

From Day-dreaming to Meditation

SWAMI YOGATMANANDA

I always feel that Vedanta is an immensely practical thing. Vedanta, or Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's teachings as well as our scriptural teachings, are never merely theoretical. They always have the practical aspect. It is but natural because the most important part of religion is its practice.

In the second chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, after Arjuna's lamentations and request for giving him wisdom, Lord Krishna tells him about the immortality of the soul, the all-pervading nature of the Self, and all such lofty truths. Yet there was a suspicion in the mind of Arjuna. Although no verse in the *Gītā* explicitly brings out this suspicion, the Lord could see that. And then, He did His best to drive away those misgivings.

Similarly, when we hear such noble truths that God is our reality, God is in the heart of everyone, or I am truly divine, these sound very nice and we get convinced only intellectually that these are true. But the paradox is that even though we can convince ourselves about the truth of these things intellectually, yet we find that practically we remain the same person. No change has come to our life.

Practically speaking, these ideals appear to be too high, unreachable and impractical. So the Lord tells in the 39th verse of the second chapter,

*Eshā te 'bhihitā sāṅkhye
buddhir yoge tvimām shrinu /
buddhyā yukto yayā Pārtha
karma-bandham prahāsyasi //*

It is a great verse linking the ideal with practicality. Sri Krishna says to Arjuna: What I had told you is the Truth according to the Sāṅkhya or the path of knowledge. It is an intellectual, logical and rational doctrine. Now listen how the theoretical understanding can be converted into practical terms, which is called *yoga*. The Lord then explains how by practising selfless action combined with devotion the bondage of *karma* can be overcome.

Meaning of yoga

The word *yoga* means conversion of what we theoretically understand into concrete, tangible and palpable fact of experience. One may read a book on music and feel that he has understood everything. But just by reading a book, maybe in one hour, does not make me a wonderful musician. What is required for being a good musician? It requires dedication and lot of practice for a long time. Then what is theoretically understood becomes a matter of practical experience. This is where Vedanta really becomes meaningful to our life. And it is then taken up as a journey.

In our scriptures you will find this concept that our life is a journey. It is not just roaming about aimlessly. What is the

difference between ‘roaming about’, and ‘going on a journey’? Journey has a destination; that I want to reach such and such a place. In our life also we want to reach a stage, which is our goal. Maybe, the nature of the goal is somewhat hazy now, not very clear to us. Yet, we all want the life to be very meaningful which will bring to us ultimately all that we cherish. So, from a point where I am now, I want to go to a place going where I will feel I have achieved my goal. But what is the goal? That is again described in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

When I was in college I heard an exposition of the verse by a swami. He asked students, ‘What is goal?’ So we discussed among ourselves and concluded that our life should have a goal although we failed to answer what that goal should be.

The swami then suggested that first we should try to have a definition of goal. That is to say, he said, when the meaning of the word *goal* is understood, you will be able to see what the goal is. As we kept scratching our heads, he gave the answer and said that the goal is that by getting which nothing else remains to be achieved in life.

Please pay attention to these words, that ‘the goal is that by getting which you think nothing remains to be achieved in life’. Because, if after achieving many things something else still remains to be achieved, then that something should be called goal. So goal, by its very definition, should mean getting which nothing remains to be achieved as the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.22) puts it,

*Yam labdhvā c’āparam lābham
manyate n’ādhikam tatah /
Yasmin sthito na duhkkena
gurunā’pi vicālyate //*

—‘Having obtained which no other gain is

considered greater; remaining in which one is not shaken even by the heaviest afflictions.’

So this is the journey that we undertake. And for this journey we use whatever means we have at our disposal. Today’s topic is also a topic of journey—a journey ‘From Day-dream to Meditation’. Meditation is described as the means of search for identifying and realizing our true nature. Although the word *dhyāna* or meditation has been explained in various ways from different angles, the common thing is that, in meditation we try and ultimately succeed in getting united with the goal, that is, God. God, is the one word that includes everything we cherish and seek in life. It is meditation through which, from day-dreaming, we can move ahead to reach the goal. As of now we all keep on day-dreaming or fantasizing. Suppose a young graduate who is going for a job interview, gets into a busy Kolkata bus, but he finds no seat. While he keeps on standing he starts thinking all sorts of things such as—the interview will be tough but I shall qualify. And as soon as the interview will be over, they will be so pleased with me that they will immediately offer me the job and so on and so forth.

However, the fact is, till now nothing has actually taken place because the young man is still on the bus. And he is imagining all this, that he has not only got the job, but getting promotions after promotions. Because of his expertise the company has tripled its profits and he was given the position of a director; by virtue of that position he becomes very close to company’s owner who sends him to U.S.A. to do further studies; he completes a three-year course in just six months; and next he,

marries the daughter of the owner of the company and becomes a big corporate magnate. Well, all these imaginations are experienced hardly in two minutes, before the bus reaches the next stop!

But, suppose you actually became a corporate magnate. What then do you do? You begin to ponder—what next? Since you have come to a stage from where you cannot go any further, you are in a fix. Then, the bus screeches to a halt and you realize you are still inside the bus going for an interview. You realize things that you have been visualizing so long did not happen actually. It was all day-dreaming!

The word ‘day-dreaming’, in a sense, is a misnomer, for day-dreaming does not necessarily take place during daytime. It can happen also at night. Naturally it is called day-dreaming because you remain partially awake at that time; you are aware of your external surroundings. Therefore, even though the mind of the youngman is racing to some very dizzy heights, as soon as the bus stops, he gets down paying the fare to the conductor. He does it all because he is also conscious of the external situation. So in day-dreaming you have the awareness of your surroundings, while in actual dream, you are not at all conscious of your immediate surroundings. That is the big difference.

Sigmund Freud

This topic, day-dreaming, was first discussed by the great psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud. He is known as the father of psychoanalysis. He was actually a medical practitioner. His attention was subsequently drawn toward psychology as he found that many disease symptoms for which patients were treated were gone temporarily, yet they

reappeared later. So he thought that the real cause of the disease lay deeper somewhere. So he decided to probe deeper and started studying, analysing the mind. Freud is known for his very deep, sharp analysis and sweeping generalizations. There are two techniques of getting knowledge—analysis and generalization. In analysis, you go deep and find out certain tools, and then generalize that. That, which is happening here, must be happening somewhere else also. So you come to a generalized understanding. But Freud was so adventurous, so sweeping in making generalizations that later on many defects were detected in his theories, and many of his disciples separated from him. One of Freud’s famous books is *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming*. In that book, he has analysed the phenomenon of day-dreaming or fantasizing very well. Now, why do we fantasize and how it is connected with creative writing? Fantasizing occurs because we are not satisfied with the existing situation. Therefore we want to change it. We want to get somewhere where the situation will be much happier. So we construe another situation where all the problems we face will not be there. It is an escape from the existing situation. If we are satisfied, there is no chance of day-dreaming. So we day-dream because we all have unsatisfied desires.

The next question Freud puts is: Can desires be satisfied? The answer is an emphatic ‘no’. The students of Vedanta know that the desires are like bottomless pits. You can go on adding whatever things you want—but you realize soon that your desires are not yet fulfilled. For example, you think a new car will fulfil your desires and you will remain satisfied. You will be

happy. So you buy a new car. But be sure you will not become happy forever. In fact, people go from one stage to another. A child thinks when he/she grows up he/she will be happy. But when they become quite old they reminisce about their very nice days of childhood. But if you right now ask a child, he will tell exactly the opposite. Now a child thinks: Let me grow up fast because everybody here is controlling me; let me first become a matriculate. I myself used to have this problem when I was about ten or eleven. Then, like all other children I had to do lot of homework. Parents used to say, sit and do your homework. Don't go out. It is evening now. Don't keep on playing, and so forth. There was no end to scoldings and all that. But I had a cousin who was then doing PhD. I noticed that he would come and go out as he wished. Nobody asked him to do his homework. I told my parents, I don't want to stay put in my fifth standard; I want to do PhD straightaway. Now, that's impossible!

So, a person may complete matriculation, his graduation, and even PhD—the goal. Is that person happy now? Doesn't he suffer from problems any more? Perhaps no. Yet we think, let me get a big job and then I will be happy. Or, let me get a spouse and then I will be happy, or I will be happy when I get this or get that. We keep on getting all these things in this manner but happiness still eludes us. It is like trying to chase the horizon. You keep on running, but never you reach the horizon. Our life goes on like that—desires are never fulfilled.

In the Ādiparva of the *Mahābhārata*, there is the story of Yayāti. He wanted to be happy by fulfilling all his desires. He wanted to live long for that purpose. So he had not only lived his own life-span but borrowed shamelessly the life of his youngest son,

Puru. Why? Because as you get older your body is incapable of enjoying life. So he borrowed the youth of his son. And even after that, he discovered his painful craving remained as before. Then he said regretfully,

*Na jātu kāmah kāmānām upabhogena
shāmyati /
Havishā krishnavartmeva bhuya
evābhivardhate //*

That is, *kāma* (desire) does not go by *upabhoga* (enjoyment). Just as you cannot put down fire by fuelling it, similarly, the fire of desire flares up more when you seek to fulfil desires. What happens is that day-dreaming continues as the desires don't go away. So here the utility of meditation through which one can convert the desire. Day-dreaming, or fantasizing is the process by which we go on expanding our imaginations to catch various things and try to fulfil our desires thereby. In meditation we do exactly the same thing. In day-dreaming our desires are all about things which are *unreal*. Therefore, we will never get them. The cravings will continue, the day-dreaming will continue, and along with it frustration.

Psychological spasm

Do you know, what happens in day-dreaming? It is a very painful thing we all must have experienced. You stretch your imaginations so much that in no time you become the Lord of the universe. But then you find you are still stuck in the realities around. Now, this creates psychological spasm, like a muscular spasm which is very painful. In muscular spasm, a muscle is stretched and it does not get relieved. You cannot do anything unless the muscle gets relaxed. Similarly, in day-dreaming our

mental muscles get stretched in the same fashion and do not get relaxed. Thus, we get what is called psychological spasms. This is why it becomes so painful.

Meditation tells you to do the same imagination about what is *real*. As it is real, you will surely get it. If you try to get that which is real, there is every chance that you will get it. But if we try to get something that does not exist, what chance do we have of getting it? Nil. So, exactly that happens when we direct this day-dreaming to something that is real. That is God. As Sri Ramakrishna says, the Lord alone exists. What then should a practical person do? Should he run after things which are non-existent, or after the thing that exists?

This is where I sometimes feel pretty amused. People claim that those who pursue religious ideals are *impractical*, while they are very much *practical* because they run after money! Now, tell me who is practical? The one who runs after a thing which exists, or the one who runs after that which does not exist? We all can understand that it is practical to go for that which is really there. Thus, the process is shifted or transformed—from day-dreaming to meditation. In other words, this becomes a journey towards the goal. We realize God, we realize everything.

Day-dreaming and dreaming have many differences. Although in Freudian consideration they are similar, there is a lot of difference between the two. In Indian psychology these differences have been explained very clearly. In day-dreaming you dissociate yourself from the present situation only partially. You are conscious about it and you always feel you are becoming better and better. But in dream you have absolutely no control over what is going to happen. It is pretty much like the present world. You do

not have any control over rains, or earthquakes or other natural calamities. But in day-dreaming you have some control. As such you derive a kind of happiness in day-dreaming—when you imagine you have become the lord of the universe. But dream is different. Sometimes it is pleasant, sometimes unpleasant or fearsome. I used to see a frightful dream that I was sitting a Maths examination and I had a problem which I could not solve. But day-dreaming is something that is happening while you are aware of it. That is why it can be converted into meditation and accept God as my goal.

Changing life

Now let me go step by step there. Let me change my life. It is like a journey. In journey what do you do? In journey you do not pull your goal to where you are, you first change your position. Suppose I am in Kolkata and my goal is Mumbai. Now as the distance between me and Kolkata increases, the distance between me and Mumbai decreases. This is a conscious effort. The same is between you and your God. Let this journey begin now.

In meditation therefore you think of God consciously. We always take the help of one who can guide us on this difficult journey. That person is called a *guru*. Nowadays while you undertake a journey you take the help of GPS. So in meditation also you take a GPS. Here, of course, GPS means Guru Positioning System and not Global Positioning System. Now as you undertake the journey according to the guidelines given by your *guru*, you give a direction to your mind. You tell your mind, let me begin thinking that all are one in love. It is just a nice thought that allows love to spread in all directions from your heart. So it is a stage

when you begin to calm down. You see, when we have enmity towards anybody our mind gets ruffled. So we have to calm it down. It is our primary responsibility to be peaceful. It is nobody else's responsibility. This is very important. Nobody else is going to be responsible for my peace. It is I who have to do that. This is practical science. You do and you experience.

When you calm down your mind, then think of your ideal. What happens is that the stage starts changing. What is told by the sages is exactly what you have. Sri Ramakrishna says, you have to just change the direction, give everything a Godward turn.

Earlier I was in Nagpur. We had a well there and we pumped water from it and stored the same in the water tank. Once I found there was no water in the tank. I needed to start the pump. So I switched on the button and heard the motor running and thought the tank will be filled soon. But even after ten minutes there was no water! So we had to call the technician. When he put the motor right in two minutes, I asked, 'What happened?' He said the connection was wrong. Therefore the motor was running in the opposite direction. The water therefore did not get pumped though electricity was spent. So by changing the connection, the motor started running in the right direction. Exactly, in the same fashion, our mind will start running in the right direction if we change the connection—the connection from day-dreaming to meditation. Each of us can do and experience that. To experience this you do not need to be a brilliant guy. Most ordinary persons can also understand this: Let me

now focus my mind. Instead of scattering my mind into so many different pursuits, let me focus it on that which is going to bring everything to my life. This is how this process has to go. So let me meditate. Meditate that our names and forms, which have no abiding value, are all dissolved in this ocean of all-pervading existence. As we all are made of the same Substance, we are all the same, one divine being seemingly separated just by names and forms which keep on changing. So gone are the names and forms. Let us feel that. Now there is no 'I', no 'world'. The whole existence is Absolute, beyond the clutches of time and space. In this stage I am immortal. I have no beginning and no end. I am eternal presence. I have no desire, for I am all that is. I am Bliss Itself, joy itself for I have no lack of anything. This is perfection. I realize that I am perfect.

Let us open our eyes. Look at names and forms around, but remember that the Substance within is the same. We are same in Truth. So even when we see the names and forms we do not get affected by the distinctions, the differences, because they are actually same just like waves of the ocean. Waves rise and fall, yet the ocean remains the same. We are like these waves, friends. We rise, grow, and maybe again we fall. But one divine existence always remains unchanged. When we become conscious of this Truth, you can imagine what great bliss our hearts will be always filled with. Now we have got the Truth, the Reality. The ego is gone. All the cravings are gone. And therefore day-dreaming is gone. That is how we can go from day-dreaming to meditation. ■

* Swami Yogatmananda is Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society, Providence, USA. This article is based on a lecture he delivered at the Institute on 16 October 2017.