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**The Miracle of Self Realization: Why God, Guru and the Self
are One and the Same?**

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Abstract

This contribution is rooted in Indian spirituality, more specifically in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta or the philosophy of non-dualism. In this paper, an attempt is made to outline the biggest miracle of all, namely, the miracle of self realization. In Indian spirituality, it constitutes the very purpose of our birth as human beings. This purpose lies in self revelation and if this is not successfully pursued then the current life is said to have been wasted from a spiritual point of view.

We discuss three concepts that are central to Indian spirituality. These include, God, Guru and the Self. Our purpose is to demonstrate that all three terms designate one Reality. We anchor ourselves on the pronouncements of Sri Ramana Maharishi, who was one of the greatest sages of India, who left his mortal coil in the last century. For this purpose, we have selected some excerpts from one of the most celebrated works in Ramana literature known as Talks which was put together by Sri Mungala Venkatramiah and subsequently published by Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai. It is a veritable Bible for Ramana devotees and widely regarded as such.

The central challenge in all management is realizing the nature of oneself. The advancement of humankind is best served when a human being connects with his or her or her own divinity. This is in sharp contrast to the Western view where helping others is viewed as the penultimate purpose of human existence. In Indian spirituality, the world is best served when self understanding precedes helping others. The world is changed for the better when we change ourselves. The key to a better world is self realization.

Keywords: Indian Spirituality, Self Realization, God and Guru

Someone asked a Mahatma, "WHO are you?"

"I am not," he replied.

"Are you God?"

"No. I am not."

"Are you a saint or a sage?"

"No. I am not."

"Are you an atheist?"

"No. I am not."

"Then who are you?"

"I am what I Am. I am pure awareness."

Sannyas or renunciation is the state of pure awareness

Mata Amritanandamayi (2003, p. 64)

Spirituality is primarily about self-revelation. It is not meant for everybody because of differing levels of spiritual maturity. When and how and where and why (or through whom) a person is attracted to spirituality has no recognized logical patterns and it is futile to look for one. This is because such patterns do not exist. The lives of Realized Masters across the spiritual traditions of the world are an eloquent testimony to the fact that sensory knowledge is emphatically not to the road to self-realization. This is why rationality, scholarship and professional education howsoever profound have little or no role to play in this domain. Such knowledge can indeed constitute a serious hindrance to a genuine seeker.

This perhaps explains why for a number of people, spirituality is a puzzling and often baffling domain. This is principally though not exclusively because it is not susceptible to reason, logic or rationality as we ordinarily understand these terms. Such elements as the scientific temper, raw data, conclusions derived from deduction and inference are of little use in understanding the nature of the spiritual quest, the reasons that motivate it and the still other reasons that sustain it. When a person is attracted to spirituality, there is no rational explanation as to why that happens.

As Mata Amritanandamayi, the Divine Mother, once expressed it: "Religion and its essential principles have not been understood. In fact, they have even been misinterpreted. There are two aspects for every religion in the world: the inner and the outer. The outer is the philosophy or the intellectual part and the inner is the spiritual part. Those who become too attached to the outside of religion will be misled. Religions are pointers." (From Amma's Heart, 2003, p. 104) There must come a point in the journey of a seeker when the outer must be discarded in favor of the inner. The former must be transcended.

Similarly, Sri Sathya Sai Baba said: "It is good to be born in a church but it is not good to die in it. Grow and rescue yourselves from limits and regulations, the doctrines that fence your freedom of thought, the ceremonies and rites that restrict and direct. Reach the point where churches do not matter, where all roads end, from where all roads run. Pardon the other man's faults but deal harshly with your own." (Murphet, p. 264)

The same principle applies to respecting all religions and traditions because their paths lead to the same goal: "Welcome all faiths and religions as kith and kin; all faiths are but attempts to train man along the Path; all aspire to win the same illumination through the cleansing of the mind by means of good works. The seeds of all religions are Sanatana Dharma (Eternal Truths) of the Vedanta. That Dharma examines all possible approaches to the Divine and arranges them in the order in which they can be utilized by the aspirant according to his equipment and attainment. The Vedic Dharma is the great grandfather. Buddhism is the son, Christianity is the grandson and Islam is the great grandson. If there is any misunderstanding among them, it is but a family affair. The ancestral property of which all are the co-sharers, is the same." (Murphet, p.232)

It is this refusal to be subject to the dictates of what is commonly known as "science" and the "scientific temper" and the demands of scholarship that makes

spirituality an enigmatic domain. People find it hard to accept something for which there is no constituted "proof" in the conventional sense ascribed to that term.

This misunderstanding stems from an inability to understand the nature of such proof. Proof in spirituality means something that is validated by experience. This is indeed the ultimate proof. Being driven by experience and being an experience that is completely beyond the senses, the intellect has an extremely limited role to play. This perhaps explains why the state of self-realization is so difficult to put in words. Among other reasons, this is because it is (a) a state that must be experienced and (b) it is an experience beyond the senses and this includes the body, mind and intellect.

In this paper, an attempt is made to demonstrate the limited nature of scholarship and worldly knowledge in the spiritual journey. By intellect is meant the pursuit of worldly knowledge (loka vichara). We will seek to show that (a) spirituality is primarily about self-revelation (b) that the pursuit of scholarship is of little use in this search for self-realization; (indeed, it is a positive obstacle), and that (c) self-enquiry (atma-vichara) or surrender are the best means to achieve the goal. We shall seek to demonstrate that there is in point of fact, simply no other way. In this paper, we take it for granted that the words of a Self Realized Master represent the Supreme Truth as they emanate from his or her inner Self. It is for this reason that so much importance is attached to them in Indian spiritual traditions.

It seems to me important to clarify these statements. There are two types of education and two types of knowledge. Professional education is anchored on (this includes management education) helping individuals make a living; this may therefore be described as education for a living. This is called loka vichara (worldly enquiry). The second type of education is spiritual education; this may be described as education for life. This is called atma vichara (self enquiry). We shall seek to demonstrate that among the two, the former is a positive impediment in developing the latter. Similarly bookish or textual knowledge, (including scriptural knowledge) cannot help to bring about self-realization. It can at best act as an aid but there is no substitute for actual experience.

This paper sprung from two considerations. The first of them lay in a desire to contemporize some of the revelations contained in the utterances of our spiritual masters in the conditions of today. Towards this end, we begin by affirming some critical propositions or truths in Indian spirituality. By Indian spirituality is meant Sanatana Dharma or the Eternal Religion. This affirmation is not meant to negate the existence of other spiritual traditions in India or the world. It is meant merely as a means to locate the traditions that inspire the author and to which he claims adherence. By Sanatana Dharma is meant the spiritual tradition (popularly and incorrectly, known as Hinduism), that treats the whole universe as one family. This dharma is eternal in the sense that it was never born and consequently can never die or perish; it remains (valid) for all time. (1)

The second stems from the necessity to capture the insights contained in some recent publications not available to the public before that throw light on some of the questions that have nagged spiritual seekers for ages such as the usefulness of learning,

the value of scriptures, and the nature of worldly knowledge and the exalted state of self realization.

The question naturally arises: if science, reasoning and logic have no role to play in the road to self-revelation, what is it that is needed in this journey that can help the seeker in his search? The answer is of course faith, devotion and surrender. Faith is often seen as "unscientific" and "irrational" but if the matter is considered closely, faith is the logical culmination of reason.

Amma, the Divine Mother, was once asked to explain the role of reasoning in spirituality. She replied by saying that "to give up all reasoning is the place of reasoning in spirituality". This means that unless the seeker has experienced the complete futility of worldly wisdom in advancing his or her spiritual search and abandons reasoning by embracing faith as his vehicle, there is little hope of the aspirant making any significant progress in the journey. Faith cannot develop without the seeker understanding the limitations of reason.

As Sri Yukteswar expressed it: "All creation is governed by law. The principles that operate in the outer universe, discoverable by scientists, are called natural laws. But there are subtler laws that rule the hidden spiritual planes and the inner realm of consciousness; these principles are knowable through the science of yoga. It is not the physicist but the Self-realized master who comprehends the true nature of matter. By such knowledge Christ was able to restore the servant's ear after it had been severed by one of the disciples." (Yukteshwar, 2011, p. 131)

In sharp contrast to conventional wisdom, faith in Sanatana Dharma is seen as the logical culmination of reason. It is such faith that constitutes the bedrock of spiritual revelation. This is because faith cannot develop without divine Grace. Frustrated by the nature of the world, the seeker seeks refuge in God. Grace must therefore be explicitly sought. In Indian spirituality, intense faith in God results in the seeker coming under the influence of a Self Realized Mater or Guru who guides the seeker to realize his true nature. This is why a Guru is deemed absolutely essential in the spiritual journey. The numerous testimonies of devotees leave no room for doubt on this score.

In his book which attempts to carry out an investigative report on the late Sathya Sai Baba, the Scandinavian scholar Erlendur Hardoldsson records an instance where Baba was speaking about science and scientists. It is truly revelatory: "The theme was the difference between the spiritual approach and the scientific approach. We felt that it was aimed at us. In his view, science is concerned with physical realities, whereas the spiritual approach deals with the higher reaches of the mind. Control of mind is essential in the spiritual approach, since the mind can potentially create anything. He was quite hard on scientists. According to him, they tend to lose common sense and are materialistic. He complained that there is too much freedom and laxness in education with the result that students pass through college 70% wrong and just 30% right; consequently they go 200% wrong when later in life they have to shoulder responsibilities. Here he said the spiritual approach could provide some controls. The

mind must be cultivated to be pure and uncluttered with everyday needs. The scientific and spiritual approaches are basically different. The spiritual is learned through personal experience and discipline, not, as science is, through information or knowledge about physical phenomena." (Handelsson, 1997, p. 25)

This is the heart of the matter. As the late Sathya Sai Baba said: "Man is burdened with the delusion that the true is the false, that the temporary is the eternal. Long identification has trained him so. He has to be re-educated into the right vision. The truest thing, the fact that persists unchanged is the 'I' itself. All else is unreal but appearing as real. You may ask: how is this so? I grow old; I change; I am healthy; I fall ill. But in and through all this growth and decay, the 'I' persists. 'I slept well', you say. But during sleep you were not aware of the body, the senses, the mind or the external world. Yet the 'I' persisted through the dream world, through deep sleep." (Murphet, pp. 66, 67)

The intelligent reader will discover the proximity of these insights to those contained in Advaita Vedanta. The spiritual journey in Sanatana Dharma lies in seeking that which does not change because anything that is predicated upon change cannot last and cannot be considered eternal. Worldly wisdom cannot lead to self-realization. But love, humility, reverence, faith and devotion in the form of selfless service to the Master can.

The point is this: disease and suffering is always a product of human ignorance and constitute the results of man moving away from satyam and dharma. As Murphet points out: "If God wiped out all disease and suffering with a wave of His Hand, they would return through the same human channels of ignorance and error. That is why Jesus said to at least one of those he cured, 'Go your way and sin no more', the implication being that only by refraining from his former mistakes could he remain whole." (op. cit., p.112) The world, says the Bhagavad Gita, is imprisoned in its own activity except when actions are performed as worship of God.

What is the biggest mystery of the universe? Sri Ramana Maharishi responded to this question in a remarkable and astonishingly original manner.

He said: "There is no greater mystery than this - ourselves being the Reality we seek to gain Reality. We think that there is something hiding our Reality and that it must be destroyed before the Reality is gained. It is ridiculous. A day will dawn when you will yourself laugh at your past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now."

He went to say: "In the *Yoga Vasishtha*, (a classic and highly authoritative text) it is said: 'What is real is hidden from us but what is false, is revealed as true.' We are actually experiencing the Reality only; still we do not know it. Is it not a wonder of wonders?"

"The quest 'Who am I?' is the axe with which to cut off the ego." And: "Cease to be the knower, then there is perfection." (Talk No. 146 and 147)

But what is self realization? Sri Ramana again had a unique answer: "The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. Such is the paradox of Self Realization."

"If you give up 'I' and 'Mine', all are given up at one stroke. The very seed of possession is nipped in the bud or crushed in the germ itself."

In the same breath, he was asked: "Is the study of science, psychology, physiology, philosophy, etc, helpful.?" He replied by saying: "very little. Some knowledge is needed for yoga and it may be found in books. But practical application is the thing needed and personal example, personal touch and personal instructions are the most helpful aids." (Talk No. 28)

He then added: "All thoughts are inconsistent with realization. Thought is one thing and realization quite another." (Talk No. 30) This means that this exalted state is free from thought, beyond the mind and the intellect. It can be qualified as an out of the body experience.

This state cannot be experienced by a mere desire to have it. Two essential prerequisites are needed. The first is Divine Grace and the second is self-effort. In Indian spirituality, The Supreme Being is said to perform five essential functions including creation, preservation, destruction, involution and grace. Of these grace is said to be most important.

As Sathya Sai Baba expressed it: "God dwells in you as Joy. That is why you seek Joy always in every object around you. To become as full of Joy as Radha or Ramakrishna or Vivekananda, you have to sacrifice your ego and saturate yourself with the Lord, with the consciousness that the Lord is your being. So long as you have a trace of ego in you, you cannot see the Lord clearly. Egoism will be destroyed if you constantly tell yourself: 'It is He not I. He is the force, I am but the instrument.' Keep His name always on the tongue; contemplate His glory when ever you see or hear anything beautiful or grand; see in everyone the Lord, Himself, moving in that form. Do not talk ill of others, see only the good in them. Welcome every chance to help others, to console them, to encourage them along the spiritual path. Be humble; do not become proud of your wealth or status or authority or learning or class. Dedicate all your physical possessions and mental skills and intellectual attainments to the service of the Lord. Then your ego will be wiped out." (Murphet, pp.141, 142)

Divine Grace comes in the form of a Guru. A sincere seeker committed to the path of Truth, God (or the unmanifest absolute) takes the form of a Guru (or the manifest absolute) and guides the seeker to connect to his own divinity. In the words of Sri Ramana, the external Guru appears to pull the internal Guru to itself. The Guru helps in dispelling ignorance by helping the seeker distinguish between the Real and the Unreal. By helping the seeker get rid of the unreal, what remains is the Self.

The notion that God incarnates in the form of Guru is one that is central in the Bhagavad Gita. Satya Sai Baba is in perfect accordance with this principle when he declared: "I am new and ever ancient. I come always for the restoration of Dharma (righteousness), for tending the virtuous and ensuring them conditions congenial for progress and for educating the 'blind' who miss the way and wander into the wilderness. Some doubters might ask, 'Can the Paramatma assume human form?' Well, man can derive joy only through the human form; he can receive instruction, inspiration, illumination only through human language and human communication." (Murphet, p.96)

There is therefore no difference between God, Guru and the Self. They are essentially one and the same and designate the same Reality. Self realization is not possible in the absence of a Guru. The traditions of Sanatana Dharma are emphatic on this score. This also accounts for the fact why the Guru is so praised and venerated in the scriptures.

So let us be clear! The Guru is above any kind of human law because He is the law! All law originates with Him! He is the root cause of everything! Without Him, not even a leaf or a blade of grass can move in this universe! This is because the Guru is the Supreme Self. So long as the Self is not realized the Guru is essential. For self realization to happen, the Grace of the Guru is essential. God or the Self or the Atman has an unmanifest aspect and a manifest aspect. The Guru is the latter. He is none other than God in human form. The holy Bible begins with the statement that in the beginning was the Word. The Guru is the Word.

It is because human beings tend to identify themselves strongly with their bodies (and their minds and intellects) that they project the same identification to the Guru. In their ignorance, they come under the belief that the Guru is limited to the body. But the fact of the matter is that neither is the Guru the body and nor is the human being the body. The Guru is God and so is the human being. The only difference lies in the fact that the Guru is aware of who He or She really is while the ordinary human being is not.

The ordinary human being remains unaware of his or her divinity and becomes a victim of the endless cycle of births and deaths. In between spirit and matter or between the Paramatman or the Universal Self and the atma or the individual soul, there arises a spurious entity called the ego which masquerades as the Self. Being embodied in human form, the individual self mistakes itself to be the body and imagines that it is limited. Millions of births convince the individual soul of the futility of such existence and it is then that such a soul begins to desire liberation from the cycle. This is why our scriptures affirm that human birth is precious. Its sole purpose lies in realizing the Self and the opportunity must not be wasted. It must be realized here and now!

Genuine prayer, earnest spiritual practice and faith bring the Grace of the Guru to such a seeker. The Guru is the link between the Universal Self and the individual self. He removes ignorance by making the seeker realize His presence in him or her. Without the passport issued by the Guru (initiation), it is impossible to secure the visa (blessing) of self revelation.

Even a cursory knowledge of the lives of Mahatmas will reveal the importance of having a Guru to elevate our spiritual practice. That is why Mahatmas often declare that there is only one thing that human beings can genuinely call their own. Otherwise in reality, nothing actually belongs to them in this universe. Our parents, our children, our cars, our luxuries and even the air we breathe does not belong to us. Verily it is said that everything comes from Him and goes back to Him. The only thing we can call our own is our egos and therefore it is critical that we offer precisely our ego to Him. That is the most precious offering we can make to Him. The Guru - and it is the Guru alone who can do this - enables this transformation. He helps to remove the notion of "I" and "mine" from his disciple.

According to our sages, removing the "I" it is said is jnana or wisdom and removing "mine" is bhakti or devotion. In other words, The Self cannot be objectified because its Reality is not objective. It is entirely Subject. According to Sri Ramana, it is only subject. Thoughts are foreign to this state. It is therefore a thought free state, beyond the mind, body and intellect. It is - without putting too fine a point on it - beyond the grasp of human intelligence.

No Mahatma or Self Realized Master will ever declare that He or She is God. This should not prevent us from viewing such a sage as the personification of God Himself. This perhaps accounts for the fact why God is often represented as the absence of ego, the telling actualization of humility, love and compassion. Lord Jesus and His mission is a compelling and outstanding example.

Indian scriptures declare that to treat the Guru as an ordinary human being is the greatest of sins. It is in fact a maha-papam or the greatest of sins. The Guru's essential nature is sacrifice. He takes name and form by assuming human birth out of compassion. His actions are above human understanding because He has realized Absolute Reality and has become That. The word That is used to describe Reality because it is in effect indescribable! It can only be experienced.

Once again this also explains why only absolute faith, devotion and surrender are the vehicles to reach Him. This is why Lord Jesus exhorted his apostles towards the end of His mission and castigated them for their lack of faith by saying that if they had faith - be it even the size of a mustard seed - they would be able to move mountains. Faith is therefore the essential vehicle in the advancement of spiritual life. Nothing is possible without it.

Shirdi Sai Baba once said that what He expects of His devotees are the two qualities of shraddha (faith) and shaboori (patience). He attached immense importance to these qualities. He said He is close to those devotees who have these two qualities because He is pleased by their presence. This means that the seeker is asked to display faith and patience in the most trying of circumstances because the process of extinguishing our negative karmas requires that kind of strength. The genuine seeker must not buckle under those demanding circumstances but realize through experience

that what we receive in our lives in the form of our experiences is the result of own actions. The law of karma makes no exceptions and that is because it is God's law and even God follows its dictates.

In other words, we must resist the temptation to install our desires or allow the ego to make demands upon us. In all spiritual traditions, the root cause of man's unhappiness lies in the ability to resist desire. We are asked to give up desires and surrender our lives to the will of God because He alone knows what is good for us. Instead of imposing our individual wills, our prayer to Him must lie in saying, "My Lord! Do not give me what I desire but instead give me what you think I need."

Pain is an essential condition of this process. The truth of the matter is that all evolution, real evolution that is, comes through pain. Spiritual progress is no exception: "The sugar cane should welcome the cutting, the hacking and the crushing, the boiling and the straining to which it is subjected; without these ordeals the cane would dry up and make no tongue sweet. So too, man must welcome trouble for that alone brings sweetness to the spirit within." (Murphet, op. cit., p. 76)

In Sanatana Dharma, we are specifically asked to control our desires because by controlling our desires, it becomes that much more easier to control our minds, especially our lower mind. When the lower mind is brought under control, the higher mind is elevated. The lower mind moves towards the external world, while the higher mind moves towards the inner world of perfection. The process of elevating our spiritual practice lies in getting the mind to merge into its source which lies in the cavern of the heart. Getting free of agitating thoughts is an essential precondition to stilling the mind in the silence of the Self. We come under the protective shade of a Mahatma or a Sadguru like Sri Sharavana Baba to accomplish precisely this objective because without the Grace of such a Guru, it is impossible to realize the Self. (Narayanswamy, 2010)

It is important to understand the principle that the Guru inheres because it is precisely this principle that the entire universe inheres. The whole universe is based upon it. This principle is otherwise known as tyaga or sacrifice. For those not conversant with these principles, a reading of the sacred Guru Gita is strongly recommended. This marvelous work throws precious light on the meaning of the word Guru and the nature of a Mahatma. (Narayanswamy, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c)

In its words: "On the advice of the Guru, if one meditates with firm determination on the principle of "I am one without duality" need not resort to forest for penances, and the constant practice of the above principle brings about samadhi and his sins are burnt instantaneously." (94 & 95)

"As the Rajasic Brahma, Sri Guru creates this universe, as the Sattvic Vishnu, He protects it and as the Tamasic Rudra, He destroys it." (96)

"By His grace, after having attained a glimpse of that Supreme being in Guru, one should stay alone, free from all contacts without any attachment and peacefully." (97)

"The jiva, which becomes omnipresent, ever-peaceful, lives happily anywhere, who is ever in Bliss is known as omniscient." (98)

"Wherever he (the liberated soul) stays, that country accrues all merits. O Devi, I have told to you the characteristics of a liberated soul." (99)

Sri Sathya Sai Baba often asked His devotees to learn the principle of tyaga or sacrifice embodied in Nature. In a similar vein, Sri Sharavana Baba often asks His devotees to embrace the principle of sacrifice by becoming immersed in selfless service. Sri Sathya Sai would often say: "The river is permanently flowing but its waters are for the benefit of others only. It seeks no reward for itself. Likewise, the trees bear fruits only to give them to others, not for its own eating. The cattle gives milk only for others, it does not drink it. Thus, the river, the tree, the cattle, all of them are teaching us a lesson, how to live for others, how to serve the God embodied in others. If the river, tree and cow can exhibit such exemplary qualities of sacrifice, it is deplorable that Man, who has inherited noble qualities should be lacking in the spirit of sacrifice." This is why Sai would say that man has the qualities of an animal or pasu but he is actually born to become a pasupati or the Lord of all beings.

The Guru is portrayed in our scriptures as an atiasrami. This means He is above the four ashramas or stages of human existence. The ashramas include brahmacharya, (this means wedded to Brahman and not necessarily celibacy), grihastha or family life, vanaprastha or preparation for retirement from worldly life and sanyasa or ego renunciation. This means He is not bound by any law related to any of the four ashramas. No thought, word or action binds Him because He is beyond the three gunas of sattva or purity, rajas or activity and tamas or sloth and indolence. He can eat meat, He can remain vegetarian, He can marry or remain celibate, He can accumulate wealth and not meet anyone or He can retire into the forest. He can in what appears to our eyes lead a very active life or He can sit in one place completely unobserved by anybody. In His eyes, He does not act but it appears that He does to the eyes of the onlooker. No action attaches itself to Him. No karma clings to Him and He is accountable to nobody. He is the antaryami (Indweller) who is present in the hearts of all living beings.

The mere presence of a Self Realized Master or a Mahatma is enough to save the world. Just one Mahatma is enough. Such is the awesome power that inheres in such a mighty figure. Such a Mahatma works in silence and their working is beyond human comprehension. Sometimes they may perform deeds that appear stupid, ignorant, childish and insane to human eyes but no action of such a blessed one goes waste. Their actions and utterances will always serve to benefit the world. Sathya Sai often used to say: "Even if all human beings concertedly direct their minds to understanding Me, they will not succeed in understanding even a fraction of who I am."

The statement gives some idea of the exalted state of a Sadguru. But the import is deeper. It also signifies the fact that in these materialistic times, Divine Grace is needed even to recognize a Guru. How many people understood the divinity of Christ in His

lifetime? How many understood the divinity of Lord Rama or Lord Krishna in their lifetimes? How many people understand a Mahatma when he is alive? Some strange cosmic law dictates that they are understood after they are absorbed into the five elements they came from.

Divine law is very different (and often diametrically opposed to) human law. It is often the case that acting with the very best of intentions can result in the creation of the worst karmas. This is because human law is based on partial knowledge of the present life while divine law is applicable to the past, present and future. Man's sight is limited but the gaze of the Supreme Being transcends space, time and distance. This is why Shirdi Sai Baba would declare that what man gives is limited whereas what God gives is permanent. He also said: "Trust in the Guru fully. That is the only sadhana."
(Dabholkar, 2012)

For example, in divine law, the present life is a result of the past life. Both good and bad thoughts, words and actions emanate from acts committed in our ignorant past. There is therefore a continuous process of acting and reacting that extends to several lives. The key factor that makes this process permanent is desire. This is why human beings are asked to give up desire because it is only by giving up desire and salvation from the vicious cycle is made possible. The cycle become virtuous when we realize that is important to respond to life and not react to life.

However in order to instruct the world, they adhere to its rules and regulations. They can create worlds like the one we inhabit in a trice, they can alter the course of human events and history and they can interfere with the functioning of the natural elements if they so desire. The life of Shirdi Sai Baba tellingly illustrates these principles in action. But they refrain from doing so. On the few occasions when they do, they do so to help strengthen faith, devotion and surrender among those who come into contact with them.

The greatness of the Guru cannot be grasped by a mere desire to do so. It requires not only self effort but more importantly, it requires Divine Grace. The Upanishads say that the Self chooses to reveal itself to whom It chooses. It cannot be realized by austerities, pilgrimages, worship and scholarship. The Supreme Self is often said to perform five essential functions including creation, preservation, destruction, involution or maya and Divine Grace. Of the five, it is the last that is easily the most important. Coming into contact with a Sadguru is nothing but a concrete manifestation of that Grace. It is a privilege not given to all and it is necessary to appreciate its real worth and significance.

Spiritual initiation can consist of either initiation through sight, touch, mantra or silence. There are other ways too. The ancients say that silence is the most golden of initiations and is epitomized by Lord Dakshinamurthy initiating the four sons of Lord Brahma in silence. Indeed the language of the Self is silence because it is when the mind and its vagaries are silenced and the ego tamed and destroyed that inner illumination in the form of self revelation results. In such a state, the answer to any question will

automatically reverberate from the cavern of the spiritual heart (located two inches to the right of the physical heart) which is often asserted to be the locus of the Self.

Spiritual initiation requires that a fee be paid to the Guru. This fee is called dakshina. The real meaning of dakshina means offering our individual ego to the lotus feet of the Master because it is in such surrender that the beauty of the Guru-shishya parampara or relationship is realized through experience. Since not all of us can effect such total surrender, most seekers take the route of partial surrender by giving up or offering something precious to the Guru. This may take the form of money, it may take the form of a vow, giving up a bad habit or anything seen as precious from the point of view of the individual seeker. Irrespective of what it is the Guru is iscompletely unattached to its monetary value. It is the thought that counts. God is singularly uninterested in the amount we want to offer. He is only interested in purity of our desire to offer.

This is the essence of dakshina. The Guru in turn will use that offering in the way He thinks best. He may give the offering to another devotee to use, He might distribute it to people of His choice or He might retain it to use it at an opportune time for still another devotee. Irrespective of how it is used, the seeker may rest assured that it will do him or her enormous good because only good can accrue through this action and nothing but good can result.

What does this transaction symbolize? The offering is our papam or sins and what the Guru distributes in turn is punyam or spiritual merit. In other words, what the Guru absorbs from others is their pain and karma but what He gives in return is His prasadam. Human dirt is cleansed and returned as a divine gift. What act can be more sacred, pure and beneficial? It is only a Sadguru and a Sadguru alone who can effect this transformation.

The principle bears explanation. The point about karma is that it can be overcome: As Baba once said: “You might say that the karma of the previous births has to be consumed in this life and that no amount of Grace can save you from that. Evidently, someone has taught you to believe so. But I assure you, you need not suffer from karma like that. When a severe pain torments you, the doctor gives you a morphine injection and you do not feel the pain, though it is there in the body. Grace is like the morphine; the pain is not felt through you go through it...” (Murphet, p.121)

When His Holiness Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba affirms the fact that He is a beggar, the statement needs to be understood in proper perspective. What He begs of people is to transfer their pain to Him so that He can transform that pain into punyam and give it back to them. The few rupees we offer Him are used for the upliftment of those in need of assistance and by doing so, we gain spiritual merit from that act of charity and our karmic burden is in direct proportion lessened as a result. There is no birth or death for such a Guru because He was never born and for that reason, can never die. My Guru, Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba Swamiji once played a few hands of rummy with a devotee in an aircraft on a long haul flight. The devotee lost both rounds. He was feeling a little despondent about his loss.

But Swamiji with His inimitable smile turned to the devotee and said that he had actually won. For a moment, the devotee did not understand and then Swamiji explained that by losing those two rounds Swamiji had saved him from two imminent catastrophes that were to occur in his life one of which involved a long and expensive battle in court and another a financial loss of no mean magnitude! There was of course a deeper lesson: Never try and win by scoring a point over the Guru! By losing your ego (game), you win Him! Do not win the game! Win Him instead!

Dakshina of any form of any kind therefore is the exclusive property of the Guru. It is entirely His choice of how it will be put to use. It is faith that triggers its giving and it is Grace that governs how it is used. This dakshina is the absolute property of the Guru. It symbolizes the pain of the devotee and it is important that the Guru be given the freedom to deploy it in the manner that the Guru thinks fit and appropriate. Only the Guru knows how it needs to be used. His instructions to this effect will always be precise, to the point and graphic to the last detail. It is an intensely personal relationship between the Guru and his disciple. It is sacrosanct, holy and sacred. This is not foolish sentimentalism. It is spiritualism of the highest magnitude.

Adi Shankara had once said that there are three things that are precious in this universe. The first is the gift of human birth, the second is to have the desire for moksha or liberation and the third is to come under the guidance of a living master. The manifest form of the Sadguru is only another form of the Unmanifest Absolute. The Guru is Reality incarnate.

On December 24, 2012, the Divine Mother, Mata Amritanandamayi in Her Christmas message said: "There is one thing Amma feels it is important to emphasize: in the same way you celebrate the birthdays of these Mahatmas, with so much care and enthusiasm, you should demonstrate the same care and enthusiasm in putting into practice their teachings in each and every moment of your life. It is said that Christ resurrected three days after he was crucified. The body is comprised of the five elements. It can be cut, injured and destroyed by weapons. However, just like Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita: 'The Atma or the Self cannot be cut by weapons. Fire cannot burn it. Water cannot wet it. The wind cannot dry it. It was never born and never dies. It is eternal and indestructible.' Christ's body was crucified, but this had no effect upon the Atma. If we understand that 'My nature is that of Atma', then there is no death." Sadgurus therefore actually have no birth or death.

Dakshina is their only earning. It is a gift (offering) from the disciple to the Master. The Guru is accountable only to Himself. It is precisely because He has nothing that He owns everything! It is the spiritual beggar (who voluntarily takes upon himself the pain of others) who is the real king or capable of giving happiness! In His exalted vision, such a blessed one cannot view the universe – let alone individuals - as being separate from Himself. In all diversity, what He experiences is unity. His sight is irreversibly tied to that unity. That is what He perceives all around Him. This unity is otherwise called love, perfection and bliss.

The Guru is pure being, pure consciousness and pure bliss. Embodied in human form, He or She voluntarily chooses to be bound by limitations imposed by society but they are free to discard these limitations if they so desire. Such a desire will arise in them only if it is beneficial for the universe. Nothing they do can ever hurt anybody. No force in this universe can stop them from accomplishing their mission. They will single-mindedly develop their mission and complete the purpose they set out to accomplish. They do not wait to be given a certificate to fulfill their goals. Irrespective of whether people believe in them or not, they will go about what they are about. Their gaze is equal. They do not differentiate. Swamiji once said, that "irrespective of whether I kiss you or punish you, know that both are forms of my Grace!"

This is what Irina Tweedie meant when she wrote: "It is the task of the Teacher to set the heart aflame with the unquenchable fire of longing and it is his duty to keep it burning until it is reduced to ashes. For only a heart that has burned empty is capable of love." (Tweedie, 1995)

In the absence of such an understanding of the Guru, only confusion will prevail. Members of spiritual organizations that are headed by Mahatmas must understand, appreciate and internalize these principles. They must understand above all that the Guru's word is supreme and absolute because He is the Word. This is not mere piety. The Guru is the sole refuge of the world.

It seems to me important close with an upadesam (teaching or instruction) my Guru Sri Sadguru Sharavana Baba gave his devotees on the night on April 22, 2012. This was its essence: "You must always keep an avatar happy. The times are distressing today because of the curses given by the Rishis. In this land, temples were destroyed and they were actually burnt at stake. Untold atrocities had been committed against the Rishis and it is the result of their curses that we are witnessing today. Demonic forces are happy only when the avatar is crucified. This is why they are known to the world and their teachings spread only after they leave their mortal coil. The soil that absorbs them as its own becomes holy and sacred and begins to attract devotees in large numbers. Nobody can touch Me or harm Me. I have emerged from the vitals of the earth and her soil protects Me. Where ever I go, there are at least ten beings waiting to defend, protect and execute my commands. You must listen carefully to the words of an avatar and ensure that you do everything possible to keep Him happy."

"Consider this pakoda (fried savory made from gram flour) that we are consuming. Some grew the gram, someone else farmed it. Still somebody else harvested it. Then it was cleaned and packed for sale in the market. Someone brought it in the market. Then it was made into dough and fried and only then does it arrive in your plate! Imagine the number of people who have contributed to the making of this humble pakoda and how much every single one of us owes to these people? Very few people are aware of this principle. How many karmas have we attracted by this single act? Such karma can only be exhausted by a Guru and nobody else. Know that this is the bare truth! This is why you must keep Mahatmas in a happy state to secure their blessings. When they

decide to leave this world, it is important to ensure that they leave happy." The lines are poignant, self-explanatory and they run deep.

We return to recalling some essential propositions on the nature of Reality as recorded by the Sri Ramana Maharishi. The first of these propositions lies in the observation that the spiritual journey is not meant for all: "The truth that the world is unreal is taught by the sages only to him who aspires to attain the highest state by the quest of the Self. It is not addressed to others and therefore the contentions of these objections are wholly in vain." (3) While the spiritual message is indubitably universal and addressed to all, very few are able to take this plunge. Fewer still are those who are able to sustain the effort. And even fewer reach the goal. This is certainly true of the tradition of Advaita-Vedanta.

As its author, Lakshmana Sarma explains: "The uniqueness of Vedanta is that no one is coerced by threats of hell or otherwise to accept its highly elusive teachings, but is given out only to those whose minds are ripe and have become receptive to these metaphysical truths. Indeed, the Vedanta advises ordinary people not to dabble in Vedantic studies. Vedanta makes a distinction between those who are qualified to receive its Advaitic Teaching and those who are not so qualified." (4)

The point cannot be over-emphasized. As S.S. Cohen, an outstanding devotee of Sri Ramana Maharishi wrote: "It is necessary at the outset to understand that it is not possible to hound out avidya (the primeval ignorance arising out of sense-perceptions) with a half-hearted approach, with scanty faith, with a mind weighed down by preconceptions, stubborn worldliness, fixed ideas and inordinate haste. These do not qualify for the Supreme Knowledge which exacts a steady, unwavering, whole-hearted discipline."

"The seeker of the Absolute must have no object in life but the persistent pursuit of the Absolute, to which he bends all the power of his soul. To approach it in any other attitude, say with motives not strictly spiritual or with a surfeited, insubordinate intellect, or to expect the Absolute to bend and yield its secrets in the first week or first month for one's own sake, for the sake of worldly achievements, illustrious ancestry or community, denotes a lack of the most elementary qualities that make one eligible for it. Eclecticism likewise is has no place in this path; its application is poor, its understanding diffused, so are its spiritual yearnings." (Cohen, 1991)

As De Caussade expressed it: "The present moment is always overflowing with immeasurable riches, far more than you are able to hold. Your faith will measure it out to you; as you believe, so will you receive." (Caussade, 1931)

It follows that the quest for the Absolute begins only when the seeker is ready to commence upon such a journey. The mind has to mature by arriving at a state where it acknowledges its own limitations and is ready to receive anew. As C. Rajagopalachari succinctly expressed it in his marvelous introduction to the rendering of the celebrated Bhaja Govindam by the late M.S. Subbalakshmi: "The way of devotion is not different

from the way of knowledge called jnana. When intelligence matures and lodges securely in the mind, it becomes wisdom. When wisdom is integrated with life and issues out of action, it become bhakti; knowledge, when it becomes fully mature is bhakti. If it does not get transformed into bhakti, such knowledge is useless tinsel. To believe that jnana and bhakti or devotion and knowledge are different from each other is ignorance." (www.geocities.com/bhikka.index.html)

Second: the purpose of the spiritual journey is salvation or deliverance. In simple language, the idea lies in transcending death permanently. The seat of Supreme Consciousness is located in the heart: "In the heart there dwells the Reality which is Pure Consciousness, the Real Self. To be in the heart, with the mind quiescent, is the Knowledge (Awareness) of Him and also the State of Deliverance." (5) By heart is not meant the physical organ pumping blood but the emotive space. Specifically, it is located two inches on the right side of the chest. It must be pointed out that this is a symbolic location and not a physical one. It refers to the subtle body. To consciously drag the mind back to its source in the heart is the purpose the spiritual journey. This is what is known as Self-Realization or salvation or getting out of the recurring "cycle of birth and death."

Third: between the individual soul (jivatman) and the Supreme Being (parmatman), lies the mind or the ego which is responsible for the appearance of the world. The mind is the root of ignorance and they are in fact inseparable. The mind is responsible for concealing the Reality (of the Self) and therefore the existence of the mind is tantamount to the existence of ignorance: "If the world were other than the mind, why does it not appear in deep sleep? Therein is the Real Self, who is consciousness and by whose consciousness-Light, the mind is mind!" Later: "Only then does the world appear to men, when their minds are functioning. Therefore the world is mental, in waking, as it is in dream." (6 pp. 75-76)

Fourth: it is this ignorance that causes human beings to identify the Self with the gross human body. If at all there is a notion of primal sin in Sanatana Dharma, it is to be found here in the false notion that the Self is limited to the body: "This teaching of the unreality of the world is not addressed to those who look upon the body itself as the Self, or consider the Self to be the owner of the body. For these people, the world is real, not unreal." (7 p. 58)

It is pertinent to note in this connection that Vedanta has a very specific definition of what constitutes Reality: "That alone is real which survives in the experience of the Real Self in the Supreme State; all else is only unreal. This is the distinction between the real and the unreal, revealed to us by the teachings of all the sages." (p. 56)

These remarks call for some clarification. It is a fundamental principle of Vedanta that anything that is subject to change cannot be real. Only that which remains the same irrespective of time and space and name and form can be real. The seeker is explicitly asked not to identify with the experiences derived from his senses because it is not permanent.

Fifth: the identity of the Supreme Self evoked in the sacred Bhagawad Gita will remain concealed so long as the world is taken for real. According to the Gita, so long as the universe is immersed in its own activities, it will be imprisoned by it. It is freed only when its actions are performed as acts of worship to the Absolute. It is the mind that causes the existence of the world. Consequently, unless the mind is extinguished, the Self cannot be experienced. This is because the Self extroverted is the mind, while the Self introverted is Itself.

Sixth: Self-enquiry or surrender (seeking refuge in God) are the only two ways to realize the Self.

Seventh: Certain qualities are highlighted as necessary for a spiritual seeker: "Mental calm, sense control, withdrawal from worldly pursuits, fortitude, faith in the words of the Guru, steadiness in sadhana (spiritual practice) - these six are prescribed for the aspirant, whereby his mind will remain firm in the quest."

Eighth: "For every creature, there are three states, waking, dream and deep sleep; and sustaining these three there is another sleep, the sleep of ignorance."

Ninth: "The whole of this world is contained within the trinity of states. The Reality of the Fourth State, which is wordless, transcends these three states."

Tenth: "If that mind-free consciousness, which is at the meeting point of deep sleep and waking, somehow becomes continuous, then the State those then dawns is declared by the sages to be the State of Deliverance."

Logic is of little avail in this journey. As the text says: "There is no end to logical discussions for logic does not come to rest anywhere. The Supreme transcends the world. How can it become known by the logical mind?"

Logic must instead be substituted by faith. Did not the Master exhort his disciples: cite Lord Jesus As Mother Meera poignantly expresses it: "A tear is a door through which I can come. How can I come into a heart that does not long for me?" (Harvey, 1991, p.236)

As Amma beautifully expressed it: "In the modern age, human minds are dry. Too much reasoning has spoiled the contemporary mind. People use their intellects for everything. They have lost their hearts and faith. Beauty lies in the heart. Beauty lies in faith and faith dwells in the heart. Intellect or reasoning is necessary, but we should not allow it to swallow the faith in us. We should not allow the intellect to eat up the heart. Intellect is knowledge and knowledge is ego. Too much knowledge means nothing but a big ego. The ego is a burden, and a big ego is a big burden". (Amma, pp. 248, 249)

"While drinking a cup of coffee or tea, his thoughts will be on how to breed a new species of coffee beans or tea leaves. He will not be able to enjoy the flavor of the

tea or coffee. Thus the intellectual person who has no love in him will always miss the beauty and charm of everything that comes to him. Think of the life of such a person. Can we call it life? It is death, nothing but death." (Amma, p. 249)

This is what Caussade meant when he wrote: "We are really only well taught by the words God addresses especially to us. Neither books nor laborious delving into history will instruct us about the wisdom of God. They will fill us with a useless muddled kind of knowledge that puffs us up with pride. It is what happens moment by moment that enlightens us." (Caussade, 1931)

Clearly, the root of all ignorance (avidya) is the ego. In Advaita Vedanta, this is the original sin. It is the ego that is responsible for instilling the idea that the seeker's identity is his body or his mind or his intellect. It is the ego that is responsible for this "false consciousness." It is the ego that misleads the seeker into believing that he is the charioteer when in fact he is the chariot. It is the ego that leads human beings to the delusion of doership, (that they are the do-ers) when in fact it is the Lord who is the principal actor.

Conclusion:

Science is often pitted against religion and spirituality. This is especially true when what is meant by science and what is meant by spirituality is not properly defined.

Science is an organized attempt to build and organize knowledge in the form of verifiable explanations and predictions of the universe we live in. It refers to a body of reliable knowledge that can be logically and rationally explained. It refers to the physical world.

Spirituality on the other hand is an equally organized yet relentless search to experience the divinity innate in all human beings. It is the search for the inner self. Spirituality is different from religion: the former is the essence, the latter is the scaffolding. Religion deals with the outer world, spirituality deals with the inner world. There are endless testimonies from realized masters on the unique nature of this state that is beyond human intelligence.

"You can feel yourself," said Sri Ramana Maharishi, "one with the One that exists. The whole body becomes a mere power, a force current. Your life becomes a needle drawn to a huge mass of magnet and as you go deeper and deeper, you become a mere center and then not even that, for you become a mere Consciousness; there are no thoughts or cares any longer - they were shattered at the threshold it is an inundation. You, a mere straw, are swallowed alive, but it is very delightful, for you become the very thing that swallows you. This is the union of jiva with Brahman, the loss of ego in the real Self, the destruction of falsehood, the attainment of Truth." (Sat Darshana, 2010, p. 21)

Albert Einstein believed that true religion will not conflict with science. He could well have been right in this sense that it is wrong to expect the sciences of the outer world that deal with forms of matter, motion and societal development to validate truths of the inner world. Similarly the truth of the inner world cannot be validated by yardsticks used by the natural or social sciences because the objects of investigation in each case are not the same. If this principle is grasped, spirituality and science need not be at loggerheads.

Among other reasons, this perhaps explains why the great scientist once declared "science without religion is lame" and "religion without science is blind."

Einstein's spirituality assumed the form of marveling at the perfecting of the cosmic intelligence: "Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe - a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble" because it "reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."

It needs to be emphasized that the debate between science and spirituality is often misplaced, ill-conceived and misses the wood for the trees. If the truth be told, there is a science to understand the outer world and a science that is as rigorous and as committed to understanding the nature of truth of the inner world. The approaches to both are scientific but the objects of their investigation are different.

The outer world consists of forms of matter and motion. The scientist tries to uncover the laws that govern their functioning through a process of experimentation where a hypothesis is tested under laboratory conditions and validated. Accordingly, the physicist studies physical phenomena, the chemist studies chemical phenomena and the social scientists focus their attention on understanding history, philosophy, economy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, political science and law in all their multifarious aspects. Each science of the outer world in which we live is therefore separated from each other by the object of its investigation.

Similar to the physical sciences and the social sciences, there is a science of the inner world, a world that exists independent of our senses and that is beyond the mind, body and intellect. This science is called Vedanta. It has many schools but the school that we are referring to here is Advaita Vedanta or the philosophy of non-dualism. To become a scientist in the spiritual domain is tantamount to becoming an artist in the domain of consciousness.

Vedanta is the most rigorous science known in the universe today.

When the universe is perceived from the lens of Vedanta, everything around us is actually nothing but forms of consciousness that emanate from one single source and the truth of this observation can be perceived in meditation. There are several paths to realizing the one pristine reality that exists independent of us. It is the one without a

second. This experience of perfection has been experienced by our sages and seers and their testimonies are a telling illustration of that exalted state.

It is this perfection that we describe as God or the Cosmic Intelligence or the Supreme Self. As the Upanishads declare: "He is one but He is known by many names." It is now an accepted fact in most religious and spiritual traditions that the challenge confronting human beings lies in discovering the divinity present inside them. As Lord Jesus expressed it: "The kingdom of God lies within you." God is therefore within and without. He is Creator and Creation. Inside and Outside.

To experience this state (and not just intellectually know it) is what is called self-realization or intuitive knowledge of Absolute Reality. The essence of that experience is this; that which really exists never goes out of existence; that which does not exist, never comes into existence. (The Basic Tenets, 1996, p.115) The core of spiritual science is self-realization. According to our shastras or scriptures, that is the only purpose of our birth. If we are unable to secure a glimpse of this state, then this life has been a waste and one needs another life to experience it. The primary obstacle is the human ego.

Spiritual science is about destroying the ego and experiencing the perfection present within. It is as rigorous and exacting as investigation in the physical sciences. But the truths of the inner world need to be experienced and not studied. That is the sole yardstick of their validation. The object of this inner science is God realization. In Vedanta, He is known as the Supreme Self or Guru or God. They are essentially one and the same. He cannot be known in the intellect or the senses because He is beyond them. He is located in the heart. Devotion, surrender and faith are the surest means of gaining access.

Finally, the Guru as a Self Realized Master is none other than the Supreme Self or the Universal Soul taking human form to instruct humankind along the path of Satyam or Truth and Dharma or righteousness. This is otherwise known as Self Realization or instructing man to realize the divinity of the kingdom inherent within him. It is not through the mind but by conquering the mind that this state is achieved. Neither reason nor logic is of any use in this endeavour; instead it is faith, surrender and intuition that are critical. He assumes human form because it is only through the human form that man can receive divine inspiration. To mistake such a Guru as an ordinary human being invites retribution. There is no difference between God, Guru and the Self. This astonishing process of God becoming man to elevate man to realizing his godliness is verily the greatest of all miracles. This is why Self Realization is the biggest miracle. The spiritual aspirant should strive for nothing less.

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