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SWAMI ABHEDANANDA, an apostle of Sri Ramakrishna—Born October 2, 1866—Spent his early life among his brotherhood in Baranagar monastery near Calcutta, in severe austerity—Travelled bare-footed all over India from 1888-1895—Acquainted with many distinguished savants including Prof. Max Mueller and Prof. Paul Deussen—Landed in New York, took the charge of the Vedanta Society in 1897—Became acquainted with Prof. William James, Rev. Dr. R. H. Newton, Prof. W. Jackson, Prof. Josiah Royce of Harvard, Prof. Hyslop of Columbia, Prof. Lanmann, Prof. G. H. Howison, Prof. Fay, Mr. Edison, the inventor, Dr. Elmer Gates, Ralph Waldo Trine, W. D. Howells, Prof. Herschel C. Parker, Dr. H. S. Logan, Rev. Bishop Potter, Prof. Shaler Dr. James, the chairman of the Cambridge Philosophical Conference and the professors of Columbia, Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Berkeley and Clarke Universities Travelled extensively all through the United States, Canada, Alaska and Mexico Made frequent trips to Europe delivering lectures in different parts of the Continent Crossed the Atlantic for seventeen times Was appreciated very much for his profundity of scholarship, intellectual brilliance, oratorial talents, charming personality and nobility of character A short visit to India in 1906 Returned again to America Came back to India at last in 1921—On his way home joined the Educational Conference, Honolulu Visited Japan, China, the Philipines, Singapore, Kualalumpur and Rangoon Started on a long tour and went as far as Tibet Established centres at Calcutta and Darjeeling Left his mortal frame on September 8, 1939.

ATTITUDE OF VEDANTA TOWARDS RELIGION

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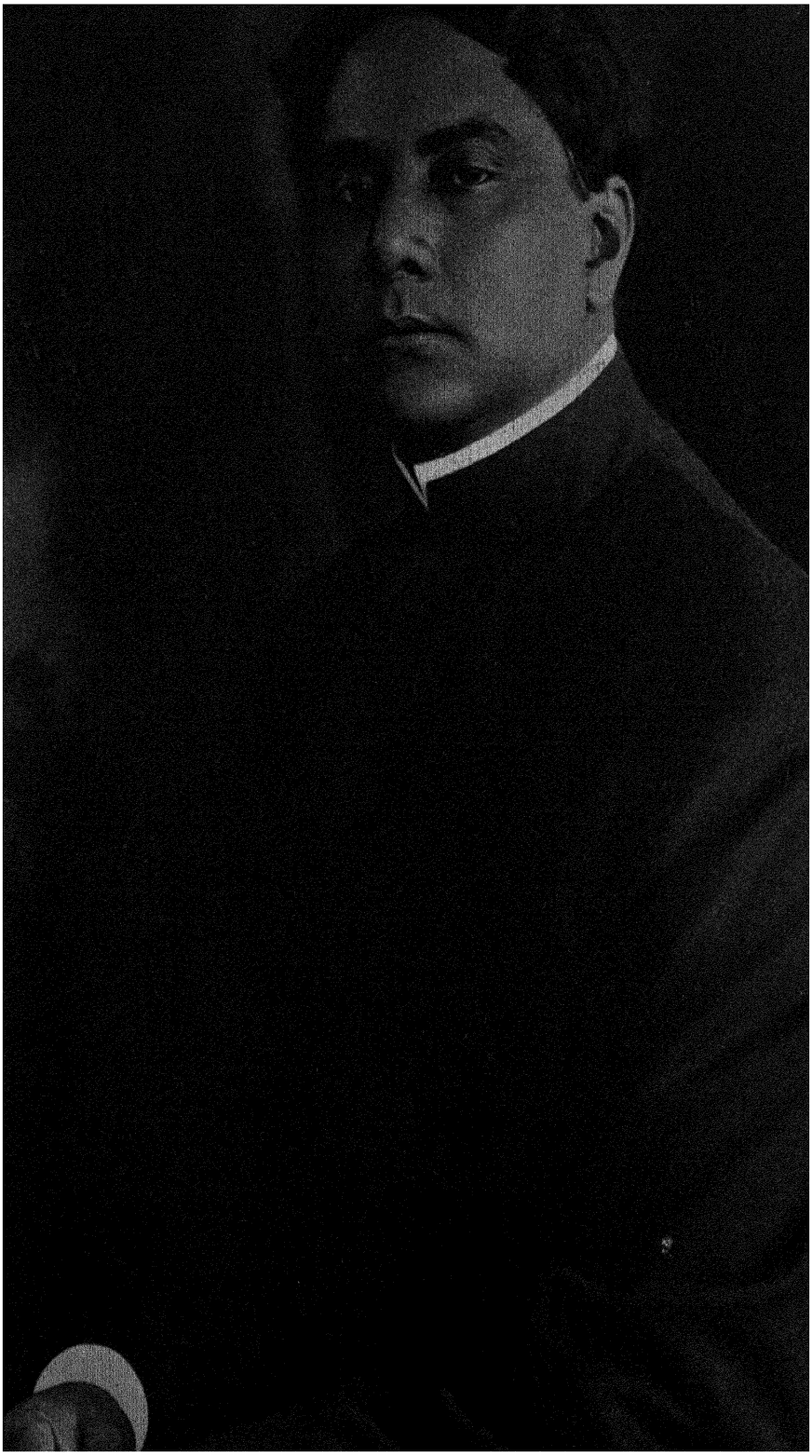
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Abhedananda Memorial Series No. 4.

ATTITUDE OF VEDANTA TOWARDS RELIGION

by

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA



CALCUTTA
RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH

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PREFACE

Attitude of Vedânta towards Religion is an offer of ours to the reading public as the *fourth* contribution of the *Abhedânanda Memorial Series.* This volume is a collection of nineteen lectures hitherto unpublished on different aspects of Vedânta philosophy and religion delivered from time to time on various occasions before the audiences in America. Swâmi Abhedananda's keen intellect, profound knowledge in philosophies and religions, both of the East and the West, and his analytic and comparative method of treatment of his subjects in a lucid style with deep penetrating thought make his writings explicit and clear. In this volume the Swâmi deals with different arrays of thoughts and problems of philosophy and religion, their ups and downs in connection with the ever-evolving phases of the human societies, their harmonies and disharmonies, their various distinctive features and characteristics, their additions and alterations, adjustments and readjustments, and also their divergent ways of approaching the ultimate goal. Besides these his is a clear and unifying vision of a universal ideal that binds the different schools of thoughts, both of philosophy and religion of the world into a synthetic unity of love and brotherhood.

Swâmi Abhedânanda marches throughout all of his discourses neither as a critic, nor as an academic preacher, but he views and reveals his subjects as a true and practical philosopher and real worshipper of Truth. Not only he studied and practised the different ideals of philosophy and religion of the world, but realized them also in his own life, had seen their central truth in his ecstatic and transcendental vision. He won the admiration of philosophical and religious Western world. By his own illustrious example he succeeded in curing the Westerners of their credulity, blind faith, sectarianism and narrow bigotry.

Inspired as he was with the blessed touch of the holy Saint of Dakshineswar, his whole thought and body were surcharged with the power divine and the universal ideal revealed in his great Master, plunged himself into the ocean of Vedântic truth and universal thought. That is why it was possible for him to harmonize all the divergent systems of thoughts and faiths into a synthetic whole. He preached before the world the gospel of Truth and universal love. His life, as it were, was an unceasing song of human unity and fraternity. By the beatific light of wisdom he never failed to show the West as well as the East the merits and demerits of their respective philosophies and religions, and led all through the royal road to the radiant land of freedom and eternal bliss.

Attitude of Vedanta towards Religion is a thesis of universal outlook of thought. It attempts to prove the identity of the essence and ideal of Vedânta with religion. Its venture is to establish that philosophy is the theoretical and speculative side of religion, and religion is the practical side of philosophy; philosophy is the flesh and bone and religion is the blood and life. So, the attitude of Vedânta towards religion is ever sympathetic, friendly and helpful. Truly speaking, religion animates Vedânta philosophy with inspiration and spirit. And not only this, Vedânta itself is a religion. Vedânta means 'end of wisdom'. That is, Vedânta is a synthetic and perfect method that reveals our supreme knowledge and divine love already lying hidden within the depth of our hearts. The attainment of this supreme knowledge is surely the Be-all and End-all of our life. The teachings of Vedânta are non-sectarian and universal. Vedânta never remains confined to the narrow walls of caste, creed and colour. Like the flood of morning light it embraces all; it brings unending peace and eternal bliss to all irrespective of their sects, faiths or practices. It admits the belief in God, both personal and impersonal, doctrines, dogmas, and all kinds of spiritual *sâdhanâs*, rituals and ceremonies, faiths and creeds. But at the

same time it again warns that they are only the scattered gems and jewels before the portal of the Chintâmani, the supreme Lord. Doctrines, dogmas, creeds, beliefs, rituals, prayers and all other vows and practices are but so many paths to reach the ultimate goal, the Brahman-knowledge. The aim of Vedânta as well as of true religion, is to strike off the fetters of false knowledge (*mithyâ pratyaya*), to go beyond the phantom of fleeting phenomena, and to attain to the peace and tranquility that impart joy and bliss unbound, eternal and unearthly.

Swâmi Abhedânanda says that Vedânta philosophy admits the process of evolution, both external and internal, and also material and spiritual. He views that the whole universe has evolved gradually out from that which was latent in the matrix of the divine Energy. In this respect there prevails no conflict between the modern science and Vedânta. Because science also admits the gradual evolution of the universe that came out from the nebulous state to the present material form. But with regard to the attainment of ultimate goal, science is still imperfect, it has not yet completed its journey.

As there is a gradual evolution of the human physique, so the mind of a man also rises from the material to the moral, from the moral to the religious, from the religious to the spiritual plane and thus completes its course through a gradual process. The ultimate goal of evolution is to reach the termination *i.e.,* perfection says Swâmi Abhedânanda and this terminus is also admitted by a host of evolutionist philosophers and social reformists like Herbert Spencer, Whitehead, Alexander, Haldane, Bernard Shaw, Hobhouse, Dewey, Spengler, Sorokin and others. Vedânta also admits the end of the gradual marching or evolution, and this end or terminus is the Godconsciousness or supramundane *Brahman.* The greatest obstacle to the path of Godconsciousness is *selfishness* or the ego-centric idea which is called by Sri Râmakrishna as the "little self' or '*kânchâ-âmi*". The very idea of the petty or narrow self is the *delusion* that keeps men

hypnotized and entangled in the chains of the world of changes. All men, nay, all living and non-living beings and things are in essence the *Atman or Brahman.* But for ignorance they cannot realize, or rather *recognize* their own pristine glory; nor they can correct their false knowledge regarding the true nature of their being. So, the Swâmi says that it is absolutely necessary to respond to the clarion call of Vedânta. For, Vedânta is the most perfect system of philosophy and at the same time a true religion. Vedânta teaches that *Atman* is the substrate of all the things in the world; the substrate or the *Atman* is only real and all beings and things that borrow their existence and value from it, are unreal. So, we shall have to harmonize our lives with the highest ideals of Vedânta and religion, we should practise that ideal in our daily run of life, and we should march onward towards the real goal, the abode of eternal tranquility and heavenly peace.

Swâmi Abhedânanda assures all the seekers after Truth that perfect freedom is sure to come if we strive hard to reach that goal with all our sincerity, wholeheartedness and simplicity. A man can be free even in this very life, provided he is possessed of earnest longing and incessant striving for freedom. Though the ways are diverse, the goal is always one and the same. There is no such hard and fast rule that all the aspirants should follow the one and same path of spiritual practice. Vedânta does not allow such rigid and one-sided principle. But, on the contrary, it has prescribed various ways and means in accordance with the various tastes, tendencies and temperaments of different aspirants. All have the right of their free choice. Everyone is free enough to choose either Yoga, or Bhakti, or Karma, or Jnâna; for, all paths will lead to the same goal. The goal is the God-realization or the knowledge of the *Brahman.* Men should have hunger—hunger for spiritual knowledge. Men should always knock at the closed door of the inner recess of their heart; the truth, the success is sure to come. So, it is our duty to march forward to reach that ultimate Truth and

neither to look behind, nor to recede backwards. Life is a great mystery no doubt, but it can be unveiled, and its problems can be solved here even in this life.

The Swâmi, in these illuminating lectures really represents the idea of Vedânta and true religion. He says that spiritual aspirants should not rest content only with the raw materials of the Vedânta philosophy and religion. They should not be satisfied only with the intellect, reason and argumentation though they are the chief instruments in the domain of philosophy, or they should not be entangled in mere preliminary practices of religion, but they should enter into their spirit, and should drink deep the nectar of divine knowledge and bliss that will make them immortal and transcend the world of sorrows and sufferings.

It is needless to add that a detailed content and an index have been added to this volume for the convenience of the readers. The nice frontspiece which is a hitherto unpublished photograph taken in America, enhances the beauty of the volume. We shall consider our efforts crowned with success if this book wins the appreciation of all the seekers after truth and wisdom.

THE PUBLISHER.

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Ist July, 1947.

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CHAPTER ONE

VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

Sisters and brothers of California, since the year 1893, when our illustrious brother, Swâmi Vivekânanda, delivered his address on the Vedânta philosophy before the Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair in Chicago, a genuine interest has been created in the minds of the people of this country to make a careful study of the philosophy and religion of ancient India. Since that time many of the wrong impressions and erroneous notions have been removed from the minds of the Western people by the writings of the Swâmis and of such able scholars as the late Prof. Max Müller, Deussen and others. But the majority of those who have not studied such writings often ask such questions: "What is Vedânta? Is it the same as Theosophy? Is it Spiritualim? Is it Buddhism? Or is it the same as the New Thought Movement which makes healing diseases the highest end of life?"

Before we discuss the difference between Vedânta and Theosophy or Spiritualism or Buddhism or the New Thought Movement, we should understand clearly the fundamental principles of the most ancient and most sublime philosophy that has ever been given to the world. We should remember that the word 'Vedânta' means the 'end of wisdom.' By this we do not however dogmatize that there is such a thing as the 'end of wisdom'. We simply mean by Vedânta that wisdom which includes all the different phases of knowledge gathered by studying nature and the various branches of philosophy, psychology, etc., which includes all the partial knowledge of the universal knowledge. In ancient times a disciple asked his spiritual master: "By knowing

what, can one know everything of this universe?" The Seer of Truth answered: "By knowing the Brahman, the eternal infinite Being which is the source of all powers that are manifested in this phenomenal universe, one can know everything." Knowing that Brahman alone, one ceases to search after anything higher or greater. That infinite source of all powers, of all sciences, of all philosophies, of all beauty and love, is the goal of all religions and philosophies. Therefore, the highest ideal of the Vedânta philosophy is to lead the human mind to the realization of that eternal One, which is the ground of the world. By knowing that eternal Truth alone, one can know everything; by understanding that eternal One, everything is understood. The highest conception of that absolute One has been expressed most beautifully in the Rig Veda, the most ancient Scripture in the world. The Rig Veda says: "That which exists is one: men call it by various names"— (एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति). That infinite Absolute, that eternal One which is nameless, formless, is the foundation of this Vedânta philosophy. That One has appeared as manifold through the manifestations of the various powers which exist potentially in this source of all things and all beings. Therefore, unity in variety is the fundamental principle of Vedânta philosophy. We must strive to see *oneness* which underlies the diversified phenomena of the universe. Our aim should be to unify all these different manifestations into that one absolute Being and to make so many phenomena into one undivided mass of Reality.

Vedânta philosophy does not teach that this world has been created by some extra-cosmic Being, who sits outside of the universe and acts from the heaven and moulds matter by living outside of matter, but on the contrary, Vedânta philosophy teaches that this whole universe is nothing but the expression or manifestation of all the powers that are latent—that exist potentially in that absolute Being. But truly speaking, the God of

Vedânta is not an extra-cosmic Being; He is not a personal God with a certain form as that of a human being with two hands, sitting on a throne etc., as we find in the Christian conception of God, but the God of Vedânta is immanent and resident in nature. He dwells in nature: He dwells in us, in each individual soul: He is personal, impersonal, and beyond both. He appears as personal to one who believes in a personal God. He appears as personal to the dualists. He appears impersonal to one who has risen above that state of dualism, who has unfolded that spiritual sight by which he can see the presence of Divinity in every living and inanimate objects of the universe. But there is a still higher conception of that Being: it is the absolute oneness of spirit, which is the Reality of the universe. Jesus the Christ realized that oneness and said: "I and my Father are one." So if we realize that oneness which was realized by Jesus the Christ, and other Prophets we shall say that we and our Father are one; "I am He"—*'So'ham;* "I am the same Being who dwells in the sun, moon and stars, who is the infinite source of intelligence and life in the organic and inorganic forms of this universe."

Vedânta philosophy teaches that the individual soul is immortal and divine. It is eternal, beyond birth and death. "Fire cannot burn it: water cannot moisten it: air cannot dry it: swords cannot pierce it."[1] It is unchangeable, immortal, eternal, infinite and absolute. Ralph Waldo Emerson was inspired by this philosophy when he wrote his essay on the *Over-soul* and his poem on *"Brahma"*. Those who have read his poems will remember the lines:

'If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain.
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.'

1 Vide *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. II, 23.

This is a literal translation of the Sanskrit verse which runs thus: "If the slayer think he slays, or if the slain think he is slain, both of them know not that the soul of man can neither slay nor be slain."[2] We are all living souls. We are beyond birth and beyond death. By *death,* we do not mean *annihilation of the soul,* but the change of form, the changing of body. "As we throw away our old garments and put on new ones, so the soul throws away one form when it has fulfilled its purpose, and puts on a new one after the dissolution of the old:"[3] This idea has been explained in Eastern countries by different sects, societies, and people. It is generally known as the doctrine of reincarnation. The doctrine of reincarnation is based entirely upon the scientific doctrine of evolution. If we believe that a germ of life, whether we call it amoeba, bioplasm, or monad, gradually passes through the different stages of evolution, and if we believe in the identity—in the continuity, of this existence through different manifestations, then it becomes similar to the doctrine of reincarnation. We do not lose our identity after death. We do not lose our individuality; but our future becomes the resultant of our present, just as much as our present is the resultant of our past. We mould our own destiny. We create our own future by our thoughts, words and deeds. Bound by the inexorable law of *Karma,* or the law of causation, as it is called by modern scientists, each soul is passing through various stages of evolution and manifesting those powers that are potential within itself. By passing through these different stages, we gradually rise higher and higher until the purpose of life is fulfilled, until the goal, the end of wisdom, is reached.

Vedânta philosophy does not say that a soul is born a sinner, but on the contrary, it teaches that each soul is a child of immortal Bliss. One of the ancient Seers,

2 Vide *Bhagavad Gita,* Ch. II. 22.
3 *Ibid,* Ch. II, 19.

after realizing that eternal Being, said in a thundering voice before the world: "Oh ye children of Immortal Bliss! listen to me I have discovered the eternal Truth, and by knowing that alone one can cross the ocean of life."[4] Vedânta philosophy teaches that sin is nothing but *selfishness* and that *selfishness* is caused by the ignorance of our true Divine nature. The moment we realize that we are divine, that we are one with the universal Spirit, we rise above the sense plane, above all phenomenal appearances, and then all attachment to little things, all attraction to the objects of senses, absolutely vanish. When we come to realize that we are one with our friends and foes, there is no one in the world who can be called enemy or foe, but all are friends. All are one in spirit and that realization of *oneness* is called *love*, the Divine Love. When Jesus the Christ said: "Love thy neighbour as thyself," he did not say *why*. But why should we love our neighbours as ourselves? Christ did not explain it. But if they are not already one with our true selves why should we love them? The explanation of this aphorism is to be found in the Vedas. In the Vedas we find the explanation in the one short sentence: *Tat twam asi, i.e.* "Thou art That" Because we are our neighbours in spirit, we cannot but love our neighbours—we are forced by nature to love our neighbours as ourselves, we cannot separate the Self of our neighbour from our Self. We must not love our neighbours on account of their good works, not on account of their meritorious deeds, not on account of something they have done for our benefit or for our good, but because of that internal *oneness*, that *oneness* in spirit that can never be broken by anything in this phenomenal world.

Vedânta philosophy is based entirely upon the doctrine of evolution. Standing on that firm rock of evolution, it tries to establish a religion which harmonizes with the ultimate conclusions of modern science and philo-

4 *Svetasvara Upanishad*, Ch. II. 5, III. 8.

sophy, and which applies the rules of logic in its search after Truth. One characteristic mark in Vedânta is that it never separates religion from philosophy, science and logic. Vedânta rather says that which is illogical, unscientific and unphilosophical, cannot be religious. It accepts the supremacy of reason and follows the rules of logic, and therefore, it is perfectly scientific. By making reason as the supreme guide in the search after truth it makes its foundation scientific. A study becomes scientific when you make reason your supreme guide and when you follow the rules of logic. Vedânta teaches what is illogical, unscientific, unphilosophical, cannot be religious, because the object of philosophy, science etc. is to discover truth, and religion teaches us how to live a life that will harmonize with that truth that has been discovered by science and philosophy. Philosophy is the practical side of religion, and religion is the life and spirit of philosophy. Philosophy is the flesh and religion is the blood. In India these two are one. A philosopher is a spiritual man in India. He is not sitting in a corner, but is practising what he has learnt. And a spiritual man in India necessarily becomes a philosopher because philosophy and true spirituality are inseparable. If a religion cannot teach us the true nature of ourselves—the true nature of the soul, its beginning, its destiny; if it does not enlighten us with the knowledge of that one eternal Truth, it is not worthy of its name. Therefore, religion, according to Vedânta, is not a belief in a particular set of dogmas. or in any creed, but it is the science of the soul. It teaches us who we are, what we are, what we were before this body came into existence and what we shall be after the dissolution of this body. It also teaches us what relation this soul bears to the absolute Being. It tells us that the soul existed before the birth of the body, because it is immortal. By *immortality*, we do not mean that it has beginning on one side and endlessness on the other, as Christian theology teaches. We say that which has a beginning, must have an end. If

the soul was created by any being, then that sould must have an end, consequently, it cannot be immortal. If you once admit the birth of the soul, then you will have to admit the death of the soul. Therefore, Vedânta philosophy tells us that the soul has neither beginning nor end. It is eternal like the Divine Being itself. Vedânta philosophy tells us that this soul has passed through the lower stages of evolution. The lower animals have souls, but they are not so well developed at present. By the process of evolution they will go on to the higher stages, will become human beings, and go on evolving until perfection is reached.

Now, what is meant by *perfection*? By *perfection* we mean the *realization of our own true nature,* the rising above all that is included in the word *selfishness,* having knowledge of everything, having mastery over nature, having mastery over the senses, over body, over mind, and attaining perfect freedom and Godconsciousness. That is, what we mean by *perfection,* is the attainment of perfect freedom and Godconsciousness. Each individual soul, is divine, but very few of us have realized it. The moment we realize it, we become Divine. The difference between a great spiritual leader like Jesus, the Christ and the ordinary man is in degree—in degree of realization and not in kind. The ordinary man who lives like an animal becomes divine the moment he realizes Divinity in himself. Then he atatins to Christhood —the state of realization. Then he will cease to be selfish,—his acts will proceed not from selfish motives, but for the good of the world. He will say the same as Jesus said: "Whatever is *mine* is *thine* and whatever is *thine* is *mine.*" *"I, me, mine,"* would become one with *"thou, thee, thine."* And Vedânta philosophy tells us the methods by which that can be attained.

Like modern science, Vedanta philosophy is not built around any particular personality, nor does it depend on any authority of any person, ancient or modern, nor does it depend upon any book. On the contrary, it includes

all the teachings of all spiritual leaders who have lived in different parts of the earth at different times,—Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Mohammed, and those who came after them or will come in the future, because it includes all the ultimate truths that have been discovered by the greatest thinkers, scientists, and philosophers, irrespective of caste, creed, or nationality. In short, "Vedânta philosophy has room for almost every religion, nay, it includes them all," as Professor Max Müller has said.

This Vedânta philosophy tells us how Godconsciousness is to be realized. It gives us different *methods*: the method through love and devotion is called *Bhakti Yoga*, the method through good works is called *Karma Yoga*, the method through wisdom or discrimination is called *Jnâna Yoga*, and the method through concentration and meditation is called *Râja Yoga*. The term *Yoga* is a Sanskrit word which means 'the path or method by which Godconsciousness can be attained, by which knowledge of Truth can be acquired.' Each of these methods is good: one is just as good as the other. One may have a devotional nature, and for that person the path through devotion and love would be the best. One who is emotional need not destroy one's emotion in order to become spiritual, but through emotion that highest end of life can be obtained. We must not destroy any thing which we possess now, but we should direct our powers, our feelings, towards the highest ideal. This is the secret of devotion. If you do any work, you must know the secret of work. What is the secret of work? The secret of work lies in doing work and having no motive. It may seem to you absolutely impossible. How can a person work without any motive? By the *motive* I mean the *selfish motive*? "To work you have the right but not to the fruits thereof."[5] Work constantly without seeking

5 "कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।"
—Bhagavad Gita, Ch. II, 47.

the result of work. Do your duty through love, and then leave the results to the care of themselves. Do not worry about results, but work. Go on working constantly and in this way you will find that all the obstructions of your mind will be washed away, cleaned off, and this kind of work will be the means of knowing the Supreme *which is dwelling within*. This path is called Karma Yoga, the path through unselfish work. The path through discrimination is the path through analysis of your own nature. Analyze your nature. Seek to know whether you are a spiritual or a material being: whether you are the result of some force merely, or whether you are something higher than matter, something better than blind force. Discriminate, have right knowledge, have right understanding of yourself and through that right knowledge and right understanding, you will reach the highest goal and fulfil the purpose of life. This was expressed by the Delphic Oracle to Socrates when he asked: "What is the highest wisdom?" He got the answer: "Know thyself." If you can know your true Self, you will know God, you will know the true nature of the universe, you will know whether there is such a thing as soul, whether there is such a thing as Divine Spirit or not. So, this path of discrimination leads to the same goal. Then there is another path through concentration and meditation. By concentrating your mind upon your Divine nature, which is dwelling within you, which is not outside of you, which is inseparable from yourself,—you will gain the knowledge, you will get that light which can illumine the dark corners of your mind and fill it with Light Divine. That path is called the path of Râja Yoga, or concentration and meditation. All these paths lead to the same goal. There is nothing mysterious, nothing occult in these teachings. Some people call it mysticism, but it is not the mysticism. It does not make anything mysterious, cloudy or hazy. On the contrary, it makes everything clear and distinct. And as it does neither teach mysticism nor occultism, nor does it depend upon the

sayings of some invisible *Mahâtman* or imaginary being, it differs from the teachings of Theosophy. The Theosophists have almost all the principles of their study from Vedânta philosophy, but it is mixed up with occultism, psychicism and all kinds of psychic phenomena. It is no longer simple and pure, consequently, it differs entirely from Vedânta philosophy.

Again, Vedânta philosophy is not the same as Spiritualism, because although it believes in the existence of departed souls, it does not tell us to go to these departed spirits for enlightenment or true knowledge of our Divine nature. These souls, who are supposed to communicate with the living, are called "earth-bound spirits". They are mostly ignorant. They do not know themselves, so, how can they teach others? Modern Spiritualism is another name for ancient Ancestor-worship. It is just the same, it does not go far enough. It has its place in the path of the investigations of truth, but it cannot help us in any way to the knowledge of our true or Divine nature. It may satisfy the curiosity of those who seek to know whether there is such a thing as a living soul after death and there it stops, but cannot illumine us with the beatific light of the *Atman*.

Vedânta philosophy is not again the same as Christian Science, because it does not make healing diseases as the highest standard of spirituality. Vedânta does not deny the existence of matter as the Christian Scientists do. One can cure diseases and heal the sick without being spiritual at all, but the Christian Scientists believe that one cannot cure diseases or heal the sick without spirituality. I have seen cases in India where power would cure diseases, but it is not spiritual power. It is the psychic power. Each one of us possesses this psychic power, and some of us are again born with highly developed psychic power. Those who are not born with it can develop it if they wish. But that has nothing to do with spiritual light or true spirituality. I saw a Mohammedan Fakir who had wonderful power of curing

diseases, simply by a single word perhaps, or by blowing over a glass of water and telling the patient to drink that water, or by giving some mental treatment, but he was neither a spiritual man nor a believer in Christ. You know the Mohammedans do not believe in Christ as the Saviour of humanity. There are many such instances which I can quote, and these instances show that one can cure disease and heal the sick without being spiritual at all. So, Vedânta philosophy tells us that curing disease cannot be a high standard of spirituality, but healing the soul of the ignorant is the highest ideal. Therefore, heal only the sick souls that do not know their true nature. If one understands the principles of life, and lives a life harmonizing these principles with the actions of life, then he will not be sick; he will go on with a pure body and a pure mind. Much of our sickness comes from the violation of the laws that govern our life. We violate those laws because we do not understand them, and this violation brings uneasiness to our health. The moment we come to know them, we cease to violate them, consequently, we live a life with a healthy body and mind, and at the same time we unfold the spiritual powers that are already latent in our soul.

Vedânta philosophy gives a logical foundation to ethics. As I have already said the logical explanation of "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is to be found in the Vedânta philosophy. And there must be a logical explanation, otherwise they will say: "Let us eat, drink and be merry, and let us help ourselves without helping others." What are you going to do with such a person? Can you convince such a person that there is a rational foundation of ethics and morality, if you do not go to the very bottom of your soul and try to establish ethics upon that basis?

Vedânta philosophy gives a foundation also for a universal religion which is nameless and formless, which is without any creed, and without any belief in heaven or hell. Vedânta philosophy believes that all religions

are like so many paths that lead to the same goal. There runs a passage: "O Lord, as rivers rising from different mountains run through different paths towards that one ocean, so all these various sects and religious creeds rising from different points of view run through different ways towards Thee, the infinite source of existence, intelligence and bliss". [1] The same idea has again been expressed by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gitâ* when he says: "Whosoever comes to me through whatsoever path, I reach him. All men are struggling in the paths which ultimately lead to Me, the Eternal:"[2] So Vedânta does not know caste, creed and colour; it is universal and all-embracing philosophy and at the same time religion; it is both theoretical and practical. The ideal of Vedânta is to enrich us with the knowledge of the Atman by which we can make us free from the fetters of false knowledge (*mithyâ pratyaya*) which is the *mâyâ*.

1 Vide *Mahimna-stotram.*

2 Vide *Bhagvad Gita*, Ch. IV, II.

CHAPTER TWO

PRACTICAL VEDANTISM

Some people think that Vedânta is absolutely theoretical and speculative; it cannot be carried into practice. Such ideas are untrue to facts. Vedânta is the most practical of all philosophies that exist in the world. Well has it been said by Prof. Max Müller that 'Vedânta is the most sublime of all philosophies, and the most comforting of all religions.'

In India, philosophy has always been the theoretical side of religion, and religion has always been considered as the practical side of philosophy. Of the tree of knowledge philosophy is the flower, while religion is its fruit. If we remember this idea, we shall be able to understand whether Vedanta is practical or not.

Let us understand the meaning of the term 'Vedânta.' If we analyze the meaning of the term 'Vedânta', we find that it is a compound made up of two words *Veda* and *anta*. The word *"Veda"* is derived from a Sanskrit root *"Vid"* which means "to know," and *'Veda'*, therefore, means "knowledge" or wisdom. The word *anta* is the same, as the English word "end". Therefore, the word Vedânta signifies the "end of wisdom."

But where is that end, and how is it—is the next question to be solved. Where can we find the 'end of wisdom'? All the sciences and philosophies of the world are trying to discover the truths of nature, and to know the truths *as they are in reality*. The end of knowledge will be there where is no more relativity, no more relation between time, space and causality. The end of wisdom cannot be limited knowledge, cannot be knowledge of a particular portion of the phenomenal world, but it must be the knowledge of the universal Being. This

universal Being is the infinite ocean of wisdom. It is the source of all phenomena. It is the foundation of our life, and the true basis of our earthly existence. That source of the phenomenal world is also the end of all wisdom.

Divinity is the end of all wisdom. What can there be greater than Divine wisdom, what higher, what nobler, and what truer? That Divine wisdom is the end. We must reach that end sooner or later. All philosophers are trying to discover that end, though they call it by various names. Plato called it the *Good*; Spinoza called it the *Substantia*; Kant called it the transcendental *Thing-in-itself*; Emerson called it the *Over-soul*. Some call it the *Noumenon*, others Brahman, Brahmâ, Vishnu, Siva, Father in Heaven, Allah, Ahuramazda and by other names. The ocean of wisdom is one, although it is called by different names. We may not see and realize the whole of it, but we may catch a partial glimpse at certain moments of our life. If we try to understand our own existence, if we wish to realize what we are in reality, we shall discover in our inner depths a spark which is potentially Divine. It has emanated from that eternal Sun of knowledge and intelligence: It is like a bubble floating on that infinite ocean of Reality. All these phenomenal objects which we perceive with our senses are mere expressions of that one divine Energy or Will-power which is the mother of all forces in nature. Whatever we perceive with our senses or conceive by our mind and intellect, is the result of that one stupendous Energy or Will-power of the infinite Being which is described in Vedânta as *mâyâ*. *Mâyâ* is the source of all phenomena, and modern science has proved to us that all the physical forces of nature can be interchanged. In fact, heat, light and motion are interchangeable, and they are the various expressions of the one universal Energy.

The whole world is the result of the vibration of the Will-power, of the infinite Being which is also des-

cribed in the *Upanishads* as *Prâna*.[1] Whatever you see in this universe is the result of that which makes the earth rotate on its own axis, and which makes us move and act in the same way in which we are living, moving and performing our duties. The force is one, but the manifestations are many. The same force of *Prâna* or the will-power of the infinite Being which is described in Vedânta as *mâyâ* is called Nature in modern science.

What is nature? Nature is nothing but *Prakriti*, and *Prakriti* is the same as *mâyâ*[2]. But is *mâyâ* separable from that infinite source of wisdom, that infinite ocean of wisdom? No, it is inseparable. As the burning power of fire or heat cannot be separated from fire itself, so *mâyâ*, the Will-power of the Lord is inseparable from the ocean of wisdom which is called the Brahman. But sometimes this power remains latent, at other times it is manifested in the form of the phenomenal world. Now, we have found that the infinite ocean of wisdom is on one side, *mâyâ* or Will-power, the nature or *Prakriti* is on the other. When we combine these two, and consider these two as one, we get Isvara, the personal God (*Saguna* Brahman) the Creator, the preserver and the destroyer of the universe. If we separate them *i.e.* if we separate the creative power from the preserving power, and the preserving power from the destructive power, then we have three entities, Brahmâ, Vishnu and Siva. In fact, they are all inseparable from that Infinite *Brahman*.

Now, my friends, there are three systems of Vedânta which we are going to take. At first we shall take all the three and then harmonize them. Let us take the *dvaita* (dualistic) system first. So long as we think of ourselves as the body, so long as we are conscious of the external world or the world of senses, we find that there

1 "यदिदं किञ्च जगत् सर्वं प्राण एजति निःसृतम्।"
—*Katha Upanishad*, II, 3. 2.

2 "मायान्तु प्रकृतिं विद्यामायिनन्तु महेश्वरम्।"
—Svetasvatara Upanishad IV, 10.

is a Ruler, a Creator, a Governor; and that Governor is the Isvara. At first we think of Him as extra-cosmic, sitting somewhere in heaven far above the clouds; we cannot reach Him; He is beyond the reach of our minds. This phase we find in Judaism. The dualists believe that God cannot be perceived; He cannot be realized; He is too far away from us; He is too majestic to be approached. This idea is also developed in Mohammedanism. This we must consider as the first step in the realization of the infinite Being—in the realization of the infinite ocean of the wisdom which is the foundation of the phenomenal universe. In this stage God appears to be extra-cosmic, *i.e.* outside of nature. Then gradually as we understand the true nature of the Divinity and our relation with that Divinity, what do we find? We find that He is not very far away from us, He is here and there, He is everywhere, He is within us. He pervades this universe. In fact, He is immanent and resident in nature. He is intra-cosmic. He rules not from outside, but from within. As the soul is the ruler of the body, and at the same time rules over the body, so the Lord of the universe has entered into the phenomenal world: He is ruling over every particle of this phenomenal world from within, and not from outside. All the individual souls form parts of the Deity—*Chit, Achit* and *Isvara*. The relation between *Chit* and *Achit* on one side, and *Isvara* on the other, is the relation of the body to the soul.

There are the two schools of the *Dvaita* (dualism) and the *Advaita* (non-dualism). Sankarâchârya, the great exponent of the *Advaita* philosophy teaches that men must rise above all anthropomorphic tendencies and then they realize that they are the true Self, the Essence of their inner-self the essence of the *Jivâtman* and the phenomonal world, and then they find perfect unity and harmony amidst all the disunity and disharmony. Then and then they attain to absolute oneness in spirit with *Paramâtman* and all external things drop off—every-

thing external is saturated by the divine Spirit. That is the meaning of the word *So'ham* or of Christ's saying "I and my Father are one." The best reconciliation between the *Dvaitavâdins* (dualists) and the *Advaitavâdins* (non-dualists) is to be found in these words of Hanuman; "Oh Lord, when I think of myself as one with the body, I am thy servant; when I think of myself as a *Jiva*, I am thy part, but when I think myself as the Atman I am one with Thee." This is what he said. So the prayer of Prahlâda also is: "I bow down to *myself.*" What does Sankarâchârya say? He too utters the same ideal the same truth: "When I think of myself as, one with the body I am Thy servant; when I think of myself as a Jiva, I am Thy part, but when I think of the *Atman,* I am one with Thee."[1] Thus here we find the absolute harmony that exists—that underlies all sectarian doctrines, dogmas, faiths, rituals, ceremonials and beliefs.

Now, my friends, here you will find the most practical side of Vedânta. First realize the unity of Godhead under the authority of all religious sects and creeds. This is the most important thing and we, the Hindus, can practise that to our best advantage, because we are born and brought up under such divine teachings.

But with other nations it would be very difficult to grasp this ideal of toleration. But this ideal will produce most wonderful results in the end. Because if we follow this ideal we shall find that we are all one as a body, not merely as a nation, but as a whole humanity we are one, and we are worshipping the same Lord under different names and forms only. This sublime ideal was given to the world by Gautama Buddha. But if we

1 "दासस्तेऽहं देहदृष्ट्याऽस्मि शम्भो
जातस्तेहंशो जीवदृष्ट्या त्रिदृष्टे।
सर्वस्यादत्मन्नात्मदृष्ट्या त्वमेवे
तेव्यं मे धीनिश्चिता सर्व्वशास्त्रैः ॥

—Sankara-Digvijaya.

study the Vedas, there we shall find the germ of the ideal of love for all living creatures. Christ preached love for humanity only, but he did not preach it for all living creatures. Buddha did preach it. But I have found in India that there are men who love lower animals more than human beings, and treat human beings worse than beasts. They will rather feed lower animals with good things, but they will make human beings starve under their nose. Such ideas we ought not to encourage. That is not our religion, our religion is to love all. What we believe we must live up to; what we have learnt we must practise. Religion cannot be in theory, it must be in practice. This grand idea we get from the *Upanishads*. We will have to cover the whole universe by the Lord himself.[2] If we cannot do that how can we expect to reach perfection, how can we expect to realize the eternal and infinite ocean of wisdom as the foundation of this universe? We must see Divinity, we must not hate our fellow-brethren, but realizing that God dwells within each one of us, we should love them, and help them wherever they are in need. In Southern India there are Brâhmins who walk on the streets, and if they happen to see the shadow of a *pâriah*, they will have to go to the length of bathing. A *pâriah* or a poor Sudra when he goes to buy something, say, from a grocer, he will have to take a cup in his hand and place it with the money about 10 yards from the shop and run away 10 yards farther. Then the grocer looks around, brings and pours the oil in the cup, takes the money and runs away. Then the low-caste man comes and takes the cup. What kind of thing is that? Is that a religion?

Let us see what our scriptures say and where we are standing today? What are we practising? Can we not practise that universal love and see Divinity in a well qualified Brâhmin as well as in a cow, an elephant, in a

2 ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत् ।"

Isha Upanishad, 1.

Chandâla or a *pâriah*?[3] Yes, that is our duty. We must practise that, and when we shall practise it, then the condition of India will be raised. The masses of people are are working in darkness, they are plunging themselves into the abyss of ignorance. How are you going to help them? They are the back-bone of India. From amongst them will rise great generals, great philanthropists, great workers, and great masters. Give them the chance and the opportunities. And Vedânta will help you in bringing that unity—in bringing that light amongst the poorer classes and giving the privileges which they need and to which they are entitled. What other religion can give you more privilege than the religion of Vedânta which accepts the universal oneness, as the ideal? That religion must be practised. But we are degenerated today, and the cause of it is that we do not study Vedânta, and do not live the life according to the universal teachings of Vedânta.

Vedânta was the first proselytizing religion in the world, then came Buddhism and Judaism, and Christianity and Mohammedanism. In Vedântic truth there is no caste-distinction, there is no distinction in the *Atman*. Can you show any passage from our Vedas or from our *Purânas*, or from the *Upanishads* which tells us that the *Atman* has any caste? The *Atman* is without any caste. *Jâtibheda* or caste-distinction is only a social category, it cannot touch the real nature of the soul, which is always the child of God. Whether you are a Pârsee or a Hindu, a Mohammedan or a Christian, a Buddhist or a Jain your *Atman* is a pure child of God, spotless and divine. There we shall find the most wonderful grandeur of the soul, and that grandeur will make us live a life which will lead us to the highest ideal of all religions. Vedânta is the most practical of all religions

3 विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।
शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥

Bhagavad Gita, Ch. V. 18.

because it teaches that there are many ways by which this grand ideal of unity, the unending ocean of wisdom can be reached or appreciated. Take, for instance, one of these ways or methods which are called *Yogas* in Sanskrit, and by the practice of which we can realize the eternal Truth, can know our true life and we can become one with that infinite Being. Let us take Karma Yoga for instance; can there be any thing more practical than this? Now, because it is the most important thing; we have to work constantly during our earthly existence, we cannot live for a moment without work; and that idea was given by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gitâ*. But in the midst of all our works you will have to find out a way by which we can transcend the law of Karma. Every act that we perform must produce its result, and that result will come back to the doer or actor. You must work constantly, day and night devote your whole energy, and let the results remain in the hands of the Lord. Let every action of your daily life be a free offering to the world. Let us all work for others and die for others, and if you do this, you will be worshipped today as a living God. Therefore, stand up and work for work's sake, and not for the hope of its return.

The method of Karma Yoga is for those who are tremendously active and who are constantly engaged in business, trades, commerce and in other kinds of industries. But there is another method for those who do not care to bother their heads about industries, trades etc.; but who are meditative in their nature, who like to sit in solitude and perform certain functions of the mind which are called *concentration, meditation, Samâdhi,* and so on. This method is called the Râja Yoga, and if we practise this method, we shall get more wonderful results. Take, for example, *concentration.* Is there any thing more practical than this? Without concentration you cannot expect to become an artist, or an astronomer, or a musician, or a painter, or say a motor-car driver. Râja Yoga teaches that concentration fully well.

Then the practice of *Prânâyâma* is absolutely necessary. It will bring perfect health. Many of my students who are physicians, give breathing exercises to their patients and cure many diseases, with complete success.

There is another method which is equally practical and beneficial to us and that is called the Bhakti-Yoga, that devotion or that power which will make us realize that we are not of this world. Tremendous love for the Lord and for all is necessary. What can be sweeter and more tender than this feeling of love and devotion which is manifested in the life and character of a true devotee of God! A true devotee does not care for the world; he sees the play of the divine Will everywhere. When any disease comes, he would consider that the Lord has sent him his guest, and he would take care of him! When death comes he would welcome it as his sister. What can be more practical than this? Vedânta will enable you to live the right kind of life; it will bring freedom to your soul, and ultimately will make you happy throughout eternity. All other things which you call practical may bring temporary results, but you cannot achieve the real result anywhere except in the religion and philosophy of Vedânta.

I may now turn to Theosophy and tell you that it is an imperfect imitation of Vedânta. It won't do any good. There have been some good workers among the Theosophists to whom we are grateful, specially, to Mrs. Annie Besant, because there has been some good educational work done by her. But she has only set an example, and now it is for us to stand up and do better work. People of India have now become so degenerated that when certain truths fall from the lips of the white faces they appear to them as revelations. Truths are always truths, eternal truths, whether they fall from the white lips or dark lips. Therefore, we must revere the truth and not the personality of any man or woman.

CHAPTER THREE

IS VEDANTA PANTHEISTIC

Wherever we go we meet people who ask these questions: "Is not your Vedânta philosophy pantheistic?" "Is not Hinduism pantheistic?" "Has it not been proved that your Vedânta philosophy teaches pantheism?" It is curious to notice how this word *pantheism* prejudices the minds of the Western people. Whenever it is uttered or read or heard of, it is disliked immensely. It changes the whole attitude of the listener or reader.

But if we should ask such persons what they understand by that word, perhaps, very few would be able to answer correctly. Moreover, if we ask them, what harm is there in the Hindu belief or in pantheism, they can make no reply. Nevertheless they have a strong impression that it is very wrong to be a pantheist.

If we undertake to trace the original meaning of the word *pantheism*, we shall have to go back to Greek mythology. There we find that the ancient Greek shepherds used to believe in a god whom they worshipped, and whom they called *Pan*. They believed that god *Pan* was the god of the flocks and of the shepherds, that he was the guardian of the fishermen and of the bee-keepers, that he was the patron of all persons who occupied themselves in hunting and in fishing. This god *Pan* has been described poetically as having the head and trunk of a man, with horns and goat's beard, pugnose, pointed ears, and tail, and with goat's feet. He was very fond of music. He was the inventor of the shepherd's lute, which he used to play upon. This poetic description of the god *Pan* is nothing but the crude, imperfect symbolization of the conception of God which the shepherds of those days had. The picture is a symbol of the spirit of nature which exists in

man, in beasts, in fishes, in birds, in insects, in plants. The shepherds thus understood the kinship which exists among all living creatures and things. Gradually, this idea was changed and widened. The god *Pan* became the god of the hills, mountains, rivers, etc., and afterwards he came to be identified with every personified object of nature. And these were the first meaning of the word *pantheism*. We may call them obsolete forms of "pantheism." At first, then, there was the worship of the god *Pan*, afterwards the worship of nature in all of its personified objects and forces. *Pan* means 'all,' and *theism* means 'belief in a god.' Pantheism in its rudest forms was the 'universal godism.' It asserts the consubstantiation of God with nature.

With the centuries, new conceptions, new ideas, have been added to the primitive forms of pantheism, until today we hear of many varieties of Pantheism, *poetic æsthetic pantheism, doctrinal pantheism, realistic pantheism, philosophic pantheism, materialistic pantheism, scientific pantheism*, etc. The *poetical æsthetic pantheism* is nothing but the worship of nature for its beauty or for itself. *Doctrinal pantheism* is based on the doctrine that everything—all this universe is the ever-changing manifestation of God, and, consequently, by worshipping the objects of nature we worship God. *Realistic pantheism* is that in which the natural causes of the phenomenal world are personified and deified. As, for instance, if matter be the cause of all the phenomena, matter would be the object personified and deified. If heat be the cause of natural objects, heat would be personified, deified and worshipped. That is what we call *realistic pantheism*. Spinoza's philosophy or pantheism is philosophic pantheism or parallelistic monism Spinoza believed that there is one universal Being, or Substance, which is the cause, and whose *modi* or attributes are mind and matter, thought and extension.

Materialistic pantheism holds that matter is the

cause of everything, as we find in the system of Strauss and other materialists. It is sometimes called "atheistic physics." Among the Greek philosophers, Xenophon was the first to promulgate this doctrine. The idealistic school taught idealistic pantheism, which tended to absorb the world in God; while the Materialistic pantheism of the Ionic school tried to absorb God in the world, and differed from atheism merely in name. In the *Epistle of John* we find an echo of idealistic pantheism, in such passages as "God is love"; And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him".[1]

In modern times the philosophies of Schlegel, Schelling, Hegel, and other German philosophers teach the same idealistic pantheism. In the middle ages some of the Christian mystics believed in the idealistic pantheism, but many could not express their ideas perfectly. Those who did express them were persecuted. In 1600 A.D. Giordano Bruno was burnt alive at Rome for his pantheistic opinions. When he was asked what he believed in, he said that he did not believe in creation, but he believed in the world as *an emanation* of the Infinite mind. He said: "To realize God everywhere, to see God everywhere, and to realize that He alone is, and all else is perishable phenomena and passing illusion; that there is one intelligence existing in God, in man, in beast, and in all that we call *matter,* and this would be the aim of true philosophy." Goethe was an idealistic pantheist. Most of the eminent English poets, such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, were also pantheists of their day. In America Emerson is considered by many as an idealistic pantheist.

But there is still another kind of pantheism which is known in modern times as *scientific monism.* Herbert Spencer, Huxley, John Fiske, Voltaire, M. Thompson, and some other modern scientists believe that there is one unknown and unknowable Reality, which is the basis of

1 The First Epistle o John, IV, 16.

mind and matter, and which is the cause of all phenomenal fleeting appearances.

Thus we see there are many kinds of pantheism. Such being the case, when we ask: *Is Vedânta pantheistic?* we shall have to find out what kind of pantheism we mean. If we consider the meaning or common conception of pantheism, which is nothing but the worship of the unconscious or personified nature as God, then we say that Vedânta is not pantheistic, nor does it teach pantheism. Vedânta does not believe in such a God and, consequently, it cannot be pantheistic. Vedânta does not teach *æsthetic pantheism*, because it does not indulge in worshipping nature. It does not teach *realistic pantheism* nor *philosophic* nor *idealistic* nor *scientific* nor *materialistic pantheism*. We cannot limit Vedânta by any of the *'isms'* of the past, present, or future. None of these *'isms,'* such as theism, monotheism, deism, pantheism, or monism, can accept all the teachings of Vedânta; but, on the contrary, Vedânta can embrace a theist or a monotheist with one hand, a deist or pantheist or monist with the other.

You may ask: How can it be possible to embrace those views which are diametrically opposed to one another? The answer is: It is possible in Vedânta. Because Vedânta says that all these differences in *'isms'* are mere differences of degree and not of kind. Vedânta says that all these *'isms'* appear to have their real value when they are understood as relating to the different stages of our spiritual evolution. As the conception of God in us gradually grows higher and higher, so we pass from one *'ism'* into another. Each of these *'isms'* marks a different stage of spiritual evolution, and Vedânta recognizes them all.

Vedânta accepts the idea that there is a natural evolution of our spiritual conception, and it teaches that each individual mind passes through all the different stages that lie in animism or polytheism on the one hand, and the highest form of monism on the other.

A man who follows the teachings of Vedânta can be a theist, a monotheist, a deist, a pantheist, or a monist. He may belong to any sect or class, creed or denomination or to any religion, and still he remains a follower of Vedânta, if he does not limit his God to any peculiarity of doctrine or dogma, if he does not say that his *'ism'* alone is true and correct, and all other *'isms'* are wrong. Vedânta does neither tell you to belong to any special sect or creed or denomination or religion, nor it does tell you at the same time to stop in any of the *'isms'*. It leads you march forward, always keeping the mind open to truth. According to Vedânta, each of these *'isms'* is like a class in the school of religion, and the individual soul is a student in that school. If any one stops in one class and spends his life there, thinking that there cannot be anything higher than that, then his progress will cease. Let him know that there are other classes higher than that. Let him strive to attain to those. Let him try to be promoted to those classes. Let him grow and march onward until he reaches the eternal ocean of Truth. None of these *'isms'* is the Reality or the essence of God. They are nothing but the names of certain successive stages in the path of spiritual realization.

When we realize why should we find fault with the *'ism'* or that *'ism'* is better than this *'ism,'* etc., and if we realize that each one is the path to that realization of the eternal Truth, then all quarrels cease for ever. There is neither fault-finding, nor there are curses, nor persecutions. As Vedânta teaches this, how can we say that Vedânta is pantheistic ?

Vedânta presents two aspects of the same Reality: one is the eternal ocean of intelligence, existence, and bliss without attributes, which is called the Absolute, and the other aspect of this same Reality is said to be "with attributes." That is, when this eternal ocean of Truth is related to this phenomenal universe, it becomes God, the creator, the preserver, the father, the mother

of the universe. He is a personal God; He has all the attributes which we give to personal God. He is worshipped by all the dualists, theists, monotheists, and all other classes of dualists that exist on the earth.

But the same God, the same Reality in nature, looked at without reference to the phenomenal world, becomes an impersonal God, an Absolute; the *Substantia* of Spinoza; an animism of the philosopher; the unknown and unknowable of scientific monism. We cannot pray to or worship Spinoza's *Substantia.* What would be the use of praying to that? Absolute cannot be worshipped. There is no such difficulty in Vedânta, because it admits that the personal God is the father or the mother of the universe.

"He is the Father of the universe, both animate and inanimate. He is worshipped by all, under different names. There is nothing in the universe which can be equal to Him; how can there be anything greater?" There are many such expressions. But those, who do not go beyond this phenomenal existence, beyond this relative world, do not believe in the existence of that absolute divine essence. Vedânta has no harsh word to say to these persons. It has no quarrel with them; but at the same time it leaves room for those who are philosophical and those who are more advanced in spirituality than an ordinary dualist. But people may think Vedânta is pantheistic, without understanding the meaning of the word. It is not pantheistic. It is a spiritual *oneness.* It is the same *oneness* as expressed by the great prophets of the world. We find in the expressions of Jesus: "I and my Father are one." We find it in the expression of the Hindu sage or prophet: "I am He" (*So'ham*). This utterance is nothing but the spontaneous expression of the realization that lies behind.

Vedânta is not antagonistic to any existing religion, sect or creed. It has no quarrel with Christianity, Mohammedanism, Judaism, or Buddhism. The follower of Vedânta can go to the church, the synagogue, the mosque,

or the temple, and can worship wherever he pleases. People may call him a Christian, a Mohammedan, a Hindu, or a Buddhist, but he does not see any difference, in them except in words. We may worship that eternal Being through Jesus or through any other prophet. If we only admit that all these '*isms*' are nothing but different stages of spiritual evolution, if we have no quarrel with anybody or sect or creed or denomination, if we are not bound by any sectarian dogma or creed or narrow idea, if we are free from superstition, prejudice, and bigotry, then we are true followers of Vedânta. Pantheism is antagonistic to theism, but Vedânta is antagonistic to none. In pantheism the prevailing idea is that God has been changed into matter and force, but Vedânta does not teach that. Vedânta says that God is unchangeable; He can never be changed into any matter or force or anything else; that matter and force are nothing but the expressions of the divine Will, which is eternal. That divine Will is working in nature. The God of Vedânta is a living God. In Him we live, through Him we exist, without Him there cannot exist anything.

Vedânta does not teach a special creation, but it teaches that the whole phenomena of the universe is the expression or manifestation of the divine Will (*Prakriti*). That divine Will is understood by the modern scientists, and is called by them "the eternal energy." All the laws of nature are nothing but the moulds in which that divine Will works in the universe.

The true follower of Vedânta is sometimes dualistic, sometimes monotheistic, sometimes monistic. When he realizes that his body is the temple wherein dwells that Divinity, when he identifies himself with his body, then he says: "I am nothing; Thou art mine all; Thou art the Creator, I am the creature." When he sees the Divine image that is within him, he says: "I am part and parcel of Thee." And when he sees this Spirit, which is Divine and immortal, he says: "I and my Father are one."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IDEAL OF VEDANTA AND HOW TO ATTAIN TO IT

The ideal of Vedânta is to solve the problem of life, to point out the aim of human existence, to make our ways of living better and more harmonious with the universal Will that is working in nature. It makes us realize that the will which is now working through our bodies, is in reality a part and parcel of that universal Will. It also teaches us that the body or the pleasures of senses are not the *summum bonum* of human existence and makes us feel that at present we are living like slaves, bound hand and foot, and we should search for the emancipation from the slavery. Its ideal is to open our eyes to truth and reality that is unchangeable and eternal. It shows us how we can live in this world without being overcome by sorrows and misery, without being affected by sufferings and misfortunes that are sure to fall on every human being in some way or other. Its ideal teaches us how to conquer death in this life, how we can embrace death without being frightened in the least. And above all, the chief object of Vedânta is to make us live the life of unselfishness, purity and attain to perfection in this life. Although by natural process of evolution each individual will become perfect after going through all the stages of the chain of evolution and gaining experience at each step, still it is a hard and most tedious process not to be desired by such who know what that process is. Therefore, Vedânta tells us how we can escape that chain, how we can shorten the time of attaining to that perfection and get it in this life, without coming again and again to reap the fruits of our own work.

The ideal of Vedânta is to let us know what powers

we possess already, how great and majestic the real nature of man is! Its aim is to establish true universal brotherhood. I do not mean that kind of universal brotherhood, which we so often hear and which when properly examined appears to be like an outward garb under which is hidden hatred, jealousy, quarrel, animosity, fight for name and fame, ambition for petty worldly prosperity and so forth, but I mean something more than the socalled universal brotherhood, a real love for all without seeking anything in return; I mean that kind of brotherly feeling which proceeds from pure and disinterested love. Love means the *expression of oneness* or we may say the *feeling* which proceeds from the realization of the oneness of Spirit. The mission of Vedânta is to establish that *oneness* and to bring harmony, peace, toleration amongst different religions, sects, creeds and denominations that exist in the world. Its object is to teach us how we can recognize the rights of all men and women alike, from that standpoint of spiritual oneness, and thus to give a strong foundation to all kinds of social, political and religious movements of all countries and amongst all nations of the earth. You will notice that each of these ideals of Vedânta is not confined to any particular place, time or class of people, but it is universal in its aspect and as wide as the heavens over our head. And such is the grand, many-sided and all-embracing ideal of Vedânta.

Now, let us see what Vedânta has to say regarding each of these ideals which I have just mentioned. In the first place, I shall explain how Vedânta solves the problems of life. One truth we learn from Vedânta is that the solution of a problem becomes easy when we understand the universal principle and the universal law under which it acts. As long as an event is isolated or single, it is a mystery to us; we do not understand it, we cannot explain it. As long as we think our life as an isolated something or as separate from the rest of the universe, so long the problem of life remains inexpli-

cause. But Vedânta explains our life by describing its relation to the universal life-principle or divine energy which is expressing itself through various forms of nature. It says that our life is nothing but a symbol of eternal life-principle, conditioned by time, space and causality. The whole universe is an expression of one living Substance. There is no such thing as dead matter. When that life expresses or manifests through time and space, it appears in different forms which are all related to one another and also to the whole. That relation is like the relation of a part to another part, and a part to the whole; all difference being a difference of degree and not of kind. So, our life being a part of the eternal life, is eternal. It has not come out of nothing as many people believe, nor has it been created by the fiat of some other being, who lives somewhere in the heavens. Each of these manifested particles of that eternal life-principle is evolving from lower to higher, from higher to still higher, from limited towards unlimited. In this process it has some definite purpose at each step; it does not evolve blindly as some think, but gain some definite object to fulfil the desire that has existed potentially in that particle of life from the beginningless past. It has its aim. That aim although may vary in particular manifestations under particular conditions, still it is tending from imperfection towards perfection, and consequently Vedânta points out that the aim of human life is perfection.

Thirdly, as we approach nearer to perfection the ways of our living become better and better, and by experience we come to know that the best way of living is not to follow the dictates of a narrow and limited will but to obey the universal Will. We start at first with a tiny, little, weak, and thin thread of will, which grows stronger and stronger as we rise higher and higher in the scale of our life. Then gradually by passing through different stages of manifestations we gain more and more experience and begin to see how the thread of the indi-

vidual will is connected with the universal Will, slowly understand their relation, and ultimately realize that our will which we have so long thought to be ours is not ours, but a part and parcel of that one Will which is moving the universe from the minutest atom to the biggest solar system, and our bodies are nothing but so many small instruments through which that all-pervading Will is expressing itself. But as long as we do not realize this, as long as we think that our will is a separate will and is not related to the universal Will, we believe that by following our imperfect will we shall gain the highest benefit but the result is suffering, misery and sorrow, which we experience in our everyday life. This idea of separation, this mistaken notion makes us think that we are free, while in fact we are bound hand and foot like a slave; consequently, we do not seek freedom. How can we seek freedom when we do not know that we are bound. First of all, we shall have to examine our own nature whether we are free or bound then we can search for liberation if we really need it.

Very few indeed in this world can realize that we are living the life of a slave. Amongst those who can understand it very few can get freedom from that dreadful drudgery of a slave; but the majority delude themselves by thinking that they are free, consequently they like their present condition and do not care for any other.

It is very curious to notice that those who are born and brought up as slaves and live constantly in the society of slaves will rather die there than become free citizens. If any one of such slaves fortunately get the idea of freedom and try to acquire it his fellow slaves will think that he is going in a wrong way, and will try their best not to allow him to get out of their community. But if his desire for freedom be extremely strong, he will never be dominated by the influences of other slaves around him, he will seek the company of such as are free, as are not bound by the chains of thraldom, as have

wiped out the mark of slavery from their forehead. Then perhaps, he will come to help those who want to be free. The community we are now living in is exactly like that of slaves. We are born as slaves, brought up as slaves and live amongst slaves. If we look around, it will be almost impossible to find a man or a woman who is truly free. If any person gets the idea of freedom in his mind and tries to attain to it, our first duty will be to find fault with the ideas of that man or to dissuade him from following his ideal. Are we not slaves to our own desires, our own passions and our own senses? Are we not slaves to our own body and to the changes that are constantly going on in the machinery which we call the human body? Are we not slaves of anger, hatred, jealousy, emotion, pain or sense enjoyments? Are we not constantly obeying the commands of hundreds of such masters that are ruling within us? If any body utters sweet words or kind expressions we feel ourselves flattered and elated, and how we feel insulted, wounded or hurt when any harsh word enters our ears. Is it not a slavery? As long as we are seeking pleasures are we not slaves of the desires for pleasures? Are we not slaves of the insatiable greed for wealth and of the ambition for social and political power, name and fame? What can be worse than such a state? But how amazing it is to notice that although we are slaves of desires and passions, slaves of pleasures, comfort and luxury, slaves of ambition, pride and vanity, slaves of beauty which is skin-deep, slaves of sweet words, anger and hatred, slaves of body and sense enjoyment, slaves of life, death and everything, yet we do not feel it, we are not conscious of it! Still we never think of any other condition better than this.

We are sleeping unconsciously after drinking, as it were, the cup of the frightfully intoxicating liquor of self-delusion. The whole humanity is madly pursuing the phantoms of hope which change their colour as we come nearer, and suddenly disappear, then after a moment appear at a distance with new brilliance—fresh colours

which attract our attention again and force us to chase them again and again, and drag us headlong in that breathless pursuit. This process is continuously going on in each individual life.

We have made ourselves slaves of delusion, and slaves of the phantoms of hope. How can we have happiness under such conditions? How can a slave become happy? He may delude himself by thinking that he is happy. But after all it is not happiness; it is a delusion. Happiness does not consist in slavery but in freedom. He who is free is truly happy. That happiness, which comes through freedom is unbounded and eternal. If we want that unbounded and eternal happiness we shall have to become free, we shall have to break down the chain of slavery; and before we become emancipated we must have to know, to be conscious of the fact that we are at present in bondage. The moment we come to know that we are living like slaves, the moment we begin to see the real conditions of our present life and existence, that very moment we begin to feel the effects of slavery in our everyday life. Then we seek the company of those that are free, that have broken the chains. Then we appreciate their sayings; then we understand their meanings and if we follow their instructions we gradually become free as they are. From that time we remain no longer slaves of passions, desires and senses, but we gain mastery over them, we control them, and we conquer them. All passions and desires can no longer bind us, but they remain as our slaves. This freedom from constant slavery, or this emancipation of the soul from the bondages of delusion is the highest ideal of Vedânta. It is called in Sanskrit *moksha,* which means liberation or freedom. Vedânta does not go on speculating and speculating, theorising and theorising like other philosophies, but it starts by taking the present conditions of our lives as they are, and then it shows the way of it, by removing their cause. The cause of such a slavery is nothing but our ignorance of the *truth.* As

Jesus said: "Ye shall know the truth and truth shall make you free." Vedânta also teaches the knowledge of truth will bring that freedom. By knowing the truth we shall be free. Jesus did not describe the nature of that truth nor the way of knowing it. By reading his sayings we do not understand what kind of truth Jesus meant. In the Vedânta we find the meaning, the clear rational explanation of that truth and also the way of knowing it. According to Vedânta that truth is one; it cannot be many. It is the unchangeable Reality of the universe, and it is our real nature as well. By knowing that Reality of the universe or by knowing our real nature—who we are, and what we are—we shall gain that freedom. Whether we call that unchangeable and eternal reality, God or the absolute reality of the universe or *Atman,* our real nature, the difference is in names only. The dualists call that truth God, because they look at it from outside, and those who look at it from inside, from within, call it *Atman,* or Self or Reality within us. It depends upon the different standpoints from which we look at that reality. According to Vedânta that one reality when looked through the conditions of time, space, and causation, appears as subject and object, as the knower and the thing known, as either the sun or the moon, or heaven or God or hell or a spook or man, beast, insect or plant. These are nothing but so many appearances of that Reality or truth, which is one throughout. Knowledge of the truth means the knowledge of the underlying unity of existence. The Vedânta says that freedom will not come until we know the unity of existence, the oneness of the reality in us with the reality of the universe, until we realize that all these appearances are phenomenal and exist in relation to our mind and that the *Atman* or the Self is behind mind, until we can go beyond the sphere of relativity, and plunge ourselves into the ocean of absolute Bliss. Here you may ask, if we are all slaves, then our real nature must be like a slave how can it be otherwise? In answering to this Vedânta says, no. Our real

nature is perfectly free, absolute and the Lord of the universe. It is divine and immortal. "If so" you may ask, "why are we slaves?" The answer is it is because of our *mind*: It is mind which is the cause of our bondage or freedom. When our mind is imperfect, it is attached to the phenomenal appearances, and it makes us their slaves, but when it is purified, when it learns to go below the surface of things, when it begins to descriminate the eternal from the unreal, then it becomes the cause of our freedom, then we understand what freedom is. Each individual mind is bound to attain to freedom, and perfection through gradual experience; (of course it takes ages) by going through the process of evolution. That process is slow, tiresome, and most undesirable. Wise men do not want to go through that slow method. Therefore, the Vedânta tells us when each one will have to become free and perfect what is the good of taking that long and tedious journey. Let us find a shorter way. Let us shorten the time by trying our best to attain to freedom and perfection in this life. The easiest way is by knowing the truth in this life, by realizing our true nature, or self or Atman, which is immortal, free, divine and perfect. It is free from death, disease and sorrow. The moment we realize this *Atman* that very moment vanishes the fear of death, that very moment we become unselfish, we become conscious how great and majestic we are. Then we know that all the powers of the universe have proceeded from the infinite source of powers which lies within each individual soul. Then and then alone we arrive at the foundation of that universal brotherhood or Self-hood or *oneness*. Because if you know your own nature, you will know the nature of the universe and of God. Then you will see that each individual soul is perfect, divine, and immortal and a living God on earth. In such a state there is no such thing as sex. The *Atman* is pure, sexless and one. The woman's rights and man's rights will be equal. As long as we are slaves of animal nature we see a man or a woman, but

from the standpoint of *Atman* or Soul all is divine. Then we shall be able to reform the social, political and religious evils, that exist today in different parts of the world. Then superstition and prejudice which arise from our ignorance of the Truth will no longer reign on earth. All religious animosities will cease for ever. Then will the kingdom of Heaven manifest here. Therefore, the Vedânta tells us that the realization of the *Atman* or our true nature will create a revolution in every department of our life. And the way to such a realization is described in one line: "आत्मा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः।" First of all hear constantly and repeatedly and over and over again, that your *Atman* or real nature is divine. Then think of it day after day and night after night. Let each of your nerves and brain cells pulsate with the idea that you are divine, you are immortal, you are one with the Supreme. And then concentrate your thoughts upon that central truth of oneness. Through that concentration will come the highest illumination of wisdom and bliss, then you will be happy both here, hereafter and for ever.

CHAPTER FIVE.

VEDANTA IN DAILY LIFE

It has been asked again and again whether the teachings of Vedânta, sublime though they are, can be applied to our practical everyday life. Some people have an idea that, being a philosophy, Vedânta must be speculative, like any other philosophy of Europe and America, that it gives a few grand theories which can never be carried into practice. Such statements would be true if Vedânta were simply a philosophy and not a religion.

In order to become a religion, the teachings of Vedânta must be intensely practical, *because where theory ends, there is the beginning of true religion.* Vedânta gives not only the principles of the highest philosophy, but it teaches also the practical methods which are necessary to make it a religion. If the ideals of Vedânta do not cover the whole field of life, if they do not enter into every plane of our thoughts, nay of our very existence in home life, in social and business life, in moral and spiritual life, then we must reject them as mere theories of a speculative philosophy, and must not call Vedânta a religion. The ideals of Vedânta, however, are so broad and so universal in their scope that for the last four thousand years, men and women, living in retirement, in caves and forests, as well as those holding the most responsible positions in society and in the state, have successfully harmonized their lives with those ideals, and have proved them to be intensely practical.

There is an impression among some people that the teachings of Vedânta are fit for those only who live like ascetics, in caves and forests, but not for those who lead a busy American's life. Such people are entirely mistaken, because they do not know that the truths of Vedânta were first discovered and practised, not by ascetics who

dwelt in caves or forests, but by kings and monarchs, ministers and statesmen who lived the busiest and most luxurious lives that we can imagine. If we read the Upanishads, the Epics—*Mahâbhârata,* and *Râmâyana*—other historical works, we find that there were not only Hindu ministers and statesmen, but kings sitting on their thrones, discharging their royal duties of governing the states and of looking after the welfare of their many subjects; and living a busier and much more responsible life than that of an ordinary businessman of the present day, could find ample time and opportunity to study Vedânta and to carry out its sublime tenets in their practical lives. When such persons could live the ideal life as given by Vedânta, what can we say of ourselves? We are not half as busy as they were. I can quote from the *Upanishads* many names of the ancient Hindu monarchs who faithfully followed the teachings of Vedânta while fulfilling the duties of their royal position. They not only lived up to the ideals of Vedânta, but taught others, and were considered by the people as the living examples of this practical philosophy. Those who have read the *Bhagavad Gitâ,* or "The Song Celestial" as Sir Edwin Arnold calls it, will remember that the great commander of a huge army, standing in the battlefield, in the midst of the din of battle at Kurukshetra, found time to discuss the ideals of Vedânta and succeeded in applying them in practice.

Many of you have seen and heard the late Swâmi Vivekânanda. He was a living example of the practical side of Vedânta. Up to the last moment of his life he worked like a giant under all conditions, favourable or unfavourable, bearing all kinds of hardship, discomfort and tribulation, and never moving an inch from the highest ideal of this great philosophy and religion of Vedânta. He lived a pure and chaste life always, working for others, trying to help humanity without seeking any return for his labour. He showed to the world what a true Karma Yogi was like. In other words, he proved

by his example that, even in this age of materialism and commercialism, one can be a sincere worker who always works for others, and lives for the good of humanity, without being guided by selfish motives or selfish desires.

The most practical side of Vedânta which will appeal to American minds, is the Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga is that branch of Vedânta which teaches that we should always work and fulfil all the duties of life, household, social or official but, at the same time, we must not consider that the performance of these duties is the highest aim and ideal of our life. On the contrary, we must regard these duties and the work of our daily life as a means to a higher end. We should also remember that every one of these works brings us new experience, makes us realize the transitoriness of earthly objects, purifies our inner nature and uplifts our souls, if it be not guided by any selfish motive. Vedânta teaches that any work which proceeds from extreme selfishness is wrong and wicked, and we should avoid it. Moreover, it tells us that every action must bring a similar reaction; that all bad or selfish works produce evil results such as sorrow, suffering, misery, disease and death. Holding this ideal before his mind, and applying it to his practical life, a student of Vedânta can go anywhere and live under any conditions, without deviating from the path of righteousness and virtue; under all circumstances, he will live a pure, unselfish life and remain contended. This is the simplest and easiest thing to practise.

First of all, we should form an ideal, and few people have their ideals. We think that we possess the highest ideal, but that may be only for a short time; next moment perhaps, the ideal has vanished, and we do not know the purpose of life, or why we are here. Therefore, our mode of expression is very poor and it proceeds entirely from selfishness. Selfishness is the result of ignorance. We do not know the laws, nor do we understand how we ought to live. We look after ourselves and take care of ourselves because that is the nearest thing to us.

But we must not forget that any person in any country, possessing a fair amount of earnestness and sincerity, will get from this practice of Karma Yoga wonderful results; most beneficial in this life and hereafter, if he knows the ideal, and if he follows it at every moment of his life. On the contrary, if we consider that the work which we are performing is the highest aim of life, that there is no further ideal, then our life will not be worth living. But whosoever holds the highest ideal and walks in the path of unselfishness is virtuous, is unselfish, is righteous and is spiritual.

Every householder should study Karma Yoga and understand the philosophy of work, and, applying those teachings to the daily life, he will eventually attain to the highest ideal of all religions. If he believes in a personal God or in an impersonal God, or in any divine incarnation like Christ, Buddha, Krishna or Râmakrishna, what should he do? He should every night, before retiring, offer the results of his daily works, both good and bad, to Him; and, by this method, he will become free from the law of *Karma,* the law of action and reaction, and reach the highest goal of salvation in the end. The works of our daily lives will be transformed into acts of worship *when we have learnt to offer their results to the supreme Lord of the universe,* and this can be accomplished by any man or woman, engaged in any kind of profession or business. It is the easiest method by which we can make the religion of Vedânta enter into every plane of our daily life, and herein lies the secret of great success, of freedom, of unselfishness, that is, either offer the results of our works to God, or work as an act of worship. He who has learnt to offer the results of his daily works to the Almighty has learnt the secret of work and is always peaceful and contented. This will be beneficial to all those who live the busiest lives, engaged in any kind of work. Works are neither low nor high; every work is great, and every work will be a means to the attainment of Divinity.

This Karma Yoga is a method by which we can get greater results by less use of our energy. The majority of people in every country waste their energy in unnecessary rush and worry for the results; they have no patience to wait for the results, and what is the effect? They shatter their nerves and suffer from nervous prostration. The lack of self-control and this nervousness they will overcome if they understand the secret of work and the laws of action and reaction, of cause and sequence, that every action must bring its result, whether we worry over it or not. It must; and what a great saving it would be, if, instead of wasting that energy in worry, we could devote it to doing other works and let the results take care of themselves! We must do our best and stop there. After performing our best, we cannot do any better, and what is the use of worry? If we lived this way, then we should be great workers.

Vedânta teaches that the less passion for work there is, the greater and more we work. If we read the lives of all the great workers of the world, we find that they were wonderfully calm men. Men and women of impulsive nature are restless and impatient they cannot do great work, and as such they cannot be steady workers: they will lose their heads. Persons who are easily disturbed by passions like anger, jealousy, hatred, ambition and selfishness cannot accomplish much. They will shatter their nerves and eventually become useless. As we find in this country (in America), persons who are impulsive can do great work for the moment, but in the reaction, they break themselves to pieces. They suffer from nervous prostration. Therefore, self-control is the secret of great work, success in business, health and longevity. This we learn from Vedânta. What can be more practical or beneficial than to gain self-control and exercise it in our everyday life?

Vedânta teaches how to be strong, physically, mentally and spiritually. Physical strength proceeds from mental strength, and mental strength in its turn is the

outcome of spiritual strength. Spiritual strength must be at the back of mental and physical strength, and that spiritual strength will come to those who live the right kind of life, who understand the laws that govern lives. The knowledge of these laws will make us free from committing mistakes, and this knowledge comes through the study of Vedânta. The practice of Râja Yoga will help us in acquiring that knowledge. That branch of Vedânta which is called Râja Yoga, is the most practical of all applied sciences. Every step of this science depends entirely upon practice. It must enter into the daily life of every individual. Take, for instance, one of the teachings of Râja Yoga, *concentration.* How absolutely helpful and necessary this power of concentration is! Nothing can be achieved without it; no one can accomplish anything without possessing some amount of this power: no one can become a great artist, astronomer or physician; no one can have success, even on the Stock Exchange, without this power of concentration. It is absolutely necessary for success in business, and this power we acquire through the practice of Râja Yoga.

The same power of concentration can be applied for material prosperity as for spiritual advancement. If we want material prosperity, we can use our power of concentration in that direction and get wonderful results. If we are spiritually-minded, we can gain spiritual results by it. Concentration, when practised for spiritual results, will gradually lead us to *meditation,* and meditation will eventually direct the soul into the state of Godconsciousness, and then we shall be able to realize the true nature of the soul and its relation to God. Thus you can understand how in Vedânta the highest ideals of true religion are made into a practical science which is intensely useful and beneficial in every possible way.

Another practical side of Vedânta is the science of breath. Anyone who understands this science of breath and possesses physical, mental and spiritual strength, can stand the sudden changes of weather, can go through any

hardship without being broken to pieces. Those who have practised regularly the lessons as given in the Râja Yoga classes held under the auspices of the Vedânta Society of New York will know how wonderful the teachings of this science of breath are and what wonderful powers can be attained. The students of Vedânta will eventually gain perfect health. By gaining control over your breath, you will make your system do anything you like. You will bring every inch of your muscle and nerve-centres under your control. As breathing exercises bring physical results, so mental powers are developed by the regulation of breath. The power of self-control is bound to come to one who has learnt the control of breath or one who has faithfully practised the breathing exercises as given by the Swâmis from India. The utility of this wonderful science is proved by medical practitioners, mental scientists, and by those who teach physical culture or voice culture. Again, when this breath is brought under control, it brings peace of mind. When the mind is directed towards the supreme Ideal, you will obtain spiritual enlightenment, in which you will discover the past and future of your soul-life. Thus Râja Yoga when properly applied to our daily lives will make us strong physically, mentally and spiritually.

A student of Vedânta does not require any special or separate training in ethics or religion, because the highest ideals and the practical side of ethics are included in the teachings of Vedânta, and, if we try to live according to the ideals of Vedânta, we cannot but be ethical. For instance, one of the injunctions of practical ethics is to be truthful. Now, why should we be truthful? The question has never been answered by any system of ethics so rationally as by Vedânta. Vedânta tells us that truthfulness is not a mere virtue, but it is the means of attaining the absolute Truth. The absolute Truth is revealed to those only who are absolutely truthful in thought, word and deed. Moral weakness and selfishness lie at the bottom of falsehood, therefore we should abandon it. We

should shun the company of those who are untruthful; and although we may go through all kinds of suffering, sorrow, misery, and changes of fortune, still we must not give up the ideal of truthfulness, we must hold on to it until the last breath has passed out of our body, because truthfulness will lead to absolute Truth. The eternal Truth is never gained by falsehood but by truth.

Another ethical law which is considered to be the highest law in all religions is: "Love they neighbour as thyself." Now, here we can ask the same question: Why should I love my neighbour as myself? Like Christianity, Vedânta teaches this ideal. Christianity teaches it as a dogma based upon the authority of its Scriptures, and does not give any reason in favour of it, but Vedânta gives the rational explanation and tells us why we should love our neighbours as ourselves: Because the true Self of our neighbour is one with our true Self. And that *recognition* of this spiritual *oneness,* when understood, is the meaning of love. Love means spiritual oneness, oneness of two souls,—that is true love. Where there is true love, there is divinity, there is the manifestation of God, and that divine love reigns in the heart and soul of a student of Vedânta and, therefore, he loves all humanity. When the same love which we call human love is not backed by selfishness, it becomes divine love, and that divine love is the means by which we can realize God. God can be realized through divine love. Therefore, we should practise in our daily lives that unselfish love which is the highest, and never encourage or practise that which is called love but which means something different, which is based upon selfishness, which produces attachment and brings bondage in the end. Neither we should practise nor indulge to it, otherwise, we shall be the sufferers, and the ideal of love, which is divine, will not be attained by us.

The highest aspiration of the individual soul is fulfilled when it realizes its spiritual oneness with the divine Being, and that spiritual oneness or divine love is the central ideal of Vedânta. Vedânta teaches that there is

one existence, one reality, one truth, one God, one life, and one spirit. All these differentiations and distinctions, which we perceive with our senses, are fictitious and unreal. They are all on the surface. Go below the surface and there you will see the undercurrent of one spirit; and when that one spirit is properly realized, we understand that we are inseparable parts of that one stupendous whole. We must love, we cannot help loving and through that divine love we realize the highest ideal of our lives. A student of Vedânta, who recognizes that spiritual oneness, sees that one universal Spirit is manifesting through all living creatures, and all human beings, and therefore he loves all human beings; and also he loves all animals. The most practical result of this love, or, the recognition of oneness, is that a student of Vedânta never injures or kills any living creature. Because he knows that there is one life, that the difference between an animalcule and a human being is only in degree but not in kind. The same life-force is expressed in so many ways and wherever the humanitarian ideas of Vedânta are preached, there prevails compassion for everybody: there is compassion for poor animals, there hospitals are built, not only for men, women and children, but also for lower animals, and there is to be found the desire to take care of the poor, the suffering brothers. Therefore, a student of Vedânta does not unnecessarily kill any animal for food, because he says: "When I cannot give life to any living creature, what right have I to take it? Let it stay on and live; it has its purpose to fulfil; I must not interfere." And having this ideal in his mind he does good to all, and he would rather give his own life than take the life of others. Such a soul is a great blessing to humanity, as also to all living creatures. The practice of this ideal will bring the most wonderful results which are morally and spiritually perfect. We should teach our children to love all creatures, for, even the lower animals possess life and feelings. From our childhood, we have been

taught that lower animals have been created for our food. Now we must change that idea and teach our children that these lower animals are also fulfilling certain principles of life, that they are on certain grades of evolution, and in course of time, they will rise on the plane of human beings, and therefore, we must be kind to them. Thus in practical life we should learn compassion, and that compassion, when properly carried out, will lead to divine love and realization of the Supreme.

The teachings of Vedânta drive away the fear of death, because they say that death cannot attack our souls; we are immortal; by our birthright we are children of that universal Spirit and therefore we are beyond death. Fear of death will never trouble the mind of a student of Vedânta. "As we throw away our old worn-out garment, so the soul throws away the garment of the old body at the time of death and manufactures a new one, according to its thoughts and deeds."[1] What a great consolation is this! That we are no longer dependent upon the freak of an anthropomorphic God; that we have not been created out of nothing by the sudden whim of a Creator, but that our souls existed in the past and shall exist after death, that our pleasures and pains are the results of our own actions. that we are responsible for our future happiness and misery. We are not going to eternal perdition, nor are we born in sin and iniquity. Thus the teachings of Vedânta take away all fear of death and make us happy and contended in our earthly career. What can be more beneficial to us in practical life?

Another great help in practical life which we get from Vedânta is the knowledge of the divine Being. The divine Being is not far from us; He is the Soul of our souls; He is ever dwelling within us! He is both personal and impersonal, and beyond both. He can be worshipped under any name, in any form, by anyone, under any sect, creed or denomination. He is one and eternal. When we

1 *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 22.

understand this, all religious animosities, quarrels and fights cease for ever. Then we consider all sectarians as our brothers and sisters; we embrace them as children of one God. What could be more practical than this! Can a sectarian do so? Can an orthodox Christian embrace a Mohammedan or a Buddhist? Very few possess so broad and liberal a mind as to embrace another man belonging to another religion, but Christ himself would have embraced a Mohammedan or Buddhist or any heathen as the child of Divinity, of his Heavenly Father, and we should follow that example. We should try to live up to it, and then in our daily lives, we shall be able to understand that secret by which we shall attain to the highest wisdom, of spiritual oneness, that will make us free. This is the meaning of salvation, which is emancipation from bondage from ignorance and selfishness. According to Vedânta, that salvation does not begin in the grave, but it should begin right here and now. Vedânta shows us the way to attain to that salvation or perfection in this life. And when that knowledge or divine wisdom comes, all darkness of ignorance is dispelled and the divine powers begin to flow through our souls. Then we rise above the animal and material plane and shine with the spiritual light of the eternal Sun.

Now we can see how all these teachings of the different branches of Vedânta fit into the different departments of our lives and how practical Vedânta is. Not only this, but there is also another thing, which we should not forget, that Vedânta includes the truths that have been discovered by different branches of science and shows us how those truths can be applied to our daily lives; how we can mould our daily lives according to these ideals and direct our efforts towards the highest goal, which is one. No other religion has done that; no other religion has ever been able to harmonize itself with the different branches of science or with the different philosophies of the world. But Vedânta includes all sciences, all philosophies and all religions, and, therefore, it is universal. A student of

Vedânta can be a Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist or a heathen, or an agnostic. Distinctions of caste, creed and nationality are never recognized in the light of Vedânta. Wherever the truths of Vedânta are preached, there prevail peace, tranquility, self-control and spiritual illumination. If we understand the teachings of Vedânta and live up to the ideals, then we shall be able to say with Schopenhauer: "Vedânta has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death."

CHAPTER SIX

ETHICS OF VEDANTA

The ethics of Vedânta runs in harmony with the teachings of Buddha, Jesus the Christ, Mohammed, Confucius, Lao-Tze, and other great moral and spiritual leaders of mankind. They are not based upon any particular book or upon the authority of any particular personage, but they are based upon the eternal laws that govern our moral and spiritual life. They are not founded upon any narrow doctrine which makes us more selfish at the expense of others, but upon the solid rock of what leads toward absolute unselfishness. From prehistoric times the great seers of Truth in India have tried their best to understand those ethical laws, to observe them in their daily lives, and to make the minds of their fellow-beings understand those laws and practise them. They have tried to explain those laws in the most rational way. Of course, some have preached those laws and their interpretation as the commandments of God. Those who believe in a personal God as the creator and ruler of the universe, gave those ethical laws in the terms of God's commands. Jesus the Christ, Moses and Mohammed believed in a personal God, and so they explained those ethical laws as the commandments of God: "God commanded these" but there is a danger in believing in them to be commandments of God, because, if you have the conception of a personal God as the ruler of the universe and giver of certain laws, anyone who would violate those laws will be punished by Him. That idea naturally comes up and that is the beginning of the conception of punishment. Those who obey the commandments of God will go to Him and will receive His grace, but those who disobey His commandments will be punished and thrown into eternal fire. This idea prevails in all the dualistic religions of

Semitic origin, as also in the dualistic religion of ancient Persia. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism—these four religions are also dualistic. They believe in the existence of a personal God, the creator of all good, and they believe also in the existence of the creator of evil as distinct and separate from the creator of all good. Those who are overpowered and tempted by the creator of evil will suffer punishment in the end. Some of the dualists believe that the punishment will continue for ever—there is no end to that punishment. But the question arises, why should God punish His own creatures for the faults for which they themselves are not responsible? Why should God be partial and unjust? The idea of justice which we have is, of course, very limited, but when that ideal of justice is mixed with the ideal of all-lovingness, all-mercifulness, we find that it is very difficult to reconcile. If God loves His creatures equally, then He ought not to punish anyone. That idea is very strong amongst the Hindus in India, and therefore, the Hindus do not believe in the doctrines of hell-fire and eternal punishment.

Then, how do the Hindus explain the evil that exists in this world? They explain it by the law of cause and effect, action and reaction, and that law is called the law of *Karma*. God never rewards the virtuous nor punishes the wicked, but we reward ourselves and punish ourselves by our own thoughts and deeds. Good thoughts bring good reaction in the form of results; evil thoughts and evil deeds bring evil reactions in the form of punishment, suffering, misery, sorrow, diseases or death. That eternal law is the basis of all ethics, the law of *Karma*. And here we find the rational foundation, but if we take the commandments of God as they revealed to Moses or other great prophets direct from Heaven, we encounter a great many difficulties. The Christian theologians have been trying for two thousand years to reconcile those difficulties and to explain them, but they have failed. They have not succeeded in discovering a rational foundation

which makes God impartial and all-loving and all-merciful. Then, again, if we study the religion of Buddhism, we find the same ethical laws, the same ethical teachings, but they are not explained as the commandments of God, because Buddha himself did not believe in a personal God who dwells outside of nature and universe, but his religion is extremely ethical. It is a religion of humanity and for humanity. It is a religion which upholds the highest ideals of ethics and spirituality.

Ethics must be the foundation of religion. Perfect morality and the highest standard of ethics must be at the roots of a true religion. A religion without ethics as its foundation is of no use, and, therefore, Vedânta says that ethics are the gateway to spirituality, the gates which lead to the attainment of Divinity, and, therefore, the ethical life must be the starting-point of spiritual life. Some people think that ethical life is the end of spirituality, the highest end, and they also believe that there is no end higher than that; but they are mistaken. Ethical life is the beginning of man's spiritual venture and the end is the attainment to Divinity. And it is for this reason, that Vedânta upholds the universal ethical laws and builds the universal religion on their basis. Whether these laws are commandments of God or not, Vedânta does not discuss. It leaves the problem to the dualistic religionists to discuss, but it takes in the commandments and enables us to see the light behind them.

The eternal ethical law is the law of mercy (*Maitree*). Mercy for all living creatures—that law we should understand. "Hatred is never conquered by hatred but by love. This is an everlasting ethical law." If you wish to conquer hatred, do not hate the person who hates you, but love that person instead. This is one of the laws. Wrath is never stilled by wrath, but by reconciliation. This is another law. Subdue hatred by love, the avaricious by generosity, evil by good, falsehood by truth. This is an everlasting law. Conquer all evil, like envy, jealousy, hatred, malice. Subdue your passions, and control your

self. This is the path to perfection. Anyone who wishes to attain to perfection must have to practise these principles, because in the character of all those great beings recognized as our ideals, great leaders of mankind and the Saviours of the world, these ethical principles are exhibited in a most prominent manner. The cardinal virtues are purity, charity, compassion, forgiveness, disinterested love for others, and self-control. When we practise these virtues and live up to them, we become ethical and we enter the gate of spirituality, the gate of Divine perfection.

The ethical law of all-mercifulness is the highest law. We must love our neighbours as ourselves. This is an old law, discovered by the ancient sages in the Vedic period, five thousand years before Christ, so this idea is not peculiar or novel to modern thought. Christ was not the first man to preach this, nor Moses, but it is an eternal law. Why should we love our neighbours as ourselves?"—not because of their good qualities, not because of the help that we have received from them, but because of our unity in spirit. We must recognize that they are children of immortal Bliss. In spirit we are like brothers and sisters because we ourselves are children of immortal Bliss. When we have recognized that in ourselves first, we cannot help recognizing it in others and will love them as we love our narrow and petty self and will try to help them in distress, will remove their grievances and bring them out of their misery and troubles. If they need anything that we have the power to give, we must give it.

A true follower of the religion of Vedânta should practise this love for neighbours, not only for neighbours, but for all humanity, irrespective of their creed and caste, colour and nationality. We must not think that: "This is a black man and there is a white man." We should not believe that the white man is a child of God and the black man is a child of devil. No, they are all children of the same God. We should cultivate that feeling. We must shed that race-

prejudice which has made us so low. We must rise superior to the colour distinction. The practice of this principle will enable us to feel that the same divine thread runs through all of us. Divinity is manifesting through all human forms, whether black or white, yellow or red, whether wicked or virtuous. The souls are neither wicked nor virtuous. For the time being, the acts and thoughts make us wicked or virtuous.

In the religion of Vedânta, you will notice that the souls are not born in sin and iniquity, nor we are all children of sin. We are children of God. Sins are nothing but some of the conditions of the medium through which the soul is manifesting its powers. The medium may be imperfect, but what is behind the medium is perfect. The light may not pass through an unclean medium or the medium may be coloured with some kind of taint, but when it is cleaned or that taint is removed, the manifestation is perfect. Sins are nothing but mistakes which we commit on account of our ignorance of the law, and every mistake is a great teacher in the long run. Mistakes have their lessons for us. We grow wiser by experience. How else can we learn? Suppose, you are thrown into a place where hundreds and thousands of machines are working and you know nothing about them; you are a stranger; you try to touch one part and you get your finger crushed, and you say: "Why, this is terrible!" Then you do not touch it again. Try another part and therefrom you receive a fresh shock. You do not go near it again. That is the way we are learning all through our life and gradually growing into fulness and perfection.

We have come to this world, not with our spiritual eyes open, not with that knowledge which makes us understand all these laws; but by experience we are gaining that knowledge and learning by committing mistakes. Due to ignorance we are all bound to commit mistakes, but we must know that they are mistakes, and the knowledge of laws will save us from committing them further.

Ignorance is the greatest Satan that is described in the religion of Vedânta. There is no other Satan outside of us, dwelling in the infernal regions and tempting us. No, it is our own ignorance. Ignorance is the mother of selfishness, and therefore we should bring that light of knowledge which will dispel the darkness of ignorance. As the darkness of the night vanishes away before the light of the rising sun, so the darkness of ignorance also vanishes when the light of the rising sun of knowledge dawns upon us. That light we must get. With that light we shall be able to understand all the laws which govern our lives, moral and spiritual. Moral laws are higher than the physical laws, because physical laws only affect the physical plane, while the moral laws effect our soul plane. This physical body may be dead and gone, but our individual egos will continue to exist after death, being bound by those moral laws, and receive reward or punishment according to the acts and thoughts which we have performed or done here in this life.

There is a saying in one of the oldest writings on Vedânta and it has been put into the mouth of a great spiritual teacher. Once a disciple went to his spiritual master and asked the fundamental principles of universal ethics, and the master answered in three words. He said: "My dear child, you learn the meanings of these three words and practise them in your daily life; then you will attain to perfection." Those three words in Sanskrit were, *dharma, dâna,* and *dayâ.* These three words begin with the letter '*D*'. *Dharma* is the first: Subdue yourself, conquer passions, restrain your senses and rise above all selfishness—that is the first teaching. *Dâna:* Give alms to the poor, be charitable—that is the second word. And *Dayâ*: Be compassionate towards all, practise disinterested love for all. Now, these three words, in a sense, sum up the whole of Indian ethics, and they are not given as the commandments of God, but they are the words which refer to the eternal ethical laws, the ethical laws that govern our moral lives. Why should we sub-

due ourselves, and control our passions? Because otherwise we shall suffer. We must conserve our energy, and rise above the material and sense plane. Why should we be compassionate towards all? It is for the same reason, as I have already explained. Why should we love our neighbours as ourselves? The wise men treat others as they treat themselves, knowing that they are all children of immortal Bliss.

Then, again, there is another ethical teaching which is very appropriate. Worldly-minded people think that: "This is my relative and that is a stranger; this is my own and that is not my own," but a wise man argues otherwise. A wise man thinks that all men and women are his friends and relatives. In the household of Divinity there is no one who is not a friend, or a relative. There is no enemy on that plane. All enemies become so simply through self-interest. Go behind the self-interest and see the Divine spark within them. Then they would appear different. Remind them of their Divine nature. They will give up and renounce their self-interest immediately. Purity of heart should be practised, because purity of heart will help us in making our intellect bright, our heart free from selfish desires, and our whole being will be peaceful and restful. In that calm state of mind, we see the flashes of the supreme Being. If our minds be dispersed or distracted by worries, anxieties, cares and sufferings, we cannot behold that beatific vision, just as the reflection of the moon in disturbed water is not vivid and clear. It is all broken into pieces, but if you wish to see the full reflection of the moon, let water be calm. Let the surface of the water be without any ripple, then you will see the perfect reflection. Do not forget that illustration. The mind is like a lake, and the Lord is like the full moon. The reflection is constantly falling upon the surface of the mind, but we cannot catch it. The mind remains usually disturbed, and for its spiritualisation contemplation in solitude is necessary. We require silence, at once external and

internal. Make your mind silent, make it free from the eddies of desires and passions, then you will see the reflection, you will find peace, happiness, contentment and all the divine qualities in you.

Another thing that we must learn is to restrain our tongue. We must not gossip; that is one of the ways in which our energy is dissipated. We must keep silent, and must not waste our energy by being garrulous. "He who talks much, must talk in vain," and that we should avoid. Chastity in thought, word and deed, should be practised. Absolute chastity is next to Divinity, and the more chaste we become in our thoughts, the purer we become in our hearts, and the nearer we proceed to Divinity.

Charity is extremely helpful. In all the scriptures of the world, charity is considered to be one of the greatest virtues. In trying to help others, we not only help others, but we help ourselves. We rise above the plane of selfishness, we become unselfish and we sacrifice a little for the sake of others, and that is a great gain. Such sacrifice, when deliberately undertaken, chastens our emotions, ennobles our feelings, and initiates us into a higher state of life. In the Mohammedan scriptures you will see that all its followers are enjoined to practise charity; they should give at least one-tenth of their income to charitable purposes. This is to be found in the Quran. They are, perhaps, more charitable men than the followers of other religions, because they are steady, and they practise it daily by giving alms to the poor. In India charity is considered to be one of the greatest virtues amongst the Hindus. They give alms to the poor, give them clothes, feed them sumptuously on such festive occasions as follow or accompany the birth of a child, the wedding or the funeral ceremony. They will invite hundreds and thousands of poor people and give them food and clothes without seeking any return. They think that it is their duty to give to the poor, to help them, and then they

would build alms-houses where the poor may get shelter, food and clothes. They have charitable hospitals and dispensaries where the poor and the sick can receive help and can cure diseases from which they are suffering.

Charity involves an elements of self-denial, and anything which makes us forget our petty self and think in terms of the supreme Being, the higher Self, is conducive to our spiritual advance. Therefore, we should practise self-denial in order to rise above the laws which govern our lower self.

Another law which all the students of Vedânta should observe is that eternal law which is working against the law of the "survival of the fittest." The ethical law is not the survival of the fittest, but to make others fit to survive,—that is a law which we should practise. A student of Vedânta will first learn these universal ethical laws: non-killing or not to kill anyone, not to steal, not to tell a lie, not to commit unjust acts, and not to be drunken. These we should practise, not because they have been written in certain books or they have come from God, but because of the eternal laws that govern our moral lives. We should not kill because we cannot give life to a dead being. Here you may ask the question: "Then should we not kill animals such as tigers and snakes?" Yes, we should. In order to preserve the higher manifestations, we should get rid of the lower. That would be the ideal. In order to preserve higher beings like human beings, we should get rid of others when they are trying to attack, but we should not kill any animal simply because they yield us pleasure.

We should not steal. Why should we not steal? Because we have no right to enrich ourselves at the expense of others. What we have honestly earned must content us, and we must remember the rights of others.

If we shall analyze all these ethical teachings which

are commonly given as commandments of God, through the writings of Vedânta you will find a rational foundation, and then you will be able to know the universal ethical laws upon which all the religions of the world are built. There is no harm in doing things which are not right, but there is great harm to ourselves. There is a statement in one of the Sanskrit writings: "There is no crime in eating animal flesh, in drinking or in practising any unchaste action, because it is a natural tendency of an animal; but the restraint is great." He who can restrain animal tendencies is morally entitled to Divine realization. He is entitled to become the ideal of nations. Others are living on the animal plane. If we look at these acts from the standard of an animal, the doers are all right. Let those men go on like this, but some day or other they will wake up and see that this is not the highest ideal of life. The highest ideal is different.

It is restraint which makes us perfectly contended and satisfied, and makes us rise above the ordinary life and lend a helping hand to all those who are suffering. This is a lofty ideal. Non-resistance of evil is great. That non-resistance is very difficult to practise under the present conditions, but it has been practised in India for centuries. Under the aggressive method of the Occidentals, they are suffering, but still they have not given up the practice of non-resistance of evil. The power of suffering is greater than that of oppressing. The oppressors will die out, but the sufferers will have their day. The Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you," is considered to be the greatest ethical law; but there is something greater still, and that is "recompense evil with good." If anyone has done wrong to you, return him good. That is greater than the Golden Rule, and that is the ideal we should hold before our vision and practise it in our daily life. So that in the end we shall be like the divine Being who sends everything that is good towards all, no matter how the

people may think of Him. As the rays of the sun fall upon the wicked and the good alike, so let our feelings of love and goodness and good-will flow towards all; no matter whether they return evil or good. Let us practise disinterested love for all humanity and recompense evil with good.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

TRUE BASIS OF MORALITY

From ancient times various attempts have been made in the Western world to explain the moral nature of man. A great majority of people refrain from violating "God's commandments", because they think that eternal torment will be their inevitable doom for such disobedience. Consequently, fear of punishment is the stuff out of which their morality grows. They dare not ask questions regarding the validity of those commandments and feel compelled to accept them, because they find no alternative course left open to them. But men cannot for ever suppress their inner searching mood. So, they often bury certain reservations and doubts in their minds, being too timid for their loud thinking.

There are again, others who try to interpret the moral law, not by an appeal to the scriptures, but by reason. Such persons are known in the West as 'philosophers' and 'great thinkers'. The oldest of these were the Greek philosophers that flourished before the dawn of the Christian era. In the fifth century before Christ arose Socrates, who tried to establish virtue and moral conduct on a firm intellectual foundation. Thenceforward the basis of morality became the principal theme of the Greek philosophers. Socrates taught that all virtue is knowledge—justice being the surest guide for every moral action. "A virtuous or a moral act is one that proceeds from a clearly conscious perception of those things to which it relates, that is, of the end, means, and limitations by which it is conditioned. Good and evil are dctermined by the presence or absence of insight. Men act wrongly, only because they form erroneous judgments."

A similar explanation of the basis of morality was

given by Plato, who based the whole of the moral fabric upon justice. But by justice he meant the State—the moral life in its complete totality. Plato believed that social ethics can alone govern the sensuous principle, which is so mighty in man. Social institutions, according to his conceptions, can suppress the "lower" nature and make man moral. Virtue must begin in the State and then manifest itself in the individual. Hence come the severity and rigour of the Platonic teachings regarding the State.

The ethics of Aristotle differs in many respects from those of his predecessors. Aristotle did not view the moral element in man as purely intellectual; he said it was the outcome of the physical nature. Socrates regarded the moral and the natural as opposites, and moral conduct as the result of rational enlightment, while Aristotle held that one proceeds from the other. He said that the chief peculiarity of human nature is rational activity. Man, being naturally intelligent, is bound to act rationally; hence, morality arises from innate virtue. The Aristotelian basis of ethics, therefore, upset the Socratic basis of morality. According to Aristotle, ethical culture and moral activity are conditioned by a properly regulated social life. Man is a political animal; a truly *human* life is possible only in a society. Therefore, "the State is superior to the individual and even to the family; individuals are only accidental parts of the political whole".

Then came the Stoics. Their ethics were most closely connected with their physics. The moral code of the Stoics was as follows: "Follow Nature, or live in harmony with Nature. Live in natural simplicity, and do not be corrupted by art. Be consciously and voluntarily what thou art by nature. Pleasure has no moral worth, and is not the end of Nature; it comes accidentally. Consequently, whatever action ends in pleasure cannot be moral." These ideas practically sum up the whole severity of the Stoic morals. Everything personal

must be cast aside. According to the Stoics, a perfect moral act is possible only when the actor has a thorough knowledge of the good and the complete power to realize it.

Then a reaction set in; and the result was Epicurianism and scepticism. The moral nature was denied. "Seek pleasure and avoid pain as long as you live" became the highest ideal. Thus ended the speculations of the Greek philosophers of the pre-Christian era.

Soon afterwards the Christian idea of morality entered into Europe. Starting from belief in the sayings of Jesus and the revelations of scripture, the moral precepts of Christianity slowly grew into the scholasticism, theology, and priestcraft of the Middle Ages, which dominated the minds of Western people for centuries. Various objections to that belief were raised from time to time, but they were promptly suppressed with dogmatic assertions, threats, and persecutions on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Then came the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Philosophers arose in different parts of Europe to discuss afresh the various questions bearing upon the nature of the soul, God and the moral law. But all these ended in the sceptical and nihilistic doctrines of Hume. And ethical science gradually became identified with social and political laws as the science of human conduct in the secular state or community.

But the appearance of Kant in Germany marked a new and important epoch in the history of philosophy in Europe. Kant tried to reestablish the rules of morality on an enduring basis. He taught that there is an innate moral law within each person that stands preeminent above all those that relate to the ends called pleasure and pain in daily life; consequently, by irresistible necessity each person is bound to follow that law, which is absolutely free from sensuous motives. The moral law, according to Kant, is not a *hypothetical* imperative that promulgates that such and such means will end in

such and such results; it is rather a *categorical imperative,* or, in other words, an absolute command. It does not originate in reason, motive, impulse, or desire, but in *pure reason,* which is autonomous, one, and universal.

The idea of freedom also is determined by this law. The moral law says: "Thou oughtest; therefore, thou canst;" and thus assures us of our freedom. It is not bound by the objects of desire. "Utilitarian mortality" is no morality at all; because it is conditioned by the objects of desire. "Theological morality" is likewise a misnomer, because it depends upon the punishment and rewards that proceed from a personal God. It does not proceed from freedom, but from the desire and hope of obtaining reward and avoiding punishment. According to Kant, we do not call that act, moral act which proceeds from the motive of obtaining happiness of sense enjoyment. When an act is performed solely for the sake of the law *per se,* it is moral. Moreover, Kant reduced religion to morality. Religion, said he, cannot be the basis of morality; it is itself based upon morality. If religion be the foundation, then fear and hope will be the prime motive of all moral action.

Belief in God does not necessarily make one moral; the idea that 'I ought to believe' must precede all such belief. Religion, when separated from morality, is nothing. The church is simply a moral community. A dogma has worth only so far as it has a moral content. We do not derive any benefit from mere believing in the Trinity. There is no moral difference between belief in a Godhead consisting of three persons and that in a Godhead consisting of ten.

According to Kant, reason is the highest interpreter of the Bible. If the records of revelation do not appeal to reason, they ought to be rejected. The German philosopher says that the foundation of a complete ethical religion originally lay in the human heart. Thus, according to the Kantian system, a religion beyond morality is unnecessary. It is a mere theory. We have obscure ideas

of God and immorality. We cannot go further, *i.e.*, we cannot go beyond such theoretical ideas.

Post-Kantian philosophers, such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, starting from the conclusions of Kant, developed other systems each having peculiarities of its own. Each of these thinkers brought forward his own speculation, but failed to give a better explanation of the basis of morality than that given by Kant. The result was considerable and heated discussion throughout Germany for years to come until a reaction set in as embodied by the appearance of Schopenhauer. This noted philosopher taught that all our actions proceed from certain motives, which can be divided into two classes: the first, *desire to further well-being;* the second, *desire to cause ill.* These underlie all our actions; hence every act that a man can possibly perform must have as its aim, either one's own well-being or another's ill, or *vice versa.*

Each human action, therefore, can be divided into four classes, according to its relation to the four motives. First, an act intended for another's ill is called malice; secondly, for one's own well-being, egoism; thirdly, for another's well-being, compassion; and fourthly, for one's own ill, asceticism. These four classes of motives determine the moral merit or demerit of human actions. The first two motives are called, by Schopenhauer, Will (to live), or the affirmation of Will; and the last two, compassion and asceticism, are the denial of the Will.

This denial of the *will to live* is, according to Schopenhauer, the true basis of morality. Acts that are performed, not for the affirmation of the *will to live,* but for its denial, are moral and virtuous; for, when it is denied, then come rest, happiness, and freedom. Thus the deficiencies of the Kantian system have been supplied by Schopenhauer. But the latter acknowledges allegiance to the wisdom of the *Upanishads,* or Vedânta (the highest philosophy, according to many Western scholars, that the human mind has ever produced), which he calls *sacred* without the least hesitation. "In the whole world there

is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Upanishads.*" These are the words of the greatest of the post-Kantian philosophers.

Schopenhauer's great disciple, Dr. Paul Deussen, says, in his *Metaphysics,* that Christianity, like all other great religions of the world, inculcates the highest moral law: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." But why should we do so? The answer we do not find in the Bible, but in the *Upanishads.* The *Upanishads* say that the whole basis of morality cannot be any other than *oneness.* Love means the expression of *oneness.* This love, however, must not be confined to our neighbours only; it must include all living creatures, because we are *one in spirit* with every other living creature. The Vedânta says: "Love every living creature as thyself"—because the same Self or Spirit, is there. First of all, "realize the Self or Spirit in thee; then thou shalt be able to realize the Self, or Spirit everywhere". He that realizes that one universal Spirit everywhere cannot kill spirit by spirit. The moment we realize that we are Spirit, all selfishness vanishes. It is on account of selfishness, which proceeds from the idea of separateness, that we do not recognize the rights of others. Because of selfishness we try to enrich ourselves by injuring others and depriving them of their rights.

Selfishness is the cause of all evil and immorality; and *unselfishness is but another term for the recognition of oneness.* That which proceeds from the idea of separateness; *i.e.,* from selfish motives, is immoral and sinful; and that which leads towards unselfishness is moral, virtuous and good. That which prevents us from realizing our oneness with God and humanity is wrong; and that which helps us in loving every living creature as ourselves is moral, godly and divine. All the commandments, "Thou shalt not" and "Thou shalt", which we find in various scriptures, may be summed up in two simple sentences: "Do not be selfish; be unselfish." Therefore, *unselfishness, or the recognition of oneness,* is the true basis of morality.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VEDANTA TOWARDS RELIGION

Hundreds of educated men and women have found in Vedânta the true foundation of universal religion. It has neither dogma nor creed of any kind. It embraces all the special religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Mohammedanism, Brahminism, and like a thread it weaves them together into a garland of flowers, variegated in their size and colour. Like an impartial judge, the religion of Vedânta gives the proper place to each of these sectarian religions in the grand evolution of the spiritual thoughts and systems of the world. Having no particular founder, it stands upon the eternal spiritual laws that have been discovered by various sages and seers of Truth of all countries and of all ages and which have been described in the different scriptures of the world. Those who have studied the religion of Vedânta in its various aspects have found the spiritual laws which are given in all the different scriptures. For them it is not necessary to study the Vedas of the Hindus, the Tripitakas of the Buddhists, the Zend-Avesta of the Parsees, the Old Testament of the Jews, the Bible of the Christians and the Quran of the Mohammedans in order to understand those spiritual laws. Because they can find the essential points, the moral and spiritual laws that govern our lives, through the study of Vedânta. It is not necessary for them if they can only understand the central point that Truth is universal. If there be any spiritual law, that must be universal and must pervade all the scriptures of the world. Then there will be no difficulty; everything will appear to us as simple. Furthermore, the students of Vedânta find in this religion the ulti mate conclusion of the greatest scientific thinkers of the world. It includes all the scientific truths. The religion of

Vedânta, therefore, is extremely comforting to those who have outgrown the doctrines and dogmas of special religions, and I can assure you that it has brought the greatest comfort and consolation to them who are earnest and sincere seekers after universal Truth.

The religion of Vedânta is like a huge structure, the foundation of which is laid, not upon the quicksand of the authority of any particular book or personality, but upon the solid rock of logical and scientific reasoning, and the walls of which are not made up of the clay of superstitious dogmas, but are built with the stones of spiritual experiences, placed one upon another by the artistic hands of the great seers of Truth of ancient and modern times. The roof of this superb structure is not confined within the celestial domain of the anthropomorphic God of a personal religion, but it extends beyond all the heavens of different religions, and, rising above all the various planes of relativity, reaches that infinite and eternal abode of being, intelligence, love and everlasting bliss. The gates of this magnificent palace are guarded, not by zealots and fanatics who carry destructive weapons in their hands to prevent the entrance of other sectarians, but by sincerity and earnestness standing like sentinels to welcome with open arms all those who are sincere and earnest seekers after Truth, spiritual life and Godconsciousness, irrespective of their creed, nationality or religious conviction. There are many stories in that palacial building, three of which are of great importance. The first floor is for the monotheists, or those who believe in the existence of one personal God whom they worship under a particular name and a particular form. Here is the place for all the monotheistic believers and worshippers in Judaism, Christianity. Mohammedanism, Zoroastrianism, Lâmâism, Brâhminism and theistic Buddhism, with their various sects and denominations. Here are to be found all the doctrines, dogmas rituals, ceremonials and symbols that are described in these particular religions.

The second story is for those who have outgrown all ritualism, ceremonialism, symbolism and the worship of a God with a particular name and a particular form. It is for those who have understood that God is not far from us, dwelling in a heaven somewhere above the clouds, but that God dwells in nature; He is immanent and resident in nature, He is not far away, but He is here, He is the Soul of our souls, He is the Life of our life; "in Him we live and move and have our beings." Those who feel this and those who realize that we are children of God, that our souls are inseparable parts of that one stupendous whole, the infinite Being, worship on the second floor of this superstructure of the religions of Vedânta.

The God of Vedânta is personal, yet He is not confined to any particular personality. He is again personal and impersonal, and beyond both. You cannot confine God by giving Him any particular personality. If you think that He is sitting on a throne somewhere with two hands, you will limit Him. In truth, God of Vedânta is beyond all limitations. He is the transcendental Reality which knows no division and duality.

The God of Vedânta has again many names and many aspects, and these names and aspects are recognized by the different religions of the world. But He has no particular form, though He assumes many forms in order to satisfy the desires of earnest and sincere devotees; and to fulfill the prayers of them. He manifests Himself in that particular form to which the heart and the soul of the devotee are devoted. His personal aspect is worshipped under different names by different religions. The Christians worship Him as the Father in heaven, the Mohammedans as Allah, the Zoroastrians call Him Ahura Mazda, the Hindus give Him various names, the Buddhists call Him Buddha, the worshippers of divine Mother call Him the Mother of the universe. But God is sexless, and the moment we rise above the ideas of any sex and personality we have become divine. God has no sex.

Why should you call Him Father and give Him masculine sex? He may be called as masculine, faminine or neuter—it does not make any difference. In truth, there is no distinction of sex in God. He is above the category of sex, but yet He is imagined as possessed of these qualities. When you understand this central truth, there in no difference in the expression. But the personal God of the dualistic religions of Semitic origin is masculine, He is Jehovah; the same Jehovah again is Father in Heaven, is Allah, is Ahura Mazda.

The third story of this structure is for those who have gone beyond all relàtivity, who have transcended phenomenal existence, and who have reached that state of divine communion which manifests the eternal, absolute oneness of the supreme Spirit. It is for those who realize the indivisible oneness of that Being. That Being cannot be divided into parts, but He is one stupendous whole, indivisible. He is finer than space, and as space cannot be divided, so God cannot be divided into parts. That is the absolute Spirit, the infinite Being. But yet this infinite Being is called by various names. In Vedânta it is called the *Brahman, Paramâtman* or Over-Soul; but It is the same as the *Good* of Plato, the *Substantia* of Spinoza, the *transcendental thing-in-itself* (Ding an Sich) of Kant, the *Will* of Schopenhauer, the *Unknown and Unknowable* of Herbert Spencer, the *Substance* of Ernst Haeckel, the *Science of Matter* of the Materialists, the *Real Entity* or *Spirit* of the Spiritualists. It is also the same as Christ. He is also the same as Buddha and other prophets.

All the different names are given to God, the Absolute by different philosophers, as also by different worshippers. Three phases of Vedanta,—the dualistic, the qualified non-dualistic and the non-dualistic or monistic,—include all the sectarian religions of the world and impart the highest ideals given in all the scriptures. What is the highest ideal given in the scripture of the Christians or of the Mohammedans,

or of the Parsees? The worship of one God; that is the highest ideal. God may be personal; He may have some form. He may have a particular name, but still He is one. This is found in the dualistic phase of Vedânta. Vedânta accepts also that ideal, and, therefore, it embraces all the religions that I have just mentioned. As, on the one hand, the religion of Vedânta embraces the special religions of the world, and the highest ideals of all the scriptures of the world, so, on the other hand, the philosophy of Vedânta embraces the highest ideals and ultimate conclusions of the greatest scientists, the most eminent philosophers, the profoundest thinkers and the best metaphysicians of the world. Therefore, the religion of Vedânta is truly universal. Its scope is unlimited and there is no other religion in the world which can be compared to it in its universality and in its infinite scope.

The religion of Vedânta is inseparable from true science and from true philosophy. Why? Because all sciences and all philosophies are nothing but so many attempts of human minds to grasp some particular phase of the eternal Truth or the infinite Reality. As truth is the goal of all sciences and all philosophies, the same truth is the goal of Vedânta; and as Vedânta attempts to lead all human minds to the realization of that absolute Truth of *oneness,* so, it embraces all the philosophies of the world. In particular doctrines, in particular arguments, in particular discussions, and in particular points there may be diversity, but the ideal is one and hence Professor Max Müller said that "Vedânta is the most sublime of all philosophies and the most comforting of all religions." Why is this? Because it embraces the highest truths given in the philosophy of Plato, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Kant, Berkeley, Hume and others. For this reason, we should call the religion and philosophy of Vedânta absolutely unsectarian and universal. The follower of the Vedânta religion is also a true Christian. He is a true Christian, but in spirit he is broader than a

Christian. He is a true Mohammedan; also he is a true Buddhist, a true Brâhmin, a true Hindu; he is a worshipper of Truth. He honours and reveres all the great prophets and seers of Truth of all countries, accepts their teachings and never fails to separate the essentials of religion from the non-essentials or the crystalized dogmas and doctrines of special religions. He does not belong to any sect or creed of any particular religion, yet in spirit he belongs to all sects and all creeds of all religions. Because he knows the spirit of all creeds, he understands the meaning of all sectarian doctrines and dogmas. He does not belong to any particular church or any particular temple, but he regards all churches, all places of worship, all temples and all mosques as equally sacred and equally holy. To his all-embracing soul they are all equally great, and so he is able to worship his ideal in a Catholic Church or in a Mohammedan mosque. Nowhere he is limited. When he sits under a tree, he worships. He may not go to Church on Sundays but he may sit in the park beneath a tree and worship God in spirit. He feels that each individual soul is the temple wherein dwells the eternal Being and He must be worshipped in spirit. That is a grand ideal.

Vedânta accepts the teachings of the great prophets, like Moses, like Zoroaster, Jesus the Christ, Buddha, Confucius, Laotze and other great prophets and seers of Truth who have arisen in India and various other parts of the world, such as Râma, Krisna, Sankara, Râmakrishna and others. It recognizes Jesus the Christ as the Son of God, as the incarnation of Divinity, but not as the only one. For, there have been many other incarnations and will be many more in future. God is not limited to any particular tribe or particular nationality, or time, or place. Why should we limit Him? He is the infinite Being, the Father of all nations. Wherever His manifestation is necessary, He will appear. He loves all mankind equally. He does not think that the Jews are his chosen people, while others are

heathens. No, they are all equal in His eyes. All nations are great before Him. Therefore, we must not have any national prejudice on account of colour or particular mode of living, we all are children of the same God.

The religion of Vedânta recognizes spiritual growth and evolution in the path of realization. As in our physical body, there are different stages of growth, so there are different stages in the spiritual life. One leads to the other, one merges into the other and ultimately all the stages lead to God, to Realization. Spiritual childhood begins with the worship of ancesters or departed spirits and ends with the conception of one extra-cosmic personal God, who dwells outside of nature. That is the limit of spiritual childhood. All primitive religions began with ancestor-worship. In fact, ancestor-worship or spirit-worship was the foundation of all religions in primitive times. Modern spiritism or ancient ancestor-worship is only the beginning of spiritual childhood. In ancient times, when the people came to believe in departed spirits and felt that they had power over certain phenomena, that they have control over certain conditions, they were frightened and they began to revere and honour those spirits. Gradually this gave rise to another conception,—that of still higher and more powerful spirits who had greater control over the phenomena of nature, and they called these tribal gods. They became nature gods, and the belief in such tribal gods you will find amongst the different tribes of the ancient Jews, as amongst the tribes of ancient India, China, Japan and other countries. They are like chiefs who have control over certain manifestations of nature or certain powers; and this may be called the second stage of spiritual childhood. Gradually this leads to another step, which is a little higher. In this stage there is one governor over all these tribal gods or chiefs, and this conception is the monotheistic conception of a personal God. He is the ruler of all, of the sun-god, of the moon-god, of

departed spirits, of ancestors and bright spirits. This is the beginning of the dualistic conception of God, and here is the end of spiritual childhood. All those dualistic religions which we call monotheistic religions do not go beyond this. They lead our minds and souls to the worship of one personal God who dwells outside of nature and they make us believe that this is the highest stage, and there can be nothing higher.

These dualistic religions, therefore, like Zoroastrianism and Mohammedanism, lead to the highest stage of spiritual childhood in the spiritual life. But the spiritual youth begins when we begin to realize that God is not outside of nature but He is in nature. He is not outside of us. He is in us but He is not extra-cosmic but intra-cosmic. He is immanent and resident in nature. He is the Soul of the universe. Just as the soul of our body is the internal ruler of our body, so the Soul of the universe is the internal ruler of the universe. He governs, not from outside but from inside. He is the Creator, not in the sense that He sits somewhere and commands and creates the world out of the material which dwells outside of His own being, but He creates by pouring His spiritual influx in nature and starting the evolution of that cosmic energy which is called *Prakriti,* or Nature. In fact, the cosmic energy forms the body of the spiritual Being. God then appears to be both the efficient and material cause of the universe; Father and Mother, both in one. The individual souls come out of His own being like sparks coming out of huge bon-fire. The huge bon-fire is Divinity and our souls are like sparks which have sprung out of that bon-fire of Divinity. We are immortal by our birth-right, because we are parts of that one stupendous whole.

This stage gradually leads to spiritual maturity, where we do not think of the world, but rising above all phenomena, we realize the indivisible oneness, that we are not merely sparks, but are something closer to Divinity, we are one with God. Then we say: "I and my Father are one." Not one in the sense that an earthly

child is one with its father, but it is an undivided unity, because God is all in all, and all is God. There is nothing outside of God, everything has vanished, all phenomena have disappeared, all relative existences have been dissolved and the whole universe appears to be like a solid mass of infinite and indivisible Reality. Then all phenomenal existences seem to be like dreams. But you cannot realize it unless you rise on a higher plane. We are all playing parts on the stage of the world. I have taken some part and you have taken some other part. There is no difference. You are playing the part of a listener; I am playing the part of a speaker, but we are all on the same stage. You may help me and I may help you. Your desires seek satisfaction through your thoughts and deeds, so everybody else is doing the same. You may have certain dreams in your life; you may think that if you can realize these, you have fulfilled your purpose in life. Then, after fulfilling that, you think that there is another purpose. You must push on and reach that end. The process will recur many times until all purposes are fulfilled, all desires satisfied and all aims are gratified. So in reaching the maturity in spiritual life, we reach the absolutely monistic perception of spiritual oneness. It is not pantheism. But it is the absolute monism. There is no other word for it. Pantheism means *'all is God';* the chair is God, the sun is God, the moon is God. But in absolute monism the chair does not exist; the the sun, the moon and the stars, nay, any particular phenomenon do not exist. but we reach the background. God is like the eternal canvas upon which the beautiful picture of this phenomenal world is painted by the divine hand. In absolute monism we realize the canvas. At present we are fascinated and charmed by the colourings of the external; we have forgotten the canvas, the background of the universe. When we realize the background, we reach the highest.

The religion of Vedânta teaches that there is one God, but with many aspects. From spiritual childhood

we must rise to spiritual youth, and from spiritual youth to maturity; then we shall be one with the Infinite. The same God is worshipped under different names. The religion of Vedânta is truly catholic and tolerent. It does not dispute, it has no particular form of worship, nor does it ask that you do this or that; but its main theme is that any form of worship which appeals to the sincerity and earnestness of the soul of the devotee is right. If you think that worship of any particular ideal in a particular way, will help you, go and do it. Do not hesitate. If you think that it would not help you, do not do it. The worship of God depends upon the attitude of the worshipper, the attitude of the human mind and temper of the worshipper. But God is above all conceptions of human mind. He is supramental and supramundane.

Try to understand the highest purpose of life and then worship the ideal under any form or any name which appears to you. All rituals, all ceremonials, all forms of worship, are only the means to the highest end, to the realization of the Divinity. Therefore the religion of Vedânta embraces all other special sectarian religions, all forms of worship, under the different names. Some do not care to worship a personal God, but think of His impersonal nature; they are just as good. They are not going astray. So long as there is sincerity and earnestness, and love for the spiritual ideal, there is no going astray. We make our heaven and hell on this earth by our thoughts and deeds. There is no other external hell or eternal place of punishment. Our own minds dwell in hell when we have performed some wicked deeds, some wrong. Our souls rebel then. But when we are in the path of righteousness, our souls are happy, there is peace, there is the manifestation of Divinity. Because God manifests when our minds are silent, and that silence comes through peace, and when there is peace, there is happiness and bliss.

CHAPTER NINE

RELIGION OF VEDANTA

The history of religions bears out that the impulse to religion is deep-rooted in man. It has been an integral part of man's being from the very dawn of history. "All that we love, all that constitutes in our eyes the ornament of life, liberal cultivation of the mind, science, grand art may be destined to endure only for a time; but religion will never die. It is the eternal protest of the soul against the systematic or brutal materialism which would imprison man in the lower region of vulgar life. Civilization has its intermissions but religion has not."

History tells us that the different religions of the world are inter-related in a changing process, and there is no religion without its roots in the past. Religions are never made but they blossom spontaneously like a flower or plant, drawing its nourishment from the soil of its birth, and bearing the stamp of local names and forms, beliefs and traditions.

We know how Christianity and Mohammedanism grew from the soil of Judaism, which was in turn influenced by the atmosphere of Zoroastrianism of Persia. We also know how Judaism gradually developed from the polytheistic beliefs of the ancient tribes of the Israelites, Babylonians, Chaldeans and other nations of antiquity.

Again, we are familiar with the fact that Buddhism sprang up from the soil of Hindusthan, but gradually spread all over the world. But it is wrong to assume that the historical successors destroy the predecessors. The birth of new religions furthers in a sense the cause of earlier ones by reinterpretation of ideas and concepts already familiar. Besides, they help the development of new conception about God, the universe and man's relation to it.

The later religions may introduce and often do introduce, new creeds and concepts, codes and customs, myths and rituals, but the central idea of the worship of God remains the same, although under different names. The Christian conception of God appears to be more developed than that of Judaism. They have followers of the two religions, indeed vast difference in their creeds and customs, rituals and mythologies exist. The same Yaweh of Judaism has been worshipped by the Christians as the Father in heaven, and as Allah by the Mohammedans only the different aspect of the Deity being emphasized in each of these religions. But tragically enough, the followers of each religion often miss the vital point and declare through sheer propagandistic zeal that their particular religion is the best of all, and it alone is fitted to become the supreme universal religion for mankind.They proceed further and believe that the non-conformists are going astray. They require to be corrected and set on the right path, no matter whether they are willing or not. Some of the followers will not stop here; they will even draw out the sword and compel others to embrace their particular faith. All these are not due to man's wickedness, but to what we may call fanaticism. Fanaticism rises from man's will to dominate others. Once it is born, it brings in its frame a lot of other evils. It blinds man's vision and stires up the animal in him. It hardens man's heart, destroys all sublime sentiments that give sanctity to life and ultimately, allows cruelty and intolerance to get the upperhand. Man then degenerates into the level of brute-creation and often becomes as ferrocious as a wild tiger.

Religion brings out the most intense love for all humanity, nay, for all living creatures and establishes peace on earth; but its perversion brings out the most diabolical hatred and persecution ever known in the world. Religion makes one saintly, a living God on earth; but its perverted form has deluged the world with blood. The latter has forced the Mohammedans to hold

the sword in one hand and the Quran on the other, and it is also religion that has kindled the fires of Inquisition and has burnt alive hundreds and thousands of innocent persons whom we now call martyrs. Again, while the former has stopped the slaughter of animals, built hospitals for the poor and suffering people, not only for men and women but for animals, the latter makes one so cruel and heartless as nothing can possibly do.

The history of humanity stands like a living witness before us to enlighten our minds by describing in full details the deeds perpetrated by religion in different parts of the world. But each of these recognized religions of the world claims to have been revealed by God. Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism—all these claim that they are revealed religions. If so, let us see what and where is the cause of discord and disharmony which we find in the religious world. A Mohammedan says that his religion is true, because it is direct revelation of God. Consequently, he cannot believe that other religions are revealed in the same way. A Christian will say that his religion is true because it was revealed by God, while others are not so. As the Quran is the revealed scripture of the Mohammedans, so is the Bible of the Christians, the Old Testament of the Jews, the Zend Avesta of the Parsees and the Vedas of the Hindus. Each of these scriptures is held to be the sacred word of God and is considered to be true by its followers, and if one, for instance, be true then the Zend Avesta, or the Bible cannot be true because they contradict each other. How can all scriptures be true at the same time when they contradict one another. A Christian who believes in the Bible as true and revealed, does not recognize other scriptures and therefore feels it a bounden duty to save the souls of the non-Christians by adopting various means, fair or foul. They must save them from darkness and bring them to light. There are some sects amongst the Christians whose motto is: "The end justifies the means," and they do not hesitate to tell

a lie or to commit any crime if it is necessary for saving a soul who follows the teachings of non-Christian scripture. This process of coercion among the followers of various religious creeds has been going on since the beginning of the religious history and will continue in future. If the Christian Bible be true and revealed, then the Mohammedan Quran cannot be true and revealed according to the Christian standard; both cannot be true at the same time for they are contradictory to each other. But the question is: "Who will decide which of these scriptures is true and revealed? Neither a Christian nor a Mohammedan can decide it, for each holds his own scriptures as infallible and denounces that of others as false.

If you believe in your scriptures as true and revealed why should you not allow others to believe in their scriptures in the same manner? The validity for one belief is just as strong as that of any other. Again, the followers of Christianity are always ready to denounce the scriptures and the prophets of other religions by giving all kinds of arguments, but they do not think for a moment that if the same arguments be applied against their prophets and scriptures, their whole religious structure will fall to pieces. Some say that the personality of Christ is historical while those of Krishna and Buddha are not. Some scholars say that the legends about Krishna and Buddha were founded upon the life and works of Jesus the Christ. If any one asked them what proof is there that the legends concerning the life of Jesus the Christ were not founded upon the life and works of Buddha or Krishna, their answer is because "Christ is historical." But has any one succeeded in proving the historical personality of Christ? Many think that they have, but still it remains doubtful.

The advocates of each religion often say that there cannot be higher doctrines and ideals than what exist in their scriptures and the interpretation which they give to their scriptures is the true meaning while any other ex-

planation is heretical. Consequently, they will not accept other explanations, but will take adequate measure against those heretics. There is no wicked act which such fanatics cannot do in the name of religion.

Furthermore, these doctrines and ideals are most intimately connected with the lives of founders of these great religions, or imbedded in the mythological descriptions of a personal God with a particular name and form. The doctrines and ideals of Buddhism are most inseparably connected with the life and miraculous powers of Buddha. The ideal of Mohammedanism cannot be separated from the life and deeds of Mohammed. Christianity has been built around the personality of Jesus the Christ, its founder. If the life and miraculous works of Christ be taken away, the whole fabric of Christianity will fall to pieces. Take away the life of Buddha and his wonderful renunciation, struggle and spiritual illumination, and nothing will be left of Buddhism. As the Christians cannot think of their religion without Christ, so the Buddhists or Mohammedans cannot think of their religion without Buddha or Mohammed. The events and incidents of the life of the founder of one religion differ from those of another and since the followers of every religion centre their whole thought upon the life and works of its founder, they cannot think justly of the founders of other religions, so they always ignore their existence and their teachings. Moreover, the follower of every creed thinks: "My prophet is the best and greatest of all, all other prophets are neither genuine, nor historical."

The miraculous deeds and wonderful powers shown by the prophet of one particular sect will be considered as true and perfect by its followers while the accounts of similar powers and similar deeds, if found in any other religion, will be rejected as mere fiction. For instance, a Christian will believe the miraculous powers of Jesus the Christ as true and historical when Jesus walked on the sea, or raised the dead, or fed the multitude with a small quantity of food; but if similar accounts are found in the

life of Krishna and Buddha, a Christian will consider them as false stories. Thus each will stick to his own prophet and denounce the rest, and this has been the cause of many quarrels and fights in the religious world.

Again, the followers of every religion will accept the mythology and rituals of their own scripture as historical facts and reject those of others as unhistorical, superstitious and horrible. For instance, a Christian will believe that God came down in the form of a dove, and he would not consider it a mythology but history, but if a Hindu believe that his God came down in the form of an eagle, then our Christian brothers would laugh at him and denounce him to be a heathen, idolator, superstitious etc. The rituals of sacrament are quite justifiable and sacred to a Christian, but the rituals of the Hindus are regarded by the Christians as pitifully horrible and barbarous. Similarly, to a Hindu or a Buddhist the Christian sacrament may appear to be horrible. He may say that the eating of the flesh and the drinking of the blood of one who was killed are nothing but the lingering vestiges of the primitive customs of a cannibal.

Thus we see that one religion differs from another in doctrines, mythologies and rituals. Therefore, the followers of each sect will naturally disagree with those of another and will continue to quarrel and fight against one another. How can there be peace and harmony in the religious world when one sect is trying to force upon others its doctrines and rituals, dogmas and mythologies, however imperfect and supertitious they might be. The Christian missionaries go to India and try to introduce their rituals and ceremonials in the place of the Hindu rituals and ceremonials. The Roman Catholic ceremonies are not different from the Hindus except that they have put Christ in the place of Krishna and Buddha.

So long as these sectarian religions will continue to exist, there shall be no crying halt to discord and disharmony. Although each sectarian religion professes to bring eternal peace on earth and pretends to lead men

and women to God and to do good to humanity, still it has, as a matter of fact, brought discord and evil and has driven many to destruction. Some people think if there were one religion in the whole world there would have been peace and harmony. The Christians have tried their best to Christianize the whole world and bring all men and women of all nations under the banner of Jesus the Christ. The Mohammedans also in the same way tried to convert the whole world into their faith, but have they succeeded? No. No sooner had they started than they began to split into different sects and each sect commenced to fight against the other. Think of the sects into which Mohammedanism and Christianity have already been divided. There are about seventy-five sects amongst the Mohammedans and two hundred and fifty amongst the Christians, each trying to subdue others.

Many reformers have risen in various parts of the world and have tried their utmost to bring all humanity under one religion. All of them have failed, no good has ever been produced by such a method. Therefore, all such attempts will end in absolute failure. Shall we then try to drive away all religions from the face of the earth in order to bring peace and harmony amongst ourselves? No, that is also impossible, because without some kind of religion man would be no better than a brute.

Religion is a spontaneous outgrowth of the spiritual nature of a human being. Our higher aspirations would be killed if there were no religion to animate our vital self. Is there then no hope for finding peace and harmony among the different religions? If we can find a religion which shall embrace all religions of the world, shall accept all the existing sects and creeds with their peculiarities, or that may exist in future, which shall give them full scope for future growth and progress to play their full parts, and which shall recognize them all as true and revealed, then there is hope of finding peace and harmony in the religious world.

Do we mean that we shall create a new religion in

order to bring peace and happiness upon this earth? No, we cannot create a religion, it already exists in the universe; those only can see this who have eyes to see. As in the physical world we find unity in variety, so in the spiritual world the plan of nature is unity in variety. As it will be destructive method to make all human beings look alike or act alike, so it will be to make every individual follow our religion. The spiritual life of every individual will be destroyed if we try to force one particular creed, doctrine or dogma upon one and all. But if, on the contrary, we discover unity in variety and variety in unity in the spiritual life of individuals, and if we do not denounce any particular sect but recognize the rights of all, then there will be peace and harmony. A religion which shows the underlying unity in variety of religious creeds, doctrines, dogmas, rituals and ceremonials without denouncing any sect or creed and which accepts all with equal reverence to all the prophets like Moses, Christ, Krishna, Mohammed, Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha and others who appeared at different times in different countries, and all those who will come in future, and accepts the teachings of each as equally true and leading to the same goal—will be known as the universal religion. That religion should be based upon the common principles of all existing religions; and should give infinite scope for the growth to all the various branches of the dualistic, qualified non-dualistic and monistic systems and to their followers. It will pass through all sects and creeds of different religions as the golden thread passes through the beads of variegated sizes and colours, and will combine them into one harmonious unity.

That unity in variety was discovered by the Vedântic sages in ancient India. The expression of this great Truth we find in the Rig Veda, the most ancient scriptures of the world: "That which exists is one, men call it by various names and worship it under different forms." The same infinite Being is called Jehovah by the Jews; Father in heaven by the Christians, Allâh by the Mohammedans, Buddha

by the Buddhists. and Ahura Mazda by the Zoroastrians and *Brahman* by the Hindus. Thus unity in variety is the foundation of the religion of Vedânta. Standing upon this universal Truth Vedânta declares that the central truth of all religions is one but the paths by which it can be reached may vary. Each special religion shows a path for attaining that one goal. The religion of Vedânta is universal because it is not built around any particular personality. Any religion or philosophy that depends for its vitality and continuity upon a specific book or person cannot be universal. The universal religion must be absolutely impersonal. So long as there is a founder of a religion, so long as it is limited by the personality of the founder, it can never be universal, as we find in Christianity, Buddhism, Mohammedanism and such other kindred faiths. The religion of Vedânta embraces all the scriptures of the world and accepts all the prophets and Saviours of the past ages and will accept all those who may come in future. Therefore, it is universal. Professor Max Müller says: "Vedânta has room for almost every religion, nay, it embraces them all."

As we see today, the universal religion of Vedânta has existed from very ancient times but it has never persecuted any sect or creed but has always shown the universal toleration as its principle. The Christians have taken shelter in India, the Mohammedans came and persecuted the Hindus, the Parsees came to India and took shelter and they have lived there unoppressed. Today you do not find the Parsees in Persia; their religion does not exist in Persia but in India, they have been living in India since the fourth century after Christ.

The universal religion of Vedânta has many phases: the dualistic phase (*dvaitavâd*) includes all the dualistic systems of the world. It teaches the worship of a personal God, or, the worship of a spiritual or a divine ideal. It does not denounce the worship of a God with form and name, but at the same time it describes that God is one

with many aspects and forms, He can take any form that He wishes.

The qualified non-dualistic (*vishistâdvaitavâd*) systems of Vedânta include all other sectarian systems which preach the immanency and transcendency of God. It says that He is dwelling in the universe as well as outside, that He is the Soul of our souls, we live, move and have our beings in God, we are all children of immortal Bliss, we are all sons of the same universal Father. That God is the one stupendous whole and we are His parts. All these are embraced under the system of Vedânta.

The non-dualistic (*advaitavâd*) phase embraces the highest philosophical religion which the human soul can attain. It is that which brings us to the plane of the Absolute where all divisions and dualities are dissolved into an eternal unity, and from where we can understand who we are, and can say: "I and my Father are one (*Aham Brahmâsmi*)." What is the meaning of the statement: "The essence of the Creator and the essence of the individual soul can be united in the non-dualistic (*advaita*) phase of Vedânta philosophy?" It is nothing but the *recognition* of the already accomplished Brahman-knowledge which forms the background of all the world-appearance.

The universal religion of Vedânta is both a religion and a philosophy. There have been in existence many philosophical systems in Europe amongst the Greeks and Romans, but none of those systems has ever succeded in harmonizing the religious ideals with the philosophy; none of them has answered the questions which trouble the religious minds; none of them has fulfilled the aspirations of the human soul; none of them has shown the way out of selfishness, out of this self-delusion, out of *mâya,* as Vedânta calls it. But in Vedânta we find the solution of all the problems, the answer to all questions which rise in the human mind, but at the same time these answers are not antagonistic. That which is unscientific or unphilosophical cannot be

religious. It teaches the evolution of the world and at the same time it has opened the door to receive all the solutions that have been discovered by modern science, or will be discovered in future.

There is another reason, why the universal religion of Vedânta can be called universal? Because Vedânta does not prescribe any particular method of worship for all individuals, but, on the contrary, it classifies human minds according to the variety of their tendencies, and these are divided in four divisions, and these again into other sub-divisions which include all classes of religious inquirers. These are called "Yoga" which means "path by which one can attain to the goal."

First is *Karma Yoga*. It means 'the path through work'. It teaches us how we can transform the ordinary works of our everyday life into the acts of worship, how we can direct all these actions towards the service of God. It teaches the secret of work. It is for those actively engaged in a worldly life, in business, but at the same time it tells us how we should work for works' sake, recognizing that which is beyond all activity, and dwelling in our souls. If we can see that which is beyond all activity, in the midst of action we have seen the Divinity. That may not seem any kind of worship, but all the actions of this daily life, if they are performed properly, understanding the secret of work, will lead to the highest goal.

The next is *Bhakti Yoga*. It is the path of reaching God through the practice of devotion or love. It teaches how all the emotions of the heart can be directed towards God, how human love can be transformed into Divine love, and how we can feel the presence of Divinity in the emotions. When the mother caresses the child, the mother will be able to feel the presence of Divinity in that child if the mother be a follower of this path called *Bhakti Yoga*. It is for the emotional who cannot comprehend the clear truths but who wish to exercise the feelings and direct the emotions to God.

The *Râja Yoga* comes as the third stage. It is the

path of concentration and meditation. Through this path one can attain to the same goal, the same ideal. The practice of this Yoga conquers the vast psychic plane. It teaches how to develop the psychic powers, thought transference and other psychic powers shown by Jesus the Christ or by the Christian Scientists of today. These are described in the *Râja Yoga*. All the psychic phenomena have been taken up under this branch of Vedânta philosophy and have been brought into a science. Those who have read the *Patânjala Darshana,* can understand how wonderfully scientific every word of it is. The *Râja Yoga* teaches the wonderful powers of breathing exercises; this is not unknown to the Americans of today, the mental healers and others. They all are beginning to recognize the power of breathing exercises today and many doctors and physicians are giving these to their patients. It teaches that through the breathing exercises one can gain self-control and can gain mental power as well as spiritual poise.

The last method is the path of *Jnâna Yoga*. It is the path of discrimination, right reasoning and proper analysis. Those who can discriminate the real from the unreal, matter from spirit and spirit from matter, know that through discrimination the highest goal of religion can be reached. It is meant for those who are intellectual, who do not care for concentration or devotion or any psychic powers and who do not believe in a personal God. Those who are agnostic and atheistic can here find consolation and happiness.

Besides these, the universal religion of Vedânta explains the fundamental principles of that which we call spiritualistic belief. Spiritualism explains how one can communicate with the departed spirits. The departed spirits do communicate with the persons being bound by the law of action and reaction, they remain earth-bound and continue to exist. It also admits the Swedenborgianism and how the correspondences were discovered ages before Swedenborg was born.

The Vedânta philosophy embraces the teachings of all the great prophets of different nations and different countries. It quarrels with none, neither with science nor with philosophy, nor with the sectarian religions of the world. It accepts the teachings of Buddha and Christ of Krishna and Mohammed, of Moses and others, only giving the most generalized explanations to all these principal descriptions of the same Truth.

The universal religion of Vedânta has neither a sect nor a creed as some erroneously think. The Christian can join or become a student of Vedânta even with a loyalty to Christianity. He may go to church and follow his creed, but still he will be a follower of Vedânta; his spiritual eye will be opened and his soul will be directed to the Truth universal.

CHAPTER TEN

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF VEDANTIC RELIGION

The universal religion of Vedânta, like other great religions of the world, includes both theory and practice. The theoretical part of Vedânta is known as *philosophy*, but when this philosophy is put into practice, it becomes the religion of Vedânta, because religion by its very nature is practical. A set of impracticable theories cannot be called religion. Where theory ends, there is the beginning of true religion. Of the tree of knowledge; philosophy is the flower and religion is the fruit. In studying Vedânta one finds philosophy and religion *i.e.*, theory and practice going hand in hand. They are inseparable. We cannot divorce philosophy from religion nor religion from philosophy.

At the same time Vedânta does not give any irrational or unscientific theory, but its theories are based upon the scientific truths and spiritual laws discovered by the seers of all ages. Its theories are not like absurd dogmas founded upon tradition and superstition, which fade away under the shining light of science, but on the contrary, they are in perfect harmony with the well-established theories of ancient and modern times. And those universally accepted truths, find their room in the philosophy and religion of Vedânta. Take, for instance, the theory of evolution. It is now an accepted truth of science. By this theory of evolution Vedânta explains the processes and modes in which the forces of nature operate and the origin of the diverse phenomena of the cosmos. The rational explanation of the universe must rest upon this theory of cosmic evolution and involution, and not upon the theory of special creation. Although Vedânta, like modern science, asserts that the special

creation is not the proper explanation of the universe, but it is wrong to think that Vedânta has received the idea of evolution from modern science; on the contrary, it has always upheld and taught this theory from very ancient times. In fact, the earliest writings on Vedânta describe cosmic evolution, and in the Upanishads and in the Sankhya system of philosophy we find the explanation of the gradual evolution of the universe from one eternal energy.

Another scientific truth, which Vedânta upholds is that the variety of phenomena has evolved from one infinite substance. This infinite substance is the eternal source of intelligence and consciousness, of phenomenal existence and of all the forces and powers of nature. This one substance appears as mind and matter, as subject and object. Nor is this a mere theory, but it is the absolute Truth accepted by the best scientific thinkers of the present age. The monistic scientists declare that the source of the phenomenal universe is one, and that one substance is eternal and infinite. To realize this eternal and infinite substance is the highest ideal of Vedânta.

Vedânta teaches that there is one substance, one existence, one life, one truth, one spirit or God. You may call that absolute One by any name you like. It is not many. All the arbitrary distinctions and the ideas of separation, although they are relatively true on the surface, will appear to be unreal from the standpoint of that one absolute substance. The higher we rise towards the realization of the absolute oneness, the less we become conscious of the divisions and distinctions that exist only on the material plane and the plane of the senses. Vedânta tells us that we must realize that one absolute Being even in this life. Here it may be asked: What shall be obtain by realizing that absolute Being? Why should we try to realize it? What good will it bring to us? These questions have been answered by Vedânta thus: "By knowing this one absolute Being, nothing will remain unknown; by attaining it, all the craving for knowledge

will cease, and we shall be able to know the exact nature of everything. By dwelling in it we shall not be affected by misery, sorrow or suffering of any kind, but we shall enjoy unbound peace and happiness in our life under all circumstances." Furthermore, when we have realized this infinite One, all doubts will be removed, all the questions which trouble our minds will be answered, and all the difficulties in understanding the Reality of the universe will be solved. Then we shall see what this universe is made of, why we have come to this world, what is the purpose of our life, and where we shall go after death. All these problems are vital problems. No other science or philosophy, not even the Scriptures, can explain them. The true explanation comes in the state of realization of the Absolute. Therefore, we must strive our best to realize it, to know it and to become one with it even in this life. In this absolute *oneness* lies the solution of all problems. All sciences, all philosophies and all religions meet here, and herein we find the deep harmony that exists among science, philosophy and religion. All ethical questions, all questions concerning our spiritual life, as well as all social and political problems will be solved by this eternal standard of *oneness*. So long as we are on the plane of relativity, our minds are limited, our intellects are imperfect, our understanding is deluded. We may understand a certain portion of Truth, but the other portions we overlook, and consequently our solution is not perfect. But when that absolute One, the infinite Substance, is known, all these problems become clear. It is the goal of all human beings.

A disciple once went to his spiritual Master and asked: "Sir, please tell me in a few words the ideal of Vedânta." The Master replied: "I shall tell thee in a few words the whole truth of Vedânta, which has been explained by millions and millions of volumes; it is this: *Brahman*, the one absolute source of existence and intelligence is the only reality of the universe, the pheno-

menal world is unreal and the individual soul is one with *Brahman.*"

This same absolute substance or *Brahman* is the Soul of all souls, the Life of our life; in and through it we live, move and have our existence. It does not matter whether we are conscious of it or not. It is there; we cannot deny it. But when we have become conscious of it, we become masters of all wonderful powers. Therefore, Vedânta holds this ideal of *oneness* before the minds of all.

The master-brains, logicians, great philosophers, the metaphysicians, have written volumes to describe this universal *oneness.* Starting from different standpoints and crossing the ocean of doubt, they have arrived at the same conclusion of this absolute *oneness* in the end. All questions that can possibly arise in human minds, all the arguments both for and against this unity have been brought forward and discussed in Vedânta in order to prove the Truth of absolute unity, the *oneness* of existence.

The theoretical side of Vedânta explains this absolute *oneness* through logic, reason and science; while the practical side of Vedânta shows us the various methods by which the realization of the Absolute can be obtained. The practical side of Vedânta also claims to solve the problem concerning life and death. One who has understood the theories of Vedânta intellectually and has practised the various methods which lead to the realization of that One, knows what the soul is, where it is, what becomes of it after the death of the body, how it comes to this world, and where it was before we were born. He also understands the value and purpose of human life. Neither making money nor merely acquiring wealth and enjoying luxuries enables us to unveil the mystery of the soul. They are of no use to serve this highest purpose of life. The possession of external objects cannot enrich the soul. Everyone must learn this. A millionaire's soul is not richer than the soul of a man who is outwardly the

poorest, but who is the most spiritual and has attained to spiritual communion with the Supreme.

Practical Vedânta also tells us that the individual will is a part and parcel of the universal Will, nay, it is one with it. That universal Will, which is working through nature and producing the diversity of phenomena, is manifesting itself through every individual. After describing the unity of the individual will with the universal Will, it tells us how we can harmonize our will with the universal Will, so that we can achieve greater results in our daily life. The individual will, when separated from the universal Will, cannot produce striking results, because it is limited, it is imperfect; but when connected with the universal Will, which is perfect and unlimited, we can accomplish everything, we become masters of nature. The body and sense-pleasures, according to Vedânta, are not the *summum bonum* of our earthly life. At present, we are slaves to nature, and to our senses; we have forgotten the Divine glory of our true Self, and we have become enchained, bound hand and foot, and tied down by the fetters of worldliness. By studying Vedânta we understand our bondage and then we can seek the emancipation of our soul.

The ideal of practical Vedânta is to open our eyes to the Truth and Reality of the universe, and then to make us follow the methods by which we can live in this world as perfected souls, having overcome all the sorrow, sufferings, misery, disease and death, which are sure to fall upon every individual. A student of Vedânta will embrace death with a cheerful heart, knowing that death cannot touch the soul. The body will drop off, but the soul will continue to remain ; and if it is necessary to take another birth to fulfil certain desire, the soul will do it. Death cannot destroy that power, and, therefore, a student of Vedânta is fearless; he has no fear of death. He embraces death with all serenity of mind, and he looks cheerful and happy even at the last moment.

Above all, practical Vedânta tells us how to live in

this world an absolutely unselfish and pure life, doing good to humanity, and at the same time realizing all individual souls are children of immortal Bliss. They are not children of human mortals. Of course, this realization is bound to come to every individual sooner or later, through the natural process of the evolution of the soul. We may not accomplish that realization in one life; but if hundreds of thousands of individual lives are necessary to attain to it, we shall never regret, because that is the universal goal of human existence. We are marching towards the infinite goal, the realization of the Absolute, and we cannot stop. Although by the natural process of evolution each individual soul will become perfect after going through all the stages of that chain of evolution and gaining experience after experience at each step, still it is a long and tiresome journey, not to be desired by such, who understand that process. Therefore, the religion of Vedânta tells us that there is a way by which we can escape that chain of evolution and reach the result in one life, and that is by intensifying the desire to know the Truth and by struggling hard to attain to it before our body is separated from our soul, and the earthly career is closed. If we earnestly struggle in this life to know the Truth, we shall gain it even in one incarnation, otherwise, we may have to go through many births and rebirths on this plane of imperfection. But he who sincerely tries to realize that absolute One and who struggles hard to attain to it in one life, easily transcends those laws which constantly enchain the soul and bring it back again on the mortal plane.

The ideal of practical Vedânta is to make us realize the untold grandeur and majesty of the individual soul and the powers it already possesses. Its aim is to establish true universal brotherhood. I do not mean that kind of brotherhood which we so often hear about, and which, when properly examined, appears to be like a garb, under which are kept hidden our selfishness, animosity, hatred, jealousy, ambition for petty earthly objects, quarrelling

and fighting for fame and powers, but I mean that real brotherly feeling which proceeds from disinterested love without seeking any return whatever. True love means the *expression* of oneness. It is, as we may say, that *feeling* which is the outcome of the realization of *oneness* on the highest spiritual plane. Divine love begins to flow in that soul which has realized that *oneness*. He then loves all human beings, nay, all living creatures, equally irrespective of their class, caste, colour, race or nationality. He becomes a living God on earth. God loves all human beings equally. He is impartial, His love is not directed to one particular soul or to a particular class of people, but His love is universal, and when we possess that Divine love, we cannot help loving all human beings and all living creatures. We do not ill-treat the lower animals then; we are kind to them, we help them, and try to relieve them in time of distress as we would relieve our own brothers. That is real brotherly feeling, it is more than the so-called brotherhood, it is the spiritual *oneness* which is the ideal of all.

The mission of Vedânta is to establish that *oneness* and bring peace, toleration and perfect harmony among the different religions, sects, creeds and denominations that exist in this world. Its object is to teach us how we can recognize the rights of every man and woman from the standpoint of spiritual oneness, and thus to give a firm and eternal foundation to all social, political and religious movements of all countries and among all nations of the earth.

You will notice how broad and universal are these ideals of Vedânta. They are not confined to any particular time or place or nationality. They can be applied in any country, at any time, under any circumstances; for these ideas are many-sided and all embracing. They are universal in their aspects and as wide as the heavens overhead. Having given the theoretical and practical sides, the religion of Vedânta describes the means by which these ideals can be realized and the methods by which we

can live up to them in our everyday life. These methods are called Yogas, the different paths by which the absolute oneness can be reached. But in order to live up to these ideals, the first necessary precondition is to grasp the central truth of oneness, that we are all spiritually one. Do not forget it. As individual souls we are also one with the supreme Spirit. The constant hearing of this central truth will enable us to understand the meaning, and this is the first step of practice. Then we should concentrate our mind and meditate upon that oneness, the absolute one existence, all-pervading, dwelling everywhere, manifesting itself in various forms, the source of all intelligence, consciousness, powers and forces. We should read such books as will describe that eternal One; we should associate with such people as are struggling to rise from the perception of multiplicity to the realization of the internal unity; and we should perform such acts as will remind us of that absolute oneness in our daily lives, as will make us feel that we are one with all, and that all souls are children of one immortal and eternal Being. In our everyday life we should watch whether our acts tend to diversity or to unity; if they are going to diversity, then we should abandon such works for the sake of that absolute oneness. We should sacrifice all works that lead to diversity of feeling for the sake of oneness. All those feelings which we call wicked lead us away from that central truth of oneness,—hatred, jealousy, malice, quarrel; but love. fellow-feeling, sympathy, all these tend towards that oneness. We should follow those acts which unite us with the one infinite Being, and we should give up the rest.

Practice means a striving with one's whole mind and energy, sense and sensibility to realize the ideal in question. Material prosperity or worldly name and fame is not the highest aim of life. To cure a disease of the body is not also the highest type of the ideal. But to know that we are not different from the Infinite, that we are immortal and eternal by nature, and that realization will

inevitably come. embodies the highest goal for human endeavour. The various methods, Râja Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and others, are described in Vedânta. The practice of Râja Yoga will lead us to that realization. Then all disease, suffering and sorrow will vanish. If you cure one disease of the body, another disease will come, you may go on curing for ever. But when you have known that you are a part of the Infinite, you can have no disease at all, since you are a soul; you are free from disease forever. That is higher than merely curing a particular ailment. The practice of Râja Yoga, the practice of breathing exercises, will help in gaining Godconsciousness, that consciousness of the universal unity. Through this constant practice will come realization. Breathing exercises will purify our body and our nervous system. They are imperfect and impure at present. Our system is full of impurities which we have gathered through our imperfect mode of living. We must regulate our food, and drink, and then, through the breathing exercises, we should first remove all physical obstacles and purify the body. Then concentration and practice of self-control will help us in removing the mental and intellectual obstacles, and ultimately, when these are removed, our hearts will be purified, and "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

God-vision or Godconsciousness, should be our ideal and not success in business. Success in business, whether it comes or goes, is only temporary. This is necessary so long as we are living on this plane, but it does not add to the treasures of our spirit. We must not miss this point. If we seek success in business and material prosperity, we must never forget that they are all secondary; the highest end is the purification of the heart and the realization of the absolute One.

You must know that, and the practice of Râja Yoga, the breathing exercises, will help you in knowing the grandeur of the soul, its immortal nature, which will continue to exist even when everything is dead and gone.

What have you done for your soul? Mere intellectual apprehension will not make you perfect. Practice is necessary. It is practice that makes one perfect. God-consciousness, absolute freedom and perfection will come simultaneously. And at that time, when you have gained Godconsciousness, you will live in this world as a perfected soul, and after the death of the body, you will be free from the chains of birth and death and all imperfection; you will then transcend all laws that govern the phenomenal plane of existence. Then you cannot injure anyone, cannot hurt anybody; and, therefore, it is said in Vedânta: "He who sees the same Divinity as dwelling in all living creatures, cannot hurt or injure anyone, mentally or physically, and, therefore, he has attained to the highest goal, the supreme Being."[1]

1 समं पश्यन् हि सर्वत्र समवस्थितमीश्वरम् ।
न हिनस्त्यात्मनात्मानं ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥
——*Bhagavad Gita,* XIII, 29.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

EVOLUTION AND RELIGION

May we hear that which is auspicious to us, may we see Divinity in all living creatures, and feel the presence of the almighty everywhere as within ourselves. May all the acts of our bodies, the thoughts of our minds be directed to the service of that almighty Being, may we have peace in our souls; peace, peace, peace be unto us all.

If we study the scriptures of the different religious systems of the world, we find that from ancient times human minds have tried to trace the origin, cause, and source of this world. These scriptures have recorded the experiences of human beings in their attempts to find out the proper solution of the problem of creation, and to know from what source the phenomena have come into existence. When the primitive man found himself surrounded by mountains whose snow-capped peaks piercing the clouds and defying the changes of weather stood like gigantic pillars to support, as it were, the blue canopy overhead or when he watched the everflowing streams of mighty rivers pouring into their beds volumes of water and rushing headlong to meet the distant ocean, or when he saw around him tall trees with spreading branches and beautiful foliages, bearing fruits and flowers, or and when he looked at the vast heavens overhead, he felt a peculiar shock and exclaimed with awe: "How grand! how majestic! how beautiful! how powerful are all these things around me! What are they, why do they exist, whence did they come?" These questions of the primitive man were the earliest of human enquiries about nature; they were, in fact, the beginning of all researches and investigations in the domain of the universe.

In the whole animal kingdom human beings alone

ask such questions. In the Rig Veda, the most ancient scripture of the world similar questions were raised and they have come down to us even to this day. The Vedic poets asked again and again: "Where is the first? who is the 'I'? from what grew the heavens and the earth? whence this manifold creations spring? who knows the secret?" Do not the same questions torment us today? Is it not true that all scientists, thinkers and philosophers of the world, have been asking similar questions through the ages? The human mind has a tendency to unveil the mystery of things and to penetrate into their deepest core. It cannot rest satisfied with simple perception of surrounding objects; it must ask: "From whence do they come?" "Whither do they go?"

Various answers have been given to these questions by different thinkers and inspired seers of Truth. Some of these answers were merely grand imageries, some were mixed up with poetical fancies, while others again were mythological allegories. Certain thinkers said water was the cause of the phenomenal universe; others attributed the cause to the fire from which had sprung the sun, the moon, etc. Others again fancied that there must be a maker of the heavens and the earth, a maker who had fashioned out the world like a carpenter who shapes a chair or a table or a potter who makes a jar. Again, that maker must be like a human being with human qualities and attributes, only infinitely bigger in size and more powerful than any ordinary mortal. From this anthropomorphic conception of an invisible maker grew their peculiar theory of creation.

The ancient Semitic tribes had a particular theory of creation by which they explained the origin of the phenomenal world, and it has been accepted for two thousand years by millions of Jews, Christians and Mohammedans of different countries. This theory was based upon the belief that a divine maker by his supernatural powers produced this world out of nothing at a particular time and it was held to be a striking miracle. The same creator

was supposed to have lived for an eternity before he made up his mind to fashion out the world, and ever since the six days of creation he had been resting. He created not only the worlds, the planets, and everything of the universe, but also their contents, those of the inorganic world first and next the organic world. A similar description of the world of creation we meet in the Zend Avesta, the scriptures of the Parsees, but the errors of this theory are too apparent to many thinking minds. In the Middle Ages men could not freely express their opinions, nor could they record their deep convictions in scientific terms. In fact, the Catholic clergy and Scholastic philosophers fettered men's minds and scientific investigation was yet in its infancy. Science made its bold strides only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The nineteenth century gave birth to the science of evolution in Europe. Although in the eighteenth century Kant and Laplace attempted for the first time to intrude into the mystery of creation in the light of Newtonian laws and sought to trace out the beginning of the world from the vast mass of nebulous matter, although Laplace tried by his nebular hypothesis to explain the mechanical formation and the separation of the different planets, yet the theory of evolution hardly received any comprehensive scientific treatment before Darwin and Haeckel. The latter were the real pioneers to advance this theory which has ever since become an essential element in the modern scientific attitude. They also tried their best by means of observation and experiment to discover the laws that govern the universe, and they succeeded to a very large extent.

This new theory of evolution has eaten into the foundations of the belief in supernaturalism and miracles. It has established the unity of nature and proved beyond dispute the uniformity of all natural laws. We are aware today that this universe is infinite and limitless in extent; it has no emptiness in it, but everywhere it is filled with substance, crude or fine. This theory of evolution has opened our eyes to the truth that this world was not

created six thousand years ago, but that it is beginningless and endless, that it is eternal.

The basic material of the world goes through various phases of transformations such as liquid, gaseous and solid before a planet or a cosmic body becomes inhabitable, either for vegetables or animals. A large mass of the vegetable substance, or whatever it may be called, passes through the gaseous state, liquid state, solid state, and when it is cooled it becomes the home of various plants and animals of different kinds. This process may take millions of years and then, in course of time, the solid body begins to dissolve and gradually involves into its original nebulous material, or ethereal substance. Ascending through the process of evolution, matter gradually passes from one form to another until organic life is possible. Every period of evolution is followed by a cycle of involution or dissolution, as it is called by some of the scientists. Dissolution means disintegration of the solid mass and the reversion to the primordial condition.

The planetary systems, the suns, moons, stars together with other cosmic bodies, are subject to this evolution and involution. Our mother earth was formed out of a portion of the substance of solar-system millions and millions of years ago, and now it is inhabitable. We find here now many plants and flowers; but the time will come when she will grow cold and lifeless and will eventually fall back into the sun. But do you think the basic material, the substance of this earth will be destroyed or annihilated? No, it will remain in its primordial condition and in course of time a new form will emerge.

By this theory of evolution we can also explain the origin and growth of all human beings step by step. We know that human beings are not the effects of special creation by some supernatural being, or extra-mundane God, but the resulting expressions of the evolution of the germs of life which existed from the beginningless past, either as animals or vegetables. So, we have not come into existence out of nothing, but in some form or other we

existed before this body was formed. Now we are living. After death which means disintegration of the body (i.e., individual involution), we continue to exist, taking fresh forms again and again. The difference between lower animals and human beings is not of kind, but is one of degree.

Such being the conclusions of modern science we find ourselves utterly helpless when we try to harmonize these conclusions with the traditional ideas of creation as envisaged by Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and Zoroastrianism. Attempts have also been made by various thinkers in different countries to show an alleged harmony between theology and science but only to court disappointment. No religion can stand unsupported by logic or science. The theories of special creation that had been once given by religious teachers were supposed to be revealed truths. But now they appear in the light of modern science to be wholly irrational and dogmatic.

The result of all this is: "How shall we think?" This is the most difficult thing to do. Some thinking minds have lost their way. They study science and ask: "What is the use of studying religion? let us be contended with the study of science; we do not know whether there is an eternal energy out of which matter, mind and everything have come into existence; but we simply know that matter is indestructible, energy is indestructible."

Now the question arises: Is it possible for a religion to have its foundations upon this theory of evolution as well as upon the truths discovered by modern science? Has there ever been any such religion which does not teach special creation, but the existence through the doctrine of evolution, or the origin, growth and dissolution of the universe in the same way as modern science does? The answer to this question is in the emphatic affirmative. The object of religion is to discover the Truth. Science also tries to discover the same goal though approaching it in a somewhat different manner. And it is also true that there has been such a religion as does not advocate any

theory of special creation out of nothing, but the doctrine of evolution. Our position needs clarification.

India has given to the world a religion which explains evolution, the source of the phenomenal universe. This religion has not its roots in creed or dogma, but in reason and passion for truth. It is a religion which has existed through the ages and has withstood the ravages of time, bringing consolation to the soul of disturbed millions, answering all questions to their profoundest satisfaction. There appeared in India scientists and philosophers to study nature even as early as seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. They conducted their investigations through observations and experiments and they discovered the laws of nature and for the first time, logically established the theory of evolution.

The earliest of these scientists and philosophers was Kapila, who is called the father of the evolution theory in India. His theories spread all over India and even outside of India. All neighbouring peoples, who came in contact with India were influenced more or less by Kapila's system of philosophy. His system was known as the Sânkhya system. The idea of religion found amongst the Greek philosophers and neo-Platonists has often been traced back to the influence of the Sânkhya school. They came in contact with India and India also had communications with them. It is also a fact that in ancient times the Hindu philosophers came to the school of Socrates.

Plato knew some of these Indian philosophers. Alexander the Great brought many of these great thinkers with him. Well has it been said by Sir Monier Monier-Williams in his *Hinduism and Brâhminism* that "the Hindus were Spinozites more than two thousand years before the existence of Spinoza; and Darwinians many centuries before Darwin; and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the scientists of our time and before any word like evolution existed in

any language of the world."[1] Huxley also unhesitatingly admits this fact when he says that doctrine of evolution was familiar to the Indian sages and philosophers ages before Paul of Tarsus was born."

In ancient times, long before this theory of evolution was known to any other country, Kapila denied the existence of a personal creator, that is, a creator who sits outside the universe and fashions the universe as a potter fashions a jar. He declared that something cannot come out of nothing. It is today a well-known scientific fact. Kapila also explained the building up of the cosmos by the gradual evolution of one eternal energy, called in Sanskrit *Prakriti*. He discovered the unity and eternity of nature as well as the uniformity of her laws. These laws operate universally wherever there are light and heat. If you can discover any law that governs your body, that law must be operative everywhere under similar conditions. Kapila also proved that dissolution of destruction of a thing means nothing but the reversion of an effect to its original causal state.

These truths which were discovered in India centuries before the birth of Christ have now become well-established fact. They are also the startling achievements of modern science. The ancient seers of Truth preached a religion which explained rationally the origin, growth and dissolution of the universe, not by presupposing any particular supernatural being, but by discovering the law of evolution that exists in nature from eternity to eternity. This religion is known as the Vedântic religion. It teaches: "Before the beginning of the manifestation of this phenomenal world there existed one infinite, absolute, universal Being, upon whose bosom rested the whole phenomenal universe in the germ state, or in the form of potential energy. We know the laws of corelation of forces and persistence of energy; they have shown us that the various forces, like heat, light, electricity, magnetism, attraction,

1 Sir Monier Monier Williams : *Hinduism and Brahminism*, p. 12.

repulsion and all others, are nothing but so many manifestations or expressions of the universal energy; this energy can neither be increased nor diminished, the sum total is always the same; it is the source of all forms existing in the universe; innumerable suns, moons, stars and planetary systems have come out of this one eternal energy through the process of evolution."

Again we find in Vedanta: "From this undifferentiated energy has come the vital force, mind, all the sense powers, powers of perception, intellect, as well as ether, heat, light, water and all that is liquid, gaseous and solid." This energy is described as insentient. It is not intelligent energy. The supreme Being or the absolute *Brahman* is the source of all intelligence, consciousness and knowledge. That energy lies dormant in the original source which is *Brahman.* Having received the spiritual influx of that supreme Being, this universal energy begins to evolve and manifest itself in various forms of force and matter, and having gone through different stages of evolution. It is sometimes latent, sometimes potent. At first it was undifferentiated, now it is differentiated.

After the dissolution of the entire universe, if we can imagine such a state as darkness existing in heat and light, so there will not be any darkness.

In order to fulfil the desires of the individual souls which lie latent in the cosmic mind at the time of the dissolution, the mother energy produces this phenomenal world, clothes these souls with various forms, whether animal or human, and makes them go onward from stage to stage in the wheel of evolution. This wheel of evolution is rotating from the beginningless past and will continue through the endless eternity; there is no rest. How many times have we taken bodies and how many times shall we do the same,—who can tell? Do you know how many times you have come into existence on this earth or on some other planet? You may point to some scriptures which have said that you did not exist before. But what proof is there that you did not exist before? When

everything is indestructible and uncreated, human souls must have existed, if matter be uncreatable, force or energy be uncreatable, do you think human souls will only be creatable?

Some souls go to heaven, and after reaping the results for a certain length of time, and enjoying the pleasures of the celestial abode, come back perhaps to this earth to fulfil other desires which existed in a seed-form in their souls. All of them are subject to the law of evolution. These heavens are within the domain of the phenomenal universe. Vedânta is the only system of philosophy that teaches that heaven is also subject to change, and it leads human minds beyond heavens.

Some people pass through different sufferings, both here and hereafter, and all these sufferings are the results of acts, either vicious or sinful. But the ultimate aim of religion of Vedânta is to have perfect liberation of the individual soul from this wheel of evolution and to be free from the causes that compel men to go through the different stages of evolution. As long as man has desires he cherishes them at present, and he will see how strong these desires are. If he can draw a line and says: "I have so many desires," he will find in three days he has many other desires.

According to Vedânta, each soul must struggle for liberation, freedom from this wheel of repeated births and deaths. The aim is to get out of these processes of involution and evolution as quickly as possible. Of course, you do not lose your individuality and identity, even when you have passed out of this wheel. It also tells us that when you have attained to that liberation, you have attained to perfection with eternal rest, peace and unbound happiness. Freedom from sickness, sorrow, birth and death when reached, the soul is absolutely free.

This being the ideal, we must try to realize it. As it is said in Vedânta: "This world can be realized by knowing the Supreme which is called *Brahman*, that absolute, infinite source of intelligence, consciousness and

bliss; by knowing *that* we can be free from the wheel of evolution and involution, for, that infinite Being remains always unaffected by it."

The supreme Being is free from the wheel of evolution and gives us freedom. We can attain to that liberation through this knowledge or realization of the supreme Being. Modern science cannot be called religion, although it explains the theory of evolution, or the process of the formation of this world by discovering the laws of nature. Science is not religion; the two are different.

We must not forget the true meaning of religion. "The perception of the Infinite under such conditions as are able to influence the moral character," is the ideal of religion. Viewed in this light the difference between science and religion becoming obvious. Then we shall be able to know how a religion can be based upon scientific truths, and how the religion of Vedânta meets all the intellectual, moral and spiritual demands of the human soul. In the first place, as we have already seen, the ideal of Vedânta is the perception of the infinite or the realization of that supreme source of intelligence, consciousness and bliss, being and becoming conscious of the infinite and ourselves and perceiving the finite within the infinite and the temporal within the eternal. Therefore, it is religion.

Secondly, the task of religion is to teach us how to outgrow the dictates of our animal or selfish nature. Vedânta philosophy also asks us to renounce our attachment to sense-pleasures and comforts of the body. We must curb our desires and sublimate them towards the realization of the supreme Being, and develop an extreme longing for freedom and liberation of the soul. Science in its pure form, whether ancient or modern, is destitute of values. By nature it is positive, and not normative as religion is. Therefore, it cannot be called religion. But Vedânta is at once a science and a religion: science, because it accepts all the truth discovered by modern science, and explains through logic and reason, how the evolution of the universe has come and is going on; religion, because it directs

our energy towards the realization of absolute freedom. It fulfils all conditions of science and religion. The condition of science is that there must be supremacy of reason over belief, and that is fulfilled by Vedânta, because it tells us not to accept anything upon hearsey or the decisions of others, not to believe in anything which does not harmonize with reason. The function of religion is to explain the origin and the future of the individual souls, which science cannot do, because science is based upon sense-perception. It cannot go beyond that limit and when it tries to do so, it is no longer a science; it then steps into the realm of metaphysics, or philosophy. Vedânta also explains the relation of the finite to the Infinite, that of the temporal and the eternal, and also explains why should we seek the finite in the Infinite and the Infinite in the finite. Infinite cannot be limited by finite but is pervading and existing in and outside of it.

It is said that supreme Source of existence, intelligence, and bliss, called *Brahman,* is worshipped by all nations under different names and forms such as Jehovah, Jahveh, Father in heaven, or Allah, or Ahura Mazda, or Christ, or Buddha. It does not matter what name we give or what attributes we ascribe to Him; He is beyond human conception, beyond the reach of our thoughts, our mind and intellect; but at the same time He is nearest of near our bodies, minds and souls. He is the Soul of our souls the Life of our life, the ultimate basis and foundation. In Him we live, through Him we exist and without Him there can be nothing. Therefore, it is said: "Thou shalt realize that supreme infinite Being in every form, whence all the animate and inanimate objects of the world have proceeded, by which they live and into which they return at the time of dissolution; knowing that alone thou shalt attain to perfect freedom and liberation from the wheel of evolution and enjoy everlasting happiness, eternal peace, even in this life."

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE NECESSITY OF RELIGION

NEVER before the necessity of religion was felt so strongly by man as it is today. In this age of materialism and commercialism, the ideals of nations have become dominantly materialistic. Material prosperity is the cry of the day and commercial motive moves mankind. Individuals are being sacrificed to the material needs of the nation to which they belong. Wars and intrigues everywhere rage to protect the commercial interests of individual nations and they are massacring thousands of lives simply to advance their material prosperity at the expense of others. Such wars and conflicts as are going on today were never seen before in man's recorded history. We are familiar how one Christian nation warring against the other of the same faith. We have also seen how the non-Christian nations even when they were living in peace, were drawn into the international conflicts, how their territories fell repeated victims to white aggression and innocent people were cruelly massacred, because they were unwilling to sell themselves off to foreign powers or to satisfy their most exorbitant commercial demands or territorial possessions.

Today, the moral and spiritual elements of human nature are submerged and the brute force seems to have got the upperhand. Religion seems defenceless to check the materialistic onrush of the age. Mankind is wandering through a world without spiritual meaning. Each individual nation is struggling hard to gain more power, acquire more wealth and seize more territorial possessions. The spirit of self-sacrifice which is the essence of all ethics and religion has receded into the background, yielding place to the spirit of material power and possession. The world has not yet been able to cast off the lingering vestiges of the Roman gladatorial system and the animal

doctrine of the survival of the fittest. We are still witnessing their agonising consequences.

Religion has now-a-days lost its hold on the psychology of the people. The worship of the supreme Being is flouted by our generation. The true spirit of religion is lost, only the barren codes and customs hold their predominant sway. New creeds out of the husks of non-essential ritualistic rites, ceremonial and symbolistic formalities have almost smothered the grain of Truth that forms the essential part of religion. People even when frequenting the places of devotion and worship, do not grasp the true import of religion. They blindly lend their loyalty to such ritualistic dogmas, doctrines and codes and ceremonials as prescribed by the clergy. The world needs once more a great tidal wave of a just upheaval that will sweep away all these flimsy creeds and barren ceremonies that fettered our minds and restore to us the religious inspiration which we have lost. We require that spiritual force which will urge every man to discover Truth and hold communion with it in silence, leaving aside all non-essential forms and ceremonies, rituals and doctrines. The time has come when we should clearly grasp the true meaning of religion and its ultimate aim instead of blind submission to the tyranny of doctrines and dogmas. We should, on the contrary, examine their validity and may accept them if they harmonize with our reason and coincide with the ultimate conclusion of science. We must not accept a religion, not because we are born in it, not because our forefathers bore its label and professed its creed, not because it commands a large following, not because it makes pompous display of ceremonies but because it satisfies our deeply-cherished spiritual cravings.

There are in the world today a variety of religions, great and small. Each of the doctrines and dogmas, rituals and ceremonies peculiar to itself. There are as many sets of rituals and dogmas as there are religions to follow. In each religion you will find some peculiar doc-

trines, ideas, etc., Mohammedanism, for instance, teaches many things that are diametrically opposed to Christianity yet their claims to the religious character are equally valid. Mohammedanism is as much a religion as Christianity is. Likewise, Buddhism is again different from Christianity in its rituals and even doctrines yet both are held as religions by their respective followers. Each of these great religions has a large following and certain characteristic forms of worship of its own. If by religion is meant certain sets of dogmas, doctrines, and ceremonies, obviously it is hopelessly difficult for us to establish a religion common to all mankind. If the doctrines and dogmas of Christianity are held to be the index to a true religion, then Mohammedanism cannot be properly called so, because the doctrines and dogmas of the latter are entirely different from the former. In that case we ought to call Mohammedanism by some other name. Likewise, if the rituals of Judaism be the standard of a religion, then Buddhism is hardly a religion, because the latter has a different set of doctrines and dogmas as well as different criterion.

In this analysis of religion certain set of doctrines, dogmas, rituals and ceremonies are confused with its deeper spirit and this confusion has been a primary cause of all religious conflicts and has led to the endless persecutions of the non-conformists. Such attitude to religion, if consistently worked out to the logical extreme, inevitably brings religious antagonism which has more than once disfigured man's history. It has forced the followers of certain sects to kindle the fire of the Inquisition and to burn alive countless men, women and children simply on account of their difference in religious beliefs. We have already witnessed its many other tragic consequences. Therefore, we should discard the old view of religion and give a new orientation to it. We must try to find out the universal character of religion which will be acceptable to all mankind.

If we define religion as obedience to dogmas as des-

cribed in the scriptures and other works of meditation, or if we define it as reverence for a personal God as said in the scriptures—apparently these two definitions sound satisfactory. But here again new difficulties will arise. The personal gods as conceived by different religions are not one, but many. The followers of Judaism, for instance, revere, fear and obey the commands of the prophets as described in their scriptures, observe the ceremonies with offerings and prayers and follow the path of Moses; this is what they understands by religion.

We know also the Christians' ideals. The Christians have also their scriptures and a set of dogmas as upheld by them. The Christian religion believes: that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and the only-begotten Son of God. It also believes that Jesus the Christ came down to save mankind, and that none can enter into heaven except through him. This is the popular meaning of the word 'Christianity.' Of course, we may read in it the deeper spiritual meaning which is however hardly done by the common followers of Christianity.

Now let us take the case of the Mohammedans. They have their own scriptures and they understand by religion obedience to those dogmas as set forth in their holy scriptures, the Quran. They also accept Mohammed as the only true prophet of the true God, Allah, the all-pervading, infinite Being, and that no one will be able to enter into heaven except through the teachings of Mohammed. According to the Mohammedans the Christians will not be able to enter into heaven, because they do not accept Mohammed as the true prophet.

Thus we have considered the peculiar dogmas and rites of three religions, *viz.*, Judaism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. If dogmas embody religion, the world has no chance of living in religious unity and peace and moral laws. They will always divide humanity into warring sects. These divisions and conflicts can be drowned in a larger unity of ideal. All religions enjoin their followers to be loyal to the eternal moral laws. This loyalty

to the moral nature of man is the central element common to all. We can transcend the divisions and oppositions of sections if we simply hold this grand ideal before our vision. Besides these three, there are many other religions, like the Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Parsees. It has its own scriptures, which are much older than the New Testament. This religion is founded upon moral laws given by Zoroaster, and Zoroaster was a prophet and he communicated with Divinity. He is regarded by his followers as the Son of God, and their religion was built around the personality of Zoroaster.

Then again there is Hinduism. It has its own scriptures, which are known as the Vedas, the oldest scriptures in the world. The Hindus obey the moral laws as described in the Vedas. They worship one God under different names. They have given birth to a large number of saints and sages who are worshipped today as the saviours of mankind. They have their rituals and ceremonies almost like those of the Christians, but much older. They have baptism; they have the communion service; they have the cross as a symbol. Perhaps, many of you know that this symbol existed many centuries before Christ. It was prevalent in Egypt, in China, even among the American Indians of very ancient times. The cross existed also in the Islands of the East Indian Archipelago, Borneo, Sumatra, Java and the interiors. The cross has been a religious symbol.[1]

Buddhism has its own scriptures which contain the moral laws given by Buddha. Although this religion does not believe in a personal God nor does it teach its followers to worship and revere a personal God, yet Buddha is considered by millions as the greatest spiritual leader of mankind. Now, if we think that belief in a personal God is an index to religion, then Buddhism cannot properly be called a religion for it does not believe

1 Cf. Swami Abhedananda : *Path of Realization* (1939), pp. 81—113 & *The Words & Cross in Ancient India.*

in the worship of a personal God. Thus the conventional definition of religion proves inadequate on critical analysis.

Then what is the true meaning of religion? The true religion does not consist in the belief in a personal God with a particular name and particular form. It does not consist in doctrines and dogmas, which vary in each religion, nor does it consist in rituals and obedience to the moral laws, but it consists, as Professor Max Müller has described, "in the perception of the Infinite to such manifestations as enable us to be moral, as helps us to become moral and spiritual; the perception of the Infinite to such manifestations as are able to influence our moral character; the perception of the infinite Being as nameless and formless that are able to influence our moral character." This definition is strikingly adequate and it can be applied to all the existing religions of the world, whether great or small. It can be applied to Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and all other religions. The God of all these religions, is an infinite Being. There is nowhere any difference in that central idea. The Christians worship this God as an infinite Being; in the Quran it is also the same. In the *Upanishads* God is described as the infinite Being; in Buddhism, Buddha occupies a similar position. In the Scriptures of the Zoroastrians also, He is the same. The central aim of each of these religions is to lead our minds to the immediate and intimate perception of the infinite Being.

The world needs today a religion which will make us forgetful of the fighting ages that are gone by, our narow indivduality, our small interests, and which will help us to perceive the infinite Being. Such redefinition of religion is the vital need of the day, if our generation is to live in peace and co-operation, though not in belief and agreement. We can sink our differences only when there is a large ideal to guide our vision. If we be deeply loyal to the perception of the infinite Being, the central ideal

of all religions, then we can rise above the sharp oppositions and conflicts of creeds and fighting formulas. Of course, we have to overcome a number of difficulties before that perception comes.

In search after the Infinite all fighting objects have to be put aside and ignored. We may ask why? Because that which is fighting cannot bring eternal happiness. No fighting object can bring freedom to the soul and the infinite wisdom. But that which is Infinite is the source of eternal happiness. Fighting objects are changeable and mortal. It is the infinite Being alone that is unchangeable and immortal. No individual soul can remain happy and contented with a fighting object. However, if we study our own nature, we shall find that no fighting object can make us happy. It is true that fighting objects may bring happiness to us for a short time, for the time being, when we are enjoying the presence of sense object. Can you realize how long that happiness lasts? It lasts only for a second. It comes like a flash of lightning and stays for a second and leaves us unhappy once more, and we try to catch it again, and this is the passage which each individual soul is trying to reach happiness. Examine yourself. Each individual soul is striving to get more power and more happiness. It is a fact, a truth with us that we need more power, more happiness, more pleasure. Those that are in power want more power, and those that are happy want more happiness. Those that are not happy are seeking happiness. Love of power and cry for happiness are innate in each individual soul; they are inseparable. You cannot separate love from power nor from happiness. Try to do it, you cannot. We may not regard it in that light, but when you examine your own soul, you will find that you want more happiness and more power. Love for absolute truth leads to the freedom of the soul, the freedom from all bondages. The longing for happiness directly or indirectly forces each soul to gain power over the environment of conditions, to be freed from all bondages, to enjoy freedom. If we have power

over environments, we love to be happy. What is the struggling for existence but to gain power over environments? If we are weak, we are crushed under the sledge hammer of these conditions. If we have no power to resist all the influences that are trying to kill us, we will go down; therefore, we need power and in that state we are free. We may be found limited in such, but the longing is for more power. Each individual soul is working under limitations. We must break down all limitations. We must be free, therefore, the soul longs for more power. Have you found any one happy in bondage, in slavery? No, it is impossible. It is freedom that makes us happy, and the more the individual soul becomes free from the environment of conditions the nearer it approaches the infinite Being, and the more it realizes the Infinite the more perfectly it is located, because it is happiness.

The perception of the Infinite leads to absolute freedom and happiness. Then only the thirst for power, which is so strong in the individual soul, will be conquered; the desire to be free will be fulfilled and true happiness will come to the soul. Therefore, instead of religion, the necessity of the perception of the Infinite will bring happiness to the soul.

Here it may be asked: Do not the existing religions help us in getting the perception of the Infinite? The answer is in the bold negative, because the finite objects and material results are holding more important sway than the perception of the Infinite in the conventional religious organization of the day. Material gains have got their support and the perception of the Infinite has become just secondary. We think of finite objects—whether we can gain a good position and retain our religion as well. We do not want to know it if it does not bring good results, something tangible.

Now that these doctrines and dogmas, rituals and ceremonies have absorbed the whole of the churches and their followers. Material prosperity has been the aim of

the present conditions that we see today. But true spirituality begins with the perception of the infinite Being, and if the existing religions of today hold this ideal before the masses and preach it with zeal, then peace and good will shall reign in this world instead of wars and disasters. If this ideal be preached, the nations will stop fightings for purpose of killing each other. The time has come when we should hold up this ideal before our masses, speak of it amongst our friends and neighbours, preach it wherever we find time and we hope that the time has come, when each one of us must concentrate our mind upon the Infinite, meditate upon it, and think of it during the ordinary moments of our daily life. We must think of it until we feel it in our pulses and our heart is in tune with the Infinite. The time has come when we must give nothing else, a higher place in our scale of values. If we recognize that each individual soul is the child of the Infinite and we are one with our brothers in spirit, then we shall understand the true significance of religion.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AIM OF TRUE RELIGION

If we examine the religious ideals of different people belonging to the various sects of different religions, we find that the majority of them blindly follow some creed, or believe in certain doctrines or dogmas and mistake them for the aim of true religion. Some consider rituals and ceremonies to be the essentials of religion; and the priests encourage these erroneous ideas by impressing upon the minds of the masses that the performances of special rituals and ceremonies is the highest aim of true religion. Quarrels and discussions have, indeed, been going on for ages among the priests of Christendom regarding the time and manner in which these non-essential forms of religion should be observed. In English churches at the present moment the main point of discussion is whether one or many candles shall be lighted on the altar, as if the number of lighted candles would save the souls of the congregation! The pages of religious history are likewise filled with horror of persecutions, massacres, and all sorts of diabolical crimes committed by priests and fanatics in the name of religion in order to establish the creeds, the rituals and ceremonials of their own religion. How many hundreds and thousands of innocent souls were burned by the fire of the Inquisition kindled by the professed custodians of the Christian religion!

As in the Middle Ages the aim of Catholic clergy was to convert the heathens into the Christian faith and to punish the heretics by torture and persecution, so even today we find the same spirit of fanaticism goading on many of the missionaries, who do not hesitate to commit similar inhuman crimes in non-Christian lands in the name of their religion. To save the souls of the heathens from eternal damnation is still the professed aim of the

Christian missionaries. We have not yet forgotten all the outrageous deeds lately perpetrate in the Far East, specially in China. Not very long ago, an Anglican bishop, addressing an English congregation, drew a vivid picture of the disasters which had befallen the Chinese capital and provinces,—wholesale massacres, burning houses, destruction of art treasures, terrible loss of life and wealth,—and, admitting that all this was the work of the missionaries, he gloried in the fact by saying: "Yes, the missionaries were the cause of all these troubles but was it not worth while to cause such trouble, to sacrifice thousands of lives and millions of pounds to bring the enlightenment of Christianity to the countless heathens and to save their souls from eternal damnation. And was it not every true Christian's duty to help each in his way in the holy warfare initiated by the Christian missionary martyrs!" Such was the appeal of the noted Bishop to his congregation. Shall we join him in calling this the aim of true religion? Obviously not.

As the Christian missionaries have been preaching for centuries with the Bible in one hand and a gun in the other, so the Mohammedans have done the same. Holding the Quran in one hand and a sword in the other, they have massacred thousands in their attempt to save the souls of Kafirs. Like the Christians, the Mohammedans believed that they were fulfilling the purpose of their religion, knowing theirs was the only true religion. But as on the one side, treachery, lying, hypocricy, persecution, and the most inhuman crimes have been committed in the name of religion, so, on the other, all the good works that have helped humanity have been inspired by religion; as monuments to this fact stand countless hospitals, institutions for the poor and needy, schools, colleges, and asylums. Shall we, therefore, say that the performance of philanthropic works is the aim of true religion? No; the ideal of true religion is still grander, and more vital than the simple dispensing of charity.

There are people who think that material prosperity

is the aim of true religion; but how can that be when we know that all the great religious leaders of mankind whom we worship today as incarnations of God, like Buddha, Christ, Râmakrishna and others, were the poorest men and did not care for material prosperity? On the contrary, they renounced all desires for earthly pleasures, sacrificed social position and power, voluntarily adopted the life of poverty, depending entirely upon the almighty will, and lastly asked their disciples to follow their example. We all know what Jesus the Christ said to his disciples: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor script for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves."[1] Yet nowadays we hear from the apostles of new religious sects like the Christian Scientists that the highest aim of true religion is good health, success in business, acquisition of wealth and property (which go under the name of material prosperity.). The aim of true religion is neither a healthy body nor the acquisition of wealth. If a strong body or good health were the aim of true religion, all savages who eat raw food, sleep in the open air, and live like animals, enjoying perfect health, would have attained to that ideal. If success in business and acquisition of wealth were the signs of true religion, all the wealthy merchants, millionaries and multi-millionaires would have realized it long ago, but we are quite sure that they have not yet attained to it. On the contrary, most of them live lives that can hardly be called religious in the ordinary sense of the term. The fire of greed for wealth and for the possession of social and political power has burnt the seeds of noble aspirations that are to be found in the field of the human soul. The majority of the wealthy classes live exceedingly selfish lives, being slaves to passions and desires, seeking nothing but sense pleasures, worldly power and amusement. Moral and spiritual standards have been pushed behind the scenes of the prac-

[1] *St. Matthew* X, 9-10.

tical affairs of everyday existence. The rich are trying to squeeze the last drop of blood out of the poor, and the cry of despair rising everywhere from the bottom of the souls of suffering humanity fills the space between the earth and the heavens.

When we know that social and political progress depends primarily upon commercial principles and are often guided by narrowly personal motives, how can we say that material prosperity is the aim of true religion? Material prosperity, howsoever necessary for material ends, is utterly inadequate for meeting the demands of the human spirit.

What is then the aim of true religion? Before we discuss this point we must understand very clearly the meaning of the word "religion". What is religion? This question has been asked again and again by the great thinkers of the world. Various answers have been given to it, but still it is vital today in thinking minds. Most people think that true religion means certain forms of creed or dogma, of rituals and ceremonies. Some say that it is obedience to the moral laws given in the scriptures of different nations; others believe that religion means a reverence for God as He is described under some particular name and form in each of the revealed scriptures of the world. The Jew, for instance, must fear, revere, and obey the commands of Jehovah, must propitiate Him by offerings and prayers, and must follow the path of Moses. This is all that he understands by the word "Religion". The Christian's idea of religion consists principally in the belief that Jesus the Christ was the only-begotten son of God or Jehovah, that he came to save the world and sinners from eternal perdition by his blood, and that no one can enter heaven except through Christ. Such is the popular meaning of religion among the Christians.

The Mohammedans believe that true religion means absolute obedience to the moral laws revealed in their holy scriptures, the Quran, the acceptance of Mohammed as the only prophet of Allah. According to Moham-

ned the Christians will not enter heaven because they do not believe in the teachings of the Quran, and do not follow Mohammed, also because they do not worship and fear Allah, the only true God.

Here we have three great religions, each one of which claims to be true and denounces the others as untrue. But who is going to decide which one of them is actually true? Then, again, outside of these three, there is Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Parsees. It is also a revealed religion founded upon the Zendavesta and built around the personality of the great prophet Zarathustra or Zoroaster.

Hinduism is another great religion which is based upon the Vedas, the most ancient revealed scriptures of the world. It has produced many prophets and incarnations of God. It has rituals and ceremonies similar to those of Christianity but much more ancient. The Hindus generally think that theirs is the true religion. Buddhism, again, the child of Hinduism, has the largest following and is the greatest of all ethical religions. Although it was not founded upon any book or upon a belief in God, although it does not teach to fear, revere or worship a personal God, still it is considered by many to be the greatest religion of Aryan origin. What a tremendous task and responsibility for the student of religions is to find out which of these great religions of the world with their innumerable followers and inexhaustible stock of rituals doctrines, and creeds, the true religion and to discover the reason why it is so.

In trying to solve the problem, the question naturally arises, is there any common platform on which all these revealed and unrevealed religions can meet and unite? The answer is to be found nowhere except in Vedânta Like an impartial judge Vedânta stands on the firm ground of reason, science and philosophy, and remaining absolutely independent of all sectarian Scriptures, creeds, and dogmas, is ever ready to describe the common background of all special religions and to show to the world what true

religion is and what it its aim. The aim of true religion we shall know when we find that common platform. In order to discover the universal standard we must go to the bottom of each special religion, dive deep into the sea of rituals and ceremonies until we reach the immovable bed which holds all sectarian religions at its bosom.

First we must understand that all these different creeds, doctrines and ceremonies, rituals, and beliefs in some particular form or name of Divinity, in a revealed book, or in any great personality, are like the husks of a grain which hide the kernal. They are the non-essentials of religion; and if we examine properly we shall see that they vary in different countries according to the ideals, culture, and superstitions of the soil from which the plant of religion draws its nourishment. If we can put aside all these non-essential husks, we shall be able to discover the kernel of Truth which forms the essential part of all religions. There we shall find the common platform upon which all these sectarian creeds amiably meet; and shall perceive what perfect harmony underlies all the conflicting non-essentials of different religions. We shall then understand what true religion means.

True religion does not consist in following a creed or in believing in dogmas, doctrines, or scriptural writings; nor does it consist in holding aloft the banner of same particular prophet, by joining a sect or denomination, but its aim is to lift the individual soul above the limitations of the senses and bring it in close communion with the Infinite, to make it realize absolute freedom from the bondage of ignorance, delusion, egotism, pride, ambition and all other imperfections which characterize human nature and hold us down on this plane of mundane existence. In short, true religion is not merely a belief in a personal God. It is not a mere worship of some form of Divinity, it is not merely fear of, or reverence for God. It does not depend upon absolute obedience to the divine commands, but it consists, as Professor Max Müller has said: "In the perception of the Infinite through all

such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man".

The perception of the Infinite, or, in other words, the *realization* of the absolute Being which is *One* although worshipped under various names and forms, is the essential point of every religion. All dualistic and monotheistis religions like Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, Zoroastrianism, Brâhmanisim agree on this common ground because the God of each of these great religions is the same one, infinite, and absolute Being, no matter what name or form may be given to Him by His worshippers. If we read of the attributes of Jehovah we shall find that He is infinite. One of the attributes of Allah in the Quran is that He is infinite. In the Vedas we read the absolute Being, who is one and all-pervading is infinite. In modern Buddhism the same infinite and absolute Being is worshipped as Buddha. When we have succeeded in feeling the presence of that infinite One in the midst of all finite things, then we have perceived it and have discovered the universal meaning of religion.

The aim of true religion, therefore, is *the realization of the absolute Being, the realization of the Infinite,* and that realization may come either through knowledge, or love and devotion, or constant, contemplation. By 'knowledge' we mean the immediate consciousness of all that is finite within the Infinite, of all that is temporal within the eternal. It gives to man a clear insight into himself, answers the highest questions regarding the nature, origin, and future of the human soul and of the phenomenal world. The moment that knowledge or *Jnâna,* as it is called in Vedânta, comes within us, the finite spirit or individual soul becomes conscious of its relation to the Infinite or absolute Spirit and transcending all limitations of sense perceptions, it realizes its divine and immortal nature. Then and then alone the individual soul enjoys perfect freedom from sin, that is, from selfishness and every other imperfection, and all the thoughts and deeds which proceed from such a soul har-

monize with the highest moral laws that are supposed to be revealed in the scriptures of the world. This absolute freedom of the soul was meant by Jesus the Christ when he said: "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

The same freedom was also the ideal of Buddha and it was the true meaning of the word Nirvâna. It is the goal of the religion of Vedânta. Salvation, according to Vedânta, does not mean the continuance of a certain kind of enjoyment for any length of time in heaven, but *it is the absolute freedom of the individual soul,* which is the aim of true religion. It does not begin after death, in the grade, *but it begins here in this life, in this very lifetime,* and brings to the soul eternal rest from earthly anxieties and sufferings, unbounded peace and ever lasting happiness. Then all attachment to things that exist in the realm of the finite or within the limits of time and space, drops off the spiritual body like the dead skin of a snake.

As long as the soul cannot come into close touch with the Infinite, cannot commune with the Supreme, cannot realize its relation to the absolute Being, so long it is attached to the finite body and to the pleasures and comforts of the flesh; so long does it try to fulfill the desires of the world and to remove suffering, worry and anxiety from the hearts of others; so long for it there is neither freedom, peace, nor happiness, but only bondage, sorrow, and misery.

A free soul, on the contrary, does not care for anything that concerns the body. It stands as a shining example of the absolute renunciation of lust and wealth. The constant effort of such a soul is to rise above the material and to be free from the limitations of physical conditions, therefore it is added in Vedânta: "That absolute freedom, that immortal freedom which is the ideal of true religion cannot be obtained by philanthropic or charitable works, or by wealth, but by renunciation." Blessed is he who has overcome attachment to everything

that is worldly and who has severed all ties that enchaining the soul, keep it bound on this plane of worldliness, and prevent it from breathing the air of perfect freedom which is constantly blowing in the realm of the Infinite.

Freedom and renunciation always go hand in hand. One cannot come without the other. Without renunciation, there cannot be freedom. How can we be free so long as we are attached to the things of this plane, that attachment will keep us here. Where there is no renunciation, there is slavery with its evil attendants, worry, anxiety, fear and suffering. There is nothing in the world that can make us fearless except renunciation; the only thing that will make a man fearless is renunciation of attachment to the things of the world.

True religion has neither quarrel nor fight with any special sect or creed, whether revealed or unrevealed. Because, it deals entirely with the kernel of essential part of the grain of all sectarian religions, and leaves out the husk or the non-essential forms, creeds, rituals and ceremonials which have always been the hotbed of dissensions and persecutions among the followers of the various religious sects and creeds. But true religion does not condemn the believers in creeds and ceremonies. It gives to these things their proper place and recognizes their usefulness for beginners in the path of spiritual progress toward the goal of true religion. As in ordinary life there are three principal stages of growth, childhood, youth and maturity —so in the spiritual life there are corresponding stages of development, the spiritual childhood, spiritual youth, and spiritual maturity. So long as we are in the stages of spiritual childhood and spiritual youth we need doctrines, dogmas, rituals, ceremonials, scriptures, and all the paraphernalia of worship which we find in a Hindu temple or in a Buddhist monastery, in a Roman Catholic Chuch or in a Jewish synagogue and so long we must obey the commands of priests and of scriptural books. True religion does not begin until we have attained to spiritual maturity, until we have begun to perceive the

Infinite in the midst of finite objects, the eternal in the midst of the temporal phenomena of the universe.

The moment we get a glimpse of the Infinite either through knowledge, devotion, or contemplation, that very moment the soul becomes conscious of its immortal nature, begins to feel itself a part of, and inseparable from, the Infinite, and endeavours constantly to be in close touch with that Infinite. This is what is meant by Divine communion. The individual soul then crosses the threshold of true religion and enters into the realm where the noise of doctrines, dogmas, sects, and creeds does not reach the ears, where rituals and ceremonies are of no further value and where the soul, rising above all temptation and transcending all limitations, realizes that peace, that happiness, that divine wisdom which enlightens the mind and makes it peaceful and happy. It breathes then the air of freedom and enjoys unending rest. Even when he comes down to the plane of the earth, he brings with him that joyous spirit. Such a soul, enjoying perfect freedom, declares to the world with a trumpet voice: "I have realized that infinite supreme Being whose self-effulgent light of wisdom dispels the darkness of ignorance. Whosover hath attained such realization hath crossed the ocean of death and reached immortality; there is no other way, there is no other way."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

UNITY IN VARIETY OF RELIGION

In a series of lectures on the great religions of the world I have described the glorious and eventful lives of their founders, as also their teachings. My main object was to make the students of Vedânta understand the ideals of all great religions of the world and to let them know that those ideals are not confined to any particular religion, but they are universal. I also sought to enable them to understand that the religion of their forefathers, in which they were born and brought up, is not the only religion in the world, but it is one among a variety of others, that the founder of their forefathers' religion was not the only prophet, but one among many such prophets who are revered and worshipped in the world as saviours of mankind, as the messengers of God. I have also shown that the fundamental principles of Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and Zoroastrianism are one and the same.

Each of these religions teaches the worship of one God, who is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Each of them is absolutely monotheistic, believes in heaven and hell, in reward and punishment, in angels, and archangels, in the resurrection, on the 'last day of Judgment,' and the immortality of the soul. Furthermore, I have shown that in the highest ethical contents these religions not only agree among themselves, but they agree with other religions of Aryan and Mongolian origin, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Lâmâism, Confucianism and modern Shintonism. Each of these religions teaches the Golden Rule and the ethical doctrine of returning good for evil. Each of these religions teaches disinterested love for our neighbours, for humanity, and asks its votaries to be loyal to this ideal. Notwithstanding

all these points of agreement, there are, however certain points on which these religions disagree, and these are the rituals, doctrines, dogmas, mythologies, and ceremonies. These doctrines, dogmas, and creeds are more or less derived from local traditions and mythologies, bearing as they do the inevitable stamp of local forms and names. History tells us that the existing religions are an inter-related process and there is no religion without a past history of its own. Religions are never made. They grow like plants, drawing their nourishment from the soil of their birth, from the local beliefs and traditions which vary from place to place. You have already seen how Christianity and Mohammedanism grew from the soil of Judaism, influenced by the Zoroastrianism of Persia. Again, Zoroastrianism has its roots in the Vedic religion of the ancient Hindus. Judaism in its turn gradually was developed from the polytheistic beliefs of the different tribes of Asia, of the Babylonians, Chaldeans and Phoenicians, influenced by the Zoroastrianism of Persia. Christianity was also influenced by the Aryan religion, the Buddhism, as also by the philosophy and religion of ancient Greece. You are also familiar how Buddhism in its turn bloomed forth on the soil of Hinduism and its various branches have spread in different parts of the world, in Tibet, Mongolia, China, Japan, Siam, Burma and Ceylon. Buddhism has civilized the barbarous nations of the East, has given them the highest ideals of life, and has brought salvation to millions of people all over the world. Taoism which developed in China is also indebted to the teachings of Vedânta and Buddhism.

Let us now disclose the links in the old and new forms of religion. Later religions do not destroy the earlier ones. They do not contradict each other, but they mark a gradual evolution of man's religious conceptions. The historical successors do not reject the predecessors altogether, but in many cases the former purify the latter and thus give them a fresh lease of life. Often

they introduce new creeds, doctrines, rituals and ceremonies, but uphold through them that central spirit which animated earlier religions. The change which the new religions bring about in the spiritual realm is not so much of spirit as of technique. The same God is often conceived in another name and form. The same Jehovah of Judaism is called by the later Christians as the Father in heaven and Allah by the Mohammedans. Different phases and different aspects of the same Deity are manifested in each of these religions. The Christian conception of God is more developed than the old Judaic conception. The Christian conception of God is of a loving Father, which is different, of course, from the revengeful God of Judaism.

Notwithstanding these facts, the followers of each religion forget the truth and the history of their forefathers' religion and declare in a spirit of blind dogmatism that theirs is the only true religion, thus rashly repudiating the claims of other religions to that exalted status. Each religion preaches and propounds certain doctrines and dogmas and insists upon its votaries accepting them as the only real ones. The zealous followers do not rest content in this; they go farther and think that those who do not believe in their doctrines will go to eternal perdition. Some proceed still farther: They will draw their sword and employ force to convert others into their particular religious fold. The Mohammedans, for instance, in their religious career forced others to accept their belief even at the point of the sword. They argued: "Either give up your faith and accept mine, or give up your life." They slaughtered thousands and thousands of innocent non-believers. They committed these acts not through a native wickedness, but through what we may call intense fanaticism. Fanaticism has its roots in man's possessive impulse. It rouses in man many wicked feelings, stirs up the animal in him, hardens his heart, makes him commit violent acts and ultimately change him into a ferocious beast. The cause of this fanaticism is nothing

but the perversion of religion. What else can be the cause of Mohammedan fanaticism? It is their perverted ideology. True religion brings the most intense love for humanity, nay, for all living creatures while its perversion brings the most diabolical hatred and persecution the world over. The former changes men into supermen, while the latter degenerates men into sub-human beings. Like the Mohammedans the Christians also resorted to violent force for the propagation of their religion. The fire of Inquisition kindled by religious fanaticism killed thousands of pious and innocent men whom we now regard as martyrs of history. Nothing can make one so tender and kind-hearted as religion and nothing is so diabolical as its perversion. It was religion which stopped the slaughter of animals. It was religion that inspired men to build hospitals for men and animals and asylums for the poor and the needy. Again, the perversion of religion once let loose, had worked towards a opposite extreme, inflicting untold misseries on mankind. The history of humanity stands like a living witness to all these noble and ignoble acts.

Each of these religions claims to be revealed by God. That is a very peculiar point. A Mohammedan says that his religion is a direct revelation from God, and, when the Mohammedans killed all the Jews and innocent Arabs, they thought that they were not killing, it was God who was killing those men and that the will of God was being fulfilled through them. Whenever they declared war, they said it was God's command, and there was the following passage in the Quran: "The Lord says through His Angel Gabriel go and do this," and so he does.

Again the Christians say that their religion is true because it was a direct revelation from God. As the Quran is the revealed scripture of the Mohammedans, so is the Bible of the Christians, the Old Testament of the Jews, the Zend Avesta of the Zoroastrians, the Vedas of the Hindus and so on. Now, if all these scriptures, are the revealed words of God, may we then ask: Why is there

so much difference of opinion A Mohammedan will not accept any other scripture as revealed; he will say that his scripture is the only one which was revealed by God, and some of the Mohammedans will again, say that this revelation was the last. A Christian will not accept other scriptures as true, but he will take his own and denounce others. If a Christian believes his own scripture is true and revealed, why should he not allow others to believe in the same way? Then there would be an end of quarrels. But at the same time, if a Mohammedan is allowed to believe in that way, he will not stop there; he will persecute others, because he will think that he is fulfilling the will of God. Now, what are we going to do under these circumstances? Who will decide which scripture is truly revealed and which is not? We are not in a position to decide it. A Christian cannot decide it, because he will say that his is the only scripture revealed. Who will decide it? If God comes down Himself and takes a human form and explains that among these scriptures such and such an one is truly revealed, even then perhaps we will not accept that statement. Then, again, the followers of Mohammed will try to force others and quarrel with those who follow other scriptures and other religions and other prophets. A Christian will denounce the prophets of other religions. He will say that other prophets are not true, but that his own prophet is the truest and most historic. He will bring you many arguments, without thinking for a moment that if those arguments be applied against his own religion the whole structure of the religion will fall to pieces. We cannot accept those arguments, because they are one-sided.

This process of coercion has been going on from the beginning of history of religions and will continue in the future. Where is the harmony? How can we find peace? Harmony and peace will come only by seeing the unity in the variety of religions. And where is that unity? We do not find it in the doctrines and dogmas. Because each religion or each scripture preaches some doctrines and dog-

mas which are different from others. We cannot find that unity in the lives of the founders of many faiths, because the miraculous deeds and historical lives of these founders differ from one another. If we accept the life of Christ as true and real and as the only one, then we cannot accept the life of Mohammed as true and real, because his life is different. He was born under different conditions, amid a different nation, and he lived a different life. He married and he had a great many wives. Christ had none. Now, how are you going to reconcile that? But there is another difficulty: If the miraculous deeds and wonderful events in the life of one particular founder of a particular religion agree with those of another founder, then the followers of the first will not accept them as real. For instance, Christ walked on the sea and healed the sick and raised the dead, and so on. Now, if those acts were found in the lives of Buddha and Krishna, then a Christian will not accept them as true. He will say: "Oh! They are not historical; they are all mythical legends built on the life of Christ". But if you say to them that their legends in the life of Christ were built upon all these traditions of the lives of Krishna and the deeds of Buddha, now who is going to decide that? The doctrines and dogmas are intimately related to the lives of the founders or embodied in the mythological descriptions of a God with a particular name and a particular form. The Buddhists cannot separate their religion and the ideals of their religion from the life of Buddha. If the life of Buddha be taken away from Buddhism, it will fall to pieces. Similarly, the ideals of Mohammedanism are intimately connected with the life of Mohammed. If Mohammed was not inspired by Gabriel, then the whole Quran is false and the whole religion goes to pieces. Similarly, if the life of Christ be taken out of Christianity, nothing is left. But the followers of each of these founders of great religions will cling to their own masters and prophets and say that their prophets are the only historical

prophets, while other prophets are all false, unhistorical or perhaps not authorized or commissioned by God.

In these circumstances, we do not find any hopeful sign of peace and harmony unless we rise above all sectorian religions and turn to Vedânta Vedânta asks us not to quarrel and fight, over the doctrines, dogmas, creeds and rituals, because they are the non-essentials of religion. Vedânta asks us to look at the essential point of religion and there we will find the unity. Conscience is the ideal—the attainment of perfection; no matter how you can get it or how you do get it. As long as the ideal is the same and the results of realization are the same, there we find the unity. We must look at the highest ideals of these great religions of the world and understand the true meanings, not the sectarian meanings as given by particular sects. For instance, the Bible is interpreted in a thousand different ways by different followers of different denominations. There are about two hundred sects in Christianity and each one quotes from the Bible and gives a particular interpretation. Now, which are you going to follow? Go to a Catholic church and there you will find a different interpretation, and go to a Christian Science church and find Mrs. Eddy's interpretation, which may be true but that is different. Go to a Unitarian church; there you will see the difference. This is extremely confusing to the followers of religions who really wish to understand the truth and to get the highest ideal and realize it; and Vedânta is extremely helpful for that. Vedânta is far above the level of these sects and there it stands as a witness upon the rock of truth. It applies reason, science, philosophy and the spiritual laws that have been discovered by all the great saviours and saints and spiritual leaders of the world; and tells how to understand the spirit of the scriptures from the more universal standard as Christ said: "And ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free;" then understand it. What is "knowing the truth" and what is "freedom?" Now, sectarians may say that truth is Christ. Another may say

that truth is God. But, whether it be Christ or God, it is one. Why do you not take it as one truth? It will appeal to your reason. Science tells the same thing. All philosophers have said the same thing and all religions tell the same thing that truth is one and universal. Find that truth, know it, and then freedom will come. That would be the rational way.

That is the position of Vedânta. Christ alone did not say that truth. Long before Christ Buddha said: "Truth is one. Know it and realize it, and then you will be free; emancipation of the soul will come to you." Vedânta teaches the same thing. Read the *Upanishads* which were given to the world hundreds of years before Christ, or, perhaps, thousands of years before Christ, and there you will find the same truth: 'Truth is one, universal, and the worship of truth is the one goal of all religions.' Truth may be called Father in heaven or Allah, Ahura Mazda or Divine Mother, Over-soul or Spirit; call it by any name It is the same one thing. We cannot destroy all religions. We must see the harmony and we cannot find that harmony in the mythologies, in the rituals, in the doctrines and dogmas, in the peculiar beliefs and traditions upon which they are built; but we shall find the unity in the highest goal, in the worship of Truth. How can you worship the Truth? By going to a church? Yes, by going to church, but not believing that outside of the church is hell. You may go to church, but do not say that those who are not going to church are going to eternal perdition. Human body is the best church. Herein dwells the Divinity; realize Him therein. All churches and temples are made after human body. If you stretch your arms, you are a cross, and all churches are built in the form of a cross. Why is it holy? Because your human body is holy. What can be holier than human body? What can be greater than it? It is a living shrine of Divinity, and so, we shall worship the Truth, within the heart. If you go to a mosque, there you can worship also being a Christian. Certainly if you go to the

temple of a Hindu or a Buddhist, do not see the faults there. They may have peculiar rites and ceremonies and images and all those things as in Roman Catholic churches, but these are non-essential. The most vital point of religion is the worship of Truth. Be really a seeker after Truth and sit in your own room and feel there you are in a church. What can be greater and more universal than that? Even when you are walking, think that you are walking in the church. The whole universe is pervaded by the supreme Being. What place can we exclude from His omnipresence, from the Divine presene?

Therefore, Vedânta asks us to worship the Truth; no matter by what name we call it. It will not make any difference in substance, for religion is not so much a matter of profession as a thing of active cultivation. If you pray, do not pray in mere words but pray in spirit. That prayer will be fulfilled. "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh," but when the heart is empty, the words may flow in torrents without producing any lasting impression. If a speaker has no fulness of heart, his otherwise wonderful discourse, fine rhetroic and fine oration, will fail to induce others to an acceptance of his experience. But when the utterance leaps forth from the inner depths, it engages the depths of another. All prophets, all messengers of God, first fill their own souls with the thoughts and ideas and then speak out before the world. The world bows down before that divine voice, because the Lord speaks through it. They forget themselves and become channels through which the Lord speaks, and, therefore, the world worships them, idolizes them, reveres them, honours them, and calls them the savious of mankind. Christ and Mohammed were prophets. Zoroaster was a prophet; Buddha was a prophet; Laotze was a prophet, and there have been many other prophets, like Krishna, Râmakrishna and others. They do not care to foretell fortunes, but they are messengers of God, greater than Jewish prophets in some respects, because they do not simply predict, but they understand

the spiritual laws and are living examples before the world. Therefore, they are worshipped by humanity, and if we understand that unity in the variety of religions, then we may live with the Mohammedans, with the Christians, with the Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists, without quarrel, without fighting.

The world will learn this wonderful acceptance of the unity in the variety of religions from India as upheld in her long historical tradition. Therefore, you see in India the Mohammedans, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Parsees and the Christians all living together as friends. As long as you worship God, you are all right. And so in Vedânta,—when you find the principles of Vedânta, do not think for a moment that you are going to be converted. We do not believe in conversion; but we believe in telling you to see the unity, to understand the highest ideals of all religions, and to worship the Truth in the church of your own heart, the living sanctuary of God.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

UNIVERSALITY OF THE VEDANTIC RELIGION

It is extremely gratifying to me to know that you care more for your religion, for your spirituality than for anything else. All other subjects, such as politics and social progress, are secondary to us, and spirituality is our life. Spirituality is a part of our soul. We cannot give it up. The moment we give it up, we will be dead. From time immemorial, from the day when all the Anglo-Saxon and European nations were tattooing their bodies and eating raw animal flesh, from that hoary age down to the present day, our treasure and wealth have always been in spirituality and not in politics or in social reform.

Our religion and philosophy are absolutely universal, that we have inherited from our ancient forefathers, who were *mantra-drashtâs, i.e.*, the seers of Truth. They do not take their stand upon the quick-sand of doctrines and dogmas but upon the solid bed-rock of eternal truths and spiritual laws that govern our souls from eternity to eternity; and standing upon this solid foundation, our religion and philosophy have withstood all the ravages of time and have been able to conquer all other kinds of movements that have sprung up from time to time. Our religion and philosophy have civilized the nations of different countries, whether of Asia, or of Europe, whether directly or indirectly. Spiritual ideals of the highest nature first arose from the heart of India, and then travelled westward and eastward—westward as far as Alexandria and Greece and eastward as far as China. Even centuries before the Christian era the great preachers of Hindu philosophy and religion went to distant lands outside of India to preach the gospel of Truth. They never carried swords or guns, but they spread and showered benediction and good-will, peace and love wher-

ever they went. The spirituality which we have inherited through our wonderful religion and philosophy is known under the name of Vedânta.

By 'Vedânta' many people may think that it means certain sectarian philosophy or some metaphysical dogmas which are purely monistic or dualistic, and consequently one-sided. The term 'Vedânta' is not limited by any sectarian doctrine or dogma or any metaphysical theory. Vedânta means 'the end of wisdom.' It is not limited to any particular book or writing or scripture, but it is absolute in its nature. What is that end of wisdom, and how to acquire it is the aim of 'Vedânta' primarily. The 'end of wisdom' must not mislead us to any such conclusion that wisdom can be limited or can be made final. The idea is that the 'end of wisdom' means that goal which is reached by all relative knowledge, by all knowledge which proceeds from the phenomenal world or from our sense of perception. Knowledge which is scientific is only striving to reach that climax to which it will never go. And where is that climax? Is it in the knowledge of matter, or in the external phenomenal world? No, matter is the combination of material particles known as the phenomenal world, which means one-half of the universe. There is another half which is not matter, but the knower of matter. It is not the same as the combination of material particles, but it is the knower, the power, the intelligence by which we are conscious of the external conditions. We can perceive the existence of matter and we can know that there is such a thing as the phenomenal universe or the external world, which is merely objective and that is one-half of the universe. The other half is subjective, and when we combine the knowledge of the objective world with that of the subjective world, then we find a grand wisdom which is unlimited by time and space. That wisdom is called the divine wisdom or eternal wisdom. That unlimited wisdom is the beginning and end of the whole universe. But where is that wisdom? Is it in the universe? Is it outside this cosmos? Is it outside our

bodies? No! It pervades the whole universe. It is outside as also inside. It is everywhere. We have wisdom itself in our souls. In fact, our souls are but manifestations of that infinite wisdom which is the foundation and the end of all phenomenal existences.

This wisdom is described by various names. Some personify and call it the Lord of the universe, but make this wisdom as one of His principal attributes. They say that omniscience is the attribute of the Soul, but is the Soul separate from omniscience? No; He is one with omniscience. He is one with divine wisdom. Therefore, the religion and philosophy of Vedânta are that divine existence and intelligence which are again are one and the same. They are inseparable, and, therefore, absolute existence and intelligence must be the foundation of the whole universe; and that foundation is called *satyam jnânam anantam Brahman. Satyam* means 'absolute existence.' *Jnânam* means 'knowledge which is beginningless or endless' and that is what is described in Vedânta as *Brahman,* the infinite Being, the supreme Being of the universe: That *Brahman* is nameless and formless. That is one, and that cannot be many. It is also said in the Vedas that this one Infinite intelligence and existence, is the source of all phenomenal universe. A question was asked in the Vedic age, what is the nature of that eternal truth of the supreme Being and how is it related to the phenomenal world. That question was answered by another sage with the following words: "That from *which* the whole phenomenal world, the universe, has come into existence, by which it exists, through which it continues to live and unto which it returns at the time of dissolution, know *that.* That is *Brahman.*" Therefore, *Brahman* is the beginning, middle and end of all relative existences. That absolute Being is also the ideal of all the great philosophers of different countries. It is called by different names. Some say the *Brahman* as "the eternal Being," the nameless and formless infinite wisdom which is the beginning and

end of the phenomenal existence. That infinite wisdom is the goal of all relative knowledge, and that is the ideal of Vedânta. Vedânta tells us how that goal can be reached, and what happens when that goal is realized. The ideal being one and the same Vedânta tells us that whether we call it personal or impersonal, whether we call it the creator, preserver and destroyer, it makes no difference but the infinite wisdom is one and the same.

If we understand that the Vedântic ideal has no particular name, then we have no difficulty in reconciling it with the ideals of sectarian religions like Christianity, Mohammedanism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, and other '*isms*' of the world. If we understand the nature of that infinite Being as nameless, then we may say that it is *Brahman* of the Hindus, Vishnu of the Vaishnavites, Shiva of the Shaivaites or Sakti of the Sâktas. It is also the Father in heaven of the Christians and the Allah of the Mohammedans, Jehovah of the Jews, and so on. The difference is only in name. But these different names do not change the nature of that absolute wisdom, the divine Being, or the supreme Lord of the universe, and, therefore, all religious quarrels and persecution that have been described in the pages of the religious history of the world, should not exist in future if we understand that 'unity in diversity' is the ideal of our existence. If we realize that the unity of Godhead has different names and forms under a variety of manifestations only then there would be no more quarrel, no more fight between the Hindus and the Mohammedans, Christians and Mohammedans, Hindus and Christians and other followers of various sects. All these quarrels and fights proceed from fanaticism, which is the child of ignorance. Wherever there is ignorance there is fanaticism, and fanaticism leads to all kinds of diabolical methods which deluged the world under the name of religion. Christians have held swords and guns in their hands and demolished temples in this country and Ceylon. They have demolished Buddhist temples in Japan and China.

Mohammedans have demolished the Hindu temples through fanaticism and through that spirit of zeal to propagate their faith, but the Hindus have always practised toleration. They have never held swords and destroyed any religious monument for the sake of their faith. Show me a nation like the Hindu nation who built churches for the Christians and mosques for the Mohammedans! Why did they do so? Because they know that the Lord who is worshipped under the name of Allah or the Father in heaven is the same Deity whom they worship under different names. The toleration of the Hindus had been unique in the religiius histiry if the world. We have never shed blood in the name of religion. We, the Hindus understand better, and, therefore, are still capable of being the spiritual leaders and teachers of the Western nations. They are yet to learn from the Hindus the grandeur of religious toleration. Hinduism accepts the fundamental principles of all religions. It is very difficult to reconcile so many varieties of creeds with the religion and philosophy of Vedânta, but, if you look a little deeper, you will see the religion and philosophy of Vedânta do not deal with doctrines and dogmas, but they give spiritual laws which are eternal and universal and which are the common property of all religions. And what are those spiritual laws, the ethical laws, the relation between the soul and God, the relation between the individual soul and the external world? All these are most beautifully described, most rationally maintained by no other system than the system of Vedânta which is not only a philosophy but also a religion as well.

Now, the religion and philosophy of Vedânta can be divided into three principal parts. One part is dualistic. By that word I mean, it admits the existence of three entities as separate, but closely related to one another. The existence of the individuals to one another, the existence of the individual soul, of the external nature, and the existence of the Creator; these three are co-eternal entitles. These exist but they are not one and

the same. Those who admit these three things as separate entities, are known as dualists. Among the Hindus you will find the Vaishnavites admit that the Lord is separate from nature as also from the individual souls. But among the Western nations those who proclaim Judaism, Mohammedanism, Christianity, etc., you will find the majority of these followers believe that the Lord of the universe is separate from the universe, and He is the ruler and the governor of the universe. The creator is distinct and separate from the individual souls which are His creatures. This is the first step in the spiritual evolution of the soul. First of all, when we see beautiful things which we perceive by the senses, we conceive of a creator, a ruler, a governor and we think of His attributes, His powers and His majesty and then we bow down to Him and worship Him. In times of distress and suffering we pray to Him and call for His help. That is only natural. Then, gradually we begin to feel that the Lord of the universe whom we conceive as dwelling beyond our reach, is not far from us. He manifests Himself within our souls, as an internal ruler and comforter within ourselves.

Then we feel we are not separate from Him but more closely connected with Him in some mysterious manner. Our true nature is not absolutely separate from Him. It is not a part inseparable from the whole; yet as a part is not the same as the whole, so we feel that our true spirits, our *Atmans* are parts of the one stupendous whoe and yet not the same. This is the second stage of the spiritual evolution. It is called *Visishtâdvaita*. It means that we are in the body of the supreme Being, and the whole external phenomenal world forms the gross physical body—*Virâtmoorti*, of that infinite wisdom, and each individual soul exists in the body of the Lord. Sometimes it remains there and at other times it manifests itself in various manifestations and incarnations.

Then there is another still closer realization and that

comes to the soul which has reached beyond the limits of all relative knowledge, sense-perceptions, thoughts and ideas. When we rise above all relative conceptions, we find that there is *something* which is the foundation of our conceptions of the creator, the preserver and the destroyer, which forms the essence of the Lord whom we worship under different names. When we realize that, we enter into the domain of the absolute existence; we are no longer conscious of external things and we feel a blissful state of *Samâdhi* which is indescribable. There we find all differentiations vanish. The sun, moon and stars disappear. Where do they go? What we do not know, but there exists one infinite wisdom, and it is said in the Vedas that neither the light of the sun, nor that of the moon, nor that of the lightning can show the glory of that infinite wisdom, which these external material lights cannot reveal. How can earthly light reveal that supreme Being! But at the same time it dwells in the sun, in the moon and the stars as well. It is the essence of all of them. No one can transcend it. It is indescribable, unfathomable, immortal. This state is called monistic or *Advaita*. Then we realize that these three, the individual soul, the external nature and the creator are but the manifestations of one absolute Wisdom which is infinite and eternal. In manifestations there is relativity. A creator exists so long as there is creation. But when there is no creation how can there be a creator? So is Isvara. What is its meaning? Isvara means ruler or governor. Now can there be a governor when there is nothing to be governed? And how long does the governor exist? So long as there is something to be governed. Therefore, so long as the phenomenal world exists, there is that manifestation which is called Isvara or personal God. But our God is not merely personal but also impersonal. Our conception of God as a personal deity is only a poor conception of God. That is only the beginning. We must rise higher and higher in the evolution of our conception of God and gradually we will find that this Isvara is only

the first-born manifestation of *something* which is indescribable and infinite wisdom. That is *Brahman.* Now, under these three heads we can include all the special religions of the world, Christianity, Mohammedanism, Judaism, etc., which are dualistic, and, therefore, they can be embraced by the dualistic system of the religion and philosophy of Vedânta. Ramanujâchârya described in his commentaries the grand truth that the first-born Lord of the universe, the *Saguna Brahman* is the almighty Being in whose body dwells *chit* and *achit,* the individual ego and nature. This idea was expressed by Jesus the Christ when he said that the great Lord is like the vine and we are but branches. It was expressed by Alexander Pope when he said that the Lord is one stupendous whole, of which we are but parts. But when we go a little deeper, we find that He cannot be divided into parts, because He is infinite and every part of Him is infinite. Then comes the most advanced metaphysics of Sankarâchârya who says that all these differentiations and distinctions are only on the phenomenal plane. The idea of separation, the idea of division, exists so long as we are limited by time, space and causation. Time, space and causation are but the products of one eternal Energy which is known as *Prakriti* or *mâyâ.*

But what is *mâyâ,* I ask? Is it merely illusion? No, it means *relative existence.* It means time, space and causation. Sankarâchârya defines it as indescribable in its nature and name. It is the energy of that supreme wisdom and Divinity. It is beginningless. It consists of three qualities or materials which combine themselves and manifest into gross material forms of the universe. Its existence can only be inferred by seeing the results, and it is that which produced all phenomenal names and forms.[1] Time, space and causation are included in that,

1 अव्यक्तनाम्नी परमेशशक्तिरनाद्यविद्या त्रिगुणात्मिका परा।
कार्यानुमेया सुधियैव मायया जगत् सर्व्वमिदं प्रसूयते॥
—*Vivekachidamani,* 110.

because these are the conditions under which all names and forms exist. European philosophers think that Kant was the first man to discover that time, space and causation are the conditions of phenomenal existence, but it was known to the Hindus long before the time of Kant. In fact, Sankarâchârya mentioned that several times in his commentary on the *Upanishads* and the *Brahma-sutras*. It was familiar to the Hindus long before Kant declared it, from the time of Sankarâchârya who lived about the eighth century A.D., and, in fact, that idea was in a germ stage in the *Upanishads* which go back thousands and thousands of years before the Christian era. We must not consider that *mâyâ* means absolute illusion. It means phenomenal existence, conditional or relative existence. It means that my existence depends upon the existence of Madras. Madras exists so long as there is India and India exists so long as there is earth and the earth so long as there is the solar system. That is conditional existence and that existence is possible only in time, space and causation. But when we rise above time and space, when relativity vanishes, there is neither *mâyâ* nor manifestation of *mâyâ*, and there is the abode of infinite wisdom and yet at the same time it forms the background. It forms like a canvas upon which the most beautiful picture of the phenomenal world is painted by the Almighty hand, and that canvas gives life and soul to the picture of the phenomenal world. Nothing can exist as separate from that infinite Being, and, therefore, we must feel our relation to the Infinite as inseparable, and this idea was expressed most beautifully by Christ when he said: "We live and move and have our beings in God.' This idea was expressed in India centuries before his time. It is expressed in the *Upanishads* thus: "That from which everything comes into existence, in which everything exists, into which everything returns." So, our beings depend upon the supreme Being. This is the ideal goal of our religion and also of all the religions of the world.

Therefore, our religion embraces all other religions. For instance, the Vedas say that *moksha* is to be attained through knowledge. By *knowing* we can attain to absolute emancipation and freedom. The same idea was given in the Bible when Christ said: "And ye shall know the truth and truth shall make you free."[1] Christ there means that knowledge brings freedom. He did not mean the knowledge of any material object or of external matter, but the knowledge of that one Being which when realized would bring the absolute freedom. If you study the Quran, you will find the knowledge of Allah is declared to be the means by which that goal of freedom can be attained. Of course, going to heaven and enjoying celestial pleasures is not considered to be the highest state of spiritual realization. Although the *Sanâtana Dharma* advocates and helps such men who are anxious to reach the goal of celestial pleasures and does not discourage the devotee who wishes to go to heaven and enjoy the celectial pleasures for a certain length of time, yet it holds before us that these pleasures are within the realm of time, space and causation, and teaches us that those seekers after Truth who wish to attain to the absolute Being and who endeavour to enter into the body of infinite wisdom must transcend the celestial region. Other religions do not give that lofty ideal but give only celestial enjoyment as the highest pleasure. And therefore those special religions can never become universal, because they do not want to go beyond that limit of heavenly pleasures. If there be any one who does not care to go to heaven, these special religions cannot help that individual, but the religion of Vedânta can help all those who wish to go to heaven and all those also who do not care to go to heaven, and, therefore, this religion is more universal than any other special religions.

Another point we must not forget, viz., that the universal religion of Vedânta which advocates the exist-

1 St. John VIII, 32.

ence of one truth, one being and one wisdom, is not based on any theory which is like the theory of special creation out of nothing. But it is purely rational. It is in perfect harmony with reason, science and philosophy. As the modern scientists after long research and investigation have arrived at the conclusion that this world was not created in six days out of nothing, but is the result of the gradual evolution of the eternal Energy which is all-pervading, which remains unmanifested at certain times and then manifests itself into various names and forms. The evolution theory has been discovered by modern thinkers through long researches and investigation. The ancient thinkers of India discovered the same law of evolution and based their religion upon that law and rejected the theory of special creation of the world by any external deity, and therefore in the Vedas we read that something can never come out of nothing, and this is a scientific law discovered by modern scientists. Until lately this law was unknown to the scientists of Europe and America, but it was known in India centuries before the Christian era. In *Chhândogya Upanishad* whose date has not yet been fixed by the Occidental thinkers, we read a father teaching his son saying how can something come out of nothing. That question was raised by the great *Mantra-drashtâ* of the Vedic period and it is raised today by the scientific thinkers. And, therefore, the evolution theory has given foundation to the religion of Vedânta which is universal, and its universality consists in that harmony which exists between itself and all sciences and philosophies of the world. I shall now proceed to show you how the highest ideal of all the scientists of modern times is included within the pale of the Vedânta religion and, therefore, it is universal. The evolution theory gives foundation to the religion of Vedânta. At the same time we must not think that this theory explains all things. There are other theories which are higher than the evolution theory. Time will not permit me to enter into the details of that metaphysical point, but I can assure you

that there is a theory which is better and more scientific than the theory of evolution, but the modern scientists of Europe do not accept it. Well has it been said by Sir Monier, Monier Williams that the Hindus were Spinizites long before Spinoza. This is true, for as early as the time of Kapila, we find him explaining that theory in detail. The modern theory which is so beautifully explained by Herbert Spencer is not very dissimilar to that ideal theory of evolution which was started by Kapila at least seven centuries before the Christian Era. And thus we find that all the scientific thoughts and discoveries are helping and sustaining the religion and philosophy of Vedânta. But what has become of the other special religions which were built upon the theory of special creation. They take this for granted. They believe in traditions and are afraid of asking questions. If any one ask a question, such as, why did God create the earth before the sun, the answer is not given, and the preacher says it is blasphemous to ask such questions, and that most inscrutable are the ways of the Almighty and He can do anything. Such explanations do not satisfy scientific minds, and, therefore, they do not accept such theories but ridicule them. But in our religion of Vedânta nothing can be ridiculed.

Another point which we must remember before we can understand the universality of Vedânta is this: It has never had any founder. A religion which needs a founder or which is built upon the personality of a founder cannot exist beyond his life, and, therefore, cannot be universal, and if the founder be one-sided, it can never be unlimited. It may satisfy certain souls but not all, and, for that reason, we find so many religions existing in this world. Mohammedanism tried to convert the whole world. Christianity has been trying this for the last 2,000 years. But has it succeeded? We doubt it. It may try another 4,000 years. We live in eternity; we do not care. Our life is not limited by three or four scores of years, but we are children of immortal bliss. We are not afraid of hell-fire after death, and there is, in addition on our side,

the fact that we are not going to eternal perdition. I was coming from England to India in a P. & O. Steamer. There was a passenger who travelled with me and was interested in the missionary work, and he thought I was a Christian missionary. So, he asked me to what denomination I belonged. I said: "To no denomination." It was very surprising to him. He said: "Don't you believe in Christ?" "Certainly I do," was my reply. Then he asked: "Do you believe 'he is the Saviour'?" I said: "He is one of the Saviours. Mohammed was a Saviour, Buddha was a Saviour and there are many others." He then asked: "Do you believe that you are a sinner? Christ will save you and through him you will receive salvation." I said: "I do not believe that." "Don't you?" he asked. I said: "No." He then said: "You are the first man I have seen that has the courage to say so." I said: "Yes! we have the courage to say so, because we know it." He then said: "Well, it is very strange. Time will come when you will believe that you are a sinner." I said: "I am a child of God, and to call me a sinner is blasphemy, and if you call me so, you commit a sin yourself." He said: "I have never seen such a man." I said: "You see me and I will show you thousands if you go with me." He then changed the subject.

So, our religion gives us that strength that we do not fear eternal hell-fire, because it does not belong to us. We are the children of immortal bliss. This must be preached in all countries of the world, where they are groaning under the burden of that blasphemous thought that they are born in sin and iniquity and we must remove that by spreading the religion of Vedânta. Awake, arise and take the banner of this universal religion and go from land to land and preach the gospel of truth to enlighten the minds of thousands and millions of men who are waiting to receive you as their own saviour. Such is the grandeur of the universal religion of Vedânta and its various methods. It does not say that everybody should believe in one particular creed, but, on the contrary, it says that

each individual will have his own particular line of thought and each will lead to that ultimate goal. Christianity, Mohammedanism, Vaishnavism, Shaivaism and Sâktamârga—they are all so many paths, each leading to the one goal. If we realize that, there will be no fight, no persecution but absolute peace and harmony. The follower of the Vedânta religion is neither a Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian, Parsi nor any other. He can worship in a church, in a mosque, in a temple or in his own heart. Because our human body is the temple of the living God, is the church of the Almighty Father and there the eternal Spirit shall be worshipped by spirit and in spirit and then we shall worship the true God. Then and then only, we shall be able to say and know the truth of the great saying which Sri Krishna made known to the world nearly two thousand years before the Christian era: "Whoever comes to me through whatsoever path, I reach him. All religions reach the same goal which is the infinite and absolute existence, intelligence, bliss and love."[1]

1 ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तां स्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।
मम वत्मानुवर्त्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥

—*Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. IV.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

UNIVERSAL RELIGION OF VEDANTA

The religious history of the world tells us that from time immemorial Asia has been the cradle of all great religions. All the grand religious ideals that have reformed the characters of barbarous nations, tamed man's unruly mind by the loftiest tenets of ethics and morality and that have raised human beings above the animal plane and all the sublime truths of spirituality that have transformed human characters into godly and divine nature, and have produced the spiritual ideals of nations and saviours of mankind first arose in the Orient. It was Asia that gave birth to the great spiritual leaders like Moses and Christ, Mohammed, and Zoroaster, Confucius and Buddha, Krishna and Râmakrishna. The spiritual horizon of the East has always been illumined with the glory of the self-effulgent sun of divine Wisdom. Whenever there was any religious upheaval in any parts of the world, the origin of that could be traced to the tidal wave of spirituality caused by the advent of some special manifestation of Divinity in some part of the Orient.

The present movement of the universal religion of Vedânta which is rapidly spreading all over the world and which is moulding the religious ideals of Europe and America, originated very long ago in the very heart of the Orient. It is going to make a wonderful readjustment of the spiritual thoughts of the people and it has already begun to bring the minds of the followers of all sects, and creeds and denominations of all special religions back to that underlying essential truths and fundamental religious principles that are eternal. Its aim is to remove all discord and disharmony that prevail among different sects. This universal religion will also establish a har-

mony between science, philosophy and religion and will prove that true religion does not depend upon doctrines and dogmas nor upon books, scriptures, and organisations, but upon the eternal truths discovered by the various branches of science and philosophy of the ancient and modern times. It will bring equal comfort and consolation, peace and Divine wisdom to all the Christians and the Jews, Mohammedans and Zoroastrians, the Buddhists and the Hindus of all sects and denominations. This universal religion is not based upon any particular scripture but it embraces all the scriptures of the world and recognizes their spiritual ideals and teachings as true and eternal. The universal religion is not built around any particular personality, like Christ or Buddha, but it accepts all the great founders of religions as Divine manifestations who appeared from time to time to establish righteousness and to remove the corruptions of the existing religions. For instance, the universal religion accepts Christ, Buddha, Zoroaster, Krishna, Chaitanya, Râmakrishna and others as incarnations of the same Divine Spirit.

The fundamental principle of the universal religion is the absolute oneness of Divinity. "*Ekam sadviprâ vahudâ vadanti;*" 'That which exists is one, men call it by various names.' There is one existence, one reality, one life and one spirit. That Universal Being is manifesting itself in infinite varieties of names and forms. It is the essence of our being, the foundation of our existence and the basis of our intelligence and consciousness. It is the Life of our life, the Soul of our souls. It dwells in all beings and abides in all hearts. "*Ko hyevânyât kah prânyât. Yadesa âkâsa anando na syat.*" Who can live for a moment if this space be not filled with blissfulness? This Absolute Being is called in Sanskrit *Brahman.* It is the same as the *Good* of Plato, the *Substantia* of Spinoza, the *Ding an sich* of Kant, the *Will* of Schopenhauer, the *Oversoul* of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the *Unknown and Unknowable* of Herbert Spencer. It is the essence of the Father in heaven of the Christians and Allah of

the Mohammedans. It is worshipped under different names such as Jehova, or Christ, Buddha or Krishna. It is impersonal, yet it appears as the personal God, the first-born Lord of the universe. The same one eternal Lord is not only the Father but also the Mother of the universe. He is the efficient and material cause (*nimitta and upâdâna kârana*) of the phenomenal universe. He creates, that is, at the beginning of the evolution he projects the world out of His own body wherein it existed potentially in the unmanifested causal state. This undifferentiated causal state of the universe is called in modern science the eternal energy. This eternal energy which is the material cause of all phenomena is called in Vedânta *Prakriti* (Latin *Procreatrix*) the creative Energy.

The universal religion of Vedânta is not based upon the idea of a special creation out of nothing at a definite period of time but upon the idea of the gradual process of cosmic evolution, from etherial to gaseous, and gradually through liquid to solid. Thus when the solid was evolved, the germs of life began to manifest on the physical plane first in the form of vegetables, then as animals and lastly, as man.[1] The difference between all these grades of life is only in degree but not in kind. This evolution takes a period of many millions of years; then the dissolution or involution begins in a reverse order and the phenomenal world goes back to its causal state and remains latent in that state for a certain period only to come out again through a similar process of evolution. Each of these periods of evolution and involution is called a *Cycle* (*Kalpa*). The cycle of evolution is followed by a cycle of involution which in turn is followed by another cycle of evolution and so on. The chain of evolution and involution is beginningless and endless. At the time of evolution an infinite number of individual souls come out of the causal state and going through the various grades of evolution becomes clothed, as it were, with the garment

1 Vide *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II, 1.

of their material bodies of finer or grosser kinds and eventually becomes human beings. They manifest their latent powers, fulfil their desires, gain experience and knowledge and march onward to reach perfection. According to the universal religion of Vedânta, each individual soul possesses infinite potentialities and unlimited possibilities. Each one of them is potentially Divine and is bound, sooner or later, to reach perfection however imperfect or sinful it may appear to be at present.

According to the universal religion of Vedânta, our souls are not born in sin and iniquity but we are all children of immortal Bliss. We are not predestined to suffer eternally, nor is this birth the first and last chance of our earthly existence. Our present is the resultant of our past and our future will be the result of our present. We create our own destiny and mould our own future by our thoughts and deeds. God does not punish the wicked nor does He reward the virtuous. The wicked punish themselves and the virtuous reward themselves by their own thoughts and deeds being subject to the law of *Karma* or cause and sequence.

The attainment of freedom from the law of *Karma*, from the cycle of birth and re-birth and from all imperfections and as well as the realization of perfection and Godconsciousness are meant by *salvation* in the universal religion of Vedânta. This salvation must be here even in this life. He who has attained to salvation shall be free from all bondage and attachment to earthly conditions and selfishness. He shall manifest Divine perfection in all the actions of his body and mind. He shall love all living creatures equally and shall see Divinity everywhere. All knots of desires are torn asunder, all doubts cease for ever, all *Karmas* and their effects are transcended and all aims of life are fulfilled when perfection is reached. All sufferings and sorrows diseases and deaths will disappear from the soul which has become perfect in this life. Such a soul lives and dies for others. He is a Christ, a Buddha, a Krishna, or a Râmakrishna.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SCIENCE OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION

We are living today in an age of science. Everything that is scientific appeals to our minds and we accept it as true. With the help of science we can see the vastness of the phenomenal universe, and it has revealed to us the profoundest depths of nature. It has studied the cell, divided it into molecules and atoms and shown us that the atoms, in reality, are not indivisible units. Through science we know that all the manifested forces of nature are the expressions of one eternal Energy and that the phenomenal universe has come to its present state through the gradual process of evolution. Furthermore, we have learnt that the life-force is not the exclusive property of the animal creation, but is manifested in vegetables and metals as well. Again, science tells us that God did not breathe the first breath into man, that the life of a man is not the result of the intervention of the supernatural Being, but it is as natural as the life of the lower animals. Thought transference or telepathy helps us to understand that our minds are but minute particles in the Cosmic Mind. Never think that our thoughts do not penetrate into other minds. They go through walls of solid rock, and if you have a high thought, that thought moves throughout the atmosphere of the whole universe. It is producing waves which are affecting minds, capable of receiving such thoughts. If we can regulate the variation of thought in our own minds and harmonize them with the Cosmic Mind, then we can become one with it. Herbert Spencer says: "Matter, mind and force are not the reality, but the symbols of reality, and the same reality is manifested subjectively and objectively." You may call it Reality or Being or God, or by any name you like, but it is the one

Substance. Students of science cannot believe in the Creator, as described in the Genesis, who creates something out of nothing. For science has given evidence to prove that life-germs are uncreatable and indestructible; that they gradually pass from lower to higher stages of development. The old theory of pre-existence and reincarnation explains that germs of life of individual souls existed before the birth, that they gradually developed according to their desires, creating their own destiny, and have evolved from the lowest to the highest stages. These germs of life exist as long as force exists. Science points out the blunders of theological and secterian religions, and their doctrines have now been set aside by advanced thinkers. The comparative study of religion shows that no religion ever had a supernatural origin; that religion, however great or small it may be, is but the attempt of the human soul to grasp the universal Truth. Some people believe in the search of man by God. God never searches man apart from Himself. If He would search man He would have to search in His own Being. Our souls, however sinful, exist as parts of the Infinite. Each cell is a life and contributes to the personality of the human being, but each cell has its own individuality. In the same way, we are like so many cells in the spiritual body of the Infinite Being. As, if one would search the individual atoms which make up his own body, he would have to search within his own organism, so if you would search the souls of men, you would have to search them in their own bodies. Nothing exists outside of God, because He is omnipresent. He is all in all. Science obeys no authority of books or personalities. It cares only for truth. We need a religion which is based upon eternal Truth and which will harmonize with all the branches of science and embrace all religions. Now is there a religion that embraces all the truths discovered by different nations under the name either of science or philosophy or religion, a religion which explains that unity and variety is the

plan of nature? Our answer is in the strong affirmative. There is one religion which is based upon this truth; it originated in India five thousand years ago, and the Sanskrit language was the beautiful medium of its expression. I will quote here a few passages: "One Reality manifests itself in various forms in the phenomenal world. As the wind going through the holes of a flute produces different notes, each complete in itself, so this one Reality manifests in the external and in the material world." "From that one source have evolved mind, intelligence, that which is gaseous, liquid and solid. All forces of nature have evolved from that one source." Is there any passage in other scriptures which voices the same truth? The universal religion of Vedânta teaches that the germ of life is eternal and indestructible, it believed in the process of evolution and that there is no creator of good or evil. The same force which appears as good at one time, may appear as evil at another. The same fire that saves a man perishing with cold may also become the medium of his destruction. The nature of fire is to burn, and its power is neither good nor evil. One soul may commit sin, that is, make some mistake, but every mistake is a great teacher and helps us toward reaching perfection. The law of action and reaction is inexorable. If you think you are sinful you are sinful. If you think you are divine you are divine. God is one stupendous whole of which we are but parts. All these various religions of the world are like so many radii of a circle which converage toward a common centre. The meaning of the universal religion was given by Krishna (about 1400 B.C.): "Whoever comes to me, from whatsoever path, I reach him. All men are struggling in the various paths which ultimately lead to me, the infinite existence, intelligence, bliss and life eternal."[1]

1 ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तां स्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।
मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥

—*Bhagabad Gita*, Ch IV, 22.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IDEAL OF THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION

The ideal of the universal religion of Vedânta is the emancipation of the soul from all bondage of selfishness, imperfection and earthly attachments and the attainment of absolute freedom. It is called in Sanskrit *"Moksha"* (*'Mukti'*), which literally means 'freedom'. From very ancient times, the saints, sages, philosophers and spiritual teachers of this universal religion have upheld this grand ideal, have preached it amongst the masses, and struggled themselves to attain to it during their life-time. When we read the history of the Orient, we find that kings and princes have renounced their thrones, wealthy men and women gave away their riches and properties, and cut off all earthly ties and have retired to the forest in order to attain to this grand ideal. They had sacrificed all earthly relations and luxuries, considering them as the cause of bondage and unhappiness. But before renouncing all these earthly objects of sense, they had realized the limitations of human existence, they had understood that the life of an ordinary mortal on this plane is like that of a slave, that it is a state of constant slavery to the masters who are governing us from within as well as from without. In fact, if we examine our own conditions of life, we find that no one of us is absolutely free yet we do not realize this state of slavery. When we look around us, we find nobody who may be called perfectly free, but we see very few have realized that the life which they are living is a life of constant drudgery and unhappiness. Few have realized that individual souls are enchained by the attractions of the objects of the external world. Fewer still struggle for emancipation and the rest delude themselves by thinking that they are free. They love their bondage and consider that this is the real con-

dition of life, and that there is nothing higher or greater. Are we not slaves of our desires and passions? Do we not see around us men and women mad for material prosperity and power, mad for name and earthly fame? Do we not serve these masters who are constantly ruling over our minds and souls? Where is our freedom? How can we call ourselves free, when we are slaves of anger, hatred, fear, jealousy, self-conceit, beauty, ambition and sense-pleasures? We have tied ourselves down to luxuries and bodily comforts, and we think we cannot live without them. Is this state desirable? We may delude ourselves for the moment by thinking that we are very happy, but there remains hidden in our depths an element of discord. Though it is not recognizable to those who live on the surface, yet it keeps the spirit in us utterly dissatisfied with the present state and we long for freedom in its essential dignity. The soul wants to get out of this condition of slavery. Are we not all slaves when we consider how elated and flattered we feel when some kind words are uttered to us, and how wounded and hurt we are when we hear harsh and unkind words? Few of us try to know the real condition of things. We go on living as the blind led by the blind. We do not ask of it any questions. We find many people who are willing to help and uplift others, but they should first of all try to uplift themselves, to correct their own faults and become free from all the slavery. Here we must not forget what Jesus the Christ said: "Thou hypocrite cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."[1] No one can help another, no one can lift another from the mire of slavery, unless he himself has become free and has got a firm foothold upon the rock of absolute freedom.

We are now sleeping the sleep of self-delusion. We must wake up from this state. We must realize how slave-

1 St. Luke VI, 42.

like and miserable we have become. Then we must strive for that freedom, attain to it and give it to others. The majority of people are chasing after the phantoms of hope. They appear bright at first, but as we approach them they change their colours and suddenly vanish, to appear again and attract the pursuers to chase them once again. We do not realize that these phantoms of hope are the causes of suffering, misery and disappointment. We do not learn the lesson. We repeat the same process over again until we are tired and exhausted, our nerves are shattered, and we fall dead. In this way we are living and obeying the commands of these pitiless masters who are dominant in us. We never ask for a moment whether we are born to serve these relentless masters, or, how long we will continue in this manner. We never ask these questions. Each individual loves and strives after something, not knowing what it is or how to attain to it; yet the individual soul cannot rest unless it has attained to that ideal. But we must find out what that ideal is, what it is that our souls want. Our souls want freedom and happiness. We all cry for happiness, but we do not know the conditions under which true happiness comes to the soul, because we are living in the darkness of ignorance. True happiness never comes in slavery, but in absolute freedom. The conditions under which we are living today will never bring true happiness to us. We may think ourselves happy, a fool may delude himself by thinking that he is happy but when he wakes up from that foolish dream, he will discover that it was after all self-delusion, that he had not reached true happiness. He is truly happy who has become absolutely free. True happiness is an accompaniment of absolute freedom. True happiness does not change, it is eternal; and along with it come absolute peace and divine wisdom. These are the signs of true happiness. When we are truly happy, we must possess absolute peace and divine wisdom. Our spiritual eyes will be opened; we shall be able to see things in a diffrent light, and then we shall have a glimpse of

the Absolute. This freedom is the goal for all individuals. Every individual soul is bound to reach it, sooner or later. It is also the goal of evolution. The evolution of nature, as well as of all individual souls, reaches its perfection, and has fulfilled its purpose when that ideal of freedom is gained.

In our everyday life, we find that we are truly happy, when we have neither wants nor desires. When all our desires and wants have subsided, leaving a peaceful and restful state within us, then we are happy. As desires increase, our happiness decreases. When we want a great many things, we are not happy, because then we are limited by those wants. The soul is tied down by those desires and clamours for their fulfilment. It strives to regain that freedom which it had before these desires and wants have taken possession of it. And these desires these wants are the causes of our misery. So long as there is one single desire or want left unsatisfied we cannot become absolutely happy. When we have certain wants, we seek to remove those wants and fulfil our desires; but, if we fail in our attempts we are unhappy. And this desire has been the cause of a great many troubles that we are going through. We cannot help it, because we were born with desires. These desires we have brought from our previous incarnations. In our previous incarnations we passed away with our desires unfulfilled, and we are trying to fulfil them in this incarnation.

There are two ways by which we can remove these wants and desires: First, by obtaining the objects of desires, by enjoying them; and, secondly, by removing these desires through proper discrimination, by subduing them. All those desires which are connected directly with the sustenance of life, like food and clothes, should be fulfilled by getting the objects of desire, because we must protect our body first. This body will be the means by which we shall attain to freedom and perfection. And this body is the abode of the soul. We must take care of it first in order to fulfil the highest purpose of our life,

but other desires, other passions, we can easily remove by right discrimination, by exercising self-control. If we can live in this way, we shall attain to unbound peace and happiness during this lifetime. What is the use of becoming slaves to ambition and greed for wealth and possessions; what is the use of increasing our wants and desires which ultimately keep us enchained like a man in prison.

Each individual being has an innate consciousness of *'I'* and *'mine'*. Whatever we hear or perceive with our senses, we want to bring within the limit of that circle of *"I"* and *"mine,"* and call it our own. If we see anything in a shop, we want to get possession of it, that is bring it within the circle of *"I"* and then we are happy. All the things that exist outside of the limit of that circle, we crave to bring within the limit, and that is the tendency in each individual soul. In lower animals also we find the same thing, but their desire is limited by physical hunger and appetite. But we collect other things which attract our senses and this tendency, you will find, is at the bottom of all these works which produce trusts and make millionaires and wealthy people at the expense of others. The gratification of these desires may bring happiness to a few wealthy people but it brings misery and suffering to a large number of individuals. Those who are living in this world, being attracted by that tendency, do not understand the real purpose of life. Their souls are enchained by greed, avarice and ambition. They try to get possession of as many things as they can. They want to be the rulers of all and mad with that vision they strive for that goal but they forget that they cannot be the rulers of the whole earth, it is beyond their power. They constantly serve the internal masters like anger, hatred, jealousy, ambition and greed for luxury and comforts. If you examine and study the characters of wealthy men and women, you will find that they are never happy. They have outward pomp and splendour, but no inward peace. They are constantly trying to serve the pitiless masters

which spur them to action. They are restless and unhappy. They do not understand the purpose of life. They are merely squandering away their time in running after this or that thing for the whole life. They are following the phantoms of hope, pursuing a wild-goose-chase and are always restless. Peace and contentment are strange to them.

There are four kinds of souls found in this world. Those who are absolutely bound by these earthly desires and earthly tendencies; they cannot get away from them. Next, those who are trying to be free; they are called *"Mumukshu."* They are trying to get out of the slavery and to become free. The third, those who have attained to freedom; and the fourth, those who are born free. They are Christ and Buddha, they are born not worldly, not as slaves but as free souls. Their number is significantly small. True freedom comes to those who have reached the knowledge of their true nature, who have realized that they are children of the Immortal Bliss, whose wants and desires are limited and the whole being saturated by real purpose of life. This is the sign of spirituality. A truly spiritual man or woman needs very little, his desires are less. He does not seek any comfort or luxury, he does not care for earthly possessions. He understands the transitoriness of earthly life, and he is contented and happy under all conditions and circumstances, whether agreeable or disagreeable, and he has, become absolute master of his own animal tendencies and propencities by means of self-control and is free from the sense of *"I"*, *"me"* and *"mine"*. We must first of all become free from the sense of *'I,' 'me'* and *'mine'* before we can understand what God is. Where *"I"* exists God cannot come. God is far from that state.

And how are we going to get rid of *"I"*? There are two ways by which we can get rid of this sense of *"I"*, *"me"* and *"mine."* The first is the path of discrimination, and the second is the path of devotion. Those who

travel on the path of discrimination realize that everything belongs to the universe and nothing belongs to the individual soul. Whatever belongs to the universe we cannot call our own. Through proper discrimination and analysis, we discover that when we cannot possess this physical body which we call our own, when we cannot keep it permanently, how can we expect to possess other things which are eternally related to this gross material body? It is impossible. Therefore, we should abandon the sense of *'I', 'me'* and *'mine'*, and claim nothing, as our own. Nothing belongs to us; everything belongs to the universe. Those who are animated by this spirit, live as freely in this universe, calling themselves nothing, and seeing everything in the universal Being. They realize that they are not one with the body, but that the body is only a transitory abode, a shell, through which the soul is manifesting its powers. This world is like a stage where we are playing our respective parts, consciously or unconsciously. Some playing the part of a husband, others of a wife, others of a mother, or a father, friend and so on. We do not know it. These are not our actual works which we have come to do, but these are the modes of expression by which we are gaining experience, learning the lessons regarding the true nature of things, how things exist in nature, and what benefit they can bring to the soul. If one part which we have played seems to be unpleasant or seems to produce undesirable results, then we try to play another part, and this is the way we are living in this world. But those who have had their eyes opened to the reality, to the Truth, have understood their true nature. And we can realize that we are not one with the body, that we are souls, that we are children of immortal bliss; then why should we run after material things which do not and cannot belong to us? Why should we run after earthly objects which can never bring true happiness and freedom? The wise man knows this, and, therefore, he renounces everything, renounces the attachment to earthly objects because he knows that earthly objects will never

bring freedom and true happiness; and, instead of wasting his time in chasing after these objects of the senses, he devotes his time and energy to the search of the highest, the eternal, the immortal Being, ever dwelling within us.

The other method by which a devotee reaches absolute freedom and happiness is through the path of devotion. The travellers on this path believe in the existence of a personal God. They understand that the Lord of the universe is one, and whatever exists in the universe belongs to Him. They do not claim anything as their own. House, property, children, furniture, wealth and other things, all of these things they declare as belonging to God. Nothing belongs to them. They say: "This child is not mine, but it is God's child. This house, this property, do not belong to me." They give everything to God and think that He is the one Being in the universe. We are all His children. We cannot possess anything. They become free from that sense of *'I', 'me'* and *'mine,'* and, instead of *'I', 'me'* and *'mine,'* they say *'Thou,' 'Thee'* and *'Thine'*. "Whatever is mine is Thine, O Lord," that is their constant prayer. Everything they possess they give to the Lord. "It belongs to Thee, O Lord! make me free from all this bondage, this attachment to earthly things. Make me, O Lord! devoted to Thee, the Infinite Immortal Being." And, gradually, they rise above the plane of selfishness. Selfishness exists so long as we consider ourselves as independent of God. "This is I; this belongs to me,', and "This is you, and this belongs to you." This idea of separateness, of differentiation, makes us selfish. But, when we overcome our individual egoism and think of the Lord as the universal Being who possesses all, then there is no room for selfishness. Think of Christ. Christ said: "Whatever is mine is Thine, O Lord; let Thy will be done." He resigned his individual will to the will of the Lord, and in his lifetime you will notice that he never had his own will fulfilled and he did not care for it. He was happy when he found that the will of his Father was fulfilled. Now, how

many of us can live in that way? Not caring for the fulfilment of our own little individual will, but for the fulfilment of the divine Will that is governing these individual wills. That state comes to a soul who has attained to freedom. The soul then becomes the playground of the Almighty Being who plays through him. He has become free from all desires and wants. He does not care for whether he possesses this thing or that. If everything is taken away from him, he is still happy. If this body be taken away from him, he does not mind. It is not a state of indifference; it is a state of vital strength. Very few people have realized this spiritual strength which comes to the soul who has resigned his individual will to the Will of the Lord. Resignation is necessary. In time of distress, sorrow and suffering, when we find no remedy, no help from ordinary mortals or earthly beings, then we are resigned. And in resignation comes true peace and happiness. That is the real state which we are longing for. Because we cannot resign constantly; we are unhappy. We want this and we want that, and we suffer; but a true devotee of the Lord is free from all wants and desires. He cares not whether his desires are fulfilled or not, but he prays to the Lord, saying: "O Lord! Thy will be done; not mine." He has absolute contentment and at the same time he understands the true relation of the soul, the relation which the individual soul bears to the infinite Being. He understands that all individuals are children of the almighty Being. He has neither enemy nor foe. All are his friends, all are friendly to him. He has no attachment to any particular condition or particular object. He does not care, because he knows that he can possess nothing. Everything that he had, he has given unto the Lord. And then he enjoys that wisdom which we are longing for. That happiness comes to him in this very life, and, after the dissolution of the body, he remains as one with the Infinite. He is no longer subject to birth and death, because he has transcended the laws of nature. He communes with the Lord and sees

the presence of Divinity around him everywhere. He discovers that everything dwells in God, and God dwells in everything, and realizing this he lives for the good of humanity, and all the acts of his body become a free offering to the world. He does not seek any result, but he gives them as a free offering, and, having transcended the laws of nature, the law of action and reaction, the law of Karma, he discovers Divine glory and attains to *realization* which lasts through eternity.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

STEPS TOWARD REALIZATION

Realization of God is described in Vedânta as the highest ideal of earthly existence, as well as the final goal of all religions. A Christian, a Mohammedan, a Jew, a Buddhist, or a Hindu equally aims to become someday conscious of the divine Spirit, who is the Lord of the universe, who is the Soul of our souls. The followers of all sects and creeds hold this ideal. Although they march each along their chosen paths, they fix their minds upon this one destination, the knowledge of God, the realization of the eternal Truth. Their paths may vary, but their goal is the same. A Christian, for instance, may follow the path laid down by Jesus of Nazareth and by his votaries. He may hold Jesus the Christ on the cross as the highest ideal. He may repeat his holy name reverentially, bow down before him; expect his grace to be saved from eternal perdition, having his sins washed off by the blood of the only-begotten son of the Heavenly Father, and eventually to enter into the celestial abode, where he hopes to come in direct presence of the almighty Spirit, to feel the Divinity within the soul and outside of it,—that is his hope. A Mohammedan, on the contrary, may not believe in the worship of Jesus the Christ. He may not care for the path of salvation laid down by the Christians, but still he aspires to know God by following the path of Mohammed, the only prophet of his Lord, Who is called Allah. A Jew may not worship Christ. He may follow the teachings of Moses, yet he expects to realize Jahveh in the end. A Buddhist may not believe in any personal God, he may not care to go to heaven, but his ideal is to realize that eternal Truth which was realized by Buddha, to become Buddha, which means "the Enlightened," to attain to perfection, and to commune

with the eternal Truth. In this manner, we can show that all the religions of the world hold the ideal of realization of Truth above all other ideals. Although the paths, described in these religions, may vary, the goal is the same. The same ideal may be expressed in different terms, —some may call it "salvation" others may call it "perfection," the Buddhists may call it "Buddhahood" or "Nirvâna", the Christians "Christhood" or state of "Divine communion"; but all these names show that their true meaning is the realization of God, the attainment of God-consciousness, to become conscious of the Divine something which is the eternal source of all existence, intelligence, and happiness.

This ideal has been held before the masses of people in India by all the great sages, saints, prophets, and philosophers as the highest of all other ideals. Inspired by a tremendous urge for this realization of God, kings and princes have renounced their thrones, men and women have sacrificed their wealth, and comfort , and unhesitatingly they have gone through the most severe trials and austerities, struggles and hardships. The materialists and agnostics who do not believe in the existence of God may think it is foolish to sacrifice immediate pleasures and comforts of life. They may think that it is a waste of time and energy to search after that Being. They may devote their energy to fulfil their worldly desires and ambitions; they may chase the phantoms of hope with the idea that the attainment of success in business or earthly prosperity is the highest aim of life; but the time is sure to come when they will wake up from the slumber of this self-delusion and begin to see things as they are in reality. Scientists can never solve these problems; philosophers who have not reached the highest goal cannot answer these questions. Each individual soul must solve these problems for himself or herself. In that state of spiritual realization, the light of the supreme Being will reveal. In that light all darkness will vanish and then, through the light of Divine wisdom, we shall be able to see things *as they*

are in reality and not *as they appear* to our senses. Those who have not attained to this *realization,* or have not got the light of Divine wisdom, are groping in the darkness of ignorance. They are asleep; they do not know what they are doing, they are dreaming the dreams of material objects. All these ambitions and earthly desires are like dreams or nightmares of the soul, and they are going through them not knowing that the soul-life is eternal. They do not know that they existed before this present life and that they will continue to exist even when this body is dead and gone. They do not understand what will enrich the soul and what will impoverish it. They think material prosperity and earthly riches will enrich the soul. What matters it to the soul whether we posses earthly riches or go without possessions? The soul is never poor. Did you ever ask whether by material wealth and prosperity your soul will be enriched? No, if you asked that, you would not run after wealth and riches.

Accumulation of wealth is the result of a disease of the brain. The millionaiers and multi-millionaiers are suffering from that disease. They do not know it, for, their souls are not awakened. Who can help them unless they help themselves? What gain or loss will it be to the soul if the whole world praises you or blames you or passes unjust opinion upon you? The soul is always unaffected by the praise or censures of people. It is beyond all material possessions and riches. The wealthiest multimillionaire who owns the riches of a whole nation or of half the world does not think for a moment that he will be unable to carry even a pin beyond the grave. He must be a fool who thinks himself rich by owning a few millions of golden coins or large real estate or a palatial building, with perhaps hundreds of men and women to wait upon him. He must be a fool who thinks that by mere possession of all these earthly objects he is superior to his fellow-beings, or that he will be able to carry with him a

particle of these objects (which in reality do not belong to him). What will he carry with him? The only thing that goes with us beyond the grave is our character i.e., the *samaskâras*. How important it is then to build our character, to mould it in the cast of the divine Ideal, so that in future we shall be better and not worse than what we are today.

The divine Ideal is free from all limitations. Wherever there is limitation there is the imperfect manifestation of Divinity. Therefore, if we wish to harmonize our character with the divine Ideal, we must remember that Divinity is free from all limitations, while we are crippled by the conditions under which we are living; and our attempt should be to rise above and remove all limitations which prevent the manifestation of Divine power, to realize the emancipation of the soul. Holding that ideal before the mind, we must march onward towards the goal.

Each individual soul, being a spark of the huge bonfire of Divinity, is of a similar divine nature. If you go to your innermost depths, there you will find the eternal spark within you; behind the ego there is a spark, and that spark is immortal, is divine in reality, but it is covered up, veiled, by your mental conditions, desires, ambition, earthly limitations, physical limitations, sense powers. Every individual soul may, therefore, be called potentially divine, and each is struggling to make that potential Divinity manifest itself on the plane of consciousness, to make it an actual reality. We are all struggling to be conscious of our divine nature, to be perfect, and so long as there is that struggle to become perfect there cannot be peace, there cannot be happiness. Knowingly or unknowingly, each individual soul is striving to become perfect, to reach that state where absolute contentment and happiness, peace and blissfulness reign for ever. For this reason, we find that the men and women of the world are not contented, they are not happy; they

are running after something, but they do not know what that thing is; they are trying to be perfect, but they do not know what will make them perfect.

Absolute peace, contentment, happiness and wisdom are the conditions of spiritual realization. As the splendour and most glorious illumination of the dawn herald the immediate rising of the sun above the horizon, so all these saintly qualities, purity contentment, chastity, tranquility, disinterested love for all, non-attachment to material things, and perfect wisdom are the signs which herald the rising of the divine Sun upon the horizon of the individual soul. Then, in that light of the divine Sun, the darkness of night is dispelled, the darkness which enveloped the real nature of things and made it invisible to mortal beings will vanish. In that divine light, the past and future will be like eternal present. There is neither past, nor future for the soul. If you rise on the soul-plane, the past and future will vanish. You will remember everything. Everything that has happened to you and will happen to you, you will see. This day and night, this month and year, which we are counting today, do not affect the soul. The moment you close your eyes, all this calculation of time will vanish, all these space relations will not exist.

In that state, there is no sorrow, no pain, no suffering of birth or death. Absolute peace and happiness come to the soul. It is said: In that state of realization, all knots of desires are torn asunder. All desires are fulfilled, all doubts cease for ever, all the questionings of the mind are answered; crookedness of the heart is straightened, and the individual soul, transcending all limitations, soars high in the infinite space and eternally enjoys absolute freedom and bliss. The souls which have reached spiritual realization are conscious of God and lose the sense of "*I, me* and *mine*" That to which we cling now, this sense of "*I*" as an individual, son or daughter of Mrs. So-and-so, will not exist; it will die. But by the death of this limited "*I*", do not think for a moment we

shall lose our identity or consciousness. This is only a false consciousness of the soul. It is like the state of an actor, when he acts on the stage thinking of him self as impersonating some other being. If he holds that idea of "*I, me* and *mine*" for the time being that may be true, so long as he is on the stage, but off the stage he is no longer the same being. So, we are impersonating somebody, but, in reality, we are not so. In reality, this sense of "*I, me* and *mine*" does not affect us. You may now claim that these things belong to you, these relations are yours; but who is your relation? You are a child of God and they are also children of God. Why should you claim them as yours, simply on account of some earthly relation or blood relation? Blood relation does not produce any effect upon the soul. All souls are children of God.

In that state, the individual soul, tracing the source of the individual will to the Infinite Will, the Divine Will, the Universal Will, resigns itself and lets the Divine Will work through the individual will. It then becomes the playground of God. Self-resignation comes to that soul who has realized the Lord, the eternal Truth. In that Self-resignation, he does not lose anything, but he gains infinite power and he is stronger in his will and energy than he was ever before. In that state of revelation, inspiration comes to the soul. The knowledge of higher truths then comes. This state is called by different names, some call it communion of the individual soul with the Heavenly Father. The Christian mystics of middle ages and the Mohammedan. Sufis describe it as a state of ecstacy, while the Buddhists call it Nirvâna, the attainment of perfect emancipation or freedom of the soul, and the cessation of all sorrow, misery, and suffering which come from birth and death. In the science of Yoga, it is called *Samâdhi* or Godconsciousness or superconsciousness. The names may vary, but the meaning is the same, the ideal is the same, the realization of God.

Now, the question arises, how can this realization be

attained? What are the steps? In answering the first question, Vedânta says that realization can be attained in perfect silence. It may sound strange to our ears, but it is the most difficult thing to accomplish. It is not merely external silence, but it is the silence of the mind, inner tranquil mood in which our mind is not disturbed by passions like anger, hatred, jealousy, envy or attachment to material things. In that state of inward calm and serenity the perfect realization of God dawns upon us. Eckhert, the great German Christian mystic, said: "There must be perfect stillness in the soul before God can whisper His word into it, before the light of God can shine into the soul and transform the soul into God. When passions are stilled and all worldly desires silenced, then the word of God can be heard in the soul." How can we expect to commune with the Lord when our minds are busy with a thousand and one things of this world? The secret chamber of the soul of a man or woman is packed up from the floor to the ceiling with worldly thoughts and ideas, with urges and passions of the flesh, and there is not an inch of space left vacant, and still we wonder why God does not come to us, why we do not commune with the Lord? How can we expect to invite the divine guest in that crowded room where there is not an inch of space to receive Him? Even if God comes into such a crowded room He would not find a place for Him, and so, He would turn away. There would be no room for God. We never think for a moment, where shall we receive Him if He comes to us? Have we cleansed our inner chamber, have we made it vacant to receive Him? No; we do not think of that. Our eyes are closed; we cannot see things and cannot understand the conditions. A seeker after realization should therefore first of all clean the sacred chamber of his soul, remove all those things which have taken possession of the space. He should cleanse the floor by tears of repentance for the wrongs committed during ignorance; he should employ the guard

of right discrimination to keep a constant watch and prevent impure thoughts and unholy ideas from crossing the threshold of that sacred chamber.

He should next practice dispassion. That is, he should not allow his mind to be attracted by the pleasures of senses, by the attractions of the world; and then, with childlike simplicity, he should send the prayers of invitation to the Lord, asking Him to come and occupy that empty space of the inner chamber of the soul. Nature abhors a vacuum. If the inner chamber of our soul be freed from all worldly thoughts and desires, it will be taken possession of by the divine Spirit. The divine Spirit will come then, but it cannot come when there is no space left for Him to occupy. Sending the prayers of invitation to the Lord, we should wait in silence, concentrating our minds upon him, expecting to see Him at every moment, with a longing as strong as it is in the heart of a lover who expects to see his beloved who has been away from him for a long time. With that intense longing, we must wait to receive Him whenever He comes. As the tremendous longing of a lover makes him impatient and forces all the energy of his mind and heart to flow through one channel towards his beloved, so a true lover of God must have his mind and energy concentrated and one-pointed and then let it flow towards the divine Ideal. With that intense longing the soul will transcend all limitations and will be able to commune with the Lord. The stronger the longing, the quicker is the realization. We must have intense longing first, but that longing will not come to the soul which has not been awakened.

The awakening of the soul is the first step in the path of realization. The soul must be awakened from the sleep of self-delusion. We are now sleeping the sleep of self-delusion. We must wake up and see things as they are in reality and not as they appear to be. This awakening of the soul is called in Sanskrit *pratibhâ,* the first step in the path of realizaion. When the soul is awakened, it

begins to see how far the animal nature leads us and what is the next step, where we are going, what we are doing, what all this means. Then the soul tries to live a moral, ethical and righteous life. It tries to correct its faults and errors and to purify its inner nature.

The purification of the heart is the next step. It is called in Sanskrit *Sadhanâ,* or the state of neophyte. The awakened soul becomes a neophyte when he purifies his heart. The purification of the heart is possible when we have controlled our animal propensities, when we keep them down, rise above them, conquer them. Four things are absolutely necessary to attain to the purification of the heart. The practice of self-control, which means the control of the mind. The mind must be brought under control. You are the ruler of the mind. Mind is not your ruler, but you have allowed it to become your ruler and to enslave you. You must turn the tide and make it stay where it belongs. You are the master, but you have lost your mastery over your mind and senses. You have weakened yourself; you are weak now. How can you expect to have that realization when you are so weak that you cannot control your own mind and senses? They are your slaves; keep them as slaves. You are the master. Self-control is the first thing. Then comes the practice of truthfulness, because the eternal Truth cannot be attained by falsehood. We must be true to ourselves first, then true to our neighbours next to humanity and finally to God. Are we true to ourselves? No. Are we true to our real nature? No. We must be true to ourselves first. Truth is the second thing. Disinterested love for humanity is another; and unselfish work the next. Why should we remain selfish? What for? This little self is not much; sacrifice it upon the altar of humanity and be Christ. That is the ideal. If we can practise these four things during our lifetime, we have purified ourselves and made ourselves ready to receive the highest truths.

Right discrimination is the third step in the path of

realization discrimination between the spirit and matter, between the eternal and the non-eternal, between the real and the unreal. Now everything is mixed up. We mistake the real for the unreal, spirit for matter, and matter for spirit. We do not know the difference. Right discrimination will make us see the difference that exists. It will also enable us to see how far extends the realm of matter and where is the realm of the spirit. Right discrimination will clarify the entire position and will give us right knowledge of everything in the universe.

Non-attachment is the fourth step. Everything that does not belong to us must not affect us. If matter is not our being, it ought not to affect us. If senses are not parts of our true being, they must not produce any change in us. Why should they? If we are parts of Divinity, if we are unborn children of immortal bliss, why should we allow ourselves to be dragged on the sense-plane by these limitations and little attractions? Be godly. God is never attracted by these little sense desires. Why we, the children of God, should be attracted by these? We must be worthy of our Heavenly Father. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by these attractions. Attachment to earthly things cannot exist in the soul which has reached this step in the path of realization.

And then comes the fifth step, the step of spiritual enlightenment. In that state, the light of the divine Sun begins to shine in the soul. We then understand we are not of this world. This world is not our home. Earthly relations belong to the earth but we are essentially rooted in the world of spirit. We are above and beyond this earth. This body is only a physical shell, a gross garment of the soul. We shall be able to throw it aside and rise above it by our will-power. Then we shall know that the soul existed long before this body was born. Then we shall be able to say: "Before Abraham was, I am." This is

the expression of an eternal Truth, not of one individual soul alone, but of all. And when we are able to do that, then we know that death cannot attack us, birth cannot touch us. We are free from birth and death.

The next step is spiritual illumination. This is the sixth stage in our progress to realization. In this state the highest nature of our being runs with tremendous force like a mighty river towards the ocean of the Absolute. Nothing can check its course. It flows towards the Absolute and it communes with the Absolute; all earthly fetters fall off, desires of this world no longer rise, peace and omniscience begin to shine in the soul. There after nothing remains unknown. Past, present, future; everything becomes as clear as broad daylight. Then you will be able to say where those departed souls belong, what they are doing and where they are going. You will see many heavens and transcend them all. You will see how transitory they are. You will not care for them. God is not attracted by heavenly pleasures. Those mortals who are craving for pleasures like to imagine a place or a realm where they will be able to enjoy those pleasures through eternity. That is the expression of the desires of our own soul. Rising above all the celestial pleasures, then you will become divine. That is the last step. Then you will be conscious of your Divine nature. All the divine qualities will reveal through you. That state is called the seventh step, or the state of superconsciousness, Godconsciousness, *Samâdhi* or Nirvâna.

Godconsciousness can be attained in this life and not after the grave. In this state of unspeakable bliss your body will remain silent for the time being. You will rise above all these conditions, but you will be able to come back after realization. Then you will be a different being Your whole nature will be changed. You will be able to say to your relatives that they are not your relatives, just as Christ said to his mother: "Who is my mother? Who is my brother These are all my mothers and brothers.'

With the dawn of spiritual realization you will b

able to say the same with as much confidence and power as Christ did, you will not then see the blood-relation, but the spiritual relation. You will see that each soul is a child of God, and your whole being will be a dedication to humanity. He who has reached that state is a blessing to humanity. Life in this world would have been utterly dull and barren if it were destitude of such blessings. The world would not exist if such blessings did not come to us often. Such souls do exist even now. Even in this age of a dominant materialism and commercialism, there are souls who have reached such a state of realization, and when that state of realization is reached, nothing is left unaccomplished. All desires are fulfilled, all ambition is satisfied, the aspirations of the soul are completed. The soul has become divine, and it remains divine forever and ever.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

REALIZATION

The universal religion of Vedânta although accepts all the rituals, ceremonies and symbols used by various sects of the dualistic religions and encourages its followers to practise them at a certain stage of their spiritual growth yet it considers them as non-essentials. The essential part is the realization of the Truth that underlies them all. We must know the spiritual meaning for which each symbol, ritual or ceremony stands. Blind practice or unmeaning observance of the ritual and ceremony will not make one truly spiritual. These will not lead men to the realization of the true nature of the soul or of God and of their mutual relation. Religion which does not bring this kind of realization in the end is no religion at all. We do not call him religious in the truest sense of the term who has not realized the absolute Truth, who has not seen God. We may read scriptures and may listen to the eloquent sermons throughout our life, but what good will it do if we do not realize the Truth, if we do not see God, if we cannot become divine.

Being and becoming divine are the meaning of realization and it is, therefore, the highest ideal of the universal religion of Vedânta. To reach perfection and to manifest divine powers in daily life are included in realization. He who has attained to realization has become perfect and manifests divine powers. He is free from selfishness. His animal nature is conquered. He lives for the sake of humanity. He loves all living creatures equally. The doubts of his mind are solved, his questions answered. His soul rests in perfect peace. He has attained to absolute freedom and emancipation from all bondage. He feels the presence of Divinity within him as well as in all living creatures. He communes with the

divine Being and ultimately becomes one with Him. To realize God is to be Godly and divine. Francis Bacon said: "The truth of being and the truth of knowing are all one. A man is but what he knoweth." Is it not an echo of what Vedânta has taught for ages? As long as a thing remains distinct and separate from the knower, it is not known. We can know a thing by finding ourselves in close contact with the thing, by making our thought and the state of consciousness one with the thing. So, knowing Truth means to be one with the Truth. This is what is meant by *realization.*

Vedânta says: "A knower of *Brahman* or Divinity is divine, is one with Divinity." "*Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavati.*" Before a man can attain to that realization of Divinity he should have an earnest longing for the attainment of Divinity and he should sincerely search it within himself, he should concentrate his whole mind and energy upon it, because Vedânta says: "The Divinity cannot be realized by mere book-reading or the reading of the scriptures, neither by intellect, nor by the constant hearing of learned discourses about it. He who longs for it with intense love and devotion, realizes it and unto him the divine Being reveals his true nature." The same idea was conveyed by Jesus the Christ when he said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."[2] That asking must proceed from the soul, seeking must be from within and knocking must be at the temple-portal of Divinity that is closed behind the soul of ordinary mortals. It is not a physical knocking

1 "नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो
न मेधया बहुना श्रुतेन ।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष
आत्मा वृणते तनूं स्वाम ॥"
—*Mundakopanishat*, III, 2, 3.

2 St Matthew VII, 7.

but the soul must knock at the door that leads its entrance into the abode of the supreme Spirit. A Persian mystic poet beautifully described this spiritual knock at the door of the supreme Spirit: "There came one and knocked at the door of the Beloved and a voice answered and said, 'Who is there?' The lover replied: "It is I." "Go hence" returned the voice "there is no room within for thee and me." The lover went away disappointed and after spending sometime in penance and austerity returned again and knocked for a second time. Again the voice asked: 'Who is there?' The lover answered: 'It is I.' 'Go hence, there is no room within for thee and me,' was the reply. This time the lover was mortified in his heart, he went into wilderness, wept bitterly and spent a long time in constant prayer with humble spirit and unselfish devotion. When his egotism was completely vanquished, he repeated the knock for the third time and again the voice demanded: 'Who is there?' The lover answered 'It is thou,' 'Come in' said the voice, 'for I am within.' "

Thus when the soul knocks at the door of the supreme Spirit with humility and with pure and unselfish love and when the slightest tinge of egotism or the sense of *'I'* and *'mine'* is completely wipped off from the heart, the door opens in response to the knock. Then the soul enters the abode of God and realizes its spiritual oneness with the supreme Divinity.

It is then that the individual soul passing through the death of egoism resurrects from the mortal phenomena and enters into the plane of the eternal and absolute existence and enjoys the glory of Divine consciousness becoming free from the worldly sense of *'I'*, *'me'* and *'mine'*, the soul then exclaims : "I and my Father are one," and realizes the spirit of that oneness. This is the spiritual resurrection of the soul.

One should thus raise up one's soul sunk beneath the ocean of worldliness. This state of realization is called by different names, some call it

Christhood. Whosoever has reached that state has become a Christ. In Vedânta the same state is called *Samâdhi,* superconsciousness or Godconsciousness. Those who have studied the *Patanjala-darshana* or the science of Râja Yoga, will understand what *Samâdhi* means. The science of Râja Yoga teaches how this state of Godconsciousness can be attained through the practice of concentration and meditation and how the highest spiritual oneness with the Supreme can be realized in that state.

The daily practice of concentration and meditation will develop the spiritual power and when the concentrated mental powers are inwardly drawn, the result will be the spiritual illumination. With the help of that light self-knowledge or the knowledge of the true self will come. When the true nature of the soul is realized, its origin source and destiny will no longer remain unknown.

Each individual soul is a child of Divinity or the immortal bliss, for it is already potentially divine. The divine powers are latent in us. We must learn to unfold them and bring them on the conscious plane. We must be conscious of our divine nature and that is the aim of spiritual realization which is the ideal of the universal religion of Vedânta.

The seers of Truth in ancient India after their attainment of highest realization each declared before the world: "Hearken ye all children of immortal bliss and those that dwell in the sphere of gods! I have realized that divine Being whose eternal radiance shineth for ever far beyond all darkness. By realizing Him within the shrine of thy soul ye shall cross the ocean of death and shall reach the abode of immortality. There is no other way; there is no other way."

APPENDIX I.

*THE VEDANTIC TRUTH**

Before entering into the subject of my discourse of this evening allow me to thank Prof. Howison through whose kindness I have been favoured with the privilege of addressing this learned audience that have assembled here to night. I have been requested to give a general outline of the Vedânta philosophy. I suppose very few of us present here are familiar with the doctrines of this most ancient system of philosophy which have helped mankind in solving the most intricate problems of life and death and which have led the truth-seeking minds of all ages and climes to the threshhold of the abode of the absolute Reality of universe.

A student of Vedânta philosophy after studying the different philosophical systems of ancient Greece and modern Germany finds that the ultimate conclusions of the Western philosophers are like the faint echoes of the thundering expressions of what the ancient Vedic seers of Truth realized at least 2000 years before the Christian era. The monistic system of modern evolutionists like Dr. Le Conte, Romanes and Heackel finds its place in the utterances of the Vedic philosophers of ancient India. The present conception of the unity of existence that was ever expressed before the world is to be found in the Rig Veda the most ancient scripture of the world: "*ekam sad viprâ vahudhâ vadanti.*"

The truth-seeking minds of the Vedic philosophers did not stop at their researches until they could unify and harmonize the diverse phenomena of the universe into absolute oneness. After discovering the one ultimate source and goal of the universe they tried to explain through

* *Delivered in the University of California, in Sept.* 6, 1906.

logic and science the process by which that eternal one appears as manifold when looked through the limitations of time, space and causation. In their attempts they discovered the law of evolution which governs the cosmic phenomena. The philosophers who came later developed from those conclusions different systems of philosophy of which Sânkhya system of Kapila and the Vedânta philosophy stand most prominent. Kapila is called the father of evolution theory in India. He was the first who gave the most logical and scientific explanation of the process of cosmic evolution out of one eternal energy called *Prakriti*. Prof. Huxley admits this fact when he says the doctrine of evoluton was known to the Hindu sages long before Paul of Tarsus was born. Well has it been said by Sir M. M. Williams: "* * the Hindus were Spinozists more than two thousand years before the existence of Spinoza, and Darwinians many centuries before Darwin; and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the scientists of our time, and before any word like 'evolution' existed in any language of the world." The theory of special creation out of nothing was refuted by a Vedic sage as early as 1500 years before Christ with these words: "How can O my disciple something come out out of nothing?" Therefore, Vedânta does not teach the theory of special creation.

The fundamental principle of Vedânta is absolute oneness. There is one existence, one life, one spirit one Being in the universe. The very idea of separateness is unreal. Vedânta does not teach, as some people think, that the phenomenal world is a mere illusion. What is regarded as illusion in Vedânta is not the phenomenal but the attribution of true substantiality or essentiality to the phenomenal without the recognition of the underlying unity. But it teaches that the underlying reality is the absolute Being which is one. That absolute One is called by various names. It is *Brahman* in Vedânta. The same absolute Being was called by Plato the *Good*. It is the

Substantia of Spinoza, *Ding-an-sich* or the transcendental *thing-in-itself* of Kant, the *unknown and unknowable* of Herbert Spencer. Some call it Noumenon, Schopenhauer calls it the *Will,* Emerson calls it *Oversoul.* But Vedânta differs from these systems by unifying the subject and object in *Brahman.*

The thing-in-itself is a pure assumption of Kant a superficiality not in any way justified by Kant's own data. Hence, it is that the successors of Kant were forced to reject the Kantian thing-in-itself and set up pure rationalism as opposed to transcendentalism. The chief defect of the Kantian system is the unnatural separation of the thing-in-itself completely from the plane of experience. But Vedânta brings the thing-in-itself within the plane of experience and recognizes it in the conception of eternal entity or *Sat* which has all other things as attributes or relations. The same *Brahman* is *Sat* from the objective point of view and *Chit* or pure intelligence from the subjective standpoint. It is the infinite source of knowledge. It is the eternal Knower of the universe. The same *Brahman* when qualified by cosmic self-consciousness, omniscience and omnipotence appears as the Ruler of the universe; when qualified by the individual self-consciousness and imperfect knowledge constitutes the individual soul; and when qualified by total absence of self-consciousness forms the object or what we called 'matter.'

Thus Vedânta recognizes three entities in the universe: God, soul and matter though they are the emanations from the same absolute One, the seconless *Brahman.* The God of Vedânta is not an extra-cosmic Being. Vedânta gives a rational formation to religion which harmonizes with the latest conclusions of modern science and philosophy.

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