

THE MEETING OF HEART AND MIND

From *The Wisdom of Vedanta*, by Swami Abhayananda, 1991
Dedicated to the Public Domain, 3-12-18
(last revised: 5-27-21)

There is a saying that the man of devotion (the *bhakta*) and the man of knowledge (the *jnani*) are like a blind man and a lame man, respectively. Neither can get about on his own; the *bhakta* without discrimination isn't able to see where he's going, and the *jnani* without heart is lame and unable to go forward. A happy solution is found to both their problems, however, when the lame *jnani* is hoisted upon the shoulders of the blind *bhakta*. For then, the *jnani* provides the *bhakta* with vision, and the *bhakta* provides the *jnani* with the means of locomotion. The point of this saying, of course, is that this is what we must do with the two sides of our own nature: we must combine them and utilize both, so we have the benefit of both discriminative knowledge and the sweetness of devotion.

In the spiritual life, the intellect and the heart play equally important parts. Like the blind man and the lame man, each is helpless without the other. Just think: how many times do we meet up with a simple, good-hearted person, full of sincere love for God, and yet who, because of a lack of discrimination, becomes lost on a path which leads only to a gushy sentimentality and misplaced affections. And how often also do we see the proud and stiff, overly intellectual, person unwilling to let go of concepts long enough to feel the joy of love, or to simply pray with a humble, contrite, and loving heart.

Clearly, both are equally handicapped. The heart without discrimination leads one only into darkness and confusion. And the intellect without the sweetness of the heart makes of life a dry and trackless desert, without any flavor or joy. It is my considered opinion that if a person is to reach the highest perfection possible to man, there must be a balance of heart and mind. There must be both the knowledge of the Self, and at the same time, the love of God.

One of the great devotional scriptures of the Vedantic tradition, the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, states: "The essence of all yoga consists in withdrawing the mind from the objects of sense and fixing it on God alone." Continuing, it

says, “The mind must be engaged in one thing or another: if it meditates on sense-objects, it becomes worldly; if it meditates on God, it becomes Divine.”

All the great scriptures of Vedanta similarly extol in one way or another the focusing of the mind on God. Some call that focus by the name of “devotion”; some call it “awareness of the Self.” Narada, who was the epitome of the *bhakta*, states in his *Bhakti Sutras*, “The constant flow of love towards the Lord, without any selfish desire, is devotion.” And Shankaracharya, who was the *jnani* of *jnani*s, says in his *Vivekachudamani*, “Devotion is continuous meditation on one’s true Self.” Now, if we examine the matter closely, we can see that devotion to God is not in any way different from meditation on the Self; and that the experience of Divine Love is not different from the experience of the Bliss of the Self.

The mind experiences Unity as Consciousness and Bliss. The heart experiences God as the fullness of Love and Joy. Are these two different in any way? If the heart sings of God, does that take anything away from His Unity? If the mind speaks of Unity, does that add anything to His Bliss? The Truth remains, whether we make a joyful noise or keep silent. Whether we give Him this name or that, He remains the same. Whether we regard ourselves as the worshiper or the worshiped, there is nothing here but the One. Whether we call our intrinsic happiness by the name of Bliss or Love, its taste remains the same. We may call Him whatever name we like; we may sing it out to our heart’s content. Whether we are gamboling in the streets or sitting quietly at home, we are always God playing within God. To remember Him is our only happiness; to forget Him our only sorrow.

When we speak of Self-knowledge, we must differentiate between such Knowledge as is identical with the Bliss of the Self and that knowledge which is simply the verbal representation of such Knowledge. Intellectual knowledge of the nondual One is a wonderful thing, but it is only preparatory to true Knowledge, that Knowledge which is synonymous with enlightenment. Conceptual knowledge we must certainly go beyond. To do so, it is necessary to utilize the heart. Devotion leads the mind beyond mere intellectual knowledge to the experience of the Blissful Self—which is true Knowledge.

The 19th century saint, Sri Ramakrishna, was fond of bringing out this truth in his conversations and his songs. Here is one such song:

"How are you trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God?
 You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room.
 He is grasped through ecstatic love.
 How can you fathom Him without it?
 And, for that love, the mighty yogis practice yoga from age to age.
 Then, when love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him
 the soul.
 It is in love's elixir only that He delights, O mind!
 He dwells in the body's inmost depths, in everlasting Joy."

Sri Ramakrishna himself became so full of desire for God, whom he regarded as his "Mother," that people began to fear for his sanity when they would see him rubbing his face on the ground and weeping for his "Mother" to come. At times, he would sing this song:

"O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
 What need have I of knowledge or reason?
 Make me drunk with Thy love's wine!
 O Thou, who stealest Thy bhakta's hearts,
 Drown me deep in the sea of Thy love!
 Here in this world, this madhouse of Thine,
 Some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy:
 Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gauranga—
 All are drunk with the wine of Thy love.
 O Mother, when shall I be blessed
 By joining their blissful company?"

Such total abandon, such complete disregard for one's own reputation, status, future welfare, is typical of those who, in the end, attain to God. The great poet-saint, Kabir, spoke often of the need to renounce all other desires in order to attain God. "Love based on desire for gain," he said, "is valueless! God is desireless. How then, could one with desire attain the Desireless?" Kabir then went on to say, "When I was conscious of individual existence, the love of God was absent in me. When the love of God filled my heart, my lesser self was displaced. O Kabir, this path is too narrow for two to travel."

You see, in the experience of the One, there's no place for two; one of the two must go. Whether your focus is on God or on the Self, you must

transcend the (illusory) separate self, the ego. The path of love, says Kabir, is too narrow for two to travel; the ego must yield to the Beloved. “Very subtle,” he says, “is the path of love! There, one loses oneself at His feet. There, one is immersed in the joy of the seeking, plunged in the depths of love as the fish in the depths of the water. The lover is never slow in offering his head for his Lord’s service. This, Kabir is declaring, is the secret of love.”

“How odd!” you may think; “Must I really offer my life, be willing to give up my head in order to attain God?” Let me tell you a story: it is a story from the *Masnavi*, the Persian masterpiece of the great Sufi poet, Jalaluddin Rumi. In it, he tells the story of the Vakil of Bukhara. The Vakil is the prince; he represents the supreme Lord. One of the subjects of this prince is told that the Vakil is seeking him for the purpose of chopping off his head. The poor man, hearing this, flees the city into the desert, and wanders from small village to village, in his attempt to stay out of the hands of the Vakil.

For ten years the man runs and runs. Then, finally exhausted and humiliated, he returns in surrender to Bukhara. The people there who knew him previously shout to him from their homes: “Escape while you can! Run! Run for your life!” But the man continues to walk in the direction of the Vakil’s palace. “The Vakil is searching everywhere for you,” they cry; “He has vowed to cut off your head with his own sword!” And, while everyone was shouting their warnings to this man, he just kept walking toward the palace of the prince. The people were calling to him from right and left: “Are you mad?” they shouted; “You are walking into certain death! Run! Run, while you have the chance!” But the man kept on walking, right into the palace of the Vakil.

When he reached the Vakil’s antechamber, he entered it and walked right up to the throne, then he threw himself on the floor at the prince’s feet. “I tried to escape you,” the man said, “but it is useless. My heart knows that my greatest destiny is to be slain by you. Therefore, here I am. Do with me what you will.” But, of course, the prince had no desire to slay the man; he was very pleased, though, to see that the man had surrendered to him even when he thought he would lose his head thereby. And so, the Vakil raised the man up and made him his representative throughout the realm. And Rumi, the author of this story, says at the end, “O lover, cold-hearted and unfaithful, who out of fear for your life shun the Beloved! O base one,

behold a hundred thousand souls dancing toward the deadly sword of his love!”

This is a recurrent theme among the devotional poets of the Sufi tradition. Kabir, whom I quoted a moment ago, asks of the devotee:

"Are you ready to cut off your head and place your foot on it? If so, come; love awaits you! Love is not grown in a garden, nor sold in the marketplace. Whether you are a king or a servant, the price is your head and nothing else. The payment for the cup of love is your head! O miser, do you flinch? It is *cheap* at that price! Give up all expectation of gain. Be like one who has died, alive only to the service of God. Then God will run after you, crying, 'Wait! Wait! I'm coming.'"

It is clear, of course, that what is necessary is not one's physical death, but the death of the ego-self. The little identity of "me" and "mine" is to be sublimated into the greater Identity of the one all-pervading Self through a continuous offering of the separative will into the universal will, an offering of the separative mind into the universal Mind, and the offering of the individual self in service of the universal Self.

Sri Ramakrishna knew very well how persistent this false sense of ego, of selfhood, is. For this reason, he taught, not the suppression of this ego, such as the *jnani* practices, but rather the utilization of the ego in devotion and service to God. "The devotee," says Sri Ramakrishna, "feels, 'O God, Thou art the Lord and I am Thy servant.' This is "the ego of devotion." Why does such a lover of God retain "the ego of devotion?" There is a reason: The ego cannot be gotten rid of; so, let the rascal remain as the servant of God, the devotee of God."

You see, Sri Ramakrishna understood that, so long as this universe exists, the apparent duality of soul and God exists. Until such time as God merges the soul into Himself, both of these exist. We are the absolute Consciousness, to be sure; but we are also His manifested images. We are Brahman, but we are also (imagined individuals within His) Maya; we are Shiva, but we are also Shakti; we are the universal Self, but we are also the individualized self. It is foolish not to acknowledge both sides of our nature. Failing to do so only leads us into great conflicts and difficulties. If we deny and neglect the existence of the soul, asserting only, "I am the one pure

Consciousness,” the active soul will rise up and make us acknowledge its presence. The only way to lead the soul to the experience of its all-pervasiveness is to teach it love for God, to transform it into Divine Love. The soul that goes on expanding its power to love eventually merges into absolute Love and awakes to the truth that it *is* Love.

Remember, whatever you continually think of for a long time, that you become. So, if the mind continually thinks of God, it will attain the state of Love. No amount of knowledge will awaken the mind to love. Nor will the mind become quieted by force or the power of will. The attempt to quiet the mind by force will only make it more frustrated, agitated and antagonistic. Instead of trying to do violence to the mind, lead it into meditation by the path of love. Soak it in the vat of love and dye it in the crimson color of love; then it will merge into the sweetness of God.

I'd like to share with you a few words of inspiration from a modern saint who extolled this very truth of devotion to God for many years. In my search for someone who best represented the synthesis of the heart and mind, I considered many different saints, both ancient and modern. But it seemed to me that one of the very best examples that could possibly be held up is that of a woman who was called Anandamayee Ma, “the Bliss-permeated Mother.” Anandamayee Ma is mentioned in Paramahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography Of A Yogi*, as a saint whom he met in 1935. Even then, she was a remarkable woman, inspiring everyone with whom she came in contact by her simple purity, and the depth of her God-realization.

She was born in 1896 in that part of India that is now the country of Bangladesh. Since the mid-1920’s she has been one of the most revered saints in all of India. She stayed in one place for only brief periods, preferring to travel about India, visiting her many devotees here and there, for more than sixty years. She recently passed from life, leaving this world a poorer place. For she was the epitome of a *jnani*, with the heart of a *bhakta*. Her exposition of the Self, from the standpoint of Nondual Vedanta, was flawless. She possessed the shining intellect of a god. She was always poised in the highest state. And yet, she was also a humble servant of God, exhorting others to give all their devotion to God alone. Listen to what she had to say:

"It is by crying and pining for Him that the One is found. In times of adversity and distress as well as in times of well-being

and good fortune, try to seek refuge in the One alone. Keep in mind that whatever He, the All-Beneficent, the Fountain of Goodness, does, is wholly for the best.

"He alone knows to whom He will reveal Himself and under which form. By what path and in what manner He attracts any particular person to Himself is incomprehensible to the human intelligence. The path differs for different pilgrims. The love of God is the only thing desirable for a human being. He who has brought you forth, He who is your father, mother, friend, beloved and Lord, who has given you everything, has nourished you with the ambrosia streaming from His own being—by whatever name you invoke Him, that name you should bear in mind at all times.

"Apart from seeking refuge in the contemplation of God, there is no way of becoming liberated from worldly anxiety and annoyance. Engage in whatever practice that helps to keep the mind centered in Him. To regret one's bad luck only troubles the mind and ruins the body; it has no other effect—keep this in mind! He by whose law everything has been wrought, He alone should be remembered.

"Live for the revelation of the Self hidden within you. He who does not live thus is committing suicide. Try to remove the veil of ignorance by the contemplation of God. Endeavor to tread the path of immortality; become a follower of the Immortal.

"...Meditate on Him alone, on the Fountain of Goodness. Pray to Him; depend on Him. Try to give more time to *japa* (repeating His name) and meditation. Surrender your mind at His feet. Endeavor to sustain your *japa* and meditation without a break.

"It is necessary to dedicate to the Supreme every single action of one's daily life. From the moment one awakes in the morning until one falls asleep at night, one should endeavor to sustain this attitude of mind. ... Then, when one has sacrificed at His feet whatever small power one possesses, so that there is nothing left that one may call one's own, do you know what He

does at that fortunate moment? Out of your littleness He makes you perfect, whole, and then nothing remains to be desired or achieved.

"The moment your self-dedication becomes complete, at that very instant occurs the revelation of the indivisible, unbroken Perfection, which is ever revealed as the Self."

These words of Anandamayee Ma constitute the ancient, yet ever-new, message of all the saints. Knowledge is essential to clear away our doubts, to understand where our greatest good lies. But it is devotion that takes us to our Destination. The determined dedication of the heart, mind, and will to God is the means to fulfillment, and the means to the perfect Knowledge which is the Self.

Meditation

What does it mean to remember God? It means to awaken in yourself the awareness of His presence within you and all around you. It is to transform the sense of selfhood into the sense of the universal Spirit, and to transform the vision of "others" into the vision of God's multi-formed beauty.

He is the Source of all that exists, and He is your inner Guide and Teacher. He is the majesty and greatness of your own soul. Remember Him with every breath, and thus keep alive the flame of His unconditional Love in your heart.

Say to Him: "Father, do Thou guide my life and my every thought, for I have no other joy but Thee. Thou art the strength of my soul, my only confidant and source of guidance. When I have forgotten Thee, I have forgotten my very heart's blood, and I have left aside the very fiber and backbone of my life.

"What I live for, Thou art. My only desire, Thou art. The sole fulfillment of all my dreams, the treasure for which my soul yearns, Thou art. O God of my soul, blood of my heart, let me not forget Thee for a single moment! O God of gods grant me this boon that I may ever remember Thee who art my soul's support and strength and let me love Thee and praise Thee ever in my heart!"

The Secret of Natural Devotion

Another who recognized the importance of utilizing both heart and mind in the pursuit of God was the 13th century mystic and poet, Jnaneshvar (Gyan-esh-war). A casteless orphan, Jnaneshvar was one of the most brilliant poets, sublime mystics, and fascinating figures in all of Medieval Indian history. At an age when most men have scarcely begun their life's work, Jnaneshvar, who lived from 1271 to 1296, a mere span of twenty-five years, had ended his; but not before having built an everlasting monument to his memory in the written masterpieces he left behind. The following is from Chapter Nine of his *Amritanubhav*, "The Nectar of Mystical Experience":

Just as a nose might become a fragrance,
Or ears might give out a melody
For their own enjoyment,
Or the eyes might produce a mirror
In order to see themselves;

Or flowers might take the form of a bee,
A lovely young girl might become a young man,
Or a sleepy man might become
A bed on which to lie;

As the blossoms of a mango tree
Might become a cuckoo bird,
Or one's skin might become
Malayan breezes,
Or tongues might become flavors;

Or as a slab of gold might become
Articles of jewelry
For the sake of beauty;
Just so, the one pure Consciousness becomes
The enjoyer and the object of enjoyment,
The seer and the object of vision,
Without disturbing Its unity.

A Shevanti flower bursts forth
With a thousand petals;

Yet it does not become anything
But a Shevanti flower.

Similarly, the auspicious drums
Of ever new experiences
May be sounding,
But in the kingdom of Stillness,
Nothing is heard.

All of the senses may rush simultaneously
Toward the multitude of sense objects,
But—just as, in a mirror,
One's vision only meets one's vision—
The rushing senses only meet themselves.

One may purchase a necklace,
Earrings, or a bracelet;
But it is only gold,
Whichever one receives.

One may gather a handful of ripples,
But it is only water in the hand.

To the hand, camphor is touch,
To the eye, it's a white object,
To the nose it is fragrance;
Nonetheless, it is camphor, and nothing but camphor.

Likewise, the sensible universe
Is only the vibration of the Self.

The various senses attempt to catch
Their objects in their hands—
For example, the ears
Try to catch the words;

But as soon as the senses
Touch their objects,
The objects disappear as objects.
There's no object for one to touch;

For all is the Self.

The juice of the sugarcane
Is part of the sugarcane;
The light of the full moon
Belongs to the full moon.

The meeting of the senses and their objects
Is like moonlight falling on the moon,
Or like water sprinkling on the sea.

One who has attained this wisdom
May say whatever he likes;
The silence of his contemplation
Remains undisturbed.

His state of actionlessness
Remains unaffected,
Even though he performs countless actions.

Stretching out the arms of desire,
One's eyesight embraces
The objects she sees;
But, in fact, nothing at all is gained.

It is like the Sun
Stretching out the thousand arms
Of his rays in order to grasp darkness.
He remains only light, as before;

Just as a person, awakening to
Enjoy the activity of a dream,
Finds himself suddenly alone.

Even one who has attained wisdom
May appear to become the enjoyer
Of the sense objects before him;
But we do not know
What his enjoyment is like.

If the moon gathers moonlight,
 What is gathered by whom?
 It is only a fruitless
 And meaningless dream.

There is really no action or inaction;
 Everything that is happening
 Is the sport of the Self.

The undivided One
 Enters the courtyard of duality
 Of His own accord.
 Unity only becomes strengthened
 By the expansion of diversity.

Sweeter even than the bliss of liberation
 Is the enjoyment of sense-objects
 To one who has attained wisdom.
 In the house of *bhakti* (devotional love),
 That lover and his God
 Experience their sweet union.

Whether he walks in the streets
 Or remains sitting quietly,
 He is always in his own home.

He may perform actions,
 But he has no goal to attain.
 Do not imagine
 That, if he did nothing,
 He would miss his goal.

He does not allow room
 For either remembering or forgetting;
 For this reason,
 His behavior is not like that of others.

His rule of conduct is his own sweet will.
 His meditation is whatever
 He happens to be doing.

The glory of liberation
Serves as an *asana* (seat cushion)
To one in such a state.

God Himself is the devotee;
The goal is the path.
The whole universe is one solitary Being.

It is He who becomes a God,
And He who becomes a devotee.
In Himself,
He enjoys the kingdom of Stillness.

The temple itself is merged
In the all-pervasive God;
The motion of time
And the vastness of space
Are no more.

Everything is contained in the Being of God.
If a desire
For the Master-disciple relationship arises,
It is God alone who must supply both out of Himself.

Even the devotional practices,
Such as *japa* (repetition of God's name), faith and
meditation,
Are not different from God.

Therefore, God must worship God
With God, in one way or another.

The temple, the idol, and the priests—
All are carved out of the same stone mountain.
Why, then, should there be devotional worship?
[Or why shouldn't there be devotional worship?]

A tree spreads its foliage,
And produces flowers and fruits,
Even though it has no objective

Outside of itself.

What does it matter if a dumb person
 Observes a vow of silence or not?
 The wise remain steadfast in their own divinity
 Whether they worship or not.

Will the flame of a lamp
 Remain without light
 If we do not ask her to wear
 The garment of light?

Is not the moon bathed in light
 Even though we do not ask her
 To wear the moonlight?

Fire is naturally hot;
 Why should we consider heating it?

A wise person is aware
 That he, himself, is the Lord;
 Therefore, even when he is not worshiping,
 He is worshiping.

Now the lamps of action and inaction
 Have both been snuffed out,
 And worshiping and not worshiping
 Are sitting in the same seat,
 And eating from the same bowl.

In such a state,
 The sacred scriptures are the same as censure,
 And censure itself
 Is the same as a sweet hymn of praise.

Both praise and censure
 Are, in fact, reduced to silence;
 Even though there is speech,
 It is silence.

No matter where he goes,
 That sage is making pilgrimage to God;
 And, if he attains to God,
 That attainment is non-attainment.

How amazing
 That in such a state,
 Moving about on foot
 And remaining seated in one place
 Are the same!

No matter what his eyes fall upon
 At any time,
 He always enjoys the vision of God.

If God Himself appears before him,
 It is as if he has seen nothing;
 For God and His devotee
 Are on the same level.

Of its own nature,
 A ball falls to the ground,
 And bounces up again,
 Enraptured in its own bliss.

If ever we could watch
 The play of a ball,
 We might be able to say something
 About the behavior of the sage.

This spontaneous, natural devotion
 Cannot be touched by the hand of action,
 Nor can knowledge penetrate it.

It goes on without end,
 In communion with itself.
 What bliss can be compared to this?

This natural devotion is a wonderful secret;
 It is the place in which meditation

And knowledge become merged.

O blissful and almighty Lord!
You have made us the sole sovereign
In the kingdom of perfect bliss.

How wonderful
That You have awakened the wakeful,
Laid to rest those who are sleeping,
And made us to realize
Our own Self!

We are Yours entirely!
Out of love,
You include us as Your own,
As is befitting Your greatness.

You do not receive anything from anyone,
Nor do You give anything of Yourself to anyone else.
We do not know how You enjoy your greatness.

O noble One!
It is Your pleasure
To become our nearest and dearest
By taking away from us
Our sense of difference from You.

* * *