

Guru's Magic Pill Exposes Feigned Love

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Introduction

Everyone knowledgeable about Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is aware of the episode when during one of Narendra's (later Swami Vivekananda) early visits to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna touched his chest. Narendra then became unconscious, and after gaining consciousness wept and said, 'Oh, why did you do this to me? I have my father, and I have my mother [at home]!' The Master said that this feeling of 'my-mine' stemmed from ignorance. Then Sri Ramakrishna further elaborated his view by narrating not one, but two of his parables, which conveyed, through using hyperbolic metaphors, that the professed love and fealty of worldly people are not always genuine.

This article includes those two parables along with some discussion about the theme.

First parable showing feigned love

The guru told the disciple: 'The world is an illusion, you come away with me.' The disciple replied, 'Revered sir, they love me so much—my father, my mother, my wife—how could I leave them and go?' The guru said, 'No doubt you are saying "my this, my that," and that they love you, but those [feelings] are all wrong. I am teaching you a trick; do that, then you will find out whether they truly love you or not.' Saying that he gave him a pill [medicine] and said, 'Swallow this, you will then become like a corpse. You will not lose consciousness, but can see and hear

everything. Then when I appear, you will gradually regain your previous state.'

The disciple did exactly as instructed. Weeping and wailing commenced in the house. His wife, mother, all of them were rolling on the ground weeping effusively. Just then a Brahmin [actually the guru] came and asked, 'What happened?' They replied, 'This boy is dead.' The Brahmin felt the pulse of the [so called] dead man and said, 'How about that? He isn't dead! I am prescribing a medicine, taking that will completely cure him.' The members of the household felt as if heaven were at hand. 'But,' the Brahmin said, 'There is something else I must tell you. Another person must take the medicine first, and then he has to take it. But the person who takes it first will die. I see so many of his dear relatives here, someone among them will certainly agree to take it; the mother and the wife are crying bitterly—they surely can [take the medicine].'

All of them then stopped crying and became quiet. The mother said, 'Well, this is a large family; if I die, who will look after them?' She became thoughtful after saying that. The wife, who was just then crying and saying 'Oh, sister, what has happened to me?' said, 'Whatever happened to him, happened. I have two or three minor children; who will look after them if I die?'

The disciple was seeing and listening to everything. He then stood up and said, 'Gurudeva, let's go, I will come with you.'

Second parable showing feigned love

Immediately following the above, the Master related another parable along the same line, but with a little twist (pun intended) as follows:

Another disciple was telling his guru, 'My wife takes great care of me, that is why, Gurudeva, I can't go [with you, leaving my family].' The disciple practised hathayoga. The guru taught him a trick also. One day there was a great deal of wailing in his house. The neighbours came and saw the hathayogi sitting in the room in a posture, immobilized, with a distorted body. Everybody realized that his last breath had escaped him. The wife was lying on the ground crying, 'Oh, what happened to us? Oh [my husband], what you have done to us [by leaving]! Oh my sister, I didn't know that this would happen [to me]!' In the meantime, friends and relatives had brought a cot to take him [the body] out of the room.

Now there was a problem. Since his body was stiff and twisted, it could not be taken out through the door. A neighbour then ran and brought a large knife [a falchion, or an axe] and began chopping away at the door-frame. The wife was crying agitatedly, but came running when she heard the banging noise. She asked, while still crying, 'Oh, what happened?' They said, 'He cannot be taken out. Therefore, we are cutting the door-frame.' Then the wife said, 'Oh, please don't do any such thing. I have become a widow now. I have no one else to look after me, and I have to bring up a few minor children. If this door goes, there won't be another one [to replace it]. Oh, whatever happened to him has happened; cut off his hands and legs [and take him out through the door]. The hathayogi then stood up [on hearing that]. The effect of the medicine

had then worn off. He said to his wife, 'So, you wretched [expletive] woman, you want [them] to cut my hands and legs off?' Saying that he left the house with his guru.² (Everybody laughed.)

The message conveyed by the parables

Both parables use extreme examples to prove a point. Sri Ramakrishna would call the initial attitude of the disciple as stemming from *ignorance*, which was from a spiritual point of view. But there are mundane reasons for the behaviour of his close relatives. In the first parable, the man found out that all the weeping and wailing were nothing but false pretence and hollow posturing. No one, not even his wife and mother, *truly* loved him. Otherwise, at least one of them would have taken the pill to bring him back to life. They loved him only for what he could bring and give them as they were dependent upon him; they all had a selfish motive. This refers to a situation where love and affection are performed rather than felt; self-interest is being disguised as affection, where the latter becomes a tool for gaining resources, influence, or for social obligation. People sometimes fake closeness to avoid conflict, guilt, or abandonment. Financial or emotional dependence can also create forced closeness. People act as 'loving husband or wife,' 'good son,' 'dutiful daughter,' or 'supportive sibling,' even when the heart isn't aligned.

Some also equate love with duty, where 'You must love your wife or husband, parents, children, and siblings' becomes a command, not a feeling. In this regard, duty, according to Swamiji, runs smoothly only when love greases its wheels; 'duty is sweet only through love,' he once said.³ W. Somerset Maugham also had commented that duty without love '...is no more

meritorious than to wash your hands when they are dirty; the only thing that counts is the love of duty; when love and duty are one, then grace is in you and you will enjoy a happiness which passes all understanding.⁴ One must recognize the difference between affection and duty, authenticity and social conditioning.

The wife's love appeared more feigned in the second parable, where she disrespected even her husband's dead body for material convenience. Swami Vivekananda once said, although in a different context, 'Worldly people only feign love to gratify their own self-interest.'⁵ After relating the second parable, the Master added, 'Many [women] make a show of grief. Knowing that they will have to weep, they first take off the nose-ring, and then take

off all other ornaments and put those in a box under lock and key. Then they fall on the ground and howl, "Oh sister, what has befallen me?" Here the wife is faking grief, maybe, out of social obligation.

Concluding remarks

It does not mean that one should experiment with the magic pill (if one can find a guru who has it) to see who really loves him or her (the concept applies to the husbands also). To get his disciple to renounce the world and follow him, the guru is essentially saying that the worldly love is conditional love, which is selfish love. So, he is asking his disciple not to be fooled by this but surrender to God. Only God's love, the *agape* love, is unconditional. ■

REFERENCES

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- 2 Mahendranath Gupta (M), *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Udbodhan Karyalaya, Calcutta, 1986-87), p. 825. English version: Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1996), p. 771.
- 3 *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 67.
- 4 W. Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil* (Vintage International, New York, 2004), p. 206.
- 5 Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1965), p. 216.

* Sri Asim Chaudhuri, an eminent writer and Vivekananda scholar, who has contributed many articles to the *Bulletin* over the years, passed away recently. His death is deeply mourned by the Publication Department of RMIC, Gol Park, Kolkata.

From 'In Search of God'

Thou wert my God with prophets old;
All creeds do come from Thee;
The Vedas, Bible and Koran bold
Sing Thee in harmony.

"Thou art", "Thou art" the Soul of souls
In the rushing stream of life.

"Om Tat Sat Om". Thou art my God.
My love, I am Thine, I am Thine.

—Swami Vivekananda