



601722



# **RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS**



# RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

*By*

SWAMI NIRVEDANANDA

*Author of Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance  
and Hinduism at a Glance*

BENGAL  
VIDYAMANDIRA  
DHAKURIA

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE  
CONFORMITY WITH THE GOVT. OF INDIA  
PAPER CONTROL (ECONOMY) ORDER, 1944

*All rights reserved*

Price Rs. 3/-

Published by S. MANDAL, Vidyamandira, Dhakuria, Bengal  
Printed by N. C. DAS, Prabasi Press, Calcutta .

## P R E F A C E

The world order is changing. Materialism must go. It has failed to deliver the goods. The human race, for its very existence, requires a spiritual readjustment of its outlook on life. Religion is able to show the way. It has the inherent strength of standing up to the acid tests of critical reasoning and purging itself of irrational crudities and then of putting human civilization on the right track. Through its different chapters, this book attempts to show how Religion can do all this and, thereby, give a fresh lease of healthy, useful and vigorous life to mankind.

The different chapters of this book consist of a few relevant articles published through some periodicals on different occasions. Through them all runs the central theme of assessing Religion in the light of modern thoughts. The book ends with a poetic depiction of the vision of life from the Vedantic standpoint.

The transliterated words or extracts from the *Hindu Scriptures* have been italicized ; and where 'a' has to be pronounced as in 'far' it has been printed in Roman character.



## PREFACE

Our labour will be amply repaid if this book helps clearing up, even partially, the mist of misunderstanding and confusion that has almost obscured “the nuggets of real gold” embedded in every religion.

NIRVEDANANDA

*Ramakrishna Mission*  
*Students' Home, Calcutta*  
*April 1945*

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
1 Are We Civilized ? .. ..	9
2 The Great March .. ..	19
3 Shaking of Hands .. ..	25
4 What Religion Really Means ..	41
5 Religion and Modern Doubts ..	51
6 Voice of Truth .. ..	78
7 Vedanta and Universal Religion ..	83
8 The Vision of Life .. ..	99

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Bri. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Brihadaranyaka Upanishad</b>
<b>Chh. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Chhandogya Upanishad</b>
<b>Ish. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Isha Upanishad</b>
<b>Ka. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Katha Upanishad</b>
<b>Ke. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Kena Upanishad</b>
<b>Mund. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Mundaka Upanishad</b>
<b>Rg. Vd.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Rig-Veda</b>
<b>Shwet. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Shwetashwatara Upanishad</b>
<b>Tait. Up.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>Taittiriya Upanishad</b>

# 1

## ARE WE CIVILIZED ?

We moderners boast of our civilization. The modern era, no doubt, has to its credit epoch-making achievements of science. The inscrutable atom has disclosed its secrets. Physical Nature is almost within our grasp. Her immutable laws bend before the inventions of science. Man moves like a master through land, air, and sea at an amazing speed. News and views go round the world in the twinkling of an eye. The rigours of climate, weather, disease, and all that, vanish before the magic wand of science. Surely, we can boast of all these and thousand other trophies of science. Yet, are we in a position to assert that we are civilized ?

Civilization means a lot. The core of it, however, is refinement. Refinement of our sentiments, thoughts, and conduct is really what it stands for. Anything less is said to be vulgar, boorish, savage. Refinement being a process, it must have stages and grades. When our refinement goes ahead of a certain stage, our civilization may be said to have advanced.

Let us see how far our civilization has advanced from the earliest stage, that of the cave-man, which is the very starting point of human history.

The cave-man was self-centred. He was swayed by instinctive impulses as much as the other denizens of the forest. He was as ferocious as the beasts of prey. His life was a non-stop fight for existence not only with elemental fury but also with brutes and brute-men. He had, perforce, to dominate others if he was to live. If he had any brain-storm, it would usually be over the invention of weapons that could kill his foes or animals for his food. To him Nature was a mystery, an object of awe and terror. His life was simple, his needs were few, in fact, no more than those of other animals. His joys and sorrows centred round the essential biological demands. His budding mind was no more than a handmaid of life.

In many respects we are far ahead of this crude, primitive stage. The starting point of civilization is beyond our ken. We have secured our life against the furies of Nature. The beasts of prey are at a safe distance from our abodes. Our skill as well as weapons have improved so far as to make the hunting of wild animals a sport. The discovery of the technique of raising food from the soil and from domesticated animals has, by a single stroke, lifted us above the prowling dangers surrounding the cave-man's search for food. We have practically banished fear from all these spheres of primitive existence.

From its earliest stage on the human plane our mind

## ARE WE CIVILIZED ?

has developed beyond recognition. Our mind is no longer a mere vassal of life. Besides meeting the biological demands in a much more thorough and extensive manner, our mind has created a distinct field of its own with an entirely novel set of appetites and values. We hunger for knowledge, we crave for beauty, we seek ethical values. They give us intellectual delight, emotional ecstasy, and moral satisfaction unknown to our primitive forbears. Indeed, when we look at this phase of our life, the cave-man appears to be no more than a mere brute in human form.

Let us now probe our mind a bit beneath its surface. Is it not a fact that all the instinctive cravings of the brute-man are still lurking there in all their rapacity ? Are we not shamelessly selfish and sensual in our thoughts and desires ?

Of course, we may very well be proud of our sky-scraping intellect and its amazing exploits on various fronts. Yet, we have to own that we are no more than bond-slaves of crude passions. Greed, lust, malice, ferocity, and all the ugly brood of crass selfishness are at the steering wheel of our conduct. Our reason is helplessly set aside when it goes against the urge of the baser instincts. Quite frequently we do things that are decried by our own sober judgment. Very often we find that we are on the wrong track ; yet we cannot simply help it. We suffer, we repent. And this, perhaps, is

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

the greatest tragedy of our life—we cannot act up to our reason. We are not trained to develop our will that alone can put a brake on the unworthy impulses and steer through the path of reason. A dynamic and well-directed will is the very basis of character. But character-building, that is, proper training of the will is none of the business of the educational systems of this day. This is why mostly we are intellectual giants but spiritual pigmies.

And this is not all. Failing to use reason for shaping our conduct we mobilize its strength for justifying our vile deeds. Our intellect is kept busy in rationalizing all that we are forced to do under the whip hand of our baser instincts. With perverted reason we proceed to whitewash our motives. Indeed, we have mastered the trick of hiding the hideous contents of our mind beneath a polished and charming exterior. And this passes as the acme of our refinement. We have guillotined truth and honesty and placed tact and diplomacy on the pedestal. We are civilized in the sense that we can successfully keep the brute in us concealed behind a smoke-screen of sweet words and noble ideologies. Looked at from this angle we are no more than camouflaged cave-men. The cave-men might have been beastly, we appear to be fiendish.

No doubt, we have built up societies and States and framed laws for regulating our lives and securing

## ARE WE CIVILIZED ?

public peace. Anti-social activities are dubbed as crimes and put down ruthlessly by the State. Slips from the ethical standard are penalized no less by social taboo. But these only drive our mischievous propensities underground and do not cure them. And this is why we seek cover whenever we are led by a base impulse to do a dirty job. We are up to anything only if we can evade laws and hoodwink society. Crimes, therefore, multiply and become more nefarious. Societies and States fail to secure the peace they seek. So long as the will of the individual is not trained to control the baser instincts, this state of things will continue in spite of law-courts and social opprobrium.

So much about the life of the individual. Collective life appears to be more shocking. Ambition and jealousy, unseemly scramble for power, exploitation and iniquity, fratricidal fights in the name of classes and nations present a ghastly picture of jungle-life all over the world. In every State or society a microscopic minority, perched on political, economic, or social vantage grounds, ceaselessly dominate and exploit the teeming millions. Safely entrenched in power, the privileged custodians of vested interests of various types and shades drain the resources of their fellow-men and reduce them almost to beasts of burden. They do this without any scruple, without any compunction. And while doing all these, they never cease declaring



from house-tops that they are inspired by the best of motives. Do they not really look like organized gangs of camouflaged cave-men ?

And all the while, how do the masses fare ? In almost every country, however civilized it may claim to be, a vast majority reel under oppression. Everywhere suffering is the badge of the masses. Of course, it varies in intensity from country to country. Yet it is there all the same. Colour, birth, wealth, or some other accident determines the pressure to be put upon a section of humanity. These go to brand a human individual as a social pariah, political underdog or an economic slave, or even a combination of all these. In any case his life is miserable. Day in and day out, he has to toil for eking out a miserable existence. Leisure he has none. Cultural refinement does not seem to be meant for him. Luxury, of course, is a forbidden fruit. He lives simply to drudge so that the privileged few may get milk and honey. On the top of this there is the fear of unemployment. This fear crushes his spirit and makes him cringe and kotow to the bosses. He is forced to remain subhuman !

The capitalists are having their day. The thousand and one amenities of life brought in by science appear to be their close preserve. They are a clever lot. Even under a democratic Government they know how to grip the State-machine and through that to get a

## ARE WE CIVILIZED ?

stranglehold on the people. With the Government in its thumb, they grind labour and the backward peoples on earth. They have the knack of seizing power and wielding it for bringing untold profits to their pockets. Through the clever ruse of nationalism they can mobilize the masses in an instant and make them dance to their tune. It is not unlikely, as Bernard Shaw through his *Major Barbara* would have us believe, that ammunition magnates may manoeuvre nations into a war !

Thus even in democratic States, where the people enjoy a good deal of freedom of speech and personal liberty, they are made victims of appalling wants and outrageous iniquities. Indeed, corruption as well as false and inadequate representation have made democracy an eyewash. No serious effort has yet been made for a just and equitable distribution of privilege. Organized labour has been making insistent demand but advancing at a snail's pace. War conditions bring them very near their coveted goal of equality. They pay the price with their life's blood. But as soon as peace comes they are thrust back into the old grooves. They become disillusioned. In spite of big promises, the capitalists have been playing this game so long, and this even in the democratic States.

In the modern totalitarian States, run on socialistic lines, the grievances of labour are claimed to have been

substantially reduced. In one of these States class discrimination appears to be at its minimum ; and food, education as well as other amenities of life are within everybody's reach, so long, of course, as he or she does not choose to remain idle. Yet the condition of these people is not covetable. They have to barter their personal liberty for economic equality. Dictatorship sits heavily on individual freedom. Their thought and speech are regimented by the State as much as their food and clothes. This is a horrible condition for human beings to live in. Without freedom of thought and speech individuals are apt to be mechanized and converted into mere parts of the State-machine. There a free thinker is a misfit ; and, therefore, he is either crushed or brushed aside. However precious service one may have rendered towards the growth of the State, one cannot with impunity oppose or even criticize the State policy. Under dictatorship of any brand nobody's life is safe, nobody's property is secure, unless one stamps out one's own manhood and reduces oneself into a mere puppet.

The bulk of the people, therefore, in any State, democratic or totalitarian, groan under tyranny and sink to subhuman depths. Add to this the condition of the masses in the empires, colonial possessions, and the so-called mandated States strewn over Asia and Africa and ruled by big powers. Preyed upon by perpetual

## ARE WE CIVILIZED ?

want and fear, they have become 'next door neighbours to brutes.' And the tyrants, representing the vested interests and the privileged classes all over the world, present, more than anything else, the depth of human degradation. They are greedy, unscrupulous, and heartless in their dealings and diabolical in their profession. This sums up our inner life at the moment.

Beneath the pomp and grandeur, flourish and glitter, intellectual feats and triumphs of science of the present day, humanity appears to be sliding back to the brute level. It is under a spell of atavism. Our civilization is a misnomer when we are losing our foot-hold on the human plane. Spiritually we are on the same boat with the cave-man.

Yet man can become divine. He can rise above selfishness and carnality and sacrifice his all for the well-being of his fellows. It is his prerogative to stand for unrestricted equality, fraternity, and liberty. Universal and selfless love is the essence of his soul. The kingdom of heaven is really within him. Only if man would care to unlock its gates he would step on to the divine plane. He would become a superman of the divine order. And this is the goal towards which humanity has to be led. The path has been chalked out from time to time by its man-gods, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mahomet, Shankara, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Nanak, and a host of saints and seers. Whenever

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

there has been a confusion about the goal, the potential divinity of man has been made manifest through the luminous life of a man-god. There is no mistake about it. Man has to evolve into superman of the divine type.

The craze, however, for becoming a superman of the monstrous type,—a superhuman wielder of brute force, is just an aberration. Some openly avow it, others come unconsciously under its grip. But this craze is suicidal. If not checked in time it may work the extinction of the human race. One world war coming at the heel of another is a pointer. We should become wiser and start treading the right path. Then alone our civilization will be saved from its present crisis.

## THE GREAT MARCH

A creature on earth is ushered into existence, apparently, to eat, grow, and reproduce its kind. Obviously, it eats to grow and grows to replenish the earth. After that, its life's part seems to be played out, and it has to wait only to be swept off the stage by death.

Nature, whoever or whatever she may be, appears to be determined to carry on her business of creation. This is her imperious demand. Her innate urge for creation releases a mysterious and inexhaustible force that brings into being, nurtures, utilizes as a helpless agent of creation and then throws away the thing we call a creature. It appears to be no more than a link in an infinite chain of creation, a mere instrument brought in and played upon by this inscrutable force for fulfilling the imperious demand of Nature. This force is persistently at work to see to the continuity of creation through the multiplication of individuals. This is the 'Life Force', the 'universal creative energy' that has been introduced so eloquently by George Bernard Shaw in his *Man and Superman*.

Man being just a species of the biological world has to feel his helplessness under the terrible grip of this mysterious Life Force. Looked at from this angle, he

is, like any other creature, nothing more than a mere tool worked by the universal creative energy. His ego may magnify what he calls his personality, in his delirious self-complacence he may dream of living in Utopias of freedom, but so far as his existence on the biological plane is concerned, he is a bonds slave of Nature, a mere device for ensuring the continuity of his species.

This is why sex plays such an important part in human life. The almost irresistible sex appeals are meant to entrap the parties so that Nature may use them up for her purpose. Sex urge is nothing but Nature's urge for creation appearing through the individual. Individuals do not matter except almost as puppets in Nature's game. Personal relations through love, thrill and all that have little meaning except as hypnotic spells for luring the parties to execute Nature's behest. This appears to be the brutal fact concealed so skilfully beneath the fascinating trappings of poetry and romance. Indeed, so far as the life phenomena are concerned, man is almost on the same level with all other animals. There is hardly any material difference. No wonder, therefore, that the Freudians have come to look upon sex urge, lying deep beneath the conscious mind, as the prime mover of the human machine.

But life alone does not explain the human complex. In the lower strata of the biological world one may

## THE GREAT MARCH

trace the existence of a rudimentary mind, which at that stage of evolution is no more than a mere handmaid of the great Life Force ; but in man, mind certainly is no less prominent a factor than life. It is this developed mind that alone has created the gulf between man and the rest of the animals and established his suzerainty over them all.

Food and progeny are no longer his only concerns. He has innate and insatiable cravings for Truth (*Satyam*), Good (*Shivam*), and Beauty (*Sundaram*). This persistent mental urge has led man to create a world of his own, namely, the world of culture. His search for Truth has given birth to religion, philosophy, science, history, etc.; his quest for Good has brought in medicine, surgery, hygiene, sanitation, education, politics, economics, agriculture, industries, etc., and filled the world with social service institutions of various kinds and dimensions ; and his longing for Beauty has furnished the earth with literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. All these constitute the world of culture created by the human mind. And it is ever expanding.

It is this creative urge of the human mind that gives a meaning and value to the existence of life. The amoeba struggles blindly to evolve into a man, and man struggles to attain his innate ideal of Truth, Good, and Beauty.



things gives him no rest, no contentment till the Divinity within him manifests Itself completely. He has to be born again and again and go through repeated shocks of disillusionment till he is able to grasp the real import of all his struggles, the destination of his life's journey. Till this consciousness dawns on him, he has perforce to drift, swayed mainly by the Life Force and buffeted by a discontented mind. This is why the bulk of humanity, in spite of their vaunted culture, appear to have scarcely stepped above the plane of brutes. The plane of Divinity is a far cry. Yet this plane is their destined goal and to rise up to this plane is the conscious or unconscious aim of all their efforts.

Indeed, civilization has to be measured by the steps humanity takes towards this goal. The more will man be made conscious of this fact, the speedier will be the advance of true civilization. Buddha and Christ, Shankara and Chaitanya, in fact, all prophets, all seers, and all saints of different ages and different climes strove to stir up this consciousness by the inspiring examples of their hallowed lives. The confusion at the present moment, however, regarding the goal of human life and civilization is more intense than that in any other epoch in the history of mankind. It is significant, therefore, that the blessed goal of the great march has been illumined over again in our days by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

## SHAKING OF HANDS

## I

The nineteenth century was a rather bad day for theologians. For, then science was very positive in certain findings that tended to cut away the ground from under the theologians' feet ; and there was a growing fancy among the people to rely more on the verdict of science than on that of theology.

Scientists of the last century were firm in their belief that they could explain the universe with a few scores of elements and half a dozen elementary forces. According to their conception the universe is a huge machine, wherein myriads of indivisible atoms are being played upon by a number of material forces. The machine is lodged in absolute space and it works with the flow of absolute time. And the mighty law of causation is there to explain every movement of the cosmic machine. The machine moves smoothly, steadily and continuously and every step forward can be determined accurately from the previous state of things.

According to these scientists the universe is filled by ether, in which lie strewn material bodies in the shape

of stars and planets at distances of millions and millions of miles. In this vast ocean of space the earth is like a tiny grain of sand on the sea-shore.

Evidence of life on the tiny speck of an earth made these scientists look upon life as an intruder in the realm of matter. Just as separation of the earth from the original star or nebula, due perhaps to the attraction of an approaching star was nothing but a pure accident,—so also must have been the appearance of life on earth something like an accident. Like the magnetic property of the Iron group and the radiating property of the radio-active group of elements, life may be a property of the element Carbon that plays such an important role in the make-up of all organic tissues.

Thus speculated the scientists of the last century on life. Such an unshakable faith did they call up regarding the ultimate nature of atoms and material forces, that even philosophers did not hesitate to build up philosophical systems on these material units. They proceeded to explain intelligence as a by-product of chemical changes in the material contents of the brain.

Hence, search for intelligence before creation naturally became a meaningless affair and as a matter of course theology was about to be set aside as something meant for satisfying puerile curiosity.

## SHAKING OF HANDS

### II

The birth of the new century has tilted the scientist's kaleidoscope. The vision before him has undergone a miraculous change.

Indivisible and indestructible atoms, on which the materialists of the last century relied so much, have betrayed their unsubstantial nature and the picture of the cosmic machine is on the point of tumbling down.

The atom is no longer supposed to be a compact, homogeneous and ultimate unit. A new world has been discovered in the sealed bosom of the atom. It has been found to be like a miniature replica of the solar system. A proton or a combination of protons and electrons forms the nucleus within the immense void of an atom, and round the nucleus electrons are engaged in a whirling ring-dance.

"The diameter of an electron is about one-fifty-thousandth of the diameter of an atom; that of the nucleus is not very much larger ; an isolated proton is supposed to be much smaller still." So, compared with the void within an atom, the space occupied by electrons and protons is insignificantly small. As a matter of fact, if all the electrons and protons composing a human body could be packed up very closely, eliminating all the unfilled space, "the man would be reduced to a speck just visible through a magnifying glass."

So all that one regarded as most solid has dissolved objectively into tiny specks floating in void. Says Sir Arthur Eddington, "When we compare the universe as it is now supposed to be with the universe as we had ordinarily preconceived it, the most arresting change is . . . the dissolution of all that we regard as most solid into tiny specks floating in void. . . . The revelation by modern physics of the void within the atom is more disturbing than the revelation by astronomy of the immense void of the interstellar space."

Then the yet more surprising fact about these tiny constituents of the physical universe is that they refuse to remain in the category of matter. The protons and electrons appear as charges of positive and negative electricity. They can very well be looked upon as 'fields of force' but in no sense as particles of matter. Thus a material object, a wall or a table is mostly emptiness, and "sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed." There is nothing substantial about it. "It is nearly all empty space—space pervaded, it is true by fields of force, but these are assigned to the category of 'influences' and not of 'things'."

And even these tiny specks of electric charge, which go to constitute all that we call matter, can hardly be looked upon as specks or particles. Experiments have proved that protons and electrons behave both as

## SHAKING OF HANDS

particles as well as waves. This is why some scientists choose to call them 'wavicles'. Just as modern science has discovered that light radiation has a dual character, namely, undulatory and corpuscular at the same time, so also protons and electrons have been found to show unmistakable signs of an exactly similar dual behaviour. Indeed some scientists consider matter as a kind of congealed radiation. Says Sir James Jeans, "The tendency of modern physics is to resolve the whole material universe into waves and nothing but waves. These waves are of two kinds ; bottled-up waves which we call matter, and unbottled waves, which we call radiation or light."

Yet the most astounding fact about the structure of the material universe is what has been discovered by Heisenburg. He holds that there is a principle of indeterminateness involved in the very constitution of nature. Position and velocity of a particle at a particular moment can never be determined accurately. "A particle may have position or it may have velocity but it cannot in any exact sense have both." If its position be accurately determined, its velocity will simply go beyond the range of precise measurement. So a proton or an electron, be it a particle, or, wave, or wavicle, is something of a superphysical nature, because its position and velocity appear to lie on two different planes. Evidently protons and electrons appear to lie

outside the normal range of even the scientist's comprehension.

This is why Sir James Jeans states that the reality behind electrons and protons belongs to higher dimensions and all that we know of them is nothing but behaviour of shadows of that reality. And this is the stuff of which the world before us is composed. The hard and tangible universe made of indivisible and indestructible atoms has been resolved into void and shadows. According to Sir Arthur Eddington, "The external world of Physics has thus become a world of shadows. . . . In the world of Physics we watch a shadowgraph performance of the drama of familiar life."

### III

Innumerable shadows in an immense void is what one gets at behind the panorama of nature in course of his empirical search. But twentieth century science does not cry halt even at this stage. Even the shadows are declared to have an ultra-shadowy character.

A shadow with which we are familiar appears to have a position in space and a measurable duration in time. But the shadows into which the universe is resolved in course of the scientist's objective search for

## SHAKING OF HANDS

reality, can be located absolutely neither in space nor in time. Absolute space and absolute time have taken wings before the magical wand of Einstein. The same distance between two objects may yield different measurements to different observers moving with different velocities. The same incident may appear to belong to the past, present or future to observers from different stations. So when we actually locate anything in time or space, we do it only with reference to a particular framework of time and space.

Moreover time and space are no longer considered to be absolutely distinct kinds of interval. There is only one kind of interval which may best be named time-space, that appears time-like under some conditions and space-like under others.

Hence the idea that our universe is a three-dimensional entity floating in the stream of time has naturally been dropped. Time and space have been welded together permanently and our universe is now considered to be a four-dimensional continuum, of which time is one of the dimensions.

Einstein's theory of Relativity backed by this conception of the four-dimensional continuum, which was advanced originally by Minkowsky, has ushered in an altogether new era of science. The very mode of the scientist's thought about the world has undergone a complete revolution. The scientist has to grasp



## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

absolutely new conceptions undreamt of in the classical scheme of physics.

While scientists are busy over readjustment of equations, theories and laws according to this new light, the man in the street finds himself in a precarious position. To him everything is slipping through the fingers. Matter, solid, liquid, or gaseous, has already fizzled out with the break-up of the atom and discovery of the shadowy character of protons and electrons. Time and space have also somehow melted into an obscure mathematical figure of 'time-space'. He finds nothing substantial about him to clutch at. Nothing but shadows on a four-dimensional continuum ! This simply takes his breath away.

### IV

Whatever may be the fate of matter, time and space,—the fact of rigid determinism might still give some relief to materialists. But as ill-luck would have it, twentieth-century-science is on a fair way to pull this down as well.

The quantum theory has shaken the foundation of determinism. According to this theory energy is absorbed or radiated in distinct lumps or quanta. So continuous motion is not a feature of the processes of

## SHAKING OF HANDS

Nature. Nature moves rather discontinuously by sudden jerks, like the hands of a clock.

Then again when a quantum of energy reaches a body,—as it is not distributed all over—only one of the atoms of the body absorbs the whole quantum. Now, who determines which atom should go in for the quantum? This question remains unanswered. So the common man is left to speculate that there may be an element of fate or will involved in the choice of the atom.

The next blow to the deterministic theory comes from radio-activity. It has been found that a process of disintegration goes on within radio-active atoms. Electrons and protons fly off from the atoms up to a certain limit and emanate in the form of a continuous radiation, till Uranium or Radium is reduced to Lead. Now, no external agency, heat, light or even cosmic energy, has yet been found responsible for knocking the electrons out of the radio-active atoms. So disintegration of these atoms is said to be spontaneous. So long as no cause of this disintegration be forthcoming the fate of the deterministic theory must remain hanging in the balance.

Then again it has been calculated that one out of every 2,000 electrons flies off from a radio-active atom in course of a year. This naturally gives rise to the puzzling question—"What is it that determines which

particular electrons should go out and which others should remain within atomic range?" Apparently no answer is forthcoming. It appears more like an act of will or fate, as one may choose to say, than like any mechanical motion.

V

Thus before the analytical vision of the physicist the world appears to be no more than a world of symbols, where probabilities play a more important role than causality. He can no longer explain life and mind in terms of matter, rather he is about to explain matter in terms of mind. Sir Arthur Eddington goes so far as to declare that, "the stuff of the world is mind-stuff . . . . The mind-stuff of the world is, of course, something more general than our individual conscious minds; but we may think of its nature as not altogether foreign to the feelings in our consciousness."

The following statement of Sir James Jeans, one of the leading scientists of England of his day, will make the new standpoint perfectly clear: "To-day there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side of science approaches almost to unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more

like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter ; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and the governor of the realm of matter—not of course our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms out of which our individual minds have grown exist as thoughts.”

Now let us add to it the revelations made by Sir Oliver Lodge, another noted scientist of England. He found unmistakable evidence regarding the existence of life and mind outside the physical world. He investigated the truth behind *seances* under test conditions and became thoroughly convinced of the existence of spirits. In the last centenary of the British Association Sir Oliver asserted before the august assembly of scientists that in the near future science was sure to prove the existence of life and mind in the interstellar space.

Even Bertrand Russell, who is not yet convinced of the ‘hereafter’ and appears to be in the same boat with Charvaka (the Indian atheist), appreciates the value of scientific inquiry into the extra-physical realm. Says Bertrand Russell, “Psychical research professes to have actual scientific evidence of survival, and undoubtedly its procedure is, in principle, scientifically correct. Evidence of this sort might be so overwhelming that no one with a scientific temper could reject it. . . . For my part, I consider the evidence so far adduced by psychical

teresting to find that some of the disclosures made by the Vedantic process of self-analysis are being corroborated by the findings and expectations of modern science. That "matter is a creation and manifestation of mind", that cosmic mind is the ruler of the universe, that life and mind exist even after physical death,—all these were revealed to the Vedic seers in course of their search after Reality by the process of self-analysis. Moreover, it was precisely by this method of self-analysis that the Vedic seers stripped off the universe layer by layer as it were and went to the very core of the universe, the Eternal Background of Pure Consciousness. So regarding the method of search after Reality science is no longer in a position to say anything against religion.

Even regarding details modern science should not raise serious objections. Supraphysical experiences of the mystic can no longer be reasonably discarded as useless hallucinations. The physicist's reality is outside the four-dimensional continuum, but we live in a three-dimensional world. Empty space containing sparsely scattered protons and electrons appears to us as substantial and continuous matter with various colour, taste and smell. On the physicist's symbolic world our mind has woven this rich fancy of the actual world of our experience. So even the scientist will have to admit that we live in a gigantic illusion,

## SHAKING OF HANDS

created by the mind. And to the unsubstantial constituents of this illusory world mind has given values and significance. What is there in a rainbow but a multitude of ethereal vibrations of varying wave-lengths arranged in a certain order ? And this fills one's mind with joy and plunges the poet into ecstasy. The mind appears to have a constitutional appetite for beauty ; so it assesses aesthetic values of its fancied creation. Similarly mind has a natural craving for purity, which leads it to endow things with moral value. Thus in a nest of illusions we live and yet we are swayed by craving and aversion. The physicist, one can hope, does not look upon any person as a big differential equation, nor even more concretely as an assemblage of electrons and protons. The physicist, in spite of his analytical knowledge of the material universe, has to love, hate, enjoy and suffer and even carry on research in the midst of illusions.

Now, the same mind, that in its ordinary mood projects this vision of the everyday world, calls up a different order of visions in another mood. The same mind, that enjoys the things of this world, enjoys rather more intensely the things of the mystic world. And from the amount of purity, strength and joy it derives from the mystic vision, the self-same mind gives greater values to the mystic world. Mind being the weaver of illusions, assessor of values and guarantor

of Reality, how may one reasonably question its verdict about its mystic experience ?

Moreover, just as the scientist tries to approach Reality in and through the illusions of the everyday world, so does the mystic try to get near Reality in and through the illusions of the mystic world. While the physicist recoils from his four-dimensional continuum leaving Reality in a background outside the scope of his investigations, the mystic succeeds in passing beyond the mystic world of names and forms and reaching the philosopher's Ultimate Reality. The avenue of consciousness into the spiritual world leads one through the illusions of mystic experience straight to the Final Cause. So the mystic world, though illusory from the standpoint of Absolute Truth, may be said to be closer to Reality.

Having regard to all these, science can no longer object seriously to the method of self-analysis adopted by religion and to its findings. Science and religion need no longer be looked upon as belonging to opposing camps. Rather, it may be expected that they will come closer together in the near future and pledge their amity by a hearty shaking of hands.

## WHAT RELIGION REALLY MEANS

Religion, in the eyes of many people, is no more than "a cloak to be worn on particular days", as Shelley has put it. Even such use of religion is made only because it is a long-standing custom. It has to be done as a matter of course and they do it without asking why. With some people religion is nothing but a pose, and sometimes even a camouflage. A vast number actually believe that by adoration, confession, penitence, and all that, they get a blank cheque for multiplying evil deeds. Then again, there is a crazy group running after religion for miracles that may go to cure a toothache, or to keep off grey hairs and wrinkles, or perhaps to procure for them a windfall. Besides, there are a few mystery-mongers prying into the secrets of nature through the trap-door of religion and discovering by that process all sorts of spirits, ghosts, and hobgoblins.

On the other side, there is a great number who consider religion as a tabooed theme. They find nothing in the universe except matter, force, and accident. From the nebula right up to the present state of the world it has been, as they honestly believe, an aimless journey made possible only by a series of count-



less accidents. They seriously hold that it was some accidental aberration of nature that led the ape to drop its tail and emerge as man. Except such accidents they have, therefore, nothing to adore. In fact, they do not find any design, purpose, skill, or intelligence behind the cosmos. Even life to them is a mere accident in a corner of an otherwise inert universe.

Bernard Shaw is, perhaps, perfectly justified in saying, "One hardly knows which is the more appalling: the abjectness of credulity or the flippancy of scepticism." The fact probably is that, of those who choose to stand for or against religion, very few care to inquire what it precisely stands for.

Surely, religion stands or falls with the theologian's God, who is none other than the philosopher's Ultimate Reality. Now, a very earnest and vigorous search for getting at the root of the universe has been going on for centuries. The scientists have made much headway ; yet they are far from the fundamental realities. They have been penetrating step by step into the mysteries of nature, but the basic why and how of things are still a long way off. Meanwhile, they have stumbled into a realm where all their pre-conceived notions have been blown up altogether and some of the scientists have been led to notice how the 'Mysterious Universe' looks more like the work of a Cosmic Mind than that of a huge machine. Matter as an ultimate constituent of nature

## WHAT RELIGION REALLY MEANS

has been resolved into 'bottled up radiant energy'. Time has been welded with space to form what is called a four-dimensional continuum, where everything has its existence only as an event. The factor of indeterminacy has become prominent enough to jeopardize the universality of the law of causation itself. All these tend to upset the materialistic outlook and serve as a pointer to the existence of an effective Creative Will, sponsored in our days by Henri Bergson and George Bernard Shaw. There may be many among the scientists who are proud of the achievements so far made by science,—achievements that have undoubtedly extended the frontier of human knowledge and contributed profusely towards the amenities and alas ! also towards the destruction of human life. Yet all of them have to admit that the epoch-making discoveries of the present century in the realm of science have, by a stroke of the magic wand, as it were, removed the fundamental verities of life and existence beyond the range of comprehension. In its search for deeper truths science has been led to a position where it is simply out of its depth.

Pure reason also has made no mean effort to unearth the Ultimate Truth. Since Descartes, rationalist philosophers have spared no pains to probe the cosmos with their keen intellect. Yet confusion reigns in the domain of philosophy. One system is replaced by another on the grounds of saner logic ; and this has been going on

for centuries. All the while, philosophy has been oscillating between the extremes of Realism and Idealism, leaving the relation between mind and matter as puzzling as ever. By this process, no doubt, human intellect has considerably extended and tightened its grasp on subtleties and enriched itself with certain invaluable findings and astounding guess-works. One of these findings is about the capacity of the intellect itself. It admits that intellect cannot go out of itself to measure its own cause. The Ultimate Cause is beyond its reach ; it is unknown and unknowable. Pure reason, therefore, has perforce to cry halt. One of the latest guess-works, however, has improved the position by declaring that in the search for metaphysical truths, intuition can go farther than intellect. If it does, rational philosophy has to change its skin and merge into theosophy.

This brings us, in a way, close to the Vedantic standpoint. Intuition of a pure mind is considered by the Vedanta to be a surer approach to metaphysical truths than intellect. It declares, 'Knowledge of the Final Truth cannot be attained by arguments'.<sup>1</sup> From many such utterances of the Vedic seers one finds how the Vedanta has passed its verdict on the power of the intellect, perhaps, more unequivocally than Immanuel Kant has done. Yet the Vedanta does not sponsor

<sup>1</sup> *Naisha tarkena matirapaneya*.—*Ka. Up.* I. 2. 9.

Agnosticism. It declares that what is unknown and unknowable to the intellect can be realized as one's own self: 'Some sages realized the Self'<sup>2</sup>; 'I have realized the Supreme Being, the Resplendent One, beyond the pale of dismal ignorance.'<sup>3</sup>

Glimpses of deeper truths through the intuition of a pure mind lead one ultimately to the realization of the Self as none other than the Supreme Spirit, the Absolute Reality. This realization is achieved only when the mind ceases to function, when one is said to be in *nirvikalpa samadhi* (deepest 'trance' according to the Christian mystics). This is the fourth (*turiya*) state, when transcending all limitations the soul rests as boundless, pure Consciousness, Bliss and Existence, while the consciousness of the ignorant ones plies only among the three states of awakening (*jagrat*), dream (*swapna*) and sound sleep (*sushupti*). The fourth state is the real awakening when one stands, as it were, face to face with the philosopher's Ultimate Truth, or rather becomes That. Compared to this superconscious realization, the phenomenal world is no more than a passing dream.

This realization makes one free for ever from all doubts<sup>4</sup> and from all griefs, delusions, and fears.

<sup>2</sup> *Kashchidhirah pratyagatmanamaikshat.*—*Ka. Up.* II. 1. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Vedhametam purusham mahantam*

*Adityavarnam tamasah parastat.*—*Shwet. Up.* III. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Chhidiyante sarvasamshayah.*—*Mund. Up.* II. 2. 8.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

‘Neither grief nor delusion can assail one who realizes the essential oneness of things.’<sup>5</sup> ‘Knowing Brahman, the Absolute, as the essence of Bliss, the illumined soul has nothing to fear.’<sup>6</sup>

The Vedanta holds that the self of all creatures is one and that it is no other than the Absolute.<sup>7</sup> The same Self dwells in the tiniest insect as in the Buddha (the enlightened one). The difference is in the degree of manifestation through a veil of *avidya* or Primal Ignorance. From the state of the amoeba up to that of the Buddha the evolution is a gradual process of removing this veil. In the lower strata of the biological world this process is carried on by the elemental urge of nature through instinctive impulse, while man is born with the capacity for extending the range of his consciousness and developing his power almost indefinitely by his determined efforts. He can tear off the remaining portion of the veil and fully manifest the Divinity That has been lying all the while within him. And this is his religion.

Although endowed with a rational mind, man, at the start, is helplessly dominated by instinctive impulse as much as any member of the sub-human order. So long as he is swayed by such instinctive urge, he remains practically on the brute plane, and this in spite of all

<sup>5</sup> *Tatra kah shokah ko moha ekatwamanupashyatah.*—*Ish. Up.* VII.

<sup>6</sup> *Anandam Brahmano vidwan*

*Na vibhethi kutashchana.*—*Tait. Up.* II. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ayamatma Brahma.*—*Bri. Up.* II. 5. 19.

his efforts for sharpening his intellect, for stuffing his brain with all sorts of information, and for extending his sway over external nature. He cannot act up to his own judgment when it goes against the trend of his impulse. Between his reason and impulse there is an almost perpetual conflict. His intellect has wrought miracles, no doubt, yet man is still rooted to the brute plane. The brute-in-man is extending its hegemony in the name of human civilization ! So long as this state of things lasts, obviously, there cannot be any peace in individual, communal, national, or international life.

But the process of evolution has not come to an end. Man can and must leave the brute plane for ever and go higher up. Intellect has brought him so far. Now he has to take recourse to pure intuition, through which alone one can get glimpses of his inner Divinity. The Vedanta teaches him how he may unlock the gates of pure intuition by practising self-control, selfless service and concentration of mind. This is sure to lead man through higher and higher altitudes far above the brute plane till his consciousness transcends both intellect and intuition and becomes one with God. The lives of Christ and Buddha are luminous pointers to such a course of further evolution of the human species. These man-gods are the correct models of the Superman, and humanity has to shape itself after these effulgent models. And this can be done only by practising religion.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

Indeed, religion is immensely practical. It does not consist in merely giving one's assent to a particular creed, nor in counting oneself as a member of any religious community. Real religion does not want us to live in perpetual terror of "an almighty fiend, with a petty character and unlimited power, spiteful, cruel, jealous, vindictive, and physically violent". Nor does it teach us to concern ourselves only with sending our earnest prayers to Heaven for a handful of lollipops. God is in us and everywhere about us. Our unclean minds, like so many sooty chimneys, are obstructing the glorious realization of this truth, which alone can solve all our problems and bring to us peace eternal. 'Realizing Him one can transcend death (i.e., all forms of bondage), for which there is no other way open.'<sup>8</sup> 'Getting which nothing more covetable remains to be gained and no sorrow, however acute, can shake one's mind.'<sup>9</sup> To attain this state of perfection, we have to cleanse our minds, and this is all that religion teaches us to do.

This is the essence of all real religions. The rest, namely, mythology and rituals are non-essentials. They are no more than kindergarten lessons in the scheme of spiritual education. So long as they help us to purge

\* *Tameva viditwa'timrityumeti,*  
*Nanyah pantha vidyate'yanaya.*—*Shwet. Up.* III. 8.

\* *Yam labdhwa chaparam labham manyate nadhikam tatah,*  
*Yasmin sthito na duhkkena gurunapi vichalyate.*—*Gita* VI. 22.

## WHAT RELIGION REALLY MEANS

our minds of impurities and manifest the Divinity within us, they are useful. None of these has any absolute truth-value: this is why they have scope for infinite variations. There is no reason why people should fight over the truth of any set of mythology and rituals. All sets have equal pragmatic value so long as they help individuals to purify their minds.

It is true that in the hands of unilluminated persons, posing as priests and preachers, real religion, as it has been taught by the seers and prophets of the world, degenerates into a mere creed, a bundle of crude dogmas and meaningless ceremonials. Its followers become wild and fanatic and make religion a cause for communal fight!

But this is not religion. The Vedanta teaches us to distinguish such crude stuff from real religion. It warns us of the danger of being led by impostors. Real religion is to be had from the source, from the original teachings of the seers and prophets. The essential function of such religion is to teach us to purify our hearts and thus to manifest "the Divinity That has been already within us". The Vedanta holds that this is the path of religion, along which humanity has to march in its quest for perfection. Each step forward will be marked by a fresh triumph over the brute-in-man till mankind evolves definitely into a higher species, more akin to the Buddha or Christ than to the Napoleonic type



## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

of Superman conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche. During this epoch-making journey, it is religion, based on the realization of the fundamental realities, that promises to be the sole guide and incentive.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

Religion has the sanction of ages behind it. It is as old as human civilization. Yet one cannot be expected to accept it simply because it is old. Does it convey any truth worth possessing? Can it serve any useful purpose of the modern world? Does it hold out any promise of peace and happiness here on earth? Moderners want straight and satisfactory answers to these simple queries before they may be expected to do anything with religion. And for this, moderners are not to blame. This age, ushered in by George Bernard Shaw in England as Mr. Ward has put it, is precisely an age of critical judgment. Things have to be weighed, analysed, tested and assessed properly before they may be accepted or rejected by the enlightened people of this age. The sanction of ages cannot make them swallow ideas and ideals about whose worth they are absolutely in the dark. Very naturally, therefore, religion, however old it may be, has to pass through this ordeal of critical judgment. There cannot be any question of avoiding this issue.

Now, there are many among us who are apt to discard religion simply because it is old. The Theory of Evolution vaguely suggests that moderners compose

the vanguard of progressive thought, and in its perspective the ancients appear like little children with an overwhelmingly bigger share of credulity than reason. Some of us readily imagine that the curiosity of the ancients regarding the mysteries of nature would perhaps be satisfied as soon as some one would come up to explain these mysteries in terms of more mysterious things. Hence they sometimes hasten to conclude that religion must have derived its existence through some such process. Who knows if God is not an assumption of some ingenious ancients to explain the mysteries of nature ? Then what about the myriads of angels, the heaven and hell and the ridiculous stories of creation found in religious texts ? Are these not drawn purely from imagination for tickling the fancy of puerile minds ? There are many among us who honestly believe that the eighteenth century French encyclopaedist, *Holbach*, was right when he said, "If we go back to the beginning, we shall find that ignorance and fear created the gods ; that fancy, enthusiasm or deceit adorned or disfigured them ; that weakness worships them ; and that custom respects and tyranny supports them in order to make the blindness of men serve its own interests." Somehow these moderners are possessed by the idea that religion born of fantastic dreams was ushered into society simply by the weight of authority. The Church and the State combined to declare from the housetop

that the validity of religion was beyond question and this was all that forced people to swallow its teachings. With such a stuff the modern world cannot have any business. Religion, they declare, is old, rusty and useless. It does not rest on logic, science, nor even on common sense. Obviously it must go to the scrap-heap. This in short is the demand of those moderners, who do not find any light or substance in religion.

Moreover, some hold that religion is a dangerous commodity. It gives rise to crusades and jihads, communal dissensions and sectarian squabbles, riots and breaking of heads. There is something in it that lets loose anti-social forces jeopardizing the solidarity of a nation having many religions. Further it enervates the people by converting them into dreamers concerned more with the next world than with the present. Free will is cramped by thoughts of predestination; enthusiasm is diverted through unproductive channels to win rewards in heaven, while the horrors of hell remain sitting on the hearts like a terrible nightmare. And all these combine to bring down the zeal for earthly ends very close to the zero-point. On the top of this, the Church, allied sometimes with the autocratic State, exploits this weakness of the masses in order to aggrandize itself. These considerations lead some moderners to condemn religion as the opiate of the people, positively detrimental to the growth of a nation.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

But, has religion really no solid ideological ground to stand upon ? And, does it really injure the best interests of a nation ? These two questions require a very careful scrutiny. No prejudice on either side should be allowed to vitiate our judgment.

First of all, we should note the fact that these doubts regarding the truth and efficacy of religion are neither new nor peculiar to our age only. These may be said to be at least as old as the age of the Greek Sophists. And we had our own Charvaka. However, since the days of the Sophists in the Western world, successive waves of scepticism, though at irregular intervals, have left a clear impress on the pages of history. A regular tug-of-war between faith and reason has been going on throughout the entire period of which history claims to have an authentic record. And India can boast of a religion whose existence can be traced at least to the fifth millennium B.C. without doing any injustice to the honest scruples of historians. How is it then that in spite of the onslaughts of fact-finding reason in different ages and different climes religion has succeeded in surviving so long ? This is a question that should not be passed over lightly. Our ideas of evolution suggest that survival presupposes fitness. Following the lead of Herbert Spencer, who applied the principles of evolution to every department of human knowledge, we may conclude that

religion has the fitness to survive the onslaughts of reason. A little scrutiny will show that after each attack religion comes out stronger than before. Doubts help religion to clear the mist and confusion about it and compel it to restate its fundamentals clearly and logically in terms of the requirements of contemporary reason. It was to meet the challenge of reason that Buddha, Shankara, Ramanuja, and many others in India restated the old religion in terms of contemporary thoughts. It was to meet the challenge of reason that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Martin Luther, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and many others enunciated their theistic philosophies so that the established religions might be purged of their crudities and brought in line with the contemporary way of thinking. In the present age we have our Realists, Behaviourists, and Marxists and yet perhaps to meet this very situation we have on the other side our Pragmatists, Intuitionists and, if I may be permitted to say so, the Vedantists. Who can say if this time also religion will not keep up its tradition by emerging from the tussle through a necessary and thoroughly up-to-date restatement of its fundamentals ?

So caution should be our watchword before we pass our verdict on religion. We must draw a line between critical judgment and a hasty verdict based on thoughtlessness or sheer prejudice. Our business is to detect

flaws, if any, of religion with the help of pure reason and not with the aid of an up-to-date set of fallacies, dogmas, half-truths or slogans. No hasty generalization will help us in the matter. We must beware of the craze for novelty that very often forces our thoughts into a vicious circle that leads nowhere. If we seriously want light or substance from any quarter, we have to guard ourselves against the glamour of wiping out the past and creating a brand new world out of our imagination. This is not an easy job. Voltaire was perhaps right in believing that society is a growth in time, not a syllogism in Logic, and "when the past is put out through the door it comes in at the window." So we must be doubly sure of our position before we decide to take up the Herculean task of banishing an institution like religion that has its roots in the hoary past and that has survived many an onslaught of sceptical thoughts.

With this necessary caution, let us now take up the ideological question, namely, whether religion conveys any truth worth possessing. Most certainly we do want facts and not fiction to solve the enigma of nature. And facts have to be ascertained thoroughly by experiment, observation and mathematical reasoning, because it is our almost instinctive conviction that first-hand experience combined with sound logic cannot but yield correct knowledge. The findings of science are obtained through such a procedure and that is why science

commands our faith. How we wish that the ultimate realities could be discovered through the scientific process, for then nothing would possibly stand in the path of our belief. But as things stand now, science is not yet in a position to say the last word about nature. The deeper mysteries of nature remain unsolved. As a matter of fact, even now the ultimate scientific ideas can hardly be brought within the scope of rational conception, and one may reasonably doubt whether we shall ever be able to comprehend them although we may vaguely apprehend them through the medium of mathematical abstraction. Herbert Spencer appears to be perfectly right when he says, "Ultimate scientific ideas are all representation of realities that cannot be comprehended . . . . In all directions the scientist's investigations bring him face to face with an insoluble enigma. He learns at once the greatness and the littleness of the human intellect—its power in dealing with all that comes within the range of experience, its impotence in dealing with all that transcends experience." Take for instance the fact that science has so long defined force in terms of matter and that now it has begun to explain matter in terms of force. This makes a rational conception of force or of matter impossible. Just as the ultimate nature of force and hence of matter is inscrutable so also is that of time and space; yet science has so much to do with motion which involves



the "triple obscurities of matter, time and space". Then again regarding the fundamentals that transcend direct experience science advances only theories and hypotheses, and these also in terms of mathematical abstractions and one must not forget the fact that these theories and hypotheses do not bear the stamp of finality on them. They are liable to correction by further research and one may reasonably doubt with Herbert Spencer whether they will ever lead to a clear and definite knowledge of the ultimate and fundamental verities of life and existence. Yet it is a fact that the popular mind of our age is in a mood to swallow as gospel truth whatever may appear with the hall-mark of science, be it a hypothesis or a theory. Is it not a new type of superstition against which we have to guard ourselves before we proceed to pass our critical judgment on religion?

The conclusions of Herbert Spencer as put down by Prof. Will Durant are to the point : "Let science admit that its 'Laws' apply only to the phenomena and the relative ; . . . Let science cease to deny deity, or to take materialism for granted. Mind and matter are, equally, relative phenomena, the double effect of an ultimate cause whose nature must remain unknown. The recognition of this Inscrutable power is the core of truth in every religion, and the beginning of all philosophy." Indeed since the days of Immanuel Kant rational

philosophy has made it perfectly clear that it is not given to the intellect to jump out of its limitation and grasp the Absolute. Caught within its own meshes of time, space and causation, intellect can never aspire to get hold of the Transcendental Reality. Yet this Ultimate Reality is the core of truth in every religion as Herbert Spencer has put it.

Now the question that confronts us is,—how can religion concern itself with the Ultimate Reality which transcends the limits of our intellectual comprehension? It is refreshing to find that some of the Western philosophers have contributed substantially towards the solution of this problem. Even Immanuel Kant, who discovered the limits of the intellect, pointed out in his *Critique of Practical Reason* that our reason leaves us free to believe that behind the Thing-in-itself there is a just God because our moral sense commands us to believe it. When Pascal said that the heart has reasons of its own, which the head can never understand, or when Rousseau announced that above the logic of the head is the feeling of the heart, or when Bergson attracts our attention to the possibilities of intuition as a conveyer of direct knowledge, these reputed thinkers mean to suggest that there is in man some other door leading to the realities of a higher plane where the intellect has no access. Moral sense, feeling, heart,

intuition appear to be probable clues to this secret door of transcendental knowledge.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the findings of Swami Vivekananda. The Swami worked on the data furnished by Sri Ramakrishna's epoch-making spiritual experience as well as by his own observation and then explained the subtle facts and laws of the spiritual plane. On the strength of his own observation he said that it is through the heart that all realizations come. When the heart is thoroughly purified one develops something like a sixth sense, namely, the intuition of a pure heart, through which comes the experience of supersensuous realities that lie beyond the ken of intellect. This experience is no less valid than that of the intellect on the lower plane. Purification of the heart leading to the development of pure intuition is a tangible process for a quite normal expansion of man's range of knowledge. It is only a changing of tools, a grosser tool for a finer one, in order to work with finer things. There is nothing of abnormality or supernaturalism in mystic experience, because the intuition of a pure heart, through which it comes, is a normal and natural faculty of man as much as his intellect. Of course, it has to be developed through the purification of the heart, but our intellect also has to be developed by proper training before we may rely on its findings. Swami Vivekananda pointed out that this fact was discovered ages ago by the

Hindu seers and that the *Patanjala Yoga-Sutras* may very well be looked upon as a compendium of the science of mystic experience dealing with the possibilities of expanding our range of knowledge through the development of pure intuition.

The Swami pointed out that all religions were fundamentally based on the data gleaned by the intuition of pure hearts, that is, by the first-hand experience of seers. "Go to the source of any religion," he would say, "and you are sure to find it emanating from the lips of one or more seers, those who stood face to face with truth." God was no assumption of the wily ancients for fooling their ignorant comrades, as many of us so readily imagine. God had been actually realized before He was announced. In our age, Sri Ramakrishna, standing on the bed-rock of his spiritual experience, has assured us over and over again that it is open to everybody to see God provided he can purify the mind. In ages long gone by, the Upanishadic *rishi* said the same thing when he uttered, '*Vedahametaṁ puruṣam mahantam*'—"I have realized this Supreme Being." Then, is it not the same truth upheld by the prophet of Nazareth when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." These utterances convey neither clever assumptions nor poetic imaginations ; these are clear statements of facts of the spiritual realm. It is up to anyone to test the truth of the statement that

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

through the intuition of the pure heart one can come into closer touch with Divinity and get a direct knowledge of the basic truths of life.

One thing has to be made clear. Even philosophers may smile at the idea of seeing God. But one has to remember the fact that the intuition of a pure heart is also a faculty of the mind and like the intellect it has also to work within the limitations of subject-object relations and time, space and causation. The Thing-in-itself, the Absolute, which is beyond both mind and matter, is certainly beyond the reach even of pure intuition. Just as the Absolute appears before our sense-perception as the panorama of gross nature, so also before the intuitive perception it appears as a no less extensive panorama of mystic experience. The difference lies in the fact that through the latter it gives a surer and clearer glimpse of the Ultimate Reality. Thus, Formless God is perceived by pure intuition through various forms. Moreover, it transforms the observer's character by thoroughly purging his heart of all crudities and rousing his disinterested love for God and His creation and steeps his mind in ineffable peace. Lastly, this intuition of a pure heart is the corridor that leads one on to the direct experience of the very core of Reality. A time comes when the entire mind including both the faculties of thought and feeling, intellect and intuition, is hushed into silence, the body remains fixed

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

like an inert substance and the real self of man realizes its identity with the Absolute. The Vedanta teaches us that the real self of man is neither the body, nor the mind, nor a combination of both ; it is beyond both mind and matter and no other than the philosopher's puzzling Thing-in-itself, the Absolute. This finding of the Vedanta was based on the fact of self-realization by the Hindu sages of old. And it has been confirmed in our days by the realizations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Thus the Absolute, that cannot be known by the mind,<sup>1</sup> does in a sense become more than known through self-consciousness when the mind is stilled in the complete silence of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. This is how religion concerns itself with the Ultimate Reality as the core of its Truth—first through intuitive glimpses and then through transcendental self-knowledge.

## II

Let us now come down to the common sense view of nature. Can we accept the world as it stands ? Is there no riddle behind it waiting for a solution ? Are not our senses deluding us all the while ? Do they convey to us exactly what lies outside or do they add something substantially to what they receive ? Are we to believe

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha*.—*Tait Up.* II. 9.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

the scientists or our senses? The physicists have discovered that there is nothing but electric forces and vast empty spaces in the universe. Is it not a fact that these formless and colourless entities are somehow transformed by our mind into this beautiful panorama of nature and endowed by it with moral and aesthetic values? Our love and hatred, joy and sorrow, philanthropy and oppression, world federation and class-war are certainly not related to the physicists' mysterious electric units, nor do they spring from unintelligible mathematical formulae. They are all evidently related to the fabric woven by our mind. Again this fabric, as we all know, varies with the range and number of senses of the observer. A slight change in the number and range of the senses is bound to change the entire kaleidoscopic view of nature beyond recognition. This identical objective world of the physicists calls up different views of nature before the vision of the different classes of beings. Thus our view of nature is not an absolute and universal reality. Of course, it may be safely admitted that through evolution we, of all animals, have attained the capability of getting the widest and richest view of nature. Yet can anybody say that the process of evolution has come to a stop? Who knows that we shall not evolve further and have yet wider, richer and more significant views of nature? Professor James of the Harvard University, the cele-

brated sponsor of Pragmatism, is worth quoting. He says, "I firmly disbelieve, myself, that our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe. I believe rather that we stand in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine and feline pets do to the whole of human life. They inhabit our drawing-rooms and libraries. They take part in scenes of whose significance they have no inkling; they are merely tangent to curves of history, the beginnings and ends and forms of which pass wholly beyond their ken. So we are tangent to the wider life of things." Thus our view of nature is, firstly, a dream spun out by our mind from the suggestions received from the physicist's objective world of electric forces and empty space. Secondly, though this view of nature is universal with all normal human units, it is undoubtedly a relative affair compared to the possibilities of vision of other animals ; thirdly, it may quite reasonably be supposed to be an ever-widening and ever-changing affair along with the stages of evolution. Our common sense logic brings us so far.

Now, may it not be reasonably suggested that the seers are individual specimens of the higher order towards which humanity is consciously or unconsciously advancing through the process of evolution ? These seers claim to have a different view of nature ; and they do also tell us something about the evolution of their mind



## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

along a definite line that makes it possible for them to get a different view of nature. With one voice they declare that when the mind becomes pure and concentrated one can see things that lie beyond the range of the common human vision. Why call these seers dreamers ? They are no more dreamers than we are. They only describe what they experience, just as we do. Their view may differ from ours, just as our view may differ from that of the members of any subhuman species. Nor can their view be lightly dismissed by equating it with hallucination simply because it is rare. Because, they show us the way to climb up to their observation-tower from where we may also visualize their perspective. Hence it is at least as much real as our own view of nature, and we should remember the fact that our view has no absolute character or value. If we question the sanity of the seers for their different view of nature we have to admit that the beasts have as much right on precisely the same ground to question our sanity. Yet, if we ignore the visions of the beasts as well as of the seers and obstinately stick to our own view of nature as the only correct one, this attitude may show our intellectual snobbery and unwarranted dogmatism but it can never prove our sanity.

Not only is the seer's view of nature as much real as our view, there is plenty of corroborative evidence to prove that it is in a sense more real. It is wider, richer

and more useful than our view of nature. Its aesthetic and moral values far surpass those of our view. Our view makes us proud, selfish, discontented, restless, acquisitive, pugnacious, oppressive and unscrupulous,—their view makes them humble, selfless, happy, calm, all-renouncing, benign, altruistic and righteous. Our view emphasizes the diversity and concomitant discord on the surface of nature, while their view discloses the unity and harmony reigning eternally within the core of the universe. That is why, in spite of the superficial diversity and discord of nature, it is possible for the seers to stand for universal peace and well-being.

And this leads us on to the question of the usefulness of religion. Not only is religion a quest for the Ultimate Reality, not only does it lead an individual towards peace and perfection, but also it does contribute substantially towards the establishment of amity and harmony in social relations. The path of religion is the path of gradual self-effacement, for this alone chastens the heart and prepares it for the realization of the spiritual truth. The novice who treads this path and wants seriously to reach the goal has to curb his baser instincts, and precisely for this reason it is not for him to contribute to the disruptive and disintegrating forces of the world. He has to expand his heart, to love and serve his neighbour as his own self. And the seer, who has reached the goal and realized the fundamental unity

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

of the universe, cannot know anything but unbounded, unconditioned and universal love as the very essence of his own being. Hence, religion, that goes to eliminate the baser instincts of man and manifest the Divinity within him, is surely the greatest of all civilizing forces.

How does then religion bring about jehads and crusades, communal riots and breaking of heads ? It looks almost like a paradox, yet it is a fact that can never be ignored. But the answer is quite simple. It is not religion, but ignorance and perversion of religion that is at the root of all these evils. Voltaire clears this point when addressing Hollbach he writes, "Religion, you say, has produced countless misfortunes; say rather the superstition which reigns on our unhappy globe. This is the cruellest enemy of the pure worship due to the Supreme Being. Let us detest this monster which has always torn the bosom of its mother : those who combat it are the benefactors of the human race; it is a serpent which chokes religion in its embrace ; we must crush its head without wounding the mother whom it devours." Indeed it is superstition, or rather perversion of religion due to ignorance regarding its fundamentals that is to be held responsible for all the iniquities carried on in the name of religion.

Humanity may take some time to understand and assimilate the fact that all religions are based primarily on the empirical observation of seers and as such each

and every one of them is true, and leads alike to the same goal, namely, realization of God and consequent manifestation of Divinity in man. Ignorance of this fundamental unity of all religions divides humanity into warring camps. But the science of religion that is about to take shape is sure to dispel this ignorance and transform these mutually destructive camps into a magnificent federation of all religions. Consider for a moment how our small earth has developed so many varieties of physical food for human consumption. Each country has its own special variety. Now, if the people of one particular country stand up and say, "We are taking the only right kind of food necessary for the body-building of man, all other peoples on earth have to imitate us in their choice of food, else they will die," surely we shall all laugh at this ridiculous utterance. And why ? Because both history and science prove the absurdity of this utterance. History shows how different people with different food-charts have been living through centuries ; and science shows how underneath the superficial diversities of food we have the same group of chemical ingredients essential for the physical growth of man. So long as the essentials are all right, the food is quite good for its purpose, however much it may be modified on the surface to suit the varieties of taste and other exigencies. This is exactly the case with religion, which may be described as our spiritual food.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

History proves that every religion has succeeded in producing great saints and seers within its fold. And the science of religion will show that it has been possible simply because underlying the diversities of religion we have the same group of essentials necessary for the spiritual growth of man. Much light has been thrown on this point by the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna, and signs are not wanting to show that the enlightened believers of the world are gradually becoming aware of this essential unity of all religions.

However, ignorance regarding this essential unity has been at the root of all communal and sectarian squabbles. Moreover, we fight, simply because we are pugnacious by nature. And surely for these, religion cannot be held responsible. Can Newton or Faraday be blamed for the scientific ravages of modern wars ? Or should we ban science, because it has produced engines of destruction ? Well, science is a search for truth ; it does not ask man to fight. Men fight, because they are goaded to do so by their baser instincts. And so long as this condition obtains, they will make science yield what they require for their nefarious work. So also with religion. Instead of submitting themselves to the chastening process of religion, men goaded by their baser instincts sometimes turn round and proceed to make an organized display of their passions under the cover of the sacred name of religion. They deceive

themselves by thinking that when they fight in the name of religion they cease to be brutish. Little do they know that they are thus played upon by their baser instincts in order to nullify by their unworthy acts the sanctity of the very religion that they want so eagerly to uphold. Really, egoism and its breed have no place in religion. When these are active under the banner of religion, we have nothing but a monstrous perversion of religion. And for this, religion is not to blame.

The fact is that we are not yet civilized. We love to be led by our baser instincts. The brute within us is rampant. The thin veneer of ethical and aesthetic sense that we have been able to develop since the first appearance of the cave-man does not go very far to curb the brute within us. The meagre demand of our ethical and aesthetic sense is often satisfied as soon as we succeed in bringing up a plausible cause for which the brute in us may have a free play. Thus we are ready to play the brute for a lofty cause and we are proud of it. We declare without any compunction that the end justifies the play of our baser instincts. And this happens alike whether we stand for religion, or for the country, or for a particular social, political or economic programme. We then let loose the brutes in us to suck our brothers' blood and to devour their flesh. And we do not blush ! Rather we go so far as to boast of our power, our organization and our civilization ! We cannot help it,

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

because it is yet in our nature, in spite of the much-vaunted process of civilization through millenniums of human history. And for this, religion is surely not to blame.

Rather it is from religion that we get a genuine incentive for transcending the brute-plane and manifesting the Divinity in us. Religion, honestly and sincerely pursued, opens our eyes to detect the vagaries of our mind leading to self-deception. It inspires us to rise above the crudities of the primitive man and urges us forward along the upward path of civilization. This religion should never be confused with its perversion.

Lastly, it is a folly to think that religion enervates the masses. Far from that. The path of love, truth and selflessness alone makes us strong. Look at Mahatma Gandhi and see what a mighty power descends unto the man who sincerely treads this path. Our scriptures hold out this truth. In the Upanishad we find that Janaka was declared to have reached the stage of absolute fearlessness when he attained self-knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Our *Bhagavad-Gita* is not a gospel of imbecility. It infuses life even into dead bones. Indeed, who is more fearless than he who hugs truth, throws self overboard and loves everything in creation? Death has no horror for him. He alone can stand on the cross and yet bless the persecutors. It is for him alone to offer his head

<sup>2</sup>. Cf. *Abhayam vai Janakah prapto'si*.—*Bri. Up.* IV. 2. 4.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

for the life of a goat. Such personages may be rare, yet they represent the ideal which the men of religion are to try sincerely to approach. Religion that produces such ideal lives can never be said to have an enervating influence. Of course, here also it is misconstrued, misunderstood and perverted religion that may be said to be 'pernicious trash.' Let us kill this monster by all means as Voltaire has enjoined, but we must not touch its mother, namely, religion.

Nor can religion be condemned on the ground that it makes people indifferent to the world about them. This is a sweeping and unwarranted generalization, and is no more than a new dogma, a new superstition. There have been hundreds and thousands of men and women with whom love for the ideal of perfection has been the only urge for religious life and who have contributed substantially to the world about them through their selfless service to suffering humanity. Then, if the life after death be a fact and if it be causally linked with our present life just like all things in nature, why should we shut our eyes to it? We have perforce to adjust our present to our needs of the future. Can anybody prove that there cannot be life after death? We have yet to find such a person, though there are many who may dogmatize on the issue. But, even Bertrand Russell in his *What I Believe* admits the worth of the scientific achievements as well as the future possibilities of the



proceedings of the Psychic Research Society. He confesses that in the near future when the volume of evidence will increase quantitatively, we shall have to revise our opinion and come in line with the findings of religion which are so often branded as arrant trash. Religion stands on empiric observation through pure intuition when it acquaints us with the fact of our continued existence. Yet religion does not teach us to ignore our present life. Anyone going through the *Bhagavad-Gita*, particularly Sri Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna at the beginning, can never say that religion makes one other-worldly. Religion, rather, teaches us to love and serve the present world more sincerely and thoroughly than anything else does. Here also it is misunderstood and perverted religion that generates other-worldliness.

In this connection arises the question of fear associated with religion. Surely the masses have some amount of fear involved in their religious belief. The fear of Divine Scourge or of the law of *karma* bringing unto them retributions of their misdeeds either in this life or in the next is no doubt a serious factor of the religion of the mass-mind. Yet, unless this fear is exploited by interested people with sordid motives, it cannot be said to be entirely useless. Is not the fear of the police and the military still considered a necessity for checking the anti-social propensities of the average

human mind ? So also fear of the 'hereafter' does serve the useful purpose of curbing the evil propensities of the mass-mind. Of the two kinds of check, it may be noticed that the first is imposed from outside, namely, from the State, while the second is completely a self-determined one. Religion teaches one to check one's baser impulses of the present moment for getting brighter moments in future. It is one's own urge for future happiness or fear of undesirable consequences that determines one's opposition to baser impulses. This self-imposed and self-determined moral discipline is more thorough and comprehensive than anything else. This explains the high pitch of mass-morality in the days of Buddhism in India and of Confucius in China.

Yet one may ask, "Why do you bring in fictitious things like heaven and hell to govern the impulses of the human mind ? Cannot the earth supply us with truer and worthier motives for the purposes ?" Heaven and hell may not be as fictitious as we are tempted to think. Our view of nature, as we have already seen, is neither exhaustive nor absolute. Shakespeare was perhaps right when he made Hamlet say, "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Heaven and hell may have as much objective reality as our human view of nature. If there be life after death it is in the fitness of things that there should be devices of rewards and punishments in the

scheme of nature for our gradual refinement even beyond this world. Of course, the thoughts of these rewards and punishments are necessary only for the beginners in religion. And we have to remember the fact that many of us are no more than mere beginners in religion, because in spite of our well-refined intellect we have to start with the A. B. C. of the intuition of the pure heart. This is why in the spiritual school most of us like little children have to think of rewards and punishments and go through a little bit of kindergarten exercise as well. In this lie the truth and utility of all rituals, parables, stories and mythologies. The idea behind all these is to gradually chasten the mind and prepare it for spiritual realization by opening up the channel of pure intuition.

This was why Swami Vivekananda wanted each man to believe things according to the stage of his spiritual growth. The religion of the masses may appear to the intellectual man to be very crude, yet we may safely let them start from where they stand and all that we have to do is to enlighten them regarding the essentials of pure religion so that instead of perverting religion they may work their way up. We have only to eliminate all that lead to perversion of religion and the rest is all right. There is nothing wrong with religion. It is neither unscientific, nor illogical, nor pernicious in its effect, unless, of course, we make the mistake of judging it by the fruits of its perversion. Rather the lives and

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in our days go to establish the view that it is religion alone that illumines the upward path of human civilization.

## VOICE OF TRUTH

Man thirsts for knowledge but cares very little for truth. The man in the street is content with the report of the senses and does not feel the necessity of winnowing out illusions. He has no hesitation in taking a shadow for a ghost, a dream for a reality. He believes in whatever he gleans from gossips and stocks them carefully, for to him every bit of hearsay has the stamp of evidence. His thirst for knowledge is really unquenchable but he is equally glad to drink out of reserved tanks, muddy ditches, or stenching cesspools—nay, he is ready to drink even out of the mirage ! Poor man ! A dupe of ignorance ! How many penalties he has to pay in course of his life simply because he does not know how to distinguish truth from untruth. Swallowing fibs and fictions as gospels, a victim of superstition—how many times he acts contrary to truth and receives stunning blows in return !

Men with a higher intellectual level are not played so helplessly into untruth by stolid ignorance—but alas ! they delight in a conscious juggling of truth—without which they say there cannot be any success in life. Playing false has become a necessity in the political,

## VOICE OF TRUTH

economic, social and even religious arena of life. A successful statesman is generally supposed to be a tissue of falsehood—a big merchant is suspected to be a great dealer in untruth. Lawyers and even physicians often confess that they have to mix up truth with untruth for their very subsistence. Showing off for the sake of prestige has become a phenomenon of necessity in society—and to play the impostor in the name of religion has assumed the proportions of a lucrative profession. So far as knowledge is concerned all these men may be said to be encyclopaedias of information in their respective spheres, but, for truth they have little regard.

If man could but stretch his vision beyond the immediate price of his truth-juggling, and see the potency of truth the world would be relieved of much of its miseries. If he could but realize that every piece of untruth is a loose stitch in the web of his life for which he has to pay heavily, if he could but know that the untruths he has been dealing out to others are more dangerous to humanity than any poisonous gas that the world has ever invented, the will-o'-the-wisp of the millennium would become a reality in no time.

Nevertheless, there are men, however few they may be, with whom search for truth is the principal occupation of life. Scientists, philosophers and savants in various departments of human knowledge have been

sacrificing their lives on the altar of truth but alas! the fruits of their labour have been feeding the brute-in-man. The truths they have wrested from the womb of nature are being seized by the unscrupulous for bringing more effective havocs on humanity. A new mine discovered is a fresh signal for bloodshed ! A mystery of nature unravelled is a new acquisition in the armoury of blood-hunters ! By a strange irony of fate, greed and falsehood are being fattened by truths squeezed out of the savants' blood !

In spite of its few votaries of truth, the world in a fit of intoxication is wallowing in untruth and necessarily groaning under miseries. For truth is sure to take its toll from the disloyal. No savant can wean away the brute-in-man from its mad pursuit after untruth and concomitant miseries, even as none can induce the camel to cease feeding upon thorny brambles and escape bleeding.

Yet the inner man, the divine element residing within every individual, bids for truth. Whenever the voice of truth reaches the inner self, there is a sure response, a speedy revaluation and radical readjustment of life. The savant can touch the intellect but the inner self is stirred only by the saviour. This is why the suzerainty of the senses has been overthrown the moment man has stood before a saviour. The lower self may have fretted and foamed for a moment, may have even gone so far

## VOICE OF TRUTH

as to crucify the messenger of Truth, but ultimately the inner man quickened by the touch of Divine Truth has triumphed. The potency of truth transmitted by seers and prophets is demonstrated everyday whenever man bows his head before a cross or a crescent, or sits in a temple or shrine.

But amidst the din and clamour of the senses in the present age, the voice of truth is heard too dimly to stir the inner man. So there is no fresh impulse for manifesting the Divinity within. Bowing and praying have become almost a dead form, a mere survival of a worthy habit.

This is why the voices of all the seers and prophets of the world have issued forth again in an ever-swelling symphony from the temple of Dakshineswar to resuscitate humanity once more from its spiritual torpor. All creeds, all religions, all seers and all prophets have been reinstalled in their glory by a fresh decree of Truth—and the inner self of humanity is bound to respond. Scientists have to stretch their vision to the cause of causation itself, and philosophers have to step beyond the arena of intellect in search of the Inscrutable. Intellect has to make its obeisance to intuition flashing across the pure mind.

Nothing less than a complete revaluation of life and a thorough overhauling of the world's affairs is the imperious demand of Truth. Man must provide for his



spiritual growth even as he does for his physical and intellectual growth—and for this he has to accept truth, sacrifice, purity and love as the cardinal requirements.

Exploitation and competition have to make room for co-operation and service. Hatred and jealousy between castes, communities and nations have to be substituted by love and fraternity. Different creeds have to join hands to preach unto man the same Divine message and to prescribe unto individuals different paths suited to their taste and capacity for arriving at the same blessed goal. In a word, self-interest of all forms and proportions have to be sacrificed on the altar of humanity.

This is what the voice of Truth demands of humanity to-day and promises in return peace and happiness for which it has been yearning for centuries.

## VEDANTA AND UNIVERSAL RELIGION

As man is learning to shift his gaze from the surface to the core of things, he is becoming dimly aware of the fact that unity in variety is the key-note of nature's music. Beneath a tumultuous surface of apparently jarring and uncompromising diversities, science has begun to detect, in every sphere of nature, the invariable existence of a fundamental note of unity. The diversities contribute to the wonderful and infinite richness in the make-up of the universe, while the underlying unity blends the diversities into a harmonious whole. With the gradual dawning of this consciousness of central unity and all-pervasive harmony, man has been advancing steadily towards a wider, more liberal and accommodating outlook on all that surrounds him.

The cry for universal brotherhood is already in the air. Secular knowledge has safely stepped out of esoteric seclusion. The task of delivering spiritual knowledge also out of sectarian and communal grooves is only a step ahead. When man has discovered the fact that there is a uniformity in the application of physical, biological and even psychological laws to all the different ethnic groups of the human race, it is perfectly

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

reasonable to expect that he has to discover a similar uniformity in the application of spiritual laws as well.

It is surprising to notice that, thousands of years back, Vedanta held out a promise of fulfilling this expectation by furnishing us precisely with a clue to such an epoch-making discovery of a fundamental unity beneath the diversities of religion. This clue, when worked out, is sure to take the wind out of the sails of communalism and sectarianism and usher in Universal Religion as a conspicuous feature of the days to come.

Religion is neither a bewildering medley of philosophical speculations nor a bizarre warehouse of meaningless ceremonials. Its exterior may have suffered considerably from the vandalism of dogma as well as of untrammelled intellect, but the core of it is grounded firmly in the bed-rock of realization. Emanating from the intuitive experiences of pure hearts, religion, essentially, is something that has a vital relation to our growth. Just as we grow physically and intellectually, so we have a constitutional demand for spiritual growth, and it is religion that directs and fosters this growth.

Every one of us has been craving, every moment of our life, for unbroken peace, unlimited knowledge and immortal existence. All religions declare in one voice that this can be found only in God and lay down one universal condition of realizing God, and that is purity.

From this it follows that the purpose of a religion is served if it can attract our vision away from the vanities of the world towards God and give us sufficient incentive to purify our mind, thus preparing us for realizing Him. Now, people vary in their tastes ; so the same picture cannot attract all. Gross minds require gross representations and subtle minds, subtle ; the intellectual man must have strict logic, while the emotional man requires a stir of his emotions. So there is absolutely no harm if different religions, or even different sects of the same religion, present different pictures of the same fundamental truths. If the different pictures of these truths really help different groups of people to purify their minds, the purpose is served, because this process of purification alone will guide them surely to the realization of the truths as they really are.

Unlike other religions, Vedanta holds out a number of different representations of the fundamental truths, covering, as it were, the entire range of human taste and requirement. By Vedanta, of course, we do not mean merely the monistic system of philosophy as propounded by Sri Shankaracharya, though in this restricted sense it has come to be used by many. Vedanta literally means the end of the Vedas, which are the oldest scriptures of mankind. So by Vedanta we mean the Upanishads, which form the concluding portions of the Vedas.

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

In these Upanishads we find an epitome of all shades of religious belief; they throw open to mankind a vast mine of spiritual experiences, which make it possible for every creed to accommodate its doctrines to the views of the Upanishads. So numerous and varied are the representations of the fundamental truths met with in the Upanishads "that almost anybody may seek in them what he wants and find what he seeks." That is why the sayings of the Upanishads have given rise to so many schools of philosophy in this land, which are nursing the various creeds enfolded within the catholic arms of Hinduism. Each dogmatic school may fight with the others and may fasten its views upon the Upanishads by straining their language, whenever necessary—each may try to 'victimize' the philosophy of the Upanishads by an interpretation of its own, but the fact remains that all these different schools have drawn their inspiration from that one source. The harmony of the Upanishad is not on the surface; it lies in the fact that all these various representations are not mere guesses at truth, but actual readings of the same truth in the flashlight of intuition taken from different stages of spiritual growth, and that every one of them fits in with the taste and requirement of a certain group of people.

The man of logic is perfectly satisfied when he hears of the truth of the Impersonal Brahman being described as *neti neti*—"not this, not this"; for nothing can surpass

the logical accuracy of this description of the Absolute. The Absolute is beyond time, space and causation; so any attempt at describing the Final Cause limits it within the range of mental concept. The man of logic, therefore, is satisfied when in his ears rings out the passage, 'From where baffled in the attempt, speech recoils with the mind.'<sup>1</sup>

But such an unconditioned and undifferentiated existence beyond the realm of all names and forms cannot surely be comprehended by many. Something more tangible, more concrete is required by the majority. Vedanta is ready with other representations to meet this requirement, viz. 'Brahman is consciousness and bliss'<sup>2</sup>; 'Brahman is truth, consciousness and infinity'.<sup>3</sup> And Brahman is immanent in the universe; in and through Him every name and every form has its existence. 'The phenomenal world is to be considered pervaded by God,' says the *Isha Upanishad*.<sup>4</sup> This is another representation of the same Impersonal Brahman; but here something has been posited of the Absolute. Even this all-pervading Brahman is a reading of the Absolute taken through the mist of space-concept.

We meet with yet another picture—that of the *Antaryamin*, the ruler of the universe—its creator,

<sup>1</sup> *Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha.—Tait. Up. II. 9.*

<sup>2</sup> *Vijnananamanandam Brahma.—Bri. Up. III. 9. 28.*

<sup>3</sup> *Satyam jnanamantam Brahma.—Tait. Up. II. 1.*

<sup>4</sup> *Isha vasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyam jagat.—Ish. Up. I.*

preserver and destroyer, the infinite abode of all that is good, all that is beautiful. Here we find God without form but with qualities—God of infinite love and infinite mercy. This suits the man of emotion, for he can pray to this God, and find a solace in the thought of His infinite love and grace.

Even this is not sufficient—something more concrete is required by many. They must have God with a definite form and a fixed abode. Such an idea of God, too, is not wanting in the Upanishads. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we have the description of Brahman with a body of golden hue and lotus-eyes residing in the sun,<sup>5</sup> and in the *Kena Upanishad* we find the gracious one by whose power the fire burns and the air blows, appearing before Indra in an effulgent and beautiful female form.<sup>6</sup>

These widely different views represent the same truth from different standpoints, like so many photographs of the same sun taken at different distances. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* declares, "This universe was but Existence at the beginning—One only without a second."<sup>7</sup> The glorious One alone exists, untainted by

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Atha ya esho'ntaraditye hiranmayah purusho drishyate hiranya-shmashrutirhiranyakesha apranakhah sarva eva suvarna. Tasya yatha kapyasam pundarikamevamakshini.*—Chh. Up. I. 6. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Tasminnevakashe striyamajagama vahushovamanamumam Haimavatim.*—Ke. Up. III. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Sadeva saumyedadagra asidekamevadwitiyam.*—Chh. Up. VI. 2. 1.

any name or any form, and whatever we experience has its existence only in Him. It is the Absolute that, looked at through the prism of the mind, appears as the world ; as this prism becomes more and more purified, It appears as God with form and qualities and later on as God without form but with qualities, and the culmination is reached when the mind becomes absolutely stainless and dissolves, as it were, and the individual, stepping out of all limitations, merges in the Absolute.

This is about the Final Cause ; the same thing happens with creation as well. The various sayings of the Upanishads have furnished materials to different schools of philosophy to hold out different explanations regarding creation. But, like the real nature of the Absolute, the first step towards creation also will ever remain a mystery to the human mind—for both lie beyond its range of comprehension. We cannot deny the fact that Brahman, in whom there cannot be any trace of differentiation, is after all the Final Cause of this infinitely differentiated universe. But how such a contradiction has become a fact will ever remain a puzzle to the intellect. For who can state the how or the why of the cause of causation itself ? The query is logically absurd, and any attempt at answering it may at best be a theory, but never a correct representation of the first step from the undifferentiated to the realm of differentiation. The different systems of philosophy



simply give us so many theories, couched in grosser or finer imagery, to make the fact of creation comprehensible and acceptable to different groups of people.

The majority cannot comprehend anything more than a Personal God of infinite power creating this universe by His will. This may be a step in the process of creation, and the Upanishads boldly declare that it is so, when they describe *Hiranyagarbha* springing out of the Absolute and creating the universe by His will. But certainly this God with a will and individuality cannot be the Final Cause, nor can this step be the last word about creation.

For yet finer minds there is the theory of the projection of this universe out of the Impersonal Brahman 'like hair and nails growing on a living person, like trees shooting out of the earth, or like cobwebs coming out of the spider.'<sup>8</sup> They look upon the Impersonal Brahman as both the efficient and the material cause of the universe. Undoubtedly this is an advance towards the fact of creation, but even this falls short of the truth, for it cannot satisfy extreme reason.

To the strict Advaitists, who form the vanguard of rational speculation about the fundamental truths, this causal relation of the universe to the Absolute, taken in its literal sense, appears to be a logical absurdity. For

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Yathornanabhik srijate grihnate cha yatha shadhyah sambhavanti. Yatha satat purushat keshalmani tatha'ksharat sambhavatiha vishwam.*—*Mund. Up.* I. 1. 7.

how can the Absolute change ? So they say that creation is an illusion and not a fact—the universe has only an apparent existence, like the illusion of a snake on a rope or of a mirage in the desert ; and they ascribe this illusion to the agency of *maya*, an inscrutable power of Brahman.

But even this does not solve the riddle of creation. For one may ask the Advaitists : “How do you know that the Absolute cannot change ? Do you fear that the law of contradiction will be violated ? But this law is a fact within creation. And what right have we to stretch it beyond the universe and bind the Absolute by its shackles ?”

Therefore, we cannot say definitely whether it is a case of real or apparent manifestation, just as we cannot say anything definitely about the real nature of the Absolute. Indeed, Brahman is wonderful unlike any other thing within the range of our conception ; this inexplicable self-contradictory fact of the one becoming many has been possible in Him—this fact we may call *maya*. So none of the above-mentioned representations of the different systems give us the final word about creation—they are only theories. And they have no reason to quarrel, because everyone of them has the pragmatic value of drawing different groups of human minds towards the Eternal Abode of infinite Knowledge, Bliss and Existence.

One finds precisely the same state of things even regarding the most vital topic, namely, the relation of the individual self to nature and God. Here also two different views are upheld by the two prominent schools of Vedanta, the monistic and the qualified monistic. As a matter of fact, the qualified monistic view, championed so ably by Sri Ramanujacharya, is the basis of all conceptions of the various dualistic sects within the fold of Vedanta. Whoever acknowledges the authority of Vedanta cannot accept dualism in its strictest sense—he has to accommodate his creed to a fundamental unity preached by it.

According to Sri Ramanujacharya, nature and souls have separate existence although they are one in essence with the *Antaryamin*, the ruler of the universe. Ordinarily the souls are bound by the laws of nature, the most rigorous of these being the law of causation. Here also the schools of Vedanta are unanimous. All of them accept this portion of the Samkhya system of cosmology and believe that every bit of this phenomenal universe is made of matter, gross or fine. The body, vital energy, mind, intelligence and ego are all made of matter ranging from the grossest to the finest, and corresponding to these entities pertaining to the body there are material worlds of various degrees of fineness. Now all these comprise nature and there is not a single recess in it which is free from the yoke of this law of

causation. Every change in any sphere of it must be preceded by a cause and followed by an effect. The soul encased, as it were, in five sheaths of matter of different grades of fineness, namely, physical body, vital body, mental body, ego body and causal body, makes up the individual. Every action of the individual is bound to produce a result, which comes in the shape of pleasure or pain, and the embodied soul is never immune from the "dual throng." Each experience of an individual is causally linked with one or other of his own actions. A child is born blind : he himself must be responsible for the suffering. This leads to a logical assumption of a previous birth. Indeed the infinite variety of experiences of different individuals cannot be accounted for by the actions done within the brief space of a single life. So the Vedantists hold that death is nothing but a dropping of the physical body, when the self with the remaining four bodies proceeds to finer worlds of intense enjoyment or intense pain, according to its own actions, and after a period it comes again to be born in this world in another physical body. Thus from birth to death and from death to birth the embodied soul proceeds in the almost inextricable maze of *karma*.

Now, to all schools of Vedanta, *moksha* or freedom means freedom of the individual from this inexorable law of *karma*. This may take place when the self is extricated out of the meshes of nature. And Sri

Ramanujacharya says that only those who struggle hard for freedom and become absolutely pure, are lifted above nature by the grace of God. Even after attaining freedom they retain their individuality, although there they shine in their innate nature of infinite Bliss, Knowledge and Existence—for they are one in essence with the Lord. Dualists of all schools take their stand on such a fundamental conception of *moksha*.

But against this Sri Shankaracharya stands up with the tenets of monistic philosophy and says that all this is true only to a certain extent and no further. The dualistic conception of distinct existences of soul, nature and God and their interrelations is true only in a relative sense, all these having only a phenomenal (*vyavaharika*) reality and not an absolute one. The monists hold that One alone exists and any idea of differentiation is due to *avidya* or ignorance of the true nature of reality. So even the *moksha* of the qualified monist or the dualist, in which the individuality of the soul as distinct from God persists is within the range of *avidya*. Moreover, the self, as long as it has a body, however fine that may be, is susceptible to pleasure and pain. So by *moksha* the monists mean the complete disappearance of *avidya* and necessarily of all ideas of duality, when the illusory limited individuality drops off, the phenomenal world vanishes, and the soul finds itself one with Brahman.

According to this school, ignorance of the soul's identity with Brahman is the fundamental cause of bondage. Naturally, therefore, knowledge about this identity is the only cause of freedom. The soul is already free, already one with Brahman. The idea of its bondage is an illusion, and it has to be rooted out by true knowledge. We are bound by our actions ; our actions proceed from our desires, and desires from *avidya* or a false notion of identity of the self with the non-self. According to them, therefore, real *moksha* or absolute freedom from all duality of name and form can be attained by discrimination between the self and the non-self and a practical application of this intellectual process in the shape of renunciation, which is an attempt at rooting out desires. And this they prescribe only for those who are sufficiently purified by prayers, worship, and the performance of worldly duties in the right attitude to comprehend this identity of the self with Brahman and to practise a considerable detachment from the attractions of the sense world. As the monists believe in the phenomenal existence of the material world, they need not grudge to admit that the freedom of the dualist may be compared to a stage in the soul's journey, fitting in with their own idea of *kramamukti*, i.e. freedom attained through stages of spiritual development.

So practically there is no serious contradiction

between the two views with regard to the relation of the individual to nature and God. Both take their stand on the essential divinity of the soul and declare that it can never be bound permanently by nature, however inexorable she may be. Freedom is the birthright of every soul. It is always free, always above nature, always of the same essence as God. Its bondage is a temporary appearance due to the impurity of various bodies or sheaths through which it works.

This is the message of Vedanta, and what a message of hope and strength it obviously is! Man is not hopelessly bound by a superior power. For every act of omission or commission he has not to tremble before the judgment of an unseen autocrat. He has simply to remain prepared for the consequences of his own actions and work out his own salvation by manifesting the Divinity that is already within him.

Even those who cannot appreciate anything beyond sense-pleasures, are not summarily dismissed with a threat of eternal damnation. Vedanta looks upon them with sympathy and says that it is quite natural for man to be roaming in the sense-world, for senses are so constituted that they reveal to him only the external world and not the inner self.<sup>9</sup> That is why every individual goes through repeated births and deaths

Cf. *Paranchi khani vyatrinat Swayambhuh  
Tasmat param pashyati nantaratman.*—*Ka. Up. II. 1. 1.*

searching happiness in the sense-world ; and this goes on until his own experience teaches him that pleasure unalloyed with pain is an absurdity in nature, and that the fulfilment of desires never quenches the thirst for enjoyment. Growing wiser through experience, every individual is sure to enquire one day about the path of liberation from the tyranny of desires and every one of them is destined to find it ultimately in God.

This Vedantic standpoint enables everybody to take a liberal and sympathetic view of everything about him. It explains why one should be patient even with the hardest criminal. It reminds one of the potential divinity of every creature and sweeps out all distinctions as so many accidents around an essential unity.

Thus one finds in Vedanta a bold, clear and unambiguous charter for religious catholicity. As a matter of fact, it accommodates every shade of doctrinal opinion and every stage of psychological growth by presenting, as we have seen, different aspects of the same set of fundamental truths about the Final Cause, creation and the relation of the individual to God and nature. Moreover, the splendid generalization, 'One alone exists, sages call It by various names',<sup>10</sup> lays down the very principle of unity underlying all those different aspects.

<sup>10</sup> *Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti.*—*Rg. Vd.* I. 164. 46.



## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

It is quite probable that the metaphysical positions of the different religions may be explained by a reference to one or other of these aspects. If the different religions be so many melodies, in Vedanta one finds the keynote of them all. From this synthetic outlook one learns to respect all scriptures, all prophets and all apostles, and to bend with equal reverence before the Buddhist *vihara*, the Christian church, the Moslem mosque and the Hindu temple. This Vedantic message of a central unity beneath the diversities of religion is expected to lead mankind to the realization of Universal Religion and the inauguration of a new era in the history of religions.

## 8

### THE VISION OF LIFE

A wild, fantastic fitful vision  
Flowing in an endless stream,  
Ever changing, ever broadening  
The airy substance of the life of dream.

The smiles that in the celestial dimples live,  
Toned down by sobs of a mysterious woe,  
On the cradle did shine—a cheering light  
Of thousand hues, a veritable rainbow.

Lo ! Now no more ! The scene hath changed !  
Down from the cradle the babe descends  
To charm all by its angelic grace,  
Its voice the eternal Beyond to paint pretends.

But, like a lightning, that sends its blazing streak  
To fringe for a while the skirts of a murky cloud  
And swiftly withdraws, leaving a double gloom,  
The smile, the lip creep beneath a lurid shroud.

A boy of sportive freaks and fancies wild  
Emerge ; colours bright animate his soul :  
The blazing orbs, the coloured bow  
Beyond his reach ; in the leafy dale to stroll  
His chief delight, to catch a painted fly  
Or a bird that tempts his wondering mind  
With all that is rich and bright, and a son'rous cry.  
The boy too steals into the shroud of the past,  
As soon doth wan Time raise his magic wand.  
No longer rises the shrilling cry to join  
The Siren songs of the wooded land.

A youth with heaved breast is whistling his way  
Unmindful of the path he treads. A land  
Of romance his abode, where fragrant spray  
Of fairy founts in thousand colours glow,  
Where the moon never sets, and the azure deep  
With all its spangles ever doth show  
A living wonder. Blossoms of countless hues,  
That richly paint the vernal year,  
Weave with emerald leaves a garment loose  
For nature dear. Here he lives and drinks  
The nectar, that green-eyed Hope  
Pours from a vase of Sapphire. Smiles and winks  
Play on his blooming face, when he fondles  
His playmate Love. Anon the scene sinks  
Into the grave of the past.

The same figure now  
On a frail boat doth ride the tempestuous deep,  
A haggard look—lines of care on his brow.  
Gloom has piled on gloom on the dreary sky  
And on the bosom of the deep. Thund'ring waves  
Lash to make a frantic dance, on which doth ply  
The sol'tary boat : the helm and the rudder held  
By spectres wild—Passions their name.  
With each breath he draws, he sees the face  
Of grim Death revelling in his cruel game.  
Visions of the past slowly rise and dance  
A wild measure before his bewildered gaze—  
A contempt in their face, a mock in every glance.  
The dear companions of Life's sojourn—  
Name, fame, lucre and fondlings of love,  
That held him so fast to life's concern,  
Melt into airy nothing. The boat is sunk,  
The spirit fled.

But where ? Perchance  
To come again and play another game.  
From birth to death and death to birth he goes,  
Much like a stringed stone, that about the fist  
Makes ceaseless whirls, ever shifting  
Though seemingly at rest. Snap off the string  
Off will fly the stone, the whirling cease.  
Desire—the string that binds us mortals

## RELIGION AND MODERN DOUBTS

To whirl in the dreary path of births and decays.  
Snap off the cord and lo ! The magic re'lm  
Of time and space with all its visions wild  
Will fade before the blazing soul.  
No more thy birth ! Growth and decay  
Are absurd things ! Changeless thou art,  
The whole past a bewild'ring dream.  
Consciousness and Bliss eternal  
The only truth, and thou art That.

