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VI. Divine Grace

1. The Lord's Grace

Indian: "Ye Gods, raise up once more the man whom ye have humbled and brought low. O Gods, restore to life again the man who hath committed sin" (RV 10:137.1). "This Atman ... is attained by him alone whom it chooses. To such a one Atman reveals Its own form" (Kat. Up. 1:2.23). "Through His [THE Lord's] grace a man loses his cravings, transcends grief, and realizes Him as Supreme Brahman" (Svet. Up.* 3:20, p. 196; cf. 1:6). "By His grace you gain Supreme Peace and the Everlasting Abode" (BG 18:62; cf. 7:22; 10:11; 11:1; 18:73).

Old Testament: "You have found grace in my sight" (Ex. 33:17, KJ). "The Lord will give grace and glory" (Ps. 84:11, KJ). "For I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace" (Zech. 12:10, KJ). New Testament: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 17; cf. 1:14, 16; 15:16; Rom. 1:4-5; cf. 5:15; 16:20). "For by grace you have been saved by faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God- not because of works" (Eph. 2:8; cf. 2:5; Rom. 3:24).

The Lord gives peace. Indian: "Having known me ... he attains Peace" (BG 5:29; cf. 2:64-65; 6:15). "By His grace you will gain Supreme Peace" (BG 18:62). Old Testament: "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num. 6:26; cf. Job 22:21; Is. 26:3). New Testament: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn. 14:27; cf. Phil. 4:7).

Protection under God's wings. Indian: "As the birds spread their sheltering wings let your [the Amity's-celestial deities] protection cover us. We mean all shelter and defense" (RV 8:47.3). Old Testament: "Keep me as the apple of thy eye; hide me in the shadow of thy wings" (Ps. 17:8). "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge" (Ps. 91:4).

For Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820), “You have to sever the bond of karma only by attaining that knowledge which is caused by the grace of the Lord” (Isvara-prasada). Attainment of the final goal is due to the Lord's grace, “Then, by his grace you will obtain supreme peace and attain my supreme eternal abode.”¹

“According to Bengal Vaishnavism, Bhakti is the immediate means of attaining the Bhagavat [God]. But the earth-bound souls cannot wake up to the life of Bhakti without the grace of the Bhagavat, which eternally flows to them through His genuine devotees. Grace cannot be won by human efforts. It is bestowed on all by the Bhagavat Himself. But all are not fit recipients of it. It finds its abode in those who empty themselves of all desires and wait in trust on the Bhagavat.... It is not grace but the capacity for receiving and realizing grace that has to be earned. Effort is called for simply to remove the obstacles that prevent grace from entering the heart. As soon as the obstacles are removed, grace takes possession of it. Great indeed are those who can receive and realize Divine grace.”²

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) taught his followers, “Everything depends upon His grace. To have His grace, whatever work you perform, do it with sincerity and earnest longing for him. Through His grace the environment will become favorable and the conditions of realization will become perfect.... The darkness of centuries is dispersed as soon as a light is brought into a room. The accumulated sins of countless lives vanish by a single glance of God.... Through His grace He reveals Himself. He is the sun of Knowledge. One ray of His has brought the power of understanding in this world. On account of it, we have the power to know each other and to acquire various forms of knowledge. We can see Him only if He turns His light on his own face.... The Lord sends love, reverence and faith into the yearning heart of the devotees before He makes His advent.”³ “God’s devotees have nothing to fear. They are His own. He always stands by them.”⁴

His disciple Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) indicated, “The one thing necessary is His grace. Without the Lord's grace no spiritual practice is possible.... Know for certain that the impossible becomes possible through His grace.”⁵ “Nothing can be accomplished without His grace. Can man realize Him by spiritual practice alone? If He reveals Himself out of compassion, then alone can one realize Him, otherwise not.... You will realize Him the moment He lifts the veil of ignorance. It is grace and grace alone that we need. There is no other way.... It is very difficult to realize God and it is impossible unless one has His grace. Through His grace, light may flash in a room that has been steeped in darkness for thousands of years. He is the Ocean of Mercy.... These are all very subtle matters. Of course, above all, one

must have the grace of God. Unless the Divine Mother is gracious, there is no hope of all this. It is only when She opens the door to Knowledge of Brahman out of Her compassion that the aspirant becomes able to attain it, and not otherwise.... Man can see Him, just because He condescends to reveal Himself out of His infinite mercy; this is His grace. Had He not revealed Himself out of His mercy, how could man ever have seen Him? Not only does He love His devotees, but He is a very ocean of compassion.”⁶

Shivananda’s brother disciple Swami Premananda (1861-1918) maintained, “He who keeps his mind in God, finds His grace, and through His grace becomes absorbed in meditation. Through His grace he finds holy association, his mind becomes purified, and he becomes endowed with right understanding. The mind itself will then become the guru and lead you by the right path.... One can have the right understanding only through the Lord's grace.... If one has faith in God's hallowed name, all delusion will be destroyed in him by God's power. With God's power all is possible. May he through his grace remove the bandage of ignorance from our eyes.... Through the grace of God, a sinner becomes a saint. We may have been just so many pieces of iron, soiled by the dirt of ignorance; but Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother are touchstones—their touch has turned us into gold. Blessed are we through their grace.”⁷ Though it seems that we are drawing ourselves closer to Brahman-God, actually Brahman-God through His love for us is slowly drawing us to Him. If we realize this and think of the process from Brahman-God’s standpoint and not from ours, we will make faster spiritual progress.

J. N. D. Kelly clarifies that Augustine (354-430) the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, “Grace of whatever kind is God’s free gift. The Divine favour cannot be earned by the good deeds men do, for the simple reason that those deeds are themselves the effect of grace: [Augustine writes] ‘grace bestows merits, and is not bestowed in reward for them.’ No worthwhile act can be performed without God's help, and even the initial motions of faith are inspired in our hearts by Him.... Augustine acknowledges that God’s omnipotent will, operating on our wills by grace, is irresistible. But he points out that He works through our wills, the effect being that they freely and spontaneously will what is good.”⁸

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) reasoned that God is the first intelligent Being and mover and therefore, the determiner of all that follows in the causal process. “Man does not move himself so as to obtain Divine help which is above him; rather, he is moved by God to obtain it.... Divine help is not given to us by virtue of the fact

that we initially move ourselves toward it by good works; instead, we make such progress by good works because we are preceded by Divine help.” The soul “is preceded by Divine help toward good action, rather than preceding the Divine help and meriting it, as it were, or preparing itself for it. Besides, no particular agent can universally precede the action of the first universal agent” from which it originates.⁹ God first comes to us in order that we might come to Him (Jn. 6:44; 1 Jn. 4:19). “God’s intention cannot fail ... Hence if God intends, while moving, that the one whose heart He moves should attain to grace, he will infallibly attain to it. [Nevertheless] He who is better prepared for grace receives more grace.”¹⁰ “Man’s perfect Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence. Now the vision of God’s Essence surpasses the nature not only of man, but also of every creature.... every knowledge that is according to the mode of created substance falls short of the vision of the Divine Essence, which infinitely surpasses all created substance. Consequently neither man, nor any creature, can attain final Happiness by his natural powers.”¹¹

Normally we are bound to the necessary horizontal law of causation based on a series of empirical conditions. Through the Lord’s grace we are subject to the more compassionate vertical Divine causation. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) expressed the view that the effects of the natural world can be overridden by the intelligible cause. “While the effects are to be found in the series of empirical conditions [karma], the intelligible cause [Brahman-God], together with its causality, is outside the series. Thus the effect may be regarded as free in respect of its intelligible cause [grace], and at the same time in respect of appearances [empirical world] as resulting from them according to the necessity of nature [karma].”¹²

What We Receive

There is Common Grace, which is the undeserved blessings that extend to all humankind. It has four aspects: 1) Sustaining care in creation - such as God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). 2) Restraint of sin - civil authorities maintain order and punish wrongdoing. 3) People have a conscience discerning the moral value of doing good and avoiding evil. 4) Blessings to humanity such as advancements in medicine and other areas. Common Grace makes it possible for humanity to live together in an orderly and cooperative manner.¹³

Preparatory Grace occurs before a person converts to a religious faith. In this early stage, the future religious devotee might not understand the reasons why certain things are happening to them. Only many years later do they understand how these events formed a pattern that coherently made sense and led them to religion. It causes the individual to respond correctly to events during their pre-conversion years. Preparatory Grace is largely conditional, since the Lord's decision to impart this boon, is based on the external character, internal thought patterns, and prior life experiences and events of the individual. This grace would be unconditional, if the choice of who is to receive Preparatory Grace is based only on the inscrutable will of the Lord and nothing else. In His creative activity Brahman-God as the first cause, works through secondary causes to accomplish a task. For example, when the Lord desires to transform a person, He makes that individual work as a secondary cause in striving this goal.

Through external Karmic Grace the Lord causes certain life events to occur to the devotee, which increases their interest in religious life. It is possible for the Lord to rearrange an individual's karma for this purpose, and then grace and karma work together to bring the desired results. In its external aspect, this hidden grace over time leads the individual to the appropriate environment where they can make spiritual progress. Meritorious actions produce positive karmic rewards, but do not necessarily bring the Lord's grace. However, if a religious aspirant produces many good works and desires spiritual rather than earthly rewards, out of love for His devotee the Lord will certainly bestow grace on that person. This is accompanied by internal Samskaric Grace where the thought patterns of the individual are altered to make them more religious.

Internally there is Prevenient Grace (from the Latin "to come before"), where the Lord turns the devotees will toward spiritual matters. This increases the desire to be regenerated, awakens the desire to find the truth, and increases faith in the religious solution they find. The will is strengthened and stimulated without coercion so that it desires the good. This phase precedes the personal experience of receiving a higher grace.¹⁴

The Lord works with people that have imperfect minds that have some nonreligious desires, a few of which may be incompatible with religious life. There is a gradual regeneration of the will, an awakening of the mind, and an increased faith in the Lord. Spiritual effects will eventually occur though there may be some backsliding.

Persevering (Sustaining) Grace is necessary since there are ups and downs in

spiritual life, though if one continues on there will be a long-run gradual progress. Some people lack this grace and eventually turn away from the religion.

Regenerative Grace is explained by the the American Baptist Augustus Strong (1836-1921), “Regeneration is that act of God by which the governing disposition of the soul is made holy ... It is God’s turning the soul to Himself.... Regeneration is a change indispensable to the salvation of the sinner.” It brings about a change in the heart, a moral rebirth, and a new governing disposition. “Sanctification is that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the holy disposition imparted in regeneration is maintained and strengthened.”¹⁵

Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) declared that, “Regeneration consists in the implanting of the principle of the new spiritual life in man, in a radical change of the governing disposition of the soul, which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, gives birth to a life that moves in a Godward direction. In principle this change affects the whole man ... it is a secret and inscrutable work of God that is never directly perceived by man.... Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy.” “By a creative word God generates the new life, changing the inner disposition of the soul, illuminating the mind, rousing the feelings, and renewing the will.... the Holy Spirit works directly on the heart of man and changes its spiritual condition.”¹⁶ Sanctification is “a Divine operation in the soul, whereby the holy disposition born in regeneration is strengthened and its holy exercises are increased. It is essentially a work of God, though in so far as He employs means, man can and is expected to cooperate by the proper use of these means.” Negatively, the sinful and corrupt nature of the old man is crucified and destroyed. Positively, God creates the new man “whereby the holy disposition of the soul is strengthened.” It is a life long process that “never reaches perfection in this life.” Sanctification is brought about by God working through the Holy Scriptures, the sacraments, and providential guidance ending in salvation.¹⁷

From Bonaventure (1221-74) we learn, “Grace is a gift that cleanses, enlightens, and perfects the soul; that vivifies, reforms, and strengthens it; that lifts it up, makes it like to God, and unites it with Him, thus rendering it acceptable to Him; a gift of such a kind that it is rightly and properly called ‘sanctifying grace.’”¹⁸

The devotee lives a life of religious practices that bring about a change in their character and outlook. It is the boon of Brahman-God that makes the aspirant work hard for self-improvement, and to struggle to attain the higher Sanctifying Grace of

purity and liberation-salvation. Gradually they receive the grace of living a happier and more sublime life, of attaining some experience of Brahman-God consciousness, and eventual liberation-salvation. At a higher stage, Sanctifying Grace brings about the love of Brahman-God in us. It raises a person's mind to a higher level where they can properly manifest their spiritual potential. If He so wills the Lord through the manifestation of His creative power of love and grace, can make the seemingly impossible possible and transform a sinner into a saint.¹⁹ The infusion of sanctifying grace prepares one for the BrahmaloKa-Kingdom of Heaven where they become partakers of the Divine nature and of eternal life.

Some people believe that Glorification is the final state beyond Sanctification. It is the final state of grace that cannot be attained while living on earth, but is the perfection reached in the postmortem state.

Brahman-God administers Its benevolence to different people of the world in a wide variety of ways. It may be internal and/or external, irresistible or resistible, spiritual or secular, depending on the circumstances. A devotee might receive one type of grace and not another. Through the grace of Participation, we become functionaries involved in one way or another in Brahman-God's work and by the grace of meditation, to experience the presence of the Divine while living on earth.

What We Have to Do

The human will has the freedom to either accept or resist Divine grace if it chooses. There is a synergy (cooperation) between human freedom and the Lord's grace. The initiative comes from Brahman-God, but humans must consent to grace for it to be effective. Free will is necessary to hold people accountable for the actions they perform. Else, they are not to be blamed for their misdeeds since they have no control over them.²⁰

Also important is Cooperating Grace, since the more the devotee cooperates with the Lord, the faster the progress they will make. A devotee may resist the grace of Brahman-God since they are not able to make the necessary sacrifices to obtain it.

Christian doctrine teaches that God imparts Divine Grace upon humanity through the vehicle of the sacraments-(Baptism, Eucharist). Sacraments are subject to God's power and are the effective means to facilitate the reception of his grace because He works through the Church. It is the sacraments per se and not the persons who administer or receives them that are the means of grace.²¹ Both the

Christian baptism and the Vedantists initiation stress the importance of a religious ceremony performed by a cleric in the liberation-salvation process. In Initiation Grace the seeds of future development are imparted into the soul by the guru.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) emphasized that grace takes a human personal form in Jesus Christ {Avatara}, a cognitive and verbal form in the *Bible* [scriptures], and a material form in the sacraments [practices] and the church [Temple].²²

2. Conditional Grace

Indian: “He who chooses [i.e., longs for the] Atman-by him alone is Atman attained. It is Atman that reveals to the seeker its true nature” (Mun. Up. 3:2.3). “A man who has taken refuge in Me reaches, by My grace, the eternal and imperishable Abode.... Fixing your heart on Me, you will overcome every difficulty by My grace; but if from self-conceit you do not listen to Me, you shall perish utterly” (BG 18:56, 58; cf. 9:29; 12:6-7).

Old Testament: “For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsake them will obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13). New Testament: “Blessed are they who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14, KJ; cf. Mt. 5:45).

Seek God and He will save you: Indian: “Those who take refuge in Me alone, shall cross over this maya” (BG. 7:14). Old Testament: “But I call upon God; and the Lord will save me” (Ps. 55:16-17). “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation” (Ps. 62:1; cf. 91:14).

God’s former love of His devotees: Indian: “What has become of those ancient friendships, when without enmity we [Varuna] walked together” (RV 7:88.5)? Old Testament: “Will the Lord spurn for ever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?” (Ps. 77:7-9). “Lord where is thy steadfast love of old” (Ps. 89:49).

The Bengal Vaishnavist Jiva Goswami (c. 1511-96) emphasized that a worshiper who persists in their spiritual practices for a long period of time will receive the grace of devotional love from Bhagavat (God). There is no success in

religion if the Lord is not pleased, and it is our love directed toward Bhagavat that satisfies Him.²³ “Penance and asceticism cannot control the will of God as much as devotion does.” “He is the dearest Supreme self, Inner Controller of all creatures, Who gives Himself to those who love Him whole-heartedly.” “To those who give themselves (to Brahman-God), He gives Himself and His love.” “God awakens the eternal Vedic wisdom embedded in the heart of man when He is worshipped with devotion.”²⁴

Concerning the Lord’s grace that comes through a guru Sri Ramakrishna told a doctor, “There are three types of physicians. The physicians of one class feel the patient’s pulse and go away, merely prescribing medicine. As they leave the room they simply ask the patient to take the medicine.... There are physicians of another class, who prescribe medicine and ask the patient to take it. If the patient is unwilling to follow their directions, they reason with him.... Lastly, there are physicians of the highest class. If the patient does not respond to their gentle persuasion, they even exert force upon them. If necessary they press their knees on the patients chest and force the medicine down their throat.”²⁵

Following the analogy given by Ramakrishna, Brahman-God acts in three different manners. Not everyone receives the same level of grace. Some people receive the first type of grace (it is offered), some the second (a rationale of why it should be followed is provided), and others the third which is Irresistible Grace (it is forced upon the recipient). At the second level the Divine influence is persuasive and not demanding. Those with Resistible Grace might make progress for a while but eventually they can lose interest in their spiritual pursuit. Meaning the Lord’s responses cannot be limited to one type of behavior pattern, it depends on the circumstances. Brahman-God remains sovereign but has different plans for different people. The type of grace a person receives is based their spiritual potential. Devotees with little substance receive less grace. Another factor is where they are located in the Reincarnation Process. Do they have many lives in the future or are they near the end of the rebirth process.

One is most fortunate if they receive Irresistible Grace that keeps them on the path in spite of obstacles. Two Christian examples of Irresistible Grace are: the apostle Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, and Jesus telling his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn. 15:16).

Many similes were offered by Sri Ramakrishna to explain the nature of Conditional Grace. Brahman-God has “cooked the food and placed the food before you. Now you must use your hand to put the food into your mouth.... If you move

one step towards Him, He comes ten steps toward you.”²⁶ “The Lord approaches quickly the holy devotee whose heart is full of devotion and faith.... Though a soul has received the grace of God, of a Guru and of a good devotee, yet it meets with destruction through the lack of the grace of one [‘s self]. One might have been fortunate enough to receive all the first three forms of grace, yet if one’s own heart shows no grace to itself, i.e., if it has no yearning to save itself, they are of no avail. One might have been fortunate enough to receive all the first three forms of grace, yet if one’s own heart shows no grace to itself, i.e., if it has no yearning to save itself, they are of no avail.... However much you may try, without God’s grace nothing can be attained; He cannot be realized without Divine grace. But Divine grace descends not so easily.... God never appears in the heart of him who thinks himself to be the doer.”²⁷ “Grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practiced spiritual discipline.... If you give God something, you or filter through the person’s mind because it was not subjectively open to it. When we become aware of the grace we mistakenly think it is new, though it has always existed.

These insights were expressed by Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922), ““He reveals his grace to him who seeks it with a sincere heart. As we pray to Him, He gives dispassion, longing for Him, and right understanding. Out of thousands, perchance one desires for God.... Without Divine grace it is not possible to take refuge in God. And in order to feel this grace one must associate with holy men, read sacred books, and pray earnestly.... There is the ocean of Divine grace—if anyone will sincerely call on Him but once. The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] used to say: ‘If you move one step toward Him, He comes down ten steps toward you’.... You cannot buy God. His vision comes only through his grace. Does this mean that you should not practice spiritual disciplines? Certainly you must practice, otherwise passions will create havoc in you.... My boys, you have the grace of the guru. You have the desire for spiritual knowledge. By receiving the Lord’s name you have received his grace, and you also have the society of the holy. Now you must strive to get the grace of your own mind. By gaining mastery over your own mind, you will, by its grace, realize the grace of God and the grace of the guru.... Yes! Through his grace I see him. Anyone can see him if he has His grace. But how many are there who love him? How many yearn to see him?... Unless the heart is purified, God’s grace is not revealed.... The mud of the mind is washed away if one thinks of the Lord and meditates on him and prays to him with a yearning heart. At

once the magnet of God attracts the needle of man's mind to Him, and the moment the mind becomes pure, Divine grace begins to flow. Through this Divine grace God is revealed.... Try patiently to dive deep in meditation; in due course you are certain to receive God's grace. If you wish to meet an important man you must seek him through his ministers. Similarly, to obtain the Lord's grace, you must seek the help of godly men and undergo many spiritual disciplines.”²⁸

Swami Brahmananda’s disciple Swami Prabhavananda mentioned in lectures we can have the grace of the Lord and the guru but we must also have the grace of our own mind.

Bishop Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-95) taught in the principle of synergy that the grace of God and the efforts of man cooperate with each other. “There is a direct proportion between the efforts of the man who receives grace and the measure of grace received.... It is the grace of the Spirit that gives eternal life and unspeakable heavenly joy, but the eros [life energy] of doubled effort, which is the fruit of faith, makes a soul worthy to receive the gifts and to enjoy the grace. When the work of righteousness and the grace of the Spirit come together in the same soul, they fill the soul with blessed life by their mutual support; but when they are divorced from one another they offer the soul no gain. For the grace of God cannot enter a soul that rejects salvation, and the power of human virtue is not in itself sufficient to elevate to the form of (Divine) life a soul that does not partake in grace.” “Through good works and thoughts man is enabled to receive the Spirit, and with the assistance of it he becomes a new creature.... The corruption of the human heart is so deeply rooted that human virtue and zeal alone cannot eradicate it without enlisting the power of the Spirit as its ally.... Prepared by the works of virtue, the soul becomes a worthy 'heir' of the Divine gift, i.e., the gift of grace.... The love of God grows in the soul through many efforts and through the synergy of Christ, who sends the Paraclete [Holy Spirit].... The efforts of the man who aspires to Divine life attract the Spirit, and so he comes to participate in its grace.... Workers with Christ receive through faith and works of virtue, the goods that are beyond their nature from the grace of the Spirit.... Through its effort to transcend its own nature and to overcome evil, the soul becomes a dwelling-place for the Spirit.... The grace of the Spirit makes the works of man’s own virtue easier.... In order to obtain the synergy of the Spirit on your way upward, take upon yourselves every effort and labor.”²⁹

The Patriarch of Constantinople John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) stressed God

draws “those who are willing to be drawn.” For salvation we must “give evidence of purity of life.” Concerning Chrysostom views J. N. D. Kelly noted, “Without God's aid we should be unable to accomplish good works; nevertheless, even if grace takes the lead, it cooperates with free will. We first of all begin to desire the good and to incline ourselves towards it, and then God steps in to strengthen that desire and render it effective.” God’s favor comes to those souls that desire it, being that God draws those who are willing to be drawn.³⁰

At the Council of Trent (1547) the following propositions were condemned by the Catholics as in error, “That the impious is justified by faith alone—if this means that nothing else is required by way of cooperation in the acquisition of the grace of justification and that it is no way necessary for a man to be prepared and disposed by the motion of his own will” [and] “That justification once received is not preserved and even increased in the sight of God through good works, but that these same works are only fruits and signs of justification, not causes of its increase.”³¹ This is expressed in the contemporary Catholic viewpoint, that actual grace can be resisted and refused. To be saved one must freely cooperate with Divine grace by showing a change in character and conduct. “Supernatural life is capable of increase and depth, depending on the frequency and fervor with which the sacraments are received, on devotion to prayer and, in fact, on the whole gamut of good works performed, which merit growth in sanctifying grace and advancement in the soul’s nearest to God.”³²

In Protestant theology, according to Arminianism, God makes salvation possible, but it is our choice to make salvation actual. God is a necessary condition for our salvation but not a sufficient one, since we have a choice to accept or reject it. Thus, our salvation is conditional depending on whether we accept Divine grace or not. An alternative idea is the monergism (meaning to meaning “to work alone”) belief of Calvinism that God alone is responsible for our salvation. Our salvation is conditional depending on whether or not God has willed it.³³

Brahman-God’s grace is also bestowed at the group and national level. God made a covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:32; 34:13), which they broke (Jer. 11:10). The Lord temporarily withdrew his love and mercy from these people (Jer. 16:5). Later He decided to make a new covenant with them and to forgive them for their sins, restore their fortunes, and have mercy on them (Jer. 29:11; 30:11, 18; 31:32, 34; 33:8). Perhaps the evacuation of 350,000 British soldiers from Dunkirk in 1940, aided by an unexpected calmness in the English Channel that is usually turbulent at that time of year, were due to Divine intervention.

For more on this subject see: SVSP, Ch. II. Striving to Realize Brahman-God, Section, 9. Conditional Grace.

3. Brahman-God Gives Liberation-Salvation and Eternal Life

Indian: “From death lead me to immortality” (Br. Up. 1:3.28). “Completely merged in Brahman, they attain freedom from rebirth.” (Svet. Up. 1:7; cf. 6:18). “Try to realize that state from which there is no return to future births. Let him take refuge in that Primal Being” (BG* 15:4, p. 147; cf. 7:30; 9:28). “Having come to Me, these high-souled men are no more subject to rebirth ... they have reached the highest perfection” (BG 8:15; cf. 16).

New Testament: “The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:23; cf. 1 Cor. 15:52-53, 57). “He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:8).

Knowing God one attains to eternal life: Indian: “Knowing Him [Brahman] as such, one is freed from death” (Kat. Up. 1:3:15; cf. Mund. Up. 3:1.3; Svet. Up. 2:15). “By knowing Him [the Supreme Lord] who alone pervades the universe, men become immortal.... Only by knowing Him does one pass over death” (Svet. Up. 3:7-8; cf. AV 10:8.44). New Testament: “This is eternal life, that they know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent” (Jn. 17:3).

Knowledge of liberation and salvation: Indian: “The Higher Knowledge is that by which the Imperishable Brahman is attained” (Mund. Up. 1:1.5). “Aspirants may find enlightenment by two different paths. For the contemplative is the path of knowledge” (BG* 3:3). New Testament: “To give knowledge of salvation” (Lk. 1:77; cf. Rom. 11:33; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:10). “To be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

Shankara realized, “Non-return [to this world] stands as an accomplished fact for those from whom the darkness (of ignorance) has been completely removed as a result of their full illumination.” Having taken “refuge in the qualified Brahman” i.e., Ishvara the Personal God, they go to the city of Brahman in the third order of heaven (the Brahma Loka). There they attain to eternal life and do not return to earth to be reborn.³⁴

Commenting on the same aphorism from the *Brahma Sutras* as Shankara, Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137) concludes, “This Supreme Lord, when pleased by the

faithful worship of his Devotees—which worship consists in daily repeated meditation on Him, assisted by the performance of all the practices prescribed for each caste and ashrama [stage of life]—frees them from the influence of Nescience [lack of understanding] which consists of karma accumulated in the infinite progress of time and hence hard to overcome; allows them to attain to that supreme bliss which consists in the direct intuition of His own nature: and after that does not turn them back into the miseries of Samsara [reincarnation].”³⁵

Madhva (1199/1238-1278/1317) emphasized that liberation is a great gift of Brahman (God). “Release from Samsara is possible only through God’s grace. It is bestowed on those who have a direct vision of God. Such vision is vouchsafed to those who have constantly meditated on Him in loving devotion, after going through the discipline of since study of Shastras [Scriptures].” “The Lord reveals Himself by means of Bhakti [Love of God], and bestows release from Bondage on Jiva [Individual soul]. In this way, Bhakti is stated to be the prominent means to mukti [liberation] and hence, it is said to be the cause or means.... He becomes the object of vision by means of Bhakti and grants release to Jiva on account of Bhakti. The most respectful and loving attachment for the Lord is called Bhakti.”³⁶ Through the Divine Will, the Lord removes the veil of ignorance that obscures the intrinsic self-luminosity of the soul. For the blessed individual the repeated cycles of birth and death come to an end. Moksha [liberation] is a state spiritual joy, free of all evils, strife and conflict. “To the ignorant Vishnu [The Lord] gives knowledge; to those who have knowledge, He gives liberation; to those liberated, Vishnu, ‘Upsetter of Men,’ gives joy.”³⁷

Sri Ramakrishna informs us, “After the purification of the heart one obtains Divine love. The one sees God, through His grace.” “The Mother of the Universe. It is She who creates and preserves the world, who always protects her children, and who grants whatever they desire: dharma [righteousness], artha [wealth-success], kama [desires, pleasure], moksha [liberation-salvation].” “Through the practice of spiritual discipline one attains perfection, by the grace of God. But one must also labour a little. Then one sees God and enjoys bliss.” “It is the Knowledge of God alone that gives liberation.” “Union with God even for one moment surely gives a man liberation.”³⁸

Thomas Aquinas specified that a person’s final and most sublime happiness is the experience of God as He is in Himself, which is attained through supernatural grace and not by natural reason. “A lower nature cannot acquire that which is

proper to a higher nature except through the action of the higher nature to which the property belongs.”³⁹ “A created intellect cannot see the essence of God unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it.”⁴⁰ “We see in natural things that nothing can by its operation bring about an effect which exceeds its active power, but only such as is proportioned to its power. Now eternal life is an end exceeding the proportioned of human nature, as is clear from what we have said above. Hence man, by his natural powers, cannot produce meritorious works proportioned to eternal life; for this a higher power is needed, viz., the power of grace.”⁴¹

When Brahman-God through His/Her grace saves or liberates an individual, it is the their Divine Self that the Lord loves. Brahman-God sees the Divinity (image of Brahman-God) in the person and looks at their individuality and uniqueness in this sense.

4. The Lord Protects His Devotee

Indian: “Far from me, Varuna removes all danger” (RV 2:28.6). “May he [Varuna] vouchsafe us triply-barred protection” (RV 8:42.2). “No one who seeks Brahman ever comes to an evil end” (BG* 6:40, p. 86). “Fixing your heart on Me, you will overcome every difficulty by My grace” (BG 18:58; cf. MB, Bhishma Parva 66).

Old and New Testament: “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence ... Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you” (Ps. 91:2-3, 9-10; cf. Gen. 15:1; Ps. 25:15; 28:7; 33:20; 46:1; 55:22; Is. 40:29; 41:10; 43:2; Rom. 8:31; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 5:7). “With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me” (Ps. 118:6; cf. Heb. 13:6)?

Sri Ramakrishna affirmed that, “One need not have any fear if one takes refuge in God. God protects His devotee.” “Once Lakshmi and Narayana were seated in Vaikuntha [a Heaven], when Narayana suddenly stood up. Lakshmi had been stroking His feet. She said, ‘Lord where are You going?’ Narayana answered, ‘One of My devotees is in great danger. I must save him.’ With these words He went out. But He came back immediately. Lakshmi said, ‘Lord, why have You returned so soon?’ Narayana smiled and said, ‘The devotee was going along the road overwhelmed with love for Me. Some washermen were drying clothes on the grass,

and the devotee walked over the clothes. At this the washermen chased him and were going to beat him with their sticks. So I ran out to protect him.’ ‘But why have You come back?’ asked Lakshmi. Narayana laughed and said, ‘I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at them. So I came back.’”⁴²

J. David Bleich gives us the views of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), “Not all individuals of the human species enjoy the same degree of providence; the protection and guidance of providence varies in accordance with a persons character and achievement. The highest form of providence is extended to the prophets; a lesser one is associated with the pious and with wise men.... Furthermore, even individuals possessing the requisite intellectual perfection enjoy the protection of providence only so long as they meditate on God. When thought is directed to mundane matters, the bond linking the human and the Divine is broken, and providence departs from them while their thoughts are centered upon other matters. It is only those whose perception of God is so perfect that their minds contemplate Him constantly—this constant intercourse between the human intellect and the Active Intellect being the highest perfection man can attain—who are the recipients of providential guardianship at all times.”⁴³

In a sermon the German mystic Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) mentioned, “If you suffer for your own sake, however this may be, the suffering hurts you and is hard for you to bear. But if you suffer for God's sake and for his sake alone, the suffering will not hurt you and will not be hard for you, because God is carrying the burden. This is really true!... Whatever a man suffers for the love of God and for him alone, God makes this easy and sweet for him.”⁴⁴

Concerning “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt. 6:33) in his commentary Martin Luther (1483-1546) commented, “We should know that here, too, we shall have what we require for the necessities of this life. That is why He says: ‘If you just seek the kingdom of God first, then all these things shall be yours as well.’ That is, you shall receive food and drink and clothing as a bonus, without any anxiety of your own. In fact, it will come by the very fact that you are not anxious about such things and that you risk everything for the sake of the kingdom of God, and in such a way that you will not know where it came from, as our experience teaches us every day. God has enough in the world to feed those that are His.... How would it be possible for a person to starve to death who serves God with fidelity and furthers His kingdom? After all, he gives the whole world more than enough.”⁴⁵

A devotee should realize that if they surrender themselves to Brahman-God, He/She will protect us from harm. These positive thoughts will replace negative ideas and feelings.

5. Brahman-God Makes a Sinful Person Righteous

Indian: “Even the most sinful man, if he worships Me with unswerving devotion, must be regarded as righteous; for he has formed the right resolution. He soon becomes righteous and attains eternal peace” (BG 9:30-31; cf. 8:66; 9:32).

Old Testament: “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:9-10; cf. Is. 1:18-19). New Testament: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9; cf. Ps. 32:5; Mt. 9:13; Rom. 6:22; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 1:15).”For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified (Rom. 10:4).

Mercy to sinners: Indian: “Before this Varuna may we be sinless-him who shows mercy even to sinners” (RV 7:87.7; cf. RV 1:24.11, 14; 31.16; 97.4; 2:28.5; 4:12.4; 5:85.7-8; 7:88.6). “Take refuge utterly in him [the Lord]. By His grace you will find supreme peace, and the state which is beyond all change.... For I will save you from sin and from bondage” (BG* 18:62, 66; p. 172). Old Testament: “I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sins” (Ps. 32:5; Prov. 28:13). “I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Is. 43:25; cf. Ezra 9:13; Ps. 6:1-2; 38:1; 103:10; Dan. 9:4-19).

In the pious words of Jiva Goswami, “If a person who worships God happens to commit a slightly sinful act through inadvertence, God residing in his heart destroys the sin.... God residing in his heart destroys the impurities of mind of His devotee due to his lapses through inadvertence, who worships God with undivided devotion.... Abandon all works and take refuge with God. He will purify you of all sins. Do not grieve (BG 11: 5, 42; 18:66).... Devotion to God completely destroys the sins of His devotees, even as burning fire burns wood into ashes.... God destroys the sins of the persons with tainted minds if He is remembered by them.” When Bhagavat (God) resides in the heart, the adherent will always desires to perform moral actions.⁴⁶

On this subject Sri Ramakrishna told his followers, “If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins ... he will certainly be saved through his faith. Let him only say to God, 'O Lord, I will not repeat such an action.’” “One should have such faith as to be able to say, 'What? I have taken the name of God; how can I be a sinner?' God is our Father and Mother. Tell Him, O Lord, I have committed sins, but I won't repeat them.' Chant His name and purify your body and mind. Purify your tongue by singing God's holy name." "Again, you find that the water of a reservoir dug in a meadow is evaporated by the heat of the sun. Likewise, the water of the reservoir of sin is dried up by the singing of the name and glories of God.” “Repeat His name and sin will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on.” “If a man has the firm conviction that God alone is the Doer and he is His instrument, then he cannot do anything sinful.”⁴⁷ “When a man merges himself in God, he can no longer retain wicked or sinful tendencies.” “The Lord says in the *Gita*, 'O Arjuna, take refuge in Me. I shall deliver you from all sins.' Take shelter at His feet. He will give you right understanding. He will take entire responsibility for you.” “A man should have such fiery faith as to be able to say, 'I have uttered the name of God; how can I be a sinner?' Imagine a man repeating the name of Hari day and night and at the same time saying that he is a sinner!” “Heinous sins—the sins of many births—and accumulated ignorance all disappear in the twinkling of an eye, through the grace of God. When light enters a room that has been kept dark a thousand years, does it remove the thousand years' darkness little by little, or instantly? Of course, at the mere touch of light all the darkness disappears.”⁴⁸

Swami Shivananda responded to the confession of guilt of another person, “‘Maharaj, I have done many awful things in my life. I am a great sinner. Kindly accept me as a disciple and be gracious to me; otherwise, what will happen to me? I am afraid, you too will condemn me if I tell you all the sins that I have committed in my life.’ [Shivananda responded] child, you need not be afraid. From today you are free from all sins.... [The Lord] is the Ocean of selfless mercy. He is kind to those who are lowly. He is the Redeemer of souls. You have taken refuge at his feet. From today you have a new body—you are reborn. You are no longer a sinner, my child. From today you are one of his children and servants. Do you understand me, my child? [He] has taken you in his arms, shaking the dust and dirt from your body. From now on forget all your past misdeeds.... Sins are like a mountain of cotton. Even as a tiny spark of fire can reduce to ashes the mountain-high cotton, so does a little of Divine grace remove heaps of sins.... Blessed are those who repent, for

they shall see God. Don't be afraid. The Lord will certainly redeem you. To Him no sin is too great. He was born to redeem people like you. He is the Indwelling Spirit, residing in every heart. He has been gracious to you, knowing full well your past, present and future. Be wholly resigned to Him. From now on He is holding you by the hand. He will not let you slip any more. Have no worry, my child. Call upon Him earnestly. He will assuredly come to your rescue and bring you deliverance.”⁴⁹

It was explained by Swami Brahmananda that, “The sins of many births can be wiped out in a moment by one glance from the gracious eye of God. What is morality? If one acquires devotion to God, morality and purity will follow without one even trying to be moral or pure”⁵⁰ “Heaps of cotton can be burnt with one matchstick; similarly, one gracious glance from God can wipe out mountains of sins. The man who appears as a sinner today may be a saint tomorrow.” “[In answer to the question:] ‘Holy sir, we are worldly people. We have so many attachments and are confronted by so many obstacles. What are we to do?’ Pray to the Lord. Talk to Him! Through His grace mountain-high obstacles are blown away as easily as a heap of ashes.”⁵¹ “Many sinners have become pure and free and divine by taking refuge in the name of God.... Sin exists only in man’s eye. In God’s eye there is no sin. One glance of His and the sins of many, many births are wiped away.” “Many holy men, after leaving the physical body, live in subtle, spiritual bodies, and help earnest religious aspirants in different ways.”⁵²

Another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Turiyananda (1863-1922) recited the quotation, “The Lord says in the *Gita*, ‘Even if a very wicked man worships Me, with devotion to none else, he should be regarded as good, for he has rightly resolved. Soon he becomes righteous, and attains to eternal peace. O son of Kunti, boldly canst thou proclaim that My devotee is never destroyed.’ Even if the greatest villain resigns himself entirely to Him, he must be considered a devotee. And soon he becomes righteous. Through His grace he no longer remains a villain but becomes a pious man. An expert dancer never takes a wrong step. No sin can possibly be committed by him who surrenders himself to God, although he might have committed many misdeeds before.”⁵³

For a Christian to be born again or regenerated is a gift from God through faith in Christ. Just as our physical birth resulted in a new individual entering the earthly realm, our spiritual birth results in a new person entering the heavenly realm. The new birth is a holy, and heavenly birth that results in our being made spiritually alive by Christ. The regenerated person undergoes a transformation from

the state of unrighteousness to the state of holiness. Spiritually, it means that God brings the person to new life from a previous state of separation from Him. As the believer then progresses in his religious life, he continues to receive God's grace both directly as well as through the sacraments. "After regeneration, we begin to see and hear and seek after Divine things; we begin to live a life of faith and holiness. Now Christ is formed in the hearts; now we are partakers of the Divine nature, having been made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). God, not man, is the source of this transformation (Eph 2:8)." Regeneration begins the process of sanctification wherein we become the person God intends us to be. Redemption offers several benefits: eternal life in the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3), forgiveness of sin (Eph. 1:7), abundance of grace (Rom. 5:17), peace with God (Rom 5:1), the Holy Spirit within you (1 Cor. 6:19-20), and adoption into God's family (Gal. 4:5).⁵⁴

If there is an obstacle to our spiritual progress that we cannot overcome we can follow the following procedure. First, admit we are powerless to overcome this obstacle. Next, become aware of the fact that we are not the doer of our action. Realize that Brahman-God and/or our Chosen Ideal has the power to remove our obstacles. Then make a decision to humbly ask Brahman-God to remove our shortcomings. In this manner we improve our conscious contact with the Divine.⁵⁵ When we try to change ourself we work on our conscious mind but the Lord works on both on our conscious and unconscious mind.

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- ⁶ Shivananda, pp. 66, 70, 90, 217, 260; Tipple, pp. 201-03.
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⁴⁹ Tipple, pp. 522-23.

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⁵⁵ This approach is based partly on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous that originated with Bill Wilson (1895-1971) the co-founder of AA. Wilson was a friend of Vedantists Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley and visited the formers Trabuco College in the 1940s (Web:

<http://www.vedantawritings.com/HVS3.pdf>; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve-step_program;
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