

## The Bridge Between the Two Worlds

In my experience I have come to realise that God-realisation is the bridge between the two worlds. Indian classical spirituality gives much importance to one's own interiority, where one finds God as one's innermost Self. Christian mystics have also arrived at this wisdom: the abiding Spirit of Christ within, as the true Self of our being; this process of sanctification they named as *Theosis*, the Divinisation of the Human.

Spirituality is the experience of the Divine within and all around, the all-pervading presence of the God in the universe. Interiority is the depth-dimension of our being and of consciousness: we realise that God abides within us in the mystical consciousness of the divine Spirit. Our search for interiority should finally reach this inner depth of our being, where we experience God, not as the object of our thinking, but as the very inner life-giver, who strengthens us and transforms us. This divine consciousness within us is to be experienced as the ultimate subject of our being. Indian sages teach that we should know the divine subject not by the senses, nor by the mind, but through the *buddhi*, the inner eye of God hidden within us. Through *vijnana* or learning we can know about God, but not know God, we cannot experience the Divine. In order to attain that experience and silence of the mind, we meditatively wait for the dawn of the divine Light that enlightens our *buddhi*. The Divine presence breaks into our heart as grace. The abiding Spirit (*Atman*) enlightens us from within and guides our life.

The same divine Spirit is vibrating in all humans and in all things: the Divine is the true Self of all things in creation; there is a deep spiritual interconnectedness between all things. In the Divine we are related with one another. This cosmic spirituality is the bridge between the two worlds. In the depth of interiority East and West meet.

I would like to make this reflection with the help of a few symbols. The inspiration for this is from the spiritual classic: "You are divine, 100 Meditations on *Theosis*", by Sebastian Painadath SJ. This book is placed on the desk outside; have a look at it and if anybody wants to buy it, a few copies are available with me.

## **1. The Hidden Spring and the Streams**

John Chrysostom, one of the Church Fathers, offers the imagery of a lake on the top of a mountain. The water from the springs, hidden in the earth, gives birth to the lake. The hidden springs are the symbol of the *Father*, the generating mother-base. The lake, through which the springs unfold, is the symbol of the *Son*, the self-expression of the Father. The inherent current, which makes the springs pour themselves out as the lake, is the symbol of the *Spirit*, for the Spirit is the power of love within the Divine. The lake descends to the valley as a river; this divine descent we Christians experience in Jesus Christ. And, we are like streams emerging from Christic river. Through us flows the divine life into creation. The presence of God is the essence that permeates the entire creation. In the conscious awareness and communion with the Divine we are all related with one another. "Everything in creation is a manifestation of God" (Swami Abhishiktananda).

## **2. Rivers Merging into the Ocean**

An image found in the Upanishads as well as in the writings of Theresa of Avila is that of rivers merging into the ocean. All rivers flow into the ocean: in every drop of the river water there is a pull felt towards the ocean. Similarly, there is a spiritual longing felt in our hearts towards merging with the Divine. Once the river joins the ocean it loses its shape and name completely; this is what happens in us: one has to give up the ego-fixation to merge into the divine ocean. Just as all the rivers merge with the ocean they become related with each other. So also, in God-realisation we are deeply related to one another. Willingness not to hang on to the things of the world is a presupposition to become ONE with the Divine. When we are in God, we vibrate with divine Spirit: we are in resonance with the Divine. We move with the divine Spirit.

## **3. Wave of the Ocean**

St. Theresa of Avila and several Buddhist masters use the imagery of the ocean and the waves. St. Theresa says: as rain water falls in the river, you cannot distinguish the water that flows from the springs and the water that comes from above; this is how we merge into the divine river. We could expand this imagery to the ocean. The oceanic undercurrents surface as the dance of the waves in different forms. No wave or drop of water is by itself; every wave is related to every other wave; the entire ocean is one dynamic reality. The ocean unfolds through the waves. Similarly, we are the waves of the divine

ocean. Ultimately the wave and the ocean are of one nature; we participate in the divine nature: *we are divine*. The Divine is the ultimate subject of our being.

#### **4. The Silk Worm**

Through the imagery of the silk-worm St. Theresa of Avila teaches about contemplation. In the initial stage as a caterpillar the silk worm is totally preoccupied with eating the mulberry leaves: 3-4 a day. It is like a person fully immersed in worldly allurements and activities. In the second stage, the caterpillar stops eating as if eating does not satisfy its inner yearning. This inner quest draws itself within and it starts spinning its own silken thread. It wraps itself into a silken cocoon. Thereby it goes through a dying process completely cut away from the outside world. Later comes a stage, when it is transformed into a beautiful butterfly. It spreads its colourful wings and starts flying; it enjoys the sweet fragrance of flowers and drinks the delicious nectar; it moves from flower to flower and helps the fertilisation of plants. No longer it is attracted to the mulberry leaves. Cooperating with the promptings of the divine Spirit through meditation a person too goes through a similar transformation: he/she becomes a God-realised being. He/she recognises the same transformation in all others and lives in communion with them.

#### **5. Pure, Clear Crystal**

In his book *The Living Flame of Love* St. John of the Cross compares our soul to a crystal that is placed in the sun, a pure and clear crystal. The sun light brightens up every molecule of the crystal to the extent that it becomes fully absorbed in the sun light. The rays of the sun are transmitted through the transparent crystal. In no way can the crystal be distinguished from the sun light. So too the soul that is pure is one with the divine light. When the divine rays of Christ fall on the soul, it is liberated from the ego-centred life to life-in-Christ. The crystal remains crystal, yet it is brightened up in the sun; similarly, the human soul remains human, but brightened up in the divine light of Christ: it is not annihilated, but transformed into a Christic person. A God-realised person radiates the compassionate love of Christ. From his/her heart shall flow the streams of peace and joy.

#### **6. Iron in the Furnace**

St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "To be deified is to be penetrated by the Divinity, just as iron in a furnace is penetrated by the heat of the fire, allowing the

beauty of the inexpressible nature of the Trinity to shine in us.” The Sufi mystic Rumi also uses this imagery to describe the transformation into the Divine. “As a piece of iron, I fell into the red-hot furnace and I took on the colour and glow of the fire. I am fire, I cried out.” This imagery beautifully describes the transformation that takes place in a God-realised person. The piece of iron, dark in colour and cold by touch, when placed in the furnace takes on the colour and heat of the fire. The fire penetrates all the pores of the iron; the piece of iron absorbs the heat, gets purified and glows just like the fire. Iron remains iron in the red-hot furnace, yet so intensely transformed into fire. Similarly, the human soul in communion with the divine Spirit is purified, enlightened and illuminated by the divine wisdom, and then transformed into the likeness of Christ. The human nature is not annihilated, but transformed into the Divine, as it happened in Jesus. The presence of God shines forth through the words, actions and life of the person. His/her life evolves from God-centredness, not from ego-centredness. In this transformation we realise that *we are divine*.

### **7. Dance of the Divine**

At the beginning of the book of Jeremiah we read: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you came to birth, I consecrated you. I have appointed you as prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5). This shows, that God has a unique design for each one of us, even before we are born. God is the divine potter and we are the clay in his hands. Creation is the dance of the Creator. God expresses himself through the cosmos. But the human beings misused the God-given freedom and turned away against the will of the Creator. Sin and suffering entered the world. By the participation of God in the human predicament through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, life in God was reinstated. Through Christ we realise, that we are the chosen, beloved, holy and redeemed children of God. In the divine design in our life, we are members of the God’s family, *heirs of God and coheirs of Christ*.

### **8. Full Moon**

Full moon is also a beautiful symbol of a spiritually enlightened person. Though the moon consisting of black rocks has no light, when it comes close to the sun, the sun light reflects from it *fully*. When the moon moves away from the sun, the light becomes less and less and consequently comes *no-moon* day. Again, as the moon draws close to the sun it sheds light. “Just as when sunbeam falls on pure, bright and transparent bodies, they become brilliant and shed forth a

fresh brightness from themselves, the Spirit-bearing souls, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual and send grace to others” (St. Basil, *De Spiritu sancto*). With the eyes illuminated by the divine sun one recognises the same brilliance shining forth from one’s sisters and brothers and in that light; all are divinely related with each other.

### **9. Parts of the Divine Body**

St. Paul tells us: “We are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (I. Cor. 12:27). This is a powerful symbol that Paul uses to explain our intimate oneness with Christ and our deep relatedness with one another. There is a vital oneness between the head and the rest of the body. Though there is a distinction between the head and the limbs, and among the limbs, there is no separation at all: *distinct, but not separate!* In the one body all are mutually related. As each limb has its function, each person has inborn talents and designs in life. Different parts make the body efficient. The entire body is one. The symbol of the body explains well the deep spiritual unity among all human persons enlivened by the vibrant presence of the Divine. In Christ we are all ONE.

### **10. Hen and the Chicks**

Another beautiful imagery is that of Jesus: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you refused" (Mt. 23:17). The chicks feel safer under the motherly wings of the hen. But they cannot stay long there; they have to learn to find food for themselves: they have to grow. The growth process brings in a lot of threat. So too our human destiny. Under the wings of the Trinitarian God, we feel safe. But as long as we live in the world, we have a lot of threat to experience. We need to take moments of contemplative silence invoking his holy Name within to relish the loving and protecting care of the Divine, remaining in peace and absorbing his love, goodness, joy, power and protection. May we be energised, enlivened by the divine Spirit. May we feel our connectedness with each other, under his wings as God's children and when we come out to our daily life, feel empowered to share his Love with one another.

## Conclusion

All these beautiful imageries reveal an intense and intimate relationship of the images with its generating source: stream with the hidden spring, iron with the fire, moon with the sun, crystal with the sun-light, wave with the ocean. The Divine is the source of our life. God is the Self of our being. Even before we are born, God has a specific design in our life. All of us are called to God-realisation, to be a transparent medium to transmit the divine presence in the world. Our life evolves not so much *before* God, but from *within* the Divine, as it is clear from the imagery of the vine and its branches (which we shall take up for the meditation). The divine Spirit streams through us as the life-giving energy; we are being guided, enlivened and inspired by the Spirit. The divine Spirit pours herself out through us; she is the Power (*Sakti*) within us. We are the channels of the divine love, compassion, goodness, wisdom and bliss. In that awareness we can say: I am a branch of the divine tree, I am a limb of the divine body, I am a wave of the divine ocean, I am a stream from the divine river, I am a flame of the divine fire, I am a crystal in the divine sun...*I am divine*. Christ lives in us. Liberated from ego-centredness we live as the daughters and sons of God. In the divine Spirit we are related as the children of God.

*Sr. Rose Pudukadan*