

CHANT • POEM (Nalini) • WELCOME • TOPIC

The Highest Ideal

I can hear him now,
my small and loving but fiery Bengali guru,
raising his voice for unequivocal direction:
“Keep your mind on your highest Ideal!”
And he would reiterate: “By hook or by crook.”
That is, by any means possible -
in whatever mind-set or activity you might be engaged.

Worship is not only ritual;
it is the act of offering all you are and have and do to the Highest.
Study is not only reading books and scriptures;
it is absorbing ideas, practically, working with them to make them
your own.

Discrimination is not only the discernment of what is Real today
and will remain so tomorrow;
it is the clinging to the fundamental of Truth.

Is there truly, then, a way to keep the main thing the main thing?

Yes, there is.

By deploying every ounce of energy we possess
every minute and every second of every day
in service to the very Highest and Unchanging concept we hold.
What challenge could be more fun?

What else is this life for? — *Nalini (Edith Tipple)*

Vivekananda's Bhakti Yoga

This morning, we begin another month's study of Bhakti Yoga. As a bhakti yogi (bhakta), you establish a devotional relationship with God through study, prayer, ritual, and worship. You practice giving every action, thought, emotion, perception and tendency "a Godward turn."

All of your energies and attributes, both positive and negative, are offered to the Divine Presence. Your constant prayer is for complete self-surrender, in ecstatic union with your Belovèd.

One who follows this path may become a lover of God — a bhakta, or devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna said, *"You should remember that the heart of the devotee is the abode of God. He dwells, no doubt, in all beings, but He especially manifests Himself in the heart of the devotee. ... The heart of the devotee is the 'drawing-room' of God."*

Swami Vivekananda taught, *"The great quality of Bhakti is that it cleanses the mind ... The one great advantage of Bhakti is that it is the easiest and the most natural way to reach the great divine end in view ... The path of devotion is natural and pleasant. ... It is a longer way, (yet at its end the bhakta says), 'Thine am I for ever; henceforth whatever I do, it is Thou doing it. No more is there any me or mine.'*

“Bhakti differs from (some) Western ideas of religion in that Bhakti admits no elements of fear, no Being to be appeased or propitiated. ... There can be no fear in true love, and so long as there is the least fear, Bhakti cannot even begin. ...”

We will explore these and other instructions on Bhakti Yoga. And we'll discuss how your efforts on this path can result in a life of greater contentment, self-fulfillment, and God realization.

Some wisdom about devotion from Rabia of Basra, a woman who became a Sufi saint in the 8th C.:

The Sky Gave Me Its Heart

The sky gave me its heart because it knew mine was not large enough to care for the earth the way it did.

Why is it we think of God so much? Why is there so much talk about love?

When an animal is wounded no one has to tell it, “You need to heal;” so naturally it will nurse itself the best it can.

My eyes kept telling me, “Something is missing from all I see.” So I went in search of the cure.

The cure for me was His Beauty; the remedy — for me was to love.

My Poems Attempt

All of what I would want my child to know, my poems attempt.

We are infants before one another, are we not, so vulnerable to each others' words and movements.

I have come to see that all are seated at His table, and I have become his servant.

Sometimes God is too shy to speak in public, so he pinches me.

That is my cue — to fill in the blanks in your understanding, the best I can.

Swami Sridharanandaji

This saintly swami now heads the Ramakrishna Mission's work in Australia and New Zealand. Previously, he served as Head of the Sri Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Swami S on cleansing the mind:

Slowly and slowly I am has to be converted to He Is. We generally always express and experience and feel that "I am."

Now what we need to do is to start by saying, "I am and He is." And slowly and slowly the awareness of His presence overwhelms the awareness of my am-ness.

(The truth is), when I say "I am," in actuality I am experiencing His presence.

(Yet,) because the reflective material within ourselves, our mind, is dirty, so the reflection (of the Divinity within) becomes deformed, distorted, and mutilated. That is why the concept of "I am" is experienced by us all the time.

This awareness of I am-ness has to be converted to "He Is." I don't exist; He Is, He exists. That can only happen by purification of the reflective material, which is the inner organ known as the mind.

From Hafiz, a 14th C. Persian saint who influenced Emerson, Goethe, Brahms, Garcia Lorca, and others. Goethe wrote, "Hafiz has no peer."

The Christ's Breath

I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's breath moves through, listen to this music.

Each Soul Completes Me

Beloved said, "My name is not complete without yours."

I thought: How could a human's worth ever be such?

And God knowing all our thoughts — and all our thoughts are innocent steps on the path — then addressed my heart,

God revealed a sublime truth to the world when He sang,

"I am made whole by your life. Each soul, each soul completes me."

Swami P, about purification, in a talk on Devotion:

"When we begin to think of God, everything else gradually becomes tasteless. The path of devotion is really wonderful in this way: you don't have to struggle to gain self-control or anything of the kind. You only have to think of God, try to love him, pray that you may love him, and all the baser things of life fall away from you automatically.

"What are the spiritual disciplines on the path of devotion?"

- *Chanting the name of the Lord,*
- *meditating on him,*
- *serving him,*
- *serving him in others, (which means)*
- *learning to see God in others, and serving the God within them.*

These are the preparatory methods and means. Of course you have to have ethical principles also: truthfulness, chastity, freedom from greed, things like that, but here is the point: if you can just chant the name of the Lord and think of God and meditate on him, your life naturally becomes ethical. You don't have to struggle to have self-control. The more we advance towards God, the less craving we have for objects of the senses."

— from Realizing God, pp 378 & 380

St. Catherine of Siena, a 14th C. Catholic saint, was said to be profoundly interested in every human being that ever came before her. She devoted herself to relieving the mental and emotional suffering of the hundreds who sought her out; her words and her touch bestowed a soothing grace.

A Peasant Before a King

If I did not understand the glory and sufferings of the human heart, I would not speak before its holiness.

Like a peasant called before a great king when all of His court is assembled —

that is how I stand before every woman and man.

How is it that God seeks our counsel whenever a voice or a face asks of us?

What a sweet divine game He plays.

I stand with humility before every creature when they call me into their court,

because of your holiness, my dears.

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS
Regular Closing prayer