Lesson Twenty

DEMAND FOR FERVOR IN DIVINE LOVE

WHISPERS FROM ETERNITY

by

PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA

Teach me, O Spirit, to love Thee as wholeheartedly as the miser loves money. Make me as attached to Thee as the drunkard is addicted to wine. Teach me to cling to Thee as erring ones do to their bad habits. Teach me to be as attentive to Thee as a mother is to her child. Teach me to perform my duties diligently, with my attention fully riveted on Thee. Teach me to love Thee as the worldly man loves his possessions. With the first love of true lovers, teach me to love Thee.
Patanjali, 5th Niyama: Devotion to the Supreme Lord

Paramhansa Yogananda used sometimes to pinch his skin between his thumb and forefinger and say, “In a little gram of flesh like this there is enough energy to keep the whole city of Chicago in enough electricity for a week!”

It is extraordinary, how much energy we have at our disposal. All we need do is apply our will power.

Jerry Torgerson, a brother disciple, was working with a group of us, helping to build India Center in Hollywood. One day a girl about fifteen years old crossed the street on her way back from school. Just then a car, driving too fast, came around the corner and ran over her. She was pinned beneath the front. Jerry was strong, but not this strong: Without thinking, he immediately came out, lifted the car by its front end, and pushed it back, releasing the girl.

Devotion takes that kind of energy. It is a process of directing all our energy upward from the heart to the brain. When our longing for God becomes intense, the King of the Universe will enter and redeem us from all our delusions.

A certain intellectual man from Chicago once visited Master. He had brought with him a long list of what he considered to be deeply perceptive questions. He read out the first of them.

“Love God!” said the Master in reply.

The man shrugged uncomprehendingly, then read out the second of his questions.

“Love God!” Master said a second time. Without another word, he stood up and left the room.

That man became a spiritual teacher in Chicago, and for years thereafter cited this story as showing that even masters have their problems!

So strongly imbedded in American culture is people’s faith in intellectuality that this man, and presumably his listeners as well, were incapable of understanding the true meaning of that episode.

I once saw the title of a book, Science Is a Sacred Cow. The reliance of science on reason as the only reliable tool for ferreting out the truth of anything is what makes it a sacred cow. The belief is only a superstition, like the superstition in India that certain cows are holy because a priest has blessed them.

Science changes its mind in many profound ways every ten years or so. Even the teachings of Darwin, which were once considered the very cornerstone of modern science, have been challenged lately—by logic itself.

Meanwhile, there is one form of investigation, not based on belief but on direct experience, that has reached the same set of conclusions in every country, culture, and century. It lies not in the field of religion, but of spirituality.

No one who has ever sought and found God has ever declared, “What a scam!” All true mystics (perhaps that very word will have to be changed; it smacks of the unknowable!) have reached the same conclusions, based on universal experience. They never squabble among themselves. And all of them have declared that life has only one purpose: to find God.

Again the man shrugged. His studies hadn’t prepared him for such an answer. Then he read out the third question from his long list.

“Love God!!!” said the Master a third time. Without another word, he stood up and left the room.

So strongly imbedded in American culture is people’s faith in intellectuality that this man, and presumably his listeners as well, were incapable of understanding the true meaning of that episode.
Rationalists (whose endless disagreements among themselves call their own “infallibility” into question) challenge the saints on that statement because saints offer no telescopes, microscopes, and the sifted evidence of laboratory experiments for others to study their findings and either corroborate or disprove them. How absurd! It is like a Frenchman saying, “Unless you converse with me in French, I will not consider a word you’re saying.” The language of mystics is not that of test tubes; it is of the uplifted love of the heart. If you want to understand what they are talking about, you must do as they have done: you must purify your heart.

Jesus told us to develop that purity. The wonderful thing is, we don’t have to do all the work of self-purification ourselves! Even scientists who reach out mentally for the truth do not realize how many of their insights have come to them, not by logic, but simply because they have invited them. We live far more in a world of consciousness than we realize! Many times it has happened that two scientists have made the same discovery almost simultaneously. Logic didn’t lead them to it. Rather, they had reached the point in their investigations where they were ready to receive it. Einstein received his understanding of the law of relativity in a flash. It took him ten years thereafter to present that insight to others clearly enough to persuade them of its validity. (And even then, I’ve read that there were only ten men in the world who had even an inkling of what he was saying. Fortunately, they were the right ten!)

For those who seek a higher Truth, however, mere facts are a waste of time.

I myself, when young (I was thirteen years old), in my own earnest search for truth dismissed God, because to me God seemed unknowable. I sought through science, as I said at the outset of these lessons. When that finally seemed a sterile path, because it didn’t inspire my heart, I sought it through systems of politics. Then I turned to the arts, still earnestly trying to find out what life was all about. But I found every path to be a dead end. Only God, I realized, could—if He existed—solve for me the secret I had been seeking so earnestly. And I can say now, after more than sixty years of inner searching, that I have found enough to convince me to my core that this direction alone can lead us to the truth. I have found such bliss, peace of mind, and universal love that I would gladly have given all the riches, fame, and social approval the world can offer for only a taste of what has become my constant experience.

What, indeed, are the things of this world compared to the intense love which God pours out to all who would receive it?

Rabindranath Tagore tells the story of a great king who approached a village in his chariot. Standing there waiting for him was a humble beggar. The king, on reaching the beggar’s house, stopped, and got out. The beggar thought, “My fortune has been made!” And then the king said, “What hast thou to give me?”

Alas! what was this? A king, asking alms from a beggar? The beggar, abashed, went into his hovel and examined his takings for that day. Finally, he picked up a little grain of rice, and gave it shamefacedly to the king.

The king thanked him with a smile, and drove on. The next day, when the beggar emptied his little sack of rice onto the floor, he found among the white grains one little grain of pure gold. And then he thought, “If only I’d been wise enough to give him everything I had!”

Jesus Christ said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be add-
ed unto you.” You won’t have to worry about creating security for yourself. He Himself will take care of you. And the real needs of your heart—for love and bliss—will be His first and greatest gift to you.

Even the tests He sends you are only to prove your love for him.

There is the story of a guru who, pretending anger at his disciples, drove them away from him one day by throwing bricks at them. One disciple took a brick (it had bruised his shoulder) and laid it reverently on his altar. The next morning, he found that that brick had become solid gold.

Master told us of a woman he had met in Seattle. She was in her eighties, and for the whole of her life she’d been unable to believe in God. On meeting him, she underwent a complete conversion. From then on she thought of Master constantly, meditated, and practiced God’s presence. She didn’t live many years longer, but in that little time she reached spiritual freedom. And so you see, it isn’t when you come to God that matters. It’s how intensely you seek Him, once you do come to Him.

Nor do the spiritual experiences you have along the way matter very much. Master sometimes told us wryly, “The path to God is not a circus!”

Sri Rama Yogi, a spiritually liberated disciple of the famous saint Ramana Maharshi, told me this story.

A young man came to a great guru, and was initiated by him. His guru gave him the task of carrying wood up from the village every day for the ashram kitchen. This the young man did faithfully, not counting the years.

One day, as he dropped his pile of wood into the courtyard, two logs caught his brahminical topknot, and pulled out two of his hairs. To his amazement, they were white! In dismay he thought, “How long have I been carrying wood for my guru? And here I’ve been serving my guru for—how long? Forty years? Fifty years? And what, in all these years, have I attained?”

Silently, he began to weep.

Just at that moment, his guru hurried out of the house and caught his first tear before it could reach the ground.

“Don’t you realize,” the guru exclaimed, “what would happen to this whole countryside if one drop of your tears were to reach the ground? There would be famine for seven years! Dear soul! Don’t you realize the greatness you have attained after all these years of single-hearted service!”

He touched the disciple on the forehead, and suddenly the young-but-now-old man experienced transcendent oneness with God, a bliss beyond compare. Nothing that any man in his human state experiences could even hint at that perfection of joy.

I was present at Master’s desert retreat when Master spoke about Horace Gray, a very simple disciple who had the great disadvantage of being spastic; he had difficulty in even articulating his words. Horace himself was not present on this occasion.

“Horace’s devotion,” Master said fondly, “has satisfied God.”

James Collar, who was present also, made an effort to understand Master’s words in comparison to what he himself knew of Horace.

“Sir,” he remarked, “it must be a very simple kind of devotion, isn’t it?”

“Ahh!” Master replied blissfully, “that is the kind that God loves!”

How is it possible to develop this simple devotion? For one thing, never try to impress anyone. You aren’t your
little self anyway, this ego whose importance you might want to impress on others. You are the soul—the infinite Self. In your ego, you are nothing. Horace found it easier to keep this thought in mind, for in the sight of others he was, indeed, pretty much a nonentity. But the general of a large army; the performer of civilization-staggering deeds—his temptation to think otherwise may be great, but even his contributions to society are of no more importance than a bubble! I recall the many things I have done these sixty-four years of service to Master, then I think, Bubbles, all. And it wasn't I who blew them!

Another of Master’s disciples, Michael Krull (later, Brother Bhaktananda) was a similarly simple soul. His constant prayer was, “I love you, Master.” One day he met Master in the garden, and Master said to him with a smile, “I love you, too.”

Master praised him for his humility. I confess I slightly envied Michael his simplicity. I had so many ideas constantly crowding into my head. But all of us are what we have made ourselves. We must accept ourselves as we are. I have had to learn to be grateful that I simply have a way of serving Master.

Whenever we were in a group, Master would address his words to me. I would think, “I wish he would look at others! I’d like to close my eyes and enjoy the vibrations he emanates so palpably.” But my role has been what it is. I realized long ago that I must simply resign myself to serving as God and Guru want me to.

I suppose I have a keen mind. My job at the beginning was to avoid becoming like that man from Chicago. The intellect is simply a tool; it does not define us. What defines us, if anything does, is the devotion of our hearts. Indeed, if I’ve been able to understand Master’s teachings at all it has been by remaining simple in my heart. I have no stomach for long-winded intellectual discussions. One thing I must add, however: My path has not been easy.

When the first Swami Shankara lived, he rescued Sa-naat Dharma from the atheism of the Buddhists of his time (Buddha himself was no atheist) by explaining that God is not all the images people have created of Him—Shiva, Parvati, Saraswati, Ganesha, or any of the other—and that they used to worship. He is Absolute Spirit, Satchidananda: Ever-Existing, Ever-Conscious, Ever-New Bliss (Yogananda added that “ever-new”). But followers of the great masters always get it wrong. As the followers of Buddha had concluded from his teachings that there is no God, so those who came after Shankara came to the conclusion that God is a sort of intellectual abstraction.

In fact, there is no ultimate difference between dualism and non-dualism. God is both. He is the Spirit beyond Creation. And He is Creation itself. In Him, there is no division of realities.

Thus, for the human mind it is not necessary to think of Him as an Unimaginable, Abstract Spirit. We can understand love more easily in the form of the people dear to us, and who express love for us: our mothers, fathers, friends, sweethearts. That there is nothing wrong in worshiping God with form may be seen in the lives of many saints who have found Him through a more personal path. God may even be worshiped in the form of the guru, for indeed, as my Guru taught, once you achieve oneness with God, you become God. There is no difference, then, for once you realize God, you see Him in everything!

The Father aspect of God is what Jesus worshiped, perhaps because of his Jewish tradition. The father in a human family may of course be lovable, but more often he is associated with stern reminders of one’s duty.
The aspect of God as Friend is both close and sweet, but it has the disadvantage that if a person thinks of God that way, he might presume on God’s love for him more than his present deserts. We must know that God is indeed, as Master described Him, “the Nearest of the near, the Dearest of the dear.” Yet, in our presently imperfect state, we should also hold ourselves mentally in an attitude of one who has everything to gain and learn from this Cosmic Friend. Any presumption on our part of favoritism in his eyes would be absurd.

The aspect of God as Cosmic Beloved poses, from the above point of view, an even greater danger. Many of the legends about Krishna underline this difficulty. One who confuses divine love with human, possessive, or sensual love remains tied to the senses.

The old legends about Krishna are symbolic, and must be understood from the highest point of view. My Guru used to tell a story of Radha and Krishna. Radha, according to legend, was his closest beloved. In this story, Radha and Krishna were walking together through a forest. At one point, Radha said to him, “I am so tired!”

“Is that so?” said Krishna. “Would you like me to carry you?”

Oh, she was so pleased! Immediately she climbed onto his back. The moment she did so, however, Krishna disappeared, and Radha fell to the ground in a very undignified sprawl!

“Forgive me, Lord!” she cried. “I understand what you wanted to teach me.” At once he reappeared, and they continued to walk calmly through the forest.

In all human visualizations of God there are certain disadvantages. The one with the fewest disadvantages, however, is the aspect of Mother. The mother in a human family is the most purely self-giving, and is that particular aspect of humanity which most elevates one toward higher aspiration.

I myself have always worshiped God in two forms, especially: as my Guru, and as my Divine Mother. My heart melts when I think of Her as the Source of my very being. Everything I am and aspire to, I see in Her.

In whatever form you yourself love God, however, my Guru said, “Always see, in those divine eyes, the consciousness of Infinity.”

God, the Supreme Lord, is Infinite Consciousness itself.
In the court of King Akbar, in India, there was a famous singer named Tan Sen. This man had so much power in his voice that, on one occasion, he sang an evening raga at noon, and the entire palace precincts became plunged in darkness.

The king often complimented him on his singing. But Tan Sen always replied, “Your Majesty, I wish you could hear my teacher. He is much better than I.”

The king replied, “That is just the natural humility of a disciple. But no one could possibly sing better than you!”

After this conversation had been repeated several times, however, the king insisted that Tan Sen prove his point by introducing this teacher to him.

“Your Majesty,” said Tan Sen, “he would never condescend to come here.”

Well, this seemed a strange answer! But Akbar agreed to visit this august-sounding person. Tan Sen then said, “Your Majesty, he would never sing for you if he knew you are the ruler of this land. My teacher is so simple that if you come dressed as the king, he will not sing for you. You must dress as a very ordinary man, in the simplest of clothing.”

The king agreed. Together then, they went to visit Tan Sen’s teacher.

During their visit, Tan Sen asked his teacher to sing for them. The teacher refused. Finally the pupil hit on a ruse. He sang a raga he’d learned from his teacher, but deliberately made one mistake.

When he did this, the teacher had to correct him.

Afterward, Akbar said to Tan Sen, “I would never have believed it, but he does indeed sing better than even you. How can this be so?”

“The reason,” the other replied, “is that I sing for Your Majesty. My teacher sings only for God.”

Affirmation

May my heart’s devotion to Thee so absorb me that I have no room in my heart for any other love.