Doors to Spiritual Knowledge


Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and ever more protect us O Lord by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The title announced for this morning’s lecture is: Doors to Spiritual Knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is knowledge of God, knowledge of man’s true nature and knowledge of the world in relation to God, the Spiritual Reality.

Imagine a big room with a round table and around that table a dozen of specialists in different branches of knowledge are seated. Say, a chemist, an economist, or a child specialist, a doctor, a gardener. Like that we can mention any number of specialists in any branch of knowledge. There is no end to the subjects in which man can have knowledge. Formerly we would use the expression, “gardener.” Now gardener is a big term. Under that term there can be hundreds of subspecialists: a specialist in roses, a specialist in vegetables, a specialist in zucchinis. See this vast world, the vast universe is filled with wonders. And man is basically an explorer.

Basically there is a hunger for knowledge. Man wants to know, to know, and know. So there is no end to these different branches of knowledge. But all this knowledge pertain[s] to what we call the world of senses – the world that we can see, that we can touch, that we can smell, and even that we can imagine. It is based on this universe of senses. Of course there is the mind. Mind -- also universe of senses -- and you could say also universe of the mind, in a limited sense.

Now spiritual knowledge is something different. See these people sitting together, each is great in one’s own place. Each can talk. Each has studied a lot
about the particular subject. Now in that room enters a man of God, the person who has not read many books, but he is a deeply religious person. He is thoroughly convinced of the existence of God and his life is filled with God and he sees the same world but in a different way. He sees that it is a world ruled by God. And God’s presence and power have entered into every fiber of this universe. He looks upon human beings as living temples of God. He looks upon trees and plants as filled with God’s wonder and beauty. So his perspective of life is different and his personal life has become— as a result of this experience of God, his life has become very calm and peaceful. And from his mind all doubts have vanished. There is no doubt. He knows it is only One. It is God who is appearing in many ways. It is God’s power that is activating everything in this universe, including my mind, my life, which is God, God, God. He is filled with God, but for him that is also knowledge, spiritual knowledge.

Now this spiritual knowledge is not needed for our everyday practical life. If it could be added to our practical life with all our different knowledge— our life, of course would have been enriched. But for the... Generally [ordinary?] man spiritual knowledge is something which is redundant, unnecessary. But even in our life a time comes when we feel the necessity of something. We do not know. Because life is always, for all people it is not all smooth sailing. There are frustrations. There are dangers— crises which we cannot solve. And moreover there is an inner hunger in man.

That hunger may not show today or tomorrow, but sometime it will show. It will ask for something... The person feels that I am through with all this, with all this knowledge of this subject, that subject, with all the loves and with all my engagements and all my activities and honor and even still something lacking. A kind of emptiness, a kind of hunger comes. It may not [come] to all persons but sometime it comes. In Indian thinking, man does not live only one life. There is what is called, reincarnation. Man is a traveler from life to life. Just as a river emerges from some distant spring and travels through deserts, valleys, forests and finally reaches the ocean. So man has emerged from somewhere and ultimately will reach the ocean. That ocean is God. So man, from life to life he becomes satisfied
with many desires. There are so many things to know, so many things to love, so many acts to do. So man does this – and there is no end to human desires.

So all those desires cannot be fulfilled in one life. So man has yet to travel through many lives. And in some life, some time this hunger and thirst will come – thirst for God, thirst for the Highest. In the Indian scriptures God is called Brahman. Brahman means the Great – the Greatest. Now that Greatest, our scriptures say, the Vedanta scriptures say that Greatest is really the foundation of this universe, of everything, beginning from the atom, to the stars to the planets to the skies to the heavens to all human beings, animals. The foundation is God the eternal existence, Sat, eternal knowledge, Chit, and eternal joy, Ananda.

Now since man is living with that God, even though he may not know, the Chandogya Upanishad gives an illustration. A man is walking over a ground. Underneath there is some precious treasures. He may not know, but he is walking over it. So man is carrying that Infinite, that Brahman within him. But he does not know. So there is time for everything. So the Bhavagad Gita says, “kalanatmani vindati”1 “You are timeless.” There is a time when man must seek spiritual knowledge, the knowledge of God, the knowledge of his own spiritual nature, which will put an end to all kinds of sufferings: disease, death, frustration, restlessness, passions. All these things which make our mind restless. So all these things will be over when that knowledge of God, that knowledge of self comes to us. That is man’s great hope.

So Sri Ramakrishna said, “The ultimate purpose of human life is see God.” Lord Jesus Christ said the same thing. Seeing God. “Thou shalt love the Lord Your God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul.” We are familiar with what love is – love for children, love for our parents, love for wife, love for husband, love for this, love for that. Without love we cannot live. Love is the foundation of life. But the highest love, the greatest love is God. All love is coming from Him. So in one of the yoga books, bhakti yoga books it is said, “Sa Ishvarah anirvachaniyapremasvarupah.”2 “God is of the nature of unspeakable, indescribable love.” So man is living with that God. So a time has to come when man will be drawn to that Source of all Love. Now we know, we mentioned the different kinds of knowledge.
Different kinds of knowledge can be multiplied in hundreds and thousands. Different branches of knowledge. If we go to a library... we can see how many different subjects and titles there are for man to study, to know. But this study is a different study. In the Upanishads it is said, “Sa Brahmatmavidyam Sarvavidyaapratisthaam”3 “The knowledge of self is the foundation of all knowledge.” Because when man knows this spiritual reality-- either through devotion as God or through knowledge, inquiry his true self, then he feels that there is nothing else to know. There is nothing else to know. Everything has been known, we have gone to the source of knowledge.

In the Old Testament of the Bible in one of the Psalms, it is said, “God...” a devotee is saying, “From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God.” That means this man, this devotee of God is saying in that Psalm, it is described. “Everything [is] running away. Everything is perishing, but You are Eternal. You are timeless. From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. You are not changing. You are eternal.” And we have to find it. Without finding that eternal, our life really is meaningless. This, you may not understand right now, but sometime in the course of spiritual evolution this will come. Blessed is that person to whom this inquiry – in Sanskrit it is called vichetasaH [Not sure of word, sounds like like jicassa -- possibly vichetasaH or bewilderment]-- comes. He is not satisfied with the things around. He is not satisfied with himself. He is not satisfied with the world which he sees. He wants to go deeper. He wants to go to the root of things. That is the first step – first door. First door is that inquiry. See? If that inquiry/interest does not come, then the situation is not hopeless. A time will come, if not in this life, in another life.

That is the grandeur of Vedanta. Vedanta says, “Man cannot run away from God. Someday he has to come to God.” He can wait. You see, God will wait for him. One nice illustration is given by Sri Ramakrishna: a child is playing with his toys and it is time for food. Mother has prepared the baby's food, but the child is playing, playing. Mother goes... “No!” He does not come in, leaving his toys. Then the mother waits. The mother knows when that child will be hungry, then he will leave those toys and run to her. So it happens soon. The child went, “Mama, Mama, Mama.” So Sri Ramakrishna says we are all children; we are playing with toys. Eh...
In all the occupations of life all our desires, all our search, search is really child’s play. This vast world, which we see and experience, is just a little clot of earth. That is the vision of seers, the vision of the seers.

When you experience God, when we have knowledge of God, everything becomes mini. Everything becomes little compared to the vast majesty of God. Everything is little; everything is insignificant. The only significant thing, the only significant thing is God. That is the experience of people who have known God, who have loved God. So in two Upanshads this idea is put in the form of a question. In one Upanishad, in the Mundaka Upanishad a disciple is -- or a teacher is telling the students, “You see there is a Truth by knowing which everything is known, and I will tell you about that Truth.” (1:1:3) And in the Chandogya Upanishad [there is] a dialog between a son and a father. The father is an illumined sage and the son is a very ... conceited... young man. He was sent to school in the forest school and he had education there for twelve years, and when he returned he was puffed up with pride. And the father noticed that. And the father told him, “Well boy, you have studied for twelve years – Vedas and other things, other, but can you tell me did you learn of something, some truth by knowing which everything becomes known?” Then the boy was puzzled. He said, “My teacher probably did not know.” [laughter] “I tried my hardest to learn, but my teacher did not know this thing; I never heard of this. You please tell me.” He was humbled and humility is necessary for knowledge. So when the boy was humbled, the father began to chapter by chapter, describe the majesty of man’s true self and how to have that knowledge-- Self Knowledge. So the spirit of inquiry –question, that is important. See... That is why as Lord Jesus Christ says, “Seek and you shall find, ask and it will be given you, knock and it will be opened to you.” See there are stages of ... these are ... these are called doors. Doors to spiritual knowledge.

The first is... first one has to be interested in spiritual knowledge, spiritual life at its depth. See. A study of books of course is helpful. It is one door that is called in Vedantic language, Svādhvyāya study, study of books written by people of experience, people, sages who have known God who are... who are... whose perspective of life has totally changed. They are calm, peaceful and they, these
people when they write [a] book, the words of that book has power. Jesus Christ’s words. Lord Buddha’s words. Lord Sri Krishna’s words, the Gita. These are the scriptures with direct experience, the words which give the direct experience of sages. Now study of those scriptures is helpful in developing our interest. Sometimes it is, it becomes just intellectual knowledge. There have been persons who have deeply...who have studied all religions but their life itself, in their life, in their experience, nothing has come. He remains the same old fool. His heart is filled with the same old passions and cravings and doubts and fears. See? So mere reading is not enough. See. But reading of course is helpful. And a person can be a seer of God, a knower of self even without any book reading. The illustration is, the example is our great master, Sri Ramakrishna. He had no book learning, but all the books were open to him, spiritual, vast spiritual knowledge. Vast spiritual knowledge was open to him.

So the first door is that interest. Sometimes that interest comes by suffering, the shocks of life so the Sankara[?] philosophy says, Dukha tyagi vichetasaH[?] Man’s spiritual inquiry comes through the impact of three kinds of sufferings. All human sufferings have been classified into three types. See. And so these sufferings of life sometimes open our eyes to what is life, what is this? What I am running after? What I am running after? Is there something which will give me peace? Is there something which does not change? Is there something which will be with me even after death and which was with me even when I came to this world? This inquiry is the first door. And how this inquiry will come we do not know. Sometimes a person is born with that inquiry. He is born with a spirit of... he thinks that this so-called life is not for me. I must find God. When we study the lives of saints and sages we find in some persons even from their early childhood they show this inner tendency. They must find God; they must find what life is. Anyway this interest in God at His Depth, not God as we talk about or we go to church and we think: we are religious; we have done our duty to God. That is not enough. That is not enough to satisfy the great hunger, that great, great hunger for knowledge, even for the great hunger for life itself.
There is an innate tendency for life. Man does not want to die. So how is that possible? Rationally it is not possible. We see before our own eyes people dying. Death cannot be prevented. So we are afraid of death. And it is not... We do not like that. We blame God. Why there is death? Why there is old age? Why I am not young forever? These are the questions we put to God and God does not answer directly, but smiles. God says, “Wait. You will see. I have given you immortality... immortal life, but you are blind. I have given you infinite happiness but you did not care for that. See? That means: Me, I [am] God and I am living with you. In the core in the depth of your heart I am there always. But when you will be understanding, you will no longer put me these questions. You will see that you are immortal. Your mind is the keyboard. There are different switches. You turn one switch: one knowledge will be before you. The realm of chemistry. You turn another switch and the realm of gardening comes. Another switch, the world of astronomy comes. Another switch the atomic world comes. So there is another switch. If you can turn that switch, the spiritual world, spiritual knowledge will come to you.

So is said in Vedanta scriptures that one great important door to spiritual knowledge is called viveka, discrimination. Open your eyes. Open your eyes and try to see what is happening around you. And one thing, if you observe enough, if you study enough, you will see that change is the very nature of this world. Everything is changing! You rely upon one person as your friend, great friend and after one year that friend goes, leaves you. Situation. You are in a happy situation today, but tomorrow the situation changes. In the sky, in the sky of your life it is all bright sunshine, but suddenly it is overcast with clouds. This is life. If you observe sufficiently, you will find the clues to spiritual life, spiritual knowledge.

The first thing to know, to understand: that everything here is changing. It is not dependable. The heart wants security, but the real security is not here. The real security is in God, is in our spiritual truth. This we can find if by sufficient observation –discrimination-- we can see what is changing and why. Then we crave for what is real, what does not change. Now we have to depend on the scriptures, on the words of persons who have seen God, who have discovered their true spiritual nature. They say that there is Eternal Reality, Who is God, who is outside and inside
this world. But He is spirit, he is not matter. He is not mind. Matter, mind, light, these things are... at the back of this there is consciousness. There’s Sat-Chit-Ananda. So don’t be frustrated by the absurdities of life, by the contradictions of life, by the changes of life. There is an eternal reality, God, that is an unchangeable reality, God. So trust this faith, this belief. This faith in God is needed: first inquiry and discrimination, and then this faith that there is a God.

God is not a myth. Many, many, many persons -- we call them saints, seers--men and women who have, who have experienced this spiritual reality. Their words are dependable. Somebody comes by visiting Jerusalem and describes to me Jerusalem. I believe. That is also valid knowledge. If I can go myself and see Jerusalem, that is first class knowledge. The second class knowledge is: we learn from books, from persons, authentic persons. So these sages... reading and listening to their words is authentic knowledge, though not first class knowledge. First class knowledge will come when you yourself experienced, experience God or your true Self.

So, this great faith about the existence of God, the existence of something unchanging. As I look into myself I see: my body is changing all the time; my mind is changing all the time, my emotions are changing all the time. But still I have to believe in these words of the scriptures, the words of these seers that within the depth of your personality there is, there is the reality, your true Self. Now they merely do not describe but they also tell us the ways, the methods, the doors through which we can enter into that region of God, region of our true Self. So the first thing they said, when you have really [become] interested in that eternal which is God, you have to develop what is called dispassion. If your mind is running after too many things, too many pleasures, too many outside things then you cannot see that insight. This is called in Vedantic literature vairagya, dispassion. We have to... Detachment, we have to practice this.

If our interest is deep, then this dispassion is not difficult. See? For the sake of something great we sacrifice. Persons who... scientists who wanted to know the scientific truths about the polar regions they lived there for months in the terrible...facing all kinds of difficulties and privations. But for the sake of science they did
that. So spiritual knowledge is a science and to, to understand that knowledge we have to make sacrifices. Sacrifices, this is called vairagya and that is a great door to spiritual knowledge. Without vairagya, without that detachment we cannot really enter. You see? There cannot be a harmony between light and darkness. If we seek light, we must not like darkness. Two things we cannot. Later in our spiritual life, when we have seen God, then this situation changes. Then what we tried to give up, to renounce, becomes transformed.

When things are transformed, there is no danger. A thing or person to which or to whom I am attached and I am disturbed by that attachment, that disturbance goes away if we can see God in that person or thing. Everybody sees the sky, wonderful sky but a man of God sees not merely the material sky, but God. Everybody sees the sun but St. Francis used to see the sun as a messenger of God and he wrote poetry about the sun. So this material nature which in [a] thousand ways binds us, brings us attachment, this material nature is transformed when God’s light comes.

When God’s love comes in our heart, we then see God in all the things we loved. I may have children, and if I look upon my children as my children, then I am in bondage. The children may disappear sometime and I will be miserable. But if I can see these children as God’s children—God gave me these children, God’s possessions, all my possessions, all my attachments. If I link them with God then no longer, then they can, they can bind me. See? This very world becomes a heaven for us. But till that wonderful thing has happened to us, till that God experience has come to us, we need in the path of struggle, in the path of sadhana, the practice of vairagya, detachment. That is not pessimism. In the interest of a great treasure, we are sacrificing little treasures. But they will come back; they will come back as great when we have brought God into our life. Then trivial things will be great. Then we shall, we won’t see any change. We shall see it is God who is playing there. It is God [Who] is appearing as beauty. It is God who is appearing as love – all loves.

So there is the hope of that transformation, but till then these are the doors: discrimination which is called viveka and vairagya means dispassion. And there are the six practices which in Vedanta is called six treasures—control of mind, sama;
control of senses, dama; shraddha, great faith in the words of scriptures, the words of saints and seers; upeksha, the practice of forbearance; and upparati, means practice of inwardness. See? Don’t be drawn to noise always. We love noise. If it is too much noise we resent, but otherwise we like noise. We have to love calmness. We have to love solitude; we have to love sometimes aloneness. Nobody is there; I am alone with my God. This is called upparati, practice – not all the time but sometimes we should be able to be alone with our God. Quietness, this is called upparati, inwardness. It has to be practiced. And the sixth spiritual treasure is called meditation or contemplation. What we read in the scriptures, what we hear from the mouth of teachers, we have to think about that. We know God is... Eh? About God we read so many things in the scriptures. He is beauty; He is love; He is eternal life. Now these things the mind... The mind is ordinarily dispersed in many directions. That mind has to be collected. So we have to practice what is called concentration. The mind should be [focused on] just one idea.

If you are a Hindu, then you try to worship God through an image and concentrate on that image and try to think that at back of this image really there is a spiritual presence. That is called concentration – concentration either on an idea or an image or a symbol. The Christians concentrate on the cross, see? Now this practice of concentration, see, it leads the mind to the higher spiritual regions. There’ll be what we call the switch, switches – one switch after switch is opened up and the mind faces the spiritual reality on different levels. The final level is the experience of this unity. Everything is God. All is God. That experience does not come in one day, but it comes.

So in the Vedantic scriptures these meditations are prescribed – how to do this contemplation, step by step, and eventually how to meditate on God as Consciousness, as Joy. In one of the Upanishads [it] says, “God is joy.” It is God’s joy that is scattered all around: the joy that we find in nature, the joy that you find in your family, the joy that you find in sense enjoyment. Really speaking all this joy is coming from God. God is joy: raso vai sah. These single words, single expressions of the Taittiriya Upanishad one can think of that, deep thinking. Then slowly a man, that person can find out so the concentration of mind extends the capacity of the
mind to experience subtler things, subtler things. See. This concentration, practice of concentration.

So these are some of the doors through which we can enter into that religion, that spiritual religion which is God. God has --if you believe in-- forms. In India, the Hindus have conceived of God in many forms. But Sri Ramakrishna says, “It is not essential that we should think of God with a form. God is also formless.” But don’t say, “God cannot have any form.” See? Don’t be dogmatic. That is the one central message of Sri Ramakrishna, “Don’t be dogmatic.” Because God is infinite. God’s mind is Infinite Mind and in how many ways He can reveal Himself to you, you do not know. You have no right to limit God. Say, “No, Sir, You cannot have any form.” [laughter] That is not… That is you are insulting God, because God is Almighty.

He can be a tiny atom; He can be the great heavens. So the Chandogya Upanishad prescribes a meditation. It is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great. All colors, sarvakama [?], all desires are coming from Him, sarvakarma [?]- all activities are coming from Him. If you see any action, at once, if you are a student of spiritual life, try to think: any action anywhere, all the actions that people are doing, is really source is God. See? These ideas should come to our meditation. So this Chandogya Upanishad gives a very complete, complete meditation, which is called the Shandilya of India: “Sarvakarma sarvakama sarvagandhah sarvasah sarvam idamadam abhyattah.” 7 “All fragrance is coming from Him, the fragrance of flowers, this fragrance of the wind. All fragrance is coming. Hmm… All actions are coming from him. All...” In this way, God is --All. Whatever is attracting you is really coming from God. In this way we have to practice contemplation, meditation. Then the mind becomes free from – more and more – free from passions and distractions and can gradually feel the presence of God in the heart. First inside my heart and then outside. Inside and outside. So spiritual knowledge is a vast study. It is a vast study, but that should not embarrass us if we are sincere. Then, God can help us.

And in the religions tell us of the Holy Name of God and that is particularly very true in the Indian religions. See they speak of the.. the power of God’s Name. So they repeat God’s Name through the mantras. They repeat God’s Name and that itself is a spiritual practice. It is called japa, repetition of God’s Name. And that
concentration of mind and that word, the holy Name of God purifies our mind and God is revealed to us through it. So, these... there are these different practices, spiritual practices and each practice is a door, door to spiritual knowledge. And if we are too much confused by too much reading and too much...then we should... Eh? We should seek, if we are fortunate, a teacher, a spiritual teacher who has gone through this path, that spiritual teacher by the grace of God may be available to us. But Vedanta says, the real teacher is God. If a person sincerely is craving for God’s knowledge and God’s love, God fulfills that person’s desire.

So this spiritual knowledge is a great objective and it ... just as each branch of knowledge has its own fulfillment, so spiritual knowledge has its fulfillment in that transformation of our life, a life which becomes calm and peaceful and free from passions, which develops equality. He sees this world as revelations from God. He sees the Light of God. He really enjoys. He enjoys life, the life in God. And he is not...that person is not afraid of death, because for him a greater vision has come. God is above both life and death. God’s Truth is above life and death. So this person, this devotee of God, is not afraid, is not afraid of death.

This is the stop signal... [laughter].

Tomorrow morning we have a celebration, the celebration of the anniversary of the dedication of our temple in 1964. It happened to be the worship day of Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri. Divine Mother has many forms. Some time ago we had worship of Divine Mother, Durga. And then we had worship of Divine Mother, Lakshsmi and... So this is another form of Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri. It literally means the mother who is the sustainer of this universe.

So on that day in 1964 we had this public dedication, a dedication of this temple. It took twelve years to complete. When we came here and we bought the land it was a desert. Not a single tree or plant. So, twelve years of hard labor of love, of devotees, monks and nuns of San Francisco and of here, we finally had this partly finished and we were able to open this temple to the public. Before that we used to have a small service in what called now the foyer. So we observe every day [year?] this day the worship of Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri, our anniversary of the
dedication. And several devotees and monks and nuns will come from San Francisco. So, it is a working day but some, I understand that [for] some it is also Veterans’ Day leave. So if possible, please come and bring your friends. At 10:30 the worship. It will be worship and chanting and devotional songs. And then here refreshments, prasad, will be served in the library room. So it is a, for us it is a very joyful day and we invite everybody to join this function tomorrow.

Then next Sunday there will a seminar, as we know that we are celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, so different functions, so this, will be next Sunday there will be a seminar and three speakers will be there: Swami Prappanananda(?) and Alex Johnson, a young man, a young American, a budding American. Alex Johnson, the son of Mr. SG Johnson who is one of our own devotees and directors. And then Charles Chatton who is one of our members and is a teacher. So they will discuss the subject, Harmony in World Tumult. Harmony in World Tumult. That will be next Sunday. And next Wednesday as usual, Swami Prappanananda (?) will conduct Bhagavad Gita class and next Saturday there be ...class on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Ganeshananda.

Om. Madhu vaAtA R^itAyate madhu xarantI sindhavaH.
mAdhvIrnaH santu auShadhIH..
madhu naktamutoShaso madhumat.h pArthivam.h rajaH.
madhu dyauH astu naH pitA..
madhumAnno vanaspatiH madhumAm.h astu sUryaH.
mAdhvIrgAvo bhavantu naH..
Om madhu madhu madhu.8

Sweet blow the winds and the very oceans give forth blessedness. May the herbs grant us health and happiness. Sweet unto us be the nights and dawns. May every particle of mother earth be charged with blessing. And may the heavens shower us with benediction. Sweet unto us be the noble forest trees. Sweet unto us be the shining sun. Sweet unto us be all living creation. Om sweetness, harmony, peace.
Quotation sources

1. [chapter 4, verse 38 http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/verse-04-38.html]
2. [from http://www.vivekananda.net/PDFBooks/BhaktiYoga.pdf ]
5. ?? Lost on this one and am not even sure it is “Sankara” philosophy.
8. [Transliteration of Rg Veda verse is taken from http://satsangh.tripod.com/pujatexts/satya_baskegar.html] accessed June 26, 2012. The site says: “This page uses Unicode encoding for Devanagari. Please set the fonts and languages setting in your web browser to display the correct Unicode devanagari font such as Mangal.ttf from Microsoft or Raghu8.ttf from the BBC site.” [Have not done that, so transliteration may need some editing.]
Further Note: I think this is (Rg Veda : I.90.6-8) per http://www.ramanuja.org/sv/bhakti/archives/jul2001/0029.html accessed 7/23/12.