

## Far and Near 91-03-17

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

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 evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The subject of the lecture this morning is: Far and Near. The ideas “far” and “near” are used in many contexts. They seem to be very common. Without the idea of “far” and “near,” our practical life cannot be smoothly accomplished. So let us examine the different areas, the different levels in which we use these two words, “far” and “near.” And we shall see that these same two words are very important in the comprehension of Vedantic truth, Vedantic reality.

“Far” and “near” are connected, not merely with the idea of space, distance. Something which is distant, we say, “far.” And if it is very far, we add more words, “far, far, far away.” And “near” means close -- in space. We use these terms in the context of space. Some object, some person, some country is “far.” We have to use it. And some object, some person is very near – in space. This is... we are thinking in terms of space, but the terms “far” and “near” are equally applicable in the context of time.

That event, say the Kurukshetra War,<sup>1</sup>... when we think of the Kurukshetra War, our mind thinks it’s far away. It happened, many, many, many years ago – in time. And something happened just... just yesterday, then that is close, closeness, the idea of closeness come in terms of time. And often these two concepts space and time are mixed together, and we use “far” and “near” [both] - - this with regard to space and time.

When we study modern astronomy, we are drawn into the marvels, the wonders of space. Formerly we used to know that [the] sun is very far. We accurately we could, we have, now the knowledge, accurate knowledge, how far the sun is from the earth -- so also, Jupiter; so also, Pluto – the planet. We have, modern science has ... is more and more developing the power of exploring space. Things become far and far and far – so far that we cannot measure it in our ordinary way. We have to use scientific concepts to measure the distance – how far. If we say, “three hundred millions of miles,” that does not help, that does not cover the distance. It is so far that we have to use new concepts, scientific concepts: the light year, the concepts of light-year.

Some stars are so distant from us that they say, the scientists say, “their light has not yet reached us.” And the measure of... the measuring this distance is done by the scientific concept of “light year.” The speed of light is something constant, the scientists have found: one hundred eighty six thousand miles. It’s a constant figure. ~~Now---~~ The light travels one hundred eighty six thousand miles per second. Now see, in one year, what would be the distance in terms of miles?

Now, “Light year” means the distance that is traveled by light in one year, at that rate. Mentally we cannot... mentally we cannot form any concept of such tremendous distance. It is **so** far, that is the word we use. It is “so far.”

So also, in the atomic world. Distance can be great and distance can be little. In the atomic world, the distances are so little that it is beyond our comprehension. Can we imagine one billionth of a second? But still they are facts, scientific facts, and they are expressed in scientific terms, in mathematical terms.

So, in the relation to space and time in our every day life, ~~now~~ these are – when we study astronomy, when we study astronomical phenomena, ~~these~~ we have to use these terms and use the idea of how far, how near, both in the outside space and also inside the minute atom. It is also a universe! And that universe is also space/time bound. There is space operating there and time also operating there. But that space/time is so different from the outer space time. But still, that space/time in the atomic world is also a fact. And these facts are very interesting to us. That is why we study these things, and they enrich our knowledge of distance. How far and how close? How big and how small?

Now, the words “far” and “near” can also be used in many other fields of life. Two persons who are friends, somehow their friendship is disturbed. They are angry with each other. They hate each other. At one time they was a deep love between them and now, instead, somehow, some event, something happened that broke this friendship. Now when these two persons were friends, we used the term “near.” They are very near to themselves. They cannot bear not seeing them every day. Every day after work they have to meet. They have to work together, like this. So they were very near to each other. But now something happened and they part away. And this part[ing], this distance between them can be repaired, or it can never be repaired – they remain distant all through their life. Somebody, a third person asks, “What happened to Mr. So and So, he was such a close friend of yours?” “Oh, don’t talk about it. Don’t talk about it. Don’t talk about anything. It is gone, gone, gone with the wind.” [He chuckles.]

So in human relationship there we use also the terms “far” and “near.” Far and near... And in friendship, marriage for example, when two persons marry each other, they are prepared to be very close to each other. They do everything to retain that closeness. The wife tries to understand the mind of the husband and the husband tries to understand the mind of the wife. And slowly they understand each other. The more clearly they understand each other, the closer they become. The wife says, “I have no secret from you.” The husband says, “I too have no secrets.” And the marriage is a very happy marriage. That is, that they’re close. They’re close.

And if, apart from household relation, if they have also similarity in profession, or in other shores [not positive it is shores, but it sounded like that] of life...Both like a particular sport. Both like to travel. Both like painting. Both like music. In all these cases their marriage becomes very stable. In one fact they may vary. Both do not like the same religion. One likes... one comes from the Protestant family and the other comes from the Catholic tradition. Now here

there is a conflict. But they are determined... “Well religion is not so important in life. You remain a Protestant and I remain a Catholic. We shall manage.” “And if you go to attend mass in a Catholic Church, you are free to do [that] for the sake of saving our marriage. I am prepared to let you go to the Catholic Church.”

But sometimes this religious factor becomes very important. The wife says, “Oh my family, my family says that your husband should be a Catholic, so that the family happiness would be complete.” So, in our human relationship the terms “far” and “near” play an important part. If we are friends... if we are..., but sometimes in this old world, this world is a mysterious world. It is of course, God’s world, but God does not work in the straight way, always.

Always God’s work is mysterious and we do not understand. And we cannot... some people complain, “Oh God, why do You do this? You knew that we loved each other” – this girl and this man– “we loved each other. Why did You not bring to me a girl of the same religion? It’s a mistake. Why did You play the trick?” And God says, “Well, this playing the trick is my role...I like to do that!” [Audience laughs with him.] “I am a boy. I am really a boy. I have absolute freedom. That is why I do this. I sometimes bring you health and sometimes I bring you sickness. I bring you life. I bring you ten children, and I take away five children. To you it is improper, but for Me it is fun. I am a God of fun. My definition...” What is God’s definition? “God -- the most-funny person.” [He chuckles.] So you see the two words, “far” and “near” enter into many areas of life.

Now we shall discuss this in the area of religion, our spiritual life, which is our primary purpose of coming here and sitting here and listening whatever is told... Our purpose is a religious purpose. Let us... what I am, I know, whether I am truly or religious or not, that I know. But since we have come to a church, it is taken for granted that we are religious people. We have faith in God and we listen to religious teachings and we try to act in our life as much as possible, religious practice, religious teachings.

Now, is God “far” or “near?” That is the important question. When a person hears about God or reads about God, in the scriptures, he feels that God is very far. But that does not matter. Distance does not trouble God. It is God’s glory that he has made this universe a vast universe. Whatever the scientists -- the astronomers, these speak about these distances, and its light years, that is God’s glory. It is God, [Who] has created this mysterious world of time and space. So for God, really speaking there is no distance. What is three hundred million light years is nothing to God. What is ten million years in time is nothing to God. For Him it is just two seconds. God is not bound by the ideas of far and near. But for a devotee of God, who has faith in God and who is trying to experience God in his life, for him, the idea of far and near is important.

A devotee of God should always... [know] and feel that ... “God is very close to me.” Even though where heaven is, we do not know... sometimes we say heaven is far away... far away. But for the worshipper, a person who is trying to love God through rituals, through worship, through prayer, his primary condition [is] that he should not banish God to a far away place. For him, God, he should try to feel that “God is very close to me.” Though He can hear me,

even though He is millions of miles away, but I want Him closer, closer in space in time. I do not want [to wait] till death to have an experience of God. I want to feel the presence of God; I want to love God – right now! Right now! That is the deepest aspiration of a spiritual seeker. And also, in space, the worshipper wants to see God closer.

Of course... most worshippers of course know that God cannot be seen physically, physically to see God, unless you are a worshiper of images. That is why. That is why the Hindus practice the image worship. Though the image is something material – the image is made of a stone or clay or a picture of a certain idea of God – maybe the Mother God, or Father God. The Hindus have, the sages they have thirty millions of gods. The Hindus are given great freedom in religion, and as a result they began to create God -- god after god, god after god, god after god. But that was no danger, because their main book, religious book, the Vedas always spoke that [God is one] even though God's forms are many – endless forms. He appears [in that way.] This universe is a form of God. Whatever you see in this objective universe, whatever you see in the natural objects, these are all images of God.

And if you like, you can imagine human forms. And the Hindus have done that. They have imagined various forms of the Mother, the female God. And also they have imagined many forms of the masculine God. As a result in the Hindu mythology there are stories and stories of God as male and God as female. And, in the practice of religion there is usually an image. They know fully well their scriptures, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita says, “God really is formless.” The forms that you use in stone or clay or any other material, they are necessary for your practical purpose because that, because that ... it becomes easy for the mind, because the mind is a material object. It is easy for the mind to grasp, or see something material.

But really speaking, in Truth, the Hindu scriptures tell us, this image which you see near, close to us will one day in your spiritual life, they will disappear. They will disappear. Where they will disappear, we cannot understand. In the beginning you say, He has gone far away – in heaven. He has gone to heaven and I have His memory. I have the memory, and I shall worship You in mind – mental worship. In mental worship no physical image or physical picture is necessary. But for those who are interested in image worship, for them, the image is a symbol of God. It is not a material object any more.

Through his prayers, through his devotion, that material object, so long as he worships that material object with flowers and incense and prayers and chanting, that material image becomes something living – so much so, in his worship, the devotee treats that image or picture like a human being. And a human being needs food, so they offer not merely incense and flowers, but they also offer food. And after food is offered, that material image very rarely can really eat that food. That the worshipper knows. As a religious practice, I am collecting these fruits and some goodies... hmm... but they won't disappear. You won't eat it... and so, but His blessings will be there, and then we shall participate in the food. That is called “prasad.” The Hindus call it “prasad” – offered food. Just as in the Catholic tradition, you have the Mass... [In] the Mass

[it is] a piece of bread and a little wine that is offered and then the worshipper partakes of a little of this wine or those bread. They call it Mass.

Now, it may happen that a devotee of God is worshiping an image of God – like Ramakrishna. He was worshiping the Divine Mother in the form of Kali, and for him, he believed – he had that faith that this is not child's play. The Mother, in this, which is an image of stone, really She is not stone. Really She is conscious. The God, the Mother to Whom I am praying, is not an inanimate object. Can't be! That faith was there, and that faith is very much necessary for the worshipper.

So in the life story of Sri Ramakrishna we read that he was worshipping all right, but he was not satisfied. He wanted to see a tangible living form of the Mother. He would say, "Mother, you must not stand there as a stone image. I want to speak to you. I want to see that you are living." So sometimes he would bring his hand, put near the nose, nostrils of the image and see whether any breath is coming. So usually no breath would come, and he would be disappointed. He would cry, "Oh Mother, I want to see you living, but You... that is why I am taking so much trouble to worship You, light incense, pick You flowers... and this offered food is cooked with so much trouble, but You are not responding."

So he was a very sincere spiritual aspirant and he would cry and cry and cry. And there was great anguish and feeling that the Mother, even though I have tried to bring the Mother close to me through this image, through this temple, through this altar, but Mother is still far away from me. So the Mother must be living! That was the idea of Sri Ramakrishna and we read in his life story, the Mother one day became living. Sri Ramakrishna felt that the Mother is real... a really living Mother. But one strange thing happened. He found that the Mother's usual form has disappeared. There is the usual form of Mother Kali which he used to worship is no longer there. Instead, there is Consciousness, the Light of Consciousness – in the temple, outside the temple, like a vast ocean of Consciousness. He was... and he felt that it is the Mother. It is Mother's formless form. It is the same Mother, affectionate Mother, my dear Mother, whom I worship by calling, "Ma, Ma, Ma." That same Mother has responded to my prayer, but not in the usual form. She has become Infinite Consciousness – Infinite Consciousness within me and outside me. He had then no doubt that this is the vision of the Mother. There could be many other visions. There have been people, and Sri Ramakrishna himself was one, in later days he even saw Mother in a physical, in a physical way. He found a woman walking past and he had no doubt, this is Mother. The same Mother, whom I worship in the temple, She is walking as a woman here.

So, he had in his life the physical vision of Mother, but his first vision was the vision of Infinite Consciousness. And he retained that experience. Whenever he would speak about God, he would say that God is really Infinite Consciousness, an Infinite Existence. Whatever exists, exists through the existence of God. That I am existing, I am feeling, that I am someone who is conscious, who is alive – now this experience of life, this experience of consciousness is coming from God. God is Infinite Consciousness. The Mother,

whom I worship in the temple, is really speaking, Infinite Consciousness. That faith was strengthened in him and he never lost that faith. He stuck to that faith till the end of his life. But at the same time he would say, "Don't be dogmatic.

There are many worshippers who say that God is really confined in that image. Outside the image there is this world, material world – which is God's world, no doubt, but God himself is concentrated in **that** image, the image of Krishna, or the image of Kali, or the image of Jesus Christ. And that image, for them is something very real. And so, when they sit before the image, they feel that God is very close to them, is not far. Though this universe of infinite dimensions-- which we cannot ascertain, the scientists cannot ascertain how far the stars are there. They sometimes tell us things, which is [are] difficult to believe.

But a devotee of God says, whatever may be the world, the world was created by God, and this world is being sustained by God, and this world is also vanishing from moment to moment – disappearing. Things are not the same every day. What is today around me will be different tomorrow. So, he believes these things – God as Infinite Consciousness, Infinite Reality.

At the same time, as a bhakta, as a devotee of God, he believes that I am worshipping God through a picture of Divine Mother, or an image of Krishna, an image of Kali, that is also good. That is also true. When I offer some incense, or offer some flowers to my deity, then my deity does accept it. I feel that He has accepted my offering, humble offering. It may be some flowers. It may be some... some leaves. It may be some incense, but God has accepted that. That is the feeling of closeness, nearness, to the worshipper, who believes in image worship.

Even those, even those bhaktas, even those devotees who do not believe in images, like the Christians, like the Muslims, they believe in impersonal... not impersonal, but formless God. If there be very sincere devotees among them -- they can feel, not through an image or... Even though God is without form -- His presence can be felt. There have been devotees who are great devotees, great lovers of God. They feel the closeness of God always! But they don't believe in any form. For them, no form is necessary. They can feel that God has been around me, and He is also inside me. The Upanishads, important scriptures of Vedanta, they describe that God, the Spirit has entered into this body. This body is a mortal body, but inside this mortal body, the immortal God is there. He is before my eyes. He is before my ears. All my organs are effective because of the presence of God. They feel the presence of God in their body, so much so that their bodies do themselves become a temple. They feel that this body is a temple, and in the heart, in the core of my consciousness, there is this living God. I can talk to Him!

Sri Ramakrishna said, "You can not merely see Him, but you can talk to Him!" You can talk to Him. The presence of God has become so real, so keen, that they do not feel any kind of distance. He is close. He is very close. And so, they pray their prayer: "Come closer and closer to me. Penetrate my body. Penetrate my consciousness. Stand at the back of every thought of mine." That is the language of the Kena Upanishad, "Pratibodha-viditam" [4:4]<sup>2</sup> A devotee

who has developed such love, and interest in God, they feel the presence of God in every thought. In every action they do, they feel it is God's power that is working through me. And the sense of ego, egoism... everyone in order to function in this world has to exert his ego – my individuality, "I." Now this "I" is a great danger to spiritual life.

If you feel that I am the doer, I am the actor, then you are deceived. You may be a very successful person in this world, in this changing world, but for a spiritual person this "I" is subdued. He says, "The more I exert myself, the more I am, "I"... the God... I become far away from God. The more I can give away my ego, the more I can surrender myself to God, the more I can say, 'Oh God, I am your child; I am your servant. I wish to be Your companion.'..." the 'I', his little I is gone. The little ego is gone, not that he becomes an inert object. He works hard like other people, but he never exerts his ego. He knows: everything is being conducted by the Great Operator, God. So he feels the presence of God in his hand, in his mind. If his mind is alert and if he is a writer, he writes [a] wonderful thesis, he knows it is by God's power. It is from God that all power of intelligence comes.

So his world becomes filled with God. God is no longer far from him. He is near, near, near, nearest! The Upanishads says the Atman – Atman means that God's... the divinity which is in us. That divinity, that atman, that soul of ours is coming from God. God is the universal soul and a little bit of His universal reality is present in man – not only in man, in all living beings. So this devotee, this worshipper, for him God is always close. God is never away – far. Near. He is always near. And as a result of this experience his life becomes blessed. He is not afraid of anything. His character has...is bound to change. He cannot have any hate in him. He cannot have any meanness in him, because he feels the Great Holy One, the great Divine One by his side, even though we cannot see him physically, but He has entered my consciousness. He has entered my organs. And that is a permanent experience for him.

And if that experience is missed for some time, somehow, then he cries. "Oh God, you had so much grace on me. I used to feel Your presence in so many ways and now I do not see You." You can well imagine the anguish of his heart. Just like the two friends or a husband and wife who have been living together for many years and the husband is called to... Arabia. And what is the condition of the wife? The wife becomes, day, day after day, she expects a letter.. day and day, twenty-four hours she is in the television, the news of the Gulf War. And one day the news comes: he is returning, the war is ended and he is returning and she is oh so happy. And on the other hand, if that terrible news comes, her husband has died there, the condition, you can imagine what agony, all through her life, all through her life she would have to face.

In the case of God, true lovers of God, when once through prayer and meditation and sincere spiritual practices [he] has an experience of God... What is the highest experience of God? The feeling of closeness! When that devotee goes to bed, he does not go there without God. He knows that I am going to God. The Upanishads have said when a man goes to sleep, he really merges into Consciousness – God. God as Consciousness, is there in sleep. He has an

experience of God in sleep! Of course there is an appendix. Every person goes to sleep, so does it mean that every person realizes God in sleep every day? The scriptures have said, “No.” [Bṛhadraṇyaka Upanishad 3:19-34 – there also may be others]<sup>3</sup> Sleep gives us an experience of profound joy and peace. When you go to sleep, you leave all your worries behind. There are absolutely no worries. You do not think of your wife or children or your job or your debt, of so many worries we have to face in the waking state. But when you go to sleep, everything is forgotten. Is that not a great blessing – a grace of God?

But there are some persons who really believe that in sleep they are merged with God. And so long as there is karma left, they have to come back. Every man comes to this world with a mission, with a load of karma, unfinished work, which he has done through previous lives. Through previous lives man has done many works, good and evil, and some of the results of that good and evil have fructified in previous lives, but some have not. So there is a residual karma, a residual... to be finished. And so, after sleep, he has to come back – come back and face this world, but he is not sad.

A true believer in God, a true devotee of God is not sorry to face this world! In this world there may be miseries; there may be disease; there may be unwelcome things. But he does not feel sad, for it is by God’s will that everything is happening. So let me be a companion of God! I must not blame God for anything. God is beyond our criticism, because He is Great. So this man never misses God. For him, God is always near him, always near him...He has pervaded my physical body, and Vedanta says besides our physical body there are four other bodies. The next is the body of prana, the pranic body by which our breathing, our lungs and our heart operate. That is the prana in us, the pranic body. And after that there is the mental body, where thoughts and desires [originate]– all these things are happening in the mental body. In Vedanta these are called sheaths, coverings.

So this physical body is covering four other bodies – subtler [bodies]: the prana, and the mind. Mind is called manas. And after the mind there is the buddhi. Buddhi means intelligence, the ego. That is also a body. And after that there is the body of joy. In the deepest core of our individuality there is the body [of joy]– anandamaya kosha in Vedanta it is called, where man enjoys bliss. [Taittiriya Upanishad 2:2:1 to 2:6:1]<sup>4</sup> All the bliss that we are enjoying in our life, the joy of eating, the joy of going there, joys of doing this. Man is always seeking joy – seeking pleasure. And this pleasure or joy is coming from, is operating in that fifth body. Deep in the core of our personality there is that covering of joy. It is called anandamaya kosha.<sup>5</sup>

But all these five bodies are really bondage – but not for a real true devotee of God. He tries, he feels the presence of God in the physical body, in the pranic body, in the mental body and in the body of intelligence or buddhi, and also in the body of ananda, joy. Whatever joy he is experiencing, not merely he but his friends and companions... wherever a joy is experienced, this experience is God-experience. This experience is coming from God. So for a devotee of God, God is never far. He is always near. He is always near.



If I do something very vicious, then for the time being I miss God. He goes far away. Then I understand my mistake, my “sin” if you want to use that word sin. The Vedantist does not like to use the word, sin. Instead he wants to use the word, mistake. If by some mistake God’s presence is not felt, then that becomes a source of great agony of heart to the devotee, because the devotee knows that my life, my purpose of life, [is] to be with God. And when this body, after a certain age, when this body decays and the body goes... dies, then his soul, his real... a devotee of God, thinks himself as a flame of God. So that flame of God does not die.

Many scriptures give us assurance that with the death of the physical body, a man does not die. He goes to God. He has eternal companionship of God. And Vedanta says that in the ultimate – for some devotees, for some spiritual seekers, even the company of God is not necessary. He merges into God. He does not... his individuality merges into the cosmic individuality of God. That is called mukti. Mukti means freedom, nothing to bind me anymore. There is no bondage of body. There is no bondage of mind. There is no bondage of my ego. There is no bondage of my family. I am free! That freedom, is according to some statements, that freedom is the ultimate goal of life.

This world, as we see, is a mixture of good and evil. It is called the world of maya. That [person]... a person who has devotion to God, who has attained some degree of self-knowledge, for him this world, he bears with this world, but he never says this is a perfect world. He has to say that this world is a mixture of opposites, is a mixture of joy and suffering, is a mixture of health and sickness, is a mixture of love and frustration. So this world cannot be our goal. Our goal is God – either with form or without form. That is why Jesus Christ said, “Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father is perfect.” [Matthew 5:48]<sup>6</sup>

God is perfection itself. There is no flaw, there is no blemish in God’s personality. That is the faith, which a devotee of God should maintain – that God is ever perfect. And man has to aim at that perfection. Through his spiritual practices he is slowly going towards God. But that God is not a distant God. He is not far. He is far only when we make some mistake. Otherwise he is ready to be with us in life and in death. After we die, we can be eternally merged in God or we can enjoy eternal companionship of God. So says the Bible in the last chapter, the Book of Revelation, how a devotee who has lived a spiritual life here with faith and love, after death he enjoys the company of God. [Revelation 20:6, 21]<sup>7</sup> That is a different world; that is not a physical world; that is a spiritual world.

So, the Book of Revelation is very interesting. It gives us some faith that after, after death we shall be near God. If we have lived this life in a virtuous way, if we have tried to love God in life and to surrender ourselves to God in life, then after death there will not be any darkness. There will not be any calamity. There will be God.

So for a devotee, for a spiritual seeker, this idea of far and near has this meaning, that God can be far if we are not wise enough. And God can be near and nearer and nearest to us-- as my soul. There are people who feel, “My soul, my individuality, the core of my individuality is God, the shining God.” So for such a person, the far and near have become the same thing. For him, there is

no “far” and “near.” Far and near both have become God. Both have become one! Thus we can apply this concept of far and near in our religious life.

1. “Kukrukshetra War.” [Checking spelling] Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurukshetra\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurukshetra_War) accessed June 23, 2017.
2. Kena Upanisad in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p. 586.
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4. Taittiriya Upanisad in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p. 543-547.
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6. Matthew 5:48. King James Bible. Bible Gateway. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5:48&version=KJV> accessed on July 9, 2017.
7. Revelation 20:6 and Revelation 21. King James Bible. Bible Gateway. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+20:6&version=KJV> and <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21&version=KJV>