

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

February is a month for study of Karma Yoga, a spiritual path leading to the abandonment of selfishness, and a life free from worry and care. As a karma yogi, you practice offering all your thoughts, actions, feelings, and perceptions to the Divine Presence.

Even before fully knowing this Presence, you hold firmly to the belief that the Presence is within each person or other living being that you interact with or serve. Working and abiding in this spirit, you are increasingly able to release attachment to your activities and their results. This yields the freedom promised by Karma Yoga.

The Phenomenon of Sri Ramakrishna

On Sunday, February 18th, we will joyously celebrate the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. There is a direct link between that Great Master's life and teachings and what you are hearing just now. This morning we will talk about that timeless connection.

Here is what Christopher Isherwood writes about Sri Ramakrishna, as he starts his book *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*:

"This is the story of a phenomenon.

I will begin by calling him simply that, rather than 'holy man', 'mystic', 'saint', or 'avatar'; all emotive words with mixed associations which may attract some readers, repel others. A phenomenon is often something extraordinary and mysterious.

Ramakrishna was extraordinary and mysterious; most of all to those who were best fitted to understand him ...”

Two people who were best fitted to understand Sri Ramakrishna are Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji), his most famous disciple, and his, wife Sri Sarada Devi (Holy Mother).

This morning we will explore and discuss some of what Swamiji and Holy Mother wrote and said about Ramakrishna. As their knowledge of him is shared, the connection between the Master’s life and your presence here may become clear.

About Holy Mother (from Swami Nikhilananda’s biography):

“When Holy Mother came to Dakshineswar at the age of sixteen, Sri Ramakrishna asked her whether she had come to pull him down to a worldly life. Without hesitation she said, “No, I am here to help you realize your Chosen Ideal.” From then on, Holy Mother lived with Sri Ramakrishna as his spiritual companion, devoted wife, disciple, and always the nun. She was the embodiment of purity. Her mind was never sullied by the faintest breath of worldliness, though she lived with Sri Ramakrishna for the greater part of fourteen years. She never missed communion with God, whom she described as lying in the palm of her hand, though she was engaged day and night in various activities.”

Sri Sarada Devi (Holy Mother):

“He who has really prayed to the Master, even once, has nothing to fear. By, praying to him constantly one gets ecstatic love (Prema Bhakti) through his grace.

Pray to (the Master) with tears in your eyes whenever you want illumination or find yourself faced with any doubt or difficulty. The Lord will remove all your impurities, assuage your mental anguish, and give you enlightenment.

Even Avataras, saints, and sages have to undergo the ordeal of suffering, for they take upon themselves the burden of sins of omission and commission of ordinary human beings and thereby sacrifice themselves for the good of humanity.

We have to surrender ourselves completely to the (Master) with faith and devotion in Him, serve others to the best of our capacity, and never be a source of sorrow to anybody.”

**AVATAR or INCARNATION OF GOD:
BIRTH IN HUMAN FORM**

Vivekananda: In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna declares, “Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I come down to help mankind.”

Human beings drift away from any knowledge of their “true original nature”, become less than fully human.

An AVATAR is both FULLY DIVINE AND FULLY HUMAN — FULLY CONSCIOUS. TO BE FULLY HUMAN IS, IN PART, TO BRING THE “SUBCONSCIOUS” INTO WAKING AWARENESS (CONSCIOUSNESS).

Modern psychology says at least half of life is thoroughly irrational, or “unconscious”.

THIS APPEARS AS OUR DREAM LIFE. AND, IN OUR WAKING STATE, INTUITION AND IMAGINATION, DAYDREAMS, YEARNINGS AT THE EDGE OF AWARENESS.

AVATAR’S ROLE: EMBRACE THE IRRATIONAL, TO MAKE THE IRRATIONAL KNOWN, SEEN IN A POSITIVE LIGHT, AND LEAVE INSTRUCTIONS TO MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE TO US.

SECOND ATTRIBUTE: ERASE (BY TAKING UNTO THEMSELVES) KARMIC DEBT = REMISSION OF SIN
THIS ALLOWS A SPIRITUAL SEEKER TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL (LIBERATION) – WITH ENOUGH EFFORT – IN THIS LIFETIME (Turn to me ... I see no sinner ...)

THIRD ATTRIBUTE: CAN PASS THE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO BECOME FULLY HUMAN — SPIRITUAL PRACTICES — AND HOW TO ASSUME KARMIC DEBT, TO THEIR FOLLOWERS

THEY BECOME THE GURU OF GURUS

Sri Ramakrishna: "Anyone and everyone cannot be a guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him.

Therefore in every age God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity. Satchidananda alone is the guru."

Vivekananda (Christ the Messenger): *“The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until He is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth — the Prophets, the man-Gods, the Incarnations, the embodiments of God.*

We all know that God exists, and yet we do not see Him, we do not understand Him. Take one of these great Messengers of light, compare his character with the highest ideal of God that you ever formed, and you will find that your God falls short of the ideal, and that the character of the Prophet exceeds your conceptions. You cannot even form a higher ideal of God than what the actually embodied have practically realised and set before us as an example.”

Breaker of This World’s Chain

*Interpretation by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood of **Khandana Bhava Bandana** by Swami Vivekananda*

Breaker of this world’s chain, we adore Thee,
whom all men love.

Spotless, taking man’s form, O Purifier,
Thou art above the gunas three,
Knowledge divine, not flesh;
Thou whom the cosmos wears,
a diamond at its heart.

Let us look deep in Thine eyes;
they are bright with the wisdom of God,
That can wake us from maya’s spell.

Let us hold fast to Thy feet,
treading the waves of the world to safety.

Oh, drunk with love, God-drunken Lover,
in Thee all paths of all yogas meet.

Lord of the worlds, Thou art ours,
who wert born a child of our time;
easy of access to us.

O Merciful, if we take any hold upon God in our prayer, it is
by Thy grace alone,
Since all Thine austerities were practiced for our sake.

How great was Thy sacrifice,
freely choosing Thy birth in this prison, our Iron Age,
To unchain us and set us free.

Perfect, whom lust could not taint,
nor passion nor gold draw near,
O Master of all who renounce,
fill our hearts full of love for Thee.

Thou hast finished with fear and with doubt,
standing firm in the vision of God;
Refuge to all who have cast fame, fortune,
and friends away.

Without question Thou shelterest us,
and the world's great sea in its wrath
Seems shrunk to the puddle that
fills a hoof-print in the clay.

Speech cannot hold Thee, nor mind,
yet without Thee we think not nor speak.

Love, who art partial to none,
we are equal before Thy sight.

Taker-away of our pain, we salute Thee,
though we are blind.

Come to the heart's black cave, and illumine,
Thou light of the light.

From Vivekananda's MY MASTER:

"This man (Ramakrishna) came to live near Calcutta, the capital of India, the most important university town in our country, which was sending out sceptics and materialists by the hundreds every year. Yet many of these university men — skeptics and agnostics — used to come and listen to him.

I heard of this man, and I went to hear him. He looked just like an ordinary man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language, and I thought, "Can this man be a great teacher?" — I crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: "Do you believe in God, Sir?" "Yes," he replied. "Can you prove it, Sir?" "Yes." "How?" "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense."

That impressed me at once. For the first time I had found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life.

I had read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed, about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, "Be thou whole," and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside.

It could be done; and my Master used to say: "Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world." Be therefore spiritual first; have something to give, and then stand before the world and give it. ...

Religion consists in realisation. As a fact, we all know that nothing will satisfy us until we know the truth for ourselves. However we may argue, however much we may hear, but one thing will satisfy us, and that is our own realisation; and such an experience is possible for every one of us, if we will only try."

Q&A & Commentary — CLOSING CHANT