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Swami Abhedananda

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Foreword

It is with a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow that the publishers venture to offer to the reading public in this neat little volume seven of the unpublished lectures of Swami Abhedananda delivered in America; joy, because of its long looked-for emergence from the press, and sorrow on account of the passing away of the Swamiji Maharaj to whom it can no longer be presented.

Be that as it may, the publishers have one solace at least and that is, they claim to have placed before the seekers after Truth the impassioned utterances which, instead of mystifying the Truth as is being done nowadays in the name of hazy bizarre mysticism

open new vistas of thought and hold up before our mind's eye the evershining true ideal as envisaged by a Child of Ramakrishna.

Intellectual apprehension of the Reality in its fulness is impossible unless the Truth is revealed in our loftiest intuitive experience and that is the key-note of the philosophy delineated in these pages. But though intuition has been placed in a higher level than reason, reason is neither annulled nor contradicted. For intuition transcends reason and in the act of transcending fulfils it and completes it. Truth is alogical and its intuitive apperception does not mean going against the fundamental principles of thought or the canons of logic. Intellect has its place in any systematic presentation of views philosophical. And in these lectures the profound thinker marshals his arguments and presses his conclusion to a logical end without disparaging reason upon which rests the massive structure of any thoughtful production and exhorts his readers following his line of argument not to remain contented with a placid sort of belief in the creeds of their faith.

May these inspiring lectures, coming as they do from the lips of a Man of Realization, help the true and sincere seeker after Truth in unlocking that door which prevents the onrush of knowledge and may the glory of Truth be felt by us all.

तमेवैकं जानथ आत्मान-
मन्या वाचो विमुञ्चथामृतस्यैष सेतुः ।

Search after Truth

Search after Truth

Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus of Nazareth declared before the world, "And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." The knowledge of Truth (Satyam) brings freedom to the soul ; this is the quintessence of the religion preached by that illustrious personage, who is worshipped all over Christendom as the only begotten Son of God.

About five centuries before the advent of Jesus the Christ, Buddha declared in India, "Happy is he who has found the Truth. The Truth is noble and sweet ; the Truth can deliver you from evil. There is no saviour in the world except the Truth." Again, centuries before the appearance of Buddha, the holy sages and prophets of the Vedic period announced that Truth is the goal of the universe. From Truth we have come into existence, in Truth we live, and into Truth we return in the end. Whosoever has found

the Truth is happy, is free, and is blissful. On the one hand, all the religions—all the great spiritual teachers of the world of past ages have taught that the knowledge of Truth is the highest ideal, and it brings freedom to the soul; so, on the other hand, all the great metaphysicians, philosophers, and scientists of all ages, and all climes, after realizing that the knowledge of Truth is the highest goal of all knowledge, spared no pains in searching after it. To know the Truth, to realize the Truth has always been the one theme in the life of the kings and beggars, apostles and prophets of ancient and modern India. All philosophies, all sciences, all religions are nothing but so many attempts of the human mind to realize the Truth, to know the Eternal Truth.

Scientists of to-day have held the same ideal. The most eminent of modern scientists, Ernst Haeckel, writes: "Every effort of genuine science makes for a knowledge of Truth." If knowledge of Truth is the highest ideal of life, the question only arises in our minds, "What is the nature of that Truth, by knowing which the soul can become free and

attain to happiness, and what are the methods by which that knowledge can be acquired ?" In the first place, if we analyse the various meanings of this term "Truth," we shall find that in its most abstract sense the word "Truth" refers to something that is universal, that is one. Its meaning in its most abstract sense is all-embracing, universal ; but when it is limited by sectarian ideas, particular doctrines or dogmas, then it loses its original universal meaning. As, for instance, the theologians of antiquity in trying to explain that passage, "And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free," declared that Jesus the Christ was the only begotten Son of God, and that he came to this world to save mankind. This is the Truth and you must believe in it. Belief in this Truth will bring freedom of the soul from sin and bring pardon. That interpretation has been given by many theologians to this passage. While others have given a little different interpretation—that Jesus the Christ came to this earth to preach the highest Truth, and that his life was the standard of Truth. If we have faith in him and in his teachings, that faith will bring

knowledge of Truth, and we shall be able to appreciate what Truth is, and attain to freedom in the end. No other interpretation will appeal to such thinkers. On the contrary, such thinkers will not accept anything which is outside of the boundary line of their doctrines and opinions.

Similarly, if we go among the Buddhists, and enquire what they understand by Truth, they would declare : "The Truth is Buddha's essence, and the Truth will remain the ultimate standard by which we can discern false and true doctrines. Let us, then, revere the Truth ; let us enquire into the Truth and state it, and let us obey the Truth. For the Truth is Buddha our Master, our Teacher, our Lord." As the Christians hold Christ, his life and his teachings as the standard of Truth, so among the Buddhists you will find that they hold Buddha, his life and his teachings as the standard of Truth. Now here we see limitations. If we go to the Mohammedans, we will find that Mohammed is the standard of Truth, and his teachings are Truth. They say, "You must have faith in his teachings, if you will be saved." As

the Buddhists will not accept anything outside of the teachings of Buddha, so the Christians do not accept anything outside of the teachings of Christ ; nor will Mohammedans accept anything outside the teachings of Mohammed.

By examining all these sectarian ideas we find that each has its limitations. That universal meaning which was almost lost in the mass of dogmas, doctrines, theories and ceremonials has now been recovered and revealed once more by the scientific thinkers of the present age.

We are no longer referring to the sectarian idea of Truth, but we want to know the Truth. Scientific thinkers say knowledge of Truth is the ideal of life, but by Truth they do not mean sectarian truth ; they want to know the ultimate cause, the reality of the source. The search after Truth, according to the scientific thinkers, cannot be limited, cannot be found within the limits of any sectarian statements ; on the contrary, science has rejected all the sectarian statements regarding the creation of the universe, and its cause. Science has made free invasion into the

domain of nature and has discovered many truths, which were truths unknown to the writers of the so-called revealed scriptures of the world. It has taken its stand upon reason, and has rejected all that is blind faith.

Five centuries before Christ, Buddha realized this fact, and he understood that blind faith or belief in a set of doctrines or dogmas would not help one in the search after Truth, and, therefore, he declared before his disciples, "Do not believe in what ye have heard; do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations; do not believe in anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many; do not believe merely because the written statement of some old sage is produced; do not believe in conjectures, do not believe in that as Truth to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders; after observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it." Mind, this was uttered by Buddha five hundred years before the Christian era. The same

spirit which guided the ancient seekers after Truth in India, and which resulted in the discovery of the law of evolution, and many other moral, philosophical and spiritual laws, which govern or which underlie all phenomena—that same spirit has also forced the scientific thinkers to find out the errors of the scriptural theories, doctrines and dogmas, and has also made them reject and throw aside all these errors as the result of ignorance.

For two thousand years the prevailing idea has been that this world was created six millenniums ago, in six days, out of nothing by some extra-cosmic Being. Has this belief done any good ? On the contrary, history tells us that it has done more harm than any good. It has forced the priests to persecute Giordano Bruno, Copernicus, Galileo, who were all imprisoned and tortured, because of their denial of scriptural dogmas which were upheld by the church. For this reason Bruno was burnt alive in the streets of Rome in A. D. 1600. But to-day the theory of evolution has given a death blow to the theory of Special Creation in the Genesis ; we know that that description is nothing but a myth ; there is no truth

in it. No scientist will accept it as truth. And those who do not believe in such an erroneous and dogmatic statement have now gained much in knowledge through science, have discovered new laws, and have gained a new revelation.

If we remember the meaning of truth, that that which remains permanently, that which does not change, is the ultimate reality of the universe, then we cannot accept anything that is subject to change as the ultimate Truth. The theory of creation would have been true, I mean, the theory of creation that is given in the Genesis—if science had supported it, if the theory of evolution were not a fact. To-day the theory of evolution is a fact, so we cannot believe that the earth was created before the sun, that everything was created for the earth, and that man is the lord of the earth, of everything, and that all the lower animals were created for the pleasure of man. This was an idea among the Parsees and one which was accepted in those days ; but when we stand upon reason we find that such ideas, having their origin in ignorance, not in absolute knowledge, must go. We are in search

after the absolute Truth, that which does not change. Where can we find it? With the help of modern science we have learnt many things. We have learnt that this world is full of changes; that every phenomenon of this universe is subject to constant change. This is one of the points which is gathered from the study of modern science. The next point is that all these changes are caused by the natural processes of evolution, governed by natural laws. The third point is that the law of the persistence of force and the indestructibility of matter have shown that there is no such thing as the creation of something out of nothing, or the absolute annihilation of a particle of that which has once existed. That which exists to-day, existed in the past, and shall continue to exist in future in some form or other. For instance, if we burn a piece of wood, apparently, that piece of wood is destroyed; but at the same time, if we observe closely, we shall see that it has produced ashes, water, carbonic acid gas and nitrogen, the quantity of which is the same as that of that piece of wood. The form of wood is gone, but its elements remain the

same. The quantitative substance of that wood can neither be increased nor decreased by any power which human beings have learnt to wield.

So the form may be destroyed when a person dies. Death means the destruction of the form, or disintegration of that particular form into its elemental condition ; but the particles of matter, the forces, the energy, remain the same ; they are not destroyed, and the sum total of that energy, force and elements is always the same, and can neither increase nor decrease. There is no power in the universe that can destroy an atom or a force. But transformation of force, transformation of energy is possible ; light can be transformed into heat, heat can be transformed into motion, but it cannot be destroyed ; the difference is only in degree, not in kind. So, therefore, by studing science we come to the fourth conclusion that the sum total of all the forces of nature, the sum total of the cosmic energy can neither be increased nor decreased. Fifth, the sum total of matter and force which is exhibited in various forms, is beginningless and endless. No one has ever seen a particle

of matter coming out of nothing into some form of existence. So matter is uncreatable and indestructible, the same as the nature of forms. Force is uncreatable and indestructible, and the sum total of that matter and force can neither be increased nor decreased. Matter, energy and force are eternal, infinite, beginningless and endless, and these are the truths which are being carefully studied by the most advanced scientists of the present age. The appearance of things may change, a piece of stone may change into something else. Matter is indestructible, force is indestructible, ether is indestructible. The sum total of this universe in its most primordial condition is one homogeneous substance which we cannot perceive with the senses; we can arrive at this conclusion by experience and logical inference. No one has ever seen this substance, but it is known to us through the process of logic.

By studying the external world, the objective world, science helps us in arriving at the conclusion, that the universe with all its variety of phenomena has come out of this eternal substance which is beginningless and

endless. This substance is infinite. It does not change in quality or quantity. It may appear to change, taking different shapes and forms, but in reality it does not take form; forms exist in time and space, and this substance is beyond time and space. If you analyse time, you will find that it means nothing but "succession," which is a condition of thought; and space means "co-existence." One thought following another gives us a conception of intervals which we call time; while, when two ideas rise simultaneously, that which separates them is what we call space.*

But when there is no manifestation, there is neither succession, nor co-existence, *i.e.* neither time nor space. Therefore, the substance is not in space, but space is in the substance, and time is in the substance. The appearance of a thing may seem to be real, for the time being. For instance, we see in the dark a piece of rope; we imagine that it is a snake. We are frightened. Palpitation

* Vide Author's Philosophy of Work (American Ed.) pp. 16-17.

of the heart takes place ; but when we look at that thing in broad daylight, we find it was an error. Now you see that palpitation and fright which took possession for the time being was real ; we suffered from false perception. The reality was that it was not a snake, it was a piece of rope. This will give you an idea of the effect of the appearance of a thing. We see that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west; but this is not a fact, this is an error. The sun does not rise in the east nor set in the west, but we see it so. We do not call this ultimate reality. But the revolution of the earth on its axis produces this idea. As in going on a fast train it appears as if all the trees were going backward, so in the same way when we are moving 25,000 miles in twenty-four hours, we find that the planets and everything else are moving in an opposite direction. Thus we see many things as moving, but they are in reality the results of false perception. Although we perceive that our ideas are the results of these false perceptions, still they produce certain images in our minds. Then we jump to a conclusion, and that conclusion may be right or wrong ; so that the study

of science will help us to discriminate between false perception and right knowledge. We see the colour of the sky as blue. The cause of it was explained by the old Theologians that there was a blue dome over our head, and beyond that a heaven. But science has exploded that false explanation.

Science teaches us that space is infinite. We cannot imagine where it begins or where it ends.* From the study of modern science we have come to the conclusion that all this variety of phenomena has been produced by the processes of evolution from one homogeneous mass, and that nothing besides is known. Our scientific researches begin upon sense perceptions, continue on sense perceptions, and depend upon sense perceptions. But that which is beyond sense

* But Vedanta tells that space is finite. It has a beginning and an end. And this conclusion has also been confirmed by the scientists of the twentieth century. In the Taittiriya Upanishad we find that space arose from the Atman. "तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः" (Taitt. Up. 2.1) Atman *i. e.* the Knower transcends space and time. Material science in its search after Truth does not know what can exist beyond space and time.

perception, science cannot bring to us. Science says that beyond this we cannot go, that we must stop here. So modern science, after having described this substance as the cause of the universe, has stopped there. Some have gone beyond, but they are not considered as scientists; they have transcended the limit of science, and are metaphysicians or philosophers. But scientists tell us that this is false speculation. We cannot tell anything beyond our sense perceptions and that inference is not the same as direct perception. In India, centuries before Christ, seekers after Truth came to the same conclusion that there was one substance that was the mother of all substances; they called it Prakriti (Latin, Procreatrix) or cosmic energy which means the creative energy. Some understood by this term, Mother, and some called it Maya, the eternal energy or substance of the universe. According to Vedanta, Maya, called also the Undifferentiated, is the divine energy. It is beginningless and endless. It cannot be perceived by the senses; but it can be inferred by looking at the manifestations. If we observe the manifestations, and step

by step follow the processes of logic, and the deductions of reason, then we come to this homogeneous mass which manifests all these phenomena of the world.

Science has brought us almost to the gate of the reality of Truth ; go through, and you will find the Truth that is beyond time and space. But shall we remain content with knowing that there is one substance ? Science declares it to be insentient and that intelligence and knowledge have been produced by this insentient substance. Shall we remain here satisfied with this conclusion and seek no further ? The earnest seekers will go on. We must know the unknown, otherwise life would not be worth living.

The school of Vedanta tells the scientists that they have gone so far,—that they have studied the objective phenomena, which are part and parcel of the sense perceptions. But the objective world is only one-half of the source, and they cannot come to the same conclusion by studying one-half of the universe, nor can they discover the ultimate Truth by the study of the objective phenomena only. When the scientists study the subjective

world, they will come to another conclusion—perhaps a better one, they will discover the relations that exist between the subjective world and the objective world, and until that discovery is made the search after Truth is not complete. We must put the discovery of the external world aside and search further. All scientific researches begin with the sense perception ; that is the solid ground to begin with, and starting from that ground we go on to that which is beyond sense perceptions.

Physiology tells us that when we see a thing, a certain impression is produced by the light upon the retina and then that impression causes a stimulation which is carried by the optic nerves into the brain cells, where a certain molecular change is produced. This molecular change is translated by the conscious ego into a sensation. So in order to see a thing, we must have three things : the organs of sense, which must be in proper condition ; a retina, capable of receiving an impression, and an optic nerve to carry the impression to the brain cells, the molecules of which must be in a normal condition. Under these three conditions, the perception of the

thing with the eye, or the sight of the thing, is possible. Similarly, when we hear a sound, we must have auditory nerves to carry the impression to the brain cells. When these three things come together, we have an impression of light, sound, taste, touch or smell. These are the gates of knowledge, or perception. But that is not all. There must be mind behind these gates. When we go to sleep our ears are still open. But we do not hear in our deep sleep the noise going on in the street continuously. The physical conditions are all fulfilled. But mind is not there, therefore we hear no sound. In order to have the perception of sound, there must be mind attached to the organ of hearing. For instance, when you are sitting in your library reading intently, your mind is absorbed in the passage, or thought. The tick of the clock is going on all the time, yet you do not hear. Similarly, you may have your eyes wide open, but you do not see the clock—you are abstracted. Mind behind these brain centres must be active. And what does mind do? Mind cogitates, and has different impressions. Mind again after cogitating and reflecting

upon the particular nature or character of the sensation carries it, as it were, before intellect (Buddhi) or the determinative faculty or the faculty of judgment. Intellect compares it with other impressions stored up in the subconscious mind and comes to a certain determination that this is so or that it is not so. Thus when any sound is heard, it is intellect which determines whether it is a whistle of a steamer, a musical note or the cry of a baby. Then after determining its nature intellect ultimately presents it before the Subject or the Knower of all mental changes.

The Subject or the Knower is the conscious self in us. Mind and intellect are but instruments. Thus when the whole process is complete we are conscious of the object. Therefore Vedanta says that all knowledge comes from the Knower within us and not from the external objects. Do you think when you see a flower, the flower gives you some knowledge which you had not before? No. You are the source of all knowledge and the flower gives only a suggestion. It gives a knock to your *being*

and in response to that knock you bring out the knowledge from within. You have never learnt anything from outside.

The objects of which we are conscious are apparent objects or things as they appear to our senses. We cannot know things *per se*, as they are in reality, but only our relations to them, or, in other words, we know only those mental changes which are produced when we come in direct contact with the objects of senses. Therefore, by studying our internal nature or the subjective side of the universe, we realise the existence of the conscious self, which is the Knower of the intellect, mind with its various modifications and sensations and which is also the Knower of the external objects. This Knower cannot be known by anything else. Therefore the Vedanta asks :

"येनेदं सर्व्वं विजानाति तं केन विजानीयात्
.....विज्ञातारमरे केन विजानीयात्"

Brih. Up. 4. 5. 15.

"How can you know that by which you are capable of knowing everything else ?"

"By what can the Knower be known ?" Or, in other words, He who is the Source of Knowledge and from whom proceeds all knowledge cannot be known by mind or intellect. There is nothing in the universe which can help us in knowing the Knower or the conscious self. This conscious self is called in Vedanta Atman. It is not something which is produced by the mind, but it is always there as the Knower ; without that conscious self we cannot know anything.

This analysis will help us in understanding our subjective world. Psychological truths will help us in studying our own nature, and in realizing the ultimate Truth that underlies the subjective world, as physical science was absolutely necessary in studying the external world. So physical science and psychology are absolutely necessary in our search after Truth. And thus we shall be able to determine the connection between the Truth that underlies the objective world and the Truth which underlies the subjective world.

What is that Truth which underlies the objective world and the subjective world ?

We have found that the Truth is that substance which is one and not many. It underlies the objective world. And here we have found that the conscious self is the one fundamental Truth of the subjective world, because without the conscious self nothing can be known. All the schools of the Western philosophy have traced these phenomena, but have not been able to discover the connection between the truth underlying the subjective world and that of the objective world. Even Kant did not realise that the Thing-in-itself (Ding-an-sich) of the objective world and the "Ding-an-sich" of the subjective world are one and the same.

Vedanta, on the contrary, has gone beyond the position which Kant took, and has proved that the underlying reality of the subjective world and that of the objective world is the conscious soul.

Modern science studying the objective world has rejected God, and the existence of the soul as an entity, and there it has shown its limitations. Still, in studying Vedanta you will find that the same Truth which was discovered by the scientists, and by

different branches of science, has been accepted; yet the follower of Truth—the follower of Vedanta does not remain confined within any limitation. The Knower, or the self in us, is the Knower in the universe. Vedanta tells us that this conscious self, which is not the same as mind, which is not the same as intellect, but is a source of self-consciousness, is the same in all living creatures. Your Atman is not separate from that of others in its most universal sense. Every one has consciousness. You cannot bring any differentiations into that consciousness. Your conscious self is the source of all knowledge. The conscious self of the whole universe is the same everywhere, and, therefore, it is said that there is only one universal Knower in the universe, and that universal Knower is the only Knower. We, as individual knowers, are part of this cosmic Knower. The sum total of this conscious self is God. Beginning with the minutest animalcule up through the universe to the personal God, the sum total of this conscious self of the universe is one: it is the source of all knowledge, and the source of all phenomena, and from that

conscious self everything has come into existence. Mind and all the powers of the intellect are contained in this conscious soul. That which was considered by modern science as insentient, is considered by Vedanta as the Universal Being, the Reality, the unknown and unknowable Being. Vedanta tells us that it is true that it is unknown and unknowable by the mind, but it is known and knowable by our true self. By spirit spirit can be known. Spirit cannot be known by anything else. God can be known only by God. When a mortal comes face to face with God, he is no longer a mortal. We cannot face the Absolute until we become Absolute. Then all scientific knowledge, all philosophy, becomes religion. Vedanta can turn our science into a system of religion. We must stand on the solid ground of reason and ultimate research to understand the final goal of religion. Vedanta tells us that religion is nothing but the science of the soul, and that science of Being is not distinct and separate from the science of the universe—that universe is but one Being.

We have numberless cells in our body.

Each cell has its life, mind and memory and may be considered as conscious of itself. And so the whole universe may be considered as one universal whole, and each separate individual is like a cell in that cosmic body. Each individual has consciousness, has life of its own, but the sum total of these makes up the consciousness of the Universal Being. The Knower cannot be known by anybody else. When science tells us that this absolute unknowable Truth is unknown and unknowable, it presupposes the existence of a Knower, and that Knower is your true self. So the search after Truth may begin with the external phenomena first, but it must come back to your true self in the end. Then we have realized that the ultimate Reality of the universe is not far from us ; that it is, after all, our own Being, a part and parcel of the universe, the Soul of our souls, the Life of our life, the ultimate Reality, because God is the Cosmic Knower, the Reality of all. When we understand that, we are no longer confined within the limitations of the body, and disease and suffering no longer have dominion over us. Vedanta

comes to us then with the knowledge of Truth, and that freedom is freedom from the bondage of the flesh. All the desires which we have—the running after things of the world, are produced in us by our not knowing ourselves; so when we know our true self, we have known God, we have known the universe. Then we can never die, death being but a change of body. And knowing this, we spiritually worship the Supreme Being, the Highest Ideal.

After giving us the highest ideal of the absolute Truth, Vedanta tells us how to approach it; how to reach it. Each path is called a Yoga. There is Raja Yoga, to be attained through the practice of concentration, meditation, breathing exercises etc. Karma Yoga, the path of work; Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion and love. These different methods are preparatory. We can reach the highest goal by following any of these methods. These various methods are given to suit the different tendencies of individuals. Some have tendency to work and cannot concentrate their minds upon anything else. They are not blessed with intellect and so

must learn the path of work and purify their own hearts, for "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Thus studying Karma Yoga, when we learn the secret of work, all our acts will be looked upon as a form of worship; whether we walk, or shop, or gossip even—all will be looked upon as acts of worship. Then we can turn all the feelings of our heart to the ultimate Knower of all, and make our life happy and peaceful. So also human affection and human love, when turned towards the Reality of the universe, brings freedom from the bondage of flesh, and ultimately we realize that grand Truth—the Oneness with the Universal Being—which was realized by Buddha, Christ, and Ramakrishna. That Oneness is the ultimate goal of all religions, and cannot be realized until we know the Truth and become one with it. By following this analysis, we can easily understand how deep will be our search after Truth; how we must go below the surface of the world, before we can realize the ideal of all religions, and before we can declare as Christ did, "I and my Father are one."

When we realize our true birthright and become free from the bondage of hatred, discord, and greed for possessions, we let all else go but the heritage of peace in our souls ; then we transcend all conditions, for we know that death can never come to us. We can embrace Death and say, "Come, Sister Death ! come, take the offering of my material body ; we are glad to give it to you,"—but always knowing that we are eternal, and immortal, deathless and changeless.

Vedanta says that he who realizes the true Knower, the true self, which is deathless in our bodies, which is changeless in the midst of changes, attains to the Eternal Truth. His search after Truth is fulfilled, and he enjoys eternal peace and happiness in this life, and forever and ever he remains in the abode of infinite joy, infinite peace and everlasting life.

Worship of Truth

Worship of Truth

All religions unanimously declare that God is Truth, and Truth is God. Therefore we may say that whosoever worships the Supreme Being under whatsoever name and form, believes that the Truth is the object of his worship. The man who stands before a cross or an image or an idol which he believes to be the symbolic representation of his Divine Ideal and offers flowers and other sacrifices, burns incense and prays for help by addressing him as the Friend, Father, Lord or Mother of the universe or by some other name, knows that the object of his worship is the Eternal Truth, or, in other words, he believes that his God sees everything which is done before His image, that He accepts everything which is offered before Him and that He hears all the prayers that are uttered in His presence. In short, he believes that by worshipping the image he worships the Supreme Being who is the Absolute Truth and Reality of the universe.

Another man who condemns him as an idolator may worship his Ideal of the universal Truth by fixing his eyes upon the sky overhead and by pouring forth the supplications of his heart in the form of prayers asking forgiveness and pardon for his sins and seeking His grace which alone would deliver him from eternal perdition. He believes that his God dwelling above the blue dome of the heavens hears the prayers of His worshipper and sends His help and blessings to him and delivers him from all evils and sufferings.

One may worship God or the Absolute Truth through some Divine manifestation in a human form like Christ, Buddha, Krishna, or Ramakrishna. He believes that his Ideal is the incarnation of Divinity in a human form, a perfect embodiment of the blessed qualities of the Supreme Spirit, mysteriously manifested by the creative power of the Divine Energy (Prakriti). Each of these incarnations showed the most wonderful self-mastery, disinterested love for humanity, extraordinary self-abnegation, matchless renunciation of the attachment to the things and pleasures of the world, Divine wisdom,

uncommon spirituality and superhuman powers which are exemplary ideals, rarely to be discovered among ordinary mortals. The same Eternal Truth can be worshipped either through Christ or Krishna, or through Buddha or Ramakrishna, or any other manifestation like these. As to an orthodox Christian the life of Jesus the Christ appeals as the highest Ideal of Truth, so Buddha would appeal to a Buddhist; similarly, to others Krishna or Ramakrishna would appeal as the greatest manifestation of the Absolute Truth.

Each one of these Divine incarnations is great and glorious. Each one of them is like the open gate through which ordinary mortals can enter the abode of Truth. Each one is like a river which carries on its breast the rafts of the struggling souls to the infinite Ocean of Divinity. The followers and devotees of such a Divine incarnation believe in him as the Truth, and worship and pray to him as though they are worshipping the almighty Lord who pervades the universe. For instance, the orthodox Christians believe that Jesus the Christ, the only

begotten Son of the Heavenly Father came to preach the Truth, whatever he said was Truth, and his life or whole being was the embodiment of Truth. By worshipping him, they would worship the Eternal Truth; having faith in him they would have faith in God; being devoted to him they would be devoted to the Supreme Being who is the ultimate Reality of the universe. They say: If we appreciate him and know him, we have known the Truth and have fulfilled his saying—"And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." There is no other way of attaining freedom, that is, salvation from eternal perdition.

The followers of Buddha would declare: "The Truth is Buddha's essence, and the Truth will remain the ultimate standard by which we can discern false and true doctrines. Let us, then, revere the Truth; let us enquire into the Truth and state it, and let us obey the Truth. For the Truth is Buddha our Master, our Teacher, our Lord." Thus the standard of Truth among the Buddhists is the life and sayings of Buddha just as the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ are

with the orthodox Christians. Like the orthodox Christians,. the Buddhists do not accept or honour anything as Truth which exists outside the boundary line of their creed or doctrines taught by their Master. As Christ is regarded as the second person of the Christian Trinity, so Buddha and Krishna are regarded as the second person of the Hindu Trinity. Buddha lived about five hundred years before Christ and Krishna appeared about 1400 years before the Christian era.

The followers of Krishna regard him as the greatest incarnation of Divinity and believe that Krishna is the manifestation of the Truth and Reality of the universe. He is the personification, as it were, of the Eternal Truth, and the Saviour of the world. Whosoever worships him worships the embodiment of Truth. Krishna says in the Bhagavat Gita, the Song Celestial :—"I am the Father of this universe, the Mother and the Dispenser." (IX.17.) "I am the Goal, the Sustainer, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Shelter and the Friend. I am the Origin, the End and the inexhaustible

Seed of all phenomena." (IX. 18.) "By Me all this world is pervaded; My form is the unmanifested Truth. All beings dwell in Me." (IX. 4.) "Fools disregard Me, clad in human form, not knowing My higher Being as the great Lord of all." (IX. 11.) "I do give heat, withhold the rain and send it forth. I am Immortality as well as Death." (IX. 19.) "I am alike to all beings; hateful or beloved there is none to Me. They who worship Me with a whole-hearted love are in Me and I am in them." (IX. 29.) "I accept the offerings of flower, fruit and prayer when they are made through love and devotion by the pure-hearted devotees." (IX. 26.) Again Krishna says:—"What thou doest, what thou eatest, what thou offerest as oblation, what thou givest and the austerities that thou performest, do that as an offering unto Me. Thus thou shalt be liberated from the bonds of selfishness and evil and shalt attain to perfect freedom, peace and everlasting happiness." (IX. 27-28.) Furthermore he says to his followers:—"Giving up all the formalities of religion come unto Me, take refuge with Me, fix thy mind on Me, be devoted to Me, wor-

ship Me and adore Me. I shall make thee free from all sins, grieve not." (XVIII. 65-66.)

The spirit of these sayings is to be found in the sayings of Jesus the Christ. The followers of Christ believe that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, the middle and the end of all things. He is the Creator of all visible and invisible objects ; all this universe came into being through him, the Eternal Maker. Jesus said to his disciples : "I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." "I am the light of the world." Like Krishna Jesus the Christ said : "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Thus we see that as the orthodox Christians worship the Eternal Truth by worshipping Christ, the Buddhists by worshipping Buddha, so the followers of Krishna worship the same Truth and reach the same goal of salvation through the worship of Krishna, the Saviour of the world.

This form of worship consists in being devoted to any of these Divine manifestations, in obeying their commands, and in following

the path trodden by them. Like the followers of Christ the worshippers of Krishna find in him the expression of all the Divine qualities and love him as their Lord and Master. The one peculiarity, however, among the devotees of Krishna is that they worship their Divine Ideal not through fear but through intense love. Where there is fear of punishment there cannot be true love in the heart of the devotee. When the fire of Divine love is once kindled in the soul, it destroys all fear and instantly burns up all sins of the worst sinner. The followers of Christ worship their Lord through fear of punishment, while the followers of Krishna worship him through love and say that fear and true love cannot remain in the same heart at the same time.

Another thing should be noticed here that all forms of worship are based upon some kind of relationship between the worshipper and the object of worship. The relation of a servant to his master or that of a creature to his Creator is to be found among the Jews, Christians, Mohammedans as well as among many of the dualists in India. Jesus the

Christ introduced among the Jews a closer and more intimate relation—that of a son to his father. But among the worshippers of Krishna we find many who regard him not only as their Father but as their most intimate Friend. Just as in ordinary life we open our hearts to our dearest friends knowing that they will never chide us for our faults but will try to help us and sympathise with us, so there are devotees who regard their Divine Ideal as their nearest and dearest Friend, to whom they open the innermost secret of their hearts without any fear, and whose advice they follow, and whom they love, revere and worship as the dearest Friend in the whole universe. Through this worship they become one with the Absolute Truth.

There are some again who worship the Eternal Truth as manifested in the incarnation of Krishna through the most intense motherly love which a true mother can feel for her most beloved child. As a mother forgets herself and every thing of the world when she fondles her child, so there are women in India who think of themselves as the mothers of baby Krishna and love and worship the Lord

as their Blessed Child. Through that motherly love and devotion they become absolutely unselfish and gradually reach perfection. This may be shocking to some, but for the Christian women it would be the easiest path, if they can think of themselves as the mothers of baby Jesus and love him as their child.

There is another and the most sacred relation that is cultivated by some of the followers of Krishna. It is the love of a bride for her lover. According to these devotees God is the Eternal Lover of all mankind. They say: Let all our passions and emotions go up unto Him; they are meant for Him. If they go toward any other mortal object, they would miss their mark. All passions and desires must go to God. Who in this universe is more fitted to become the perfect lover than the Eternal Truth symbolized in the form of Krishna? Thus by giving all passions and directing all emotions to God these devotees become free from their sting and from all earthly attachment and ultimately reach perfection. This would be the easiest method for those who follow the path of love. In Krishna-worship all human

relations can be established with the Lord and each of them becomes the means of the realization of the Absolute Truth.

There is another way of worshipping the Eternal Truth or the infinite and supreme Lord of the universe, who dwells in all beings and who is the life and soul of all animate and inanimate objects of the world. He is not outside nature but immanent and resident in nature. He is the one stupendous Whole of which the manifested phenomena are but parts. The gross material universe is His physical body. He sees through all eyes, hears through all ears, eats through all mouths, feels through all hearts, thinks through all minds and reasons through all intellects. His will is the cosmic will of which our individual will is but a fractional part. He is called in Vedanta "Iswara," which means the Creator i. e., projector of the phenomenal universe and the governor of all. According to this conception Iswara is the first-born Lord of the universe or the first manifestation of the unmanifested Absolute Truth. In other words, He is the highest possible

reading of the unknowable Eternal Realty by the human mind.

All Divine incarnations like Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Ramakrishna are but the particularized or individualized manifestations of this one universal Whole. The worship of this Whole or Iswara includes the worship of all Divine incarnations as well as the worship of the personal God of the various sects of the dualistic or monotheistic religions. By loving the Whole we love all parts, however great or small they may be. In fact, to love the whole universe which is the highest ideal of all religions is possible only by way of loving Iswara in whose body dwell all animate and inanimate objects of the universe.

Iswara, again, is not only the Father but also the Mother of the universe. Some worship the Fatherly aspect and call Him the Father in Heaven, while others worship the Motherly aspect or the Creative Energy of the same stupendous Whole and call it the Mother of the universe, and according to them, it is appropriate to call that Divine Energy the Mother rather than the

Father. They say : "Thou art the Creative Energy of the Absolute Truth. Of Thee is born every thing of this world, therefore, Thou art the Mother of the universe." "O Mother of all ! Thou art the infinite source of all powers and forces of nature. Thou art the cause of creation, evolution and dissolution of the world ; from Thee we have come, in Thee we live and into Thee we return in the end. Therefore, O Mother Divine, have mercy upon us, Thy children, and protect us with Thy compassionate face." Such is the prayer of the worshippers of the Mother of the universe. They consider the Absolute Truth and the Eternal Energy as inseparable and worship the two in the form of the Divine Mother. They regard womanhood as the representation of the Divine Motherhood and like devoted children they love and adore the Mother of all. A devotee of the Iswara or of the Divine Mother worships his Ideal through whole-hearted love and devotion and resigns his individual will to the almighty Will of the Iswara or the Divine Mother. He realizes that all living creatures are the

children of God, they are parts of His body, consequently they are inseparable from Him. As he loves the Whole he cannot help loving the parts also. For this reason, he loves all human beings, nay, lower animals also equally and cannot hurt or injure any one whether physically or mentally. He feels for every body. From the minutest insect to the highest man all beings are his friends, because they are parts of the Whole. Therefore he has no enemy.

Such a devotee alone can really love one's enemies. Even the most venomous snakes and ferocious tigers are not excluded from his all-embracing love. He is ready to sacrifice his body for the good of humanity. He works for the good of all without thinking of reward or any other return. Love is the chief motive power in all the actions of his body and mind. Having become dead to the lower self he lives in the world as a free soul ever ready to lift the burden of and thereby relieve the suffering humanity and to carry it upon his own shoulders. His strength is unlimited. His powers are extraordinary. His whole body and mind are but the instru-

ments through which the Divine powers manifest themselves on the phenomenal plane. No one can be compared with such a true devotee of the Iswara or the Divine Mother. Thus he becomes perfect even in this life.

Lastly, there are devotees who worship the Absolute Truth in its purely unmanifested aspect. Their worship does not consist in symbols, ceremonies, rituals, prayers, nor in the emotions and feelings of the heart; but they worship the Truth through the path of knowledge. Their worship is not limited by belief of any kind. They choose the path of right discrimination and knowledge. They understand by Truth the unchangeable Reality which forms the background or the Noumenon behind all phenomena. It is the pure Existence which never changes. It is called in Sanskrit "Satyam"—"That which is" or "That which exists in all times and under all circumstances without being subject to any change whatsoever."

The seekers after Truth carefully studying the phenomena of the universe learn (1) that every object thereof is subject to constant changes, (2) that these changes are caused

by the natural process of evolution and they are governed by natural laws and (3) that the law of the persistence of force and the indestructibility of matter have proved that in the midst of the constant changes of the universe there is no such thing as creation of new matter or absolute annihilation of a particle of what once existed. That which exists to-day existed before and shall exist in future in some form or other. For example, when we burn a piece of wood, apparently it is destroyed. But a closer observation will show that though burning destroys both wood and air, it produces at the same time other things such as, ashes, water, carbonic acid gas, nitrogen exactly equal in amount, though different in properties. So of all the existing things of the world, appearances or forms can be changed, but the quantitative amount of substance that was in the thing can neither be increased nor diminished by any power which a human being has learnt to wield. Thus we understand that the substance of the universe is indestructible. Again the total amount of the cosmic force or energy is a constant quantity. Both the

substance and energy of the universe are beginningless, endless, eternal and infinite. Therefore, the underlying truth of the phenomenal appearances of the objective world is one eternal, indestructible, all-pervading substance which contains the potentiality of all forces and powers that are manifested in the universe. It is beyond comprehension or cognition of human minds.

The same eternal substance which manifests itself as the objects of the phenomenal world like the sun, moon, stars, earth and other planets, as well as the organic and inorganic bodies, appears also as the eternal subject or the soul of the subjective universe. It is beyond sense perception, beyond mind and its functions, and above thought. It is the source of consciousness, the basis of intelligence and the foundation of knowledge. It does not change with the changes of body and mind. It is the one unchangeable Truth in the midst of all subjective changes. It is birthless and deathless. It is the one Absolute Being dwelling in all things, yet hidden by the veil of time, space and causation. It is called in Vedanta

"Brahman." The worshipper of this "Brahman" or the unchangeable Truth of the objective and the subjective universe going through the path of right discrimination rejects all the phenomenal names and forms, whether physical or mental, by saying "Neti, Neti," "not this, not this." Subjugating the senses he gains perfect control over his mind and concentrates upon the Brahman. Ultimately he enters into the state of superconsciousness and realizes that the Eternal Truth which is worshipped by various individuals under different names and forms, is not very far from him—it is rather inseparable from his own being, nay it is one with it. Having acquired this knowledge of oneness he devotes his whole heart and soul to that Eternal Truth and worships it in and through all the actions of his body and mind by constantly remembering that it is the essence of his phenomenal being, the Life of his life and the Soul of his soul. It is the only Reality. Everything outside of it is unreal in the truest sense of the word. His knowledge of *Brahman* is the highest kind of the worship of Truth.

In the fire of *Brahman* he pours the whole phenomenal world as an oblation and watches how it vanishes into nothingness. In his worship he needs nothing but constant remembrance or meditation. Through ceaseless devotion to Truth he crosses the ocean of death, attains to immortality and perfect freedom and becomes one with the Absolute Brahman.

Thus we see that there are various ways of worshipping the Eternal Truth. Many are the paths by which the sincere and earnest souls can reach the ultimate goal of all religions. Each of the revealed scriptures describes a method of worshipping the Truth, gives a particular form and a particular name to it, and asks its votaries to denounce all other forms of worship. But Vedanta embraces all the scriptures of the world, accepts the different ideals and methods of worship given in them, and teaches that all worship eventually goes to the same Truth which is one and universal, and that all religions are but so many paths which end in the realization of the same all-pervading Being, whether it is called

Jehovah, Father in Heaven, Christ, Buddha, or Krishna, Allah, or Brahman.

"रुचीनां वैचित्र्यादृजुकुटिलनानापथजुषां
नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ॥"

As rivers rising from different mountains run crooked or straight into one ocean, so all forms of worship rising from different points of view run crooked or straight into the One Absolute Eternal Ocean of Truth which is the goal of all religions.

Faith and Knowledge

Faith and Knowledge

Faith in God is the corner-stone of all the great mansions of the religions of the world. It is the life and soul of all scriptures among all nations, ancient or modern and it is the foundation of all creeds of the various sects and denominations. The Hindus, Zoroastrians, Christians and Mohammedans have been preaching for centuries that faith in God can achieve wonders, and that it is the only means of attaining salvation. A Hindu sage of this age said : "He who has faith has all, and he who lacks in faith lacks in all." Spiritual life begins with faith while doubt is the sign of spiritual death. In the teachings of Jesus the Christ we find similar expressions. After destroying the fig tree, Jesus said to his disciples : "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; it shall be done. And all things, what-

soever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matt. XXI. 21-22.)

Faith-healers of to-day know what tremendous power faith has. The faith-healers in India have understood this power of faith from very ancient times, and they have cured many diseases in the same way as in America the Mental Scientists, Divine healers, Christian Scientists, New Thoughtists do to-day. So there is no question about the fact that faith can do wonders. Human mind possesses that wonderful power which we call faith. It may be directed towards different objects of the world or towards God. History tells us that one may have faith in a particular name and form of God, and through that faith one can achieve wonders, while another may attain similar results through his faith in a prophet, or a spiritual master or saint or an imaginary Mahatman or an image of a certain personified ideal or any idol, or one's own self. It does not make any difference by what name we may call the object of faith; thus far it is true that faith is a great power. We are all familiar with this truth.

Now let us pause for a moment and ask ourselves what is the nature of this faith which has so much power. Is it a kind of dogmatic assertion of one idea in one's own mind ? Is it a kind of belief which is not based upon reason or experience ? Is it a kind of trust or confidence in a particular person or object ? Or does it mean a kind of mental conviction which proceeds from right reasoning, knowledge and experience ? Ordinarily we understand or rather use the words "faith" and "belief" as opposed to reason and knowledge. It is generally accepted that faith leads one to a realm where reason and knowledge cannot reach. It is used in the sense of a belief in something supernatural, supersensuous and superrational, as contradistinguished from reason or knowledge which depends upon observation, inference or upon the sensations, perceptions and impressions received through the senses. It means a firm conviction of the truth of what is declared by another simply on the ground of his truthfulness, or faithfulness, or intellectual conviction. This kind of faith is never backed by reason or knowledge. It is that which is

commonly known as blind faith. For instance, if we take for granted as truth any story or tradition because it has been handed down to us through generations or because it is written in a certain book without asking any further question but which is supported neither by reason, nor by experience, nor by evidence of any kind, then that belief will be blind faith.

Suppose we blindly believe in the story of Jonah and the Whale. Do you think that it will reveal any truth or bring any good to us or make us better than what we are now ? Certainly not. It is nothing but a superstitious belief, or a blind faith. We may believe in such stories for years, we may blindly accept them as true but by that we shall not gain anything nor come nearer to truth ; on the other hand we shall remain deluded and ignorant all the time. Suppose if we say to ourselves that body does not exist, will that make body non-existent ? No. It is a false belief, a blind faith. Blind faith proceeds from ignorance which is the mother of superstition and delusion ; consequently it ultimately leads to ignorance. We should learn to

distinguish this blind faith from true faith. There is no other word in the English language more abused than this word "Faith." Ordinary people use this term with so many different meanings. What the orthodox Christian churches ordinarily call faith is nothing but sheer credulity. It means the same thing as was meant by the old Church Father Tertullian when he said "Credo quia impossibile est," that is, "I believe because it is impossible." It reminds me of the answer which a Sunday-school girl gave when she was asked what faith was. She replied that it was believing something that one knew was not true.

We often hear people say, "We have faith in the life of such and such a great man who was born in Nazareth nearly two thousand years ago, who lived in a certain way or did or said certain things." Faith has nothing to do with the biography of that great man. The facts about the life of a man, however great he might be, are matters of history; they are not to be accepted in a lump by anybody as an object of faith, but they are for critical scientific examination just as much

as the life of Socrates, Plato or Shakespeare. If we do blindly accept it upon the authority of some writer, it will not be faith but sheer credulity, and it will do no special benefit to us. Blind faith is considered by orthodox churches as a virtue. It takes the name of religious faith when it means a belief in absurd dogmas and doctrines, in miracles and supernatural agencies which are hopelessly contradictory to reason as well as to the facts of science and the laws of nature. It is the same as what we call superstition. Superstition always contradicts the well-known laws of nature and is therefore irrational. Credulous people do accept any absurd thing or statement as truth without making proper investigation and waste a great deal of their time and energy in supporting it.

Let me remind you the story of Golden Tooth mentioned by Fontenelle * in his "Histoire des Oracles." In 1595 a child of seven was found in Silesia to have one of its first double teeth a gold tooth instead of an

* A celebrated French writer. Born at Rouen, in 1657 and died in Paris, in 1757.

ordinary tooth. The rumour spread rapidly like wild fire. The Professor of Medicine in the University of Helmstadt whose name was Horotius, wrote the history of this tooth declaring that it was miraculous and that it was done by God to console the Christians for the ravages of the Turks. The explanation was accepted seriously by those who heard the rumour. A second account of the tooth was written in the same year by Rullandus and after two years another scholar, Ingolsterus by name, wrote a third account contradicting some minor particulars given in the first two treatises. A little later another great savant named Libabius collected all that had been said and written about the tooth and published a volume describing how wonderful and miraculous this tooth of gold was. Those learned works brought the child with its gold tooth before the public with great prominence. At last a goldsmith who was of a sceptical nature came to see the child and after close examination discovered that a cap of gold-leaf was very skilfully placed upon the natural tooth of the poor child. But treatises and books had been

written and theories and explanations had been given by great scholars before any one thought of consulting a goldsmith or a dentist.

We find many similar instances in these days. Credulous people still believe that Tibetan Mahatmas send letters by occult powers to American Theosophists living in New York. This kind of credulity may be called blind faith. At one time a priest who was administering the sacrament held up before the communicants a piece of old bread which was tinged with reddish mould and declared, "You can see for yourselves that the emblems have verily been turned into the real flesh and blood of the crucified Lord." The credulous people believed it. But the microbe that caused the red tinge on the bread must have laughed in its sleeve and felt highly honoured! We must first of all make our mind free from such credulity and blind faith by bringing the light of reason and knowledge. In India about 500 years before the Christian era, when Buddha lived, the masses of people had this kind of blind faith; in order to make their minds free from all sorts of superstitious beliefs

which got firm hold on them, Buddha said to his disciples :—1. Do not believe in what ye have heard ; 2. do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations ; 3. do not believe in anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many ; 4. do not believe merely because the written statement of some old sage is produced ; 5. do not believe in conjectures ; 6. do not believe in that as Truth to which you have become attached by habit ; 7. do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders ; after observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it (Kalama Sutta). That faith is beneficial which is founded upon right knowledge, right reason and is supported by proper evidence.

Is true faith, then, the same as scientific faith ? The study of science reveals to us that all hypotheses and theories of modern science are based upon what is called scientific faith. All scientific generalisations and explanations of the phenomena depend upon this scientific faith or intellectual conviction with-

out which our knowledge will keep us within the limits of sense perceptions, and the discovery of any truth that lies beyond those limits will be absolutely impossible. In Physics the theory of the vibratory movement of ether, in Chemistry the hypothesis of atoms and their affinity, in Biology the theory of the molecular structure of living protoplasm—in all these and similar other theories and hypotheses, we exercise our imagination which fills up the gaps left by the intelligence in our knowledge of the connection of things. Although they are approximations to truth, still they are indispensable for all true science. Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and other branches of science cannot go very far without depending upon some theories, nor can they explain the world of phenomena without assuming a common cause which may remain obscure in character.

We do not know the nature of the force of gravity, still we believe in the law of gravitation. And that belief is so strong that it cannot be shaken by any theory of the Bible or any other revealed scripture. Similarly, the ether of the physicists, the

atom of the chemists, the heredity of the evolutionists—all these are nothing but conceptions of some great theories which are the outcome of the scientific faith. That faith is indispensable for all scientific discoveries. But scientific faith always stands upon observation and experiment and never contradicts any of the truths or laws discovered by science. It is that power of the mind by which we receive and hold the truth until some other higher truth is discovered. In science we accept that theory or concept as true which for the time being explains most of the facts leaving the mind open to higher truths and better explanations. Consequently, the faith in such a theory is relatively true but not absolutely. In short, when faith is joined with the knowledge of science, and when reason approves of what faith accepts as true, it is rational and not blind faith.

Thus we see scientific faith which helps us in discovering the higher truths of nature must start from reason, must be based on the solid foundation of reason, observation, and knowledge and not on tradition or heresy. Otherwise it will become blind faith and

superstition. Scientific faith is relatively true, but true faith is that which never changes but is always the same. As the Absolute Truth is unchangeable, so true faith is absolutely unchangeable.

It is that kind of faith which establishes some Truth contradictory to that which appears to our senses to be true. For instance, we see the sun rises in the east and sets in the west; this apparent knowledge which we gather through sense perception is to be corrected by a belief in the rotation of the earth upon its axis which we can never perceive by senses, but still it is a rational faith. As long as it is supported by right reasoning, it has more power than our belief in our sense perceptions. Senses often delude us because they are imperfect. They prevent us many a time from knowing the real nature of things. Optical delusions like the blue colouring of the sky and so forth produce a kind of false belief in our mind. It should be corrected by right reasoning and right knowledge. And faith which rests upon right knowledge is much more powerful than that which proceeds from wrong perception, just as the Copernican

theory and conception of the universe is stronger than the Ptolemaic conception.

True faith is the unerring handmaid of right knowledge. Therefore as right knowledge is a great power so true faith is a tremendous power. True faith and true knowledge come simultaneously. Wherever there is true faith there is also right knowledge and vice versa. Blind faith being opposed to right knowledge is also opposed to true faith. By right knowledge we mean the realisation of the true nature of a thing. If we want to have true faith in a thing, we must have to realise or know exactly the absolute and unchangeable nature of that thing. There is only one unchangeable Reality of the universe which is called God. Therefore true faith in God involves right knowledge or realisation of God and, conversely, knowledge of Self produces true faith in one's real nature or Self or Atman. As long as we do not realise what God is, we imagine that God must be like this or that which is nothing but projection of our ideas or we take for granted without questioning certain statements either from a

scripture or from some other authority ; and if instead of going further we delude ourselves by imagining that we have true faith in God, the result will be that we shall not be able to realise God, so long as we are thus deluded. All progress will be stopped. Consequently true faith will never come. True faith does not come in confinement but it appears in the mind which is unbiased and always open to Truth and which is able to transcend all the limitations of time, space and causation.

The first sign of true faith is Shraddha (শ্রদ্ধা), i. e., that frame of mind which is to be found in a true enquirer or an earnest seeker after Truth ; that Shraddha is the first stage of faith which leads to the realisation of Truth. It is that earnest and unbiased attitude of mind which is receptive of Truth and which leads the searching mind step by step into the realm of the Unknown and ultimately ends in the realisation of the Unknown. First of all, there must be a firm conviction regarding the existence of Truth. Otherwise the search after Truth will be of no avail. God is at first unknown to us. We first believe in His existence, then we approach that Unknown

Being at first by guesses, by imaginations, and by projecting our thoughts and ideas and personifying them ; we think that He is outside of us ; then we search here and there ; in this search after that Unknown, weak intellect having failed to find any reality becomes atheistic and agnostic ; and those who have blind faith not guided by proper reason and knowledge stop somewhere and mistake the guesses for Truth.

But a true seeker does not stop until he has realised it. He suddenly turns the course of his search from outside to inside ; he dives deep into his heart and there he discovers the Reality and then he realises God who is enthroned within his heart. Then God and his real Self are no longer separate, but are one. Then he says, "I am He." Then and then alone comes true faith in God. If the whole world stands against him and denies what he says, he cannot think or say in any other way. Therefore, true faith in God and realisation of God as the Soul of our souls within us are simultaneous. True faith in God is impossible without the realisation of God within us or without the know-

ledge of our real Self. This realisation again comes through ordinary faith or conviction that there is a God; because it is more perfect to know an object in itself by means of its immediate presence than to arrive at its knowledge by hearing the teachings of others or by reading books. It is a state in which one begins to taste inwardly what has been embraced and held in faith so long. When we know our true Self we know God. Again knowing and being are the same. Bacon said, "The truth of being and the truth of knowing is all the same." "A man is but what he knoweth."

Therefore it is said in Vedanta that the Knower of God is God Himself. When we realise our true Divine nature, all the powers that are in God gradually begin to flow through our soul. Such a man who has realised the oneness between God and Soul is a God-man on earth. He is free. He cannot do anything wrong. At every step he realises that God's will is working through his mind and body. He feels it, he is conscious of it. He has lost his idea of separateness; he has bathed in the ocean of Unity;

his ego has become transformed into Divine Spirit. He has crossed the ocean of death by the bark of the knowledge of his Supreme Self. Such men are worshipped as living God on earth. They are the embodiment of Truth, Reality and Divinity. All the great founders of religions first attained to this realisation and then they appeared before the public. Therefore it is said in Vedanta that nothing can be higher than the right knowledge or realisation of Divinity in man, or one's Divine Self. Its another name is true faith.

A man who has not reached this highest realisation may believe in this or that, or assert or deny this or that, or have faith in God whom he does not know ; but it cannot be called true faith ; there is no life or strength in such a faith ; he will not manifest divine powers through his actions ; and his ego will not be transformed into Divine Ego. He may cure certain diseases such as headache or nervousness and so forth, but he will not be able to know the Reality of the universe, or God or his own nature. But the more we realise our Self or true nature, the higher we rise above the physical plane where

pain, disease, sorrow or suffering cannot reach. If simple assertion and denial can produce such results as we often hear, how much more can be achieved when the true knowledge of our own perfect nature and true faith in ourselves will come to us.

All the dualistic religions which believe in an extra-cosmic personal God say that if you do not believe in such and such a name and form of God, you are an atheist ; they do not say anything about the knowledge of Self. But Vedanta says, if you do not have faith in yourself you are an atheist. This Self we must at first learn to understand as one which is the Knower of body, senses, mind, intellect, feelings, sensations, and so forth. Self-analysis is necessary to come to the door of Self-realisation. But self-analysis of an impure mind will not reveal the true Self or Spirit. Mind must be properly trained in order to come straight to Truth without going astray. Untrained minds generally fail to understand the true nature of Self. Some look upon the Soul or Self as a wonder ; others speak of it with great astonishment ; others again hear of it as wonderful. Few

can comprehend it after hearing it described over and over again.* Such subtle and inscrutable being the nature of our Soul or Self or Atman, we ought not to neglect it nor deny its existence. Our first duty ought to be to find out who we are, and what the nature of our soul is. Vedanta has preached this unique method of realisation of God for centuries. I do not find this method in any of the dualistic systems of religions. The method is this, "First realise your higher Self or true nature. Do not bother your head about the attributes of God, whether He is Personal or Impersonal and so forth. All these questions will be answered when you know or realise your Atman or true Self." The result of such a method is that it denies the special necessity of all the rituals, ceremonies, forms, symbols, mythology, scripture, imagery and a host of other things which a dualist believes as absolutely necessary for realising God. It has simplified theology into philosophy, faith and its results into know-

* "आश्चर्यवत् पश्यति कश्चिदेनं
आश्चर्यवद्वदति तथैव चान्यः" etc.

ledge or realisation, salvation into freedom of the soul from the bondages of ignorance, superstition and so forth, and Truth or God into the Self or Reality in us. It is a great relief for the mind which is overloaded with all the paraphernalia of a dualistic creed. They have their use at a certain stage of religious development. But they are not necessary in every stage.

Faith in the dualistic conception of the extra-cosmic God does not help us to know our true selves, nor the true selves of others, nor the Reality of the universe ; while the knowledge of our Self or Atman brings us the knowledge of not only our immortal nature, but of every individual, and of all living creatures, and of the Reality of the universe. Therefore knowledge of Self is more potent than the blind faith in an extra-cosmic God whose existence is neither supported by science nor reason.

Faith in God as separate from the universe makes us separate from Him, from one another and also from the universe ; while knowledge of Self brings and shows us the harmony and oneness of Spirit in the variety of the

phenomena. Such a faith makes us always afraid of punishment and does not bring love in our soul because love means expression of the realisation of oneness ; it does not make us unselfish because the hope of reward is always predominant in the mind of a worshipper. But the realisation of our Divine nature makes us love all human beings, irrespective of their caste, creed or nationality, nay, all living creatures with equal kindness. Therefore it is more useful and uplifting. Such a faith forces us to disregard all knowledge which we gather from science or philosophy and to throw it aside as useless, while knowledge of our true Self makes the best use of everything and accepts every truth discovered by every branch of science and philosophy. It does not fear anything ; therefore it is stronger.

Knowledge or realisation of our Self or Atman makes us come direct to the intra-cosmic God immanent and resident in nature. It is infinitely more powerful than ordinary faith which is not attended with such a realisation. A sinner may have faith in God and may continue to be a sinner. But if he knows

what his real Self is, he is instantly transformed into a great sage. Knowledge of Self brings strength in one's self and that strength can overcome everything which stands in its way. The great Hindu Sage of the nineteenth century whose life and sayings have been published by Prof. Max Muller said, "As a man who is desirous of fishing in a lake or pond first goes to those persons who have fished in it and eagerly asks them whether there are big fishes in the pond or not, what kind of bait is necessary and so on; and having collected all informations and believing in the instructions of his friends he resorts to the pond with his rod, waits there throwing his line and allures the fish with patience and dexterity until he has succeeded in hooking a large and beautiful dweller of the deep; so a sincere and earnest seeker after Truth putting implicit faith in the instructions of Holy saints who have realised Divinity must try to catch and confine God in his bosom with the bait of devotion and the rod of the mind and hook of concentration. He must wait with patience until the Divine fish is caught and the Eternal Truth

is realised. Blessed is he who has attained such knowledge and realisation of the Divine Being; he is free, happy and divine even in this life."

Necessity of Symbols

Necessity of Symbols

The world needs to-day a universal religion, which will embrace within its unbounded arms all the established religions of the world, and which will give them their proper places which they deserve in this scale of religious revolution. The civilized world hears the cry of heresy and anathema, when a broad-minded theologian stands in the pulpit and dares to point out the error in the current beliefs, dogmas and creeds of a sectarian religion. However, the time has come, when we should show the courage of our convictions, stand up before the public and preach the gospel of Truth, without fearing any of the criticisms that may be levelled against us. The time has come, when we should preach in a prompt and triumphant voice before the world that Truth is eternal and that it cannot be monopolized by any sect or creed or religion.

Before we accept anything in the way of creeds, dogmas and doctrines, we must

exercise our own common sense, our own reason which God has given us to use ; and to make a proper use of it we must go down to the bottom of all dogmas, religions and creeds and try to understand what the original meaning was, and we should also try to show clearly the significance that lies behind all the forms of worship and behind all methods which the human mind has adopted, in order to reach God-consciousness.

Now we shall try to understand the meaning of symbol-worship and whether there is any necessity of symbols or not. In discussing this matter we find that all dualistic religions which advocate the worship of a personal God ask their followers to use some kind of symbol at the time of their devotional exercises. These symbols are either material objects of nature, figures, or pictures of some great personage, or concrete representations of some abstract ideas. The most prolific use of various kinds of symbols is to be found amongst the Hindus, Buddhists and Roman Catholic Christians. Upon the altar is kept the image of Jesus the Christ on the Cross, or the statue of Madonna with the baby

Jesus in her arms, with angels holding a crown over her head; the lighted candles, incense, flowers, prayers, incantations, different postures of the priests, their vestments, in short, everything that is used in cathedrals or churches, are symbols either of some being or of some thought, or of some abstract idea.

The Protestant Christians use largely the symbol of the Cross; some denominations have introduced the candles and incense, others have altars, some have pictures, either of Jesus the Christ or of his ascension, or of his resurrection, or of a crucifix on the wall. All Christians practise the sacrament and partake of the Holy Communion by eating the bread and drinking the wine, which are symbolic of the body and blood of their Lord. The ancient Greeks used to worship bread as Demeter (Ceres) and wine as Dionysus (Bacchus). This custom was prevalent amongst the ancient Egyptians, Persians, as well as amongst the Hindus of the Vedic period. It is still practised by the Buddhist Lamas in Tibet.

The Cross has been a religious symbol from pre-historic times among all nations.

Whatever importance the followers of Christ may attach to the worship of the Cross by connecting it with the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, it existed as a religious symbol for centuries before the birth of Christ, and was largely used as a sacred emblem by the Egyptians, Buddhists, Chinese, Persians, Hindus and other ancient nations of the world. There have been various forms of this Cross. The ancient Egyptians used a Tau Cross, the shape being like the English letter "T". The commonest of all the Egyptian Crosses, the Crux Ansata, was afterwards adopted by the Christians. A Cross with four equal arms was symbolized to represent the four elements of nature; when the form of the Cross consisted of two or four sceptres with a circle at the point of interception, it was said to indicate "divine potentiality;" it stood sometimes for "protective power," sometimes for "life to come." A long Cross surmounting a heart which we so often see in pictures in Christendom, meaning originally good or goodness, was used to be fixed upon the fronts of houses in Thebes

The Crux Ansata

and Memphis, intimating "This is the abode of the good."

The Egyptian symbols of five planets had a Cross connected with each. Among the Hindus of ancient India the Cross was used very largely as a religious symbol long before the time of Christ, or of Buddha who lived about 600 B. C. It was supposed to be the sign of good luck, longevity, prosperity, and happiness, a protector from evil, and its use connected with various religious rites and ceremonies. It was called in Sanskrit, Swastika, which had the same meaning. This Swastika Cross has been found among the Buddhists of the pre-Christian era in their tombs, temples, inscriptions and coins. *

In the New Testament there is no positive evidence as to the shape of Christ's Cross; no one knows exactly what its real shape was. Scholars and Christian authors from the second century A. D. down to the present day, have formed their opinions according to their guesses and imaginations.

* Arthur Lillie says: "The only Christian Cross in the catacombs is this Buddhist Swastika."

Neither do we know the exact face of Christ, for most of the pictures that we see of him and of the Madonna are idealized by the artists.

Like the Cross, the Triangle has been a symbol from very ancient times. The Triangle has been accepted by the Christians as the emblem of the "Ever-blessed Trinity." In India, it has been the symbol of the Hindu Trinity, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva. It was also a religious symbol in Egypt and Greece.

Again, "Fish" has been a religious symbol among the Christians as well as among the followers of other religions. The productive power of the universe was represented by it. Sometimes Christ was emblemed in the form of a fish. There are many old pictures and statues with a Cross in the middle and a fish on each side. Rev. J. P. Lundy says in his "Monumental Christianity": "In the Talmud the Messiah is called "Dag" or "Fish." Where did the Jews learn to apply "Dag" to their Messiah and why did the primitive Christians adopt it as a sign of Christ? I cannot disguise facts." Even to-day a fish is considered as a sign of good

luck in India. Buddha was called Dag-Po or Fish Buddha.

The Serpent was also a religious symbol. It represented Christ among the early Christians. From pre-historic times it has been the symbol of wisdom and eternity. Commonly it is believed that the serpent is an emblem of evil ; but at the same time in studying the religious history of the world, we find that the serpent was also used in representing the great saviours of the world. There was a time when a serpent on the Cross was worshipped as an emblem of Jesus the Christ.*

In Greek mythology Apollo was worshipped in the form of a serpent, and was invoked as the Solar Serpent-God. Aesculapius, the healing god, was also represented with a serpent. The serpent is an emblem of evil when it is represented with its deadly fangs ; and an emblem of eternity, or the Wisdom of the Sun when it is with its tail in its

* Moses set up a brazen serpent in the wilderness. Tertullian says that from this serpent arose the early sect of Christians called the Ophites.

mouth, thus forming a circle. In ancient times the serpent was considered to be the most spirit-like and fire-like of all reptiles, moving, as it were, propelled by breath and taking a spiral direction as rapidly as it chose. For this reason, the ancient inhabitants of this earth meant by this symbol nothing but the spirit or soul, the life or intelligence of the universe and it was accepted largely amongst the different nations, such as the Egyptians, Persians, Chinese, Tibetans and Jews ; in fact, it was the serpent which brought wisdom to the Garden of Eden, according to the story of the Genesis. It may be represented as an emblem of evil but it did a great deal to humanity by opening the eyes of the people. In Hindu mythology Shiva, the third person of the Hindu Trinity, is adorned with serpents as ornaments on his body. Again Vishnu is represented as lying on the bed of a thousand-headed serpent and Krishna, the Hindu Christ, as standing on the hood of a huge serpent.

The Rose was used as a symbol of the sun ; it was placed on the Cross in the jewel of the Rosicrucians. Probably it came from the

fable of Adonis, the Sun-god, who was changed into a red rose by Venus. Jesus the Christ was called the Rose—the Rose of Sharon—of Isuren.

Again the Dove, representing innocence or gentleness, stands as the symbol of the Holy Spirit among the Christians. Rev. J. P. Lundy says : "It is a remarkable fact that this Spirit (i. e., the Holy Spirit) has been symbolized among all religions and civilised nations by the *Dove*."* Ernest De Bunsen says : "The Symbol of the Spirit of God was the *Dove* in Greek *Peristera* and the Samaritans had a brazen fiery dove, instead of the brazen fiery serpent. Both referred to fire, the Symbol of the Holy Ghost."† Buddha, who lived about 600 B. C., was represented with a dove hovering over his head. Juno had a dove on her head. It was also sacred to Venus. The Crucified Dove which was worshipped by the ancient Greeks was none other than the Crucified Sun. At the time of the ceremonies in honour of his resurrection the worshippers

* Monumental Christianity, p. 293.

† Angel Messiah, p. 44.

used to exclaim "Hail to the Dove, the Restorer of Light." The Crucified Dove was beautifully described by Pindar, the great lyric poet of Greece, who lived about 522 B. C. The dove in India has been the symbol of gentleness and a friend of desolation and emblematic of conjugal attachment and fidelity to each other. A white dove is also a symbol of purity.

Like the Dove, the Lamb has been a religious symbol. The oldest representation of Jesus the Christ was the figure of a Lamb, couched at the foot of a Cross. This custom was held up till 680 A. D., that is, until the time of the pontificate of Agathon, during the reign of Constantine Pogonat, when by the Sixth Synod of Constantinople, this ancient symbol of the Lamb was substituted by the figure of a man fastened to a Cross.* This was confirmed by Pope Adrian I. This is further supported by the fact that "in the "Christian" iconography of the catacombs no figure of a man appears upon the Cross during the first

*Until about 680 A. D., at the Sixth Synod of Constantinople, it was decided to substitute the figure of the Man for the Lamb."

—Williamson's "Great Law," p. 116.

six or seven centuries. There are all forms of the cross except that.....That was not the initial but the final form of the Crucifix." * The Paschal Lamb was for centuries before Christ roasted on a Cross by the Israelites. The lamb in India was the symbol of innocence. Like Jesus, Krishna is called "the good Shepherd."

The Eagle also has been used as a religious symbol in Hindu and Greek mythology. It stood on the national flag of the Romans as well. In Hindu mythology Garuda or Eagle has always been the favourite bird of Vishnu, the second person of the Hindu Trinity.

The Egg as a symbol of Easter is also a very wonderful symbol. On Easter Sunday the whole of Christendom rejoices at the thought of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth; in fact, it is the date of universal rejoicing among all the heathen, Christian and pagan nations all over the world. It is one of the universal festivals that has been handed down to us from pre-historic times. This is a spring festival which was celebrated in ancient

* Gerald Massey, The Natural Genesis, Vol. I, p. 433.

times long before the birth of Christ by those people who understood the resurrection of nature after its death in the winter time, and they celebrated this festival on the 25th of March, or about that time. During the winter time one half of the world goes to sleep, or into apparent death ; so when the sun comes up towards the Tropic of Cancer, that is supposed to be the resurrection of the sun. You will find that among the Greeks and Romans they have a celebration ; among the Persians the same festivities are practised, and among the Jews there is the celebration of the Passover. So it will be noticed that it is a universal festival.* The Easter festival refers to the

*"Easter had been observed as a pagan festival hundreds of years before Christ. Like many other of our festivals, Easter is of very great antiquity. It was at the same season as our Lent that the noblest ladies of Phoenician and pagan Sevilla bore on their shoulders the golden effigy of Venus, while the people followed weeping and clad in mourning in remembrance of the death of Adonis.

The Romans also celebrated their Hilaria on the 25th of March. The Greeks sang their Jouloi, or song of gratitude, to Mother Earth at this season. The ancient

universal resurrection of nature, and it is also symbolized as the resurrection of spirit from matter; in other words, it refers to the resurrection of the whole world, and the resurrection of the world was symbolized in the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. It is the crucifixion of the animal self and the resurrection of the spiritual Self. When the resurrection comes, the animal self which has been crucified no longer exists,

Jews had their Paisack or Passover, which in many languages is the name Pascua still given to Easter. Also, the Persian festivals of Spring and the ancient Houli of Hindustan, all celebrated at this same time. Even China had its festival of "Gratitude of Tien."

Among the many symbols which have been employed to mark this festival few are more interesting than the sacred Egg. It was Pope Paul V. who first introduced this symbol into the ritual of Easter, which began: "Bless O Lord, we beseech Thee, this Thy creature of eggs." When Bishop James Gillis of Rome and Edinburgh washed the feet of twelve poor Irishmen some years ago on Easter Day he presented each one of them with an egg and an orange. Eggs are used in many countries to mark the Spring festival."

—John Henry Smith in a letter to the editor of the New York Times, dated the 10th April, 1911.

but the spiritual Self reigns in his own glory; in other words, the human being then attains to perfection. So Christ's resurrection signifies the resurrection of spirit from matter and not the resurrection of matter, though uneducated masses believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. Thus it is not confined to one or a few but is universal for all human beings. The origin of this conception is to be found in the Zendavesta among the Zoroastrians. The Jews received it during the Babylonian Captivity (536-333 B. C.). Spiritual resurrection means Regeneration. Every sincere seeker of God will have to regenerate from matter or material life, his ego must be crucified and his spirit will resurrect and ascend to Heaven. Death of the flesh, that is, death of one's attachment to flesh and to matter is the beginning of Spiritual Birth or Regeneration. The way that leads to this is not the way of the world but "to live in the world but be not of it." Regeneration begins with self-mastery over one's animal nature.

The Easter Egg has an old history. In the Vedas we find that the whole world (Brahmanda) was conceived at first as an egg

and in this universal egg there was a self-effulgent Being, the first-born Lord of universe, radiant with spiritual light and of a golden colour.* The mundane egg of the world, Brahmanda in Sanskrit, is described in the Manusamhita as containing the Creator or the first-born Lord Brahma, and at the time of creation this egg was broken open and the Lord of the universe came out ; out of those two parts He created the heaven and the earth. †

It is a scientific fact however that human beings are born of human ovums, which,

* हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्त्तताग्रे
भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।
—Rig. X. 121.

† तदण्डमभवद्धैमं सहस्रांशुसमप्रभम् ।
तस्मिन् जज्ञे स्वयं ब्रह्मा सर्व्वलोकपितामहः ॥
—1. 9.

तस्मिन्नण्डे स भगवानुषित्वा परिवत्सरम् ।
स्वयमेवात्मनो ध्यानात्तदण्डमकरोद्द्विधा ॥
ताभ्यां स शकलाभ्यांच दिवं भूमिञ्च निर्म्मम ।
मध्ये व्योम दिशश्चाष्टवपां स्थानञ्च शाश्वतम् ॥
—Manu. 1. 12-13.

although invisible to our naked eyes, are in the form of an egg. There was a belief amongst the Chinese that their first man was born from an egg which was dropped down from heaven to earth by their God Tien. The Egyptian priests never ate eggs because the egg was sacred to Isis. It is said that Osiris was born of an egg. The Hindus and Buddhists in India do not eat eggs for similar reason.

The Madonna is another symbol, the Virgin Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the universe and the Mother of God with a baby in her arms. Although the Council of Ephesus in 431 A. D. declared Mary to be the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, but she was recognised as such in 813 A. D. and her immaculate conception was accepted by the Pope and council in 1851 A. D. ; still this emblem was universally accepted as a religious symbol amongst many nations like the Egyptians and Hindus for ages before the birth of Christ. In India, Maya, the virgin mother of Buddha, and Devaki, the mother of Krishna, with infant saviours in their arms, were worshipped for centuries before the Christian era. Even

to-day the Hindu Madonna is worshipped in many parts of India.

In Egypt, Isis, the mother of the saviour Horus, was worshipped as a virgin ; she was styled "Our Lady," "The Queen of Heaven," "The Star of the Sea," "The Mother of God," "Immaculate Virgin." Isis was also represented as standing on the crescent moon with her head surrounded by twelve stars ; so we have found in Roman Catholic cathedrals in Europe the statues and pictures of Mary, the Queen of Heaven, standing on the crescent moon, and her head surrounded by twelve stars. The crescent moon was the symbol of Isis and emblematic of the Hindu *Yoni*, the productive power of the mother nature.

This Crescent has now become the symbol of the Mohammedans ; it is placed on the top of mosques and tombs as well as on the banner of the Mohammedans. The five-pointed star which they place on the top of the Crescent is the Pentacle. This is symbolical of Purusha, the male principle.

The Pentacle

In ancient times in Egypt, the priests of Isis yearly dedicated to her a new ship laden

with the first fruits of the spring. The Hindu priests even now gather the first crops of the harvest for the Queen of Heaven, Lakshmi (Ceres), and the ceremony of floating on the bosom of the river small boats made up of the bark of the banana tree with lights in them is still observed in some parts of India.

The ancient Babylonians, Chaldeans and Assyrians worshipped a virgin goddess with her son. She was called Mylitta and the name of her son was Tammuz, the saviour who rose from the dead. Indeed the worship of the Madonna played a most important part in the religious history of the world before the Christian era. Some scholars explain that the Madonna represents the Dawn-goddess ("Usha" in the Vedas), the Queen of Heaven who held her child, the new-born Sun-god, the saviour of the world. The 25th of March was celebrated throughout the ancient Greecian and Roman world in honour of the Mother of God and even now it is called the "Lady Day" in Catholic countries. The 25th of December is held to be the birthday of Jesus the Christ, but this day was originally the Sun's birthday.

At the commencement of the sun's apparent revolution round the earth, he was said to be born on the first moment after midnight on the 24th of December and it was celebrated among all pagan nations. It was afterwards accepted by the Christian churches to decide the disputed date of the birth of Jesus the Christ, just as Sunday, the Sun's day, was introduced in place of the Jewish Sabbath, by Constantine the Great in 321 A. D.

There is a theory that the origin of the idea and worship of the saviour of the world, with all the mythological descriptions of the miraculous birth, deeds, death, and resurrection can be traced back to the worship of the Sun. We know that the worship of the Sun has played a most important part amongst the ancient nations in their religious worship. Among the ancient people the glory of the rising sun was considered to be the glory of the saviour of the world. Indeed, the glorious rising of the sun early in the morning inspires the soul and makes the soul think of it as the saviour of mankind, the giver of life. Nothing could have struck

the minds of the primitive dwellers of this earth more strongly, nothing could have produced deeper impressions on their hearts, than the rising sun at the dawn of time. Think of the wonderful powers of this self-luminous, celestial body that dispels the darkness of night, that awakens the eyes of man from sleep and his mind from slumber, that brings activity in life and cheerfulness in the hearts of mankind. Is not the sunrise to a child the first wonder, the first beginning of all reflection? Does it not inspire us with the feelings of reverence and devotion? Does it not make our knees bend before the power, majesty, and glory of the self-effulgent illuminator of the world?

In fact, the morning prayers and sacrifices of the ancient people were nothing but spontaneous expressions of the admiration, devotion, and gratitude of the primitive minds at the sight of the rising sun above the horizon. Can any of us wonder why a simple, unsophisticated man, standing alone on the sea-shore at the break of day, welcomes the rising sun, calls him the friend of humanity, the giver of light and warmth, the restorer

of life and the bestower of wealth and prosperity; or when he salutes him and offers him everything that he possesses, with the same spirit which we have when we offer anything to our best friend and benefactor? No, we do not, because it is perfectly natural; human nature must express itself in some form or other when no other object of worship was discovered; when there was no higher conception of the absolute Ruler of the universe, the sun stood before mankind like the image, face or eye of the unknown or unknowable Creator.

In the Zendavesta, the scriptures of the Parsees, the Sun is described as the mediator between God and man, and the saviour of the world from darkness and death. So in Persia the Sun was worshipped under the name of Mithra, and that worship played a great part amongst the early Christians. We find the remnants of Mithra worship in ancient Rome and many of the ceremonies amongst the Christians of to-day are but the modifications of those of Mithra worship. So Osiris and Horus in Egypt, and Apollo and Hercules in Greece, were none other than the personifica-

the minds of the primitive dwellers of this earth more strongly, nothing could have produced deeper impressions on their hearts, than the rising sun at the dawn of time. Think of the wonderful powers of this self-luminous, celestial body that dispels the darkness of night, that awakens the eyes of man from sleep and his mind from slumber, that brings activity in life and cheerfulness in the hearts of mankind. Is not the sunrise to a child the first wonder, the first beginning of all reflection? Does it not inspire us with the feelings of reverence and devotion? Does it not make our knees bend before the power, majesty, and glory of the self-effulgent illuminator of the world?

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tions of the glorious sun of the heavens. In the Vedas the sun is addressed as the eye of the Almighty Being ; through that eye the Infinite Being sees everything. It is the symbol of the Eternal Being. It is for this reason that the emblem of the sun is to be found as a religious symbol among almost all nations.

Like the Sun, Fire has been a religious symbol from ancient times. In the Old Testament we read that Jehovah descended in fire. It is said : "In the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud ; so that all the people that *was* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God ; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furance, and the whole mount quaked greatly." (Ex. XIX. 16-18.)

This Fire-worship next to the Sun-worship was most widely diffused among different

nations. In Persia and India, Egypt and Greece, it was the most common object of worship. The ancient form of worship consisted in pouring oblations on the sacrificial fire. Fire was considered to be the messenger of God, the carrier of oblations, the mediator between man and the Supreme Being dwelling in heaven. It was believed that the bond of friendship between the worshipper and the invisible God could only be established by the smoke ascending from the fire-sacrifice. As the smoke ascended and gradually disappeared in the infinite space, the worshipper imagined that his offerings reached the invisible Being.

In fact, all the various forms of worship either in the form of lighted candles or of burning incense, or in any other form, which we find to-day in Christian churches, and in the Buddhist or Hindu temples, are nothing but the remnants or modifications of the earliest form of the sacrificial worship in the Vedic period.

There were two kinds of sacrifice : the first was the sacrifice by shedding the blood and the second, the sacrifice performed by offering oblations to the fire. Before man

learnt how to make and keep fire, he used to worship his deity by means of bloody sacrifices in which the blood of the victim, smeared to an image, a symbol or an altar, or exposed to the sun, represented the bond of kinship between the worshipper and his God; this was the origin of symbol or image-worship, or idolatry among the ancient Semitic tribes. We read in the Old Testament that the Jewish tribes after sacrificing an animal used to sprinkle that blood on the altar, and thus purified every object of offering and established the friendship of Yaveh.

In India, however, the other form of fire-sacrifice by the offering of oblations has been in existence from ancient times. During the Vedic period the Hindus invoked their Devas or bright ones in the fire, and considered it to be the mouth of all the Devas as well as of the Supreme Being; so whenever they poured oblations of clarified butter or of anything else, they believed that it was eaten by the Divine Being.

The people of India are condemned as idolaters and their religion is called idolatry because they use symbols and images at the

time of devotional exercises. Are not the worshippers in other religions idolaters in the same sense? Here we must remember what Carlyle said regarding idol-worship in his "Heroes and Hero-worship." The word "idol" comes from the Greek word Eidolon, which means, a thing seen, a symbol. Thus Carlyle says: "Idol is *Eidolon*, a thing seen, a symbol. It is not God, but a symbol of God; and perhaps one may question whether any the most benighted mortal ever took it for more than a Symbol. I fancy, he did not think that the poor image his own hands had made *was* God; but that God was emblemed by it, that God was in it some way or other. And now in this sense, one may ask, Is not all worship whatsoever a worship by Symbols, by *eidola*, or things seen? Whether *seen*, rendered visible as an image or picture to the bodily eye; or visible only to the inward eye, to the imagination, to the intellect; this makes a superfiicial, but no substantial difference. It is still a Thing Seen, significant of Godhead; an Idol." The object of worship must be a thing, seen either by the physical or the mental eye. In

this sense the picture or statue of Jesus the Christ or of the Cross is just as much an idol as the image of a Chinese god with twenty-four hands or ten heads, because it is a thing seen ; it is an image ; it is not by itself a god, but God as symbolized by it.

Then again when a great prophet has seen God in a vision, he tries to make it known to others in what form he saw Him ; then he makes a picture or statue, or tries to trace some likeness, and that statue or picture is afterwards taken as a symbol of the Supreme Human Being as He appeared to the prophet. The picture or statue is not worshipped, but the people worship that form in which the prophet saw the Divine Human Being. Now the question rises : Is there any necessity of any of these symbols at the time of worship ? Can we not worship the Divine Being without using any kind of symbol or image, whether abstract or concrete ? Before we answer this, allow me to ask a few questions : Do we not use symbols at the time when we read or write or think ? Can we write without symbols ? Can we speak without symbols ? Can we think without symbols ?

All we know is that the art of writing began with pictorial representations of abstract ideas that exist in our minds; that every letter of the alphabet, every character, is nothing but a symbol of the articulate sounds that constitute a word, and every word that we utter is the symbol of an idea or thought. Language itself is a framework of symbols and metaphors. Poetry, art, music, painting, sculpture are nothing but the concrete images or symbols of the abstract ideas and thoughts of our minds. If this be the fact, if it be true that we can neither read, nor write, nor speak, nor think without symbols, then we ask, would it be possible for us to worship or pray to the unknown Being except through symbols? No, it would be impossible. All religions and all philosophies are but the symbols of the Divine principle, the embodiment of abstract thoughts clothed with the garment of poetic language. After feeling the majesty, grandeur and beauty of nature can a man suppress the welling forth of poetry from the profoundest depths of his soul? Is not the essence of prayer and of worship the spontaneous

outburst of the feelings of our hearts, and the imaging forth of the felt beauty and sublimity of the unknown Supreme Being as manifested in nature ?

Such poetic expressions of the human soul, animated by the perception of the power and glory of the infinite and almighty Being, are to be discovered at the bottom of all religious symbols and mythology. Can the limited human mind approach the infinite Being or think of His infinite powers, inexhaustible goodness, without forming a mental picture, which must be limited by its capacity, and by its power of comprehension ? The Supreme Being who is the object of worship and devotion in all religions is infinitely greater than our highest conception of Him. From the lowest conception of God which we find in a primitive man, who thinks of Him as dwelling in the fire or in the water or in the sun to the highsest conception which the most cultured and advanced mind of a philosopher can make of the omnipotent and omniscient Divinity, at every step we find nothing but imperfect images of the perfect qualities and attributes of that eternal source of all

perfection. And if anyone of us, however enlightened or advanced he may be, wishes to concentrate or meditate upon any of these Divine attributes, he will have to start from one of these imperfect pictures, images, or symbols, either mental or concrete.

The more childlike the mind of a man is, the greater is the necessity of concrete symbols for concentration and meditation at the time of devotional exercises. From concrete the mind rises to the abstract and from abstract to the Absolute. It is for this reason that Vedanta does not condemn image-worship, or symbol-worship, or the worship of abstract pictures; on the contrary, it encourages the devotee to take any such symbol or image as inspires his mind with the Divine ideal and uplifts him from this world of selfishness and corruption.

In Sanskrit these symbols and images are called *Pratikas* and *Pratimas*, which lead toward Divinity and which show the limitation of the human mind in trying to conceive of the Divine attributes. In the Upanishads we read that the infinite Brahman, the eternal Being of the universe, should be worshipped,

but the beginner may take fire, sun, spirit, mind or word or logos as substitutes of the eternal and all-pervading Brahman, for concentration and meditation. The principal object for all such injunctions in the Vedanta is to direct the struggling man showly toward the realization of the infinite Being, the Brahman, the eternal Reality of the universe, who alone should be worshipped by all nations. For the same reason, Vedanta encourages the image-worship of the Christians, Buddhists and all other dualistic believers of different religions provided that such an image or symbol stands for the Supreme Being or refers to any of His Divine attributes.

According to Vedanta, there are five different ways by which the Divine Being can be approached : the first is through the help of intellectual discrimination between the real and the unreal, between the eternal and the non-eternal and through this discrimination one may go beyond all phenomenal appearances and reach Brahman, the absolute, eternal Existence, Intelligence and Bliss, from where all animate and inanimate objects have come into existence, in which they live and into

which they return in the end. In this path there is no need of worship nor is there the necessity of a symbol, or an image whether concrete or mental.

Secondly, the Divine Being may be apprehended as the one stupendous whole of which we are but parts. In this sense the gross, physical universe is the body of the all-pervading Being. His mind is the cosmic mind; the cosmic intellect is His intellect; He sees through all eyes; He hears through all ears and thinks through all brains that exist in the universe; whether it is the brain of an insect or the brain of a god, both should be included in the cosmic mind.

Thirdly, the Divine Being may be brought home to our hearts by the greatness, excellence, wisdom and power of a particular incarnation like Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Rama, Ramakrishna and others. Very few can really see God except through these Divine manifestations in human forms. Because we are all human beings; it is exceedingly difficult for us to think of God without giving Him a human form and human attributes. If we try to think of God, we make

Him human; we cannot go beyond the human form, for our conception of God is human and our explanation of the universe is human; and, therefore, a personal God of all dualistic religions is considered as with the attributes of a human being magnified to an infinite degree; but God understands the human failings and incarnates in a human form to manifest His divinity, greatness, power and wisdom, and to do good to humanity.

In the Bhagavat Gita the Lord said: "Whenever and wherever religion declines and irreligion prevails, I manifest Myself in a human form to establish righteousness, to destroy evil, and to protect mankind."

Fourthly, God can be worshipped as the Soul of our souls, as the Life of our lives; we can reach Him through our life, through our souls. He is the eternal Ruler of the universe, and from Him proceed life, intelligence and all the best qualities that are to be found in the greatest of human beings.

Lastly, He may be apprehended and worshipped through symbols and images. Thus God has many aspects and various are the paths by which the individual souls can

reach Him. It is said in Vedanta: "The lowest form of worship is the worship of concrete symbols and external images, but at the same time it has its value to a childlike mind which cannot grasp abstract ideas and attributes of the Divine Being; it is the lowest form of worship. Better than this is the worship of mental images accompanied by the repetition of the name of the Lord; in order to think of the divine attributes of the Divine Being, we should repeat His holy name. Concentration and meditation upon the attributes of the Supreme is higher still; but the highest form of worship is that in which the individual is united with the Absolute, rising above thoughts, above all mental powers and mental functions. When the individual communes with the infinite Being and feels that spiritual oneness, it is the highest form of worship; it is the state of superconsciousness, after attaining which the soul declares: 'I and my Father are one'."

Efficacy of Prayer

Efficacy of Prayer

From the very ancient times, in every country and in every age, there have been two classes of people ; one class believes in the efficacy of prayer and insists upon all, declaring that prayer to God is absolutely necessary : while the other class denies that God ever hears our prayers and thinks that prayer is unnecessary and useless. Those who belong to the former class are known by different names such as theologians, religionists, theists, dualists and so forth ; and the latter includes all the philosophers, agnostics, sceptics, scientists and the advanced thinkers of ancient and modern times.

Nowadays, along with the spread up of scientific knowledge, the minds of the educated classes have generally become more or less sceptical regarding the efficacy of prayer ; they do not believe in prayer ; on the contrary, they believe that all those who think that their prayers are heard by God, are but

ignorant fools ; they ridicule them calling them superstitious. But in spite of all the ridicules and sarcasms of the agnostics, sceptics, philosophers and scientists of modern times, we find in this world hundreds and thousands of theologians and dualists who do pray to God and believe that their prayers are heard. Nearly all forms of religions with their various creeds, sects and denominations, and all the scriptures of different nations unanimously uphold the necessity and efficacy of prayer.

The majority of the followers of these religious creeds shutting their ears to the remarks of the scientists still go on with their old habits of praying and repeat those prayers which they have learnt from their childhood ; and whether they believe that God listens to their sayings or not, they do pray because it is extremely difficult to do away with the impressions received in childhood. If a child's mind be impressed with the idea that God punishes those who do not pray at all, then that impression will linger for a long time and may remain even when the child grows old and becomes famous in the

world as a great sceptic or agnostic; and when he is left alone, or when he is facing some danger or adverse circumstance, he falls back on that idea and cannot resist the impulse to repeat prayers which spontaneously come up to his mind.

All kinds of ordinary prayers presuppose an absolute faith in certain religious doctrines and dogmas, or in the authority of some scripture or some prophet or saviour and start with a belief in a personal God who is considered to be the Creator and Governor of the universe, who is all-powerful, who can do whatever He chooses, who hears the cries and supplications of the human heart, who feels for and sends help to mankind just in the same manner as an earthly father would lend a helping hand to his suffering child. In short, ordinary prayers depend entirely upon the conception of a personal God with human attributes and human feelings. The stronger the belief in a personal God with human feelings and attributes, the more fervent grows the prayer of the believer. The more human the conception of God is, the greater is felt the necessity of prayer.

Jesus the Christ believed in the efficacy of prayer, so did Mohammed. We find amongst the orthodox Christians, the Roman Catholics for instance, who pray to God for help whether it be physical or mental, just in the same way as they pray to their saints or to the spirits of the dead ; we have heard that in a certain Catholic Church in New York City there were hundreds of Catholics who prayed to God for good husbands for their daughters. They think they ought to pray to God for all the trifling matters of human life and they cannot get along without prayer. So also the Protestant Christians and the Mohammedans pour forth all the supplications of their hearts for obtaining supernatural help even in the trivial matters of their everyday life. They think that it is a great sin not to pray to God every day.

During the Boer war in South Africa, which was a war between different nations, the churches of the rival and hostile camps prayed for victory and each believed that God would send victory to it. During the late war in Europe too, all the churches were reverberating with prayers for victory and

many people think that God heard their prayers and sent victory from heaven.

A Protestant Christian will pray once a week or perhaps once a day. But a Mohammedan prays five times a day. He must obey the calls to prayer at the appointed hour leaving aside all other works for at least five minutes. Amongst the Buddhists prayer is an essential form of their devotion. Although Buddha himself did not believe in a personal God with human attributes, nor teach his disciples to pray to any Supernatural Being, still his followers could not restrain their minds from praying to Buddha himself whenever they wanted any kind of help which they could not expect to get from any earthly being. Thus, in course of time, there grew amongst the Buddhists a strong belief that prayer is one of the most necessary items of devotion and worship.

The Buddhists in Tibet invented the labour-saving prayer-wheels. In Tibet not only in temples but on road-sides, market-places and prominent localities, they have public prayer-wheels which are turned by the hands of the passers-by, or by water-power

or by winds. The Parsees or Zoroastrians and Hindus in general believe in the efficacy of prayer, and they pray with earnestness, sincerity and faith.

Thus we see that although the number of students of modern science who are atheistic, agnostic and sceptical is increasing, still the masses everywhere believe in the efficacy of prayer—in the efficacy of the conscious and subconscious cries from human hearts and that God hears the prayers and fulfils them through His Divine grace. The cry for help spontaneously comes out of the human heart whenever we are in need of certain things and we feel that these things cannot be obtained through ordinary human efforts. Amongst ourselves, we find when a man is conscious of his own weakness and helplessness, he first of all seeks help from outside, such as his friends, relatives or neighbours; but when he fails to get it from them, he cries out in despair, appeals to his Maker and asks for His favour and mercy. As a baby cries out instinctively, as it were, with a loud scream to draw the attention of its mother when it needs any help, so when a man

instinctively cries out for supernatural help, we say he is praying. Thus a man is said to be praying when, seeking for supernatural help, he pours forth the supplications of his heart with earnestness and sincerity by uttering the praises of his Maker and bending his knees with the expression of humility and gratitude, in order to draw the attention of his Heavenly Father. Such a man believes that by appealing to God through prayer he will receive the help he needs.

There are different kinds of prayer. We may pray for material benefits whenever we are in need. When we are suffering from any severe illness which no human power can cure, we pray to God for our speedy recovery. When we are placed under adverse circumstances and find no one else to help us, we seek supernatural help and cry out ; and that cry is our prayer. Often when we have performed certain acts and do not know what results we are going to reap, or when we face some impending dangers, we pray to God for the removal of these dangers, or for the fulfilment of our desires in such a way as will make us happy, or will make us realise

what we want. Therefore extremely adverse circumstances have the power to arouse that attitude of the human mind which spontaneously bursts forth in the form of a prayer.

Sometimes we pray for something and when we get that thing, we do not like it. Prosperity often makes us unmindful to prayers. When we have got everything we need, we do not feel the necessity of prayer. The form of prayer which consists in asking of God, "Oh Lord, give me this, give me that," is like the prayer of a beggar to a wealthy person for food, clothes and other necessaries of life. The moment a beggar obtains everything he needs and feels satisfied, he does not care to come to that wealthy person anymore ; and as, in course of time, he forgets the donor and giver, so a man who prays to God for material benefits and comforts, forgets Him when his circumstances are changed. This kind of begging is the lowest form of prayer.

There is another kind of prayer. When a man after violating any of the commandments of God written in a scripture which he believes to be the word of God, remembers the punishment that is awaiting him for such

a violation, he gets frightened. Then he begins to repent for his acts and through fear of punishment he appeals to the mercy of the Lord who has fixed the punishment for the violation of His commands, with a strong conviction that if he could draw the attention of God, He, the Maker of laws, would surely through mercy make his case an exception to the general rule. This kind of prayer is like the crying of a criminal before the court of justice for mercy. This earnest appeal to the Divine mercy for pardon and forgiveness is called a prayer. It is another form of begging. The violation of the commands of God generally proceeds from moral weakness and from temporary forgetfulness of the law by which God inflicts punishment and suffering upon the evil-doer.

There is still another form of prayer which is a mere expression of gratitude and thanksgiving for what we eat, drink and enjoy in our life. This prayer proceeds from the idea that the Heavenly Father having created us out of nothing, takes proper care of us, provides us with food and gives us all pleasures, comforts and enjoyments of life, just

as an earthly father does for his son. As a son ought to be grateful and thankful to his father who after begetting him, feeds him, takes care of him, and gives him pleasure in everyway, so we ought to be thankful and grateful to our Heavenly Father for all the blessings we have received of Him. All of us are quite familiar with this form of prayer, as it is largely practised in the Christian communities. This form of thanksgiving and expression of gratitude is, of course, much better than the other two forms of prayer which are nothing but simple begging for material benefits or for exemption from punishment. Thus we can understand clearly how prayer depends upon the conception of a personal Creator with human attributes. If we did not believe in a personal God who feels and suffers for us, there would be no necessity of praying to Him either for favour or through thankfulness.

Now let us consider the arguments of those who do not believe in the necessity of prayers. In the first place, they deny the existence of a personal God with human qualities. They say that such a God with human attributes does not exist except in the

minds of those who believe in Him. It is an anthropomorphic conception. We create an image, project our thoughts and then worship Him ; thus it is the projection of human qualities and the personification of human ideas which depend entirely upon human minds. Consequently, according to these thinkers, such a human God was created by the imagination of the uncultured and superstitious human minds. They say that in this universe nothing can happen without a cause ; there is no such thing as supernatural agency. Everything that is called supernatural is, in fact, natural. The phenomena of the universe are produced by natural causes and governed by natural laws. God, if He exists at all, cannot be persuaded by prayers, flattery, or sacrifice to change the laws of nature which are uniform and eternal ; if we try to persuade God, it is only a mistake, it is a superstition. God cannot change the laws. There is nothing in the universe which happens through the whim of a personal God. So the belief that God hears our prayers or that prayers will bring us this or that, is, according to these thinkers, simply a super-

stitious belief of uncultivated persons who do not understand the laws of nature. They say that ignorant people generally mistake the fulfilment of their prayers for the effects of natural causes governed by natural laws.

Our longings and emotions have nothing to do with the external events of nature. When we cannot trace the proper cause of a certain event which occurs in nature and when any such event happens to coincide accidentally with our desires and longings, then by mistake we ascribe its cause to the verbal expressions of our desires and longings.

All scientists and philosophers, sceptics and agnostics, reject the belief that God answers our prayers by producing miraculous events in nature. The time for miracles has passed away ; there is no such thing as a miracle ; there is no room for miracles in this world which is governed by the law of causation. Science has proved that the phenomena of nature are linked together with that eternal law of cause and effect. Nothing can be produced without that law, and physical events are produced only by physical causes, which are entirely independent of mental

conditions or their verbal expressions which we call prayers. Events of nature are produced and governed by the laws on the physical plane ; nothing can change that.

Moreover, these scientists who are holding the belief in the theory of evolution, deny creation out of nothing by some extra-cosmic being and try to explain the origin of prayer by saying that in ancient times the uncultivated minds of savage tribes believed in the existence of a personal God who produced this world out of nothing by His will and performed miracles in order to convince people of His greatness and make them believe that He was the governor and ruler of the universe ; consequently, whenever these people wanted to see any miracle, they prayed to Him, expressing their gratitude and uttering the praise of the Almighty God. That is the cause of all these beliefs in prayer. But now, owing to the advancement of modern science, we do not have to believe in this way. Science has explained by discovering the laws of nature that creation out of nothing is an impossibility and that belief in the intervention of supernatural will or power is a mere

superstition. Therefore prayer for supernatural help is unnecessary.

It is for this reason that we find scientists, agnostics and philosophers deny the efficacy of prayer and laugh at those who believe in the dogma that God hears and answers our prayers. And the result is that they have given up those religious creeds which teach such erroneous dogmas. They would not listen to the teachings of scriptures, would not believe in miracles, nor in the authority of some person's sayings. They want rational explanations for everything which they would accept. They say, if we throw aside all these dogmas and other proofs, then the belief in prayer will be left without any support. It must fall to pieces. So there is no necessity of prayer at all. Such is the conclusion of the scientific and rationalistic minds who do not believe in prayers. They do not see any good which can be derived from prayers.

In India all these objections have been raised and all these questions have been discussed by the seers of Truth from a very early period. The unbiased and scientific minds

of the ancient seers of Truth understood the laws of nature and tried to explain all events, external and internal, by referring to those laws. They did not think for a moment that the laws of nature could be suddenly changed by the whim of a personal God ; nor did they believe in an extra-cosmic Creator ; nor in the creation out of nothing ; but still they did not entirely deny the efficacy of prayer.

The writings of all these great sages and seers are known as philosophies, of which the Vedanta Philosophy is the highest and most rational ; it embraces all the ultimate conclusions of modern science, but, at the same time, it does not deny the efficacy of prayer. Like modern science, it had rejected long before the dawn of scientific knowledge in the West the belief in the worship of an anthropomorphic personal God. The God of Vedanta is not a personal Being dwelling in heaven, outside of the universe, but He is all-pervading, immanent and resident in nature. His Will is the supreme power in the universe and is one with the Eternal Energy. When this Energy through the process of evolution manifests itself as the various forces of the

external and internal world, Vedanta Philosophy says, these are like so many expressions of that one and all-pervading Will. And the laws of nature are nothing but the modes by which that Almighty Will or Eternal Energy operates in this universe.

By denying the anthropomorphic conception of God, Vedanta has thrown overboard all the ideas that prayers will persuade God to change our environments and those laws which govern the phenomena. Vedanta has also rejected the idea that repentance, weeping and wailing will touch the heart of God and draw from Him mercy and forgiveness and those who shall not do so shall be deprived of His grace and pardon and shall have to suffer eternally after death. It has also shown that praises, thanksgiving, sacrifices, offerings of incense and fragrant flowers or words of flattery do not affect the Absolute Divine mind of the Almighty. Vedanta says that God cannot be bribed by these.

Here it may be asked if God does not hear our prayers, nor change His laws, then how will Vedanta explain the sudden cure of diseases and other effects, which generally

come through prayer ? As regards the objective efficacy of prayer which we so often hear, such as the sudden cure of diseases, changes of the physical conditions by prayers or the attainment of things which one needs and so forth, Vedanta says that although these physical effects are ascribed to prayers as their cause, still they are, in reality, bound and governed by natural laws—the laws of cause and effect, of action and reaction ; and so they are only the results of the law of causation in this universe. These physical events are not the results of prayer in its true sense, but may be of strong desires which are fulfilled by the law of demand and supply. The monistic explanation of Vedanta admits one set of causation in the phenomenal universe and not two. There are no two sets of causes, as the scientists affect to believe that one set is physical and the other set is mental ; but the Vedanta Philosophy teaches that both these sets are the expressions of one set and consequently there is one set of causes in the universe. The scientists who do not believe in the monistic principles say that nature and mind are two separate things.

There are also materialists who hold that mind is the result of matter; they try to trace the cause of mind to matter and material forces or their combination; consequently, they give no value to psychical changes. But, according to Vedanta, mind is the cause, or the causal agent and all causation first begins in the mind.

Will-power is the highest in the universe and there is no other power greater than it. The power which is manifested on the physical plane can be governed by will-power. The tremendous power of electricity and steam can be brought under control by the will-power of man; all the physical powers are subject to will-power, which is the first expression of mind. Mind is not the result of matter; it may be material on the higher plane, because mind is also finer matter in vibration; but still, it is not the effect of the forces that are manifested on the gross physical plane.

Every mental change has its corresponding physical change. When desires first arise in our minds, they have tremendous power; they have the power of changing the physical

conditions. Every new thought creates new changes in the brain, produces new brain cells and consequently introduces a change in the whole nervous system. And when the nervous system is changed, its relation to the external environments also changes. It will seek such environments as are favourable to and helpful for the manifestation of its changed condition. Of course, ordinary minds cannot recognise such minute changes. But, however subtle the changes may be, their effects are tremendous and they mould the whole nature and character of an individual.

If a person indulges in evil thoughts and allows these to rise in his mind and govern him, the whole action of his mind and body will take a corresponding change and will accordingly mould his nature. These evil thoughts will not stop until the results have been produced ; these results will come through the law of causation or the law of cause and sequence. The results may be physical or mental. If the evil thoughts which rise in the mind of persons be harboured for a long time, these thoughts will affect the minds of other persons with whom they are

intimately connected, and will force them to seek such environments and conditions as will agree with their ideas and thoughts. Just as a wave will not subside entirely, but will go on producing a current, so when a new thought rises in our minds, it creates a kind of wave in the ocean of universal mind and then that current influences the minds of other persons and ultimately comes back to the centre from which it started and brings the results, either in the form of good or bad. Thus every mental act by the law of action and reaction must react upon itself in some way or other and bring similar results.

Mental changes must manifest themselves on the physical plane, and if the mental changes have no corresponding physical medium, they will not express themselves so readily until they create proper medium. For instance, if I have a desire to write a letter, that desire is in my mind and the thoughts are in my mind also ; but the physical conditions must be there ; otherwise I cannot write. So in order to get the material expression of that desire and the thoughts, I must have pen, ink, paper etc. Even a spirit that wishes to

communicate with the beings of this earth cannot do it without the help of pen, ink, paper or other materials ; * so also if I have a strong desire to write, I shall do my best to get these materials and then put my thoughts into words and write the letter. Where all the conditions are favourable, the thought is expressed ; but if my hand become paralysed at that time, in spite of all the conditions being favourable, it will be impossible for me to write. That paralysis may be temporary or permanent. If it be temporary, it may be cured either by mental power in the form of a strong desire, or by removing the clot of blood and the obstacles that prevent the activity of motor nerves. Prayer is nothing but a mental desire which generates new currents in the system and these currents produce certain results, showing that mental power is stronger in many cases than that which can be obtained through drugs. But if the organs be completely de-

* But so far as spiritual communication is concerned, there are exceptional cases where spirits can directly communicate. I remember in this connection how an independent voice in a seance in the house of Sir Alfred Turner addressed us "Good Evening, Brother."

stroyed in some way or other, then no amount of prayer can remove that condition. No Christian Scientist nor any Faith-healer will be able to cure that case of paralysis.

It is for this reason that Vedanta says that those desires which are in harmony with the laws of nature are surely fulfilled sooner or later. If I have a desire to fly in the air, that desire will not be fulfilled until I have wings. One may fly in a dream or in an aeroplane. But it will not be the fulfilment of that particular desire. If we know that all desires are governed by the natural law of cause and sequence, and if we make our desires harmonize with natural laws, we are sure to get the results ; and what we ordinarily call prayer is nothing but the expression of our intense desires. Desire and will-power being the causes end in producing similar results ; being actions they produce similar reactions.

Desires bring their results more quickly when they are attended with a strong faith in their fulfilment and that faith is strengthened by the belief that God hears what we say. It is for this reason that all the dualistic religions insist upon praying with a firm belief. But

the Vedanta Philosophy does not call these expressions of our desires as true prayers. These desires we may mistake for prayer and these verbal expressions of our desires, we may say, have been heard by God. But the thing is, if we want anything, that demand will bring the result by the law of demand and supply. Thus leaving all the physical effects of such longings of the human heart in the domain of natural laws, such as the law of causation, the law of action and reaction, the Vedanta Philosophy tells us that this is a phenomenal world governed by phenomenal laws and then goes on to describe what true prayer is and how God listens to our true prayer.

According to Vedanta begging for material objects, either in the shape of prosperity or in the form of success, or for name and fame, is not a true kind of prayer. A child of the Omnipotent Spirit begging for toys of the world—what a degeneration of the mortal man! God does not hear such prayers; they are fulfilled through natural laws. The desire for freedom from punishment is not true prayer; because that freedom

will not come before we have reaped the results of our acts. Suffering is nothing but the result of the reaction of our own action. If we have committed certain deeds, God cannot give us freedom from the punishment. Thanksgiving is not true prayer. God does not care for thanks. The expression of the feeling of buoyancy for the enjoyment of sense pleasures or giving thanks to the Maker is not true prayer according to Vedanta. We have come to this world by the natural law to fulfil our desires, and to reap the results of all the works done in our previous incarnations. We are responsible for all the sufferings and pleasures of this life. So whether we thank God or not, we shall have to reap the results, and it does not make any difference to God.

True prayer is the mental and verbal expression of the highest spiritual ideal. It consists not in trying to get anything from outside, but in unfolding the higher powers that are slumbering within the soul. It is the expression of that determination of the individual soul for reaching the highest goal of life ; it is the constant desire, or constant

aim, or constant thought of attaining to the highest spiritual realization. When we rise above all ordinary desires and do not seek the fulfilment of such desires, then we are ready for true prayer. True prayer is the prayer of the individual soul, or the soul of the apparent man to the Spiritual or Divine Self or God who dwells within us; it comes to the soul which is awakened to the transitory and ephemeral character of the phenomenal universe, and which longs for freedom from selfishness and all worldly imperfections that give us trouble and make us unhappy in this life.

True prayer is said to be heard by the Supreme Being when we remember our spiritual nature. Think of it and try to realize it in this life by unfolding the higher nature that is dwelling in you. When an earnest soul longs for spiritual illumination and prays for the manifestation of higher powers that are latent, then the Divine Spirit, which is the Soul of our souls, is said to hear that prayer from within and not from outside; and then it manifests its nature. A true prayer is the expression of that

attitude of the human mind which arouses the Divine nature in man and makes it govern the lower, selfish or animal nature by which we are directed in our ordinary life to perform selfish acts. According to Vedanta lip-prayer is no prayer at all. True prayer is always mental. It is the earnest longing of the heart. It rises in that undisturbed mind which seeks higher enlightenment, knowledge, freedom and perfection.

True prayer is the expression of the determined efforts of the human mind to conquer, subdue and control the lower self. It is the soliloquy of the awakened soul. When the soul is awakened, it looks at the facts of life from a different standpoint, compares them with the highest ideal and wants to be in tune with that perfect ideal. We must live in freedom and have perfect control of mind and body ; and in trying to attain to that state, if we find that there are overwhelming attractions of the lower self which drag us down to the plane of animal nature, we make a strong determination to overcome those obstacles by knocking at

the door of that Spirit which is the storehouse of all power and strength; that knocking is, according to Vedanta, the true prayer of the soul. Whether we make any verbal expression of our determination for the realization of Truth or not, when that knocking comes, then the soul is ready to enter into the domain of Spiritual Truth; and, at that time, the door opens, and the individual soul is allowed to enter into the abode of infinite peace and it gains Divine Communion with the Supreme Spirit dwelling within us. Then unbounded spiritual strength comes to the soul and it overcomes all the obstacles and obstructions that prevent it from realizing the ideal or from making its own nature harmonize with the Divine. Then it is said that true prayer is heard and answered by the Supreme Being.

God does not hear the expressions of our desires; but when we long for that emancipation which is the highest ideal of life and try to attain it with a strong determination, then that true prayer of ours is fulfilled. True prayer is the first expression of the intense longing for freedom from all limita-

tions. It must always be attended with absolute faith and conviction and with the concentration upon the meaning of what one utters. Mind must not think of anything else at that time. True prayer is but the contemplation of the Divine nature by mentally repeating the Ideal in words. Whenever we think of anything, we think in words ; and when we mentally repeat the name of the Ideal concentrating our mind on it, that prayer is the true prayer. It is another form of meditation. And when such a meditation or true prayer leads to the realization of the Divine Spirit, then it is said that prayer is heard. True prayer is like the ladder by which the individual soul ascends to the domain of transcendental Reality. And when that state is reached, the soul becomes free and it no longer prays to any being, whether supernatural or natural, because all its prayers are now fulfilled. It gains eternal peace, happiness, knowledge and bliss. Thus a man who has realized Divinity in himself and has purged out all ideas of separateness has obtained the efficacy of true prayer. Such a man never begs for anything.

True prayer brings to the soul enlightenment and wisdom dwelling latent in every individual. It is the means by which that latent force is roused. Thus having attained the subjective value of true prayer the individual soul begins to feel the relation which it bears to the Supreme Being, learns to surrender its will to the Cosmic Will that moves the phenomena of the universe and governs all the physical and material forces, and ultimately becomes the playground of the Almighty Will. Then he feels that his mind and intellect are but instruments in the hands of the Almighty Being.

But so long the individual soul, covered by the veil of ignorance and enchained by selfish passion, does not manifest Divinity in every action, it should struggle for the attainment of perfection and should remember its highest ideal through meditation and true prayer ; and the best form of such a prayer given by the ancient Vedic sages is :

"असतो मा सद्गमय, तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय,
मृत्योर्माऽमृतं गमय,
रुद्र यत्ते दक्षिणं मुखं तेन मां पाहि नित्यम् ।"

"O Soul of our souls! O Light of the universe! Lead us from unreal to Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality! O Destroyer of all evil! Protect us with Thy compassionate Face, remove all obstacles that prevent the manifestation of Thy Divine Power and do not let us forget that our true nature is one with Thee forever and ever."

Ecstasy

Ecstasy

The scientific investigations of the Society for Psychical Research have opened new vistas of our soul life and have unveiled many of the mysteries regarding the powers and possibilities of the human soul. They have given wonderful demonstrations regarding the existence of the soul as an entity, distinct and separable from the physical organism, through which it manifests itself on the material plane. They have given scientific explanations of spirit communications and have confirmed our belief in the existence of a spiritual world. Some of these investigators, like Dr. Myers, the author of "Human Personality," have gone so far as to admit that the embodied spirits, under certain conditions, do vacate the physical organism, either partially or completely, in order to allow another disembodied spirit to enter into and take possession of it, in the same manner as the primitive people of different countries believed in ancient times. The old idea of

possession by disembodied spirits is no longer ridiculed by such great thinkers of modern times. Not only do they admit this but they also maintain that it is possible for the embodied souls to leave the body and wander in spiritual space, while the physical organism remains senseless in a trance-like condition. In this state the soul's perception is not confined to the sense plane or to the objects of the material world ; but, transcending them, it perceives the visions of the spiritual world. The seer then enters into the realms higher than anything that is to be found on this plane. This excursion of the embodied spirit from the physical form to the spiritual world with its spiritual perception is called "ecstasy."

It is a faculty distinct from any other that we ordinarily see or hear of. It is a peculiar faculty of the soul different from that of spirit communication or spirit control or possession by spirit or trance or hypnotic sleep. The outward condition of the physical organism in ecstasy may resemble to a certain extent the sound sleep or the trance-like state, but subjectively the soul reaches a consciousness which is higher than the sense-conscious-

ness, a consciousness of the spiritual realm, while the sense-consciousness remains absolutely in abeyance. Of course, it is true that in the case of spirit control or possession the sense-consciousness of a man is also in abeyance; although on this point there is an outward resemblance between ecstasy and possession, still the latter is distinguished from ecstasy by the fact that another discarnate spirit or spirits invade the organism and utilize every part of the body of one who is possessed. In ecstasy, however, neither such invasion nor possession by another spirit takes place. The body and senses remain motionless and unconscious of the surroundings, while the soul, being freed, obtains glimpses of higher truths and sees spiritual visions.

There have been innumerable instances of individual souls who have reached this state of ecstasy and have realized on the spiritual plane truths which are transcendental. The religious history of the world is filled with descriptions of the ecstatic visions and experiences of the prophets, seers, and saints of different countries. In the Old Testament

we read how Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and other Jewish prophets saw visions of the spiritual world in ecstasy. In the New Testament is described the ecstasy of Jesus the Christ, St. John, and St. Paul.

The Koran says that Mohammed was carried in ecstasy to the seventh heaven by the angel Gabriel, and in that state Mohammed saw the truths of the spiritual world and afterwards described those experiences to his followers. Mohammed, although he was an illiterate man, received all revelations in his ecstasy, and these revelations were afterwards embodied in the Koran, the scriptures of the Mohammedans.

Zoroaster (Zarathustra) became the founder of Zoroastrianism after receiving his revelations in ecstasy. These revelations formed the scriptures of the Zoroastrians called the Zendavesta. Ahura Mazda, the great God, spoke with Zoroaster in ecstasy, and the latter heard His voice and received His commands. If you read the Zendavesta, you will find that Ahura Mazda was the speaker and Zoroaster the enquirer.

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, went

in his ecstasy to all the spiritual spheres or *Lokas* or heavens and experienced those wonderful truths which he afterwards preached before the world. Many of his disciples and followers entered into that same state of ecstasy at different times.

In India there have been countless prophets, saints and seers from time immemorial. Each one of them reached the state of ecstasy and realized transcendental truths of the spiritual world. Emanuel Swedenborg is said to have discovered the Law of Correspondences in ecstasy. He saw in his spiritual visions the glimpses of heaven and hell; he heard the voices of angels and archangels associated with them, and experienced many things which he afterwards described in the pages of his voluminous works. Some of the great philosophers of ancient Greece like Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, and others claimed to have seen spiritual truths in ecstasy. Great poets like Virgil, Dante, Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson saw visions in ecstasy. It is said that Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher, had an experience of it. The Persian poets Sadi, Hafiz, Jelal-

uddeen and other Sufi philosophers considered that ecstasy was the state where the soul reached Divine Communion. The Arab philosopher Al-Ghazzali attained to ecstasy and described it as a state higher than any other state of consciousness. St. Teresa and Joan d'Arc both enjoyed the bliss of ecstasy. Some of the Christian mystics of the middle ages like St. Bernard, Eckhart and others attained to ecstasy and described their experiences.

Thus we can understand how universally accepted is this state of ecstasy. The evidence for it is stronger than that of any other religious state. It is the one spiritual experience of the soul which is common to all religions. All religions may vary in their dogmas and doctrines, in their ideals, but in this state of ecstasy they are one. No one can deny its existence, because it has been the foundation upon which the structures of all great and small religions have been built.

In this state have come all revelations of God, as well as the knowledge of celestial pleasures and happiness ; otherwise, how could we know that there is such a thing as heaven,

and that the heavenly pleasures are more desirable than the earthly ones, if this knowledge did not come to us in a certain state of consciousness? The aim of all religions is to lead the individual soul to the realization of the Supreme Being through the gate of ecstasy. The particular experiences in individual cases may vary, and the moral and spiritual interpretations of ecstatic visions may be different in each case and may be governed by the preconceived ideas and superstitions of individuals; but at the same time no one can deny the fact that the embodied spirit, withdrawing its consciousness from the physical body and from the material world, perceives spiritual and transcendental truths.

Ecstasy is entirely a subjective phenomenon. There is no objective sign other than the trance-like condition of the physical body. It is true, however, that there are different kinds of ecstasy, and that there are various stages in it. In ecstasy every higher emotion is quickened to its climax at the sight of the consummation of Divine beauty and Divine love. There is a kind of ecstasy in

which tears of joy and blissfulness run down the cheeks of the seer, the face becomes radiant with Divine lustre and a heavenly smile. The seer may talk in an unknown tongue, and, after regaining sense-consciousness, may dance with extreme joy and blissfulness. This state of ecstasy is called in Sanskrit '*Bhava.*' It comes to the soul of the devotee at the sight of his Spiritual Ideal whom he worships through love and extreme devotion, to whom he has offered his whole heart and soul and beyond whom he thinks there is nothing greater or higher. These outward signs are visible when the spirit retains a partial connection with the physical organism ; but when the connection is entirely cut off, the body remains senseless like a dead body.

St. Teresa, the Spanish saint of the sixteenth century, described the different stages of her ecstasy. She states : "In the sixth stage of ecstasy the body grows cold, speech and respiration are suspended ; the eyes close ; the slightest motion may cause the greatest efforts." Then she describes a state higher than this. She asks : "What is there beyond

ecstasy ?" And she answers : "The union with God. This is accomplished suddenly and violently, but with such force that we should strive in vain to resist the impetuous onset. God has now descended into the substance of the soul and has become one with it." Thus she realized the union with God through ecstasy.

In India the Bhaktas, or those who follow the path of love and devotion, attain to this state of union with God which they call '*Mahabhava*' or the highest state of ecstasy. There have been many in India who have reached that state. Radha, the consort of Krishna, Chaitanya, the great saint and Divine incarnation, who was a contemporary of Luther and who preached the science of Divine love, and Sri Ramakrishna attained to this state of ecstasy. Their spiritual experiences are the illustrations of '*Mahabhava*' in the religious history of India.

In ecstasy, the eagle of the individual soul, being freed from the cage of the physical body, soars high in the spiritual firmament of the Infinite Being. The freedom and happiness which then come are unbounded, the range

of perception becomes infinitely expanded, and the soul realizes the transcendental environment in the place of the material. Then he says, as Eckhart said, "And if His nature and essence and substance are mine I am the son of God." In the highest state of ecstasy the liberated soul rising above all limitations enters into the abode of the Infinite and eventually becomes one with it. Plotinus, the great Neo-Platonist, who lived nearly two centuries after Christ, attained to this state of ecstasy four times in his life. He says to his friend Flaccus: "You ask, how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The infinite, therefore, cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the infinite by a faculty superior to reason, by entering into a state in which you are your finite self no longer—in which the divine essence is communicated to you. This is ecstasy. It is the liberation of your mind from its finite consciousness. Like can only apprehend like; when you thus cease to be finite, you become one with the infinite. In the reduction of your soul to its simplest self, its divine essence, you

realize this union—this identity." * This ecstasy was called by Dionysius, who flourished in the fifth century, the state of the mystic union when the soul is united with God. Describing the nature of this state of ecstasy the great German Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, who flourished in the fourteenth century, also said, "There must be perfect stillness in the soul before God can whisper His word into it, before the light of God can shine in the soul and transform the soul into God. When all passions are stilled and all worldly desires silenced, then the word of God can be heard in the soul."

It is not merely silence from external noise but that tranquil state of mind which is undisturbed by desires and passions. How can we expect to commune with God when our minds are all the time occupied with thousand other things of the world? The secret chamber of the soul of an ordinary man or woman is packed up from the ceiling to the floor with thoughts and ideas that are worldly, with desires and passions of the flesh; there is not

* Plotinus's Letters to Flaccus.

an inch of space left vacant; and still we wonder why God does not come to us, why we have not attained God-consciousness. We do not think for a moment that we have left no room for God in the secret chamber of our soul. How can we invite God in that crowded room when we know that it is not fit even for the visit of a mortal guest? Therefore a seeker after God should, in the first place, clear the chamber of the soul and make room for the Divine guest. He should purify its atmosphere by introducing the vibrations of holy thoughts and spiritual ideas. He should cleanse the floor with tears of repentance for the wrong committed during ignorance, employ the guard of right discrimination and keep constant watch to prevent the impure and unholy thoughts from crossing the threshold of that sacred chamber. He should exercise dispassion and should not be attracted by the pleasures of senses, or objects of desires and earthly ambition. Then with childlike simplicity of the heart and extreme earnestness and sincerity, he should send prayers of invitation to the Lord eagerly longing to see Him, and with concentrated attention, he should look

for His arrival, expecting to receive Him every minute with the same feeling as a true lover has, when he expects to see his beloved who has been absent for a long time. As the tremendous longing of a true lover makes him impatient and forces this scattered energy of his mind to flow through one channel toward his beloved, so the mind of the true lover of God should be concentrated and one-pointed, and its current should constantly flow toward the Divine Ideal. At that time nothing of the world would satisfy the longing of his soul. Wherever there is such a strong longing, there the approach of the Divinity is at hand. The stronger the longing, the quicker is the realization. This ecstasy is very rare, but it is the only state in which the Infinite Being can be realized face to face. The old question whether we can realize the Infinite face to face and the answer to that question we find in the Old Testament. There it is said that no one can live after seeing God. (See Judg. XIII, 22.) It is true to a certain extent, because physically one must be dead in that state. The body will remain like a dead body, but the soul will realize

the Infinite and afterwards will become one with it.

Here it may be asked if ecstasy be the condition of the consciousness of the Infinite and of the realization of spiritual truths and if it be so universally accepted, how can it be attained ? Is there any method by which one can acquire it ? There are various methods by which it can be reached. These methods are fully described in Vedanta. Vedanta analyzes all these methods by which the different souls of different countries have attained to it and have realized the Infinite Being. It also classifies them according to their nature and each of these methods is called "Yoga" or path in Vedanta.

Bhakti Yoga, or the path of love and devotion, is the easiest of all. Love and devotion are like the two wings by which the bird of the human soul flies out of the cage of the physical body and soars high in the spiritual atmosphere of the Infinite Being and enjoys ecstatic happiness. This path has been followed by the majority of the great seers of different countries who entered into ecstasy. If we examine the lives of all these

great saints and prophets, their religious exercises and the methods by which they attained to ecstatic realization, we shall find that love and devotion were at the bottom of them all. The fire of true love and devotion for the Supreme burns all earthly ties and consumes everything which the devotee claims as his own. It is a tremendous fire. Few possibly have realized what that fire of true love is. It acts in the system like high fever. The tongue becomes fever-dry and the blood runs like fire, creating heat and a burning sensation in the body, which can be quenched by no earthly object. The all-consuming fire of love destroys sleep before ecstasy comes. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna did not sleep for twelve years when his whole soul was burning with the fire of love. At one time he suffered for several months from this unbearable burning sensation in his whole body. He used to plunge himself in the Ganges and remain there for hours ; but, alas ! the cold waters of the Ganges failed to put out that fire of love which was burning upon the altar of his heart within the body ; nothing could quench that fire.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the latest Divine manifestation of the present age, showed in his life all the stages of ecstasy as described in the pages of the religious history of the world. His whole life was like a continuous chain of the different states of ecstasy. It was natural with him, while with others ecstasy was a rare accomplishment coming through hard and long-standing practice. The first ecstasy that came to him was when he was six or seven years old after seeing the glorious colouring of a tropical cloud, in the background of which a flight of snow-white cranes flew, and that took him out of the body. His body fell motionless and that experience he never forgot during his lifetime. He always used to mention that state, and whenever any one would ask him what ecstasy was like, he would immediately go into that state ; and we have seen in him the highest state of ecstasy, '*Mahabhava*,' in which his body would remain like a dead body, his pulse and heart-beat would stop for the time being and his spirit would leave the prison of the body and commune with the Infinite. Once he fell in a bowl of burning charcoal and a live coal

struck him on the shoulder and it burnt almost an inch deep into the flesh. He had no sensation and he did not feel it ; and that shows how he could separate himself entirely from the body. Yet he was not possessed by any other spirit at that time ; it was not an obsession, not a trance ; it was a state of ecstasy. When he would remain in that state, his soul would leave his body and enter into the abode of the Infinite. Sometimes he would speak in an unknown tongue which no one could understand. Coming down from that height and regaining his sense-consciousness sometimes he would dance with extreme joy and blissfulness and relate his experiences. He had the power of rousing ecstasy in his disciples by a single touch. He used to say that the joy and happiness in that state of ecstasy can be compared to the indescribable joy and happiness of a live fish which, after being taken out of the water, finds itself back in the water. Can you imagine the happy condition of such a fish ? Sri Ramakrishna used to say that in ecstasy the soul finds its real home where it enjoys absolute freedom from all bondage.

The state of ecstasy, described as *Samadhi*, superconsciousness or God-consciousness, can also be reached through the path of Raja Yoga or concentration upon the Supreme Spirit with higher breathing exercises. The higher breathing exercises, as practised by the Yogis in India, will lift the soul above the material plane and bring the highest revelations of ecstasy in the end. They are entirely different from any other breathing excercise which produces merely physical results or cures diseases. Raja Yoga gives the scientific method by which one can attain to ecstasy, and therefore it is safe for everybody. In Bhakti Yoga, there is a danger of becoming sentimental, erratic and insane; because it is very difficult to control the emotions when the whole heart and soul are flooded with exuberance of the stream of love. These emotions become so unruly and unmanageable that they unbalance the mind of the devotee. There have been many instances of persons who failed to attain to ecstasy and became insane because they could not control their passions and emotions. But there is no such danger in the path of

Raja Yoga or concentration with breathing exercises.

Furthermore, the students of Raja Yoga can advance step by step towards ecstasy under the guidance of an experienced spiritual teacher, and they can thus avoid many of the side-tracks in the field of ecstasy which lead to psychic phenomena, visions and hallucinations that are generally mistaken for the realization of the highest spiritual Truth. Here we shall have to distinguish the experience of ecstasy from hallucinations and ordinary visions or any other psychic phenomena. How are we going to do that? I have seen a number of spiritualists and other occultists who have gone into a state similar to ecstasy, but have not found the spiritual Truth. Because they could not distinguish the highest spiritual Truth from mental visions and psychic phenomena. First of all, we must learn the expressions of spiritual Truths, and in what way they come, and Vedanta will help us in understanding these different stages. Of course, an experienced spiritual teacher is necessary, as in studying either music or art we need an experienced teacher, who

understands the defects and different side-tracks and different conditions which may come along the way. Similarly, we need an experienced teacher also in the practice of Raja Yoga. The science of Raja Yoga claims that this highest state of ecstasy, in which the Divine Being is realized and the consciousness of the Infinite comes, can be attained by any well-qualified man or woman, who has faithfully practised the teachings and has been favoured by direct personal instruction of such an experienced Guru or spiritual Master. In Raja Yoga there is no limitation of any kind. It is not confined to any age or clime nor is it limited by creed, doctrine or dogma of any special religion. But in Bhakti Yoga there are such limitations.

In Bhakti Yoga one must have absolute faith in a personal God with a particular name and form, and must worship that personal God through certain forms of worship until the true love and true devotion come. While in Raja Yoga, no such faith in a personal God is absolutely necessary. One who has no faith in the Supreme

Being can practise Raja Yoga and get the results. There is another peculiarity in Raja Yoga which is this that it does not ask you to believe in anything until you have realized it ; while in Bhakti Yoga, the path of love and devotion (as in Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism or any other dualistic religion), you will have to believe before you realize and must have faith in such a Being. But that may be very difficult for many persons. In Raja Yoga, on the contrary, if you have faith in yourself that you are a soul, a self-conscious spirit, that is enough. You know your own self first, and then, by proper practice, if you can separate your self from the physical organism, you will enter into the state of ecstasy. Raja Yoga can be practised by any follower of any religion, whether a Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist or Hindu ; whosoever follows this path with earnestness and sincerity will surely attain wonderful results in due time. The practice of concentration will develop into meditation and eventually lead the soul through different stages of ecstasy to God-consciousness.

In that state of God-consciousness, all doubts will cease ; all questions regarding the nature of the soul and the spiritual world will be answered ; and the soul will reach that freedom, that liberation from the physical form, which is considered to be the highest, and will become conscious of its past and future. Omniscience will begin to dawn upon the horizon of the soul and illumine the whole inner nature. Then the individual soul, coming in direct contact with the Infinite and realizing the Infinite face to face, as it were, will remain one with the Supreme forever and ever.

Salvation through Love

Salvation through Love

The salvation of souls is the highest ideal of all religions. Zoroastrianism, modern Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and all other monotheistic or dualistic faiths, believing in one supreme personal God who dwells in a heaven outside the universe, who creates and governs the world, rewards the virtuous, and punishes the wicked, unanimously declare that the enjoyment of celestial pleasures in a paradise or heaven is the highest goal which a human soul can possibly reach. They say that nothing can be greater, no other state can be higher than that where the soul, approaching the throne of the Almighty, praises His glory, hears everlasting music and enjoys the pleasures of life without pain, sorrow or cessation. It is a state which is acquired as a reward through the grace of the Almighty by those only who obey His commands and live a righteous life. But those who disobey His commands and are not virtuous are not allowed to enter

into heaven, but are punished forever and ever. To be rescued from this everlasting punishment and torture, and to be permitted to enter into heaven is the popular meaning of salvation amongst the Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Mohammedans and those who believe in an eternal heaven and an eternal place for punishment.

The Zendavesta, the scriptures of the Zoroastrians, describes salvation as the heavenly felicity. It comes from Ahura Mazda to the souls of the righteous as a reward for their virtuous deeds and for their obedience to His commands. Ahura Mazda says : "Happy is he, happy the man, whoever he be, to whom Ahura Mazda gives the full accomplishment of his wishes !" According to the Zendavesta, the souls of the faithful after death dwell the first night in the Good-Thought Paradise, the second night in the Good-Word Paradise, and the third night in the Good-Deed Paradise ; then resurrecting in the dawn after the third night, they come to the throne of Ahura Mazda and rejoice there with the most beautiful maidens forever and ever. The wicked souls, on the contrary, pass

through the Evil-Thought Hell, Evil-Word Hell, Evil-Deed Hell, and lastly stay in Endless Darkness. There they eat the food of poison and suffer until the last day of judgment, when the repentant souls only are rescued by the grace of Ahura Mazda. The influence of this Persian conception of salvation and of heaven and hell has been felt largely in modern Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism.

The ancient Jews did not believe in heaven or hell. They did not bother their heads about the salvation of souls. Neither did they believe in reward and punishment, nor did they attach any ethical sense to the life after death. The critical readers of the Old Testament are familiar with this fact. It was after the Babylonian Captivity which lasted between 536-333 B. C. that the Jewish Rabbis and Doctors began to believe in reward and punishment, and accepted the Persian conception of heaven and hell. There are only two cases mentioned in the Old Testament which speaks of anybody ever going to heaven. They were Enoch and Elijah. But these two instances do not give any evidence

that the ancient Jews had any idea of salvation before the Babylonian Captivity. Like the Jews, the Christians owe their ideas of heaven and of salvation to the Zoroastrians. The Christian conception of salvation, however, is to escape from the hell-fire and eternal punishment and to attain celestial felicity in the presence of the Heavenly Father. That felicity, as we all know, consists in constantly playing on the harp, and listening to everlasting music. There is a hymn which was sung at one time in all the orthodox churches, one verse of which graphically describes the occupation in heaven :

"Where congregations ne'er break up
And Sabbaths never end."

I suppose very few of us would really consider it to be a very desirable state.

A few years ago a Christian missionary went to the Red Indians to preach, and described the Promised Land by saying that there they would neither eat, drink, hunt, nor marry a wife. After hearing this one of the Red Indians contemptuously replied : "Instead of wishing to go there, I should say, my residence in such a place would be

the greatest possible calamity that I could imagine."

The Mohammedans understand by salvation going to heaven and escaping the punishment of hell. Like the Jews and the Christians, the Mohammedans also owe their idea of heaven and hell to the Persian source. But the Mohammedan heaven is more concrete than the Christian. "In it there are gardens, beneath which rivers of water without corruption flow for ever and rivers of milk, the taste whereof changes not, and rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of honey, clarified; and there they shall have shades of trees, bearing all kinds of fruits, will get enduring food of all sorts; and there the pious will find their parents and pure wives and there seed." In the desert of Arabia water and shade are very desirable, so this description of heaven with gardens and water appeals to the imagination of the Mohammedans. But I come from a country where the average rainfall annually is over 400 inches, and we have nearly six months of rainy season in Lower Bengal, where many

villages are washed away every year by the tremendous flood of large rivers. I would not like to go to a heaven full of water. I would rather prefer a drier place. I suppose very few of the English people would care to go to a damp and wet heaven.

The Greeks and the Romans also believed in a heaven and a hell. Their paradise was "Elysian Fields," and their hell was Tartarus. This paradise seems to be an imaginary place as no one has ever succeeded in locating it anywhere definitely. Some say, it was a part of the lower world, while others believe it was in the moon. However, in this paradise "shone more glorious sun and stars than illumined this world. The day was always serene, air was always pure, and a soft celestial light clothed all things in transfigured beauty. Majestic groves, verdant meadows and blooming gardens varied the landscape. The river Eridanus flowed through winding banks, fringed with laurel. On its borders lived heroes who had died for their country, priests who had led a pure life, artists who had embodied genuine beauty in their work and poets who had never degraded their muse with

subjects unworthy of Apollo. There each one renewed the pleasures in which he formerly delighted. Orpheus, in long white robes, made enrapturing music on his lyre, while others danced and sang. The husband rejoined his beloved wife; old friendships were renewed, the poet repeated his verses and the charioteer managed his horses." This heaven resembles in a great many points the Swedenborgian conception of heaven. All the earthly occupations will be resumed and continued in heaven. If this be true, I wish to know how many of the cooks, seamstresses, school teachers, lawyers, housekeepers, bell-boys would like to go to such a heaven and continue their profession forever and ever?

The Teutonic nations also believed in Elysium where the virtuous and the just were rewarded and in a hell where the wicked and cowardly were punished.

The Norwegian heaven was the palace of Odin, the Supreme God. This heaven gives a photographic picture of the manners, wants and tempers of the ancient Scandinavians. It was a place where they could eat and

drink and fight for ever. The duty of women in this heaven was to fill the drinking cups of men. "All men who have fallen in fight since the beginning of the world are gone to Valhalla, the hall of the chosen." "Every day, as soon as they have dressed themselves, they ride out in the Court or field before Odin and there fight until they cut each other into pieces," but by the mysterious power of Odin their wounds are healed, and they are up again. Then comes a wild boar whom they chase, hunt, kill and roast and thus enjoy a good feast and drink. The same performance will be continued every day forever and ever. I doubt whether the peace-loving and vegetarian people would care for this kind of salvation. One of the American mob, who was passionately fond of reading newspapers, asked the preacher, "Is there any newspaper in heaven?" The preacher answered in the negative. "Then," he replied, "I don't want to go to a heaven where there ain't no newspaper."

In India I knew a man who was in the habit of eating a lump of opium every day. His idea of heaven was a place where the

walls of the house should be thickly plastered with opium, and he would get plenty of opium and delicious sweet things to eat. I suppose few of us would like to go to such a heaven.

A young man dreams of a heaven where he will get a beautiful wife. A young woman takes delight in the dream of a heaven where she will have a good and faithful husband, plenty of jewels, all the luxuries of life without sorrow, without any manual labour, like washing dishes, scrubbing floors, and similar other disagreeable works.

Thus we can understand that these various ideas of heaven are according to the likes and dislikes of individuals, tribes and nations. They are but the projections of such ideas as are dearest to them. We create our heaven according to our ideas and wants. If we are attached to a certain object or to any particular kind of pleasure we wish to enjoy it all the time without any cessation; consequently, our heaven will be that place where we shall find that thing or that pleasure for ever. Such is the natural tendency of human minds. Our idea of heaven coincides with our idea of unalloyed happiness and pleasure,

that is, minus unhappiness, misery and sorrow. Such heavens do not exist outside, but in the minds of those who believe in them. They are like the dream-lands which exist merely on the psychic plane of the dreamers. If we are brought up in a society where a certain idea of heaven prevails, unconsciously we imbibe that idea and begin to believe it as true.

Again the idea of heaven is inseparably related to its opposite idea. If there be no hell, or a place for punishment, there will be no necessity for a heaven. When an orthodox Christian or a Mohammedan thinks that he shall go to heaven because of his faith or creed, he feels happy and rejoices at the thought that those who do not follow his creed will go to the other place. So his happiness exists as such, as long it is compared with the sufferings of others at the place of punishment. If all the heathens and sinners come to the Christian heaven instead of going to the other place, then there will be no attraction left for a Christian. Moreover you will notice that the Christian heaven is separated from hell by a transparent

wall, through which the inhabitants of heaven can see the misery and suffering of the wicked; otherwise they would not enjoy it at all. Because our happiness depends upon comparison with its opposite. If we have no conception of pain, we cannot enjoy pleasure. For this reason a Christian minister once asked in the course of his sermon, "Do you suppose that the sight of your friends and relatives in hell will interfere with your eternal felicity?" He answered that it would not; on the contrary, the thought of God's justice would make them take delight in it. Jonathan Edwards* went a little further and said that happiness is always increased by the sight of an opposite condition. If such be the case, I would rather suffer eternal punishment than be in a heaven where people are engaged in such hellish delights.

Furthermore, the very idea of eternal heaven necessitates the idea of an eternal place of punishment. Many people whose

*An American divine (1703—1758). He was an acute metaphysician, but a rigid Calvinist. He wrote "A Treatise concerning Religious Affections," "Sermons," etc.

eyes have been opened by modern science cannot bear the doctrine of eternal punishment; but they believe in an eternal heaven, although they dare not say anything regarding the condition of those who cannot enter into paradise. Whether they speak of it or not, they indirectly admit that the sinners shall have to go somewhere and suffer in some manner forever and ever; otherwise the existence of an *eternal* heaven would be an impossiblity. Therefore, if by salvation is meant going to the eternal heaven, it is implied that those who are not saved must suffer eternally as no other alternative is left for them.

Such a salvation being a reward of God to those who obey His commands, the Zoroastrians, the Jews and the Mohammedans believe that this gift can be obtained by doing good works, and by strictly observing the laws that are prescribed in their scriptures. The orthodox Christians, however, believe that such a salvation can be acquired by faith alone, and not merely by obeying the scriptural laws and commands. It was Paul who first preached this dogma of "salvation by faith."

It teaches that if a sinner after committing all kinds of sins and crimes throughout his life believes that Jesus the Christ died for him and took away all his sins, then he will be pardoned and saved from punishment and will go straight to heaven after death and enjoy there celestial pleasures for ever. This is the common belief. No doubt the path of salvation has been smoothed and made easy by this method, but the most baneful effects of such a doctrine are to be found nowhere so much as among the Christian converts in India. They imitate all Christian vices with a hope of getting salvation simply through the power of the blind faith that Christ died for them and took away all sins.

According to Vedanta, however, salvation does not consist in simply going to heaven and enjoying the celestial pleasures. Although Vedanta does not deny the existence of a heaven, but on the contrary, admitting that there are many heavens or realms of enjoyment, it says that salvation means something different from the enjoyment of heavenly felicity after death. The common name in

Sanskrit of all these heavens is "*Loka*," which means a realm. For instance, there is Pitriloka, or the realm of the Fathers, manes, or departed ancestors; Devaloka, or the realm of the *devas* or bright spirits; Brahmaloka, the realm of Brahma, the Creator, the first-born Lord, or the Father of the universe. Each of these realms is described as a heaven for celestial enjoyment and each is to be acquired by good deeds or good Karma. If, for example, any person desires some particular kind of enjoyment after death, he shall have to perform some special kind of good work, and then after death, as a result of his work, he will go to that realm where he will find the object of his desire. But at the same time Vedanta teaches that going to any such heaven cannot be called the attainment of true salvation. These realms or heavens are not eternal, because they are within the domain of the phenomenal universe. No one can stay in any such heaven throughout eternity without having any further growth or making any further progress; but on the contrary, Vedanta says that the inhabitants of the heavens shall stay there until the fruits

of their good works are reaped completely. At the end of the period of enjoyment of the fruits of their works, they shall be forced to come back to this earth, and shall be born again to perform new Karma, and make further progress.

The stay in the heavens cannot be eternal because it is the result of good action, which is finite and limited by time, and consequently non-eternal. Many people use the word "eternal" without paying proper attention to its true meaning. The term "eternal" literally means beginningless and endless. Anything that has a beginning or an end cannot be called eternal. The result of an action again, by the law of action and reaction, being of a similar nature to the work itself, the effect can be eternal only when its cause is eternal, and not otherwise. Such being the condition of the law of cause and effect, how can any work, however good it might be, when it has a beginning in time and space, produce an eternal result, that is, a result which is unlimited either in time or space ? It is simply an illogical and absurd statement that heaven, which is attainable as

the result of finite good works, or of faith, is eternal. If anyone does good work or worships God at every second of his life-time, still the sum total of all his works must be finite and limited by time. How can it then produce an eternal result? That cannot be. For the same reason there cannot be eternal punishment. If a wicked man commits the most sinful act at every moment of his earthly career, even then the span of his life being like an infinitesimal particle when compared to eternity, the sum total of all his wicked or sinful acts can never produce any such thing as eternal punishment. Therefore the doctrine of eternal punishment is also illogical and absurd. The religion of Vedanta does not accept any such dogma which makes heaven or hell eternal. In reality, all heavens when compared to the beginningless and endless eternity are as transitory as anything of this world. Therefore Vedanta Philosophy declares that eternal salvation is not acquired by going to heaven of any kind, whether it be a Christian, Mohammedan, or Hindu heaven. They are all phenomenal. For this reason it is said in the Bhagavad Gita:

"आब्रह्मभुवनाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्त्तिनोऽर्ज्जुन ।"

"O Arjuna! none of these heavens from the highest heaven of the Creator downward is permanent. The inhabitants thereof are sure to return from them sooner or later." (VIII. 16.) Consequently it is not the real salvation according to Vedanta.

The true and the highest meaning of salvation is neither going to a heaven nor enjoying celestial pleasures and living in the presence of a personal God, but it lies in going beyond all phenomena, in rising above all relativity and in attaining perfect freedom from all bondage of time, space and the law of causation. This perfect freedom is possible when one transcends all laws that govern the physical, mental, moral and spiritual planes. In that state the individual soul realizes its Divine nature and enjoys the blissfulness of absolute emancipation from all limitation and imperfection. This salvation is called in Sanskrit "Moksha," that is, perfect freedom of the soul. Perhaps Jesus the Christ meant this perfect freedom when he said: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

This absolute freedom or true salvation which is eternal cannot be obtained as the result of good works. Neither can it be attained by mere belief in this man or that being, in this book or that creed, nor by blind faith in any scriptural statement. It comes to the soul which is purified from ignorance and selfishness by unselfish works which should be done not for gaining rewards or results of any kind, but through pure and disinterested love. It comes to the soul of the lover of Absolute Truth; to that soul which is not bound by any creed or sect or dogma, but which, after breaking down all fetters, soars high in the spiritual atmosphere for the realization of the Absolute Truth.

True salvation or perfect freedom does not begin after death, like that of the dualistic religions, but it commences here in this life. He who is not free here cannot enjoy freedom in the grave. He who has not struggled for freedom in this life shall not attain it after death. He who is a slave of passions and sense desires will remain so hereafter. According to Vedanta, absolute freedom or emancipation of the soul from the bondage

of ignorance, selfishness and all other limitation and imperfection can be acquired when the ultimate Truth of Divinity is realized. In fact, true salvation and the realization of the Absolute Truth come simultaneously. Again before one realizes the Eternal Truth there must be in the soul extreme desire, longing and love for that Truth. If there be in any soul extreme longing for freedom and intense love for the Eternal Truth, it is impossible for that soul to remain contented or happy until it has realized the Truth and become free. The power of love is tremendous. There is no force in the universe greater or stronger than the power of love. If there be true and genuine love for anything, nothing in the world can resist or counteract the attraction of the soul towards that object of love. True love is that power which brings the soul and the object of love together, unites them and makes them into one, after removing all the obstacles with which the lover or the object of love might have been beset. It cuts off all ties, breaks the chain by which the lover might have been bound and sets him free. If we have real love for the Eternal

Truth our minds should naturally be withdrawn from all transitory things which are non-eternal; or, in other words, we should be unattached to that which is not eternal and only care for that which is eternal.

Our souls should not be attracted by any other object than that which is unlimited by time and space. Our life is determined by the things we love. If you tell me the thing you love most, if you show me the object of your intense love, you have shown me your life; because we live in what we love. If we love the highest then we live on the highest plane. If we love material things we are on the material plane. If we have self-love we are selfish. If we love slavery we are slaves. If we love freedom we cannot live without being absolutely free and without being saved from all bondage. Therefore when we begin to love the Eternal Truth, which is the centre of the universe, we have come nearer and closer to that centre and must gradually attain it sooner or later and ultimately become one with it. That Eternal Truth again is one and cannot be many.

It is called God, or the Father of the universe, as well as by many other names. It is said in the Vedanta : "*Raso Vai Sah*," that is, "the nature of Divinity is Love which is absolute, unchangeable, infinite and eternal. Blessed is he who has tasted that Love Divine." Wherever there is the expression of true love, there is the manifestation of Divinity ; consequently there is freedom or salvation from all bondage ; there is absolute knowledge, that is, the salvation from ignorance ; there is Truth, that is, the salvation from that which is unreal, untrue, or non-eternal ; there is happiness, that is, the salvation from misery, sorrow and suffering. The light of Divine Love dispels the darkness of ignorance and reveals the Eternal Truth which is dwelling in each soul.

The easiest way of attaining this Divine Love is to understand the conditions under which human love becomes divine. Although every one of us is conscious of the feeling of love, still very few indeed do realize the true nature of Divine Love. The same love which is manifested in human hearts, when governed by selfishness is earthly, narrow,

limited and it leads to bondage, sorrow and suffering ; but when it is not guided by selfish motives, it is pure, divine and it leads to freedom of soul and eternal happiness. All evil and wickedness proceed from love governed by selfish feelings ; and all good and virtue are the results of acts which are prompted by unselfish love. Whatever is bad and sinful in society is nothing but the ill-directed working out of the feeling of love. But when it is properly directed toward the Eternal Truth, it always produces good and happiness, and brings to the soul salvation from all selfishness and wickedness.

In each individual soul is flowing a current of love, which like a confined river constantly seeks an outlet through which it can run into the ocean of Divine Love which is called God. It may not find an outlet for a long time ; it may remain confined for ages within the limits of the narrow self or ego ; but it never loses that tendency to run toward the infinite ocean of Eternal Love. It must find its way out of that limit sooner or later. Every drop of that stream of love which flows in the human heart contains the germ of Divine Love.

But it varies in its character according to to the direction toward which it flows, and to the motive by which it is governed. When it flows toward one's own self, it is animal; when toward another for mutual benefit, it is human; but when it flows toward an object only for the good of that object, then it is divine. This is only possible when the love for Eternal Truth springs up in the bosom of the individual soul. As the Eternal Truth is all-pervading and manifests itself as souls of all living creatures, and especially through human beings, the love for Truth generates true and unselfish love for all human beings—nay, for all living creatures. It is then alone that whatever is done by body and mind is performed through pure and disinterested love for the good of all, and not for fulfilling selfish motives or desires, or for gaining anything in return.

Divine Love does not seek any return for work. Wherever there is a feeling of getting any return of love, it is no longer unselfish or divine; it does not bring freedom or salvation from selfishness; but on the other hand, it binds the soul with the tie of that desire for

getting the return, and consequently makes it unhappy and miserable. All desires proceed from self. How can a man taste the nectar of Divine Love and obtain salvation from selfishness so long as he is a slave of desires? O man! if thou desirest to enjoy eternal freedom, first wipe out from the tablet of thy heart the least stain of selfishness and attachment to selfish desires or motives. Divine Love saves the soul from the bondage of fear. Love and fear cannot dwell in the same place at the same time. Fear proceeds from attachment to the self; while true love makes one unattached to the self, and attached to the Universal Truth. Love and fear are like the two opposite poles; where the one predominates the other cannot approach. Even in ordinary life when a man truly falls in love with another, he loses all fear of criticism or opinion of others, and becomes absolutely fearless. He does not fear death even, when he knows that after death he will be with his beloved. As such, how is it possible for an unselfish lover of the Eternal Truth to fear anything of the world? Divine Love conquers all fear.

Furthermore, Divine Love makes one free from the bondage of duties. As a true lover neglects his duties towards parents, relatives, friends, society, when he is in the company of his beloved, so a lover of God rises above all duties ; and like God Himself, he ever remains free from them. Again, as a true lover leaves everybody for the sake of being with his beloved, so the lover of God renounces everything for the sake of being always with Him. Divine Love brings non-attachment to worldly pleasures and enjoyments.

In fact, Divine Love and absolute renunciation of all other desires for pleasures and enjoyments go together hand in hand. Thus the true lover of God desires nothing, he cares for nothing but the Eternal Truth. His mind is absolutely one-pointed and he is truly happy.

Divine Love brings the highest ecstatic condition in which the individual soul communes with the Universal Spirit. It transforms the human nature into the Absolute Divinity which is ever free and ever blissful. In that ecstatic state of Supreme Love the individual soul reaches true salvation or absolute freedom from attachment to the lower

self, which is the highest aim of our life. Then he does not care to go to heaven or to enjoy celestial pleasures after death. He enjoys everlasting bliss even in this life. Having once acquired this absolute freedom he never for a second loses it, but always remains as the master of nature and lord of the world. With his soul fixed in union with Brahman, the Eternal Reality, or Truth, he conquers birth and attains true salvation in this life through that love which is unselfish and divine.*

* Gita, V. 19.

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