

PLATO
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VEDIC
IDEALISM

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THE VEDANTA CENTRE
1 Queensberry Street, Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

ANANDA ASHRAMA
La Crescenta, California, U. S. A.

Plato and Vedic Idealism

BY
SWAMI PARAMANANDA

AUTHOR OF "TEACHINGS OF CHRIST AND ORIENTAL IDEALS," "EMERSON AND VEDANTA," "REINCARNATION AND IMMORTALITY," "THE VIGIL," "SOUL'S SECRET DOOR," "VEDANTA IN PRACTICE," ETC.



Published by
THE VEDANTA CENTRE, BOSTON, MASS.

ANANDA ASHRAMA
La Crescenta, Los Angeles Co., Calif.

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“All ancient books which have once been called sacred by man will have their lasting place in the history of mankind, and those who possess the courage, the perseverance, and the self-denial of the true miner, and of the true scholar, will find even in the darkest and dustiest shafts what they are seeking for,—real nuggets of thought, and precious jewels of faith and hope.”

Max Müller.

MAKER OF THE BEAUTIFUL*

It is beauty I love.
Though like the foolish moth
Oft I burn my limbs in the flame;
Yet evermore my soul craves
 its attainment.
Beauty in the rose draws my heart;
Beauty of dawn exalts my soul;
Stillness of the night fills me
 with wonder;
Beauty of face and beauty of sight
Awaken in my soul love and ever
 greater love.
In love and with love
I seek the Maker of the beautiful.

*This poem by the author so strikingly resembles, in thought, Plato's idea of beauty, that it makes an appropriate introduction to the volume.—Editor.

I

GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND INDIAN THOUGHT

IT is the natural instinct of every human being to inquire; but the method of inquiry varies according to individual tendencies. Some try to find the cause of creation exclusively in external phenomena, others seek it in internal nature; but every system of philosophy without exception is the outcome of this search, whether directed to the inner or to the outer realm. Since it rises from the instinctive desire of man to know, however, it is very difficult to fix an historic date when this

search began. In India the oldest record, contained in the Rig-Veda, the most ancient known Scripture, is placed by conservative authorities at between two and three thousand years before Christ.

Turning to Greece, Thales (636 B. C.) appears as the first marked figure in Greek philosophical research. His investigations led him to the conclusion that water is the most vital principle in the universe. As he studied Nature—sky, sea, earth—he found water present everywhere. He observed that man, animal, plant, all alike depend on water for their life and sustenance; therefore he concluded that water is the basis of creation. His disciple Anaximenes went one step further and regarded air as the most vital principle. “Just as our soul, being air,” he said, “holds us together, so do breath and air encompass the whole world.” The next eminent philosopher in the Ionian School, Heraclitus, (503 B. C.),

declared fire to be the basic principle of life.

This tendency of the human mind to find a satisfactory explanation for creation in external phenomena is not peculiar to the Greek philosophers only, but is to be found in every ancient philosophical system. This was undoubtedly the origin of all nature worship. As man apprehended the great elemental forces playing about him, he was overwhelmed with awe and wonder; and gradually personifying these forces as gods, he sought to propitiate them, and to gain their blessing and protection. We observe this in the earlier periods of Indo-Aryan development. In the Vedic Scriptures we read of the Fire-God, the Air-God, the Wind-God; but it is evident that these are not worshipped as the Supreme Ruler, but as different manifestations in nature of the One Infinite and Absolute Cause.

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While the Greeks took account of only four elements—earth, water, air and fire—the Indo-Aryans in their cosmogony recognized a fifth element,—ether. They knew that all created objects are the combination and recombination of these elements, which, however, could never operate without a Supreme Intelligence behind them. Therefore even in the most ancient Vedic period, they were never regarded as fundamental; for while the Greeks respected nature as a vital part in itself, the Indo-Aryans knew that nature was only an expression of something higher.

This tendency to go behind the elements and seek an immaterial cause for the universe also appears, although much later, in Heraclitus' conception of fire, which he defined as the "self-kindled principle of life, endowed with intelligence and ceaseless activity." He "found that there was life within him which he could not call his

own, and yet it was in the very highest sense himself, so that without it he would have been a poor, helpless, isolated creature; a universal life which connected him with his fellowmen,—with the absolute source and original fountain of life.” (Maurice). George Henry Lewes also writes in his “Biographical History of Philosophy”: “He, (Heraclitus), proclaimed the absolute vitality of nature, the endless change of matter, the mutability and perishability of individual things in contrast with the Eternal Being—the Supreme Harmony which rules over all.”

The idea of a Supreme Intelligence, which remained dim and indefinite in the mind of Heraclitus, was fully developed by Anaxagoras, the most distinguished of the Ionian philosophers and the teacher of Pericles, Euripides and possibly of Socrates. Born in 500 B. C. of a rich and noble family, he renounced his inheritance

and, leaving his home in Asia Minor, he came to Athens at the most glorious period of her history in order to devote himself wholly to the study of philosophy. He recognized mind, not matter, as the Final Cause. According to him Intelligence was the basis or "shaping-spirit" of the universe. This Intelligence or the *Nous* he described as "infinite, self-potent and un-mixed with anything else." "*Nous*," he says, "is the most pure and subtle of all things and has all knowledge about all things and infinite power."

This doctrine of the *Nous* passed to Aristotle. But the knowledge of it, according to him, could only be acquired through reason; the senses were too limited, the intellect too weak, life too short to perceive the Great Spirit or *Nous*. Such a conception of the Eternal Spirit as the basic principle of the phenomenal world resembles that of the Indo-Aryan sages,

who gave to this spirit the name, *Satchidanandam*, "Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute"; and who, many centuries earlier, proclaimed in the Mundaka-Upanishad: "He is not perceived by the eye or by speech, or by the other senses; nor can He be attained by austerity or work; when a man's mind is illumined by the pure light of wisdom, then he beholds Him through meditation."

Side by side with the Ionian school, we observe another trend of thought, wholly different in method. Anaximander, one of the most noted mathematicians of Greece, born in 610 B. C., was the first exponent of this school. His speculations led him to the most abstract realm. He could not accept such material explanations as were offered by Thales, but declared the Infinite to be the origin of all things. According to his theory of the

universe, the abstract was the source of the concrete, the primary Being was a unity, one in all, comprising within itself the multiplicity of elements, from which all mundane things are composed. It is only in infinity, he said, that the perpetual changes of things can take place.

Anaximander by his method of didactic mathematical speculation paved the way for Pythagoras, one of the most brilliant figures of Greek antiquity and a contemporary of Buddha and Confucius. "Old historians paint him as clothed in robes of white, his head covered with gold, his aspect grave and majestic, wrapt in the contemplation of the mysteries of existence, listening to the music of Homer and Hesiod, or to the harmony of the spheres." (G. H. Lewes). Although little is recorded of his younger years, it is known that he was acquainted with the Ionic philosophers and that he travelled exten-

sively, visiting Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, India and other countries. About 530 B. C. he settled in Crotona, a town of Magna Graecia, and gathered round him a few faithful followers who lived in common and rigidly practiced obedience, silence, abstinence, extreme simplicity in dress and food, renunciation of material possessions, and the habit of introspection and contemplation. Philosophy with them was not merely a matter of intellectual speculation, but of life and the cultivation of the higher virtues.

This community in time developed into a school, which in its character and training strongly resembles the ancient monastic system of India. The influence of his contact with Indian thought is also obvious in certain of his cardinal doctrines, such as the transmigration of the soul and its incorporeal nature. His strong mathematical trend of mind led him to

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find the essence of the created universe in numbers. "All is number," he affirms, or as Diogenes Laertius sums up his teaching: "The monad is the beginning of everything. From the monad proceeds an infinite duad." Thus we see the "Infinite" of Anaximander transformed into the "One" of Pythagoras, which is apparently identical with the "Ekam" or "One without a second" of the Vedic sages. So in his search for the cause he passed from physics to metaphysics. The life and teachings of Pythagoras and his followers left a lasting impression on Hellenic thought and were dominant factors in shaping the philosophy, science and theology of the pre-Socratic period, not only in Greece, but later in Rome, Alexandria and elsewhere.

II

SECOND PERIOD OF GREEK THOUGHT

THE second stage of Greek philosophy begins with Xenophanes, who was born in Asia Minor in 560 B. C., and who, being exiled from his country, wandered over Sicily as a minstrel. "Sad, earnest, enthusiastic, indifferent to money, comfort, friends, fame, that he might kindle the knowledge of God" by singing his own elegiac poems full of the profoundest truths. In 536 B. C. he settled in Elea, a town of lower Italy, hence the name "Eleatic" attached to the school of philosophy which he founded.

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The foremost subject of his inquiry was God Himself, the "First Great Cause," the "Supreme Intelligence." From his fundamental principle "*ex nihil, nihil fit*," "out of nothing, nothing is made" or something cannot come out of nothing, he drew the conclusion that all things that exist are eternal and immutable, therefore without beginning. God, Who is perfect and the essence of all things, he declared to be eternally one, immovable, all-powerful and all-pervading, but in no sense personal. The universe and God with him were synonymous. The world could not exist without God, nor could God be separated from the world. He was a monotheist, but his monotheism was pantheistic—that is, God and the manifested world were inseparable. He recognized that by reason alone one could not reach the ultimate goal of philosophy, and that "error is spread over all things."

This conception of God and the universe was further developed by Parmenides, a pupil of Xenophanes, and the most illustrious of the Eleatic School. He sought to realize Absolute Being, uncreate and unchangeable, the fullness of which was "thought and intelligence." He proclaimed that knowledge gained through the senses was uncertain, but he did not deny that one could acquire correct understanding through reason. Out of this naturally sprang the idea of a two-fold knowledge—the true and the apparent. Parmenides was the first Greek philosopher who made this clear distinction between relative knowledge acquired through the senses, and higher knowledge gained through Reason.

His disciple, Zeno, born 500 B. C., was chiefly noted for introducing dialectics (the art of rational conversation) into philosophical inquiry—a method by which

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through logical argument error is refuted and truth established. This was the method which later became so powerful in the hands of Socrates and Plato. He was also the first among the Greeks to use dialogue as a medium of philosophy; but students of the Upanishads are well aware that neither the method of dialectics nor the use of dialogue in philosophical exposition originated with him.

Zeno, like his master, upheld the theory of One Absolute Existence, but he did this by proving the non-existence of the many. Next came Empedocles, who was convinced like his predecessors of the futility of sense-perception as a means to knowledge and claimed that Reason was the only road to Truth. He observed that along with the material elements there existed in the universe two great operating forces, love and hate. The nature of the first was to unite, of the second to disunite. This

led him to conceive of Truth as unity ruled by love. This he said was the first Great Cause, the Creative Power; for, to use his own words, "God is Love."

The fundamental principles of the Eleatic system of philosophy especially resemble the teaching of the Vedic sages, who, however, ante-date this school by many centuries. The conception of One unalterable and all-pervading Being as the First Cause, the emanation of this manifold phenomenal world from that One, the impossibility of knowing Him through sense-perception, and the recognition of two kinds of knowledge, real and apparent, all these remind us forcibly of the Advaita system of the Vedic philosophy. "Error is spread over all things" suggests very strongly again the Indian doctrine of *Maya*.

The teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita—
"There is no existence for the unreal and

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the Real can ever be non-existent. The Self is never born nor does it die; nor after once having been, does it go into non-being. It is unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient"—finds its parallel in these words of Parmenides: "For this shall never be proved that the things that are not, are . . . What is, is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete, immovable and without end. I shall not let thee say or think that it came from what is not; for it can neither be thought nor uttered that what is not, is."

All these great men of ancient Greece stimulated the minds of the people of their time, not only by their teachings but by their exemplary lives. Some of them were born to wealth and position, but forsook both for the study of philosophy and the pursuit of Truth. Anaxagoras, who let his family inheritance run to waste through neglect, declared: "To philosophy

I owe my worldly ruin and my soul's prosperity." Without any exception, all the leaders and followers of the Ionian, Pythagorean and Eleatic schools were men of dauntless character. Whether they pursued the inductive or the deductive method, their one aim and ambition in life was to know the First Great Cause; and in order to accomplish this they renounced worldly pleasures and comforts and bore ridicule and persecution. They boldly attacked the anthropomorphism and superstitions of their day and thereby brought about greater freedom of thought and action.

But although they were of blameless and lofty character, they were sometimes one-sided and hence antagonistic to one another. This led to bitter controversy, which gradually gave rise to doubt and scepticism in the minds of the public. In consequence this glorious period in Greek

thought was immediately followed by a wave of materialism and unbelief. Philosophy grew unpopular because apparently it brought no tangible, outward benefit. Instead of spending their time in unprofitable speculations on God-nature, people devoted themselves to the study of those branches of learning such as rhetoric, mathematics and natural history, which promised them more immediate returns. Oratory was one of the most esteemed of the arts and eloquence became a tool to gain the desired end, even at the cost of law and justice. To satisfy the growing ambition for fame, power, wealth, there arose teachers known as Sophists—men of keen intellect, who disdained religion and held the aim of life to be worldly glory and pleasure. They claimed that nothing was absolutely right, but was made so by custom. Truth, they said, was uncertain and could not be known by

man. They used many tricks in logic to establish their own ideas and throw ridicule on their adversaries. They were, however, often men of wide learning and refinement, brilliant talkers, quick of wit and sophistry; but "men who made money by sham wisdom" as Aristotle defined them.

At the moment when the Athenian world was permeated with Sophistic doctrines and deeply engrossed in material pleasures, a mighty figure rose in Athens, who, despising wealth, ease and fame, devoted his whole life to the quest of Truth for the sake of Itself. This was Socrates, born in 470 B. C. He was the son of a sculptor and received the usual education of an Athenian youth. It is believed that he followed his father's profession for a time, but it is known that later he took part in two important military campaigns, during which his valor, his great physical strength and indifference to hardship

awakened the admiration of his comrades. His ungainly personal appearance and careless dress made him conspicuous among the notably handsome and richly clad men of Athens. Even in winter he walked bare-footed and wore at every season the same homely clothing.

He was indifferent not only to luxury, but even to the most ordinary comforts, and had perfect control over his appetites; while his mode of life even more than his teaching, was an open protest against the conditions of his times. He wrote no books, he established no regular school of philosophy. He merely mingled freely with his fellow-citizens on the market-place and in the gymnasium, attacking every one with a wit and charm of eloquence which made him so irresistible that a noted Athenian profligate declared: "I have heard Pericles and other excellent orators, but was not moved by them;

while this Marsyas—this Satyr—so affects men that the life I lead is hardly worth living and I stop my ears, as from the Syrens, and flee as fast as possible, that I may not sit down and grow old in listening to his talk.”

His quarrel, however, was never with persons, but with error. He frankly admitted his own ignorance and strove to convince other people of theirs. To accomplish this he adopted the dialectic method of question and answer. Although Socrates became acquainted with the philosophy of Anaxagoras and his predecessors, he looked upon all effort to find the cause of the physical universe as futile. To “know one’s self” he believed to be the vital aim of life, and in this study he often became so absorbed that he would lose all sense-consciousness. Alcibiades relates that he once stood still for twenty-four hours entranced in thought. He was pro-

foundly religious, believing in a Divine Providence, in the immortality of the soul and the worthlessness of the body.

Although Socrates himself did not found a regular school, his method of inquiry was adopted and carried out by his various followers, who in their turn became the founders of schools. Among these were Aristippus, Anthistenes, (whose disciples were the noted cynic Diogenes, Euclid of Megara, Phaedo of Elis) and Plato; but Plato alone was fully imbued with the Master's teaching—the others accepted only portions of it and hence differed widely among themselves.

Plato was born in 427 B. C. of an aristocratic family of Athens, and after a thorough training in poetry, music, rhetoric and philosophy, he was brought in contact with Socrates at about the age of twenty. He became his ardent disciple and remained with him until the Master's

death in 399 B. C. During the ten or twelve years which followed, he travelled continuously, going to Egypt, Sicily, Cyrene, Italy, and perhaps to Persia and Babylon. On his return to Athens, he began to teach in the Academy, a public garden in the western suburb of the city, filled with tall plane trees, statues and temples and named after the hero Academus. Here and in his own adjoining garden he drew round him a large band of disciples, whom he taught, like his master, through informal conversation. He also wrote a number of works in the form of dialogue in which he set forth the teachings of Socrates.

Plato was succeeded in the Academy by his sister's son Speusippus, but his greatest disciple was Aristotle, whom Plato always called the intellect of the school. He was the son of the friend and physician of the king of Macedonia and was partially

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educated to take up his father's profession ; but his insatiable desire for abstract knowledge made him abandon medicine and devote himself to philosophy. In his eighteenth year, (362 B. C.) he came to Athens to pursue his studies ; and on Plato's return from Syracuse some time after, he became his pupil, soon making his master aware of his remarkable intellectual power. He remained at the Academy until Plato's death in 347 B. C. Soon after, he left Athens, and in 335 B. C. we find him back in Macedonia as the tutor of Alexander the Great.

Twelve years later, when Alexander set out on his invasion of Asia, Aristotle returned to Athens and at the age of fifty established a school which he called the Lyceum, because of its proximity to the Temple of Apollo-Lyceus. His habit of walking up and down the shaded paths of the garden as he taught won for him the

name "Peripatetic," which has ever since been attached to his system of philosophy. His school was widely celebrated and from it went out a number of the noted men of Greece. He himself is generally considered the most widely learned man of Greek antiquity as well as the most prolific writer, although he was entirely lacking in the charm and poetry of style so marked in Plato's dialogues. His chief literary merit lay in the extraordinary precision and exactness in his use of terms. Aristotle, although differing from his master in his conception of "Ideas," added little to the fundamental principles as enunciated by Socrates and Plato, but he extended his field of investigation beyond the confines of ethics and philosophy, and has left works not only on dialectics but also on politics, natural history and physics. His "History of Animals" was regarded as so important that his royal pupil presented

him with the enormous sum of eight hundred talents with which to collect material for his research. Hegel says: "Aristotle penetrated into the whole mass and into every department of the universe of things; and the greater number of the philosophical sciences owe to him their separation and commencement."

Plato led men to the realm of "Ideas," Aristotle directed them to the study of Nature; Plato made reason the basis of knowledge, Aristotle gave this place to experience, which alone he maintained, could furnish the principle of science. While Plato's chief effort was to reach the abstract, Aristotle sought to know the relation of the particular to the general by a careful building up of evidence through a process of analysis and induction, which led to so high a development of syllogistic reasoning that even to the present day Aristotle is called the father of logic. An

equally developed system of logic, founded by Gautama and known as *Nyaya*, existed in India at least two centuries before Aristotle; and many Oriental scholars believe that Aristotle became acquainted with it through his pupil Alexander the Great, who invaded India and, it is said, carried both manuscripts and teachers back to Greece. It is more probable, however, that each evolved his system independently.

With Aristotle, the most glorious period of Greek philosophy came to a close. Although Zeno, the founder of the Stoic School, was a great teacher, and exercised a powerful influence not only in his own country but also in the Roman world—Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus being among his followers—yet he evolved no new system and added nothing to the philosophical ideas already propounded. Thus we find through our comparative

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study that although differing in time and method, Indian Sages and Greek philosophers alike discovered the same fundamental truths which have lived through the ages and which continue to shed light far and wide, illumining the hearts of mankind.

III

PLATO AND VEDIC IDEALISM

“**A**S the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their waters in the sea; so, O Lord, the different paths which men take because of their different tendencies, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!” This ancient Indo-Aryan prayer gives a picture of the ultimate goal of unity, towards which all philosophies and religions tend. When we reach the heights of spiritual vision, little barriers and differences melt away and we realize the underlying unity of cosmic life. But even before we attain this final oneness, if we are open, fair and

genuine, we cannot fail to realize a certain kinship among all the great ideals of the world. For instance, when I study the writings of the Greek philosophers, it is almost like reading the teachings of the early Vedic seers. The eminent English Orientalist, Sir Wm. Jones, recognizes this when he says: "It is impossible to read the Vedanta, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India."

This does not mean that the Greeks borrowed from the Indo-Aryans, or the Indo-Aryans from the Greeks, although there is no question that there was intercourse and free exchange of thoughts between them from very early days; but spiritual ideals are the common property of all peoples. The cosmic universe is rich enough in knowledge to supply all

abundantly. There is no need of borrowing. Besides, borrowed knowledge never stands the test. One may try to repeat the ideas of another, but the words have no vital force and can produce no lasting impression. All vital contributions to world thought must rise from one source only—direct vision.

It was because both the Greek philosophers and the ancient Indo-Aryan seers, in their spiritual research, reached the same lofty heights that they perceived the same fundamental ideals and often defined them in almost identical terms. Thus we find Plato's conception of a world of abstract self-existent ideas or "patterns fixed in Nature," of which all individual ideas and forms are copies, corresponds to the Vedic conception of the Absolute out of which springs all relative manifestation. Both alike declare this Source of being to be one and eternal. In the Chandogya-

Upanishad a father says to his son: "That which exists is One and all things have sprung from that One. It is not, my child, that in the beginning there was nothing and this universe came out of that nothing. No, something cannot come out of nothing. In the beginning there was the One, the Infinite and Absolute"—that which Plato defines as the ultimate Idea of Good or the Permanent Reality: "One which is something over and above the many."

A like distinction is made in the *Mundaka-Upanishad*, when a sage says to a disciple: "There are two kinds of knowledge to be known—higher knowledge and lower knowledge." Lower knowledge is gained through sense-perception and intellectual study, while "higher knowledge is that by which the Imperishable is known"; and "knowledge of Brahman the Supreme is the foundation of all knowledge." In Book V of the *Republic* again

Plato discriminates carefully between "opinion" and "science" or real knowledge. "Science has for its province to know the nature of the existent"; "it is correlative to the existent and the negation of knowledge (ignorance) necessarily to the non-existent," while opinion is "something more dusky than knowledge, more luminous than ignorance."

This is illustrated by the allegory of the cave given in Book VII. He describes a cave running down a steep incline into the earth. Some way down, where daylight is no longer visible, a bright fire is burning and beyond it there is a low wall built across the cave. Over the top of this wall little figures of animals and men are moved back and forth by showmen. The shadows of these figures are thrown upon the rocky end of the cave, facing which are prisoners, so chained that they cannot turn around. Seeing thus from

day to day only the shadows of the manufactured images, would they not come to regard them as the only realities? So is it with those who have merely second-hand or hearsay knowledge of disjointed facts.

Suppose, however, that one of the prisoners is released and compelled to walk with open eyes towards the light, the dazzling splendor of which renders him incapable of discerning the objects which had cast the shadows on the end-rock. If some one tells him these are only phantoms and that he is somewhat nearer to reality, will he not be puzzled? So is one who begins to acquire first-hand knowledge of the facts of the universe. But suppose that he is dragged up the steep ascent of the cavern out into the light of the sun, will he not be vexed and indignant at the treatment? and, blinded by the glare, will he not find it impossible to make out so

much as one of the objects all around him? At first he will be better able to gaze at their reflections in water; but degrees, however, his eyes will grow accustomed to the daylight and he will be able to discern clearly each thing as it is. So is it with a man who has reached the stage of direct apprehension of Principles—above all, the Principle of Ultimate Good. This type of man in Vedic classification is called the *Rishi* or seer, the man of vision, while the prisoner is the lettered scholar, the man of opinion or intellectual grasp only.

This higher knowledge, Plato explains further, cannot be sought “in perception at all, but in that other process, however called, in which the mind is alone and engaged with being.” The *Katha-Upanishad* also tells us: “No one can see Him with the eye . . . but when the five organs of sense perception become still, together with the mind—that is called the highest

state.” These words of both Socrates and the Upanishad give a true definition of transcendental or superconscious vision which is the aim of the Indian system of Yoga—a system evolved to teach man how, by withdrawing his mind from all the distractions of the sense plane and making it perfectly one-pointed or single, he may gain access to his inner resources.

Patanjali, the father of the Yoga philosophy, says: “At the time of concentration, the seer rests in his own unmodified state (the state of perfect serenity).” Only in this state of introvision or “aloneness,” which presupposes complete detachment from external perception, can true knowledge be apprehended. Undoubtedly, Plato held the same conception when he declared that education was “a turning round of the eye of the soul.” And “this is the rule for achieving it,” it is said in one of the Upanishads, “restraint of the breath, re-

straint of the senses, meditation, fixed attention, investigation, complete union with the object of meditation.”

In the process of turning inward the soul's eye the need of a teacher is universally recognized, as is the need of a guide when one travels into an unknown region. The teacher in India is called *Guru*, or “sight-giver” or “one who dispels the darkness.” He is also regarded as the parent in the second birth of the awakening soul. In *Theatetus* Socrates even calls himself a midwife. “My art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs,” he says; “but the difference lies in this, I practice on their souls when they are in labor, and not on their bodies; and the triumph of my art is in examining whether the thought, which the mind of the young man is bringing to birth, is a false idol or a noble and true creation. Therefore, I am not myself wise, nor have I anything

which is the invention or offspring of my own soul, but the way is this: Some of those who converse with me at first appear to be absolutely dull; yet afterwards, as our acquaintance ripens, if the god is gracious to them, they all of them make astonishing progress. There is clear proof that they have never learned anything of me, but they have acquired and discovered many noble things of themselves, although the god and I helped to deliver them."

Here Socrates expresses with remarkable definiteness the Vedic idea that the Guru is merely instrumental in drawing out the inherent powers of the soul. A real teacher must be full of humility and deeply conscious that he is only a channel through which the Divine works. For that reason he must be free from all ulterior and selfish motives and unwavering in his devotion to Truth. "I have actually known some who were ready to bite me

when I deprived them of a darling folly," Socrates says; "they did not perceive that I acted from good will, that no god is the enemy of man; neither am I their enemy in all this, but religion will never allow me to admit falsehood, or to stifle the truth."

The injunction of the Vedas that "Truth cannot be attained by mere study of the Scriptures, nor by intellectual reasoning, nor by frequent hearing of it. . . He who has not turned away from evil conduct, whose senses are uncontrolled, who is not tranquil, whose mind is not at rest, he can never attain Truth even by much study," finds a frequent echo in Plato's teaching. He was uncompromising in his claim that the highest type of conduct is inseparably bound up with the highest type of knowledge; and that this knowledge can only be gained by one who is willing to seek the aid of something beyond physical perception or mere intel-

lectual theory. The man merged in the flux of sensuality, he declares with reiterated insistence, can never reach the knowledge of God.

According to Plato, this knowledge should not be the aim merely of the recluse or scholar; it should be sought with equal earnestness by men in every department of active life, especially by those who govern public affairs. The highest political power must be vested in philosophers only; and he defines a philosopher as one who is "able to apprehend the eternal and immutable"; who is possessed of "truthfulness, that is, a determination never to admit a falsehood in any shape, if it can be helped, but to abhor it and love the truth"; he must be "temperate and thoroughly incovetous, for he is the last person in the world to value those objects which make men anxious for money at any cost"; he must be "quick at learning,

lofty-minded and graceful, the friend and brother of truth, justice, fortitude and temperance"; for "a mean and cowardly character can have no part in true philosophy." He concludes by asking: "Can you hesitate to entrust such characters with the sole management of state affairs, when time and education have made them ripe for the task?" And a long discussion follows to prove that "the miseries of our cities will find no relief until philosophers become rulers."

This Platonic idea of a philosopher-ruler we find realized in Indian history more than once, in such wise and virtuous kings as Janaka, Yudishthira, Asoka and various others. They were not only able statesmen, but profound spiritual teachers as well, to whom even holy men and ascetics came for religious instruction. Wisdom they had in excess and they applied it wholly for the betterment of man-

kind. They looked upon their rulership as a sacred vocation, entrusted to them by God; and they consecrated all their activities to selfless service of their fellow-beings. They never used their power for personal gain or self-aggrandizement. They treated their subjects as their children. Love of justice and truth was the burning passion of their hearts. Their devotion to philosophy, however, did not make them visionary or lead them to give themselves wholly to contemplation and metaphysical speculation. On the contrary, they were of a noble, heroic type, full of practical ability and keenly alert in the performance of their duties.

The Indo-Aryan teaching that there can be no true unity so long as the feeling of "I" and "mine" dominates, finds a strong parallel in Plato's development of the Ideal State. "There is unity where there is community of pleasures and pains,

where all the citizens are glad or sorry on the same occasion," are Socrates' words in the *Republic*. "And where there is no common, but only private feeling, that disorganizes a State—when you have one-half of the world triumphing and the other sorrowing at the same events happening to the city and the citizens. Such differences commonly originate in a disagreement between the term 'mine' and 'thine'." The Bhagavad-Gita gives the same thought as applied to the individual. "He whose heart is steadfastly engaged in the practice of Yoga, looks everywhere with the eyes of equality, seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self. . . He who looks upon pleasure and pain everywhere with the same regard as when it is applied to himself, that one is highly esteemed."

IV

CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL AND
ITS IMMORTALITY

PLATO reaches the greatest heights of his sublime philosophy when he considers the theme of the soul. In the *Republic* he states that the soul of man consists of three parts: the wisdom-loving, the honor-loving and the gain-loving. The soul to which Plato refers here is what the Indo-Aryans call the *Jivatman* or individual soul. It is not the permanent principle in man, but only the reflex of the *Paramatman* or Real Self. The three parts in the Platonic classification correspond to the mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*) and ego (*ahamkara*) which in Vedic phil-

osophy constitute the subtle body of man. This subtle body contains the character and determines the course of the soul after bodily death. It is not, however, the indestructible essence of man's being, although it is much less perishable than the gross physical body. Like the Indo-Aryan sages, Plato lays great emphasis on the distinction between the spiritual and the physical. "The soul is like the divine and the body is like the mortal," he declares; or to quote the words of the Bhagavad-Gita: "These bodies are perishable, but the dwellers in these bodies are eternal, indestructible and impenetrable."

Again Socrates says in *Phaedo*: "The body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food, and also is liable to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after truth; and by filling us full of loves and lusts and fears and fancies and idols and

every sort of folly, prevents our ever having, as people say, so much as a thought. For, whence come wars and fighting and factions? Whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? For wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body; and in consequence of all these things the time which ought to be given to philosophy is lost. Moreover, if there is time and inclination towards philosophy, yet the body introduces a turmoil and confusion and fear into the course of speculation and hinders us from seeing the truth; and all experience shows that if we would have pure knowledge of anything, we must be quit of the body, and the soul in herself must behold all things in themselves. In this present life I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible concern or interest in the body, and

are not saturated with the bodily nature, but remain pure until the hour when God Himself is pleased to release us.”

As long as we are absolutely identified with the body, we have no access to the domain of the soul. We do not gain soul vision, however, by destroying the body, but by learning to discriminate between the spiritual and the physical, the eternal and the perishable; and by transcending the shifting conditions of bodily life. “The feelings of heat, cold, pleasure, pain are born from the contact of the senses with sense objects; they are with beginning and end, transitory. Therefore endure them. He who is serene and not afflicted by these sensations, but is the same in pleasure and pain, is fit to attain immortality.” Such are the words of Sri Krishna; while Plato expresses it thus: “And thought is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of the things trouble her—neither

sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure,—when she has as little as possible to do with the body and has no bodily sense or feeling, but is aspiring after being.”

The Indo-Aryans do not condemn the body or regard it as an evil in itself. It becomes so, they say, when we fail to look upon it merely as an instrument and take it to be all in all. So long as we remain wholly engrossed in the physical, the soul must be like a prisoner, since it can have no freedom for true self-expression. In this, Indian philosophy is in accord with Plato when he says: “What is purification but the separation of the soul from the body,” “accustoming her to collect and rally herself from the body on every side, and to dwell alone by herself as much as she can both now and hereafter, released from the bondage of the body?”

This release, however, is not accomplished by bodily death. On the contrary,

mere dying will not bring it to us. If we have not realized a life apart from the body while we are still in the body, death will not reveal it. Nor is this liberation from physical bondage to be gained through self-torture or practice of severe austerity. Only through clear knowledge of our soul nature shall we attain it. Free souls, even when they are thrown into the midst of the world, are never overcome by its confusion, because they know how to separate the essential from that which is non-essential. Therefore, they are called in India *Paramahamsas* or great (*parama*) swans (*hamsas*), because like the mythical swan, which can take the milk out of the water when mixed with it, they intuitively discriminate between the real and the apparent, between spirit and matter.

If the soul's life is independent of the body, what is the nature of that life? The Vedic Scriptures answer: "The soul is

never born, nor does it die. This Ancient One is unborn, eternal, everlasting. It is not slain even though the body is slain." And Plato's answer is: "When death attacks a man, his mortal part dies, but his immortal part retreats before death and goes away safe and indestructible. Beyond all question the soul is immortal and imperishable."

When Simmias and Cebes refuse to be convinced of life after death, Socrates thus rebukes them playfully: "Like children you are afraid that the wind will really blow the soul away and disperse her when she leaves the body; especially if a man happens to die in a storm and not in a calm"; at which Cebes laughs and says: "Try and convince us as if we were afraid, Socrates, or rather, do not think that we are afraid ourselves. Perhaps there is a child within us who has these fears. Let us try and persuade him not to be afraid,

as if it were a bugbear." In another passage from *Phaedo* we read: "Your favorite doctrine, Socrates, that knowledge is simply recollection, if true, also implies a previous time in which we learned that which we now recollect. But this would not be possible unless our soul was in some place before existing in the human form; here then is another argument for the soul's immortality."

There can be no doubt that Plato possessed as firm and definite a belief in pre-existence and reincarnation as the sages of India. "Our souls existed formerly apart from our bodies," he says. And again: "The souls of the dead must exist somewhere, whence they come into being again, for the soul is strong enough by nature to endure coming into being many times." "They say that the soul of man is immortal, and at one time has an end which is termed dying, and at another

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time is born again, but is never destroyed. . . . The soul then being immortal, and having been born many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she would be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything; for as all nature is akin and the soul has learned all things, there is no difficulty in her eliciting, or as men say, learning out of a single recollection all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint; for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection." "We must have received our knowledge of all realities before we were born."

Being a true philosopher Plato realized that immortality could not extend in the direction of a future life only; it must extend back into pre-existence also. Eternity must stretch equally backward and for-

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ward, because what has no end cannot have a beginning. This is one of the most salient points in Vedic teaching. Sri Krishna says to his disciple Arjuna: "It is not that I have never existed before, nor thou, nor all these kings. Nor is it that all of us shall cease to exist hereafter. As in this body the embodied soul passes through childhood, youth and old age, in the same manner it goes from one body to another." "As man casts off worn-out garments and puts on others which are new, similarly the embodied soul, casting off worn-out bodies, enters into others which are new."

How can we explain what we see to-day unless we are able to relate it with what existed yesterday? In the same way, how can we explain our present life unless we relate it with some previous existence? In the cosmic universe nothing happens by chance. There can be no effect with-

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out a definite cause, yet often we are confronted here with situations for which we can find no cause in our present life. If, however, we could penetrate the veil which hides the past, we should find the direct cause of all these happenings. The understanding of the unbroken continuity of life and of the unfailing working of just law, will remove from our mind the idea that the destiny of man is controlled by an arbitrary Deity, or that we are the creatures of fate.

Immortality is not a mere dogma or theory, which can be settled by argument or intellectual study. It is the profoundest fact of our being and can be realized only through whole-hearted consecration. One who has not the realization of it, however much he may try to fortify himself by learning and science, will prove inadequate when he faces the vital problems of the Unseen. The conviction that soul is

immortal removes all sense of impatience. As soon as a man fully grasps it, he no longer feels the need to fulfill the whole purpose of life in this little span. He does not rush headlong, anxious lest he may lose opportunities which will never come again. He knows that Eternity lies behind him and before him and all about him, and that he stands as a witness of that Eternity, as a part of that Eternity. At once he is shorn of all fear—fear of disease or death or loss. “Any man whom you see grieving at the approach of death, is after all no lover of wisdom, but a lover of body. He is also most likely a lover either of wealth or of honor or, it may be, of both,” Plato declares.

Also in describing the last hours of his Master he writes: “Socrates smiled and said: ‘O Simmias, how strange that is; I am not very likely to persuade other men that I do not regard my present situation

as a misfortune, if I am unable to persuade you; and you will keep fancying that I am at all more troubled now than at any other time. Will you not allow that I have as much of the spirit of prophecy in me as the swans? For they, when they perceive that they must die, having sung all their life long, do then sing more than ever, rejoicing in the thought that they are about to go away to the God whose ministers they are. But men, because they are themselves afraid of death, slanderously affirm of the swans that they sing a lament at the last, not considering that no bird sings when cold or hungry or in pain." This is the test. No man who has not the vision, who has not the fact of immortality clearly established in his heart, can remain tranquil and exalted at the hour of death or of calamity.

What do we learn from this comparative study? Do we find any fundamental dif-

ferences? No, on the contrary, we realize more vividly that the deeper feelings and aspirations of the human heart are everywhere the same. If we are willing to set aside all barriers of prejudice, all personal likes and dislikes, we cannot fail to discover the underlying unity in all thought and life. When our spiritual sight is opened, we turn away from all the non-essentials; our eye becomes single; and through this singleness of vision we are able to perceive the Divine, which is the final goal of all philosophy and all the religions of the world.

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PART II

**Platonic Myths and
Vedic Parables**

“There are neither two gods, nor three, nor four, nor ten. He is One and only One and pervades the whole universe. All other things live, move and have their existence in Him.”

—Atharva-Veda.

PLATONIC MYTHS AND VEDIC PARABLES

IN his "Chips from a German Workshop" Max Muller dwells with great emphasis on the "value of the Veda for the purpose of comparative mythology, a science which, without the Veda," he declares, "would have remained mere guesswork, without principles and without a safe basis." No one can read the legends, tales, myths and parables of the different peoples without perceiving the strong analogies existing in them. These analogies presuppose close kinship of thought and feeling, and create a point of unity among the various races of the East. For

this reason they have a useful part to play in all effort towards unity. I have given in the pages which follow analogous myths of Plato and parables from the Vedic Scriptures, laying a little more stress on the Indo-Aryan parables, because they are less familiar to Western readers. Such parallel allegories could be multiplied many times, but these will suffice to show the strong resemblances found between them, both in form and context.

In compiling this section of the book, I have made use of translations of many orientalists, chiefly of Max Muller's most valuable work "Chips from a German Workshop." In a few instances I have made slight additions and alteration of language to make the thought more comprehensible.

I

THE SOUL IN ITS COURSE

“IT is not a Tale of Alcinous I will tell thee, but the story of a mighty man, Er, the son of Armenius, of the nation of the Pamphylians.

“It came to pass that he fell in battle; and when the corpses were taken up on the tenth day already stinking, he was taken up sound; and when they had carried him home and were about to bury him, on the twelfth day, being laid on the pyre, he came to life again; and began to tell of the things which he saw there.

“He said that when his soul went out, it journeyed together with a great company, and they came unto a certain ghostly place wherein were two open mouths of the earth hard by each other, and also

above, two mouths of heaven, over against them; and judges were seated between these, who, when they had given their judgments, bade the righteous take the road which leadeth to the right hand and up through heaven; and they fastened tablets on them in front, signifying the judgments; but the unjust they sent by the road which leadeth to the left hand and down, and they also had tablets fastened on them behind, signifying all that they had done. But when he himself came before the judges they said unto him that he must be for a messenger unto men concerning the things there, and they charged him straitly that he should give diligence to hear and see all the things in the place.

“Now, he told how that he beheld the souls departing, some by one of the mouths of heaven, and some by one of the mouths of earth, when judgment had been given unto them; also how that he beheld souls

returning by the other two mouths, some coming up from the earth travel-stained, covered with dust, and some coming down from heaven, pure. And he said that all, as they came, being come belike from a long journey, turned aside with joy into the Meadow and encamped there as in a congregation; and they that were acquaintances greeted one another, and they questioned one another. They that were come from the earth questioned them that were come from heaven concerning the things there, and in like manner they that were come from heaven questioned the others concerning the things that had happened unto them. So they discoursed with one another,—some of them groaning and weeping when they called to mind all the terrible things they had suffered and seen in their journey under the earth—and others of them, to wit, those which were come from heaven, telling of blessings

and marvelous fair sights. He said that their journey was for a thousand years.

“Time would fail me, O Glaucon, to relate all that he said, but the sum thereof was this:—That according to the number of the wrongs which each man hath ever done, and the number of them who he hath wronged, he payeth penalty for all in their course, ten times for each:—now, it is every hundred years that he payeth, for a hundred years are counted for the lifetime of a man: so is it brought to pass that the price of evil-doing is paid tenfold. Thus if certain caused the death of many by betraying cities or armies and casting men into bondage, or taking part of other iniquity, they are recompensed tenfold with torments for each one of these things; but if any have done good unto other men, and have been just and religious, they in the same measure receive their rewards. . .

“Thence, Er said, each man, without

turning back, went straight on under the throne of Necessity; and when each, even unto the last, was come out through it, they all together journeyed to the plain of Lethe, through terrible burning heat and frost; and this plain is without trees or any herb that the earth bringeth forth.

“He said that they encamped, when it was already evening, beside the River of Forgetfulness, the water whereof no pitcher holdeth. Now, it was necessary that all should drink a certain measure of the water; but they that were not preserved by wisdom drank more than the measure; and as each man drank, he forgot all. Then he said that when they had fallen asleep and midnight was come, there was thunder and an earthquake, and of a sudden they flew up thence unto divers parts to be born in the flesh, shooting like meteors. But he himself was not suffered to drink of the water; yet by what means and how

he came unto his body he knew not; but suddenly he opened his eyes, and lo! it was morning, and he was lying on the pyre.

“Thus, O Glaucon, was the Tale preserved from perishing, and it will preserve us if we believe in it; so shall we pass over the River of Lethe safely, and keep our souls undefiled.

“This is my counsel: let us believe that the soul is immortal, and able to bear all ill and all good, and let us always keep to the upward way and practice justice in all things with understanding, that we may be friends both with ourselves and with the gods, both whilst we sojourn here and when we receive the prizes of our justice, like unto conquerors at the games which go about gathering their wagers; and that both here, and in the journey of a thousand years of which I told, we may fare well.”—*From Plato's Republic.*

* * * *

He who, at the time of death, thinking of Me alone, goes forth, leaving the body, he attains unto my Being. There is no doubt in this.

O son of *Kunti*, whatever state or being one dwells upon in the end, at the time of leaving the body, that alone he attains, because of his constant thought of that state or being.

Therefore, at all times, think of Me and fight (perform actions). Having offered thy mind and intellect to Me, thou shalt without doubt come unto Me.

O son of *Pritha*, by the steadfast practice of meditation with unwavering mind (not moving elsewhere) and constant thought of the Supreme Divine Being, one goes to Him.

He who thinks upon the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, the minutest of the minute, the Sustainer of all, whose form is inconceivable, self-effulgent like

the sun, and beyond the darkness of ignorance;

He who thus meditates on Him at the time of death, with unflinching mind, possessed with devotion, fully fixing the *Prana* (life-breath) between the eyebrows by the power of Yoga, he attains to the Supreme Divine Being.

That which the knowers of *Veda* (Truth, Wisdom) speak of as imperishable, that which the unattached *Sannyasins* (self-controlled renouncers) enter into, by desiring which they practice *Brahmacharya* (life of continence and service), that state I shall declare unto thee in brief.

Closing all the gates of the senses, confining the mind in the heart, and fixing the *Prana* in the head (between the eyebrows), thus engaged in the practice of concentration (*Yoga*); . . . he attains the supreme goal.

He who is without any other thought but Me, who remembers Me daily and constantly, O *Partha*, I am easily attained by that ever-devoted *Yogi*.

The great-souled ones, having reached Me, do not come to re-birth, the ever-changing abode of misery, for they have attained the highest perfection. . .

O Prince of the *Bharata* race, now I shall declare to thee that time, at which in departing (leaving the body) the *Yogis* return to re-birth, and also that time at which in departing they do not return.

Fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight (ascending moon), the six months of the sun's northern course, departing at such time, the knowers of *Brahman* (the Supreme) go to Brahman.

Smoke, night-time, the dark fortnight (waning moon), the six months of the sun's southern course, the *Yogi* departing at such time and receiving the lunar light, returns.

These two are considered as eternal paths of the world, the bright and the dark (path of wisdom and path of ignorance). By one, man attains to non-return (freedom); by the other, he returns again.

O son of *Pritha*, by knowing these two paths, the *Yogis* are never deluded. Therefore, O *Arjuna*, in all times be thou steadfastly engaged in *Yoga*.

Whatever fruits of good deeds are promised in the study of the *Vedas*, in sacrifices, in the practice of austerities, in charitable gifts, the *Yogi*, having known these and rising above all, attains to the primeval Supreme Abode.—*Bhagavad-Gita*.

* * * *

Know the Supreme Self or Soul as the lord of the chariot, and the body as the chariot. Know also the intellect to be the driver and mind the reins.

The senses are called the horses; the sense objects are the roads; when the Self

is united with body, senses and mind, then the wise call Him the enjoyer.

He who is without discrimination and whose mind is always uncontrolled, his senses are unmanageable, like the vicious horses of a driver.

But he who is full of discrimination and whose mind is always controlled, his senses are manageable, like the good horses of a driver.

He who does not possess discrimination, whose mind is uncontrolled and always impure, he does not reach that goal, but falls again into *Samsara* (realm of birth and death).

But he who possesses right discrimination, whose mind is under control and always pure, he reaches that goal, from which he is not born again.

The man who has a discriminative intellect for the driver, and a controlled mind for the reins, reaches the end of the

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journey, the highest place of the All-pervading and Unchangeable One.

Beyond the senses are the objects, beyond the objects is the mind, beyond the mind is the intellect, beyond the intellect is the great Self.

Beyond the great Self is the Unmanifested; beyond the Unmanifested is the *Purusha* (the Cosmic Soul); beyond the *Purusha* there is nothing. That is the end, that is the final goal.

This Self, hidden in all beings, does not shine forth; but It is seen by subtle seers through keen and subtle understanding.

A wise man should control speech by mind, mind by intellect, intellect by the great Self, and that by the Peaceful One (the *Paramatman* or Supreme Self).—*Katha-Upanishad*.

II.

CREATION

NOW when the original creature was cut in twain, the one-half, longing for the other half, went to meet it, and they cast their arms around one another, and clung unto one another, eagerly desiring to be made one creature; and they began to die for lack of food and of all other things that a man must provide for himself; for neither would eat aught save together with the other: and when one of the halves died, and the other was left, that which was left went about seeking for another half, and when it happened upon the half of that which aforetime was a woman—this half we now call woman—or upon the half of that which was a man, joined itself unto it.

Of such oldness is the love of one another implanted in us, which bringeth us again into the primitive state, and endeavoureth of two to make one and to heal the division of human nature. Every human creature, then, is a counterpart, being a half cut flat like unto a flounder, and always seeketh his own counterpart. . . These be they who all their life through are always together, nor yet could tell what it is they wish to obtain of each other—for surely it is not satisfaction of sensual appetite that all this great endeavour is after: nay, plainly, it is something other that the Soul of each wisheth—something which she cannot tell, but, darkly divining, maketh her end. . .

Love, then, is the name of our desire and pursuit of the Whole; and once, I say, we were one, but now for our wickedness God hath made us to dwell separate. . . and even yet are we in danger, if we are

not obedient unto the gods, to be again cut in twain, and made to go about as mere tallies, in the figure of those images which are graven in relief on tablets with their noses sawn through into halves. Wherefore let our exhortation unto every man be that he live in the fear of the gods, to the end that we may escape this, and obtain that unto which love of our Captain leadeth us. Him let no man withstand. Whoso is at enmity with the gods withstandeth him; but if we are become friends of God, and are reconciled unto him, then shall we find and meet each one of us his own true love, which happeneth unto few in our time.—*From Plato's Symposium.*

* * * *

In the beginning all this was Self alone, in the shape of a person (*Purusha*). He, looking round, saw nothing but his Self. He first said, "This is I;" therefore he became "I" by name. Therefore even now,

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if a man is asked, he first says, "This is I," and then pronounces the other name which he may have. And because before (*purva*) all this, he (the Self) burnt down (*ush*) all evils, therefore he was a person (*puru-sha*). . . .

He feared, and therefore any one who is lonely fears. He thought, "As there is nothing but myself, why should I fear?" Thence his fear passed away. For what should he have feared? Verily fear arises from a second only.

But he felt no delight. Therefore a man who is lonely feels no delight. He wished for a second. He was so large as man and wife together. He then made this his Self to fall in two (*pat*), and thence arose husband (*pati*) and wife (*patni*). Therefore *Yagna-valkya* said: "We two are thus each of us like half a shell." Therefore the void which was there, is filled by the wife. He embraced her, and men were born.

She thought, "How can he embrace me, after having produced me from himself? I shall hide myself."

She then became a cow, the other became a bull and embraced her, and hence cows were born. The one became a mare, the other a stallion; the one a male ass, the other a female ass. He embraced her, and hence one-hoofed animals were born. The one became a she-goat, the other a he-goat; the one became a ewe, the other a ram. He embraced her, and hence goats and sheep were born. And thus he created everything that exists in pairs, down to the ants.

He knew, "I indeed am this creation, for I created all this." Hence he became the creation, and he who knows this lives in this his creation.—*Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad.*

III.

SEARCH AFTER ULTIMATE REALITY

INTO these Lesser Mysteries of Eros, peradventure, mightest thou, even thou Socrates, be initiated; but his Greater Mysteries of the End and the Perfect Vision, for whose sake, if any man shall pursue after them in the right way, these Lesser Mysteries are performed, I know not if thou art able to receive. Nevertheless, she (the woman of Mantinea) said, I will do what in me lies to open them unto thee; do thou endeavor to follow if thou canst.

He who would rightly approach this initiation whereof I now speak must begin in his youth, and come near unto beautiful bodies: and first, if his leader lead him aright, he will be smitten with love of one

of these, and will straightway of his love engender beautiful discourse. Thereafter he will perceive of himself without instruction that the beauty which belongeth to any corporeal body is kin to the beauty of another; and that if the specific beauty is that which must be sought after, 'twould be foolishness to think that the beauty which belongeth to all bodies is not one and the same. When he hath comprehended this he must needs become the lover of all beautiful bodies, and his vehement love of the one body he will remit, despising it now and thinking it a small thing.

Thereafter cometh the time when he deemeth the beauty that is in souls more precious than the beauty in the body; so that if any one hath some goodness of soul, but little comeliness of body, such an one pleaseth him well, and he loveth him and careth for him, and in companionship with him bringeth to birth, and

seeketh after such discourse as shall make young men better; seeking after this, he is constrained to survey that beauty which is in morals and laws, and seeth clearly that it is all of one kindred. Apprehending this beauty, he must needs deem the beauty of the body a small thing.

After morals, behold him next led up to sciences, that he may see their beauty; and looking at beauty now widely extended, may no longer be as a bondman, mean and paltry, enslaved unto the beauty of one,—unto the beauty of some boy, or man, or custom,—but having turned him unto the great sea of beauty and looking upon it, may bring forth many arguments fair and high, many thoughts out of the fullness of philosophy, until, having been there strengthened and increased, he can discern that one science which comprehendeth that one beauty. Now, I beseech thee, she said, hearken, as diligently as

thou canst, to my words and understand them.

Whosoever hath been led by his preceptor thus far into the mysteries of Eros, and hath surveyed beautiful things in the right order, when he cometh at last to the end of his initiation, on a sudden shall behold a marvel, a thing of beauty, that thing, Socrates, for whose sake all the former labours were endured, that which always is, without generation or destruction, or increase or decrease; which is not, on this side, or at this time, beautiful, and on that side, or at that time, deformed; in comparison with one thing, beautiful, and with another thing, deformed; in one place beautiful, and in another, deformed; beautiful in the eyes of one man, and in the eyes of another, deformed.

Nor will the Thing of Beauty appear unto him as a countenance, or as hands, or as aught which corporeal body hath be-

longing unto it; nor as any speech, or science; nor as that which is somewhere in some other thing, as in a living creature, or in earth, or in heaven, or in any other thing; but he shall see it as that which "Is in Itself," with Itself, of one form, eternal; and all the other beautiful things he shall see as partaking of it after such manner that, while they come into being and perish, it becometh not a whit greater or less, nor suffereth any change at all. 'Tis when a man ascendeth from these beautiful things by the right way of love, and beginneth to have sight of that eternal beauty—'tis then, methinks, that he toucheth the goal.

For this is the right way to go into the Mysteries of Eros, or to be led by another: beginning from the beautiful things here, to mount up alway unto that eternal beauty, using these things as the steps of a ladder; ascending from one to two, and from two to all; beautiful bodies, and from

beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from beautiful customs to beautiful doctrines; and from these till at last, being come unto that which is the doctrine of the eternal beauty and of naught else beside, he apprehendeth what beauty itself is. 'Tis then, dear Socrates, said the woman of Mantinea, that life is worth living, and then only, when a man cometh to behold beauty itself; the which if thou hast once seen, thou wilt hold wealth, and fine raiment, and fair companions, as naught in comparison with it. . .

What thinkest thou, then, she said, if a man could see beauty itself, clear, pure, separate, not gross with human flesh, and tainted with colours, and decked out with perishing gauds—what thinkest thou, if he could behold beauty itself, divine, uniform? Thinkest thou, she said, that it would be a paltry life for a man to live, looking unto that, beholding it with the

faculty meet therefor, and being with it alway? Understandest thou not that thus only shall he be able, seeing with that whereby beauty is seen, to bring forth, not images of virtue; for 'tis no image that he layeth hold of, but things true, for he layeth hold of that which is true; and when he hath brought forth true virtue and nurtured her, understandest thou not that then he hath become above all men beloved of God, and himself immortal!—*From Plato's Symposium.*

* * * *

Prajapati said: "The Self or Soul which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire, and imagines nothing but what it ought to imagine, that it is which we must search out, that it is which we must try to understand. He who has searched out that Self and understands it, obtains all worlds and all desires."

The *Devas* (bright ones) and the *Asuras* (demons) both heard these words, and said: "Well, let us search for that Self by which, if one has searched it out, all worlds and all desires are obtained."

Thus saying, *Indra* went representing the *Devas* and *Virochana* representing the *Asuras*; and both, without having communicated with each other, approached *Prajapati*, holding fuel in their hands, as is the custom for pupils approaching their master.

They dwelt there as pupils for thirty-two years. Then *Prajapati* asked them: "For what purpose have you both dwelt here?"

They replied: "A saying of yours is being repeated,—'the Self which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire, and imagines nothing but what it ought

to imagine, that it is which we must search out, that it is which we must try to understand. He who has searched out that Self and understands it, obtains all worlds and all desires.' Now we both have dwelt here because we wish for that Self."

Prajapati said to them: "The person that is seen in the eye, that is the Self. This is what I have said. This is the immortal, the fearless, this is *Brahman* (the Supreme.)"

They asked: "Sir, he who is perceived in the water, and he who is perceived in a mirror, who is he?"

He replied: "He himself indeed is seen in all these."

"Look at your Self in a pan of water, and whatever you do not understand of your Self, come and tell me."

They looked in the water-pan. Then *Prajapati* said to them: "What do you see?"

They said: "We both see the self thus altogether, a picture even to the very hairs and nails."

Prajapati said to them: "After you have adorned yourselves, have put on your best clothes and cleansed yourselves, look again into the water-pan."

They, after having adorned themselves, having put on their best clothes and cleansed themselves, looked into the water-pan.

Prajapati asked: "What do you see?"

They said: "Just as we are, well adorned, with our best clothes and clean, thus we are both there, Sir, well adorned, with our best clothes and clean."

Prajapati said: "That is the Self, this is the immortal, the fearless, this is Brahman."

Then both went away satisfied in their hearts.

And *Prajapati*, looking after them, said:

“They both go away without having perceived and without having known the Self, and whoever of these two, whether *Devas* or *Asuras*, will follow this doctrine will perish.”

Now *Virochana*, satisfied in his heart, went to the *Asuras* and preached that doctrine to them, that the self (the body) alone is to be worshipped, that the self (the body) alone is to be served, and that he who worships the self and serves the self, gains both worlds, this and the next.

Therefore they call even now a man who does not give alms here, who has no faith, and offers no sacrifices, an *Asura*, for this is the doctrine of the *Asuras*. They deck out the body of the dead with perfumes, flowers and fine raiment by way of ornament, and think they will thus conquer that world.

But *Indra*, before he had returned to the *Devas*, saw this difficulty:—As this self

is well adorned, when the body is well adorned; well dressed, when the body is well dressed; well cleaned, if the body is well cleaned; that self will also be blind, if the body is blind; lame, if the body is lame; crippled, if the body is crippled; and will perish in fact as soon as the body perishes. Therefore I see no good in this doctrine.

Taking fuel in his hand he came again as a pupil to *Prajapati*. *Prajapati* said to him: “*Maghavat* (Indra), as you went away with *Virochana*, satisfied in your heart, for what purpose did you come back?”

He said: “Sir, as this self is well adorned, when the body is well adorned; well dressed, when the body is well dressed; well cleaned, if the body is well cleaned; that self will also be blind, if the body is blind; lame, if the body is lame; crippled, if the body is crippled; and will

perish as soon as the body perishes. Therefore I see no good in this doctrine.”

“So it is indeed, *Maghavat*,” replied *Prajapati*; “but I shall explain the true Self further to you. Live with me another thirty-two years.”

He lived with him another thirty-two years, and then *Prajapati* said:

“He who moves about happy in dreams, he is the Self, this is the immortal, the fearless, this is *Brahman*.”

Then *Indra* went away satisfied in his heart. But before he had returned to the *Devas*, he saw this difficulty:—Although it is true that that Self is not blind, even if the body is blind; nor lame, if the body is lame; though it is true that that Self is not rendered faulty by the faults of the body; nor struck when the body is struck; nor lamed when it is lamed; yet it is as if they struck him in dreams, as if they chased him. He becomes even conscious,

as it were, of pain, and sheds tears. Therefore I see no good in this.

Taking fuel in his hands, he went again as a pupil to *Prajapati*. *Prajapati* said to him: "*Maghavat*, as you went away satisfied in your heart, for what purpose did you come back?"

He said: "Sir, although it is true that that Self is not blind even if the body is blind, nor lame, if the body is lame, though it is true that that Self is not rendered faulty by the faults of the body; nor struck when it is struck; nor lamed when it is lamed, yet it is as if they struck him in dreams, as if they chased him. He becomes even conscious, as it were, of pain, and sheds tears. Therefore I see no good in this."

"So it is indeed, *Maghavat*," replied *Prajapati*; "but I shall explain the true Self further to you. Live with me another thirty-two years."

He lived with him another thirty-two years. Then *Prajapati* said:

“When a man being asleep, reposing, and at perfect rest, sees no dreams, that is the Self, this is the immortal, the fearless, this is *Brahman*.”

Then *Indra* went away satisfied in his heart. But before he had returned to the *Devas*, he saw this difficulty:—In truth he thus does not know himself that he is “I,” nor does he know anything that exists. He is gone to utter annihilation. I see no good in this.

Taking fuel in his hand he went again as a pupil to *Prajapati*. *Prajapati* said to him: “*Maghvat*, as you went away satisfied in your heart, for what purpose did you come back?”

He said: “Sir, in that way he does not know himself that he is “I,” nor does he know anything that exists. He is gone to utter annihilation. I see no good in this.”

“So it is indeed, *Maghavat*,” replied *Prajapati*; “but I shall explain the true Self further to you, and nothing more than this. Live here another five years.”

He lived there another five years. This made in all one hundred and one years, and therefore it is said that *Indra Maghavat* lived one hundred and one years as a pupil with *Prajapati*.

Prajapati said to him: “*Maghavat*, this body is mortal and always held by death. It is the abode of that Self which is immortal and without body. When in the body, by thinking this body is I and I am this body, the Self is held by pleasure and pain. So long as he is in the body, he cannot get free from pleasure and pain. But when he is free of the body, when he knows himself different from the body, then neither pleasure nor pain touches him.

“The wind is without body, the cloud,

lightning, and thunder are without body (without hands, feet, etc.). Now as these, arising from this heavenly ether, appear in their own form, as soon as they have approached the highest light, thus does that serene being, arising from this body, appear in its own form, as soon as it has approached the highest light (the knowledge of Self). He in that state is the highest person (*Purusha*). He moves about there laughing, playing, and rejoicing, never minding that body into which he was born.

“Like as a horse attached to a cart, so is the Soul attached to this body.

“Now where the sight has entered into the void (the open space, the black pupil of the eye), there is the person of the eye, the eye itself is the instrument of seeing. He who knows, ‘let me smell this,’ he is the Self; the nose is the instrument of smelling. He who knows, ‘let me say this,’

he is the Self; the tongue is the instrument of saying. He who knows, 'let me hear this,' he is the Self; the ear is the instrument of hearing.

"He who knows, 'let me think this,' he is the Self; the mind is his divine eye. He, the Self, seeing these pleasures (which to others are hidden like a buried treasure of gold) through his divine eye, the mind, rejoices.

"The *Devas* who are in the world of *Brahman* meditate on that Self as taught by *Prajapati* to *Indra*, and by *Indra* to the *Devas*. Therefore all worlds belong to them, and all desires. He who knows that Self and understands it, obtains all worlds and all desires." Thus said *Prajapati*, yea, thus said *Prajapati*.—*Chandogya-Upanishad*.

* * * *

"If some one were to strike at the root of this large tree here, it would bleed, but

live. If he were to strike at its stem, it would bleed, but live. If he were to strike at its top, it would bleed, but live. Per-
vaded by the living Self that tree stands firm, drinking in its nourishment and re-
joicing;

“But if the life (the living Self) leaves one of its branches, that branch withers; if it leaves a second, that branch withers; if it leaves a third, that branch withers. If it leaves the whole tree, the whole tree withers. In exactly the same manner, ‘my son, know this.’ Thus he spoke:

“This body indeed withers and dies when the living Self has left it; the living Self dies not.

“That which is that subtile essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, *Svetaketu*, art that.”

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

“Fetch me from thence a fruit of the *Nyagrodha* tree.”

“Here is one, Sir.”

“Break it.”

“It is broken, Sir.”

“What do you see there?”

“These seeds, almost infinitesimal.”

“Break one of them.”

“It is broken, Sir.”

“What do you see there?”

“Not anything, Sir.”

The father said: “My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great *Nyagrodha* tree exists.

“Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O *Svetaketu*, art That.”

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

“Place this salt in water, and then wait on me in the morning.”

The son did as he was commanded.

The father said to him: “Bring me the salt, which you placed in the water last night.”

The son having looked for it, found it not, for, of course, it was melted.

The father said: “Taste it from the surface of the water. How is it?”

The son replied: “It is salt.”

“Taste it from the middle. How is it?”

The son replied: “It is salt.”

“Taste it from the bottom. How is it?”

The son replied: “It is salt.”

The father said: “Throw it away and then wait on me.”

He did so.

Then the father said: “Here also, in this body, forsooth, you do not perceive the True (*Sat*), my son; but there indeed it is.

“That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O *Svetaketu*, art That.”

“The Infinite is bliss. There is no bliss in anything finite. Infinity only is bliss. This Infinity, however, we must desire to understand.”

“Sir, I desire to understand it.”

“Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite is mortal.”

“Sir, in what does the Infinite rest?”

“In its own greatness—or not even in greatness.”

“In the world they call cows and horses, elephants and gold, slaves, wives, fields and houses greatness. I do not mean

this; for in that case one being (the possessor) rests in something else (the possession). But the Infinite cannot rest in something different from itself.

“The Supreme Self or Soul is below, above, behind, before, right and left—Self is all this.

“He who sees, perceives, and understands this, loves the Self, delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self. He is lord and master in all the worlds.

“But those who think differently from this, live in perishable worlds, and have other beings for their rulers.”—*Chandogya-Upanishad*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what must we think when we find the same ideas repeated, the self same thoughts expressed by others in all ages! Truth takes no account of time. Its beneficence ever destroys all distance and difference.

The light that opened the spiritual insight of Plato, Pythagoras and the sages of India and quickened their tongues to speak the words of oracle—when the same light will possess us and unfold our inner vision, then alone shall we witness the unseen and our voice will learn to sing in harmony the one undying song of life.

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