

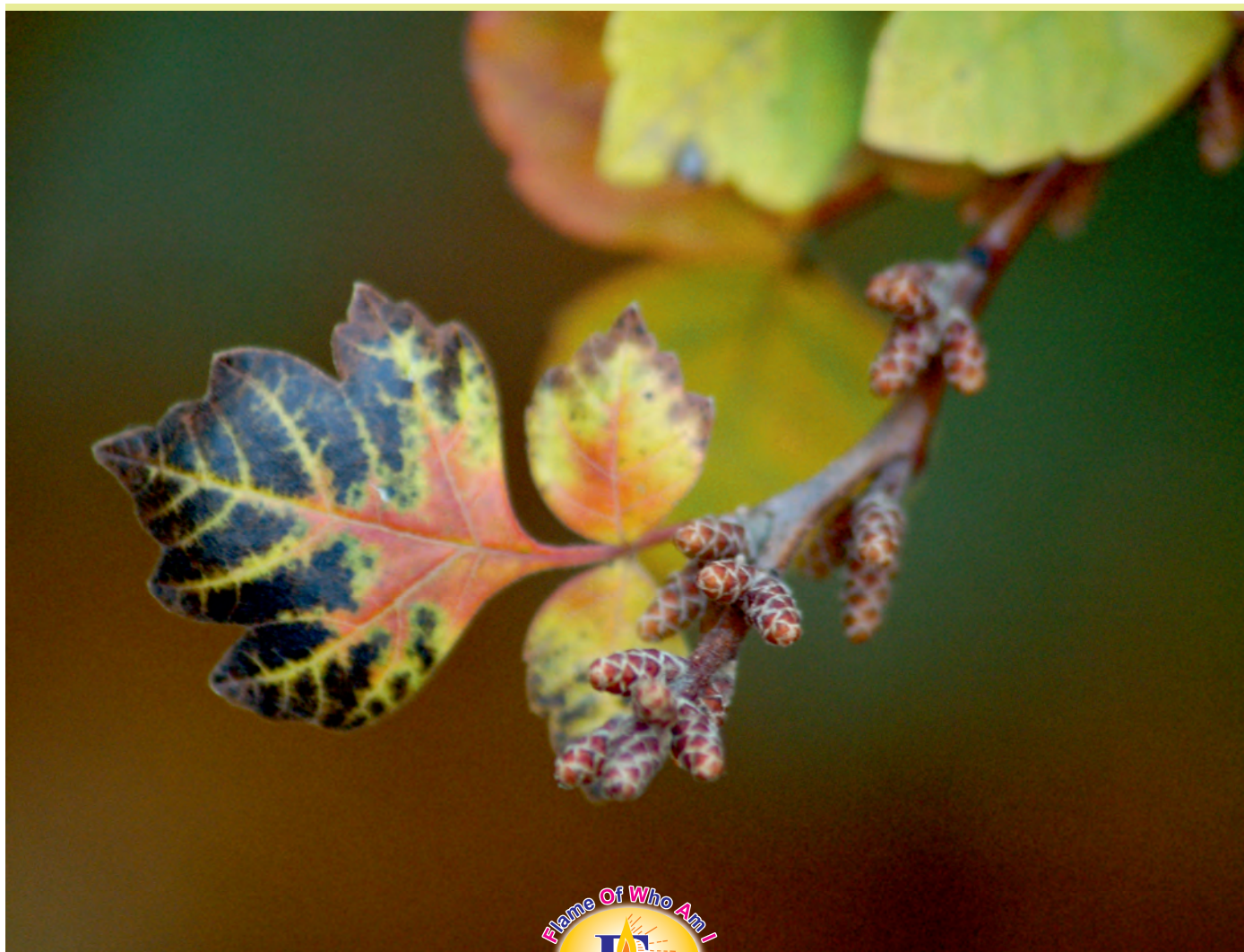
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Inner Flame

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

We are indeed happy to place before you this issue of our bimonthly magazine. We have been receiving encouraging feedback from many readers, especially from those, who are more used to reading printed versions, rather than the soft copies on the screens of electronic devices.

Our regular columns like *The Beacons* and *Places that Beckon* are ever refreshing, as they bring us in touch with ancient roots that support modern wisdom. Both 'exemplary personalities from the spiritual domain' and 'astounding places of pilgrimage' make an impact on our psyche, helping us to turn inward. As an Upanishad¹ rightly says, "One in a million turns inward, seeking immortality."

Vedānta, we know, takes our mind to great heights of contemplation where our problems are dissolved, more than solved. In other words, the insights of Vedānta have the capacity to turn our 'problems' into 'no problems'. Sometimes, this wisdom comes to us in the form of stories too. One such example may be seen in this issue, where the conversation between Ribhu and Nidāgha is highly elevating. Please take a look at it under *Stories Teach*.

A subject that has recently been included in many universities also, and one, where an increasing number of scientists are fascinated by the discoveries therein, is 'Consciousness: What is it?' Under the column *Perceiving Phoenix*, I have attempted an introduction to this awe-inspiring theme.

From the beginning of this magazine, we have been drawing from sources around the world – from literature, religion, mysticism, etc. We firmly believe that *Truth is one, and the wise speak of it in different ways*, as a mantra² from the Rigveda declares. It is in that spirit that we have presented in this issue, a poem, 'As Time Goes by' by Donna Ashworth, which has profound insights that go well with the teachings of Sanātana Dharma.

We wish you happy reading and, as always, welcome your feedback.

- Swāmi Chidānanda

Notes:

1 *Kathopanishad*

2 *ekam sad-viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti*.

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The Beacons

Sakkubai

- Compiled by Dakshu Mansukhani

*bhaktyā tvananyayā śhakya aham
evam-vidho 'rjuna
jñātum draṣṭum cha tattvena
praveṣṭum cha parantapa*

*But by devotion to Me alone may
I be known in this form,
O Arjuna, realized truly, and entered into,
O dreaded prince.*

(Bhagavad Geetā 11.54)

They were poor, but had won the hearts of the people of their town, Pandharpur, with their humble, philanthropic attitude. Staunch devotees of Pānduranga Vithala, the presiding deity there, they led a contented life, but for the occasional distress, since they were not blessed with children, their only wish. But soon enough, their prayers were answered: the wife gave birth to a girl child. Named Sakku, she grew up into a beautiful, lovable individual. From the beginning, everyone around her sensed her deep devotion to God: she happily assisted in the 'poojā' at their home by preparing flower garlands, sandalwood paste, etc., tended to the cattle, helped her mother in cooking and did other household chores. Sakkubai was so sweet, that she never hurt anybody, nor uttered any harsh word against anybody.

On the banks of the Krishna River, there is a town known for its scenic beauty with green fields, flowering plants and fruit orchards. The fragrance of the

flowers filled one's mind with tranquility, while the colourful fruits were a feast for the eyes. The town, Karaveerapuram, was filled with all the different castes of people. They all complemented one another quite nicely.

There lived a Pandit in Karaveerapuram. Though the land was bountiful, though the man was well versed in Purānas, though he had enough and more to spare, he never donated a single penny to the needy. After meals, he would not drive away a crow with his unwashed hand, lest a morsel of rice should fall, and the crow might consume it. People had named him 'Krupanaraya' (*krupana* means a miser). His wife Gayyalibai was a quarrelsome woman, who was always insulting people and picking up quarrels. She was neither a devotee of God, nor helpful in any way to others. The couple had a son, whose name was Oaduraya. Neither the father, nor the son, dared to open their mouth before the tyrant lady. To put it in a nutshell, Krupanaraya, though a Brahmin, was a cunning, cruel, unfriendly and selfish man. Being brought up by such cruel parents, one could not expect Oaduraya to be friendly or good-natured, and even though his father had imparted to him the knowledge of the Vedas, he had unconsciously imbibed his father's bad qualities as well. The family was so ill-reputed in the town, that no one offered

their daughter to the young man: they felt it would be better to drown their child in the well. Oaduraya's father had to go in search of a daughter-in-law in the neighbouring places.

In his search, Krupanaraya happened to come to Pandharpur and to Sakkubai's house. As he watched the young girl, he was impressed by the good nature of Sakkubai and the family's hospitality. She brought him water to wash his feet; she helped her mother in the kitchen and in serving food. Krupanaraya did not think even for a split second what her fate would be, if she fell into the hands of his nagging wife. All that he knew was that he badly needed a daughter-in-law, and here was one who well fulfilled all the requirements. Without wasting a single minute, he proposed the alliance to her father.

Sakkubai's father had heard about the wealthy Pandit, but had not heard about his bad reputation. He did not take the time to think, as to why a wealthy man should seek an alliance from a poor family. Sakkubai's father and mother were thrilled at the offer, looking at it as a boon from Lord Vitthala, as they wanted to see their daughter well-placed. Krupanaraya quickly fixed the '*mahurat*' [a period of 48 minutes] for the wedding, while the poor Brahmin made excellent arrangements for the bridegroom's party. Gayyalibai had brought some presents for Sakku's parents and some gold jewellery for the bride. The girl's parents felt their daughter was lucky. They were still in the dark regarding the boy's family's ill reputation. Sakku was just

twelve years old, and though her parents wanted to keep her with them for a while longer, the in-laws insisted on taking her to their home.

When she was much younger, Sakku had learnt a Krishna *shloka*; she continued to chant her *shloka* at her in-law's house, but the cruel mother-in-law, instead of being pleased with it, felt that she was shirking her responsibilities. In fact, she did lots of work: she had to pound paddy, churn the grains, clean vessels, store water, wash clothes, and do many more chores. Still, she could never please her mother-in-law, who continuously nagged her, pointing out silly mistakes in her work. She would openly and angrily blame Sakkubai's mother for not teaching her household duties. She did not serve her proper food either: she would throw a little rice and a bit of vegetables onto her plate. It would become stone-cold by the time she ate it. Sometimes, it would be infested with insects and flies. Many days, she had to go without food. Sakkubai never longed for food of the Gods, but this food was not even good enough for dogs. She did not mind even that but could not bear the cruel treatment meted out to her. In her father's house they were not rich, but there was always provision for a little charity. A handful of rice was always available to those coming for alms. Here there was so much abundance, but she had no liberty to offer charity. Instead, her in-laws poured insults on her. But Sakku found her solace in Vitthala, to whom she would pray to bless them with good thoughts and deeds.

One day, Sakkubai's parents came to see her and were shocked at her pitiable condition; she looked pale and weak, her clothes were worn out, her hair had become tangled for want of oiling. Sakkubai was not even allowed to say a proper hello to her mother. Her mother-in-law shouted at her and subsequently at the mother too, when she enquired about her daughter's health. The neighbours quietly asked, "Don't you have a well in your town?" The parents tried to take her back home, but were thwarted in their efforts, rudely being ridiculed for their poverty. Filled with humiliation and shame, mutely, they left Sakkubai to her fate. All they could do was to give her a statuette of Vitthala. "His will be done." were their last words to her. That made it clear to Sakkubai that their doors were closed, rather made to be closed, for her. Till then, she had been hoping against hope, to be taken away from the family of devils. Now she had no other go. She could still survive there because of her *ananya bhakti* [having unswerving devotion to God]. Anybody else in her situation would have died.

Knowing the storm her mother-in-law would create, if she saw the statuette, she hid it in the folds of her saree and continued to do her household chores, chanting, or talking to God all the while! But for how long could this situation continue? The vicious, suspicious mother-in-law spied on her and caught her red-handed. She flung the statuette away, paying a deaf ear to her pleadings. On top of it, she complained to her son



against his wife. The son did not bother to probe into the matter; instead, he gave her a good thrashing!

Sakkubai's devotion to God continued to grow on par with the atrocities of the family. When the neighbours sympathized with her, she only said, "Vitthala is my father, mother, and everything. He will take care of me. Don't you worry." She became thin and weak. Somebody dared to bring it to the notice of the father-in-law. It brought no change. It only brought her a fresh round of thrashing, while the neighbours hung their head in shame. They had to leave her alone with her God.

One evening, Sakkubai, accompanied by Shantabai, a neighbour, went to fetch water from the

river. There she came across a group of pilgrims on their way to Pandharpur. These devotees had to walk for miles as there were no transport facilities in those days. Sakku was fascinated by them. She expressed her desire to join them on their pilgrimage. She did not pay any attention to the pleading of her neighbour, who went back alone and had to blurt out the truth to her in-laws. The enraged mother-in-law and husband hurried to the river. They were shocked to see Sakkubai dancing in ecstasy chanting the name of Lord Vitthala. They dragged her home by her hair and tied her to a pole. They warned her not to run away from home. But nothing could dispel her devotion to Vitthala. She was not worried about food, sleep, clothes, or rest. She continuously chanted, 'Vitthala! Vitthala! Please fulfil my desire.'

The time was ripe for Sakkubai to be relieved of her miseries. Around midnight, Lord Vitthala, disguised as a woman, came to her, and said: "Dear Sakku ! You are keen on having a *darshana* of Vitthala, aren't you? Go ahead. Till you come back, I will look after your work." But Sakkubai said, "You are very kind to me, but I am helpless. If I go, you will be ill-treated by my in-laws. I don't want you to suffer. Therefore, you please go ahead and convey *pranāmas* [prostrations] to God on my behalf." The lady insisted, "No, Sakkubai, you go, and you convey my *pranāmas*. I will stay in your place and serve your people on your behalf." So saying, she untied Sakkubai's ropes and got herself tied up in her place. She smiled, "Go happily to

Pandharpur and participate in the celebrations. Be assured of my help." Sakkubai gladly joined the Sadhus.



The Sadhus were surprised at the glow on her face. They were not carried away by her humble words that she was an ordinary woman, who

had come along with them, to serve the Lord. They prayed to her, "Oh! You are Goddess Lakshmi Devi Herself. You reside in the heart of Lord Vishnu. You have donned a human form to safeguard us on our pilgrimage. Normally, the Lord is always beside you, but now we see you all alone. Why? Does it mean, we have not purified ourselves totally? You, being a mother, are considerate enough to your children. Please request God, on our behalf, to manifest himself before us." They prayed to her thus, and together they chanted the Lord's name. Panduranga Vitthala, who already had a soft corner for Sakkubai, was impressed by their sincere prayer and manifested Himself with Rukmini before the devotees. The devotees' joy knew no bounds. They all prayed to the God and Goddess, while Sakkubai fell at their feet and did not get up. God lifted her up caressingly, and said, "I am pleased with your *jñāna* [knowledge/understanding]

and *vairāgya* [detachment]. Your difficult times are coming to an end very soon. Please have patience.” Saying so, they disappeared. The Sadhus were grateful to Sakkubai, for they realized they had the *darshana* of God, only because of her.

Chanting, they proceeded. Sakkubai was thrilled when she sighted the temple pillars. She had a bath in the holy Chandrabhāgā river and had a *darshana* of God, with flowers and incense. What a feast for her eyes! The God was standing on bricks in a marble floored temple with His hands at his waist. Sakkubai gazed at him from top to toe, at His *shankha*, *chakra*, His wide eyes, His ear studs, His *kaustubhas*, His holy garments, etc. She forgot the troublesome world around her at the sight of the blissful Lord, while she offered Him flowers, fruits, going around the temple, praying to Him with various *shlokas*. She continued thus for many days.

Back in her house, the in-laws did not untie Sakkubai (God) for a few days, as a means of punishment. But there was a sudden transformation in the husband. He felt sorry for her, untied the ropes, and asked her to carry on with her household duties. God-turned-Sakkubai did every job that the latter used to perform: she went to the river to fetch water, cleaned the vessels, washed the clothes and pounded the grain. When she served food, it was like savouring nectar! How lucky they were to eat food prepared by God Himself. The family ate heartily, praising the dishes prepared. But the constant chanting of Vitthala’s name irritated Gayyalibai. She thundered,

‘Don’t chant that bad word.’ Boldly, Sakkubai paid no heed. Gradually, in the divine presence, there was a sea-change in the family. They stopped their cursing and using bad language.

Out there, in Pandharpur, the real Sakkubai was praying to God joyfully! One fine morning, when she felt she had prayed to God to her heart’s content, said, ‘Oh God! Let me join you!’ Then her *jeevātmā* [individualized *ātman*] joined *paramātmā* [Supreme] in the form of a *jyoti* [light]. The other devotees, who witnessed this scene, took her physical body to the Chandrabhāgā riverbed and performed the funeral rites there. One of them went back to Karaveerapuram to report the news.

Goddess Rukmini Devi was perplexed at the situation. God promised to stay back in Sakkubai’s place till she returned. How will Sakkubai go back now? Devi appeared in those devotees’ dream and said, “My Lord is in Sakkubai’s house. You please bring her mortal remains but keep it a secret.”

The devotees shared their dream among themselves and secretly brought back the mortal remains of Sakkubai, which they collected in a golden platter and placed humbly before the goddess. She was pleased with their actions, manifested herself before them and said, ‘You will be blessed by My Lord.’ Sakkubai came back to life when Goddess Rukmini touched her. Goddess Rukmini blessed Sakkubai saying, “Oh Sakku! My Lord, being impressed by your love, is serving your in-laws in your form. So please go back to your house and release him. You chant the name of

the Lord and transform your in-laws and others around you. Eventually, you will be liberated.”

Accordingly, Sakkubai hastened to her village. She met God at the riverbed. He was holding a pitcher of water. She fell to His feet and thanked Him profusely. “Oh God! What a great sinner I am! I made you do the menial jobs at home! Please forgive me! I am also thankful to you for sending me to Pandharpur. Please see to it that I visit your holy place every year.” God told her fondly, “Don’t you worry. Your *ananya bhakti* made me do your household jobs. Your family members will become my devotees through you.” He gave her *prasāda* and disappeared.

Sakkubai arrived at home with the pitcher of water. Just then, one of the pilgrims stepped into her house to convey the tragic demise of Sakkubai to her in-laws. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He narrated what he saw in Pandharpur.

The mother-in-law couldn’t believe her ears, since Sakkubai was with them, serving them as humbly as ever, all the time. Sakkubai narrated what happened. “An old lady untied me and sent me to Pandharpur where I served the Lord to my heart’s content and when I came back half an hour ago, she gave me this pitcher of water and left.”

The in-laws and her husband could guess, at once, it was nothing but God’s *leelā* [play]! How great was Sakkubai, and how mean were they! They were so cruel to the Almighty Himself! They pleaded with Sakkubai to forgive them. Sakku, who had no ill-feeling towards

them, only said, “You had punished me only for my good. In fact, I should thank you, since because of the ill treatment meted out to me, I prayed more sincerely to God.” She enlightened them thus:

“This physical body of ours is mortal. The children, wife, husband, house, properties are but temporary. The world around is *māyā*, but we devote our entire time and attention on these. Instead, if we divert at least one-tenth of that time and attention towards God, we will attain *moksha*. We are blessed to be born as human beings. We should utilize this opportunity in a proper way. God is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient. We should learn *jagat mithyā*, *brahma satyam* and pray to God with a sincere heart. Owing to our *karmas*, if we fall a prey to our *indriyas* [senses] and lead the life of a sinner, we will be born again and again, and we may not don the human form again. We should seek a *sadguru*’s feet and be enlightened by him. Let us go to Pandharpur and seek the *sadguru* there.”

Sakkubai was indeed a saint but the life of a saint cannot really be described easily. The biographic landmarks, as are seen in the case of great men in this mundane world, are not found in a saint’s life. The saint’s life is an inner life, and this inner life is a closed book and is not open to the public. The outward symbols associated with saints, their behaviour, and the way they live, are all that we can investigate. Generally, even the messages of saints are not understood well, as their real purport or significance

is lost or missed. And it is only very rarely that we can get a glimpse into the recesses of the inner depths of saints, and that is when we can commune with their real being.

Describing the term ‘intense devotion’, Swami Krishnānanda says: [unlike in the case of Sakkubai], “usually, in our love of God, only a fraction of our mind is given over to Him. The other portion is reserved for the world, where the mind sees personal, social, and other values. Only when a man is hit by resentment, due to some strong shake-up in his worldly life, does his life really change direction and move towards God. From that point onwards, life’s different powers that God has endowed man with (viz., physical, vital, mental, intellectual, moral, and emotional) begin to be utilized in one channel for the highest purpose of attaining God. All the feelings towards the world begin to be withdrawn and made to return to the real Source. This pushing back of the main current towards the Source intensifies the thrust of the current, the potentiality of the current, which is otherwise used to getting scattered and diluted in diverse worldly directions. If this spiritual pressure is sustained for a long time, at one time or the other, the worldly barrier between God and devotee is broken and the devotee’s mind runs automatically towards God. And the devotee surrenders himself completely to God with all that he has and all that he is”.

Swami Krishnānanda gives many examples of how love for God arises. He says: “God, when He wants to call you to Him, often brings about cataclysmic

changes in your life, gives you frustration, bereavement, losses, a sense of helplessness and so on. He does not call you always with an embrace or a smile. *sāma*, *dāna*, *bheda* and *danda* [*upāyas* or methods used as means to reach a solution in politics, to avoid conflicts and war situations]—all four methods are employed by Him to wean the mind of people away from the world and towards Him.”

Swami Krishnānanda explains what is meant by intense feeling or ‘*tivra samvega*’, matching Sakkubai’s devotion. *tivra samvega* is the same as the *ananya bhakti* of the *bhagavadgeetā* [VIII.14]: *ananya cetah satatam yo mām smarati nityashah*) and the Kathopanishad Valli 2.8 (*ananya prokte gatrā nāsti*). Simply put, *ananya bhakti* is intense, purest love. This intense love has only one object before it and as importantly, it does not demand any return either. When one is intensely attached to anything, she has no time even for sleep. There hunger also is absent. To be ‘*ananya*’, *bhakti* must not merely be one-pointed, but be always present, all twenty-four hours. It is difficult for the mind to conceive this single-minded love for God.

There are two types of *bhakti*. One is *aparā* or *gaunā bhakti*; the other is *parā bhakti* or *rāgātmikā bhakti*. In the first instance, certain accessories are necessary to strengthen the love for God; but, for the second type of *bhakti*, there is no need for any accessory. Even social restrictions on individual behaviour have no relevance here. We may say that *parā bhakti* is, in a sense,

‘shameless’ *bhakti*. It is whole-souled love. Bliss inundates the personality of the devotee, who is under the spell of *rāgātmikā bhakti* or *parā bhakti*. He becomes the same thing as his Beloved. As Swamiji describes the love of the Gopis for Lord Krishna, feelings rise to a climax. The Gopis themselves were the lovers and they also became the Beloved. Lover and Beloved became one! Two became one, just as Sakkubai did! Swamiji described how, even in recent times, many *bhaktas* like Mirabāi, Tukārām, and Chaitanya Mahāprabhu gave up their everything for the sake of this God-love.

In the *bhagavadgeetā*, at the end of the Eleventh Chapter, the Lord says that nothing, except *bhakti*, can enable one to see Him. Even Sankara has written many verses explaining this love for God, which is due also to His Grace only: "*Isvaranugrahād-eva pumsām-advaita vāsanā*." On the one hand, there must be active love of God, and on the other, passive submission to allow ingress of that love. By whatever means, this God-love must come about. This is the surest way to reach God. No other way exists. This is the glorious consummation of Yoga. "The voice of the heart is the final decision", says Swami Krishnānanda. Swami Vivekānanda, who was a *jnāni* in his outward behaviour, but who was immersed in the sweetness of the intense love for God bubbling within, said, "Where there is a conflict between the head and the heart, give way always to the heart."

Three stages of God-realisation are mentioned in the *bhagavadgeetā shloka*

quoted at the beginning: (1) *jnātum* - to be known, (2) *drashtum* - to be seen, (3) *praveshtum* - to be entered into. Sakkubai obviously was born with devotion, and had knowledge of God, whom she saw and whose presence she felt, all her life. In the beginning, man acquires knowledge of the nature of the Lord, as did Sakkubai just through the constant repetition of the *shloka* from a young age. Even this is difficult because it requires deep study and correct understanding of the *shāstras*. At this stage, the Lord, though his nature is understood, is quite far away. This is *dvaita*. Then in the next stage, the devotee can see the Lord face to face, have a clear vision of God in whatever form she contemplates Him. Now there is no doubt at all about His existence, because he has directly seen the Deity. The second step is higher than the first. God is seen like a leaf or fruit in one's own hand. This is nearly the state of *visishtadvaita*.

After long and arduous practice, the devotee becomes united with the Lord (*praveshtum*). Like salt in water, like rain drops in the ocean, like water in milk, the devotee is merged in the Lord. Then there are no two entities, the devotee and the Lord; the Lord alone is. This is the highest stage. This is perfect *advaita*. The aspirant should not stop anywhere till this highest goal is reached. The first is the nearness of God (*sāmiṇya*), the second is the vision of the God (*sārupya*) and the third is union with God (*sāyujya*). The natural progress of man towards God is explained thus in this verse. Every aspirant should move forward from the

first to the second, and from the second to the last and ultimate state. It is for this reason that the Lord has stated '*jnātum*' first, and '*drashtum*' next, and '*praveshtum*' last.

Suppose somebody tells us that he has seen a good and beautiful, highly relishing fruit in the market. What is our reaction? We are interested to first go and see the fruit and then to buy it and then eat it. At first, we have come to know of the fruit (*jnātum*) and next we see it (*drashtum*), and finally we are fully satisfied by tasting the fruit for ourselves (*praveshtum*). The last is the state of the *jeevanmukta*, the liberated man. It is *moksha*. We come to know of a house, see it, and then enter it. Thus, one should approach God and realize Him. Everybody can/should attain the highest *advaitic* realization even in this very life. Then only he is free from the bondage of '*samsāra*'...like Sakkubai was.

If Vedic study alone could lead to God-realization, the illiterate shall have to go

without it. If austerity alone should lead to God-realization, the weak shall have no hope; If '*yajnas*' and '*dāna*' alone could lead to God, the poor shall have to remain where they are. As it is declared by the Lord that by single-minded devotion alone, he could be realized, every human being can aspire for God-realization by pure and uncontaminated devotion. Thus, out of His compassion, the Lord has revealed the easy path of God-realization to all beings.

Sakkubai was neither educated, nor born to rich parents and though married into a well-to-do family, she could not take advantage of the wealth. All she had was *tivra samvega*, intense, *ananya bhakti* for her beloved Panduranga Vitthala. That was all she needed, to make her one with her beloved.

<http://www.telugubhakti.com/telugupages/monthly/Bhaktas/content30.htm>
<https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/>



- Swāmi Chidānanda



There was a time when science grappled with the dichotomy of energy and matter. There were two different camps of energy and matter, and each of them seemed to be indestructible. The laws of 'conservation of matter' and 'conservation of energy' were accepted by scientists in the good old days. The twentieth century saw the unification of these two – energy and matter – and the famous equation $E = mc^2$ is now widely known, which underscores the possible conversion of energy into matter or the other way round.

PHYSICS THE TWO CAMPS



Is an electron matter, in the form of a particle with certain mass? Or is it energy, in the form of waves with certain

probability functions? Scientists now talk about the mystery of the electron that behaves, at times as a particle, and at other times as a wave. So, they call it a 'wavicle'!

Consciousness is the knowing principle in all living beings. An elephant or an ant knows various stimuli coming towards it and responds to the stimuli. Is consciousness in a totally different camp as compared with matter or/and energy? Or is consciousness an epiphenomenon of matter/energy? In other words, does consciousness arise from our brains (in the context of us, human beings) and, with the death of the brain, does consciousness cease to exist?

METAPHYSICS THE NEW TWO CAMPS



Spiritual philosophies in India have always maintained that consciousness is the supreme truth. '*prajnānam brahma*' is a great statement from the Rig-Veda (in the Aitareya Upanishad). Called *prajnā*, *chit*, *samvit*, *chetanā* or *prajnānam*, this principle (*tattva*) is talked of, as being way higher than either matter or energy, in terms of subtlety (*sukshmatā*). Spiritual philosophies

claim that 'realizing this principle as our true nature' is the ultimate fulfilment in life. It is Self-realization; it is liberation (*moksha*).

Shri J Krishnamurti, the extraordinary thinker and mystic of the last century, used the word 'consciousness' as the summation of our thoughts, feelings, beliefs and conditionings. He called for a radical transformation in human consciousness. Though he did not like to propose an independent, imperishable principle called 'consciousness', he, very notably, made a case for the ending of 'the self', which, elsewhere, is called 'ego'. He enquired into the cessation of self-centred thought processes.

Awareness, the backbone of Spirituality

Many other mystics are of the view that consciousness is a dimension of intelligence, which neither belongs to the body (gross matter) nor to the mind (subtle matter). Traditional spirituality tells us we are bound when we get identified with our body, our possessions, our accumulations. We get liberated when – through *viveka* (discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral) and *vairāgya* (rising above false attachments) – we remain as Pure, Witnessing Consciousness (*sākshi-chaitanya*).

Vedānta talks about the hierarchy of objects and subjects. Under the topic of 'discrimination between the seen and the seer,' we call 'forms and colours' the seen while the eyes are the seer. The eyes themselves becomes the seen (the 'known') while the mind becomes the seer. The diverse thoughts of the

mind are 'the seen', where the witnessing consciousness becomes the ultimate seer.

In the context of daily spiritual practice (*sādhana*), it becomes extremely important that we remain **aware** of our own thoughts and emotions. No wonder, emotional self-awareness has become a much-recognized component of *Emotional Intelligence* these days. As pleasant and unpleasant situations unfold in daily life, we need to shift our attention from 'external factors that cause joy or sorrow to us' to 'internal causes that make particular scenarios go well with us, and other scenarios not suit us'.

Some wise man said, "Awareness is the beginning, the middle and the end of a spiritual journey!" The religions of the world differ in their symbolism, in their rituals and in their definitions of God. All of them, however, admit that anyone 'who is spiritually advanced' is deeply aware of his or her own mind's inner movements.

Science and Spirituality

It is possible these days to examine this crucial topic of consciousness, drawing from both Eastern and Western perspectives. Spiritual philosophies and neuroscience can probably shake hands and stay on good terms. A large number of scientists do have religious beliefs, and perhaps an equally large number keep away from religion. Excellence in scientific studies does not run contrary to spiritual pursuits. Much depends on definitions and interpretations of spiritual themes.

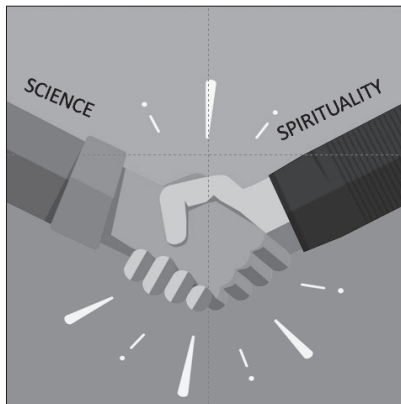
The wise have said, "A little science

takes you away from religion; more science may (by bringing about deeper and newer understanding of spirituality) bring you closer to religion!" Einstein had remarked, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."

Can consciousness change our psyche?

Authors like Prof Amit Goswami have proposed that a conscious observer (like a human being watching an experiment) can cause waves (energy) to collapse into particles (matter). A camera, which is not a conscious observer, cannot do that. While that is a debate in physics, we have a parallel proposition in philosophy. J Krishnamurti remarks, "Seeing *what* is changes it." This amounts to saying that our anger or jealousy cannot remain if they are watched closely without any bias.

Such an interpretation of 'what awareness can do' has great implications in the context of meditation. It seems higher meditation has nothing to



do with concentrating on symbols, reciting some mantras or visualizing some scenarios. It is rather being aware of whatever could be going on in our mind. Quiet observation – without encouraging or suppressing any thought – seems to have the tremendous potential of bringing about radical

changes in us. Above all, our selfishness makes an exit if it is brought under the purview of impartial observation.

Religions may supply a hundred props for mind-control. As the seekers advance, they let go of those props or supports, and learn the higher way to staying gently alert. It is then that meditation becomes 'all seeing' and 'zero doing'. The unbelievable part of this whole matter is that the duality between the individual seeker and his goal vanishes. *Being nobody, Going nowhere* then becomes the inner experience of the erstwhile seeker, while external life continues to be *business as usual!*



After every storm, the sun will smile; for every problem, there is a solution, and the soul's indefeasible duty is to be of good cheer.

-William R Aiger



- Narration from *Ribhu Geetā*



Although Ribhu taught his disciple the supreme Truth of the One Brahman without a second, Nidāgha, in spite of his erudition and understanding, did not get sufficient conviction to adopt and follow the path of *jnāna*, but settled down in his native town to lead a life devoted to the observance of ceremonial religion.

But the sage loved his disciple as deeply as the latter venerated his master. In spite of his age, Ribhu would himself go to his disciple in the town, just to see how far the latter had outgrown his ritualism. At times, the sage went in disguise, so that he might observe how Nidāgha would act when he did not know that he was being observed by his master.

On one such occasion, Ribhu, who had put on the disguise of a village rustic, found Nidāgha intently watching a royal procession. Unrecognized by the town dweller Nidāgha, the village rustic enquired what the bustle was all about, and was told that the king was going in procession. "Oh! It is the king. He goes in

procession! But where is he?" asked the rustic.

"There, on the elephant", said Nidāgha.

"You say the king is on the elephant. Yes, I see the two" said the rustic, "but which is the king and which is the elephant?"

"What!" exclaimed Nidāgha, "you see the two but do not know that the man above is the king and the animal below is the elephant? Where is the use of talking to a man like you?"

"Pray, be not impatient with an ignorant man like me", begged the rustic. "But you said 'above' and 'below', what do they mean?"

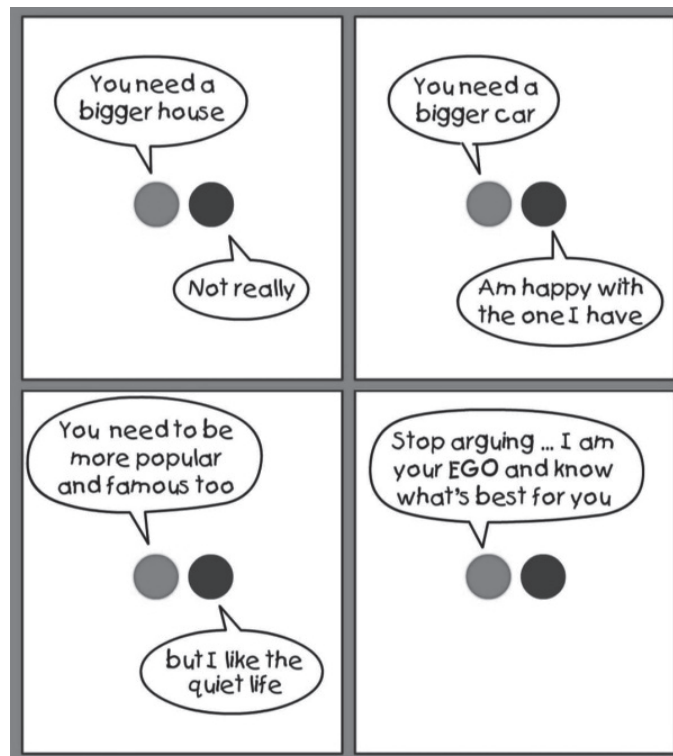
Nidāgha could stand it no more. "You see the king and the elephant, the one *above* and the other *below*. Yet you want to know what is meant by 'above' and 'below'?" burst out Nidāgha. "If thing seen and words spoken convey so little to you, action alone can teach you. Bend forward, and you will know it all too well."

The rustic did as he was told. Nidāgha got on his shoulder and said, "Know it now. I am *above* as the king, you are *below* as the elephant. Is this clear enough?"

"No, not yet", was the rustic's quiet reply. "You say you are above like the king, and I am below like the elephant. The 'king', the 'elephant', 'above' and 'below', so far it is clear. But pray, tell me

what you mean by *I* and *you*?" When Nidāgha was thus confronted all of a sudden with the mighty problem of defining the 'You' apart from the 'I', light dawned on his mind. At once, he jumped down and fell at his master's feet saying,

"Who else but my venerable Master, Ribhu, could have thus drawn my mind from the superficialities of physical existence to the true Being of the Self? Benign Master, I crave thy blessings."



Flanked by the Arabian Sea in the West, the towering Western Ghats in the East and networked by 44 interconnected rivers, Kerala is blessed with a unique set of geographical features that have made it one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in Asia. A long shoreline with serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, lush hill stations and exotic wildlife, are just a few of the wonders that await a tourist. What is more, each of these charming destinations is only a two-hour drive from the other - a singular advantage, perhaps, that no other place on the planet can offer.

Kerala prides itself for being the flag-bearer in showing 'how a culture can respect its tradition and its past, and at the same time, march forward with growth & progress'. Hundred percent literacy, world-class healthcare systems, India's lowest infant mortality and highest life expectancy rates are among a few of the milestones that the people of the state are extremely proud of.

Kerala has many temples. There are numerous temples dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Devi, Ayyappā, Subrahmanya, Rāma and Krishna. With exquisite edifices and intricate carvings, the architectural heritage of these temples makes one awestruck. Besides their beauty and grandeur, the shrines in Kerala are known for their unique rituals

and vibrant festivities as well.

Ānandavalleeshwaram Shri Mahādeva Temple, located in the city of Kollam, is one of the ancient temples in Kerala. It is believed to have been installed by Sage Parashurama. The temple is also one of the 108 famous Shiva temples in Kerala. It is dedicated to Mahādeva (Lord Shiva). The temple, in its present form, is believed to be 1100 years old. There is a golden flagstaff (*kodimaram*) in this temple. The beautiful Ashtamudi Lake is very close to this shrine.

Lord Mahādeva and Devi Ānandavalli are the presiding deities of the temple. The *shrikovil* (*garbhagr̥ha, sanctum sanctorum*) is unique, since it is the only Hindu shrine in India which has the idols of Shri Krishna, Lord Vishnu, *Bhoomi Devi* [Goddess Earth] and Lakshmi Devi, all consecrated and installed under a single roof. Lord Mahādeva of this temple is called 'ānandaswaroopa' and Devi Pārvati is called 'swayamvara Pārvatī'. The Mahādevan (Lord Shiva) of this temple is in 'soumya bhāva'. Shiva and Pārvathi are believed to be consecrated as a 'Just Married' couple, and so, both of them are in a very calm and pleasant form and in a happy state. The temple has got the name 'Ānandavalleeshwaram' from this aspect. 'Ānandavalleeshwara' also means 'the consort or Lord of

Ānandavalli’.

Even though Devi Pārvati’s *garbhagr̥ha* is the one closest to the entrance, one is supposed to enter the temple only through the door which leads to the *garbhagr̥ha* of Lord Mahādeva. Devi Pārvathi’s idol is in standing posture. There is a lotus flower in one of her hands. Lord Shiva’s idol is a ‘Shiva Linga’, but the procession idol of Lord Shiva, which is known as ‘Seeveli Vigramam’, is ‘Umāmaheshwaran’ i.e., including Devi Pārvathi along with him. It is depicted as Pārvathi Devi sitting on the left thigh of Lord Shiva and Lord Shiva embracing her, just after their marriage ceremony. It is, therefore, believed that they gladly grant the rightful needs of the devotees.

Lord Shiva is consecrated facing west and Pārvathi Devi faces the east. The sub-deities include Ganapathy, Murugan, Shri Krishnan, Hanumān, Ayyappā, Mahā Vishnu, Lakshmi Devi, Bhoomi Devi and Nāga Devathās.

History of The Temple



There is no historical record to show the antiquity and origin of the temple. The name of the temple was Ānandeshwaram in olden days. There are five

famous temples in Kollam town viz., Rameshwaram, Manaleeshwaram, Ānandeshwaram, Chittadeeshwaram and Thrikkupaleshwaram. All these five temples have been constructed during the same period. Some believe that the temple was constructed by merchants from Sri Lanka, who used to trade with Kollam. Some say that the temple was constructed by Navakody Nārāyana Chettiyār, an industrialist from Thanjavur, who settled in Kollam. The fact that a Chettiyār family looked after the affairs of the temple, supports this belief. Later, the temple was taken over by the rulers of erstwhile Venad, whose headquarters was Kollam, before it was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram.

The temple was renovated and new idols were made of *panchaloha* (an alloy of five metals – iron, copper, tin, silver and gold) during the year 1806 A.D. It is said that the deity was the tutelary deity of the Venad dynasty. During the civil war between Veluthampy Dalawa and the British, some damages had been caused to the temple and it was repaired by the British Government in 1823 A.D. The temple is under the Travancore Devaswom Board.

Annual Festival

The Ānandavalleeshwaram Mahādeva Temple festival commences with the traditional *Thrikodiyettu* [hoisting of the pennant] and continues for ten days. This takes place every year during the months of March and April (the Malayalam month of *meenam*). As part of the annual festival, there are other rituals including *Pallivetta*, *Arattu*, *Arattu Ethirelpu*, *Ezhunallathu*, *Kazhcha Sribali*,



Hoisted Flag on the Golden Flag Mast in the Annual Festival

Kettukazhcha and other cultural programmes comprising dance, dramas, music and pyrotechnic display.

Shivarātri, Navarātri, Mandala Makaravilakku, etc., are all celebrated. *Pournami*, *Pradosham*, *Āyilyam* (the day of the *Āshlesha* star), Thursdays and

Tuesdays are very auspicious for darshan.

Offerings

For getting a suitable bridegroom and for removing obstacles for marriage, unmarried girls approach the deity Pārvathi Devi of this temple in large numbers.

Transportation

By Road: Kollam is well connected by road through the national highways of NH-47, NH-220, and NH-208. There are frequent interstate buses which run in this route. Buses ply from all major cities of Bangalore, Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Pondicherry, Thrissur, etc.

For people travelling from the north, flights are a better option, as there are no direct trains available in this route. The nearest airport is Thiruvananthapuram International Airport (76 km). There are many pilgrimage and tourist places near the temple - Ashtamudi Lake, Thirumullavaram Beach, Kollam Rameshwaram Mahādeva Temple, etc.

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What do we learn from the Upanishads?

Be The Spirit, Let Not Matter Imprison You

- Swāmi Chidānanda



The entire creation, this universe, which includes us, consists of just two aspects: spirit and matter. Ensnared by matter, we are unavoidably caught in the

ego process, which is created by thought. The guidance of the Upanishads is all about freeing ourselves from the trappings of matter and anchoring firmly in the spirit. We are spiritual when we primarily identify with the spirit in us. We are, otherwise, materialistic. A mantra from the Atharva Veda spells it out, as the quote below shows.

The Creator created a pair – the matter and the spirit.

prajāpatih mithunam-utpādayate rayim cha prānam cha

Prashna Upanishad – 1.4

(Prashna 1, mantra 4)

Here *prāna* is the spirit, the fire, the one who eats. *Rayi* is the matter, the moon, the food.



Your job is not to judge. Your job is not to figure out if someone deserves something. Your job is to lift the fallen, to restore the broken, and to heal the hurting.

- Joel Osteen



(Excerpt from 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna')

Looking at the pundit Shashadhar, Master said, "My child, add a little more to your strength. Practise spiritual discipline a few days more. You have hardly set your foot on the tree, yet you expect to lay hold of a big cluster of fruit. But, of course, you are doing all this for the welfare of others." With these words, he bowed his head before the pundit.

The Master continued: "When I first heard about you, I inquired whether you were merely erudite, or whether you had discrimination and renunciation. A pundit, who doesn't know how to discriminate between the Real and the Unreal, is no pundit at all.

"There is no harm in teaching others if the preacher has a commission from the Lord. Nobody can confound a preacher who teaches people after having received the command of God. Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning, a man becomes so powerful that before him, big scholars seem mere earthworms.

"When the lamp is lighted, the moths come in swarms. They don't have to be invited. In the same way, the preacher, who has a commission from God, need



not invite people to hear him. He doesn't have to announce the time of his lectures. He possesses such irresistible attraction, that people come to him of their own accord. People of all classes, even kings and aristocrats, gather around him. They say to him: 'Revered sir, what can we offer you? Here are mangoes, sweets, money, shawls and other things. What will you be pleased to accept?' In that case, I say to them: 'Go away, I don't care for these. I don't want anything.'

"Does the magnet say to the iron, 'Come near me?' That is not necessary. Because of the attraction of the magnet, iron rushes to it.

"Such a preacher may not be a scholarly person, but don't conclude from that, that he has any lack of wisdom. Does book-learning make one wise? He, who has a commission from God, never runs short of wisdom. That wisdom comes from God; it is inexhaustible. At Kāmārpukur, I have seen people measuring grain. It lies in a heap. One man keeps pushing grain from the heap toward another man, who weighs it on a scale. So the man who weighs doesn't run short of grain. It is the same with the

preacher who has received a commission from God. As he teaches people, Divine Mother Herself supplies him with fresh knowledge from behind. That knowledge never comes to an end.

"Can a preacher ever lack knowledge if, but once, he is favoured with a benign glance from the Divine Mother? Therefore, I ask you whether you have received any commission from God?"

Pundit: "Commission? No, sir, I am afraid I haven't received any such thing."

Host: "He may not have received the commission, but he preaches from a sense of duty."

Master: "What will a man accomplish by mere lectures without the commission from God? Once a Brāhmo preacher said in the course of his sermon, 'Friends, how much I used to drink!' and so on. Hearing this, the people began to whisper among themselves: 'What is this fool saying? He used to drink!' Now these words produced a very unfavourable effect. This shows that preaching cannot bring a good result, unless it comes from a good man."

"A high government official from Barisāl once said to me, 'Sir, If you begin the work of preaching, I too shall gird my loins.' I told him the story of people's dirtying the bank of the Hāldāpukur and of its being stopped only when a constable, armed with authority from the government, put up a notice prohibiting it."

So I say, a worthless man may talk his head off preaching, and yet he will produce no effect. But people will listen to him, if he is armed with a badge of authority from God. One cannot teach others without the commission from God. A teacher of men must have great power. There's many a Hanumanpuri (a noted

wrestler of the time) in Calcutta. It is with them that you will have to wrestle. (Pointing to the people assembled there) These are mere sheep!"

Master: (to the pundit) "Therefore, I say to you, dive into the Ocean of *sat-cidānanda*. Nothing will ever worry you if you but realize God. Then you will get His commission to teach people."

"There are innumerable pathways leading to the Ocean of Immortality. The essential thing is to reach to the Ocean. It doesn't matter which path you follow. Imagine that there is a reservoir containing the Elixir of Immortality. You will be immortal if a few drops of the Elixir somehow get into your mouth. You may get into the reservoir either by jumping into it, or by being pushed into it from behind, or by slowly walking down the steps. The effect is one and the same. You will become immortal by tasting a drop of that Elixir."

"Innumerable are the ways that lead to God. There are the paths of *jnāna*, of *karma*, and of *bhakti*. If you are sincere, you will attain God in the end, whichever path you follow. Roughly speaking, there are three kinds of *yoga*: *jnānayoga*, *karmayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga*."

[Pundit Shashadhar, was one of the renowned Sanskrit scholars of his time—a pillar of orthodox Hinduism, which has reasserted itself after the first wave of Christianity and Western culture had passed over Hindu society. His clear exposition of Hindu scriptures, his ringing sincerity, and his stirring eloquence had brought back a large number of the educated young Hindus of Bengal to the religion of their forefathers.]

- Donna Ashworth



This amazing art is by Autumn Skye ART

AS TIME GOES BY

As time goes by,
You will loosen your grip on that rock,
The one you always thought was home,
And you will realise that home is not a place,
It's a state of mind.
Let it go ...
As time goes by,
You will learn to see yourself more clearly,
The girl/ boy who was always too much of one thing,
And too little of another, was actually
Everything you needed to be.
Let yourself out.
As time goes by,
You will let the simple things become big,
And you will allow the big things to become simple,
And that readjustment will be,
The day you really start to live.
Let it be.
As time goes by,
You will be forced to say goodbye many times,

And your soft little heart will shatter but,
It will still beat and that will bring you,
All the purpose you need.

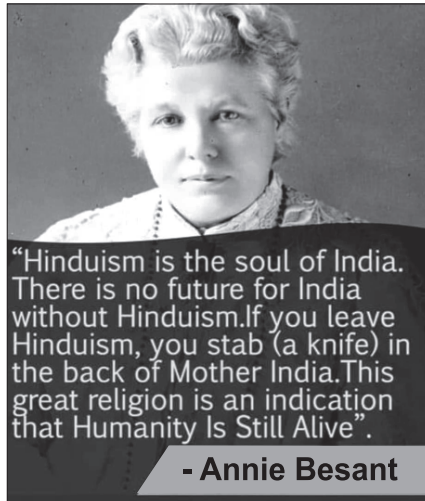
Let it beat.

As time goes by,
You will stop choosing wealth over peace,
You will stop choosing money over time,
And you will see that the treasures you need,
Are in the smiles and the laughter.

Let them in.

As time goes by,
The moments you remember when your life flashes past,
Are never the awful memories my friend, it's the joy,
The summer nights, the lazy days with loved ones,
The midnight chats and the morning hugs,
Let them happen.

Let them all happen





ज्येष्ठत्वं जन्मना नैव Jyesthatvam janmanā naiva
 गुणैर्-ज्येष्ठत्वमुच्यते । gunair-jyesthatvam-uchyate
 गुणाद्-गुरुत्वमायाति gunād-gurutvam-āyāti
 दुग्धं दधि घृतं क्रमात् ।। dugdham dadhi ghritam kramāt

***Supremacy is never attained by birth, the wise say.
 Greatness must be earned by acquiring merits. Even
 though milk is generated first, it becomes heavier (and
 more valuable) gradually, from milk to curd, and from curd
 to ghee.***

(From Subhāshita)

[We may add that life gives us opportunities all through our long years to act wisely and stop our foolish ways. More than seniority or past success, what we learn and how we grow matters. We must never conclude that we have failed or that we are a failure in life. We must start a new page in the book of our life and start afresh.
 – Editors]





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F.O.W.A.I. = Flame Of Who Am I?

“Who am I?” is the most basic question of life. The understanding of the self, the ‘me’, can cause radical change in the quality of life. This requires turning (the flame of) attention towards thoughts and emotions. When likes and dislikes fall away, pure perception takes place. That heralds freedom.

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