

**Swami Vivekananda's Poem "To a Friend"** (Translation of "*Sakhār Prati*" by Swami Medhananda)

- [1] Are you looking for happiness here, O wise one,  
Where darkness is experienced as light, misery as happiness, disease as health,  
And where the newborn's cry is its only sign of life?  
Where the conflict of dualities runs ceaselessly, where father disowns son,  
Where "selfishness," "selfishness" remains ever the keynote—  
Where is there even the semblance of peace here?  
Who can escape this *samsāra*—this veritable hell mistaken for heaven?  
Where, tell me, can the slave go, whose neck is tied by karma's fetters?
- [2] Yoga and bhoga, householder life and Sannyāsa, japa and prayer, earning money,  
Vows, renunciation, and severe austerities—I have seen through them all.  
I realize now that there is not a trace of happiness, that life itself is a cruel irony.  
The nobler your heart, the greater is your sorrow—know this for certain!  
Oh great-hearted and unselfish Lover! There is no place for you in this world.  
Can a marble figure bear the blow that an anvil can?  
Be virtually insentient, crude in the extreme, with honeysweet words on your lips and poison within,  
Devoid of honesty, intensely selfish—only then will you find a place in this *samsāra*!
- [3] I have devoted half my life to the relentless pursuit of knowledge;  
For the sake of love, I have clutched at shadows lifeless, like one insane.  
For religion, I have explored many faiths, and how many days have I passed  
By the Ganga and other sacred streams, in cremation grounds and mountain caves, living on alms!  
Utterly alone, clad in rags, begging from door to door,  
The body broken under the weight of severe austerities—what wealth have I earned?
- [4] Listen, I will speak to you from my heart, I have discovered the true essence of life—  
There is only one ferry that can take us across the terrible ocean of *samsāra* buffeting us with its waves—  
Mantras and rites, control of breath, disputation, philosophy, science,  
Renunciation, enjoyment—all are mere delusions of the mind;  
"Love," "Love"—this is the sole treasure.
- [5] Souls and Brahman, human beings and God, ghosts, departed spirits, and so on,  
Minor deities, animals, birds, insects, and worms—this Love is at the heart of them all.  
"God," "God"—tell me, who else is this but Love?  
Who else but Love compels everyone in the universe?  
The mother sacrifices her life for her son, the robber robs—motivated by Love!!  
Though beyond speech and mind, Love is the foundation of happiness and misery.

She comes in the form of Mahāśakti Kālī, the form of Death, and also in the form of a mother’s love.  
Disease and grief, the plight of poverty, dharma and adharma, merit and demerit—  
These are but various ways of worshipping Her!  
Tell me, what can the *jīva* do on its own?

[6] Deluded is he who seeks happiness, insane is he who seeks misery—  
Insane, too, is he who longs for death, and immortality—a vain aspiration!  
However far you may go, mounted on your mental chariot,  
There still remains this same ocean of *samsāra*, in which happiness and misery alternate without end.

[7] Listen, O wingless bird, this is not the way to make your escape!  
Again and again you receive blows, why do you exert yourself in vain?  
Leave off your studies, japa, ritualistic sacrifices, and strength; unselfish Love is the only true wealth.  
See, the moth teaches us a valuable lesson—in embracing the flame!  
The low insect is infatuated and entranced by beauty; your heart is drunk with Love.  
O Lover, cast into the flames the taint of selfishness!  
When will the beggar ever attain happiness? What good can come from being the object of charity?  
Give and don’t ask for return, if there is any true wealth in your heart!  
You are an heir to the Infinite, the Ocean of Love is in your heart,  
“Give!”, “Give!”—whoever asks for return, his Ocean dwindles to a mere drop!

[8] From Brahman down to the worm and atom, in all things the same God of Love dwells.  
Friend, offer mind, life, and body at their feet!  
These are God’s various forms right in front of you—  
Rejecting them, where are you looking for God?  
One who loves all beings truly serves God.