



Knowledge and Devotion

Ramakrishna

“The jnani, following the path of knowledge, always reasons about Reality, saying, ‘Not this, not that.’ Brahman is neither ‘this’ nor ‘that’; It is neither the universe nor its living beings. Reasoning in this way, the mind becomes steady. Finally it disappears and the aspirant goes into samadhi. This is the knowledge of Brahman. It is the unwavering conviction of the jnani that Brahman alone is real and the world illusionary. All these names and forms are illusionary. What Brahman is cannot be described. One cannot even say that Brahman is a Person. This is the opinion of the jnanis, the followers of Vedanta philosophy.”

But the bhaktas accept all the states of consciousness. They take the waking state to be real also. They don’t think the world to be illusionary, like a dream. They say that the universe is a manifestation of God’s power and glory. God has created all these—sky, stars, moon, sun, mountains, ocean, men, animals. They constitute His glory. He is within us, in our hearts. Again, He is outside. The most advanced devotees say that He Himself has become all this—the twenty-four cosmic principles, the universe, and all living beings. The devotee of God wants to eat sugar, not to become sugar. (All laugh.)”

“Do you know how a lover of God feels? His attitude is: ‘O God, Thou art the Master, and I am Thy servant. Thou art the Mother, and I am Thy child.’ Or again: ‘Thou art my Father and Mother. Thou art the Whole, and I am a part.’ He doesn’t like to say, ‘I am Brahman.’”

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: “Sir, has God forms or has He none?”

MASTER: “No one can say with finality that God is only ‘this’ and nothing else. He is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jnani, that is, for him who looks on the world as a mere dream. The bhakta feels that he is one entity and the one another. Therefore God reveals Himself to him as a Person. But the jnani—the Vedantist, for instance—always reasons, applying the process of ‘Not this, not this.’ Through this discrimination he realizes, by inner perception, that the ego and the universe are both illusionary, like a dream. Then the jnani realizes Brahman in his own consciousness. He cannot describe what Brahman is.”

“Do you know what I mean? Think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the bhakta’s love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a Person. But with the rising of the sun of Knowledge, the blocks of ice melt. The one doesn’t feel anymore that God is a Person, nor does he see God’s forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his “I” anymore.”

“If one analyzes oneself, one doesn’t find such thing as ‘I.’ Take an onion, for instance. First of all you peel off the red outer skin; then you find thick white skins. Peel these off one after the other and you won’t find anything inside.”

“In that state a man no longer feels the existence of his ego. And who is there left to seek it? Who can describe how he feels in that state—in his own Pure Consciousness—about the real nature of Brahman?”

There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. A man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the 'I,' which may be likened to a salt doll, melts into the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with It. Not the slightest trace of distinction is left."

"As long as his self-analysis is not complete, man argues with much ado. But he becomes silent when he completes it. When the empty pitcher has been filled with water, when the water inside the pitcher become one with the water of the lake outside, no more sound is heard. Sound comes from the pitcher as long as the pitcher is not filled with water."

"For people like you and me it is good to have the feeling, 'I am a lover of God'....The Saguna Brahman is meant for the bhaktas. In other words, a bhakta believes that God has many attributes and reveals Himself to men as a Person, assuming forms. It is He who listens to our prayers. The prayers that you utter are directed to Him alone. It doesn't matter whether you accept God with form or not. It is enough to feel that God is a person who listens to our prayers, who creates, preserves and destroys the universe, and who is endowed with infinite power."

"It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion."

The Gospel of Ramakrishna (1907)

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