



SIX LECTURES ON VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

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**BY
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WHY A HINDU IS A VEGETARIAN

Eminent physicians and dietetic reformers of the present day are deeply interested in solving the great problem of wholesome food for human beings, and in introducing food reform in Western countries. Through their efforts thoughtful Americans are beginning to know something of the healthful effects of vegetarian diet, and to question whether they shall become vegetarians. This question has never been discussed in the West with so much earnestness as now. Among the ancient Greek philosophers we find strong advocates of vegetarianism in Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Seneca, Plutarch, Tertullian, Porphyry and others; but the vast majority of Western people regard vegetarians with contempt and ridicule. In India this problem was solved by the Hindu philosophers long before Pythagoras was born, and in their writings we find logical and scientific arguments against the killing of animals and the eating of animal flesh. Many historians and Oriental scholars are of opinion that Pythagoras owed his ideas regarding a vegetable diet to the Hindu philosophers, who from prehistoric times had advocated and practised a strictly vegetarian diet.

India is the only country in the world where vegetarianism has prevailed for centuries among the vast majority of people. The Hindus were the first nation in the world who understood the fundamental principles of the vegetarian theory. It was from the Hindus that other nations, such as the Chinese, Japanese, Thibetans, Siamese, Burmese, Ceylonese and Persians became impressed with the idea that the slaughter of animals for food is cruel, inhuman and wicked. The greatest thinkers and sages of ancient India gave arguments in support of vegetarianism from different standpoints, such as physical health; the physiological structure of our organs; the chemical analysis of food; and the moral and spiritual ideals of life. Native doctors and physicians in India do not approve of animal food and agree generally with many Western doctors that animal flesh is one of the main causes of such diseases as dyspepsia, gout, consumption and nervous disorders. Hindu physicians argue that animals fattened for slaughter are more or less diseased on account of their unnatural mode of living and the unnatural food which they are forced to eat; that the germs of various diseases are introduced into the human system and that parasites come into the human body through the medium of animal flesh. They further assert that all flesh, being a product of nutrition, contains some refuse matter and impurity, because their elimination is suddenly arrested by the slaughter of the animal. Some of these refuse materials are intensely poisonous, especially *creatin*. Animal flesh enriches the blood with unnecessary *fibrin*, and this produces unnatural heat in the system and in turn is the cause of unusual activity and restlessness, ultimately leading to the nervous debility which afflicts many meat eaters. Constant use of meat increases the action of the heart and brings premature loss of vital forces.

Physiologists and comparative anatomists like Sir Everard Home have shown from

the structure of the teeth, stomach, alimentary canal, the microscopic human blood-corpuscles and the digestive processes that man is by nature more related to frugivorous animals than to the carnivora.

From the chemical analysis of different vegetables, cereals, fruits, nuts, etc., and the flesh of different animals, and from the comparison of the constituent properties of vegetables with those of animal flesh, it can be shown that everything necessary for the growth of the muscles, for the strength of the nerves, and for the nourishment of the whole body can easily be obtained from the vegetable kingdom. As from animal food are obtained the proteids, fats and mineral matter, which are the principal factors in the nourishment and healthy growth of the body, so from the vegetable world these elements are supplied in rich abundance, and in addition to these the *carbohydrates* (starch and sugar), which cannot be found in animal food. This being the fact the question arises, why do we eat animal flesh? Is it for nourishment? No. The same nourishment can be obtained from vegetables, cereals, and pulses. Is it for health that we eat meat? No; because vegetarians as a class are healthier than the majority of meat eaters. Why, then, is meat eaten? Because of the habit transmitted from generation to generation, and because of superstition, prejudice and ignorance.

In ancient times when agriculture was unknown, people lived upon fruits, nuts and other vegetable products which they found in abundance. But when the struggle for existence, which is so strongly manifested in the animal kingdom, became more difficult on account of the scarcity of fruits and nuts, they lived upon whatever they found around them. In that struggle the question of existence must precede the question of food. The savage tribes who do not know anything about agriculture and have not proper fruits and nuts, live chiefly upon wild animals, birds, reptiles and insects. Thus began the eating of flesh by man. Some people argue that flesh is the natural food of man, but this is not so. The meat-eating habit was formed through the force of necessity, and was handed down from father to son. Most people in civilized countries learn to live on animal flesh from their infancy, their parents teaching them by their example. They thus grow to think that they can hardly live without a diet of animal flesh. Some savage tribes became cannibals when they could not procure enough meat of wild animals. Shall the habits of cannibals signify that human flesh is the natural food of man? In Australia the aborigines live on loathsome worms and reptiles. In India there is a class of aboriginal hill-tribes who eat poisonous snakes with great relish. Shall we say that these are the natural food for man? A man can eat anything with the help of cookery. But shall it be considered that man is naturally as omnivorous as a pig? The cows at Cape Cod eat the refuse of fish; horses can be taught to eat beef; bears can be trained to smoke tobacco; monkeys easily learn to drink tea, coffee and wine. Will such artificially acquired habits supply the arguments for man's eating flesh? Certainly not. The natural food of man is not animal flesh, but vegetables, fruits, nuts, cereals, etc., which grow spontaneously on this earth.

When Hindu boys and girls go to school and read their first lessons they learn the highest humanitarian principles, and as they grow older they are kind toward all living creatures. They are taught: "Be kind to lower animals. Do not kill them for your food, because the natural food of man is not an animal." I learned in the first book of Sanskrit: "When enough of nourishment can easily be obtained from that which grows spontaneously on the earth, who will commit such a great sin as to kill animals for filling his stomach and deriving a little pleasure of taste?" "Compare the eater with the animal that is eaten. The one has pleasure which lasts for a few seconds, and the other is deprived of all the pleasures of life." Seneca expressed a similar idea when he said: "Vegetables are sufficient food for the stomach into which we now stuff valuable lives."

It is extremely difficult for people in the West to realize why it is sinful to kill animals for food or for pleasure. Their religion stands like a great stumbling-block in the way of their understanding. It teaches that the lower animals have no soul, no mind, no feelings ; that they have been created for the food of human beings, and the duty of man is to eat what the merciful Lord has created for his sustenance and thank Him in return. This is the reason that so many animals are killed for Thanksgiving and Christmas days in Christian countries, as though the merciful Lord would not accept prayers unless some of His creatures are killed and eaten: A minister of a high church in London was present when I was talking about vegetarianism, and said to my friend: "Do not listen to these ideas; our Scriptures say they are the doctrine of devils," referring to the passage in the New Testament, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; . . . commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I. Timothy, iv, 1, 3, 4, 5). How is it possible for people who believe in such sayings as the word of God to think that the killing of animals for food is sinful? As it is impossible for a Christian believer in this teaching to think that the slaughter of animals for food is sinful, so it is impossible for a Hindu to believe that the lower animals are created for this use by a merciful Lord. The idea that animals were created for food for man is entirely Semitic in its origin. Such a doctrine is horrible to the Hindus, because their religion does not teach that this world was created out of nothing by an extra-cosmic personal God sitting on a throne somewhere in the heavens and commanding men to eat animals whom He created for this purpose.

The Hindu religion with all its various phases, such as the religion of the Vedas (which is erroneously called Brahminism), Buddhism and Jainism, is based upon the one fundamental principle,—the evolution of man from lower animals. It teaches that one life principle is manifesting in various forms of the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms; that all are linked together by a mighty chain of evolution; and that from the minutest protoplasm to the highest man, each stage of life differs from another

not in kind, but in degree. The religion of the Hindus denies entirely that the lower animals are without mind, soul and feeling; and teaches that life and mind are manifested simultaneously. Wherever there is life there is the manifestation of the cosmic mind, the difference being in the degree of manifestation. The least expression is in the mineral, it is a little higher in the vegetable, and still higher in the animal kingdom. Even a unicellular amoeba has mind. It feels pain and tries to avoid that sensation. Advanced scientists of modern times do not deny this. Prof. Le Conte expresses this idea most forcibly in some of his lectures. As we rise in the animal kingdom we find the expression of the same life and mind in and through highly developed animal bodies; and ultimately, through the most individualized and complex organism of the human body. Each one of these animals possesses a soul, has individuality and the sense of "I," can feel pleasure and pain, has fear of death and struggles to live. The germ of life in each one of these will gradually pass through the various stages of evolution and ultimately appear in a human form. Therefore, the religion, philosophy and Scriptures of the Hindus teach that as life is dear to us, so is it dear to the lower animals; as we do not wish to be killed, so they too shrink from death. Do not kill any animal for pleasure, see harmony in nature and lend a helping hand to all living creatures," say the Hindu Scriptures. The earliest writings of the Hindus, I mean the Vedas, teach: "*Ma himsyat sarva bhutani*," that is, "Do not kill any living creature either for food or for pleasure."

The great epic of the Hindus, the Ramayana, or the exploits of Rama, teaches that we should treat lower animals as our brothers, and describes their value in the economy of nature in the most poetic and dramatic way. It is said that Rama, the great Incarnation of God in flesh and blood on earth, fought with the king of demons in order to rescue Sita, his devoted wife, who was captured by the demoniac King of Ceylon. His huge army consisted of all kinds of animals. The ape, Hanuman, the greatest of organized life beneath man in the scale of evolution, was the commander-in-chief. The bear is described as the prime minister, and other animals as soldiers. The whole story is written in such a masterly manner that whoever reads it can never be unkind or cruel to any animal, not to speak of killing it for food.

Western people have the mistaken impression that Buddha was the reformer who introduced vegetarianism amongst the Hindus. This is an error. Buddha merely popularized the doctrine of non-killing taught by the Vedas, which was practised at that time by only a limited class of Hindu sages; he also protested against animal sacrifices performed by the priests. The priests sacrificed animals not for the purpose of eating flesh, but for propitiating the Devas or bright spirits, through whose mercy they thought they would gain higher powers and conquer their enemies.

Some people say that in the economy of nature the struggle for existence demands that one animal shall live upon another, as birds of prey live upon other birds, as carnivora live upon other animals; and that we are therefore perfectly justified to live upon animal flesh. It is true that in nature we find the expression of such a law. It is a law that governs the lower animal nature. We may call it a brutal law. But there are

other laws which govern our better nature. These are moral and spiritual laws which do not express themselves in lower animals but in human beings alone. If we do not recognize these higher laws we shall never rise above the animal plane. Man stands at the head of the animal kingdom not because he possesses in a highly developed form the same qualities that the lower animals have, but because he is capable of subduing the animal nature by the moral and spiritual. A man lacking this moral and spiritual nature is in no way better than the lowest order of brutes. Human beings have the power of degrading themselves to the lowest animal plane as well as of raising themselves to the highest plane of spiritual enlightenment. They can manifest perfectly their divine nature. In short, they can live on earth as embodiments of all good. The same human being may carry destruction, havoc, disharmony, and inhuman cruelty wherever he goes, or he may bring help, good-will, peace, love and blessings. The same energy when guided by animal nature creates havoc and becomes diabolical; when directed by higher nature and love it brings happiness to all.

Think of the moral degeneration of the slaughterhouse butchers. The continuous contact with slaughter blunts their higher feelings and at last makes them brutal. They do not hesitate to drive the same knives with which they kill helpless beasts into the hearts of their fellow-men. Chicago has the largest slaughter-houses in the world. Many thousands of animals are killed there every month by trained butchers. Most of the murderers in Chicago come from the butcher class. Who is responsible for their moral degeneration and for the crimes committed by them? Do the meat eaters ever think of this phase of flesh eating? They neither like to hear such facts nor to think of them, because it shocks their sensitive feelings. They want to close their eyes and ears to such sights and sounds. But the truth is that meat eaters are responsible. They are indirectly the causes of all the wicked deeds done by those butchers; they are the causes of their moral degeneration. If there be no meat eater, there will be no butcher. A refined woman would shudder at seeing a red-handed butcher, but she should remember that she must share the responsibility of brutalizing and degrading him. If she killed the animals by her own hands, for her own food, it would be better, for this would save another from becoming an inhuman slayer for her. In every country butchers are considered as heartless and feelingless. In India they are debarred from the society of gentlemen, and the Hindus think that there is no stronger curse than to call a man a butcher. In the United States in some commonwealths no man connected with this trade is allowed to sit in a jury for trying a murder case, because it is recognized that the mind, feelings and whole moral nature become blunted by association with the slaughter of animals. If the process of furnishing flesh from the slaughter-house to the kitchen were remembered when sitting at table with a savory piece of steak before them, I dare say two-thirds of the meat eaters who have any feeling at all would give up meat eating without delay. A young American of my acquaintance who visited the slaughter-houses in Chicago was so deeply impressed by the brutality, cruelty and inhuman atmosphere of the place that he never touched any meat from that day. No individual who eats animal

flesh can avoid moral responsibility. He must necessarily take a share in the cause of the moral degeneration of his brethren.

Various objections have been raised by meat eaters against vegetarianism. Some say if animals are not used for food they will overrun the earth. The same argument applies to animals which are not eaten, such as horses, donkeys, dogs, cats and rats, as to sheep, cattle, pigs and poultry. In India the Hindus do not kill cows, but they are not overrun by them. The Hindus did not have any slaughter-houses until the British Government established them. In the states that are still governed by the Hindu Rajas the wild animals and birds are protected by strict laws. But these states are not overrun by wild animals, nor are the inhabitants driven out by them.

An American who recently made a short visit to India, Dr. J. H. Barrows, formerly of Chicago, said in a lecture in New York that he saw in the streets of Benares some oxen lean and poor as compared with those which are fattened for the Chicago slaughterhouses. His heart melted with kindness and pity at the sight, and he said it is much more kind to kill cattle for food than to allow them to live half-fed or ill-fed. What a curious notion of kindness is this! Dr. Barrows also said that if we do not eat fish the seas and oceans will soon become a solid mass of fish. Any efforts of man to keep down the number of fishes would be vain without the operation of nature's laws, which regulate production and preserve a proper ratio. But this sort of statement and argument is not uncommon from friends of the flesh-eating habit. Others hold that unless they eat animal flesh they will be weak and useless for work and will lack bravery and courage. This is a great mistake. You have heard of the Hindu Sikh soldiers in India, who are the bravest and strongest fighters in the British army. They never turn their back to an enemy in the battle-field. One Sikh soldier can stand against three beef-eaters in hand-to-hand fight. But these soldiers never touch meat, nor fish, never drink wine, nor smoke tobacco. They are strict vegetarians. Millions of Scotchmen have become healthy, strong, hardy and intellectual while living on oatmeal. In a running race of seven athletes in Germany, amongst whom there was one vegetarian, it was shown that a vegetarian can win over meat eaters even in athletic sports. A vegetarian diet gives great endurance and makes one even-tempered. People generally mistake a ferocious, restless and rash temper for courage and strength. These say that a tiger or a wolf is stronger than a horse, a buffalo or an elephant. They make ferocious nature the standard of strength. It is true that a tiger can kill a horse, but has he the muscular strength which enables a horse to draw a heavy load a long distance? A tiger can kill an elephant, but can he lift a cannon weighing hundreds of pounds? Ferocity is one thing and muscular strength is another; we ought to distinguish the one from the other. The source of strength lies in the vegetable kingdom and not in flesh and blood. If flesh eating be the condition of physical strength, why do meat eaters prefer the flesh of herbivorous animals and not that of the carnivora? Some meat eaters say that animal flesh has a large quantity of vegetable energy concentrated in a small compass. If that be their reason

for the meat-eating habit, they ought to live on the flesh of carnivorous animals and birds, such as tigers, wolves, vultures and hawks.

As in the animal kingdom the carnivora are more restless than the herbivora, so amongst men we find that meat eaters are more restless and less self-controlled than vegetarians. As a peaceful, well-poised and self-controlled nature is the first sign of spiritual progress, it is plain that animal food is not the most helpful diet for spiritual development. It is for this reason that meat eaters find it so difficult to concentrate their minds on one particular object. It is impossible for them to meditate on their spiritual and divine nature. Therefore the Hindus, who understand the secret of spirituality, object to meat eating. The Hindus who devote their whole life and mental energy to the attainment of spiritual perfection are called Yogis. According to them the non-killing of animals is one of the conditions of spiritual progress, and killing any animal, either for food or pleasure, is a great stumbling-block in the path of spirituality. Again, they classify the killing or injuring of animals in three divisions,—“committed,” “caused,” and “approved of.” For instance, I may kill an animal myself; this will be, according to the Yogis, “committed.” Secondly, I may cause another to kill; and thirdly, I may approve of the killing committed by another person, as by buying the flesh from a butcher. According to a Yogi, he who wishes to practise non-killing must not kill; must not cause another to kill; and must not approve of the killing done by another. When this non-killing or non-injuring is perfectly established in a Yogi, he receives injury from none, not even from tigers nor from snakes. Tigers and snakes injure us because we have the feeling of injuring them. In fact the Yogis in India have carried the golden rule to its extreme and applied it to lower animals even, thus succeeding in making it a universal law. In the presence of Yogis ferocious animals become peaceful and render them great service. Such a state is idealized in the images and pictures of the greatest men and women Yogis in ancient India. The great Yogi Siva has most venomous snakes as ornaments on his neck, head and body. The great woman Yogi Durga stands on the back of ferocious tigers and lions. Truly speaking such Yogis have no enemies in the world.

Another reason why a spiritually advanced Hindu does not like meat, is that eating flesh and drinking wine go hand in hand. It is a well-known fact that many people acquire the habit of drunkenness in trying to digest animal food with the help of liquors; and as drinking leads to all sorts of other vices, a Hindu believes that one can most easily be free from those vices by being a vegetarian. The Hindus are strongly opposed to drinking wines or liquors. If a high-caste Hindu gentleman should go to a saloon or should drink publicly, he would lose caste. Hindu women do not touch wine. In Hindu society no one can find a drunken woman, as one finds in the streets of cities in Western countries. The Hindus allowed no saloon in large cities; but now, under the demoralizing influence of the liquor trade of the British Government, one finds hundreds of saloons in some cities. Hindus cannot understand how a civilized nation can approve of liquor trade and opium trade; can seek to demoralize sober people by opening saloons in villages, and inducing the

poor laboring classes to acquire habits of drunkenness by offering them strong liquors at no cost. Many people have asked me again and again whether the Hindus have become more moral under the British rule. They would not ask such questions if they knew the demoralizing effects of liquor trade and opium trade in India, and also if they remembered that wherever a Christian missionary goes, a bottle of brandy or whiskey soon follows him. The vegetarian Hindus do not touch wine, even in the form of a medicine.

Lastly, a Hindu is a vegetarian from the standpoint of love. Love means the expression of oneness. The Hindus love lower animals because of oneness. Their ideal is to realize that one spiritual Being is manifesting through all living creatures. The divine Spirit which is dwelling within us and illuminating our inner nature with the light of intelligence and consciousness is also dwelling in lower animals. Their ideal is not a vague, indefinite and meaningless word, such as "brotherhood." They wish to realize that we are one in Spirit with the lower animals, one with every living creature. Their religion teaches: "Love every living creature as thy Self," because the same Self or Spirit is in all. "Realize the Self or Spirit within you; then you shall be able to see the same Spirit everywhere.

He who realizes the one universal Spirit everywhere, cannot kill Spirit by Spirit." He becomes truly unselfish. He is ever ready to help all. Whenever we kill any animal for our food or pleasure we are selfish. It is on account of extreme selfishness that we do not recognize the rights of other animals and amuse ourselves, by killing innocent creatures or by injuring them, or by depriving them of their rights. This kind of selfishness is the mother of all evil thoughts and wicked deeds. That which makes us selfish and helps us to cling to our lower self is degrading and wicked; that which leads us towards unselfishness is elevating and virtuous. That which prevents us from realizing the oneness of Spirit is wrong; that which opens our spiritual eyes and helps us to see that Divinity is expressing itself through the forms of lower animals, and makes us love them as we love our own Self, is godly and divine.

Every kind of food which we take into our bodies produces changes in our system, both physical and mental. Those who have carefully examined the changes that are produced in their minds by meat diet and who have struggled for self-control, will find it extremely difficult to govern animal passions, violent nature and restless condition of mind without giving up animal food. Thus, looking at the food question from various standpoints, a Hindu is a vegetarian and cannot advocate the eating of animal flesh.

DIVINE COMMUNION

“He whose heart is unattached to the objects of senses, and whose soul is fixed in Divine Communion with Brahman, attaineth to bliss everlasting.”— Bhagavad Gita, Ch, V, 21.

Divine communion, according to the Christian belief, is most intimately related to that ritual which is known by various names, the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist, Sacrament or Mass. The general belief is that during the celebration of this ritual the souls of those who partake in this holy service commune with each other as well as with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In Matthew we read: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it and brake it and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Chap. xxvi, 26-28.

These words have given foundation to that memorial service called “Holy Communion,” which was instituted by Jesus the Christ, and which has been practised by all the Christian nations for nearly 1900 years; but if we read the religious history of other nations we find that the eating of bread, or the body of God, and the drinking of wine, or the blood of God, existed among pagan peoples many centuries before Christ was born, and was practised by the Greeks, Egyptians, Persians and the Hindus of the Vedic period.

Readers of the comparative history of religions know that the Eucharist is one of the oldest rites of antiquity. The Greeks called it the Eleusinian mystery. Rev. Robert Taylor said: “The Eleusinian mysteries were the most august of all the pagan ceremonies celebrated, more especially by the Athenians, every fifth year in honor of Ceres, the goddess of corn, who, in allegorical language, had given us her flesh to eat just as Bacchus, the god of wine, in like sense, had given us his blood to drink.”

“Prodicus, a Greek sophist of the fifth century B.C., says that the ancients worshipped bread as Demeter (Ceres) and wine as Dionysus (Bacchus) therefore when they ate the bread and drank the wine, after it had been consecrated, they were eating the flesh and drinking the blood of their deity. “The Eleusinian mysteries were accompanied by many religious rites and ceremonies expressive of the purity and self-denial of the worshipper, and were therefore considered to be an expiation of past sins.” Throughout the whole ceremony the name of the Lord was repeated many times.

The ancient Egyptians annually celebrated the resurrection of Osiris, their Saviour and Lord, and commemorated his death by eating the bread and wine consecrated by the priest through many rites and ceremonies. The worshippers who partook of

this holy sacrament believed that the bread and wine became the veritable flesh and blood of their god Osiris.

In Persia, many centuries before the birth of Christ, the worshippers of Mithra, who, according to the Par-sees, was the Mediator, Redeemer and Saviour of the world, took the sacrament of bread and wine with the same belief that the Christians do today. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Renan and other scholars believe that the Christian Eucharist was an imitation of the Persian ceremony which was practised by the worshippers of Mithra from most ancient times. In India, among the ancient Vedic sacrifices, we find one of special importance for remission of sins. It was a sacrifice of cake and wine. Cake was called Purodasha and wine was called Soma; this cake was made especially for this purpose, was round in shape, its top resembling the back of a tortoise. It was considered to be the symbol of the body of Prajapati, the firstborn Lord of all creatures, who sacrificed himself before creation for the good of all, and out of whose body the whole universe arose, The wine of the Soma plant is described in the Vedas as the liquor of immortality, the giver of life and strength, the water of life; it was called the nectar which purified the body and soul of all those who drank, and which conferred immortality upon them. The sacrificer in ancient times consecrated this cake, then cut it into pieces, and, chanting the name of the Lord, threw each of those pieces into the sacrificial fire; at the same time he poured consecrated wine into the fire. The remaining portions of the cake and wine were reverently eaten by the assembled family. The sins of the past fortnight were confessed, repentance was expressed, forgiveness was asked, and when they drank the divine beverage they thought that they were in communion with the Heavenly King in spirit—that they were one with the Heavenly King and Father of the Universe. Every householder used to make this sacrifice at the end of each fortnight; husband and wife performed it together and ate the cake and drank the wine with the rest of the family. The rich and powerful employed the ordained priests to perform the sacrifice for them.

Thus we can see that this holy communion service was performed by the ancient nations for the expiation of their sins even centuries before Christ instituted it among his disciples; that ritual which is observed today by millions of Christians all over the world was performed long before the time of Christ by many nations who had never heard of Him. But the Hindus did not continue this practice; they gave it up when the Vedic seers began to grasp more abstract truths. Their truth-seeking minds could not rest contented with the sacrifices and ceremonials which were described in the Vedas; they gradually came to see that those sacrifices stood for something greater, and they tried to understand the spiritual significance; they searched for deeper knowledge of the mysteries of the universe; they struggled for the realization of the true nature of the soul and its relation to God, who was the objective Lord and Father of the universe. At that time they began to question whether or not God was objective and extra-cosmic; whether or not the soul was created by God. Those seekers after Truth were gradually led beyond that old conception of an objective,

personal God, who dwelt in heaven outside of nature. As they progressed higher and higher in spiritual researches and arrived at the Vedantic conception of God and the world, their meaning of the Divine communion became higher and more spiritual.

Here we should remember that as long as God is extra-cosmic, outside of nature, as long as He is far from us, so long there remains a vast gulf of separation between God and man. The more distant God is from us, the less chance there is for us to approach Him and come into direct communion with Him. Such being the conditions, the problem of Divine communion does not arise in the minds of the followers of a religion which makes God unapproachable, as we find to be the case in two of the great religions of the world, Judaism and Mahammedanism. These two religions believe in an extra-cosmic, objective, personal God, who is the all-powerful Creator of the world and of human souls.

In Judaism the conception of Jehovah is so transcendent, so objective, so strongly marked and so majestic, that there arose a vast sea of separation between Jehovah and the individual souls. The communion or approach of any individual to Him was considered to be almost an insult to the Deity. This difficulty which such a conception produced was understood and felt for the first time by the Alexandrian Jews, like Philo and his followers, who were influenced by the Greek philosophy; they tried to bridge over that sea of separation between God and man by accepting the Logos theory of the Greek philosophers.

The Logos is described in the writings of Philo as the only begotten son of God, the Father; it was considered to be the Mediator or bridge between God and the world, between the Creator and His creatures; the same Logos was afterwards identified with Jesus the Christ; and since that time the followers of Christ have believed that no one could come into close communion with God except through that especial Logos, or Word, or Mediator, or through Jesus the Christ. The orthodox Christians think that it is impossible for a human being to commune with the Divinity except through the only begotten Son, the Christ. They say that it is blasphemous even to think of the possibility of an individual soul approaching God without coming through Jesus; they have forgotten, however, that the expression of "*only begotten Son*" was first used for the Logos, which was universal, and not for any particular personality.

Do you know why the Christians say that it is impossible for any individual to approach God without coming through Christ? Because their conception of God is the same objective, majestic, transcendent and extra-cosmic being as Jehovah of the Jews, under the name of Father in Heaven. As long as this conception of the Father in Heaven remains extra-cosmic, so long such an idea will continue to prevail.

In Mahammedanism the conception of God is the same as that in Judaism. The Allah is the all-powerful, transcendent and personal God who dwells in heaven, outside of the universe. Like Jehovah, Allah is to be feared rather than to be united with or approached or communed with. According to Mahammed, true religion lies in

the complete submission to Allah's will, and nothing more. There is no possibility of a beatific communion with Allah in the religion of Mahammed. The modern Babists, who are but reformed Mahammedans, still maintain a similar conception of God; they believe in the same Allah, who is extra-cosmic, majestic and outside of the universe. The God of Mahammed lived in a heaven, and from that celestial abode commanded the universe; but the more philosophical class among Mahammedans went beyond this conception; they were known as the Sufis, and were almost like the Christian mystics of the middle ages. They were the mystics among the Mahammedans. They believed in a communion with God, and that that communion could be established through love in the state of ecstasy.

Although these Sufis believed that a human being could approach God, yet they did not accept the idea that a human soul could be one with Him. They were dualists; they believed that the individual soul could be god-like and a temporary union between the soul and God could be accomplished only through love. They did not believe in any other mediator; they even rejected Mahammed as the only prophet of God. The writings of the Sufis are full of Oriental metaphors which seem horrible to many of the practical, matter-of-fact Western minds. Even the mind of a great philosopher like Emerson could not understand the metaphorical language of the God-intoxicated Sufi poet and philosopher, Hafiz. Those who have read the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam will understand how difficult it is to grasp the true meaning which underlies the metaphorical expressions of the Persian Sufis.

Sufism, which arose about 820 after Christ, was the result of the influence of the Vedanta Philosophy of India upon the dry Mahammedan conception of the objective, personal God or Allah. The peculiarity of Vedanta, on the contrary, lies in a conception of God which is not only objective, but both subjective and objective. He is not merely transcendent but immanent. God, according to the Vedanta is not only outside of nature but dwells in every particle and atom in nature; He is not only the soul of the universe, He is the soul of our souls. Although Vedanta does not object to the worship of an extra-cosmic, personal God, still it does not stop there as other religious systems have done. On the contrary, it says that a man may fear and worship God as the extra-cosmic being for some time, but when his spiritual eye is opened, and when he understands the true nature of the soul and its true relation to God, he begins to realize that God is both objective and subjective.

The soul, according to Vedanta, is not created by God out of any material which is outside of Himself, but it emanates from the spiritual essence of Divinity; consequently it is of the same substance and the same nature as God Himself. It is immaterial, immortal and unchangeable. God is not separate from the universe; there is no gulf of separation between God who is infinite and all-pervading, and the human soul or the world; but He is like the Eternal background of the variegated colors and scenes of the panorama of the phenomenal world. He is like the spiritual canvas upon which are painted the pictures of human souls by the invisible hands of the Almighty Artist. He is the infinite source of all powers and forces which are

manifested in the material and physical planes of the universe; He dwells within our souls.

Every individual soul is a part of the spiritual body of the God of Vedanta; He is nearer to our souls than are our bodies, nearer than our senses, our minds, our intellects; He is the essence of our existence and life. In Him we live and through Him we exist, consequently there is no need of any bridge, any mediator, between Him and us. The relation of the individual soul to God being naturally so close and so intimate, the Divine communion in Vedanta has a more spiritual meaning and a deeper significance than that of merely eating the flesh and drinking the blood of God. God has neither flesh nor blood. True communion with Divinity, according to Vedanta, does not come through any external relation to place, time or personality, but it comes to the soul when the innermost door of the soul is open to receive that blissful current of the Divine Spirit which rushes in with tremendous force. It comes when the depths of our hearts are flooded with the one sheet of the water of immortality, and when all the weeds of selfishness, hatred, jealousy, sectarianism and bigotry are washed away by the tremendous outrush of the current of that all-loving omniscient Spirit; then rises on the horizon of the soul that self-effulgent sun of wisdom; the soft and benign rays of that eternal sun dispel the darkness of ignorance that had reigned there for ages, and illumine the heart with Divine light.

Divine communion comes at first like the reunion of two kindred spirits united by the everlasting bond of love, but who are apparently separated by the delusive power of forgetfulness. As a child who loves its mother, and knows nothing but that beloved mother, may forget her for the time being when its whole soul is fascinated with the toys of Christmas time; or as a young woman, charmed by jewels and beautiful garments, may forget her lover whom she adores, and considers the embodiment of all happiness; even so, the individual soul, bewitched by the objects of sense, may forget the true source of happiness, which is more intimately related to it than the mother is to the child or the lover to the beloved one. But, as the joy of the child when it is reunited to the beloved mother—as the joy which comes to the soul of that woman when she again remembers her lover—cannot be described by words, so that happiness which comes through the reunion of the soul with God is beyond the power of utterance. That happiness is not temporary; it is unbounded and everlasting. This reunion leads to a still higher realization of the spiritual oneness with God. At that time the soul regains its true nature, breaks through all barriers and walls of limitation and attains to perfect freedom and omniscience; from that time divine qualities begin to flow through the soul. In that state all questions are solved, all doubts cease, all results of past actions are annulled and all the knots of desire that arise in the self-loving and self-seeking ignorant heart are torn asunder. After this realization there is no more struggle for the expiation of sins, no more crying for forgiveness, no more fear of punishment. The human soul is transfigured with Divine Spirit. This transfiguration, or perfect atonement, or at-one-ment with God, is the aim of divine communion.

Divine communion brings the attainment of God-consciousness*; all other phases of consciousness which are manifested on the lower planes in daily life, merge into this supreme consciousness of the divine nature of the soul; it is called in Sanskrit, Samhadhi; it is the state of God-consciousness; if any man or woman can reach this state for an instant even, then he or she destroys all effects of the sins which he or she may have committed during perhaps hundreds of previous incarnations.

No individual soul, whether virtuous or sinful, rich or poor, can ever become truly sinless and happy without coming into that state of God-consciousness. You may cry for help and pray for forgiveness day after day and night after night, may ask redemption from sins, but rest assured that he who will forgive sins is your own Self. Your own Divine nature alone can make you free from sins. You may call that Divine nature, God or Buddha or Christ, it is all the same; no one other than the Divine Self possesses the power of forgiving the sins of the individual ego. Remember that all help that you have received has not come to you from the outside, but it has come from the very bottom of your own soul; you might have thought, through ignorance, that the forgiveness and help came from outside, but the time is sure to come when you will have to realize that all the help you have received in your life, or will receive in the future, is from within; that it is your own Divine Self that will help and forgive you, who, through ignorance and self-delusion, have committed many mistakes, and have played the part of a sinner.

The highest ideal of divine communion—that is, the attainment of God-consciousness—does not come through ceremony or ritual, nor by muttering passages from the Scriptures, nor by counting beads, nor by confessing sins to a priest, nor by worshipping the departed spirit of any holy man; these may be helpful to those whose souls have not awakened to spiritual truths, but God-consciousness comes through the realization of our true nature, which is eternally one with the pure, blissful and all-knowing Spirit Divine.

There are many paths that lead to such realization; each of these paths is described in Vedanta as Yoga, or the method of attaining this consciousness. Those who practise Yoga sincerely, keeping the attainment of divine communion and God-consciousness as the highest ideal, should not stop until it is acquired. Life is not worth living if we cannot become conscious of our Divine nature in this life. What good can be gained by living like slaves to passions and desires; what shall we gain for our souls by attiring our bodies in rich raiment, or by living in beautiful mansions, or by filling high positions in the state or country? These may be of great value to those whose aim is not higher than the attainment of earthly comforts and pleasures of the body. How long will this body stay? Not more than five or six scores of years; but remember that the soul life is not confined to the life of the body; it is from eternity to eternity. What are you going to do for your souls?

Have you gained anything for the soul? The treasures of the earth do not enrich the soul and comforts of the body cannot long satisfy that soul which is overburdened

with cares, anxieties, suffering and worries, and which is obeying the commands of hundreds of masters internal and external. The pleasures of the senses do not satisfy the soul which has realized the transitoriness and the ephemeral character of worldly objects. No family ties, no earthly relations, can ever quench the thirst of that soul which longs to drink the water that comes through divine communion alone; no earthly thing can stand in the way of that soul which eagerly seeks the path to return home and rest there peacefully after the tiresome journey along the by-ways in the maze of the phenomenal world. Vain are the hopes of those who try to be happy by acquiring wealth, or the pleasures of the senses and comforts of the body. Since the beginning of the history of humanity no human soul has ever become truly happy, or peaceful, or blissful in this life by pursuing the pleasures of the senses and comforts of the body. Therefore Vedanta says: "If a man becomes master of the whole world, still he is not happy; he wants something else." And Jesus says: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Neither happiness nor immortality can be bought by the almighty dollar. One may be the father of many children, but he must be a fool who expects to be happy on account of many children. True happiness comes to a soul when it renounces the foolish idea of becoming happy through sense pleasures and earthly enjoyments, and seeks God-consciousness by entering into the gate of divine communion. He who has entered that gate by the sincere and earnest practice of Yoga, and has succeeded in regaining his true nature, sees Divinity everywhere. To his eyes the beauty of a human face, or of a landscape, appears infinitely more beautiful because behind that beauty he sees the Infinite Source of all beauty; he knows that this external beauty is but a partial expression of that Divine beauty. He feels Divine presence in music, as well as in every sound that enters into his ears. Such a soul perceives Divinity in every object of the senses.

Then the mysteries of life and death are solved. The whole life, which seems to us meaningless, unfolds higher purpose, nobler and more spiritual meaning to one who has reached God-consciousness through Divine communion. He whose soul communes with the Divine Spirit within does not care for any celestial felicity; he does not want anything of this world; he is serene, peaceful, restful, happy and always contented, free from worry, anxieties, misery, sorrow, suffering and fear of death. He knows that he is divine. If the whole world persecutes him, tortures him and cuts his body into pieces, even then he resists not, but blesses his persecutors and gently utters: "I am Spirit Divine; swords cannot pierce me, fire cannot burn me, the pains of the body cannot affect me; I am immortal. I am in the sun, in the moon, in the stars; nay, I am the soul of the persecutor's soul. I am He, I am He. If the whole world go, I do not lose anything by it." He says: "I bow down to my Divine Spirit, which does not possess anything, yet which is the Master of all that exists in the universe, or will exist in the future."

DOES THE SOUL EXIST AFTER DEATH?

One of the most poetical of the Upanishads, I mean the Katha Upanishad, which has been translated by Sir Edwin Arnold, under the title of "The Secret of Death," begins with this inquiry: "There is this doubt; when a man dies, some say that he is gone forever, that he does not exist, while others hold that he still lives; which of these is true?" Various answers have been given to this question; metaphysics, philosophy, science and religion have tried to solve this problem. At the same time, attempts have also been made to suppress this question and to prevent inquiry as to whether or not man exists after death. Hundreds of thinkers have brought forward all sorts of arguments to do away with questions bearing upon this momentous subject.

From ancient times there have been atheistic and agnostic thinkers in India who denied the existence of the soul after the death of the body. They are known as Charvakas. They believe that the body is the soul, and that the soul does not exist outside of the body, and that when the body dies, the soul is also dead and gone. They believe in nothing that cannot be perceived by the senses. Their motto is: "As long as you live, do not fail to enjoy. Live comfortably and enjoy the pleasures of life. Do not think of the future. Get all that you need and wish; if you have not got money, then beg or borrow it, for when the body is burned into ashes no one will have to be accountable for your deeds."

Such Charvakas we find in almost every country. For instance, in the Old Testament we read, Solomon says: "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart.....Live joyfully with the wife - whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Eccl. ix. 7, 9, 10. The followers of such thinkers are spreading very rapidly and their number is increasing every day. They are now known as atheists, agnostics, materialists, etc. According to this class of thinkers, those who believe in the existence of the soul as separate from the body, or in a life after death are ignorant and superstitious fools, while those who follow their ideas are clever and intelligent beings. Most of them hold that there is no such thing as soul. No argument can convince them or change their views, because they will not admit the existence of anything which lies beyond the reach of their senses, or which cannot be perceived by the limited powers of the senses. They have written volumes after volumes against the existence of the soul, and have tried to stop such useless questions of the mind; but in spite of their efforts, have they succeeded in stopping that innate question, "What remains after death?"—which rises spontaneously in almost every human heart? No. The same question rises to-day as it arose thousands of years ago. No one can stop it, because it is inseparably connected with our nature.

The same question was asked by saints and sinners, by prophets and priests, by kings and beggars amongst all nations, in all climes. We are discussing the same question to-day; and it will be discussed in the future. We may forget it for the time being in the turmoil and struggles of our lives; we may not ask it when we are deeply absorbed in comforts, luxuries and sense enjoyments; we may delude ourselves by various false argumentations; but the moment we encounter the sudden appearance of death, the moment we see that some one of our nearest and dearest is breathing his last, we stop for a while and ask within ourselves: What is this? Where has he gone? Does he still exist? What has become of him? That dormant question reappears in a new form and disturbs our peace of mind. Then we begin to inquire; but at the very threshold of our inquiry we find an adamant wall which it is almost impossible to break through. Weak intellects stop there; their feeble attempts to cross that wall produce no result. That wall is nothing but the belief that the body is the producer of the soul, that the soul is the result of the physical form we call the "body." Those who can overcome this strong barrier can understand whether or not the soul exists after death. The old, crude way of inferring the existence of soul after death and a future life for all men, women and children from the tradition of a single miraculous resurrection of a certain person, no longer appeals to our reason. The days of believing blindly in the authority of any one's sayings are gone by. We are no longer children; we want maturer reason; we want to discuss that question more deeply. Those who believe in that miraculous resurrection will perhaps say that those who do not believe in it have no hope. But we no longer accept their statements. The time has come when we want to discuss the question scientifically, psychologically, philosophically, metaphysically, and in all other possible ways.

Now let us see whether the explanation that body is the cause of the soul is satisfactory or not. Taking it for granted that the soul, or the mass of thought, or whatever you may call it, is the outcome of the combinations of matter which make up the body, we ask, What is the cause of that body? What force combines the matter into the form of the body? What force is there which forms your body in one way and my body in another? What is the cause of those distinctions? The materialistic Charvakas will answer that this body was caused by another body of the parents. As the parents produce this body so the body of the parents is the cause of this body.. But that is not the true answer, for instead of explaining the cause of this body and this combination of matter they show us another combination of matter, and the question remains the same. What is the cause of that combination of matter,—the parents' body? They answer, another combination of matter,—and so on. Instead of answering the question and explaining the cause of the combination of matter they say that this combination is the result of another combination, which ultimately leads to the fallacy of *regressus ad infinitum*. The method of explaining the soul by the body is like the process of explaining the cause by the effect, which is putting the cart before the horse.

Modern physiologists, anatomists, pathologists, and a host of other materialistic and agnostic thinkers, however, hold that body, or the combination of matter, produces thought, intelligence, consciousness, mind or soul. In medical schools and college laboratories students are taught that thought, or intelligence, or consciousness, is nothing but a function of the brain. Moreover, they learn that every special form of thought is a result of the activity of a special portion of the brain. When we see things, or think of seen objects, the optical convolutions of our brain are active. A certain portion of the temporal lobes are active when we hear, and so on.

Those of the modern scientists who advocate the production of thought by brain say that "mind is conterminous with brain functions." If the brain functions stop, the mind, intelligence, consciousness, and all the mental phenomena will instantly stop. The phenomena of consciousness correspond, element for element, to the operations of special parts of the brain. There is no such thing as soul; consequently there can be no question regarding its existence after death. They deny the existence of the soul altogether. The sensations decay when the organic conditions change and stop when the machinery stops. The brain brings into existence the material of consciousness of which our minds consist. Some explain the process by which thought is produced by the brain, by saying that the peculiar structure of the brain is destined to produce thought and consciousness just as the stomach is destined to perform the function of digestion and the liver to secrete bile. As food materials, after falling into the stomach, change and assume new qualities, so the impressions of the brain through the nerves are metamorphosed into ideas, thought, emotion, will, expressions of the face, speech, disposition, etc. Thus thought or soul is the secretion of the brain; when the brain is gone, soul cannot exist. Here impressions are compared to food as if the impressions were gross forms of matter or as if they could exist apart from a perceiving mind. Buchner, one of the most famous materialists, says: "Thinking must be regarded as a special mode of general natural motion." J. Luys says: "As one sees a metallic rod, placed in a glowing furnace, gradually heat itself and pass successively from the shades of bright red to dark red, to white and develop, as its temperature rises, heat and light,—so the living sensitive cells, in presence of the incitations that solicit them, exalt themselves progressively as to their most interior sensibility."

Mr. Percival Lowell says: "When we have, as we say, an idea, what happens inside of us is probably like this: the neural current of molecular change passes up the nerves, and through the ganglia reaches at last the cortical cells... .When it reaches the cortical cells it finds a set of molecules which are not so accustomed to this special change. The current encounters resistance, and in overcoming this resistance it causes the cells to glow. This white-heating of the cells we call consciousness. Consciousness, in short, is probably nerve-glow." Thus the western materialists who believe that the physical forces are metamorphosed into ideas, thoughts and sensations describe the process by which this change takes place. Mr. Herbert Spencer, being an agnostic, advocates the metamorphosis of the physical

forces into states of consciousness but he does not describe the process. He leaves it as a mystery which it is impossible to fathom. That is, he does not know how this metamorphosis takes place, but he is sure it does take place. Mr. Spencer, however, identifies the soul with the brain and compares it to the piano. He says: "Ideas are like the successive chords and cadences brought out, which successively die as the other ones are sounded, and it would be as proper to say that these passing chords and cadences thereafter exist in the piano as it is proper to say that passing ideas thereafter exist in the brain" (soul).Principles of Psychology, VII., p. 485. But here Mr. Spencer forgets that the piano needs a performer to produce musical sounds. Music is never brought out by the piano itself if it does not exist in the mind of the performer. So his analogy is imperfect and incomplete. It would have been complete if he supposed that the individual soul or mind is detached from the brain and plays upon its nervous centres and brain cells as a performer plays upon the keys of a piano.

Another materialistic thinker, Professor W. K. Clifford, who believes in the combination theory, says: "Consciousness is a complex thing made up of elements, a stream of feelings. The action of the brain is also a complex thing made up of elements, a stream of nerve messages. For every feeling in consciousness there is at the same time a nerve message of the brain. Consciousness is not a simple thing, but complex; it is the combination of feelings into a stream. Inexorable facts connect our consciousness with this body that we know; and that not merely as a whole, but the parts of it are connected severally with parts of our brain action. If there is any similar connection with a spiritual body it only follows that the spiritual body must die at the same time with the natural one." Thus the materialistic thinkers, who do not believe in a soul as separate from the brain, or independent of the physical body, try to deduce mind and intelligence from matter, or from the combinations of matter, either by applying the theory of production, or the theory of combination.

In India similar theories were advanced by the Charvakas and the Buddhists, who did not believe in the existence of a soul as separate from the gross body. The Buddhists maintained that the body is the cause of mind and intelligence, that consciousness is the result of the combination of insentient matter and unintelligent forces of physical nature. They used the illustration of a lamp and the light. This body is just like a lamp, and the intelligence, or consciousness, is like the light produced by the burning of the candle.

But Vedanta philosophers refuted both these materialistic theories by pointing out the fallacy of their principal arguments. Vedanta says that matter or object is only one half of the universe, and the other half is mind, or subject, or soul. It is impossible to deduce the one from the other. In the first place if we analyze our knowledge of matter and force, we find that we cannot know matter by itself and we cannot know⁷ force by itself; that what we know is nothing but a mental change. Knowledge of matter is nothing but the knowledge of that change of mind of which we are conscious. When we say that matter exists we are conscious of a peculiar

or man, the living protoplasm not only ultimately dies and is resolved into its mineral and lifeless constituents, but is always dying, and, strange as the paradox may sound, could not live unless it died." Although every particle of the body changes, we still continue to exist; our continuity is not broken. From babyhood to old age we retain the same sense of "I" and of personal identity. This continuity of the conscious agent, or "I," cannot be explained by any physical or chemical law. According to Vedanta philosophy, thought, or feeling, or intelligence can never be produced by any mechanical or molecular motion. "Motion produces motion and nothing else," says modern science. As such, how can the motion of the atoms of the body produce consciousness? That must be due to some higher power, or force. This force is ordinarily called "soul." The soul is not subject to the atomic or molecular changes in the body; it is rather the cause of them. It is beyond all change, and consequently, beyond death. It is the basis of the continuity of the conscious state and of the sense of identity in the individual. As we survive and retain our individuality after each seven years of change and renewal, so we shall live as individual souls after the final dissolution of the form of our bodies. In the Bhagavad Gita it is said: "As during our lifetime we survive the death of the baby body, the young body, and the mature body, successively, and retain our individuality, so after the death of the old body we shall survive, live, retain our individuality and continue to exist through eternity."

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