



Finding God in the World: Advice to Householders

Ramakrishna

THE MASTER WAS CONVERSING with Kedar and some other devotees in his room in the temple garden. Kedar was a government official and had spent several years at Dacca, in East Bengal, where he had become a friend of Vijay Goswami. The two would spend a great part of their time together, talking about Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual experiences. Kedar had once been a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He followed the path of bhakti. Spiritual talk always brought tears to his eyes.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Kedar was very happy that day, having arranged a religious festival for Sri Ramakrishna. A singer had been hired by Ram, and the whole day passed in joy.

The Master explained to the devotees the secret of communion with God.

MASTER: "With the realization of Satchidananda one goes into samadhi. Then duties drop away. Suppose I have been talking about the ostad and he arrives. What need is there of talking about him then? How long does the bee buzz around? So long as it isn't sitting on a flower. But it will not do for the sadhaka to renounce duties. He should perform his duties, such as worship, japa, meditation, prayer, and pilgrimage.

"If you see someone engaged in reasoning even after he has realized God, you may liken him to a bee, which also buzzes a little even while sipping honey from a flower."

The Master was highly pleased with the ostad's music. He said to the musician, "There is a special manifestation of God's power in a man who has any outstanding gift, such as proficiency in music."

MUSICIAN: "Sir, what is the way to realize God?"

MASTER: "Bhakti is the one essential thing. To be sure. God exists in all beings. Who, then, is a devotee? He whose mind dwells on God. But this is not possible as long as one has egotism and vanity. The water of God's grace cannot collect on the high mound of egotism. It runs down. I am a mere machine.

(To Kedar and the other devotees) "God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.

"You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him. Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as 'Baba' or 'Papa', but the babies can at best call him 'Ba' or 'Pa'. Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Hazra on the long northeast verandah of his room,

when

M. arrived. He saluted the Master reverently.

MASTER: "I should like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar a few times more. The painter first draws the general outlines and then puts in the details and colours at his leisure. The moulder first makes the image out of clay, then plasters it, then gives it a coat of whitewash, and last of all paints it with a brush. All these steps must be taken successively. Vidyasagar is fully ready, but his inner stuff is covered with a thin layer. He is now engaged in doing good works; but he doesn't know what is within himself. Gold is hidden within him. God dwells within us. If one knows that, one feels like giving up all activities and praying to God with a yearning soul."

So the Master talked with M. — now standing, now pacing up and down the long verandah.

MASTER: "A little spiritual discipline is necessary in order to know what lies within."

M: "Is it necessary to practise discipline all through life?"

MASTER: "No. But one must be up and doing in the beginning. After that one need not work hard. The helmsman stands up and clutches the rudder firmly as long as the boat is passing through waves, storms, high wind, or around the curves of a river; but he relaxes after steering through them. As soon as the boat passes the curves and the helmsman feels a favourable wind, he sits comfortably and just touches the rudder. Next he prepares to unfurl the sail and gets ready for a smoke. Likewise, the aspirant enjoys peace and calm after passing the waves and storms of 'woman and gold'.

"Some are born with the characteristics of the yogi; but they too should be careful. It is 'woman and gold' alone that is the obstacle; it makes them deviate from the path of yoga and drags them into worldliness. Perhaps they have some desire for enjoyment. After fulfilling their desire, they again direct their minds to God and thus recover their former state of mind, fit for the practise of yoga.

"Have you ever seen the spring trap for fish, called the 'satka-kal'?"

M: "No, sir, I haven't seen it."

MASTER: "They use it in our part of the country. One end of a bamboo pole is fastened in the ground, and the other is bent over with a catch. From this end a line with a hook hangs over the water, with bait tied to the hook. When the fish swallows the bait, suddenly the bamboo jumps up and regains its upright position.

"Again, take a pair of scales, for example. If a weight is placed on one side, the lower needle moves away from the upper one. The lower needle is the mind, and the upper one, God. The meeting of the two is yoga.

"Unless the mind becomes steady there cannot be yoga. It is the wind of worldliness that always disturbs the mind, which may be likened to a candle-flame. If that flame doesn't move at all, then one is said to have attained yoga.

"Woman and gold' alone is the obstacle to 'yoga. Always analyse what you see. What is there in the body of a woman? Only such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, and the like. Why should one love such a body?

"Sometimes I used to assume a rajasic mood in order to practise renunciation. Once I had the desire to put on a gold-embroidered robe, wear a ring on my finger, and smoke a hubble-bubble with a long pipe. Mathur Babu procured all these things for me. I wore the gold-embroidered robe and said to myself after a while, 'Mind! This is what is called a gold-embroidered robe.' Then I took it off and threw it away. I couldn't stand the robe any more. Again I said to myself, 'Mind! This is called a shawl, and this a ring, and this, smoking a hubble-bubble with a long pipe.' I threw those things away once for all, and the desire to enjoy them never arose in my mind again."

It was almost dusk. The Master and M. stood talking alone near the door on the southeast verandah.

MASTER (*to M.*): "The mind of the yogi is always fixed on God, always absorbed in the Self. You can recognize such a man by merely looking at him. His eyes are wide open, with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs, and there is a vacant look in her eyes. Can you show me such a picture?"

M: "I shall try to get one."

As evening came on, the temples were lighted up. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his small couch, meditating on the Divine Mother. Then he chanted the names of God. Incense was burnt in the room, where an oil lamp had been lighted. Sounds of conch-shells and gongs came floating on the air as the evening worship began in the temple of Kali. The light of the moon flooded all the quarters. The Master again spoke to M.

MASTER: "Perform your duties in an unselfish spirit. The work that Vidyasagar is engaged in is very good. Always try to perform your duties without desiring any result."

M: "Yes, sir. But may I know if one can realize God while performing one's duties? Can 'Rama' and 'desire' coexist? The other day I read in a Hindi couplet: 'Where Rama is, there desire cannot be; where desire is, there Rama cannot be.'"

MASTER: "All, without exception, perform work. Even to chant the name and glories of God is work, as is the meditation of the non-dualist on 'I am He'. Breathing is also an activity. There is no way of renouncing work altogether. So do your work, but surrender the result to God."

M: "Sir, may I make an effort to earn more money?"

MASTER: "It is permissible to do so to maintain a religious family. You may try to increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not the earning of money, but the service of God. Money is not harmful if it is devoted to the service of God."

M: "How long should a man feel obliged to do his duty toward his wife and children?"

MASTER: "As long as they feel pinched for food and clothing. But one need not take the responsibility of a son when he is able to support himself. When the young fledgling learns to pick its own food, its mother pecks it if it comes to her for food."

M: "How long must one do one's duty?"

MASTER: "The blossom drops off when the fruit appears. One doesn't have to do one's duty after the attainment of God, nor does one feel like doing it then.

"If a drunkard takes too much liquor he cannot retain consciousness. If he takes only two or three glasses, he can go on with his work. As you advance nearer and nearer to God, He will reduce your activities little by little. Have no fear.

"Finish the few duties you have at hand, and then you will have peace. When the mistress of the house goes to bathe after finishing her cooking and other household duties, she won't come back, however you may shout after her."

M: "Sir, what is the meaning of the realization of God? What do you mean by God-vision? How does one attain it?"

MASTER: "According to the Vaishnavas the aspirants and the seers of God may be divided into different groups. These are the pravartaka, the sadhaka, the siddha, and the siddha of the siddha. He who has just set foot on the path may be called a pravartaka. He may be called a sadhaka who has for some time been practising spiritual disciplines such as worship, japa, meditation, and the chanting of God's name and glories. He may be called a siddha who has known from his inner experience that God exists. An analogy is given in the Vedanta to explain this. The master of the house is asleep in a dark room. Someone is groping in the darkness to find him. He touches the couch and says, 'No, it is not he.' He touches the window and says, 'No, it is not he.' He touches the door and says, 'No, it is not he.' This is known in the Vedanta as the process of 'Neti, neti', 'Not this, not this'. At

last his hand touches the master's body and he exclaims, 'Here he is!' In other words, he is now conscious of the 'existence' of the master. He has found him, but he doesn't yet know him intimately.

"There is another type, known as the siddha of the siddha, the 'supremely perfect'. It is quite a different thing when one talks to the master intimately, when one knows God very intimately through love and devotion. A siddha has undoubtedly attained God, but the 'supremely perfect' has known God very intimately.

"But in order to realize God, one must assume one of these attitudes: santa, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya, or madhur.

"Santa, the serene attitude. The rishis of olden times had this attitude toward God. They did not desire any worldly enjoyment. It is like the single-minded devotion of a wife to her husband. She knows that her husband is the embodiment of beauty and love, a veritable Madan.

"Dasya, the attitude of a servant toward his master. Hanuman had this attitude toward Rama. He felt the strength of a lion when he worked for Rama. A wife feels this mood also. She serves her husband with all her heart and soul. A mother also has a little of this attitude, as Yasoda had toward Krishna.

"Sakhya, the attitude of friendship. Friends say to one another, 'Come here and sit near me.' Sridama and other friends sometimes fed Krishna with fruit, part of which they had already eaten, and sometimes climbed on His shoulders.

"Vatsalya, the attitude of a mother toward her child. This was Yasoda's attitude toward Krishna. The wife, too, has a little of this. She feeds her husband with her very life-blood, as it were. The mother feels happy only when the child has eaten to his heart's content. Yasoda would roam about with butter in her hand, in order to feed Krishna.

"Madhur, the attitude of a woman toward her paramour. Radha had this attitude toward Krishna. The wife also feels it for her husband. This attitude includes all the other four."

M: "When one sees God does one see Him with these eyes?"

MASTER: "God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a 'love body', endowed with 'love eyes', 'love ears', and so on. One sees God with those 'love eyes'. One hears the voice of God with those 'love ears'. One even gets a sexual organ made of love."

At these words M. burst out laughing. The Master continued, unannoyed, "With this 'love body' the soul communes with God."

M. again became serious.

MASTER: "But this is not possible without intense love of God. One sees nothing but God everywhere when one loves Him with great intensity. It is like a person with jaundice, who sees everything yellow. Then one feels, 'I am verily He.'

"A drunkard, deeply intoxicated, says, 'Verily I am Kali!' The gopis, intoxicated with love, exclaimed, 'Verily I am Krishna!

"One who thinks of God, day and night, beholds Him everywhere. It is like a man's seeing flames on all sides after he has gazed fixedly at one flame for some time."

"But that isn't the real flame", flashed through M.'s mind.

Sri Ramakrishna, who could read a man's inmost thought, said: "One doesn't lose consciousness by thinking of Him who is all Spirit, all Consciousness. Shivanath once remarked that too much thinking about God confounds the brain. Thereupon I said to him, 'How can one become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness?'"

M: "Yes, sir, I realize that. It isn't like thinking of an unreal object. How can a man lose his intelligence if he always fixes his mind on Him whose very nature is eternal Intelligence?"

MASTER (*with pleasure*): "It is through God's grace that you understand that. The

doubts of the mind will not disappear without His grace. Doubts do not disappear without Self-realization.

“But one need not fear anything if one has received the grace of God. It is rather easy for a child to stumble if he holds his father’s hand; but there can be no such fear if the father holds the child’s hand. A man does not have to suffer any more if God, in His grace, removes his doubts and reveals Himself to him. But this grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practised spiritual discipline. The mother feels compassion for her child when she sees him running about breathlessly. She has been hiding herself; now she appears before the child.”

“But why should God make us run about?” thought M.

Immediately Sri Ramakrishna said: “It is His will that we should run about a little. Then it is great fun. God has created the world in play, as it were. This is called Mahamaya, the Great Illusion. Therefore one must take refuge in the Divine Mother, the Cosmic Power Itself. It is She who has bound us with the shackles of illusion. The realization of God is possible only when those shackles are severed.”

The Master continued: “One must propitiate the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy, in order to obtain God’s grace. God Himself is Mahamaya, who deludes the world with Her illusion and conjures up the magic of creation, preservation, and destruction. She has spread this veil of ignorance before our eyes. We can go into the inner chamber only when She lets us pass through the door. Living outside, we see only outer objects, but not that Eternal Being, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Therefore it is stated in the Purana that deities like Brahma praised Mahamaya for the destruction of the demons Madhu and Kaitabha.

“Sakti alone is the root of the universe. That Primal Energy has two aspects: vidya and avidya. Avidya deludes. Avidya conjures up ‘woman and gold’, which casts the spell. Vidya begets devotion, kindness, wisdom, and love, which lead one to God. This avidya must be propitiated, and that is the purpose of the rites of Sakti worship. (In this worship a woman is regarded as the representation of the Divine Mother.)

“The devotee assumes various attitudes toward Sakti in order to propitiate Her: the attitude of a handmaid, a ‘hero’, or a child. A hero’s attitude is to please Her even as a man pleases a woman through intercourse.

“The worship of Sakti is extremely difficult. It is no joke. I passed two years as the handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my natural attitude has always been that of a child toward its mother. I regard the breasts of any woman as those of my own mother.

“Women are, all of them, the veritable images of Sakti. In northwest India the bride holds a knife in her hand at the time of marriage; in Bengal, a nut-cutter. The meaning is that the bridegroom, with the help of the bride, who is the embodiment of the Divine Power, will sever the bondage of illusion. This is the ‘heroic’ attitude. I never worshipped the Divine Mother that way. My attitude toward Her is that of a child toward its mother.

“The bride is the very embodiment of Sakti. Haven’t you noticed, at the marriage ceremony, how the groom sits behind like an idiot? But the bride — she is so bold!

“After attaining God one forgets His external splendour, the glories of His creation. One doesn’t think of God’s glories after one has seen Him. The devotee, once immersed in God’s Bliss, doesn’t calculate any more about outer things. When I see Narendra, I don’t need to ask him: ‘What’s your name? Where do you live?’ Where is the time for such questions? Once a man asked Hanuman which day of the fortnight it was. ‘Brother,’ said Hanuman, ‘I don’t know anything of the day of the week, or the fortnight, or the position of the stars. I think of Rama alone....’”

M. (*to the Master*): “What should one do if one’s wife says: ‘You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide.’?”

MASTER (*in a serious tone*): “Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life. Let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband’s spiritual life is an ungodly wife.”

Immersed in deep thought, M. stood leaning against the wall. Narendra and the other devotees remained silent a few minutes. The Master exchanged several words with them; then, suddenly going to M., he whispered in his ear: “But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control — the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband’s part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example.”

This had a most soothing effect on M.’s worried mind. All the while he had been thinking: “Let her commit suicide. What can I do?”

M. (*to the Master*): “This world is a terrible place indeed.”

MASTER (*to the devotees*): “That is the reason Chaitanya said to his companion Nityananda, ‘Listen, brother, there is no hope of salvation for the worldly-minded.’”

On another occasion the Master had said to M. privately: “Yes, there is no hope for a worldly man if he is not sincerely devoted to God. But he has nothing to fear if he remains in the world after realizing God. Nor need a man have any fear whatever of the world if he attains sincere devotion by practising spiritual discipline now and then in solitude. Chaitanya had several householders among his devotees, but they were householders in name only, for they lived unattached to the world.”

It was noon. The worship was over, and food offerings had been made in the temple. The doors of the temple were shut. Sri Ramakrishna sat down for his meal, and Narendra and the other devotees partook of the food offerings from the temple.

The Gospel of Ramakrishna (1907)

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