



The Realization of God: With the Brahma Devotees

Ramakrishna

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 world 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 his inner perception, that the ego and the universe are both illusory, 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. Then one doesn’t feel any more that God is a Person, nor does one 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’ any more.

“If one analyses oneself, one doesn’t find any 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 finds 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? Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner was it in the water than it melted. Now who was to tell the depth?

“There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the ‘I’, which may be likened to the salt doll, melts in 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 becomes 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.

“People used to say in olden days that no boat returns after having once entered the black waters’ of the ocean.

“All trouble and botheration come to an end when the ‘I’ dies. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the ‘I’ doesn’t disappear. 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 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. You are bhaktas, not jnanis or Vedantists. 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.”

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: “Sir, is it possible for one to see God? If so, why can’t we see Him?”

MASTER: “Yes, He can surely be seen. One can see His forms, and His formless aspect as well. How can I explain that to you?”

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: “What are the means by which one can see God?”

MASTER: “Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms.”

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: “Sir, why are there so many different opinions about the nature of God? Some say that God has form, while others say that He is formless. Again, those who speak of God with form tell us about His different forms. Why all this controversy?”

MASTER: “A devotee thinks of God as he sees Him. In reality there is no confusion about God. God explains all this to the devotee if the devotee only realizes Him somehow. You haven’t set your foot in that direction. How can you expect to know all about God?”

“Listen to a story. Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: ‘When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green.’ Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last they started quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied: ‘Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey, and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none.’

“In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes; then again He has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can appear in various colours, and he knows, further, that the animal at times has no colour at all. It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument.

“Kabir used to say, The formless Absolute is my Father, and God with form is my Mother.”

“God reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most. His love for the devotee knows no bounds. It is written in the Purana that God assumed the form of Rama for His heroic devotee, Hanuman.

“The forms and aspects of God disappear when one discriminates in accordance with the Vedanta philosophy. The ultimate conclusion of such discrimination is that Brahman alone is real and this world of names and forms illusory. It is possible for a man to see the forms of God, or to think of Him as a Person, only so long as he is conscious that he is a devotee. From the standpoint of discrimination this ‘ego of a devotee’ keeps him a little away from God.

“Do you know why images of Krishna or Kali are three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. Again, on account of distance the sun appears to be small. But if you go near it you will find the sun so big that you won’t be able to comprehend it. Why have images of

Krishna and Kali a dark-blue colour? That too is on account of distance, like the water of a lake, which appears green, blue, or black from a distance. Go near, take the water in the palm of your hand, and you will find that it has no colour. The sky also appears blue from a distance. Go near and you will see that it has no colour at all.

“Therefore I say that in the light of Vedantic reasoning Brahman has no attributes. The real nature of Brahman cannot be described. But so long as your individuality is real, the world also is real, and equally real are the different forms of God and the feeling that God is a Person.

“Yours is the path of bhakti. That is very good; it is an easy path. Who can fully know the infinite God? and what need is there of knowing the infinite? Having attained this rare human birth, my supreme need is to develop love for the Lotus Feet of God.

“If a jug of water is enough to remove my thirst, why should I measure the quantity of water in a lake? I become drunk on even half a bottle of wine — what is the use of my calculating the quantity of liquor in the tavern? What need is there of knowing the Infinite?

“The various states of mind of the Brahmajnani are described in the Vedas. The path of knowledge is extremely difficult. One cannot obtain jnana if one has the least trace of worldliness and the slightest attachment to ‘woman and gold’. This is not the path for the Kaliyuga.

“The Vedas speak of seven planes where the mind dwells. When the mind is immersed in worldliness it dwells in the three lower planes — at the navel, the organ of generation, and the organ of evacuation. In that state the mind loses all its higher visions — it broods only on ‘woman and gold’. The fourth plane of the mind is at the heart. When the mind dwells there, one has the first glimpse of spiritual consciousness. One sees light all around. Such a man, perceiving the divine light, becomes speechless with wonder and says: ‘Ah! What is this? What is this?’ His mind does not go downward to the objects of the world.

“The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind reaches this, the aspirant becomes free from all ignorance and illusion. He does not enjoy talking or hearing about anything but God. If people talk about worldly things, he leaves the place at once.

“The sixth plane is at the forehead. When the mind reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God day and night. But even then a little trace of ego remains. At the sight of that incomparable beauty of God’s form, one becomes intoxicated and rushes forth to touch and embrace it. But one doesn’t succeed. It is like the light inside a lantern. One feels as if one could touch the light, but one cannot on account of the pane of glass.

“In the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises there, one goes into samadhi. Then the Brahmajnani directly perceives Brahman. But in that state his body does not last many days. He remains unconscious of the outer world. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out. Dwelling on this plane of consciousness, he gives up his body in twenty-one days. That is the condition of the Brahmajnani. But yours is the path of devotion. That is a very good and easy path.

“Once a man said to me, ‘Sir, can you teach me quickly the thing you call samadhi?’
(All laugh.)

“After a man has attained samadhi all his actions drop away. All devotional activities, such as worship, japa, and the like, as well as all worldly duties, cease to exist for such a person. At the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God, the outer display of his work becomes less and less — so much so that he cannot even sing the name and glories of God. (*To Sivanath*) As long as you were not here at the meeting, people talked a great deal about you and discussed your virtues. But no sooner did you arrive here than all that stopped. Now the very sight of you makes everyone happy. People now simply say, ‘Ah! Here is Shivanath Babu.’ All other talk about you has stopped.

“After attaining samadhi, I once went to the Ganges to perform tarpan. But as I took water in the palm of my hand, it trickled down through my fingers. Weeping, I said to Haladhari, “Cousin, what is this?” Haladhari replied, ‘It is called galitahasta (Literally, “inert and benumbed hand”.) in the holy books.’ After the vision of God, such duties as the performance of tarpan drop away.

“In the kirtan the devotee first sings, ‘Nitai amar mata hati.’ (“My Nitai dances like a mad elephant.”) As the devotional mood deepens, he simply sings, ‘Hati! Hati!’ Next, all he can sing is ‘Hati’. And last of all he simply sings, ‘Ha!’ and goes into samadhi. The man who has been singing all the while then becomes speechless.

“Again, at a feast given to the brahmins one at first hears much noise of talking. When the guests sit on the floor with leaf-plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. Then one hears only the cry, ‘Bring some luchi!’ As they partake of the luchi and other dishes, three quarters of the noise subsides. When the curd, the last course, appears, one hears only the sound ‘soop, soop’ as the guests eat the curd with their fingers. Then there is practically no noise. Afterwards all retire to sleep, and absolute silence reigns.

“Therefore I say, at the beginning of religious life a man makes much ado about work, but as his mind dives deeper into God, he becomes less active. Last of all comes the renunciation of work, followed by samadhi.

“Generally the body does not remain alive after the attainment of samadhi. The only exceptions are such sages as Narada, who keep their bodies alive in order to bring spiritual light to others. It is also true of Divine Incarnations, like Chaitanya. After the well is dug, one generally throws away the spade and the basket. But some keep them in order to help their neighbours. The great souls who retain their bodies after samadhi feel compassion for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish as to be satisfied with their own illumination. You are well aware of the nature of selfish people. If you ask them to spit at a particular place, they won’t, lest it should do you good. If you ask them to bring a sweetmeat worth a cent from the store, they will perhaps lick it on the way back. (*All laugh.*)

“But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. Ordinary souls are afraid to teach others. A piece of worthless timber may itself somehow float across the water, but it sinks even under the weight of a bird. Sages like Narada are like a heavy log of wood, which not only floats on the water but also can carry men, cows, and even elephants.

(*To Shivanath and the other Brahma devotees*) “Can you tell me why you dwell so much on the powers and glories of God? I asked the same thing of Keshab Sen. One day Keshab and his party came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. I told them I wanted to hear how they lectured. A meeting was arranged in the paved courtyard above the bathing-ghat on the Ganges, where Keshab gave a talk. He spoke very well. I went into a trance. After the lecture I said to Keshab, ‘Why do you so often say such things as:

“O God, what beautiful flowers Thou hast made! O God, Thou hast created the heavens, the stars, and the ocean!” and so on?’ Those who love splendour themselves are fond of dwelling on God’s splendour.

“Once a thief stole the jewels from the images in the temple of Radhakanta. Mathur Babu entered the temple and said to the Deity: ‘What a shame, O God! You couldn’t save Your own ornaments.’ ‘The idea!’ I said to Mathur. ‘Does He who has Lakshmi for His handmaid and attendant ever lack any splendour? Those jewels may be precious to you, but to God they are no better than lumps of clay. Shame on you! You shouldn’t have spoken so meanly. What riches can you give to God to magnify His glory?’

“Therefore I say, a man seeks the person in whom he finds joy. What need has he to ask where that person lives, the number of his houses, gardens, relatives, and servants, or the amount of his wealth? I forget everything when I see Narendra. Never, even unwittingly,

have I asked him where he lived, what his father's profession was, or the number of his brothers.

“Dive deep in the sweetness of God's Bliss. What need have we of His infinite creation and unlimited glory?”

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