

Spiritual Contemplation

The topic of this morning's lecture is: Spiritual Contemplation.

Spiritual contemplation is a general name for any kind of effort we make to come into touch with spiritual reality. This spiritual reality we can call God, we can call our true self, or we could give any other name. The Buddhists call this reality, Nirvana. What name you give to this spiritual reality doesn't matter. But there **is** a spiritual reality at the back of things-- at the back of all the phenomena we are encountering all the time.

Vedanta['s] declaration is, that at the back of all this changing flux of life, at the back of the world outside as also at the back of our own personality, there is an unchanging reality. That reality is not matter. That reality is not bound by any natural laws. It is neither space nor time. It is neither life [n]or mind. It is standing on its own majesty, ever free, ever conscious and ever peaceful or joyful. So Vedanta calls that reality Sat-Chit-Ananda: the undecaying, undying substance-reality that is Sat. And that reality is not dark. It is not inert like a mountain or stone. It is ever conscious. All the time we are experiencing knowledge!

Knowledge is a sort of light, knowledge of anything, knowledge of a wall, knowledge of a thought, knowledge of the stars, [phrase repeated] knowledge of the thought. Any kind of knowledge is a kind of light. It is removing some ignorance. When we are knowing, when we have some astronomical knowledge... now before we had that knowledge our mind was completely dark about that astronomical truth. When that knowledge comes to our mind, a chamber of our mind is illumined. We know that we... formerly I did not know, but now I know. It is a kind of illumination, so any kind of knowledge you are having. All the time we are having knowledge, [a] procession of knowledge is going on in the mind all the time. And we could say that this is a procession of light, as if in our mind there are millions of light bulbs, tiny light bulbs and one after the other, one or two together, or three together, is being illumined. That is the process of knowledge, philosophically speaking, vedantically speaking. In our mind... when there is no light, then we go to sleep – where there is no knowledge. Whenever there is any knowledge, there is an illumination in our, in our mind. Now the spiritual reality is the totality of all illumination. All the knowledge that was in the past, all the knowledge that is coming to millions of minds, and all the knowledge that will come to millions of minds in the future – the sum total of all this knowledge is that spiritual reality. Vedanta calls it “chit,” the infinite consciousness, infinite light of all lights.

And, we have an everyday experience, all the time, an experience of pleasure or joy or happiness. But those experiences have just little tidbits of happiness. We eat ice cream, we have a kind of pleasure. We see a movie, we have a kind of joy. We meet one of our friends, a beloved friend, there is a kind of happiness. We are experiencing that all the time. Now Vedanta says, the totality of all happiness or joy or peace or pleasure is God, is that reality – Ananda.

So joining these three things together we say Sat-Chit-Ananda: infinite existence or reality, infinite knowledge or consciousness, and infinite joy or peace or bliss. That is God, if you want to use the word God. Now Vedanta says that this is not a myth. This is true, and if we make an earnest and serious effort we can experience Him. We can experience this reality, this God, this Sat-Chit-Ananda.

So spiritual contemplation is the way by which we can come in contact with this background of everything. We are so ungrateful. That background, because of that background it is possible for us to live, to think, to work, to feel. It is because of that background that we see this wonderful universe of ours. But normally we are not conscious of this background. That is ungratefulness.

To be conscious of that background is spiritual life. Spiritual life means an addition to our normal experience. In our normal life we experience the things in a fragmented way. We see the stars; we see the sky; we hear the sounds; we feel something; we eat; we read; we study. All these things, occupations of our life, is going on minus that reality, though everything is going on, is happening, on that reality. But we do not know that. That is the basic ignorance of life, which is called maya. Maya means to ignore, to forget, the Truth of our truths, the Real of all ~~reals~~ [realities], the Light of all lights. That is our condition. So we are... Normally we cannot, we do not see that reality, though that reality can never be absent. It is surrounding us. It is penetrating us all the time.

The very feeling that "I am"... the very feeling that "I am happy," the very feeling that "I am knowing," this is possible because of that Sat-Chit-Ananda. Just as if there is not a movie screen, [the] movie, the pictures are not possible. There has to be a screen on which the pictures come and go and move and roll. But the screen is the, is the base. So the basis, the foundation, the ground of our life is God, is that Sat-Chit-Ananda.

Now when we are inclined to... when we are dissatisfied with the normal state of things we are restless, we are unhappy, we are miserable, we are bereaved, we in distress—then, sometimes, this spirit of inquiry comes. "Is there something at the back of this changing phenomena of life, these tensions and conflicts and the crisis of life?" That inquiry, that question comes. That is the beginning of our spiritual life.

Spiritual life is not just a social chore. I am born in a Christian family; I have... go to the church and sit there, however boring it is. I have to sit there for one hour. And every day I have to spend something, at least fifty cents. It is a social custom in order to show that I am respectable man. I have faith in God. I have faith in religion. I am not an atheist. But that is not spiritual life. Spiritual life is an earnest hunger for the deeper truth of life. It is a hunger for God. Why this hunger? Because, otherwise my life is meaningless. My life is a passing show. So not that to all people, this hunger will come, but those persons are really fortunate if this hunger has come -- this inquiry has come. In spite of all my achievements, all my knowledge, all my prosperity, all my joys, there is a vacuum in me, an emptiness in me. I am missing something. That is the spiritual inquiry, spiritual awakening.

And when that spiritual awakening comes, our spiritual life begins. And when that spiritual awakening comes, we have to nourish it. Left to itself, it will be again covered with ignorance, because the plan of this life, the plan of this life has two directions. One is bondage and the other is freedom. Everything here is binding you. And, if you are intelligent, if that spirit of inquiry has come, everything here will help you in the realization of God, in achieving that freedom, in discovering your own spiritual nature, in solving the riddle and mystery of life. So when that spiritual inquiry, spiritual awakening has come, we are very fortunate, and we have to, just as we pay attention to a precious plant we have put in the ground in the soil, we have to watch it. We have to water it. We have to put manure in it. We have to fence it. So many things we have to do in order to, that the.. the plant may grow.

So when that spiritual interest has come to our mind, we have to nourish it and this method of nourishment is called spiritual contemplation. Now spiritual contemplation has many forms. Sometimes it takes the form of prayer. Sometimes it takes the form of meditation. Sometimes it takes the form of worship. Sometimes it takes the form of repeating the holy name of God. So there are many ways, just as [there is in] love.

Love has many expressions. You cannot... you cannot just say that this is... if you love, you have to love in this way. No! Love is an expression of creativeness, of inner freedom. When you love somebody, sometimes you take him to a... to a restaurant. Sometimes you bring some present. Sometimes you go on dancing with that person. Sometimes you go on swimming. Sometimes you sit together and watch tv – together, togetherness. So these are all expressions of love. Sometimes you do not do anything. You just mutually look at one another's face. Just no words. Half a minute. Ten minutes, looking at one another's face. These are all expressions of love. We cannot criticize it, because love is a creative power.

So contemplation is also a creative urge in our life. So there are many ways of spiritual contemplation. But, we have to, if... we have to preserve and strengthen our spiritual interest. And if we want, if we want to lead this spiritual interest to its natural fulfillment, namely the ultimate vision of God, the ultimate discovery of our true nature, spiritual nature, then, spiritual contemplation is a must! It is more important than your morning coffee. [He chuckles.] It is more important than anything else, because spiritual fulfillment is the highest [level] of human achievement. When a man realizes God, when a man realizes his spiritual nature, he becomes... he becomes free. His perspective of the world changes: his emotion changes; his strength changes. He is ushered into a new life where there is no more any doubt or confusion or suffering. It is as clear as broad sunlight.

So spiritual fulfillment, self-knowledge, or God realization -- these are synonymous expressions -- is, you could say, the highest goal of human life. So, spiritual contemplation has to be practiced every day. How long one has to practice? That does not matter. But one should seriously spend some time in spiritual contemplation, either in the form of prayer or either in the form of meditation or either in the form of repeating the name of God. Whatever way,

you carry on your spiritual contemplation, does not matter. But some time we must be detached from this normal life: our eating, our drinking, our encountering people. We must be alone. Just as one of the great mystics has said, “The journey from alone to the Alone.” We need not be afraid. So spiritual contemplation – there are many ways of spiritual contemplation.

It is wise to learn this contemplation from experienced, illumined persons. That is why we should take the help of scriptures. Scriptures are the records of spiritual experience, the methods of prayer and meditation that the ancients did, saints and sages of all religions did. We should... we should not be too egotistic. “No, I can devise my own contemplation.” There is a danger in that, because you are devising some contemplation when you are ignorant. Had you been illumined, you had the right to devise a way of contemplation or meditation.

So, we should be humble and we should learn from those who have gone before us. We call them seers, in the Indian language, Sanskrit language, they are called rishis -- a seer of truth -- saints and seers and sages, men and women who have transformed their life by this tangible experience of the spirit. So, what method they used, what words they used, we should learn and we should follow their example. If we do not, you see... the... each person has a different mind, has a different aptitude. Some persons would like to contemplate God with the help of a symbol, or the help of an image. And some persons would like to contemplate God in an impersonal way – no personal relation[ship]. They do not like to call [on] God as the creator, or father, or mother. Just they want to keep their mind on the sublime truth of God. That was done in India. In the Upanishads, in the Vedas, you find this technique – no personal relation with God. God is not a person, but God is an infinite truth; He is the ground of all existence.

So there is a wonderful contemplation in the Vedas, very well known in India. It is called the Gayatri Prayer. There is no personal relation with God – God is my father – but God as the light of consciousness. So this prayer, this Gayatri Prayer says that the light of consciousness that is illumining all the worlds, illumining everything, let that light come to my heart. That light is in my heart, but I do not know. May I be able to recognize that light of all lights in my heart. If we can recognize that light of all lights, in my heart, things become different. Then I feel this... my life, my personality, my ego, my emotions, everything is really illumined by that truth, the light of all lights. That light of all lights, of course, is illumining everything, but for me, in my heart, He is really the source of all my energy, my thought, my love, my emotions, my desires. He is the grand operator of this life. So this contemplation [is given].

A person... here he is not calling God. He has that faith, that faith has to be developed that I am not searching [for] something empty. Many, many people have experienced this reality and I am following their example. So I am invoking that light, though that light is everywhere, even in my heart, in my eyes, in my mind, in my emotions. But I want to tangibly experience that light. So this method of contemplation, see he is trying to lead his mind to this idea. See, he is not thinking of trees. He is not thinking of persons. He is not even thinking of his

body. See? For the time being he is lifting his mind to this idea. That is contemplation.

Mind is a wonderful instrument. Mind, as Sri Ramakrishna said, is like a white linen. You can color it in any way you like. If you want to color it yellow, it will be yellow. If you want to color it red, it will be red. So we have that mind which is helping us in our everyday chores, now that mind... we have told our mind, "Oh mind, let us go to another level for fifteen minutes. Don't be impatient. It will do you tremendous good. You will be expanding. You will be seeing things in a different light. You will experience great joy and fulfillment."

So we have to persuade the mind. Sometimes the mind is very naughty. It does not want to cooperate. The mind wants to go to a bar, to a restaurant, to a volleyball...to an Olympic game. You see? These are the normal chores of the mind. So we have to tell the mind, "I am not depriving you of anything, but for fifteen minutes you must cooperate with me." [Mind replies,] "For what? What you are going to do to me?" [Audience laughs with him.] "Spiritual contemplation." The mind will at once revolt. "Oh, no, no, no." Then we have to give some candy to the mind. [Audience laughs again.] See, in this way we have to persuade the mind.

It is very difficult to persuade the mind. But if there is spiritual interest awakened, things will be easier. Then the mind will cooperate. So that mind... we have to lift that mind to this contemplation, that there is at the back of things, at the back of my own life, at the back of my senses, my thoughts and emotions, there is the light of consciousness. It's illumining everything. So let me reflect on that light and let me desire that... that light comes to me. Be my companion. He is hiding himself all the time because of my repulsion [? not sure of this word, which sounded like a cross between perversion and revulsion, but "pushing away" would make sense], but I am ready to receive that light. So let that light come.

In this way, this is one kind of simple contemplation. You are not subscribing to any religious dogma or creed. A Christian can do that. A Buddhist can do that. A Hindu can do that – because you are thinking of the essential truth of God, God as the light of all lights, the light of consciousness. Indivisible light! Our physical light is broken. There is light in this room. There is darkness in that room. So the physical light is all the time broken. But the light of consciousness, which you are invoking in our heart, is unbroken, is the totality of all lights. So this contemplation is a very simple contemplation, contemplation of that spiritual reality as the light that is illumining everything – and let that light come to my heart.

In the process of this contemplation, one will, if one sincerely practices this, you will soon find that this contemplation is making him calm. His outgoing, turbulent senses are becoming calm. You see? A sort of peace you will feel from day to day. And that will lead to further practice! If we find joy in something, then we want to continue it. And if we go on doing something, which is boring, we cannot continue for long. But this contemplation is bound to bring a sort of calmness and harmony. By practicing this, then slowly it is supplemented. Because, that light is the light that is illumining everything. It is giving existence

to everything. These ideas will begin to come. And then our contemplation will become richer; it will be extended. Then we shall be able to think of that impersonal reality as the ground of everything. It is at the back of mountains. It is at the back of the sky, at the back of the stars, at the back of the rivers, at the back of the flowers. We will slowly... our contemplation will cover these ideas. That does not mean that our mind will be distracted. No, because all these ideas you are joining to that one reality. That reality is unbroken reality. Sat-Chit-Ananda/God is unbroken existence, consciousness and joy. So you, for your satisfaction, you are trying to think of that reality in everything, everywhere, just as we do, just as we do, in our expression and experience of love in our everyday life.

A mother has a very angelic child, is holding that child. And mother is looking at the eyes of the child. "How beautiful. How beautiful." Then the mother looks at the hair of the child. "How beautiful. How beautiful." Then the mind touches the muscles of the child, the tendons. "Oh, wonderful." In this way, the mother's love is showing, is going in many directions, centered on that object of love, namely the child. But the mother's love does not say, "This is my child. This is my child." No. Love is creative. Love wants to flow in many directions, but all these directions are centered in the object of love.

The same thing happens when we are contemplating on God, that spiritual reality. We start with invoking that reality in our heart as the light that will illumine my mind, my emotions, my thought, my body. But as my practice goes on, my comprehension, my contemplation becomes richer, becomes extensive. Then we try to think that that reality is the source of all beauty. With open eyes whatever beauty I see in this world, all beauty is coming from Him. There is a meditation, a contemplation in the Chandogya Upanishad in the third chapter. It is called the contemplation according to the sage, Sandilya -- Sandilya vidya. There the contemplation is of this form: "That reality, Brahman, that truth is the source of all beauty, of all joy, of all fragrance, of all light."¹ You see, more ideas are coming. But these ideas are coming because you are trying to think of that reality as covering everything!

So and... So that made contemplations as, "He is the Truth of my truth! He is my most beloved, truth. And He is inside my heart. Let me be joined to Him. And even when death comes, I am not going to be separated from Him." These ideas are included in that contemplation. In this way, impersonal contemplation can be practiced: God-- not a dead God... God -- not a far away God, but a God who is of the essence of consciousness, is omniscient. His knowledge is... is directed everywhere.

So that Sat-Chit-Ananda sometimes, that infinite, I can contemplate in the... my heart, sometimes outside with open eyes, when I am comparatively in a leisurely mood, say in the morning or at dead of night. See? We can contemplate. We are all the time having a knowledge of the vast universe with us. Wherever we go the... this space is with us. Wherever we go, the sun or the moon or the stars [go] with us, the forests with us. We are the vast universe; our experience is a part of us. Is a part of us. When we go to... when we die we shall be ushered into another sphere where the same [thing happens] and

another environment will come, just as it happens in dream. When we go to dream, the waking environment changes. We have another environment. So, man is not isolated from this universe. It cannot run away. Wherever he goes, he goes with his body, he goes with ego, goes with his mind. But he also goes with this universe. This universe is there.

Now a spiritual person, a person who is practicing contemplation, he brings the spiritual reality in this universe. He says this universe is all the time surrounding me, but this universe is centered in that Sat-Chit-Ananda, in that God. It is he who is giving light and joy and coherence and consistency and motion-- to everything. So, this contemplation goes on in two directions.

Sometimes within me, the person who is contemplating, the spiritual seeker, tries to feel the presence of that light, that light which is enabling my senses to operate, my thoughts to operate, that reality which is giving, which is making possible for me to exist. An unbroken sense of my existence is there with me all the time. I am standing here; I am. I am going to the capitol building; I am. I am going to San Francisco; I am. Now this "my existence" it is coming from God. God is that infinite existence. In this way, this contemplation of that impersonal infinite reality can be practiced.

Then, if we want, see, to bring emotion [there is another contemplation]. In this first kind of contemplation, there is emotion, but a quiet emotion. In the Indian spiritual tradition it is called shanta-bhava -- not in a personal relation that God is my father, God is my mother; I am God's child. The truth of God, the vast wonderful truth of God, God as reality, God as consciousness, and God as joy, peace, bliss -- this very idea fills our heart with an emotion of love.

Love has many expressions. See, when we see a wonderful landscape in a moonlit night, we **love** that moonlit night. But that is not the love we... we extend to a friend who has come after two years. In meeting that friend we have to jump. We have to say, "Oh I am so happy, happy, happy." We have to talk; we have to jump; we have to make a cup of coffee. But when we are enjoying the quiet moonlight night you won't have to jump. Moonlit night does not need your coffee. [Audience laughs with him.] But there is love! That love is called quiet love. The heart is filled with a kind of quiet gladness, a quiet peace and joy. So in the Indian spiritual tradition it is called, "shanta-bhava," "quiet love, calm love."

Now when you want to establish a personal relation[ship], when you are conscious of yourself, when you say, "Who am I?" you are, you want to be more conscious of your destiny. Then you have to take another direction of contemplation. In other words, you have to give a personality to Sat-Chit-Ananda. Then you say, that infinite God is a person. He is a cosmic person, a not a person like me, or he or she, but He has a personality. He is our father. He is our master. He is our creator. In other words, you have brought human attitudes in your contemplation. So you are trying to feel that God, that infinite Sat-Chit-Ananda is related to you. You are eternally related to Him. You are His child. You are His servant. You are His devotee. In other words, you are, in your contemplation, you yourself has entered now: He, God -- and me. He is my father; I am His child, or if you want, to look upon God as the universal Mother

and God is my mother; I am God's child. In this way, you try to... in your contemplation you are adding human emotion. Your God has become a person – person, you have given a personality to God and you are also... you have been more conscious of your self.

Normally we are conscious of our self as a combination of body, mind, ego, attitudes, desires, all working in this framework of this everyday world. But, here you have added something to yourself. Normally it is not necessary to do that. When you are cooking, you are a housewife you are cooking, you can think [of] yourself as a beautiful lady. You can think of yourself as an excellent cook, as the wife of somebody, as the mother of somebody. See? In this way, you are doing meditation on yourself in your normal way – not in a spiritual way. But if you have become interested in spiritual contemplation you are doing the same thing.

You are working in the kitchen, a housewife, but you are then trying to think, "I am a spark of the divine, all that I am doing all this intelligence, all this ability is coming from my Supreme Master, my God, my Beloved." So side-by-side with your kitchen chore, contemplation is going on. You are not conscious of yourself as a body or a mind or this and that, but you have added the spiritual truth of yourself. You are trying to think that you are an image of God. You are a spark of the divine and all that is going on in your body, in your mind, in your actions is coming from that Supreme Master, is coming from your Beloved Father or Mother. In this way, in your contemplation, God as a personal being has come and you also have come, emerged as a spiritual entity, not just body-mind combination, but a spark of the Spirit, a lover of God. These things have been added to your personality.

In this way spiritual contemplation goes on in two ways: contemplation about God the divine and contemplation of yourself as a devotee. You sometimes become, just as you are thrilled with joy by contemplating on God as that divine intelligence, Sat-Chit-Ananda, you are also thrilled on contemplating on your self. You are thrilled to know and feel that oh, you are not just a changing mass of bones and flesh and blood, and the restless combination of restless thoughts and wild emotions. But you are divine. "I am the child of God." And in that role, you are sharing the life of God. You are also a conscious spark of spirit. You are also in your nature, you are really blissful, you are really pure. The body and mind may be impure, but the spirit in you, the soul in you can never be impure. The soul in you can never die! These ideas come and enter into your contemplation, contemplation on God the infinite and contemplation on **you** as the seeker of God, as the devotee, as the spiritual aspirant. In this way, this contemplation with God as the personal being, this is also a very interesting way of contemplation.

Now sometimes something more can be added. You want to contemplate on God with the help of some form. See? You want to bring your creative faculty – see more tangibly. And so, in the religious tradition, we have these different kinds of spiritual contemplation, with the help of images, with the help of symbols. That is also one way of contemplation. You try to think of God as the infinite calmness and you... you will give a form to that God. And then, in the Hindu

tradition, God is called Shiva, eternal meditation. He is showing us the way, how to meditate, how to remain, build up calm. See?

So that has been done, meditation with the form of an image. If you are Christian, you can medi[tate]... you can take the help of lord, Jesus Christ, pure form, the embodiment of self-sacrifice, the embodiment of compassion, love, the embodiment of, you see, unselfishness. See, all are personified in his life, and as a Christian you believe that God has descended into that personality, Jesus Christ. So I can meditate with the help of the form of Jesus Christ. Meditation becomes very interesting. When you try to think of these attributes of God, God's compassion, God's sacrifice without the help of... but when you take the help of a form, it... it becomes easy. You are meditating as if God's... these great attributes of self-sacrifice, compassion, love has taken a tangible form in Jesus Christ. So you can think, visualize in your heart a glorious illumined form of Jesus Christ. You are not really thinking of a material entity. It is a spiritual light, taking the form of, human form of Jesus Christ.

In this way, the technique goes on. You can take in your contemplation, you can take the help of a form. If you are a devotee of Krishna, the same process goes on. Krishna now becomes the personification of divine love, divine charm, divine beauty. And you have, by your creative imagination you have given a form, that form of Krishna. You meditate and you contemplate on your heart. You pour your heart to that; you see, with the help of that form, you practice your contemplation.

So contemplation can also be carried on in this way, with the help of first, personal god -- plus with a form. So in this way there are many ways, many ways of contemplation. But, the most important point is: we have to practice this. Whatever suits my temperament, I have to... just as not a single day I forgo my meal. If I forgo food, then this body cannot last. So my spiritual interest, my spiritual desire cannot survive if I do not, I do not nourish it and nourishment comes through the help of this contemplation!

[Just as this tape had no beginning chant, no ending chant was recorded.]

1. Chandogya Upanisad [3:14.4] , in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.392.