

## ‘Do Not Seek for Him, Just See Him’

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### Not a far-off entity

**T**his sentence which forms my subject is a saying of Swami Vivekananda. He uttered this during a discourse he gave in 1895 to a group of listeners in a retreat, a place called Thousand Island Park on the bank of St. Lawrence River. Swami Vivekananda lived there for about seven weeks. Those were quite unforgettable days. We have some records left by those who were part of that group. Some of you no doubt have read some of the notes of the Swami’s talks taken by Miss S. E. Waldo and published under the title *Inspired Talks*.

When I first read that book many many years ago I came upon that sentence which seemed like a revelation to me. At first it would seem that the sentence does not make much sense, because the fact that we do not see God is quite clear. We see the world and its men. If we were seeing God then there would not have been any doubt about His existence. We have many sincere seekers after Truth who at any rate do not claim that they have seen any God. Yet in the face of such undeniable facts Swamiji says that we need not seek Him, all that we have to do is to see Him, as if He is just present before us. He is not hidden and does not need to be found out. We have only to make a little effort to open our eyes and see Him.

I think the Swami pointed out a fact which we often ignore, and that is why finding God becomes such a very difficult task for us. Now it must be evident to you that if a God does exist, He must be an

object of our perception every moment. It could not be otherwise. Why? Because, God is all-pervasive. He is infinite by nature. So we should try to find out if there is any such thing, any such reality which is infinite in every respect and if we do not find it then we might come to the conclusion that God does not exist.

Usually, in theistic religions or in some other forms of religion, God has been considered a far-off entity. And yet oddly enough every religion has spoken of God as ‘Him’, as Infinite and Eternal. But somehow by some kind of clever argument they have considered this Infinite one as far-off and different from Its creation. They seem to hold that He is not on earth although He has created this earth. He is maintaining this earth by His power and yet He seems to be somewhere away from this earth. So, when you perceive anything on this earth you are not perceiving God.

Frankly speaking, I do not see any cogency in these kinds of statements. Yet that is the idea that has precisely obsessed people who have been seeking God. They like to believe that God is in heaven wherever that heaven might be. God can only be seen after we have passed this life. That is to say, time seems to stand as a barrier between ourselves and our vision of God. Some have even maintained that you can never see God. You live under Him—God, the King, but here the climate is not as good as it is in heaven where the climate is perfect, and accommodations wonderful!

There is summer vacation *ad infinitum*. Such a perfect world should be free from all the miseries that we know of. Many people think like that and I may mention here that there are also many Hindus who hold that kind of view.

### The Vedantic view

There is, however, a Vedantic view about the very highest ideal of man’s attainment and that highest ideal is complete identification with God. It does not speak of going to heaven or hell or any such place that is beyond space and time. Generally speaking, it is complete identification with God that is the highest realization possible for the soul. Well, you see, these are various views and all these views underline an assumption about the present state of our being as well as its potentiality. In Christianity, they start with the idea that God created the soul—God created us. In India, we do not think so. Yes, there are some who probably would think along these lines but the general view is that the soul is eternally existent. Nobody had to create it. Just as you do not ask who created God, similarly, you do not ask any question about the creation of the soul. If you read Western theology, you find that it is everywhere taken for granted that God created the soul, God created the earth, God created the heaven, He created Adam and Eve, and so on. Now, when you think scientifically you will find that the fundamental thing is uncreated, whatever that might be. Either it could be a constituent of an atom or whatever you think, hydrogen, or any kind of thing—the original stuff was not created. It was naturally there. Such a view stresses that Nature existed in one form and has been continually undergoing changes. It may be

that order has emerged out of chaos. But, anyhow, the basic assumption is that change is taking place continually in the original nature wherever that might be. Then if you take for granted that the soul is uncreated, and therefore eternal, it follows that the soul is perfect. If you think a little, you will find it must be so because whatever is imperfect has to undergo change. That which is changeless has to be perfect.

You may find some interpretations of the Vedanta philosophy like the dualistic interpretation in which the soul is not considered perfect but is capable of reaching perfection. Or, even if you read the qualified monastic interpretation of Vedanta, it also says that the soul undergoes two transformations—one is contraction and another is expansion. It holds that through impurity the soul becomes contracted. According to this view, our souls are now contracted. Therefore, they are small, impure and incapable of perceiving God. Then the same soul expands when it has undergone purification. But Swami Vivekananda pointed out in one of his lectures in Calcutta that even if you admit this view, you also have to admit that what through expansion appears as perfect must have been potentially perfect in its state of contraction. Suppose, there is a beautiful cloth or a fabric which you have folded into a very small size and when you open it up, it looks beautiful and wonderful. What does it prove? When it was folded it was beautiful, only its beauty was not evident. If something appears imperfect on contraction and appears perfect on expansion, it means that perfection is latent even in this state of contraction. Ramanuja and his followers may not accept this view in the form in which Swami Vivekananda puts it; nevertheless they cannot escape this conclusion.

If you go a little further you will actually come to monism. The monists argue, if anything ever attains perfection it is because it is always perfect. How do you like this view? I think you should like it immensely. You are a democratic people. In your heart there is a belief that not only are you all born equal, you have also all kinds of potentialities within you. It just requires a little effort and then you can attain anything you like. I am afraid I am not fully democratic in that sense. I don't believe that unless you have musical talents, you cannot really become a great singer through sheer practice. You see, I always make a distinction. I say, there are talents which are accidental. But there are certain things, I won't call them talents, which are essential to our being. For example, you can be infinitely moral. No one can take away from you your moral courage or moral vigour. Just practise it and you become a fully moral person. You also become a fully spiritual person if you practise spiritual disciplines. Nobody can take that possibility away from you.

This craze for talents that you have in the West is a source of great misery to you. You judge yourself as well as one another by all these peculiar standards. You feel you have to have something peculiar to show off. If you do not have it in you, you suffer from inferiority complex and out of that comes superiority complex, out of that come hatred, anger and all kinds of things. There is no end to it. Why do you have to run after things which are not essentially yours? That really is a source of puzzle to me. I would not say that Indians do not do it, but much less. Probably, you will say, 'Oh! you were all subject people, you did not have any opportunities.' But I think, irrespective of our status as a nation, efforts in India are more directed toward the achievement of moral and spiritual life.

### Another kind of equality

If we do not believe in the equality of talents, we, however, do believe in equality of another kind. That is, if you make an effort you might become a spiritual giant, every one of you. As a matter of fact, that is our destiny. If anyone says that you would go to the heaven and live a perfect life there, then he is saying more than he really understands. He does not know that one is perfect already. It is as if you have found a stone and not knowing that it is a big diamond, you have thrown it off. In the same way you fail to recognize the implications of all your experiences. As a result, you do not benefit from them. Precious things you throw away. And when I say, you will attain to an ideal, remember that this shows that the ideal is yours, here and now. That is the thing which should be impressed upon our mind.

Now, of course, such a subject, as I am discussing this morning—'Do Not Seek for Him, Just See Him'—presupposes that you really are already anxious to find out God. The point is, how you can do it and that is where real help comes from this statement of Swamiji. I was saying that we are potentially perfect. The perfection is here and now. And I also say that if it is assumed that God would be perceived by us, then God is being perceived by us *now*. Further, this fact is corroborated by the knowledge that God is infinite and all-pervasive and whatever is perceived must therefore contain God. All these facts are there. Then what is wanted in order to benefit from this kind of teaching is *to change the attitude of the mind*. It is really more psychological than metaphysical. The benefit is psychological. Your attitude towards this whole problem of God-realization changes.

Nothing short of God-realization would do. You must remember that. If you think you would stop half-way, and say, well, realization is only for a few, that won't do.

In Christian theology they often say, well, mysticism is for a chosen few. There have been some mystics claiming that they have seen God. But they are special people. They are born with special talents and we do not have to think of them in relation to ourselves. We are born differently and made differently and what we should do in this life is to practise in obedience to God. We should fulfil His commandments and His ordinances and we should live the good life. And having lived the good life, we shall reach after death that blessed state which is called the heaven. This is the general Christian standpoint. However, we do not accept that view. We say, whatever you have here, you will also have there, and whatever you will have there, you will have here. There is no change. If you realize God here, then after you pass on you will realize God over there. If you realize this most blessed state here in this life, then after you die you will also have this most blessed state. Some of you might think, what difference does it make whether we see God or not, provided we are able to realize the highest state of our being? It is spoken of sometimes as God-vision or sometimes as being one with God, or sometimes as a state of illumination or enlightenment. Buddha so emphasized this subject that he called it *Nirvāna*. *Nirvāna* means annihilation of all that is impermanent in us. However he did not describe what remains after *nirvāna*, because if you are to describe anything, you have to do so in terms of our present experience, which belongs to the temporal world. Therefore he did not want to speak of *nirvāna* in terms of our quotidian

language, or experience. It is a state of enlightenment which is sometimes spoken of as *bodhi*. You might call it *mukti* or liberation, if you like. Some of you might well ask: What difference does it make whether we see God here or not, provided we realize the highest state by living in obedience to the Lord? I admit that. If you go on living in obedience to the Lord you will come to a point where you will find that God has become an object of your perception. Why do you think He, in whom we live, move and have our being, as St. Paul has said, is not visible to us? If your obedience is so complete and perfect that it produces the most perfect condition for yourself, then what is it that obstructs your vision of God, who is all the time with you—here and now? That shows there is still something left which is not in perfect obedience to the Lord.

The Lord said that we should love Him with our whole soul and with our whole mind, with our whole life and heart, in other words, with our whole being. That was His first commandment. Then He said that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. This was His second commandment. If our thought even for a moment goes to something else, then that is breaking of the commandment of the Lord. Now let us see how far we obey Him. If you are not aware of your body or of anything else, then you will necessarily be aware of God, and God-vision would come to you. Often we feel that all that is wanted is living a good life and that is enough. No. That is not enough.

### **Spiritual awakening**

More and more people are now coming to this conclusion that there must be a spiritual revival. Without that the present problem cannot be solved. Yes, that is just

right. But the thing that amazes me is the complete absence of understanding of what spiritual awakening or spiritual living is. You see, it is not just being good towards your neighbour or doing a little charity here and there. That is not enough by way of spirituality. If you ask me: 'Is it not enough if we do that? Will that won't change the world?' No. the world would not change because you are still intensely selfish. As long as you feel that you have a body and it has to be fed, clothed and given medical care—you are a selfish person. One may say that it is just a question of time before that selfishness will go. I say, no. It just won't. It is that thing which requires the utmost effort. Look, a person like Christ comes to the world. He does not possess anything. He sacrifices himself. Thousands and thousands are following in his footsteps and yet consider how much of spirituality or good life the West has found so far. Much has been done in order to correct the present state of things and to what meagre effect! So if you want to change the present poisonous state of the world, the spiritual awakening that is required has to be a thousand-fold more profound than any spiritual awakening of the past. Do you understand how much is expected from us? Good life is not enough. We have to say, God alone exists for me, nothing else does, all these beings are God Himself. All, whomsoever I see, is God Himself, and I love Him and serve Him. I have nothing to call my own. That is true spiritual awakening.

So you see, somehow a sort of hunger has to come, which may come in various ways. You may be eager for truth and you would not be satisfied with anything which is not true. Very soon you realize that truth to be worth that name must be permanent. An impermanent truth is no truth at all.

Relative truth is not the kind of truth which will give you the satisfaction you are seeking. It has to be a permanent and eternal truth. Think of human love. However wonderful it might be, it comes to an end sooner or later. Either the person you love suffers a change or death intervenes. So you ask, is there someone permanent, eternal, whom I can love? In this manner, through discrimination, your heart will go towards God who is by definition permanent, eternal.

We must create this hunger within ourselves. To start with, it is a small spark of fire that gradually turns into a blaze. If there is no spark, you cannot raise a fire. Fortunately this fire is there within everybody; only a little effort is necessary to turn it into a blaze. It is said sometimes that if you come in contact with people who are spiritual, then their association will kindle the fire of spirituality within you. They say, that is a sure means. Or you may go to places where spiritual people have lived or where spiritual people come and worship God. There are churches, temples and mosques where you can go, where for some very good reasons people come and worship and there the presence of God is felt more keenly. If you are seeking the knowledge of God, begin by doing the right thing which is to find people and places where God has become manifest. That is the way to go about.

But you have to find the places. You have to search for them. There are such places. I have gone to some churches and felt that God is vividly present in them. You might say that it is my personal reaction. Yes, I admit that. But if you try you might also find some such places. Even in places where people rarely go you might discover the presence of God. Of course, the presence of

God is everywhere; only in some places you feel it vividly. Then it seems that God Himself has come closer to you. Either you go to Him or He comes to you, or both come together towards each other. Find people who can make you feel the presence of God. Their lives have become, as it were, a temple of God—and in them God shines brightly. Seek their company. Then your heart will wake up and that would be the first spark of fire. Then you make it blaze.

People would practise hard austerities and spend years and years in meditation. The years roll by and they ask, ‘How far, O Lord, how far?’ Some people even say, the more you search for Him, the further He recedes. In the beginning He seemed to be rather close at hand. But as you begin to travel towards Him He just disappears, or goes further and further off. Why is it so? Because I think, in the beginning, the Lord gives us a little encouragement by coming somewhat closer to us. And then when He has caught us in His grip, He says, well, now he is hooked—I don’t have to be too kind and gentle to him. And so He then begins to assume His real proportions. It is a fact and not a joke.

You see, we have to change considerably before we are able to perceive God. And that perception can be permanent with us. You have to admit that you have to become infinite in order to be able to contain the Infinite within you. You can imagine what a tremendous change there has to be before the culmination is reached. Some of our philosophers, sages and seers have said that this long period of struggle can be somewhat curtailed if we grasp the fundamental fact that all that we perceive is God Himself, now and always. In the *Ashtavakra Gita* the great teacher says to a royal pupil: O, King! This is your bondage

that you think that you are not seeing God, that you are not capable of seeing God now. You think you have to find out where God is hidden, and at once you pile up all the difficulties and thereby you cripple your ability to see God.

### See God in all things

What happens if I say to myself that God is ever present before me, that God is being perceived by me every moment, that all that is perceived by me is God Himself and nothing else? If I am to say this, all that I have to do is to strain my eyes a little before looking at you. Instead of thinking of you as a man or a woman, good or bad, old or young, I should think that it is God Himself that is looking at me through all these eyes. All these hands are the hands of God, all the feet are the feet of God. Often I quote this line from the *Rigveda*:

*Sahasrashirshā purushah sahasrāksha  
sahasrapāt /  
Sa bhūmim vishvato vritvā atyatishthat  
dashāngulam //*

—‘The Perfect Being (Purusha) has thousand (unlimited) heads, thousand (unlimited) eyes, and thousand (unlimited) feet. Having pervaded the whole earth (manifest universe), He is beyond the universe as well.’

If you could make yourself say that, from that point onward you should never allow the mind to go back to the old way of thinking. You say, ‘No—I am not seeing Mr Smith or Mr Douglas or any such thing. I am seeing the Lord. I am hearing His voice. These are the feet of the Lord. They are walking the streets. These are the mouths of the Lord. They are eating the dinner that I have prepared.’ In every direction you see God himself. You may

ask, then what about these men and women, birds and beasts, matter and mind, all these things? The answer is that it is just one God manifesting Himself in these infinite forms. You may say, well, one cannot possibly say that because it is not just practical. 'Practical' is a word which has been wrongly used very often.

When a person says that it is not practical, it simply means that he does not want to try, because he has set a limit to his power. Is that a very practical attitude? Because of this attitude we cannot do anything worthwhile and when death comes, there is not even a second's time left to us to argue with him. Human mind has a way of moving in a rut and following the old groove. This should not be.

I think most of you believe in the existence of God and think that He pervades the whole being. Don't bother yourself why you have not attained that power by which the enlightened souls see God here and now. Just start seeing God everywhere and recognizing His presence. Of course at first you won't see the Shining Being. But what restricts you from recognizing the fact that every form is a form of God? Recognize it first. And tell yourself, whenever you look at any person, he is God Himself. I have known people who have done that. Therefore I am forced to believe that it is true. It can be practised. It is not difficult. It is the easiest of all things.

Now you see what happens if you try to imbibe this truth. Everything then becomes sacred for you. Your dining-room becomes your chapel, for there the Lord Himself partakes of the offering that you put before Him.

There is an old Indian story about an ass that was carrying a great scholar on its back. People on both sides of the street bowed to the scholar. But the ass thought: O, My! Everybody is saluting me. So I must be somebody! Being an ass of course he did not understand that the salutations were offered to his rider. Similarly, we think, this little ego, this little body and all these things are for us. But no. It is for Him who rides this body. There is nothing mystical about it. If you do a little more thinking you will find that all exists for the inner Being who presides over this body, mind and life. He is the Soul, the Self or the Ātman as we say in Sanskrit. For Him are all these things. He is the eater, hearer and seer. For Him is everything and not for this little ego that wants to take all the credit.

Once you begin to recognize this truth about everybody including yourself, you will find infinite peace and strength that were already within you without your being aware of it. Death will hold no fear, no one can frighten you, no one can bind you. You have infinite freedom and infinite kindness within you. Here is the true significance of the statement: 'Do Not Seek for Him, Just See Him'. Rub your eyes. Let the scales fall off. Then, that which is now appearing to you as the world of men and birds and beasts will appear to you as the living shining God. When you give a glass of water to somebody, just say to yourself, 'I am giving this glass of water to God Himself.' If you continue this practice diligently, you will be surprised to find how spiritual you have become. In fact, everybody is religious, everybody is spiritual. But some have chosen to neglect their own nature, that is all. ■

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\* This article is an abridged version of the lecture Swami Ashokananda delivered on 16 January 1955 at the Vedanta Society, Berkeley.