

To Unite All Hopes in God (92-09-06)

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.

Welcome everyone to this first service after the summer recess. Those of you who could not attend our birthday celebration of Krishna, which was within the vacation, will notice a new change in the altar. In the center, formerly, it was blank – just Om and a blank space, which was decorated with a vase, or on special occasions we used to put some special pictures like Durga or Shiva, whatever the occasion would be, we would have... we would place that picture in the middle. But now, Sri Ramakrishna has occupied the central place and Christ was removed from his left side to his right side and Holy Mother – a new picture of Holy Mother has been inserted to the left of Sri Ramakrishna. And, we used to have the Holy Mother's picture in the south wall. That picture has no place as yet. This is a new picture.

The subject of this morning's lecture is: To Unite All Hopes in God – to unite all hopes in God. Apparently it is a very simple subject, but when we look into it deeper we find the subject is not so simple. It involves all patterns of our life. It is a universal motive in human life. Whatever be my situation, whatever be my age, whatever be my work, I am always motivated or guided by some kind of hope. And it is that hope that gives me energy. Though hope is uncertain – we hope for something but we do not know whether that hope will be fulfilled or not. Yet, the hope has to be there! Without hope we cannot work.

In all fields of life: our family life, our educational life, our intellectual life, ethical life, religious life, spiritual life -- whatever may be the pattern of my life, there has to be some kind of hope in my mind. Now take a concrete example: now this is our first Sunday service after the summer vacation. So it is natural for me to think, "I hope some more people come to this first service." [He laughs.] I am a person who has renounced the world, yet, innocent hope of course... I am not hoping to do something evil. But still that hope is working. "Maybe this is the first service after the summer and some more people will come." And when I entered, first of course, I have to look at the shrine; I have to salute. And then I look to the audience. And they were satisfied. Quite a few people have come.

Now this is true for every person, young or old. Whatever... any engagement is going on, any kind of work, if it is not... if it is just a neutral... if it is a neutral action, then the action is not ... is not working properly. Take for example a person who works in our garden with money. He gets some salary. And he comes in and works with great enthusiasm and because he knows that

by his labor, he will get some money. He will get \$85 just for the mowing of the lawn.

One of our old-time devotees, when she... she does not live here... somewhere in [the] Bay area, when she read in our bulletin the appeal that we need volunteer workers for our garden work, our book shop, she wrote me a letter with a check of \$85. She said, "Why don't you engage a gardener, preferably a Mexican gardener, because I know that the Mexican people are very honest. Some of them may not understand English, but they work hard, honestly, and you can rely on them."

Fortunately, we have got such a gardener. And he works very hard on Saturday mornings. And, after finishing his regular mowing if he finds there are other things to do, he does it briskly of his own will. Now this person does all this because he knows, "I shall get that money." Now if he was a neutral person, of course if he was a very close devotee, there are so many close devotees who do not get any money, but they do every work, whatever they feel is there... gardening or the office work, or... any kind of work!

If you come on Saturday, you will see so many people are doing so many different kinds of work. Some are cleaning the auditorium. Some are cleaning the cobwebs...[he chuckles] ... plenty of work. And they do it, [people] who are real devotees, they do it with great joy. They think that it is the Lord's work. "We are doing all this as yoga, as karma yoga." And so the perspective changes. There is joy. And that kind of work, if you can really bring that attitude, that my work, whatever I do, it is because of God's power. It is because God is the great master of everything. Whatever is happening is happening through the will of God. And this idea we find in many places of the Upanishads.

In one section of the Chandogya Upanishad, a meditation on Brahman is prescribed. Now, how to meditate on Brahman? Brahman is... several places of the Upanishads Brahman is described [as being] of the Reality beyond our mind and words. You cannot say even that Brahman "is." Any words you use do not go to Brahman. He is... You cannot use any language, yet the Reality of Brahman is there, all the time. And it is from that Reality [that] all other minor realities are coming. So a devotee of God, an earnest, serious, spiritual seeker of Truth, they more and more realize this through their work. Not merely through their work, [but] through their meditation, through their worship. Whatever it [is] they do, they do... it is by the will of God. It is God, Who is enabling me to do this work.

If a person is a cook, for example, a man, a woman... is cooking a special dish. She has studied the recipe carefully. Still, in the mind there is that idea, "Will it be successful? Will it be successful?" The hope of success is... is pervading his or her mind. When we go to school or college for a particular examination, naturally it is the hope, "Shall I succeed? All this labor, day and night. I am studying and studying book after book, but will all that be successful?" This is the idea, general idea that comes to our mind in all situations of our life. That is natural.

Now, the Upanishad says to meditate on Brahman. The Upanishad prescribes some... the Upanishad knows that Brahman as... He is beyond the

reach of meditation, yet through meditation, through worship, through prayer, through unselfish work, through these practices we have to progress in our spiritual life. So the goal of spiritual life, you could say, when we come to spiritual life, the goal is to... unite all hopes in God. So, this Chandogya Upanishad in that chapter of meditation [Chapter 7]¹, it prescribes: you want an object of meditation, I can tell you dozens of objects, familiar objects. So many objects we see, but we do not see the Whole. We see only a part of that. We see the sky. We see the trees. We see the forests. We see the rivers. We see men, women, and this vast world with millions of objects are before our eyes. And the Upanishad says, "Among these we can choose some sections of nature, some powers of nature, some phenomena of nature as: meditate as Brahman. Think that this is Brahman. That is the beginning.

If a person just reads in the Upanishads, "meditate" and one section says, "Meditate [on] hope as Brahman." Now you can read it, but it seems after you have read ten times, you think, "What does this mean that hope is Brahman? Brahman must be beautiful. Brahman must be something bringing joy to our heart. But you are telling me to meditate [on] Brahman as hope! Now if you think it yourself, day after day, the why the Upanishad calls to meditate [on] hope as Brahman. Brahman is the ultimate reality. These things have been described earlier in different places. Brahman is the totality of everything! If that be so, then you can bring that totality in hope and examine your life, your practical life, your intellectual life, your ethical life, your moral life, and finally your religious life you examine, and you see, "Well, there is hope. In every life, in every situation, there is hope." And now, bring that, that direction to meditate [on] hope as Brahman.

Now first you, by your common knowledge try to see what hope is doing to us. Now, hope is giving us the motive. If there is no hope we cannot work, unless we have become a sage, we have become a saint. A saint or a sage or a realized person... a person who has realized God, great love for God, or a person who has attained self-knowledge, such a person sees that hope can indeed be meditated [on] as Brahman, because the field of hope is everywhere. Everywhere in all situations of life, there is hope. Without hope, there is no joy. Because there is hope, we tend to work, and then we come to our religious life.

In religious life we pray; we read scriptures; we listen to holy discussions; we attend religious services. We do that. At the same time, we have to remember that all that we are doing in our religious life is only to get away from the bondage of hope, because without knowing the spiritual truth of hope – that hope is really a power of Brahman. It is through this power that Brahman is... is operating this world, operating our life. In each person, each living person, young or old, this power of hope has to be there. Otherwise there will be no movement. So Brahman, it is Brahman that is, as hope, is doing some miracle... the miracle of work.

So in our religious life, whatever we do – we pray, we read scriptures, we read holy books, we visit holy shrines – whatever we do, we should all the time remember that this is not my doing. I have really no power to get away, to loose myself, to free myself from this great binding power of hope, which is binding all

life. Whatever may be pattern of life, it is hope that is keeping that person engaged in that responsibility. See, in a sense, it is a great bondage. It is a great bondage... spiritually speaking it is a great bondage.

So, a spiritual... on the spiritual level a person has to do whatever work he has to do – his worship, or prayer, or study of scriptures, or pilgrimage – what we call religious work, but at the same time, he or she should remember that it is – it is God! It is God's power. It is God that is unifying all our hopes.

Any action means some kind of hope is there. Now when I have come to religion, my goal is freedom... freedom not from my body. Normally our body is a great bondage to us, because the body brings us... For a certain time when we are young and strong the body is a blessing. Now a man of God, a devotee of God, should think this blessing of my health is coming from God. That I am enjoying health, this is the will of God. It is God, Who is the great director of all movements of life: human life, super-human life, animal life, plant life.

Wherever there is any expression of life or reality this is a part of God. So God is a Unity. God's Mind is uniting everything. The ignorant man does not know that so he becomes a slave to hope. A person who is trying for an examination in order to get a very important position, now there is nothing wrong to think that, "Shall I succeed or not?" Hope is allowed. But really speaking, hope is a bondage! Hope is keeping us bound to this world of... material world, intellectual world, ethical world – whatever may be the sphere of my life, I am bound to it by hope. So hope, spiritually speaking is a bondage.

Now a spiritual seeker should... should examine the ways of life, this life which is... that is coming to us. What are its elements? And you find that commonly speaking, hope is the great factor. It is by hope that God is ruling, ruling all life – human life, animal life. It is God who is the ruler; he knows that. At least he tries to know that. If he does that, then he becomes free. He does all his work, but he knows that it is... it is God's hand.

God is unifying all hope, though before -- behind every action of mine, even religious action. I am coming and worshipping, attending religious services. These are religious activities and there is the hope. What is the hope in this case? The hope of freedom – freedom from the ignorance of life, even freedom from my body.

In my youth, the body was enjoyment. But as people grow old, then they know. They begin to feel. This body is not a friend all the time. It is subject to so many diseases, so many ailments, and a stage comes when... if you are over ninety then you know how painful it is to live. And when you receive birthday cards with the words, "May you live longer" then you curse that person. [Audience laughs with him.] That at this age of ninety, I have really nothing to live for. The things that I like to eat, I cannot eat. I cannot walk. I cannot... whatever things I like, it is bad for my health. And you are asking more of this pain, more of this suffering for me!

So this, our own body is not always a friend. For some time it may be a friend. But at the back of that friendship there are these sufferings, involved sufferings. So, a spiritual person who wants to really know what life is, they realize this truth: that all hopes are unified in God. It is God's play! You are

hoping for something, which is great from the intellectual point, or physical point, or any other perspective, but really it is binding you to life. And to remain binding to this earthly life, the Upanishads says, "There are regions, there are levels of life which are much higher than our earthly life. Our earthly life is not the supreme goal of life. The supreme goal of life is God, in whom all other levels of life are included." [?? Could not identify a specific verse for this quote. Possibly Svetasvatara Upanisad 6:11 – The one God hidden in all beings.....]

In God, all levels of life are unified. So whatever may be our fear of action, a man of faith, a man of spiritual hankering should know that the Power, the Great Power, the Reality is God. And it is God, who through... in many ways He is trying to bind man and at the same time to free him.

Both bondage and freedom are in God's hand. To an understanding person, a person who has really understood this, that it is God in whom everything is unified, including hope... Love, for example. Love is such a powerful motive in life, but love is binding. Even [if] your life... love is very pure, even [if] your love is very faithful and deep. Still that love one day will come to [an] end. And you will suffer greater pain.

So a spiritual... a real genuine spiritual person, should more and more understand that this life in its aspect of bondage or freedom, is... is ruled by God. And if we remember this, then we become free from all involvement. We are not idle. We do our work, whatever work we have to do as duty. It may be family. It may be our place, our action. There will not be any bondage, because we know that it is all God's play. God is the Supreme. God is, through us, through our joy, through our suffering, it is God who is acting.

If we are free, God is happy. If we are in ignorance, God is also happy. "I have kept this fellow in bondage..." [He laughs with audience] "for some time more." But a time will come when he will understand. As Vivekananda said, "A time will come for every person for freedom." Now that person may be a person in bondage, no spiritual understanding but freedom is the great goal of creation. The great goal of creation is not bondage! The great goal of creation is freedom.

If a person by his sadhana, by his spiritual practices, by his contemplation, by his meditation, by his worship, by prayer, one day he discovers... that I am really free. God as the Supreme Reality, as the totality of everything is in my heart. All things that we see, all things that we hear... it is in me. God is not in any distant heaven. He is in my heart. He is my soul. He is my perfection, just as Jesus Christ said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."² Now what is this perfection? This perfection is this understanding, this understanding that in this world anything that we consider real is really God. It may be a little thing; it may be a great thing. It may be my personal achievement in politics or in education. It is God's will. See?

And if some suffering comes, physical suffering or mental suffering... In life we have so many bereavements. Nobody can say that I am free from all suffering. But a person who has this knowledge, he becomes free from... He knows that it is God! It is God. Everything, everything is unified.

So hope as a tool of God, a tool... a binding tool of God, so also everything, everything that we see and realize may become a fetter, may

become a... something to bind us. At the same time, if we have that comprehension that it is God who is doing this, that then same thing becomes a source of freedom. So bondage and freedom, see – ignorance and knowledge are both possible because of God. It is all God's play. And this play, when will this play end? When we shall have that complete knowledge, that everything – it may be sight, it may be sense experiences, it may be aesthetic experiences, it may be philosophical experiences, it may be ethical experiences, it may be religious experiences – it is He, it is God! In God everything is unified.

Everything is unified in God. This, this is knowledge! When this knowledge comes, then that person becomes free. That person is no longer afraid of anything. He does not need anything also. He knows that everything is in God, and that God is not far from me. He is closer, closer, closest to me. He is my soul. Just as Jesus Christ said, "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"³ If a person has great wealth, that does not lead him to any great gain.

The great gain is self-discovery, to discover who you are. And, in Vedanta, the declaration is that man by the practice of... the practice of devotion, the practice of unselfish work, the practice of discrimination [between the real and the unreal], detachment, he can come to a point when he really becomes great. He becomes... he really becomes one with everything! He sees and feels that my ego, my I-sense, my sense of individuality is another tool of God to bind me. And so I challenge God. "God" is my creation. Really "I" as that infinite self do not need anything. I am that Truth which always is. This is called in Vedanta the self-knowledge. When self-knowledge comes, my sense of individuality is not in my body, not in my mind, not in my ego, but in the Whole.

Anything that exists, anything that I conceive of, anything that I can think of or speak of is that Reality, is me... "I", that real I. There are two kinds of I, one is the little I and the other is the great I. In Sri Ramakrishna's language, one is the unripe I, and the other is the ripe I. So the ripe I.. we have to practice the ripe I. At every moment this little I will try to raise its head. "I have done this. It is mine."

That is ignorance. God laughs at this fellow's feeling ignorance. "Let him be in ignorance." But if that person through this repeated reasoning and repeated contemplation discovers the real I is infinite, the real I is the Totality. I am present in all beings. When I am praying all beings are praying with me. When I am existing, the whole reality is existing. That is the great I, rich... the ripe I, in the language of Sri Ramakrishna. That ripe I, when we had experience of that ripe I, then life becomes worth living. Life becomes a real spiritual life. See? Because we are then free from the bondage of hope, or any kind of bondage.

All bondages are necessary for creation. In creation, bondage is necessary. Freedom is necessary. But if through my spiritual inclination I choose the freedom, then I have brought that God from heaven to my heart. I feel that all movement is unified in God and that God is not a... an imaginary God. That God is real! Reality is experienced by everyone. Everyone some time or other without any interruption feels Reality. Even if we go to great, deep sleep, we are not estranged from Reality. We become one with Reality without its

external forms. So, when we say that all hopes are unified in God, that means not merely hope, but any object of perception, any object of our common values is really unified in God. And that God is not distant. That God is my true personality. When I really realize my true individuality, I become the Whole. I feel I am in the sky! I feel that I am in the trees, not merely in this world, but as many worlds as there may be. I do not know. But I am present in all the worlds, in all time – not merely in the present, but in the past also. And where is the beginning of time, I need not inquire. But I myself am timeless.

These experiences are elements of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is the knowledge of the totality, the totality from a pinpoint to the great sky. It is one! All one. One reality. And if you want a word, you say that it is my soul, it is me. And I am conscious of my self all the time. If I am ignorant, if I am not inquiring, then I identify myself sometimes with my body, sometimes with my mental state, like some bereavement, suffering.

I identify self with many things. I become miserable. But if I have knowledge, if I have true devotion to God, then I know that God is in me. My “I”, my ego which separates me from others, that is a myth! There is really no separation. Everything is unified in one – and that one you can call God when you are speaking from the point of devotion and that one is you – your own being when you are speaking from knowledge. So we have to combine these two.

We have to combine knowledge with devotion. We have to combine work with devotion. As we read in Vedanta, there are four yogas. Karma is action and bhakti is love and yoga is concentration and jnana is knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna says and Vivekananda also says that these four should be combined. Should be combined! Then, we are really free. Even in this world, we are not bound by anything. I may be the busiest person, but I am not bound by anything.

If you study the life of many saints and seers, you will see their life pattern was like this. They did not avoid this world. They faced this world. They faced this world with the love of God, with the knowledge of Self. And so they were free always. They did never think of afterlife, what will happen in afterlife. That is... that does not mean anything. When you have touched God, when you have touched that total reality, which is within yourself, which really is you, then you are not concerned with even time. Time is flowing. Sometimes we think of the past. Sometimes we think of the future: what shall be my condition when I die. These are idle questions for a true spiritual seeker. For a true spiritual seeker, the goal is to Be, and be with... one with everything, to be one with that Totality. That is why I have mentioned only one element of bondage, namely hope. But this is true of any kind of bondage.

Anything that tries to bind us, should be united in God. When we bring God as the guardian of my life, then we are safe.

Thank you.

[Announcements about next Sunday lecture by Swami Prapannananda on Sri Krishna and weekly classes not included in transcription.]

Om. Madhu vAtA 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 madhu⁴ [Rg Veda 1:90, 6-7]

Sweet blow the winds and the very oceans give forth blessedness. May the herbs and plants bring us health and happiness. Sweet be 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.

1. Chandogya Upanisad in in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p. 468-490.

2. Bible Gateway. Matthew 5:48. King James Version.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5:48&version=KJV>
 accessed June 18, 2016.

3. Bible Gateway. Mark 8:37. (or Matthew 16:26) King James Version.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8:37&version=KJV>
 accessed July 4, 2016.

4. [Transliteration of Rg Veda verse is taken from

http://satsangh.tripod.com/pujatexts/satya_baskegar.html] accessed June 26, 2012.

Alternate version of prayer with somewhat simpler spelling

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rvsan/rv01090.htm>

madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ |
 mādhvīrnaḥ santvoṣadhīḥ ||