</sup> All the arguments of the contextualists that think religious experience is mediated by our prior ideas and use of language obviously do not apply to the Nondual religious experience that words cannot describe and is separate from all linguistic and

cultural forms. It is the Noumenon that Immanuel Kant wrote about is beyond, space, time, and all categories of the human intellect.

Swami Saradananda (1865-1927) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that there are degrees in the Nondual experience. “Becoming absorbed in Nondual consciousness is called nirvikalpa samadhi. Some have only seen the Ocean of Consciousness from a distance; some have gone near and touched It; and some have drunk a little of Its water. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say: ‘The sage Narada returned after seeing that Ocean of Consciousness from a distance; Shukadeva touched It three times; and Lord Shiva drank three handfuls of Its water and then collapsed, completely devoid of external consciousness.’”<sup>71</sup>

## 6. Liberated-Saved Through Faith

Indian: “If a man keeps following my teachings with faith in his heart, and does not make mental reservations, he will be released from the bondage of karma” (BG\* 3:31, p. 56; cf. 6:23; 9:3). “Worshipping me with absolute faith. I consider them to have the greater understanding of yoga” (BG\* 12:2, p. 128; cf. 17:3, 28).

New Testament: “Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Mt. 21:22; cf. 9:29; cf. Rom. 14:23; Heb. 4:2; 11:1, 6). “We have believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ” (Gal. 2:16; cf. 3:24; Rom. 1:17; 3:28, 30; 9:30-32; 10:4-6; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9).

Sri Ramakrishna stressed that faith is an essential characteristic necessary to attain the Lord. “Once a person has faith he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith.” “If a man has firm faith that he is the son of God, then he makes rapid strides in spiritual life.” “Faith is the one essential thing. God exists. He is very near us. Through faith alone one sees Him.”<sup>72</sup> “As one thinks, so does one become.” Worship, the repetition of the name of God and devotion, are of no avail without faith. “Unless one becomes childlike in faith, it is difficult to realize God. If the mother says to the child, ‘He is your brother,’ the child fully believes that the person referred to is really its brother.... None can attain God with the calculating nature of the worldly-minded.” “The strong heart of the faithful does not despair in the midst of trials and persecutions, but the man of weak faith is shaken even by the most trifling cause.”<sup>73</sup>

Ramakrishna’s disciple Swami Brahmananda who was a realized soul explained, “If a man has faith in the words of his guru and follows them, then all doubts and



troubles vanish. If a man has faith in the words of his guru, God will meet all his wants. Holding him by the hand, He will lead him on the right path.” “Practice any spiritual discipline with faith and devotion; in the end it will lead you to the same goal.” “Be simple and guileless. Without simplicity and childlike faith nobody can realize him.” “Faith is the one thing needed, intense faith! Let not doubts get hold of your mind.” “Real faith cannot be had at the beginning, First realization, then faith. At first the spiritual aspirant must pin his faith—blind faith, it may be—in the words of his guru or some great soul; only then can he advance toward the goal.” “Faith, intense faith, is what is needed. He who has faith has everything. He who has no faith in God doubts everything. He who has faith in God overcomes all doubts.”<sup>74</sup>

Another monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Premananda (1861-1918) told his devotees that, “We want intense, maddening love for God, firm and unshakable faith, and infinite confidence.” “Have firm faith in your own self. ‘I surely will find God, I can never fail.’ This self-confidence and firm determination are needed.” “Have faith, have self-confidence. Convince yourself, ‘We are devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. We are free souls. Assuredly we shall realize God. Have this firm conviction, and then alone you can overcome the furious enemies, lust and anger and greed.” “God is love. Have faith and conviction that He protects those who take refuge in him.” “Have faith in the words of your guru, faith in other holy men, and faith in the scriptures. Then you will reap the harvest.”<sup>75</sup>

Swami Saradananda signified that, “What really comes through spiritual practice is this unswerving faith—faith in the words of the Guru, in the Lord, in the scriptures.” “You feel depressed because your faith is lukewarm. You must cultivate self-confidence. Without Shraddha, or firm faith in oneself, man is no man; he is a bundle of negatives. He accomplishes nothing. Believe that you have the power to achieve anything that your heart sets itself upon. Instead of doubting yourself, feel that you are the possessor of infinite strength and have the might to overcome all difficulties.... Keep your faith firm and repeat the name of the Lord. You will know everything from within yourself. Your mind will become your guru.” “If you carry on your spiritual practices with implicit faith in the Lord—who is your own—you will understand everything in due time. It will gradually be revealed to you how you can cultivate absolute reliance on God.” “When you feel depressed, you must drive away that feeling by saying, ‘I belong to the Lord, He is my very own. I am His child. He is holding me by the hand and will surely do what is good for me.’ These thoughts will ring strength to your nerves and faith in your heart.”<sup>76</sup>

In this regard, Swami Nikhilananda (1895-1973) of the Ramakrishna Order in New York City in his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, wrote, “Faith, or an unswerving conviction of the existence of God, the soul, and immortality, is the prerequisite of spiritual life.” “The deepening of the devotee’s faith in every form of worship comes only from the Lord. Through this intense faith the devotee obtains the result of his worship, even though he has set before himself a limited goal. It is the Lord alone who bestows the fruit of worship.” “The word ‘shraddha,’ usually translated as ‘faith,’ is not a mechanical belief in or acceptance of the words of a holy man or book. It is an affirmative and reverent attitude toward supersensuous truths. Through faith a man is intuitively convinced of the existence of the Reality underlying the universe, and his capacity for realizing that Reality. It is not imposed from outside, but produced by the tendencies that are the results of his past action. The intensity of this faith accounts for the passion with which he pursues an undertaking.... If a man’s innate tendencies are characterized by sattva [purity], then his faith will direct him to the pursuit of knowledge and happiness. If they are characterized by rajas [activity], then his faith will direct him to the pursuit of action ... And if they are characterized by tamas [dullness of mind], then his faith will lead him to ignorance and delusion.” “The untranslatable Sanskrit word ‘shraddha,’ denotes an intuitive conviction of the existence of Truth and also a mental attitude, on the part of the aspirant, consisting primarily of sincerity of purpose, humility, and reverence.”<sup>77</sup>

In Origen of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 185-254) words, “It is of much more importance to give our assent to doctrines upon grounds of reason and wisdom than on that of faith only.... it is by the wisdom of God that God ought to be known.” Simple faith based on factors like the belief in miracles has some merit but may not be lasting. Far superior to simple faith is rational faith, which involves knowing God through reason.<sup>78</sup>

Thomas Aquinas proclaimed that genuine faith is not merely a natural human capacity, but requires the Lord’s grace to be effective. It is an act of the will, moved by the gift of heavenly grace toward the acceptance of that which is revealed to us by God. “Those things which are of faith surpass human reason, and hence they do not come to man’s knowledge unless God reveals them.... Since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must exist in him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly, and this is God.”<sup>79</sup> “The act of faith is to believe, as stated above, which is an act of the intellect

determined to one object by the will's command. Hence, an act of faith is related both to the object of the will, that is, to the good and the end, and to the object of the intellect, that is to the true.... Faith is a habit of the mind, whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect accent to what is non-apparent."<sup>80</sup> "In many respects faith perceives the invisible things of God in a higher way than natural reason does in proceeding to God from His creatures."<sup>81</sup> By faith we can know sublime things about God that are not discerned through reason. Yet, there is no contradiction between faith and reason. "A man's faith may be ascribed as being greater, in one way, on the part of his intellect, on account of its greater certitude and firmness, and, in another way, on the part of the will, on account of his greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence."<sup>82</sup>

Martin Luther (1483-1546) taught, "If good works do not follow, it is certain that this faith in Christ does not dwell in our hearts." "Works are a certain sign, like a seal on a letter, which makes me certain that my faith is genuine. As a result if I examine my heart and find that my works are done in love, then I am certain that my faith is genuine. If I forgive, then my forgiving makes me certain that my faith is genuine and assures me and demonstrates my faith to me."<sup>83</sup> Faith is receiving God when He has given Himself to us along with an unconditional trust in His word. Faith increases when a believer is inwardly and spiritually convinced that God is speaking to them in their heart. This involves a direct relationship to Christ, an unconditional loving trust and confidence in His mercy, knowing that you have been accepted by God.<sup>84</sup>

On this subject John Calvin (1509-64) explained, "We never dream either of a faith destitute of good works, or of a justification unattended by them: this is the sole difference, that while we acknowledge a necessary connection between faith and good works, we attribute justification, not to works, but to faith. Our reason for this we can readily explain, if we only turn to Christ, towards whom faith is directed, and from whom it receives all its virtue. Why then are we justified by faith? Because by faith we apprehend the righteousness of Christ, which is the only medium of our reconciliation to God. But this you cannot not attain without at the same time attaining to sanctification."<sup>85</sup>

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) the first modern Existentialist realized that some religious doctrines involve paradoxes because they are beyond the limits of human reason. Due to the limitations of the human intellect some religious matters cannot be known. Consequently, he placed the emphasis on authentic religious faith based on a reliable source, a commitment and inner passionate involvement that

goes far beyond accepting certain ideas. Faith is a personal experience that cannot be taught to someone.<sup>86</sup>

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) a prominent Reformed (Calvinist) Dutch scholar and theologian on his deathbed made this insightful statement, "My learning does not help me now; neither does my Dogmatics; faith alone saves me." Implying that scholarship by itself however necessary and valuable must be translated into trust in God.<sup>87</sup>

Paul Tillich realized that a lack of faith is a form of unbelief, which generates human estrangement from God. Unbelief "means the act or state in which man in the totality of his being turns away from God. In his existential self-realization he turns toward himself and his world and loses his essential unity with the ground of being and his world.... Unbelief is the separation of man's will from the will of God.... Man's unbelief is his estrangement from God in the center of his being."<sup>88</sup> Conversely, "Faith formally or generally defined, is the state of being grasped by that toward which self-transcendence aspires, the ultimate in being and meaning. In a short formula, one can say that faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern.... Faith is the state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence and opened to the transcendent unity of unambiguous life. In relation to the Christological assertion, one could say that faith is the state of being grasped by the New Being as it is manifest in Jesus as the Christ."<sup>89</sup> Faith is being opened to God and not the acceptance of a body of religious dogmas. Having faith does not mean we should accept or reject an idea without evidence. An act of faith involves the total self with its practical, theoretical, and emotional aspects.<sup>90</sup>

Have faith in Brahman-God, the words of the guru, other holy men, in the scriptures, and in yourself. Faith is more important than intellectual assent to theological doctrines. It involves the total self being opened to Brahman-God. It is important to have faith and trust that Brahman-God will protect us during our trials and tribulations. There are degrees of faith, being that the faith of an ordinary devotee is less than the faith of a realized soul. It is enhanced by reflecting on holy books, which remove doubt and yield the conviction of the truth of the scriptures. Most important is to realize that Brahman-God loves us and wants to help us, but we must comply by giving our consent. In its most mature form, faith is grounded in authentic insight, discrimination, and religious experience. The realized soul has unswerving faith and devotion to the Lord, and is free of doubts and all forms of selfishness. There is a difference between existential faith that we are progressing

toward Brahman-God and intellectual faith in the religious ideas we hold. The Sanskrit word shraddha mentioned above is a cognate of the Latin credere “to believe,” and the English credo and creed.

Religious faith concerns belief in: Brahman-God; the ideas of an Avatara, founder of a religion or a denomination, a guru, cleric, or an associate; ideas presented in scripture, a book, a lecture, or from an associate; the value of a spiritual way of life; an organization; and/or that we are on the right path and have the protection of the Lord. It is enhanced by living a moral life, willingness to make sacrifices, practicing self-surrender, working for the good of the religion, developing devotion, study, modifying ones way of life, meditation and prayer, attending lectures, feeling love and compassion for and serving others, and humility. The devotee seeks the Lord’s grace, a better understanding of Brahman-God, attempts to follow the ideals and the example of the life of the founder. Faith is not static but the devotee strives to develop, grow, and deepen their faith bringing about changes in them.<sup>91</sup> Most important, the devotee should strive to have complete trust that the Lord will take charge of their life and make things happen the way they should.

Faith is believing in the existence of Brahman-God, the Holy Scriptures, a religion, a proposition, etc. Faith can deal with feelings (affective) in the heart, knowledge in the mind, or a practical commitment through action of the will. It is a divinely inspired gift of grace from Brahman-God that generates a religious response in feeling, thought, and deed. Faith is not static but develops, grows, and deepens over time.<sup>92</sup>

There is existential faith that concerns life events that are grounded in personal action, enthusiasm, and passionate commitment. An active religious life is based on will, feeling, and practice more than on theory. Faith is a matter of confidence in one’s actions, personal responsibility, and practical reason. By contrast, there is conceptual epistemic faith that deals with theories and beliefs. Most of the philosophical literature concentrates on this type of faith. It considers faith more important than reason due partly to the limits of human rationality.

The faith that Sri Ramakrishna had is far more developed than that of a person just entering into religious life. There are degrees of faith stretching from a beginner through intermediaries up to an illumed soul. They use the word faith because there is a common element found at any level, which Wittgenstein refers to as a family resemblance. To differentiate between the various levels of faith, perhaps it is best to have a preceding word at each stage such as preliminary or

rudimentary faith at the lowest level and illumined faith at the highest. Also, there are different types of faith such as intellectual that deal with ideas and existential which concerns life events.

To believe in the importance having religious faith is not to deny the value of reason. Faith and reason depend on each other. All of our actions are based on faith including the use of reason. First the devotee uses reason to decide which ideas to have faith in.

## 7. Bhavamukha

Swami Saradananda tells us about Sri Ramakrishna, “Because he dwelt in bhavamukha, the whole world always appeared to him to be made of ideas. He felt as though every animate and inanimate object—men and women, cows and horses, wood and earth—was rising and floating in the Cosmic Mind as different aggregates of ideas. The infinite indivisible Brahman was manifest within these ideas in varying degrees--in some places more, some less, and in other places It did not appear to be present because It was hidden behind thick veils.” “It was as if innumerable waves of ideas were rising, floating, playing, and dissolving within the Cosmic Mind. He felt that his own body, mind, and I-consciousness—as well as those of other beings—formed waves in that Cosmic Mind..... [concerning] insentient matter ... he saw Its true nature and experienced It as the living, conscious ... Not only that, the Master saw innumerable waves of ideas arising in the Cosmic Mind because of that Cosmic I. And because ordinary people see the waves of ideas more or less in parts, their individual little ‘I’s’ perceive It to be the external world and its various objects, and thus they speak, move, and function in this world. The Master saw that the individual little ‘I’s’ exist and function by the power of the Cosmic I.... This Cosmic I is the ‘I’ of God or the Divine Mother.”<sup>93</sup> With Divine eyes Sri Ramakrishna would see the world differently than we do with human eyes. Human perception sees phenomenal reality, but not Ultimate Reality. Here the Reality is not Nirguna Brahman as in Advaita Vedanta, but Saguna Brahman or the Cosmic Mind. The reality is the way the omniscient Brahman-God perceives the world.

## 8. Jivanmukta

Concerning a jivanmukta, one who has been liberated in this life, Sri Ramakrishna stated, “Even after attaining Knowledge through the guru’s grace, one

can very well live in the world as a jivanmukta.” "The sign of a man having realized God is that he ... has become utterly free from the consciousness that he is the body. He does not feel happy or unhappy with the happiness or unhappiness of the body. He does not seek the comforts of the body. He roams about in the world as a jivanmukta, one liberated in life.” “He has attained this knowledge of Brahman is a jivanmukta, liberated while living in the body.” “He who knows God and realizes Him is able to go beyond maya. He who firmly believes that God alone is the Doer and he himself a mere instrument is a jivanmukta, a free soul through living in a body.”<sup>94</sup>

In his writings Swami Nikhilananda capably described a jivanmukta as, “Having himself crossed the ocean of birth and death, he helps others to the shore of Immortality. Such a man keeps religion alive, not the erudite theologians. A jivanmukta is freed from the results of action. The stored-up impressions of past actions, which, in the case of an unillumined person, bring about future embodiments, cannot, in his case, produce any fruit. Actions performed by him after his experience of the nirvikalpa samadhi do not cling to him, because he is free from desire and ego. Whether he is in samadhi or conscious of the outer world, his illumination is steady and his bliss constant. Though he may sometimes seem to others to be like an unillumined person in respect to hunger, thirst, or sleep, yet he himself is never oblivious of his real nature of Immortal Consciousness. Free from desires, worries, and fears, he is not identified with the body though he still possesses one.... His compassion for living beings is without bounds.... He cannot do anything that is not good and not conducive to the welfare of others.”<sup>95</sup>

According to a doctrine of John Wesley (1703-91) the founder of the Methodist denomination, a believer who has been justified by faith, can attain Christian perfection in this life. “By perfection, I mean the humble, patient, gentle love of God and our neighbor ruling our tempers, words and actions.”<sup>96</sup> This event might be preceded by a long period of effort, but instantaneous perfection is characterized by a sudden and total transformation. Perfection is accompanied by the assurance that the aspirant has been absolved of their sins. God’s gift of holiness which is attained by only a few people, is accompanied by a personal knowledge that one had been freed from all voluntary sins by a direct act of God. Involuntary sins are still a possibility. A “Theology of Perfection” is supported by the *New Testament*, which speaks of people who attained perfection in this world, and say that others can do so also. Wesley appealed to Biblical quotations to support his claim that “a Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin.” Then

there is “pure love reigning alone in the heart and life.” He stated that he had met people who could honestly say, “I feel no sin, but all love. I pray, rejoice, give thanks without ceasing. And I have as clear an inward witness that I am fully renewed as that I am justified.”<sup>97</sup> “All our perfection is in Christ. Our whole Christian perfection is faith in the blood of Christ. All Christian perfection is imputed and not inherent. We are perfect in Christ. In ourselves we are never perfect.”<sup>98</sup>

For more on Jivanmukta see SVRP, Ch. XII. Liberation-Salvation and Samadhi, Section 2. Jivanmukta: Reaching Partial or Full Perfection in this Life.

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<sup>4</sup> GSR, pp. 347l, 385m, 501d, 640h, 875j.  
<sup>5</sup> Medhananda, pp. 199-203.  
<sup>6</sup> Saradananda, pp. 275-76, 574-76, 579-80.  
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<sup>9</sup> David Hume (1711-76) mentioned the first four in another context, and Rene Descartes (1596-1650) discusses the second and fifth (Copleston, IV, pp. 97-98; V, pp. 263, 289).  
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<sup>19</sup> CG, III, 51.



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- <sup>93</sup> Saradananda, pp. 408, 446-47.
- <sup>94</sup> GSR, pp. 233e, 629d, 719g, 893l.
- <sup>95</sup> Shankara, *Self-Knowledge (Atmabodha)*, Swami Nikhilananda, tr. (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970), pp. 110-12.
- <sup>96</sup> Gordon Wakefield, ed., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 298.
- <sup>97</sup> John Kent, *The End of the Line?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 15-17; Van Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964, 1979), pp. 178-79.
- <sup>98</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 174.