

Adoration (Editorial - Ramakrishna Order)

Dakshineswar temple garden, the place hallowed by the spiritual practices and presence of Sri Ramakrishna; the Bhavatarini Kali temple, where he worshipped and had the vision of the Divine Mother; the Radhakanta temple and the twelve Siva temples; the room where he lived in God-absorption and enacted the divine drama—all these sacred spots are objects of adoration to countless devotees. Those who have studied Sri Ramakrishna's life know that he was a worshipper in the Kali temple there. But what a worship it was! A worship with a difference: he cried and wept for God, the divine fire raging in his heart consuming his very being, till the stone image revealed to him the Consciousness pervading it.

He started communicating with his Divine Mother, and She with him. That marked the beginning of Sri Ramakrishna's divine play on earth—unceasing adoration and realization of God in one aspect or another, including those prescribed by non-Hindu faiths. Then, it was adoration of God everywhere. Says Sri Ramakrishna: 'One day I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had the vision of Vinit; it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity.

I could not pluck them.' To him, all existence—including the manifest world—now stood permeated with Consciousness. In his own words, 'The universe is conscious on account of the Consciousness of God. Sometimes I find that Consciousness wriggles about, as it were, even in small fish. ... Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with the Consciousness of God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.' Sri Ramakrishna's adoration was that of a knower of God, and may be considered the ideal. A spiritual aspirant, however, passes through different levels of adoration.

A. Adoration at different levels

The way a spiritual aspirant adores God depends upon his attitude towards himself. In other words, his level of consciousness determines his conception and adoration of God. In his spiritual journey a spiritual aspirant undergoes changes in his attitude to God corresponding to the different degrees of purity of his mind, and finally reaches the culmination of spiritual life: oneness with God. A verse attributed to Hanuman brilliantly describes this important spiritual principle: 'When I think of myself as a body, I am the servant and You are my Master; when I think of myself as a jivátman, I am a part and You are the Whole. When I know I am the Spirit, I am Thou—this is my firm conviction!'

B. Adoration at the physical level

Adoration means to love something deeply and with respect. Everyone in this world has something to adore. While most people adore the world and its enjoyments, there are a few who adore something different, something higher. As long as we feel that our body-mind complex—the empirical personality—is real, we see the external world as real and

it occupies our whole being. When such a person prays to God, he does it mostly to be freed from some physical or mental affliction, or for worldly prosperity: name, fame, power, and position. These, according to the Gítá, are two (árta and arthárthi) of the four types of people who worship God. Such people adore God as a human being and even conceive of Him as married and having children, if that suits them! Swami Vivekananda throws light on an important truth: the constitutional necessity for such people to worship God with a human form.

He says, ‘Suppose a cow were philosophical and had religion, it would have a cow universe, and a cow solution of the problem, and it would not be possible that it should see our God. Suppose cats became philosophers, they would see a cat universe and have a cat solution of the problem of the universe, and a cat ruling it.’ The point to be noted is: As long as cats and cows are conscious of their cat or cow form, they are constitutionally obliged to think of a God with their respective forms. Even so with a human being. As long as one’s identity with the body and the mind is strong, adoration of a human God alone is possible and just.

For those who feel attracted to the world and its objects, religion can be only a form of ‘sanctified shop keeping’. But Sri Krishna considers even such worshippers as noble-hearted. For, after all, it is God whom they approach for their worldly wants instead of manipulating men and matter, depending on their puny ego. It will be pertinent to examine the view of this attitude cannot hold water. They need to purify their mind and be free from their own body consciousness before trying to negate God with a human form. Says Swami Yatiswarananda, ‘Before you apply the concept of formlessness and impersonality to God, apply it first to yourself. It is an important law that our concept of Reality depends upon our concept of ourselves. So in order to meditate on the formless God, we must consider ourselves to be formless. We must depersonalize ourselves before we try to depersonalize God’.

C. Adoration at the mental level

The third type of people who adore God, according to Sri Krishna, is called jijnásu—one who seeks to know. Know what? Answers to certain fundamental questions of life: What is the meaning of human existence? What is the nature of God? Is a human being only what he or she appears from outside or is there a higher dimension to his or her personality? A seeker is not satisfied with the world and the sense enjoyments it has to offer. He knows that such enjoyments only sap the vigour of the senses.

Such a person turns to God, adores Him, and prays to Him seeking to know the secret and purpose of human existence. Spiritual life may be said to begin at this stage. Such a seeker practices spiritual disciplines, studies the scriptures, cultivates holy company and struggles for the purification of the mind. Since worldly things do not charm him anymore, he does not adore them now as he used to in his unawakened state. He lives mostly in the mental and intellectual planes, and derives joy from a higher dimension of his personality.

This joy arises from a level transcending his sensory system, and is born of self-control and devotion to his Ideal. When he adores God in an image, it is not the external splendour that draws his attention, but the infinite purity, knowledge, bliss and strength of the Divine permeating the image. He wages a relentless war with his own mind, which is like controlling the wind or reversing the current of a river. This marks the beginning of his adoration at the mental level. The more his own mind becomes pure, the more he realizes the infinite purity, holiness, knowledge, freedom and strength of the object of his adoration, which could be any holy form including an incarnation of God. His adoration now takes the form of a deep longing to be filled with these qualities.

Patanjali advocates meditation on the 'heart that has given up all attachment to sense objects'. Commenting on this sutra, Swami Vivekananda says: 'Take some holy person, some great person whom you revere, some saint whom you know to be perfectly non-attached, and think of his heart. That heart has become non-attached, and meditate on that heart; it will calm the mind.' Students of Sri Ramakrishna's life cannot but be astounded at his blazing superhuman renunciation and purity. Such a one-pointed and tenacious mind, which didn't stop till it accomplished what it believed to be true, cannot but be an object of adoration by a seeker.

Every other page in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna records his losing external consciousness and passing into samadhi, the highest superconscious experience. He had to struggle hard to bring his mind down to the empirical level so that he could talk to suffering humanity on spiritual life! Such was his great concern for the spiritually impoverished humanity that he prayed to the Divine Mother to bring his mind down a little from the experience of oneness with God, and not to make him a dry sadhu! such an exalted mind of a Ramakrishna with his own fickle mind.

The aspirant's restless mind is able to think of a divine idea maybe for just a few minutes during his attempts at meditation—that too with great struggle! What a contrast with the mind of a Ramakrishna that is steeped in God consciousness for all 24 hours even in the midst of an excruciating throat pain due to cancer! The struggling aspirant adores such a superhuman mind and inherits its traits by and by. By opening himself to its purifying influence more and more, his mind gets cast in the mould of his chosen Ideal. He prays to Him 'to be endowed with humility, control of mind, freedom from thirst for sense objects, compassion for all beings, and to ferry him across the ocean of transmigratory existence'.

D. Adoration of God through work

A proper attitude to work and to one's profession can convert work into a potent tool for effecting the purification of the mind. Sri Krishna emphasizes this in a series of graded disciplines for spiritual life: 'Fix your mind on Me, may your intellect dwell on Me. Undoubtedly, you will live in Me on giving up the body. In case you are not able to fix your mind on Me, desire to attain Me through abhyāsa yoga (the yoga of steadfast practice). If you are unable to do this either, be intent on working for My sake. Working for Me, you will attain perfection. If you cannot thus work for My sake resorting to yoga,

renounce the fruits of all your actions, being self-controlled.’ So, performing one’s action with a view to pleasing God is a basic discipline every seeker is taught to practice. How is one to surrender the fruits of one’s actions to God? By taking refuge in the ‘primeval Puruṣa (God) from whom have originated activities from time immemorial!’ Sri Krishna emphasizes the efficacy of adoration of God through one’s work in the 18th chapter of the Gītā: ‘From whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom is everything pervaded—by adoring Him through one’s work, a human being achieves perfection.’ Service to fellow beings is another effective way of adoring God—service as the worship of the indwelling Spirit.

This incidentally is the basic work philosophy of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Vivekananda stresses its importance in his celebrated lecture on ‘True Worship’ delivered in Rameswaram: A rich man had a garden and two gardeners. One of these gardeners was very lazy and did not work; but when the owner came to the garden, the lazy man would get up and fold his arms and say, ‘How beautiful is the face of my master’, and dance before him. The other gardener would not talk much, but would work hard, and produce all sorts of fruits and vegetables which he would carry on his head to his master who lived a long way off.

Of these two gardeners, which would be the more beloved of his master? Shiva is that master, and this world is His garden, and there are two sorts of gardeners here; the one who is lazy, hypocritical, and does nothing, only talking about Shiva’s beautiful eyes and nose and other features; and the other, who is taking care of Shiva’s children, all those that are poor and weak, all animals, and all His creation. Which of these would be the more beloved of Shiva? Certainly he that serves His children.

E. Adoration at the spiritual level

When the spiritual aspirant is blessed with the knowledge of the Spirit, his life becomes an act of continuous worship. He now belongs to the fourth class of worshippers of God, the jñāni. As mentioned already, Sri Krishna calls all the four types of devotees noble-hearted. But, he considers a jñāni (man of knowledge) to be special among them because of his one-pointed devotion to Him. Such a devotee is dear to God and so is God to such a devotee. Commenting on this verse, Sri Sankara says that a jñāni adores God alone because he fails to see anything else adorable! The adoration of the jñāni can therefore be called the adoration of the Spirit by the Spirit. Lives of saints and sages illustrate this supreme adoration of the Spirit by the Spirit, which Swami Vivekananda considered ‘true religion’.

Says he: ‘Throw away all matter! The conception of God must be truly spiritual. All the different ideas of God, which are more or less materialistic, must go. As man becomes more and more spiritual, he has to throw off all these ideas and leave them behind. As a matter of fact, in every country there have always been a few who have been strong enough to throw away all matter and stand out in the shining light, worshipping the spirit by the spirit.’ Sri Ramana Maharshi was a great saint who lived in the last century and propagated the vicāra mārga (the path of knowledge and discrimination). An incident

happened when he was twelve and living with his uncle in Madurai. One day, as he lay on the floor, he began to think he was dead. He imagined that his body was carried to the cremation ground, kept on the funeral pyre and set on fire. He experienced that still he did not die, that the Atman in him continued to exist even after the body was consigned to flames. This was not a mere thought but a tangible spiritual experience. For, when he went to Tiruvannamalai—where he remained for the rest of his mortal life—he was known to be absorbed in his inner Self in a cave where even the sun's rays could not penetrate. Worms and vermin used to feed on his limbs, about which he was not at all conscious.

Abidance in the Self became his natural state—sahaja samadhi. After this abiding spiritual experience, Sri Ramana Maharshi's visits to the Siva temple in Madurai acquired a new meaning. He would stand in silent adoration before the stone images of the 63 Nayanmars—Saiva saints of Tamil Nadu. Tears of bhakti would stream down his cheeks as this jnani stood in amazement at their devotion! One day at Dakshinেশ্বর, Sri Ramakrishna entered one of the Siva temples, and started reciting the famous hymn Ūivamahimna Stotram describing the glory of Siva.

When he came to the following verse, he was overwhelmed with emotion: 'If the black mountain were to be the ink, the ocean the inkpot, the best branch of the celestial tree the pen, and the earth the paper—with all these instruments if the Goddess of Wisdom Herself were to write for eternity, even then, O Lord, She cannot exhaust Your glories!' He then exclaimed aloud again and again: 'O Great God, how can I express Your glory?' Tears started flowing profusely from his eyes. He lost himself in the infinite Consciousness of Siva. Immersed in God consciousness, such a his body, mind and ego. This state marks the acme of all adoration—the Spirit of the devotee finds its oneness with the supreme Spirit. The river merges into the sea.