

Vedanta

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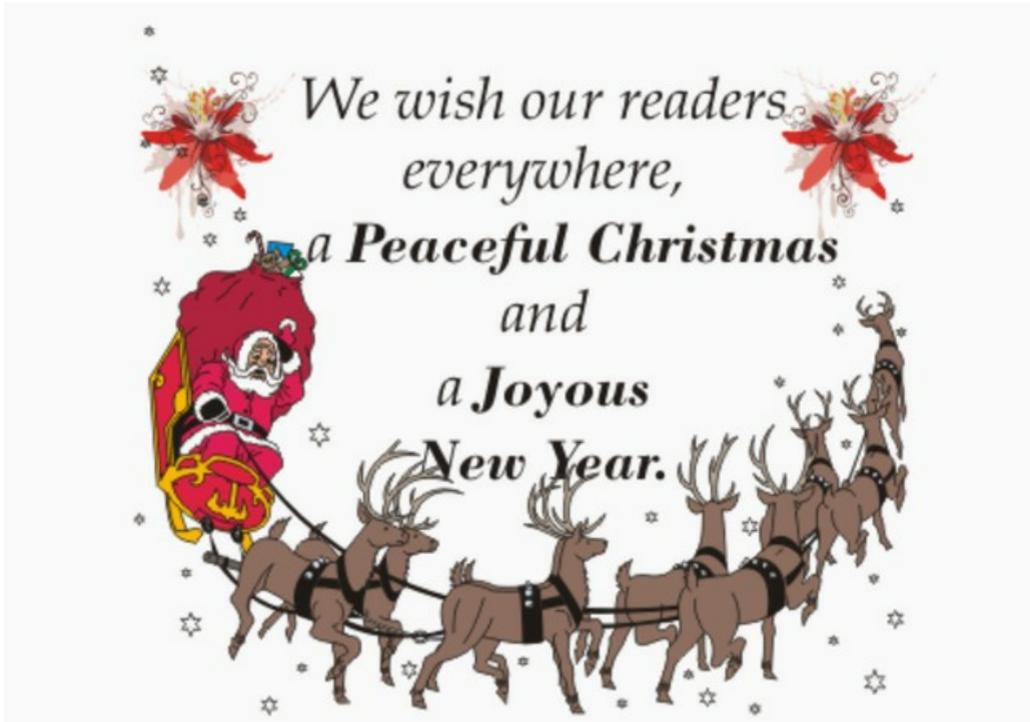
Spiritual Significance of Death

Swami Ashokananda

Jesus Christ Through Indian Eyes

M. Hafiz Syed





Divine Wisdom

An unforgettable event

Swami Vivekananda was rarely aware of his body.

A story in illustration of this was told to Sister Devamata by Miss Waldo. It took place in the front drawing room of a long, narrow room with two tall windows facing the street, between which hung a mirror "reaching from floor to ceiling."

This mirror (Devamata wrote) seemed to fascinate the Swami. He stood before it again and again, gazing at himself intently. In between he walked up and down the room, lost in thought.

Miss Waldo's (in whose house Swami Vivekananda was staying) eyes followed him anxiously. "*Now the bubble is going to burst,*" she thought. "*He is full of personal vanity.*"

Suddenly Swamiji turned to her and said: "*Ellen, it is the strangest thing, I cannot remember how I look. I look and look at myself in the glass, but the moment I turn away I forget completely what I look like.*"

continued on the inside back cover

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Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother -8

(Continued from the last issue)

We mentioned in our last editorial that before the actual worship is begun certain preparations must be made. The place of worship must be washed thoroughly and kept clean. Then all the utensils needed must be arranged in a prescribed order including a lighted lamp. Incense may also be used. The various articles of worship like water, sandal paste, flowers, etc., are kept ready for use near the worshipper who sits facing the deity.

Achamana

Since the goal of worship is to realize one's nature everything connected with worship must be purified ritually. The very first ritual in any worship is called *Achamana*, a purificatory ceremony. Here the worshipper sips water thrice uttering the name of the Deity imagining that his gross, subtle and casual bodies are being purified. Our lips are rendered impure by unholy words, eyes by unholy sight and ears by unholy sounds; hence they must be washed clean before we speak, see or hear holy things.

Then a *vedic* prayer is uttered: *The Sages always behold the Supreme Lord everywhere; through the power of this worship (like the sages) may I also be able to behold Him always.*

This *Achamana* ceremony is very important. In sipping water one repeats the name of *Vishnu* or God. This is to remind one, of the presence of God everywhere, especially in water. God, according to *Hindu* mythology, is supposed to reside in the water as *Narayana*. Water is considered as symbolic of the all-pervading *Brahman* and when the water is sipped it is supposed to purify the heart and make one conscious of the presence of God, in the worshipper's own heart as well as in all objects of nature. When a man, therefore,

does Achamana, knowing its full significance, is reminded of God everywhere as constituting the very essence of the universe. When this act is done many times, in the course of various practices, the worshipper comes to feel the presence of God everywhere. Water also represents in the symbolic language of the *Vedas* 'Shraddha'. Therefore sipping the water is supposed to produce shraddha (deep faith) which alone makes the ritual spiritually effective.

Every ceremony should begin after offering salutations to the Lord. The prayer goes thus:

Pure or impure, whatever one may be, one who remembers the holy name of the lord becomes holy both within and without.

Sankalpa

The next important step is called *Sankalpa*. Through this the worshipper is making a sacramental intention. This is a declaration of the purpose of the worship. This intention connects the will to the act of worship. It is the promise and resolution of the worshipper to himself that from now on he will try to focus his mind only on God; it is also a promise to God that he will curb all his impulses and try his best to remember Him. By the merit of the *Sankalpa* the attention and will of the worshipper are focused and raised up to a higher level.

The *Sankalpa* generally contains two parts – the negative and the positive. The negative side refers to freedom from sin or all obstructions to realization and the latter to the grace of God and a desire for devotion. Uttering of this *Sankalpa* at the very beginning of *Puja* makes the worshipper conscious of the purpose of *Puja*.

Similarly at the end of every *Puja* there is a final dedication of the whole ritual and its fruits to God. Here also the worshipper reminds himself that he has performed the *Puja* only for the sake of securing God's grace and not for any selfish purpose, and that the whole purpose of the ritual is only for the realization of God. Thus both the negative and positive aspects of the mental attitude

of the worshipper are emphasized both at the beginning and at the end.

Samanya Arghya

The next step is the consecration of the water to be used in worship by invoking in it the presence of the seven holy rivers of India. This consecrated water, called *samanya arghya*, is used for all the remaining rituals.

We mentioned earlier that water symbolizes '*shraddha*', because the best offering common to all worship is shraddha. The special vessel (called *Kosa*) which is used in this step represents the heart and filling of the vessel with water represents filling the heart with faith and devotion to God. The offering of water along with every other offering in the course of the Puja represents the accompaniment of shraddha which is necessary for all the worship to be spiritually effective.

This special vessel is placed on triangular lines representing the heart which is more or less of the shape of a triangle. The apex of the triangle is made to turn upwards to represent symbolically (like the Gothic tower of a church) the direction of the heart towards God. It is surrounded by a square and a circle which represent the gross body and causal body. A spiritual aspirant must develop this shraddha and must dedicate his life for the worship of God. The triangle may also represent control over thought, speech and action, and may indicate the dedication of all these to the worship of God. The holy word *Om* is uttered while pouring the water into the vessel to purify it with the thought of God. After this only other steps follow.

(To be continued)

The Spiritual Significance of Death

Swami Ashokananda

I

I hope you do not consider death a subject too grim for discussion. Many refuse to think of death, arguing it is enough if they live their lives properly without asking what happens afterwards. I think such avoidance of the thought of death is due partly to fear and partly to misunderstanding and ignorance.

We cannot understand life without knowing what death is and what lies beyond it. How can our birth, our life, and our actions in life have real significance unless they have a survival value? How can we be sure that we are not wasting our time and energy, unless we know that the fruits of our efforts on earth will have meaning and validity also in the other world, the world beyond death?

We must admit that life as we know it—bounded by birth and death—has no obvious meaning. Simply because we do things instinctively and find such doing interesting, does not mean our mode of living is real. It may well be that we are deluded. I am inclined to think that most of us are, for is it not true that we know very little, that our instinctive knowledge is extremely faulty? For thousands of years we have perceived reality in a certain way. Now science points out that our perceptions and conclusions are wrong—things are not what they seem. Our understanding of life also may well be mistaken. There is little doubt that most of us are ignorant. Because we happen to be in the majority, it does not follow that our ideas are trustworthy. We must probe deeply into life in order to understand it; and one way to deepen the understanding of life is to understand death.

At the present time there is a great interest in post-mortem phenomena. Spiritualism admits the existence of the soul and makes a great effort to find what happens to it after death. As a result there are many stories of after-death existence. Some departed souls are

said to establish direct contact with their loved ones on earth; others try, it is said, to reach them through mediums or to communicate with them by means of automatic writing. Even when such contacts and communications are genuine, the satisfaction derived from them is never permanent, and the benefit derived from them is doubtful. Besides, the chance of deception, especially of self-deception, is great.

Consider automatic writing, for instance. The claim is made that even living persons can inspire it. I remember a tragic case of three brothers who indulged in automatic writing. All were well educated the youngest was a brilliant student of mathematics, and the other two were lawyers. These young men composed many philosophical essays which they believed were really written through their hands by a great philosopher who lived about five hundred miles from their city. After some time one of the young men thought he received initiation from the sage through the same medium, automatic writing. Finally the brothers made a journey to the place where he lived, and upon arrival asked to see him, saying that one of them was his disciple. The sage replied that he did not know them and had not given initiation to any of them. When the brothers replied that they had been the medium through which he had written voluminously, he denied that he had done so and refused all responsibility for the writings. The brothers returned home disappointed and disillusioned.

In this talk I shall not concern myself with the kind of life departed souls live, nor even with the possibility of their communicating, either directly or indirectly, with relatives left on earth. The significance of death can no more be learned by conversing with spirits than an understanding of life can be acquired by conversing with average persons. How few comprehend the true significance of life! How many merely float on its surface! As the living may miss the meaning of life, so the departed may miss the meaning of death.

II

Various explanations are given of death. Materialists say that matter is the only substance, mind being merely a subtle form of matter. The physiologist explains that when the heart ceases to beat, the blood no longer assimilates the oxygen which the cells composing the vital organs need for their functions. Being deprived of it, the machinery of life fails, the cells die in masses, and the organs begin to disintegrate. This is, of course, a purely physical interpretation of death, and I shall not discuss it further. If it represented the meaning of death, it would also represent the meaning of life, and there would be no moral obligations, sense of duty, search for knowledge, or any other value in our existence here. We should merely be passing time. But even in saying this, we are assuming a '*we*' who would be passing time! If man is but an aggregate of organs made of cells, he is not a unitary being but a composite thing. In that case discussion of death, as of life, is not only meaningless but impossible.

There are those who are not materialists yet deny the existence of the soul. I am speaking of the Buddhists. They affirm the continuity of existence, not because of the immortality of the soul but because of the persistence of karma. They say that all actions leave impressions on the mind and that such impressions do not die with the death of the body but build up, time and again, other conscious organisms with physical and mental components. This process is said to form the continuity of existence. Is it not better to assume the continuity of soul rather than the continuity of karma as the most essential element in man?

Let us forget the materialistic and the Buddhistic views and hold to the proposition that the soul exists, that the soul is immortal, and that it dwells within the body and the mind. Vedanta maintains that the soul is clothed with three bodies : the causal body, the subtle body and the gross body. It is the conclusion of our philosophers that the mind does not die with the death of the physical body, but that the

soul departs intact with the two inner bodies, the subtle (the lower mind) and the causal (the higher mind). Therefore, the impressions made upon the mind during life remain with the soul, and only the physical body is left behind.

Death has two phases : it appears differently to the living and to the dying. When we think of death, we, the living, generally form an extraneous picture of it; we think of its objective phase. We observe that the dying person loses consciousness, that he is unable to see, hear or speak with normal clarity, and that he breathes with great difficulty. Sometimes he appears to suffer terrible agony at the time of passing. All bodily processes stop; the breath goes out; and we say that the soul has departed, that the man has died.

In regard to the subjective phase of death, that is, death as it is experienced by the dying rather than as observed by the living, we are told that when a spiritually undeveloped soul separates from the body, it feels all the shock and agony such separation implies, whereas when a spiritually developed soul departs, its passing is easy and smooth, and there is no attendant agony.

Even when the dying man appears outwardly unconscious, he is inwardly conscious and experiences the transition from life to after-life. At the dying moment his whole past life is said to pass before him as a quickly moving panorama, and certain tendencies and characteristics of his life begin to assume prepotence. Coloured and influenced by them, he departs, and the nature of the departure is determined by these predominant tendencies and characteristics. If they are good, the passing is pleasant; if not, it is unpleasant.

When a soul struggles hard and suffers great agony because it resists separation from the body and the world, on passing it appears stunned by the blow of death, and it requires some time to recover alertness. Even when full consciousness returns, it is not immediately able to determine its course. It drifts for a while, and only later is it able to find its way to a suitable plane of existence.

What do you think makes the soul resist separation from the body and the world, with the result that death means agony and struggle? Suppose I have lived in a certain place for fifteen or twenty years, that I have developed countless interests there, and that I have become fond of my neighbours. Suppose I am forced to leave that place at a moment's notice—what a stunning blow it will be to me! Finding myself torn away from all I knew and loved. I shall suffer greatly. Death is that kind of separation, and to those who have been much attached to life it is certainly painful.

As long as we enjoy life we shall be attached to it; so some philosophers say it is kind of the Lord to visit men with illness in their last days, for without a period of suffering before death, their clinging to life will not relax. If I suffer a lengthy illness, I shall no longer enjoy the things which gave pleasure in health. You may tell me of a beautiful play that has come to the town or of a new book, but they will not interest me. During a protracted illness everything loses its flavour; we grow disappointed with earthly life; and our mind is gradually prepared to withdraw. Even when it does not become consciously ready to do so, the pain of separation is much less acute than when death comes suddenly. Accidental death is therefore considered undesirable.

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of people; one kind is prepared for death and the other is not. As we have seen, those who have become detached from the world pass away easily and painlessly when the hour of death comes, while those who are attached to the world die in an agony which persists after death.

Many console themselves with the belief that however painful dying may prove, endless happiness will be theirs after death. They think they will be reunited with their loved ones who have gone before. Do not picture death so sentimentally. Let us forget the fairy stories we were taught in childhood—we adults should be able to think more realistically. Do you consider the prospect of an endless

family reunion after death so desirable? Love we should have, but it becomes unbearable if we do not, at the same time, feel independent. Whenever affection becomes a bondage, it is unendurable. Even here, if our family members cling together every moment of the day, do we not find it intolerable? Family reunions are all very well on *Thanksgiving and Christmas*, but we could not stand them throughout eternity. Is there any reason for thinking God has so arranged things that after death we shall be compelled to suffer the eternal bondage of eternal family relationships?

Many doubtless believe that we become so perfect after death that life in the other world is ideal, and not tiresome. But what is your idea of perfection? If you are perfect, can you have all kinds of relationships, cravings and attachments? These are possible only in imperfection. Family relationships arise of necessity from our limited being, because we are dependent upon others for the fulfilment of our desires. When we are perfect and therefore complete in ourselves, we do not need father, mother, son, daughter, friends and the like. Relationships then become meaningless. The perfect being cannot be related; only in imperfection is relationship possible.

Consider the implications of childhood beliefs concerning death, and you will understand how irrational they are. The idea that after death we continue the earthly existence in an idealized form has no validity. Death rudely snatches us away, and this sudden departure is indeed very painful unless we have prepared ourselves for death even while living.

III

You may say, "This is a strange teaching. Why should we prepare for death while living? Is it not abnormal to dwell on death?" All religions have attached great importance to death, and have recommended preparation for it. Hinduism also insists on our preparing ourselves for death. It teaches that we should do this by developing proper conditions of mind for it maintains that our state

after death and our existence in the next incarnation will be determined by whatever thought we entertain at the time of passing. The thought that comes to the dying is considered not to be in any sense subject to chance, but to be the result of the entire life of which the individual is taking leave. This being so, we must take great care to make our whole life a preparation for death.

I confess I dislike the idea of being at the mercy of either life or death. We belong to neither the one nor the other. Instead of preparing for either, we should rather prepare for eternity, which is beyond both.

Though no doubt this idea occurs in most religions, it is certainly prominent in Vedanta. The Upanishads have often declared that here on earth we must realize the Eternal; that what we are in this life, we are in the next life also; that if we do not reach our goal in this life, we do not do so in the next. I prefer such an approach to life and death. If, however, we are still floating on the surface of life and there is no likelihood in this incarnation of our realizing the Eternal, probably the best thing for us is to prepare for death, so that we may have peace at the time of our passing and be prepared for a more spiritual life in our next birth.

If life is lived so that one is truly prepared for death, the passing will not only be easy, but actually bring spiritual consummation. Convinced that the relations of the worldly life have no validity beyond death, one should renounce them, and thus having left the world behind, should fix the mind on the Eternal. The *Bhagavad-Gita* says : "*He who at the time of death, meditating on Me alone, goes forth leaving the body, attains My Being. There is no doubt of this.*"

That indeed instructs us concerning the ideal way to die, but can we follow the instruction? I have seen some pass in this way, raising their consciousness to a high level, fixing it on God, and departing in meditation. For such a passing there must be continuous preparation, and this preparation, this training of the mind, should be undertaken

by all. It should be made a vital part of the plan of living. At least one period in our life should be dedicated entirely to such spiritual culture.

According to the Hindu scriptures, life should be divided into four stages, of which the last should be given to complete renunciation. The first stage is student life; the next is that of the householder; and the third is the life of contemplation, into which many in India retire when they reach approximately their fiftieth year. Formerly, at this stage of life people renounced their homes and went to live as hermits in the forest. Nowadays it is not always practicable to go to the forest; so they often seek holy places, where they can live in retirement, devoting themselves to spiritual practices.

One summer I visited the sacred city of Puri on the Bay of Bengal. There, in the dark of early morning while dawn is just breaking, hundreds of worshippers go to the temple of Jagannatha, the Lord of the Universe. I still remember vividly the inspiration of seeing their white-clad figures gleaming in the darkness, as they waited calmly for the temple door to open. Countless were the hours such devotees spent in the temple in meditation. Even in Calcutta, which is modern and not looked upon as a holy city, many men and women may be seen in the dark hours of early morning hurrying to the sacred Ganges to bathe and meditate. I remember the face of a woman I once saw returning from the river. She was the very personification of profound meditation—infinite calm and power dwelt in her eyes. I cannot forget that face.

Preparation for death must be started long before we die—years and years of effort should be devoted to it. When children are grown and our duties to family and community are finished, we usually hope to spend our remaining years in recreation, perhaps in travel, but this is not the right way to spend those precious years.

Why live on the surface of life forever? Having discharged his duties, a man should dive deep in contemplation. He should penetrate the depths of life and find its true meaning. He should be able to go

deep into his soul, to enter into the holy of holies of his being and through it reach the heart of the universe. When we have finished with our duties and responsibilities, it is surely time to devote ourselves to spiritual practice. By doing so we not only fulfil our highest possibilities but also become of great service to the community.

Rather than blame young people for their unrestrained life, we should censure the old who set a bad example. If the young could see around them older men and women who were the very embodiments of sincerity, love and purity, they would feel inspired by their example. Do not think yourself useless in middle age and old age because you cannot frisk about like the young. If these later years are devoted to the quieting and purifying of the mind, to the spiritualization of thought and life, the greatest aim of life can be achieved, and death will not mean destruction, but fulfilment.

However, no one seeks the truth and joy of contemplation or tries to quiet the mind unless he first assimilates the basic truth that there is nothing on the surface of life, that life and reality as we ordinarily know them are always changing and vanishing away. Such is indeed one of the great truths to be learned from death. The dying and the dead impress it on the minds of those they leave behind, who can benefit from it if they so wish.

Picture existence to yourself. Consider how the soul moves from birth to childhood, manhood, old age, and death. Hindus have a term for this movement—samsara. It means continuous movement, transmigration. Each of us must assimilate the truth of samsara. Do you think anyone should resist this continuous movement and change? Should I expect my childhood to return, or hold forever to my present condition of being? If I am intelligent, I shall not attempt to cling to anything. I shall let everything move, change, and pass away; only I shall try to extract the best from every moment. The continuous movement, signifying that the soul is passing through many stages, does not cease with death, but

continues to an ultimate end. What is this destination? Our limited personal experience may not always disclose its nature, but we have the knowers of God and the scriptures to enlighten us.

Our ultimate end is conceivable only in terms of the Absolute, for nothing limited and relative can be permanent. To attain our destiny we have to realize the state of infinitude beyond all time and conditions, and to reach that state we must undergo disciplines to break our bondage to the finite. Our present life has justification only to the extent that it succeeds in breaking it.

The basic cause of bondage is ignorance, the belief that we are limited mortal beings, rather than the free, self-fulfilled Spirit. Our bondage is composed of the many attachments we have formed, of the many cravings we have for worldly possessions and joys. We rid ourselves of our attachments and cravings partly by satisfying them and learning the emptiness of such satisfaction, and partly by reasoning, through which we become convinced of their unreality. Understanding gradually dawns and grows clearer, until we realize that we are pure Spirit. It is thus that we solve the problems of life. The soul goes on moving from incarnation to incarnation until it realizes that it requires no further experience, because everything to be known, it has found within itself.

This is the general picture of the journey of the soul, a journey which is punctuated not only by the ceaseless and comparatively small changes in our lives, but by the recurrent and revolutionary change called death. As we would not resist the little changes, so we should not resist the profound change death, because it is urgently needed in the long journey undertaken by the soul.

Why is death urgently needed? After the soul has lived here in the flesh for a long time, the mind and body tire of activities and decline sets in, so that we no longer assimilate further experience, and forget even what we once knew. At this time rest is, of course, called for, and death is a wise provision. Is it not better to depart for a period of repose

and come back to learn anew? Death is indeed a most welcome friend when it comes at the proper hour.

When life is comprehended as part of a larger scheme of existence and attainment, it at once becomes truly purposive. Then we grow aware of an eternal fulfilment toward which we are moving. This eternal end does not belong to any particular time or space, but being eternal and infinite in nature, is forever existent and therefore inherent in our life, perceivable here and now. We do not perceive it because our present mode of perception is distorted by our partial recognition of reality, by our identification with superficial life, and by our complete ignoring of death.

If we could with an equal mind welcome the two aspects of the long journey of the soul, that is, both life and death, our perception would become clarified and the truth would be immediately recognized. It is to bring to our consciousness the need of such equanimity that death always follows life, that even through life it comes in disguise almost every day. Is not life really another name for death? Our present is reared upon the extinction of our past. Anything that happens can happen only because what preceded it is gone. Thus we are continually accompanied by the shadow of death through the twenty-four hours of every day, although we may fail to recognize it.

In falling asleep, do we not really enter into death? Every night nature separates us from the waking world, the only world that is real to us. We become virtually dead. We do not see, hear or perceive anything we are not aware of our near and dear ones; we become unconscious of all the relationships of earthly life. Every night we are made to pass through this experience, but we simply call it sleep and do not try to understand it in any deeper sense.

If we study ourselves we shall notice that we exercise most of our deeper faculties unconsciously and instinctively. We do many remarkable things. We have great power of self-withdrawal, but it is unconscious. We separate from this life, from this body, and even from

the mind we actually attain the transcendental Self every day, but we do so unconsciously. If we could effect all this consciously, it would at once disclose profound meaning to us. Death is indeed a withdrawal, a separation from superficial life, but it is involuntary. When we can die, that is, withdraw and separate from life, consciously and deliberately, we shall perceive death differently and succeed in balancing life and death in one single perception—and we shall become free from the bondage of life. This is what is meant by combining life and death. We should practise this combination in everything we do. We should learn to die deliberately.

I have already mentioned what death means subjectively, that is, to the one who dies but we are now ready to consider it further. Suppose I died a moment ago. What do you think is the state of my consciousness now? What am I thinking and feeling? I discover that the preoccupations of the life I have just left behind are no longer valid. Whatever I possessed in life is now beyond my reach and useless to me. All the relative things that harassed me have entirely lost significance. The world I knew when endowed with a body and a limited number of senses has changed its character, and another world is appearing before me. Many things which I did while living and thought worthwhile seem meaningless now, and I find that I wasted my time.

Such being the implications of death, let us say to ourselves as we deliberately practise dying while living : "*We shall hold to that alone which is immortal.*" What is it that survives death? Should we give up all human relationships? No, that is not my meaning. We can know any man in terms of impermanence or of permanence. We can relate ourselves to him as a temporal or as an eternal being. If we want to include death in our scheme of life, we shall wisely relate ourselves to the eternal rather than to the temporal in him. We shall give recognition only to what will survive change, destruction and death.

We shall pay attention not to the changeable, but to the unchangeable alone.

Here some of you may say, *"We admit an eternal element in everything and every being, but how about the infinite number of duties that have to be done? We must earn our living, help others, and share and fulfil the common responsibilities of life, and these concerns do not pertain to the eternal. How then can we combine life and death in our existence?"* You are justified in asking this, for our usual activities apparently have no eternal meaning. But when even these are done in the right spirit, they partake of the character of the eternal.

If I prepare a meal to satisfy my own hunger or because I am fond of delicacies, the act is earthly and binding; but if I do it as an offering to the Lord who dwells within me and also in the heart of the hungry man to whom I may offer it, then it takes on the character of a sacrament. Everything can be done in the sacramental spirit. I am aware that even when our daily activities are done in this spirit, they are still not absolutely eternal, but they are very close to the eternal and therefore much less binding.

If a man works eight or nine hours a day in order to earn two hundred dollars a month, little time or strength remains for spiritual practice. But if he earns this money thinking not of self-gratification or enjoyment but of learning to manifest his soul and to help others to work out their spiritual destiny, and if he devotes whatever he can spare to charity, then the earning of the money becomes an act of worship.

To illustrate this point further, let me say that although speaking to you of spiritual truths is a spiritual action, even that becomes unspiritual if I do not maintain true ideas about you and this action of mine. If I fail to perceive the eternal in you, whatever I do will have only temporary value, will belong to death, and death will claim it; it will not prove eternal. But if I have the right attitude, this action will not be an obstruction to the realization of the eternal consciousness.

So we try continually to reach the eternal in everything we know or do, and in this way gradually become detached from the superficialities of life. Do you understand what a spiritual man does? He not only conquers life here but also conquers death here. He dies while yet in this world. I mean that he consciously and deliberately experiences here and now what occurs at death, and that he thereby transcends death.

We have seen that the process of dying means complete separation from the body, from attachments to the outside world, and from the allurements of life. Any of us can deliberately accomplish such separation now. If we are not attached to this body, it dies, as it were, even while we are yet living in it.

You may ask, "*Should we refuse to breathe? Should we prevent the body from functioning*"? Yes, if you could do so as a master, that would certainly be a conquest of the body and of life, and the body and life would trouble you no more, nor would this be suicide. But since very few can do so as a master, what I suggest is this : conquer the body that it may cease to clamour for anything. Then even when hungry, it will not trouble you. However, hunger is less pernicious than some of the other bodily cravings which hold one down to life and consequently to death, and which completely obstruct spirituality. All obstructions, whether small or large, have to be eradicated.

You can indeed overcome all obstructions now, and when separation from the body is achieved—yes, friends, by gradual degrees one at last comes to feel distinct from it every moment—you will know that you are the Infinite One. that you are pure Spirit, master of both life and death. Your mind will stand still; and though apparently continuing to live on earth, though apparently continuing to work, to feel and to know, you will nevertheless perceive the great Silence—the formless transcendental Being and Consciousness underlying all superficial activities.

IV

When such detachment and separation are realized, death reveals to us a yet profounder aspect. Neither the dying nor those left behind understand this aspect unless they have already acquired spiritual vision, unless they have incorporated death in life and thereby corrected distorted perception. Having done so they are at last in a position to perceive death at its deepest.

Our infinite experience is marked by infinite changes, many of which we cannot even perceive at the time of their occurrence. When one state is followed by another state, there is between them an unnoticeable interval. What is the nature of this hiatus? What is the nature of the indefinable moment which is neither this state nor the one that follows? Of the long series of intervals, I should like to picture the particular interval when this life has ceased to be and the next life has not yet begun. What is that indefinable interval?

Let us say that I have been separated from earthly existence by death. The relative life and the consciousness connected with it fall away from me. I no longer feel that every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening I must appear on the platform or that I must sleep, eat, work, meet people—all these infinite temporal details have entirely disappeared. Of course, if I have not already attained the Eternal, another life with similar details is lying in wait for me. But the moment between these two lives—what is it?

Often we think of death as a long peaceful sleep, a cessation of all experience and activity. Such thought certainly does not infer a deep understanding of death. Nevertheless, even such an understanding contains a fragment of a truth which often eludes us, the truth that the real nature of death is the complete negation of this life and all that pertains to it, that in death nothing remains. Buddha recognized this truth. That is why he called the full realization of it nirvana, by which he meant both extinction and illumination.

The subtle nature of death that we have tried to understand as the moment between two changes or the moment between two lives, completely eludes a mind devoid of subtle perception. But when death is understood in this true way, it is the same as the realization of pure Spirit, because in that, too, all forms are extinct.

Do you know when the highest truth is revealed to us? *In that one moment*. In it the Transcendental flashes, but before we are aware of it, another life seems to overshadow it. That moment of nonexistence, that moment of death, contains the essence of truth. Have you ever noted how the hum of conversation in a crowded room can lapse suddenly for a moment into absolute silence, which is shattered the next moment by resumed conversation? That moment of silence illustrates death as we are now trying to understand it—death which is of the nature of the Supreme Divinity. We have a name for God—*Mahakala*, the Great Death. Do not think that such a name is indicative of morbidity? It shows a very profound understanding of the Divine nature.

The word Mahakala also means the *Great Time*. Have you ever tried to perceive pure time? As we cognize it, time is like a stream, the surface of which is so covered with floating things that we are unable to see the stream itself. Events crowd and hide time, so that it is never revealed to us in its true nature; but if events were eliminated, we should know pure time, pure duration. We would then find time or duration to be the same as eternity, the same as death. Death in its essential nature is not an event; it is therefore realizable at any time and is far more fundamental than life as we know it.

Life is like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. As the leaf floats above the pool, drops of water sometimes splash upon it, shine and tremble with the passing breeze, and then fall into the pool again. If the drop of water on the lotus leaf is life, the water in the pool is death. Life slips into death. Falling into the pool and mingling with its water does not mean loss and destruction to the drop, but a realization of and

release into infinity. True death is really a most wonderful revelation. Infinite peace is there, infinite joy and fulfilment. As a mother takes her child to her breast in deep affection, so the Great Death gathers us into its arms, and in that embrace we feel loving union with the Eternal.

In Paris, a young man came to Swami Vivekananda and sought to become his disciple. The Swami said, "*You want to follow me? Then you will have to embrace death. I teach death!*" The young man grew frightened and went away, but later he came to America and told this story to one of our Swamis, saying that now he understood what Swamiji meant and that he would follow him if he were yet here.

How true it is that neither life nor death is what we ordinarily think it to be! To understand life we must transcend the life of the body and the lower mind and try to perceive reality in the higher consciousness, which is truer and more certain than our so-called normal consciousness. We who are left behind can never really know death by observing it from the outside. If we ourselves were to die this moment, even then we should not understand it, unless we were properly prepared. But if we dive deep into this life, then indeed we shall be able to perceive profound meaning in death.

Let me reiterate the facts concerning the true nature of death. It reveals to us the great truth that reality is not on the surface. In a more intimate revelation it is seen by us as identical with the Eternal, the Highest Consciousness, the Great Death, the Great Time. In it time and eternity are one, in it life and absence of life are one.

This is the one truth, *the only truth*. If we want to understand death in this way and conquer both life and death, the practical thing is to unite death and life here and now. Make room for death in the scheme of your life, not in a morbid way, by sleeping in coffins or wearing long faces, but in a heroic way, with knowledge and understanding. You will find there is nothing more stimulating in life than death.

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Jesus Christ Through Indian Eyes

M. Hafiz Syed

Christianity claims to be the sole custodian of Truth. It takes Christ to be the only begotten son of God. To speak of Christianity side by side with other religions in the same breath is considered, in certain quarters, as nothing short of sacrilege. Hinduism is looked down upon as a pagan faith with no solid foundation and with idolatry as its basic principle. This surely, is the verdict of unenlightened people who have never cared to study the tenets of any faith comparatively.

Those who have taken the trouble of studying and understanding both these religions, Hinduism and Christianity impartially have come to the conclusion that both aim at purifying the human heart and ultimately leading man to the source of his being. Those who have some insight into the mysteries of religious life have come to believe that higher Hinduism, minus all its accretions and latter-day interpolations, is a universal religion that appeals to all shades of opinion and provides spiritual food for all types of men.

The more it is studied, the more does it illuminate the intellect and satisfy the heart.

A critical study of Christian theology reveals some teachings which need satisfactory explanation. Others present insuperable difficulties in fully grasping their underlying meaning and true significance. Let us take some of them one by one and see what light ancient Hinduism throws on some of the gaps that one finds in them and on the mysteries that underlie them :

(1) The doctrine of original sin cannot be reconciled with the divine nature of man accepted and believed by almost all the religions of the Aryan stock. In the Christian scriptures it is said that man was made after the image of God. How are these two seemingly contradictory teachings to be reconciled?

Man in general, humanity as a whole, is born in sin, in sinful surroundings, with sinful desires. In other words, according to the teachings of higher Hinduism, the soul (*Jivatma*) descends into the material forms and completely identifies itself with earthly vehicles. The characteristic of this period of man's life is sensual enjoyment, reckless plunging into all kinds of pleasure — an undesirable kind of life in short. Till such time as he is tired out and finally satiated with earthly enjoyments he is under the full dominance of his passionate nature and of wrong-doing. In a word, he leads a sinful life, in so far as he does not act in accordance with a moral standard and in harmony with Divine Law. He totally forgets sometimes his higher self and disregards moral sanctions.

But these vicious tendencies in him do not last for ever. There comes a time when he is awakened to a higher sense of values. From that moment onward he begins to turn spirit-ward; his evil ways are dropped one by one and he begins to tread what is called the path of return. This view of life explains the meaning of original sin. There is a deeper meaning also underlying this doctrine. In the words of Ramana Maharshi :

Sin is said to be in man; but there is no manhood in sleep; manhood comes on waking, along with the thought, I am this body; thought is the real original sin; it must be removed by the death of the ego; after which this thought will not arise.

Further he explained the truth of Christian teaching in these convincing words :

The body is the cross; the ego is Jesus, the son of man; when he is crucified, he is resurrected as the 'son of God', which is the glorious real Self. One should lose the ego in order to live in the true sense of the word.

(2) The kingdom of Heaven is within *you*. The word heaven stands for other-worldliness, peace, harmony and wisdom. The ancient Indian sages have taught us in unequivocal words that there is no happiness for a man outside his own higher Self, the nature of

which is bliss, *ananda*, and that this reality dwells in the heart which is the seat of the Divine Self.

Christ believed with whole-hearted conviction in what he called the kingdom of God, and he meant by this something inward, spiritual, natural and eternal, something diametrically opposite to that messianic Kingdom to the advent of which his contemporaries looked forward—a kingdom which was conceived of as outward, visible and temporal.

According to Indian thought, the Kingdom of God is already in us; all that men need to do in order to hasten its advent is to realise its presence. The kingdom of God is, in the first place, the kingdom of soul-life, the kingdom of the realised presence of God in the soul of man. It has no limits, either temporal or spatial. It is here, if anywhere. It is now, if it will ever be. We do not wait for its advent. It is in the midst of us. When we pray, as Christ taught us to pray, that it may *come*, we are praying that we may realize its hidden presence.

Further, Indian sages have taught us that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of intrinsic reality. The final measure of reality belongs to it, and to it alone. By reference to its hidden treasure all other ends, all other joys, are as shadows and dreams. When a man has found this pearl of great price, he will sell all that he has in order that he may acquire that inward prize.

The kingdom of God is attained by the age-long method of Soul-growth. The law of growth is the master law of Nature's being, and therefore the master law of human life : *To realize the divine potencies of one's nature, to become the God that one really is (though now in the germ), to earn the right to say, I and my father are one.*

It may be added that the kingdom is open to all men. The least and lowliest of us is a ray of the divine light. The chosen people is Humanity. God is their All-Father, the *light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* In the *inward kingdom*, there is neither

Jew nor Greek, there is neither bound nor free; for *God is all and in all*. Do we not know that most of the sages and saints of India have proclaimed in no uncertain language that God is the ideal Self of man because He is the ideal end? It follows from these premises that the duty of man is to find his higher Self; to grow towards the spiritual perfection of which his nature is capable.

(3) The Self in a sense is All in All. It is spoken of in the Upanishads as the Totality, of which the worlds and the creatures are fractions, though in absolute truth it has no fractions. Thus to gain the Self is to gain the All. The sacred lore of the Hindus tell us:

That which is infinite is happiness; in the finite there is no happiness.

We are taught that the Self alone is great; all else is infinitesimally small. This view of spiritual values makes the famous enigmatical saying of Jesus Christ as clear as day light.

What doth it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

For a very small price the surrender of the ego—this infinitely great Self is to be had. But this small price has to be paid.

(4) Another precept of Jesus which remains as a *hard saying* to his followers:

Be ye therefore perfect even as your father who is in heaven is perfect.

The ordinary Christian, full of ordinary frailties and weaknesses, asks how he can become perfect as God is perfect. Seeing the impossibility of the achievement set before him, he quietly puts it aside, and thinks no more about it. But seeing it as the crowning effort of many lives of steady improvement it comes within calculable distance of our achievement and these precious words yield meaning beyond our limited vision and hope. This view of gradual development is not generally accepted by the Christian divines.

Light, once again comes from the Indian sages who point this path of final perfection in clear and unmistakable language. They

rightly believe in the gradual evolution of man's mental and moral faculties. The highest aim of a Hindu neophyte is to become perfect in due course of time by gaining experience in every walk of life, through sorrow, suffering and moral struggle which finally lead him on to the goal of perfection. Christ's words seem to be more in keeping with the age-old teaching of the ancient *Rishis* than with the interpretation of the Christian divines.

(5) *Love thy neighbour as thyself; love those who hate you; bless those who curse you.*

The question that at once arises is why one should love one's neighbour as one's own self when the neighbour refuses to recognise his oneness with oneself. The Indian sages have taught us that the higher Self of man is an indivisible unity. This common life is shared by all— good or bad, rich or poor, high or low, saint or sinner. Therefore an injury done to my neighbour is an injury done to me. There is no other self than my own self. Hence this consistent and logical injunction to love others as one should love one's own self. Further, to meet life with unwavering trust is to take for granted that light, not darkness, is the heart of nature; and to believe in that light is to love it and to love it is to love all things for its sake. In the Christ-like life there is, in the last resort, but one motive for action, love.

Sweeping aside as frivolous and inquisitorial the ever-increasing multitude of rules which complicated the life and burdened the conscience of the zealous Jew, Christ gave instead two cardinal commandments which are essentially one :

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

In these words the doom of the old dispensation is pronounced, and the gates of the kingdom of Heaven—the kingdom of freedom and love—are thrown open to all. The only way in which we can

interpret our realization of unity in the world of the relative is through love for all creatures; just as any kind of hurtful action is a denial of the Reality in which all are one, so are self-sacrifice, love for all that lives and service of our fellow-men – the expressions in the world of relativity of that Supreme Reality which can never be fully expressed here, the utter unity of all that is.

(6) The Holy Trinity. One of the basic doctrines of Christianity is belief in the Divine Triad. To a non-Christian it may appear confusing but its underlying meaning is clear. According to ancient Hindu thought the manifested God, the One, appears as three. Among the Hindus the philosophers speak of the manifested Brahman as *Sat, Chit, Ananda*, Existence, Intelligence and Bliss. Popularly God is a Trinity : Brahma the Creator of the Universe; Vishnu, the Preserver; Siva, the Destroyer.

(7) Now let us take three famous verses from the Sermon on the Mount :

Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

To whom does this apply? Can an average man act up to this high ideal? Obviously it is the teaching for a man striving to become perfect, but for the man of the world it is almost impracticable. Christianity has not made this distinction; but it actually practises the distinction although it does not realize it theoretically. The effect of recognising a thing that we do not practise is to demoralise us and not to raise us. If we profess that it is our theory of life that, when a thing is stolen from us, we give the thief something more, and then if we do not practise it, we are surely hypocrites and hypocrisy is one of the worst vices.

True practice and theory make life in all parts sacred not secular. On Sunday the Christian goes to Church and admires the Sermon

on the Mount. On Monday he goes to his office and orders the prosecution of his cheating neighbour. The one life is sacred; the other is secular, profane. Hinduism permeates the whole life with religion and there is no part of the life of the Hindu which cannot form part of his faith. From the explanation we are led to believe that this teaching, lofty as it is, cannot possibly be followed by the ordinary run of humanity. That is why it is disregarded as something visionary and beyond the moral capacities of an average man. When it is viewed in the light of ancient Hindu teaching its infeasibility loses its force and it appears to be sound and sensible in its underlying significance.

The ancient Hindus have never believed in absolute morality. The relativity of the Hindu ideal of dharma is acknowledged by the contending schools of Indian philosophy. The Hindus do not look upon all mankind as on the same level of thought and morality. There are different gradations of men. Therefore the moral or spiritual laws guiding man's destiny must necessarily be different at different stages. What is right for a babe cannot be right for a boy. Similarly what is right for an undeveloped soul cannot be right for a morally awakened man.

This teaching is meant for an advanced soul who has no interest in earthly joys and has renounced them joyfully as he has found something higher and more valuable than what he had. Such people are called *Sanyasins* (monks).

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The Message of The Upanishads

S. S. Raghavachar

It has become conventional to contrast the impulse originating Indian philosophy with that which brought into existence Greek and through it Western philosophical thought. It is said that wonder or curiosity is the basis of European philosophy, while in India philosophic inquiry was initiated by the pragmatic necessity of eradicating the evils of life. The contrast implies that knowledge for its own sake is not valued in Indian thought and that truth enjoys only an instrumental value, since salvation and not understanding, it is said, is the goal of philosophy. Since the implication is of a serious nature, it is worthwhile going into the question of the accuracy of this conventionally drawn contrast.

There are two pertinent considerations: Firstly, it is to be noted that in all the schools of Indian thought that preach the ideal of salvation, the ideal is construed as attainable only through enlightenment. While knowledge is made an instrumental value, it is advocated as the one means for attaining perfection. The origin of all the evils of life is said to be ignorance. Thus good and evil are interpreted as truth and error. The seeming subordination of knowledge is virtually cancelled by the exaltation of knowledge as the pathway to perfection. Thus philosophical insight is not a child of wonder but an absolute necessity for the higher life. To hold that knowledge is its own justification is undoubtedly to place it high in the scale of values; but to advocate it as the only means of ideal life is to accord to it the highest value.

Surely the vision of reality is valued in some such spirit by the greatest of Western philosophers like Plato and Spinoza. For Indian philosophy direct experience (*Darshana*) is the final means of

spiritual liberation and is constitutive of that liberation itself, for ultimately the end and means are identical and convertible.

The concept of *Jivan-mukti*, of eternal life here and now, signifies the fact that the vision of truth is constitutive of the state of the soul's release. The finality of knowledge in the ladder of spiritual discipline, and the identity of means and end in the realm of the spirit establish once for all that knowledge is no mere subordinate value for Indian thought.

Secondly, we must analyse the notion of wonder or curiosity that is supposed to have generated European speculation. It is desire for knowledge and an urge to transcend the limitations of understanding. *It is the urge towards expansion of life* in the realm of knowledge. Surely the Indian ideal of *moksha* signifies freedom from limitations and fullness of life; thus the intellectual quest for knowledge, named wonder, is in itself an aspect of the urge for completion of being, which completion is named *moksha* in Indian philosophy. If philosophy in the West originates from the desire to know, it does not differ in principle and essence from Indian philosophy in respect of its origin, for Indian philosophy takes its rise from the urge to infinitude of life, and love of knowledge is but an aspect and a constituent part of that urge. The Indian attitude has the merit of interpreting the impulse to philosophy in a larger and deeper and, therefore, a more fundamental spirit. It has been already indicated that the major philosophers of the West have almost an Indian outlook on the nature and value of knowledge; and it looks as if this time-honoured contrast between Indian and Western philosophies in respect of their origin is somewhat superficial and is unsustainable in the long run.

The *Upanishads* are justly regarded as the principal philosophical documents in Indian philosophy. The Vedic hymns do contain elements of philosophy, but they are faint intimations rather than

emphatic assertions. They constitute just a background and undercurrent of the Vedic religion: they are comparatively scattered and disproportionately insufficient in quantity. In the Upanishads, however, the early philosophical tendency is brought to fullness and maturity of expression. In addition, philosophical reflection forms the central theme in them, Knowledge of *Brahman*, the ultimate Reality, is the sole burden of the greatest of the Upanishads. Thus they constitute the fulfilment and final formulation of the Vedic thought. All subsequent speculation of almost every school of thought is built on the foundations laid by the Upanishads. Even the heretical schools are indebted to them. The materialist school of *Charvaka* owes its analysis of nature to the Upanishads. Its materialism is but a revival of what is stated and set aside in the Upanishads. The Buddhist philosophy bases itself on the law of karma and transmigration, which is part of the Upanishadic heritage. The distinction between the Self and the non-self so fundamental to Jainism is part of the much wider and ultimately monistic conception of the Upanishads. All the *brahminical* schools explicitly acknowledge the authority of the Upanishads. The Vedantic schools make it their sole aim to champion and elaborate their teachings. The *Purva-Mimamsa* is an apparent exception, but its postulate of the *atman*, of karma and the ideal of moksha are all derived from principles adumbrated in the Upanishads. Thus we see that the Upanishads enshrine the core of India's philosophical heritage.

The most ancient and authoritative Upanishads are the *Chandogya*, *Brihadaranyaka*, *Isa*, *Katha*, *Kena*, *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Prasna*, *Mundaka*, *Svetasvatara*, *Mandukya* and *Kaushitaki*. Their antiquity and worth are proved by their style, the weighty character of their themes, and the value attached to them by the systematizers of Vedanta like *Badarayana*, *Gaudapada*, *Sankara*, *Ramanuja* and

Madhwa. Each one of these principal Upanishads sets forth a comprehensive world-view though in details they supplement one another. In what follows it is proposed to outline the basic ideas of the Taittiriya.

The philosophical part of the Taittiriya opens with the aphoristic declaration "*one who knows Brahman attains the highest end of life*". The statement enunciates the three fundamentals of philosophy, namely Brahman, knowledge, and the highest end. The function of philosophy according to the Upanishads consists of the formulation of three things, viz., the nature of Reality, the ideal mode of life and the supreme goal of existence. This conception of the scope of philosophy corresponds essentially to Kant's formulation of the basic questions of philosophy: *What can I know? What ought I to do? and What can I hope for?* The Upanishad in question affirms '*Brahman*' to be the Reality, '*knowledge of Brahman*' to be the duty of man and '*the attainment of this highest*' to be the goal of life. The entire Upanishad is an unfoldment and elaboration of this threefold theme. Let us note how these three aspects are developed therein.

BRAHMAN

The word 'Brahman' may be tentatively understood as standing for the ultimate principle and the infinite Real. It corresponds to what is ordinarily denoted by the words 'God' and 'Absolute'. The concept at once commits the thought of the Upanishad to monism, and that a spiritual or idealistic monism. The word quantitatively connotes *infinity* and qualitatively connotes *perfection*. It, in short, signifies the perfect and all-embracing spirit. The Upanishad offers a definition of this principle. It says that "*Brahman is real, conscious and infinite*". What is the meaning and proof of the 'reality' of Brahman? It means that it is not a subjective 'idea' but an objective principle. It is not a postulate but an entity. The Upanishads

Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka and *Mundaka* supplement the *Taittiriya* in this connection. In all these it is asserted that to know the manifold of existence, we must apprehend the 'One'. The world constitutes an ordered and systematic whole; the system and order in it would be impossible if it were not the manifestation and expression of a single unitary principle. It is the apprehension of this absolute ground that involves and leads to the correct understanding of the cosmos. The world of apparent plurality is grounded in a single principle, whose reality is the basis of whatever reality we cognize in the world of change and multiplicity. This unconditional and absolute Reality is Brahman. This ground of the universe, which is the unconditional Real and the source of all lesser realities is declared to be of the nature of Consciousness.

It seems to have been taken for granted that the final basis of the universe must be a spiritual principle. Probably the reason for that belief is that the first principle, which should account for all and be the self-sufficient and self-moved cause of the cosmic process, should be an absolute will. It is also partly due to the impossibility of deriving consciousness from anything intrinsically unconscious. A principle that is both one in itself and also the source of endless diversity of presentation, unchanging in itself and yet the ground of all change, cannot be other than Self. Fundamentally the unity of the cosmic ground implies that it is a self-affirming existence. What is not self-affirming, entails the dualism of subject and object when it enters the cognitive situation. The primeval unity of the absolute principle excludes all such dualism and hence it must be a self-affirming ultimate. A non-spiritual entity that does not enter the context of knowing as an object, becomes an unknown thing in itself, and thereby cancels all grounds for its affirmation.

There are only two alternatives finally. Either the first principle must be an unknown and unknowable something, the assertion of

whose existence is a logical impossibility, or it must be a spiritual Absolute, a supreme Self, essentially of the nature of self-consciousness. There is thus no scope for a monistic materialism or naturalism. The unity of the cosmic ground implies logically its spiritual nature. In the history of philosophy in both the East and the West, the concept of an absolute 'Substance' has inescapably moved to the concept of an absolute 'Subject'. This ultimate spiritual Reality is further declared to be 'Infinite'. The implication of this epithet is fourfold: in the first place it is beyond the limitations of time; in the second place it is beyond the limitations of space; in the third place it is absolute, all-inclusive, and encounters nothing alien and nothing restricting the scope of its being; lastly it has no internal division into 'is' and 'ought to be' and is an eternally self-fulfilled perfection. It is this character that lifts Brahman above the normal empirical self and renders the idealism of the Upanishads absolute and objective rather than empirical and subjective like that of the Buddhist *Vijnanavada*.

Why is Brahman declared to be infinite? Limitation is a part of cosmic actuality, and therefore the principle that is basal to and comprehends that actuality naturally transcends its limitation. Discontinuity, division, restriction and imperfection are all forms of negating unity. If Brahman is one in the sense in which the fundamental principle of the universe must be one, not 'one of the many' but 'one' above and in and through the many, it naturally follows that it must be timeless, spaceless, all-inclusive and perfect. Thus the fourfold infinity of Brahman is a necessary implication of its unity. Finitude is a necessary aspect of the items of a pluralistic world: as Brahman dissolves the apparent pluralism of the world it should in itself be above finitude. Thus Brahman is truly to be defined as '*a real infinite consciousness*'.

KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN

Knowledge of Brahman is stated to be the means of attaining the highest state of life. It is one of the axioms of Hindu thought that the quality of knowledge attainable by an individual is determined by the quality of life. "*Knowledge is a function of being*".

A pure mind apprehends Reality and purity of mind is a product of moral self-culture. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is clearly stated that one should desire to know the Atman through sacrifice, charity and austerity. In other words one's performance of the duties pertaining to one's station in life is the first requisite for a life devoted to knowledge. The practice of the three cardinal virtues of *daya*, *dana* and *dama* (mercy, charity and self-control) is a basic condition of higher life. It is also insisted that the life of moral activity must be combined with desirelessness. Virtue is self-exertion for ends other than external self-interest. Moral goodness is truly practised when it is practised for its own sake. It is this aspect of the Upanishadic teaching that is developed into a magnificent doctrine in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Three stages of knowing are enumerated in the Upanishads, and they are *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*. The first represents the study of the scriptures and learning under spiritual preceptors. One who does not know the Vedas and does not have a teacher is said to be incapable of comprehending the truth. Assimilation of the spiritual wisdom gathered and transmitted by the saints and, sages must surely be the first step. This is learning through hearing. To shun the spiritual wisdom of the past without reason is to practise irrationality and as such to disqualify oneself in the search for truth.

But it is one of the glories of the Upanishadic teaching that it does not see the finality of knowledge in this acceptance of tradition; rather it inculcates reflection or *manana*, and *tapas* or personal endeavour at enlightenment. The scriptures and sages initiate the

process of knowing; they do not finalize it. The seeker must work on the basis of the received body of knowledge, to build up for himself a rational structure of conviction. While faith is necessary, it does not obliterate critical inquiry. It actually enjoins it. It is this aspect of knowing through dialectical examination that is embodied in the great *Sutras* of *Badarayana*. When rational reflection engenders personal conviction, making spiritual truths one's own, knowing has completed the second stage.

The third stage is *nididhyasana*, which signifies the continuous affirmation of that knowledge. It consists of abiding in the light ceaselessly. Knowledge of Brahman in this stage passes from the state of transitory cognition to that of life in the presence of the Divine. It is no passing acceptance of a truth but an unbroken life in the daylight of the awareness of truth. This life in Brahman is to be sustained by effort, will and vigilance, until conviction is transformed into perception, until that stage of realization is reached after which suspension of effort does not cause relapse into the experience of the world dissociated from Brahman. This dwelling in Brahman is called *nididhyasana*. It is a deliberate and ever-growing contemplation and it ought to be pursued till the point is attained after which all perception is perception of the Absolute and contemplation is unnecessary for holding the Absolute in the soul's vision. This stage of meditation fills the interval between rational conviction and immediate vision or *darsana*.

Completeness of knowledge is reached in the final direct vision of the Absolute. If, after the attainment of rational conviction, the knowing is still mediate and inferential, it is to be construed that there is still some element of ignorance, some obstacle, not yet removed. Meditation that fills the interval between philosophical understanding and immediate vision, removes the remaining element of ignorance. The bhakti school of interpretation suggests

that the residual obstacle consists of lack of longing for the final vision. Meditation is meant to develop this essential prerequisite. Thought of God, by the very nature of the object, produces gladness, feeds and nourishes the spirit of love, and thus brings about the completion of equipment for the vision. "As is the meditation, so is the love" is the arresting opening of a song of which Sri Ramakrishna was fond. In some other Upanishads the role of the 'heart' is definitely recognized in gaining the vision absolute. The *Mundaka* and *Katha Upanishads* speak of the self-revelation of the supreme Atman as coming to one who is chosen. The choice surely falls on those who have already *chosen to be chosen*. Here meditation is identified with bhakti or loving adoration. The Svetasvatara clearly states that the final truth dawns on those great souls who have *parabhakti* or highest love. The Gita glorifies this bhakti beyond all else.

The *Isa Upanishad* prays for the self-revelation of God and enjoins self-surrender as the means therefor. The Taittiriya has a very significant expression for this attitude; it calls it *pratishtha*, and the word surely stands for unfailing steadfastness and ardent attachment. It is undivided self-merging in meditation, through both thought and love. It signifies dwelling in the Supreme both from the standpoint of continuity of awareness and from that of the integral completeness of the soul's pouring in of itself into the act of meditation. It eliminates interruption as well as reservation. It amounts to an exclusive absoluteness of interest involving the completest renunciation of all other interests. This is the meaning of love of God with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength.

ATTAINMENT OF THE HIGHEST

The final point to be considered is the fulfilment that crowns the life of knowledge. By the highest is meant the state of realization.

It is described as a condition in which all regrets are terminated once for all. It is life eternal in which the self of the seeker becomes all that it has in it to become. It is fullness of true being. This attainment of self-unfoldment is named by the word *ananda*. Now the question arises, What constitutes the centre and inward essence of this experience of perfection? The Upanishad clearly answers this question. Self-realization not merely issues from the knowledge of Brahman but consists of the immediate apprehension of Brahman. Knowledge as loving meditation is the means and knowledge as direct vision is the end. This vision is of the nature of joy and hence it is described as ananda. This statement signifies the complete identification of the immediate knowledge of Brahman with the final value and goal of life. It implies the rejection of two possible errors: the errors are (a) that the highest ideal to be aimed at is something other than and transcending the insight into Reality, and (b) that the insight into Reality is not itself the highest perfection of life. Experience of Brahman is the highest value and the highest value just consists of the experience of Brahman. It is this identification of the highest fulfilment of life with the immediate apprehension of the supreme Reality that makes the Upanishad speak of Brahman itself as bliss absolute. In many other Upanishads, like Brihadaranyaka and Chandogya, this characterization of Brahman as ananda is a settled principle. The speciality of the Taittiriya is that it gives central importance to it. It characterizes Brahman in two of its philosophical chapters as ananda maya and ananda. Bhrigu after his prolonged meditative search realizes that Brahman is ananda and that as ananda it is the cause, controller and termination of the universe. Brahman surpasses matter, life, mind and individual consciousness, and is of the essence of ananda. It is that the affirmation of which is the source of genuine being for man. It fills the universe and hence life thrives in it and attains to

the delight of abundant life. The basic idea in all this is that the ultimate reality is such that apprehension of it is blissful. It is both the cause of being and the theme for final realization. It is *rasa*, for to glimpse it is to taste joy. Attainment of it is attainment of joy supreme.

What is the ground for this mode of viewing Brahman? The ground is supplied in the Chandogya. There it is argued that the Infinite or *Bhūman* is the source of joy. The vision of that which contains all within itself is the essence of joy. All affliction is the effect of the vision of the finite. Fragmentary perception, perception of that from which thought must necessarily wander forth, is the meaning of evil in the largest sense. That from which thought cannot wander forth to anything else, for it is all-containing, is the source of bliss. Hence perception of the Infinite is joy. The quality of perception is determined by the quality of the object. Therefore the infinite entity is itself described as joy. Even mundane joys are due to a partial and mutilated sensing of the Infinite. The joy that accrues to one who beholds the Absolute passes all comprehension and utterance. It is too full to leave room for regrets, anxieties and apprehensions. It is such that the highest of earthly attainments fade into insipid trivialities in comparison. This is the highest heaven of achievement that the Upanishads in general and Taittiriya in particular speak of. It is everlasting for there can be no objective cessation or subjective withdrawal. Hence the *Vedānta Sūtras* deny the possibility of all relapse from this destiny. The Upanishad symbolizes it in chants of ecstasy. It is the *Brahma-nirvāna* of the *Gīta*.

The aphorism that '*the knower of Brahman attains the highest*' - is truly the message of Vedānta.

(Reprinted from Vedānta for East and West, Issue 58)

Kapila and Devahuti

(From Srimad Bhagavatam)

Devahuti had good reason to be proud of her beloved son Kapila. He was born a free soul and a natural teacher of mankind, and he became the founder of the school of *Sankhya* philosophy. She herself had an innate yearning for the highest knowledge, and it was naturally her privilege to discuss philosophy and religion with him. One day she said to him :

My son, you are very dear to me. Will you not teach me of that knowledge through which I may find freedom from the bondage of the world? Since taking on the duties of family life, I have become more and more attached to the world. In my youth I learned much from your beloved father, Kardama; now in my old age would I gladly learn wisdom of his son.

Kapila : O Mother, one finds complete cessation of misery by following the yoga that teaches unity with the divine Self. This yoga brings the highest good to humanity. I taught it to the saints of yore in my previous incarnations, and I will now teach it to you.

Mind alone is the cause of bondage or freedom of the soul. By the attachment of the mind to the world we become bound; by cultivating devotion to God we become free.

Give up all ideas of 'me' and 'mine'; for thus alone is the heart purified, and so freed from lust, greed, and delusion. In a pure heart are manifested knowledge and love; and the true Self, which is divine, self-luminous, pure, and free, is realized.

The wise truly say that attachment to the things of the world is the cause of bondage and suffering. Yet attachment brings freedom when directed toward devout men. These are the saints who are self-controlled, forbearing, loving, and friendly to all. They dwell always in the consciousness of God; their hearts are united with

God. No sorrow or grief, therefore, can agitate their minds, or disturb their equilibrium. They are free from all attachment.

All who associate with such men, and love them, become pure. By living in a holy atmosphere, by hearing the praises of the Lord daily, they develop faith in God and reverence for him. Finally, they take delight in the thought of him, and find love for him filling their hearts. Then assuredly they meditate upon him and become entirely devoted to him.

When a man has had such an experience, there is no longer any attraction for him in the pleasures of sense. He is freed from the meshes of ignorance, his heart becomes illumined, and, even in this earthly life, he realizes the kingdom of heaven.

Devahuti : Tell me how I may love God. Teach me that love which would easily bring freedom. Also tell me about the yoga of meditation.

Kapila : Our senses, O Mother, draw us to things because we love the world. If we direct our love toward God we find divine knowledge and absolute freedom. But there are souls who find such great joy in devotion and in the service of the Lord that they have no concern for their own salvation. Even so divine love ultimately brings freedom to them also.

Those who love God as dearly as themselves; those who have affection for him as for their children; those who trust him as their beloved companion, and reverence him as the teacher of all teachers; those who love him as their dear friend, and worship him as God — theirs is eternal life.

Blessed indeed are they that steadfastly devote themselves to the worship of God, for they shall attain to absolute freedom.

Devahuti : Tell me more about the religion of love, for it is not possible to practise the yoga of meditation without love for God.

Kapila : Love is divine. But love is expressed differently and in different degrees according to the evolution of the individual human soul.

There are people who still have hatred, jealousy, anger, and pride in their hearts. To such, God is above, beyond, and apart. They also may love God, but their love is selfish. This love is *tamasic*.

That, too, is a low form of love by which people love and worship God as a separate being, and pray to him for the fulfilment of their material desires. Such love is known as *rajasic* love.

But the love which seeks God for the sake of love alone and by means of which we offer ourselves whole-heartedly to him — this love We call *sattwic* love.

But when the love, the lover, and the beloved have become one, when we see God and love him as the innermost Self in all beings, and when there is a continuous current of love flowing in the heart, then is it that we realize divine love.

When such divine love fills the heart, we transcend the three *gunas* and become united with *Brahman*. In order that the heart may be purified and divine love may increase, one should obey the following precepts :

Perform all the duties of life, but work without thought of reward. Work must be turned into worship. Offer worship to God regularly. Chant His name. Sing His praises and dwell more and more in the thought of Him.

Learn to see God in all beings. Revere the great sages. Be kind to the poor and the destitute, and be friendly to all. Thus may one attain the kingdom of heaven.

God dwells as the innermost Self in the hearts of all beings and all things, although He is not manifest in the same degree in all. He is most manifest in a pure heart, and in a saint who has realized the unity that is in the midst of diversity.

Devahuti followed faithfully the teachings of her beloved son. She soon found God within her own heart and in the hearts of all beings.

Eckhartian Dialogue

Philip L. Griggs

(Continued from last issue)

Q. Sir, what happens when we attain to perfect union with God?

A. When the soul, being kissed by God, is in absolute perfection and bliss, then at last she knows the embrace of unity, then at the touch of God she is made uncreaturely; then with God's motion, the soul is as noble as God is himself. As the drop becomes the ocean, not the ocean the drop, so the soul imbibing God turns into God, not God into the soul. There the soul loses its name, its power, and its activity, but not its existence. The soul abides in God as God abides in himself.

Q. What happens at the moment of this union? What is it like?

A. Ah, my child, if only you could be suddenly altogether unaware of things; yes, could you but pass into oblivion of your own existence as St. Paul did when he said: "*Whether in the body I know not, or out of it I know not, God knoweth.*" Here the spirit had so entirely absorbed the faculties that it had forgotten the body; memory no longer functioned, nor understanding, nor the senses; vital warmth and energy were arrested so that the body did not fail throughout the three days during which he neither ate nor drank.

Q. Is this union with the personal God, or with Godhead?

A. Look you, Christ says: "*I have been man for you, and if you do not become God for me, you wrong me.*" God became man that we might become God. God in his God-nature lay hidden in human nature so that we saw nothing but man. And so this soul shall hide itself in God's nature until we can see nothing but God; not putting on a Person as Christ did, but wholly immersed in the divine nature. God is the nature of each nature; he is all nature's nature, undivided.

Q. Can this state of union be attained in this very life?

A. I have sometimes said that man sees God in this life in the same perfection, and is happy in the same perfect way as in the life to come.

Many people are astonished to hear this. Yet this life is attainable while a man still eats and drinks. When a man has reached this point we may well say, this man is God and man. All Christ has by nature he has won by grace. His body is filled with the noble nature of the soul, which it receives from God with divine light; thus we may indeed say, Behold, man is divine!

It may well be that you who search after God will come across such perfected men as we have been speaking of. They are away from home, my child, and no one rightly knows them except those in whom the same light shines. Believe me, if I knew one such, and I had a house full of gold and precious stones, I would give the whole of it for a single fowl for him to eat. If all the things God ever made were mine, I would at once give them all for the enjoyment of that man, for they are all his. God in the fullness of his power is his, too, and if there stood before me all the hungry who are in imperfection, I would not withhold from that man's need a single morsel of the fowl, even if it would feed that multitude. You must remember that in the case of an imperfect man, anything he eats or drinks will drag him down and make him prone to sin. But not the perfect man: what he eats and drinks he raises up in Christ to the Father. Keep a sharp lookout, I warn you, for these men are difficult to tell; for instance, if they should need it, while others are fasting they will be eating; while others keep watch, they will be sleeping; while other folk are praying, they will hold their peace. In short, the things they say and do seem unaccountable, for what God makes obvious to those who are on the way, is foreign to those who have arrived. These have no wants whatever; they are rich in possessing a city of their own. These people do the most valuable work of all, which is within. Blessed is the land wherein one of them lives; in one instant they will do more lasting good than all the outward actions ever done. See that you withhold nothing of theirs. May we all recognize these people, and loving God in them, may we possess, with them, the city they have won.

Q. By what signs may we recognize such a perfect man?

A. There are five:

he never complains;
he never makes excuses — when accused he leaves the facts to vindicate him;
there is nothing he wants in earth or heaven but what God wills;
he is not moved by time; and
he is never rejoiced: he is joy itself.

Perhaps there are six more signs, too.

Such people are dead to flesh and blood and all natural appetites.

Secondly, the pleasures of the body are like sour breath to them.

They are forever listening to God's voice within them.

They are not perturbed by the uncertainties of things.

They are neither vexed nor depressed.,

They turn everything to good account, so nothing can corrupt them.

As St. Paul says, "*All things work together for good to them that love the Lord.*" And they have no desire to compete with anyone; they live in the world as if there were no one but themselves and God.

Q. Are these then what is known as free souls, or free men?

A. Right you are. Holy Scripture cries aloud for freedom from self. Self-free is self-controlled and self-controlled is self-possessed and self-possession is God-possession and possession of everything God ever made. This is known as self-mastery. He who for one instant wholly resigns self, unshaken and motionless in himself — that man is free.

(To be continued)

Leaves from an Ashrama : 56

Worth of Shocking Experiences
Swami Vidyatmananda

An acquaintance of mine recently recounted a curious incident which occurred when he was driving home from a shopping trip. His route required him to stop, then make a left turn (without benefit of a traffic signal) across two lanes of traffic approaching from the opposite direction. Seeing that the oncoming vehicles were still far away, he started across. But across the opposing carriageways, his car stalled. With a feeling of unbelief he saw two lanes of autos approaching at high speed, which seemed to make no effort to slow down. He knew he was lost, was to be demolished broadside. Then his car leaped forward, clearing the carriageways just as two lanes of autos roared past behind him, horns blaring angrily.

'You can say,' he told me, 'that it was a lucky miss, and a miss is as good as a mile. But that's not how I see it. I should properly be dead in a great pileup of tangled metal. Grace has given me a little more time. But by rights I should be dead.'

'Well, you're not,' I replied, 'so forget it.'

'I shall never forget it. It was a momentous experience. I am a total traffic casualty like so many others, which by some fluke didn't materialize. I live every day with that knowledge. And so I have stopped acting as though I were alive. I think of myself as absent, gone, with no rights as a human being. I dwell on earth like some retired executive who visits his old corporation and sees new people doing what he used to do so intensely, but now no longer feels involved. I am not a participant. Everything goes past me as though I were not there--which indeed I consider to be the case.'

'Is it better like this?' I asked.

'Much better. I'm at peace at last. I don't have to struggle for self-assertion. I have no responsibility. I see that Someone else is doing everything and I'm glad to let Him do it. Of course I put in my customary appearance, but the conviction has gone out of my performance.'

'It must be something like the result of experiencing *satori*,' I observed.

He replied: 'I'm not sure of that. I'd say, rather, that this sense of being absent may be the prelude to *satori*. Our entire *sadhana* is directed, it seems to me, to reaching a condition of self-abandon, a point where we throw up our hands and say, 'All right, I know nothing, I am nothing; have it Your way.'"

'I should suppose that this comes to a *bhakta* through intense identification with his Ideal: love for that Ideal eradicates self-love. Or a *jnani* may come to that point as he sees every bastion of reason crack before subtler and subtler truths. Or in any number of other ways. Reports from people who have clinically died and been resuscitated confirm the same effect--a new outlook, a new childlike confidence in Something beyond comprehension. Or take the shock of being told that one has an incurable illness – that may have the same opening-out effect.

'It happens, it seems to me, as the result of some experience. Experience should be our goal. Recall how the Za-zen adherent sits rigid, rigid, for hours at a time in an effort to make something crack! However it comes, suddenly, there it is. Some door opens, some flipflop occurs in our manner of facing the world. Suddenly existence looks different.'

'And one has arrived!' I said.

'Well,' my friend grinned, 'better to say that one is at last *en route*.'

Programme for January - February 2017

Sunday discourses begin at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.
Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Jan 1	Holy Mother's Puja	
Jan 8	Jnana Yoga 1	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan 15	Jnana Yoga 2	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan 22	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Jan 29	Jnana Yoga 3	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb 5	Jnana Yoga 4	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb 12	Jnana Yoga 5	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb 19	Day Retreat	
Feb 26	Sri Ramakrishna's Puja	

Holy Mother's Puja

Sunday 1st January
at 4:30 p.m.

Swami Vivekananda's Puja

Sunday 22nd January
at 4:30 p.m.

Sri Ramakrishna's Puja

Sunday 26th February
at 4:30 p.m.

Day Retreat

**With Swami Dayatmananda and
Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre,
on 19th February from 10:00
a.m. until 7:00 p.m.
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch
to share.**

The mistake is that we cling to the body when it is the spirit that is really immortal. He who says he is the body is a born idolater. We are spirit, spirit that has no form or shape, spirit that is infinite, and not matter. This Very Soul is the Self in All In this external world, which is full of finite things, it is impossible to see and find the Infinite. The Infinite must be sought in that alone which is infinite, and the only thing infinite about us is that which is within us, our own soul. Neither the body, nor the mind, not even our thoughts, nor the world we see around us, are infinite.

The Seer, He to whom they all belong, the Soul of man, He who is awake in the internal man, alone is infinite, and to seek for the Infinite Cause of this whole universe we must go there. In the Infinite Soul alone we can find it. Stand upon the Self, then only can we truly love the world. Take a very, very high stand; knowing our universal nature, we must look with perfect calmness upon all the panorama of the world.

But as a man sees his own face in a mirror, perfect, distinct, and clear, so is the Truth shining in the soul of man. The highest heaven, therefore, is in our own souls; the greatest temple of worship is the human soul.

Swami Vivekananda

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Some people are so afraid of losing their individuality. Wouldn't it be better for the pig to lose his pig-individuality if he can become God? Yes. But the poor pig does not think so at the time. Which state is my individuality? When I was a baby sprawling on the floor trying to swallow my thumb? Was that the individuality I should be sorry to lose? Fifty years hence I shall look upon this present state and laugh, just as I [now] look upon the baby state. Which of these individualities shall I keep?

Mother, father, child, wife, body, wealth—everything I can lose except my Self . . . bliss in the Self. All desire is contained in the Self. This is individuality which never changes, and this is perfect.

Swami Vivekananda

