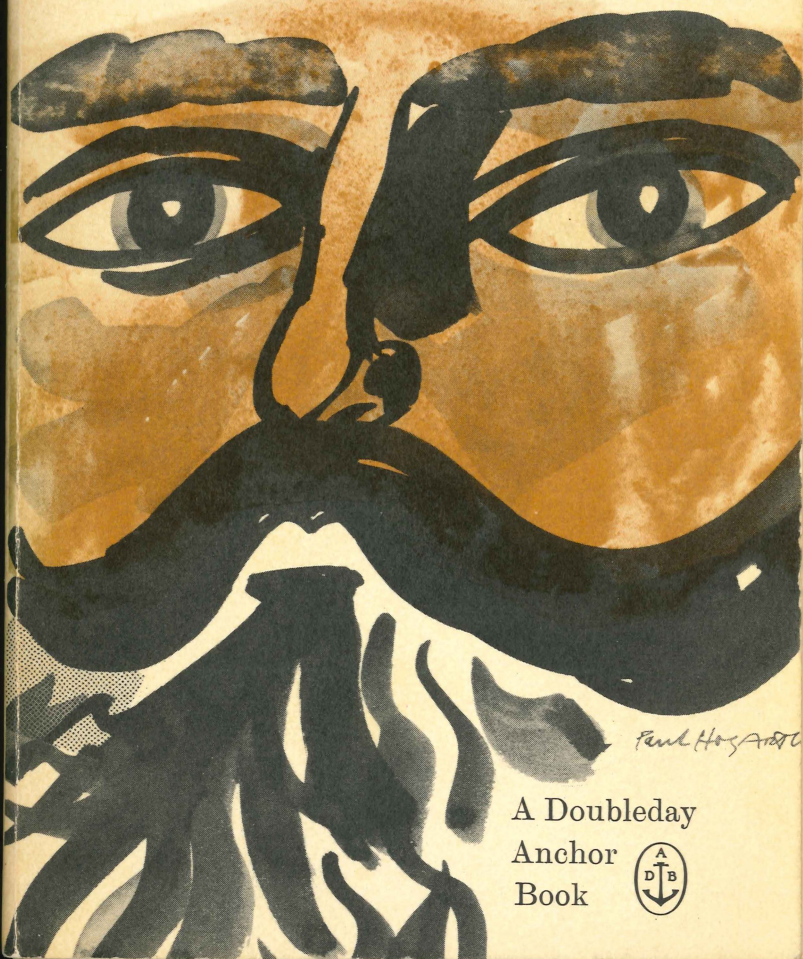


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The Spiritual Heritage of India

A comprehensive exposition of Indian philosophy
and religion by SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA with
the assistance of FREDERICK MANCHESTER



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orthodox Hindus, this body of sacred texts came into being. The answer involves certain Hindu beliefs with which, if only in preliminary fashion, we should now become acquainted. To the Hindu, creation is beginningless and endless. That it is beginningless he proves by a simple process of logic. If creation had a beginning, then must the creator also have had a beginning, since until there is a creation there can be no creator; but to admit that the creator had a beginning would be to admit that God had a beginning, since God is not God until he creates—and to think of God as having had a beginning would, to the Hindu, be a manifest absurdity. God, who contains within himself the seed, the material cause, of the universe, first brings forth the universe out of his own being, and then in due time takes it back again to himself. This process of creation and dissolution goes on for ever and ever, for it is as endless as it is beginningless. Eternity is witness, not of one universe only—that, for example, of which we are now a part—but of an infinite succession of universes. The birth, life, and destruction of a universe constitutes a cycle. To say that there was never a first cycle, and will never be a last, is only a way of affirming that the creative function of God is, like himself, eternal.

Further beliefs concern the stuff of which the successive universes are composed. This stuff is simply an immense multitude of beings, some animate, some inanimate. Plants, animals, and men are animate; rocks and stones are inanimate. But all are alike beings. These, by their nature, are involved in a process the final goal of which is their complete absorption into God—in his quiescent, or noncreative, aspect. When an individual being is thus absorbed he is free forever from the cycles of finite existence; but the process leading to this blessed state may be a long one. Not only may a being be born, live, and die, and then be born again, live, and die, indefinitely, within the bounds of a single universe, but he may also be born again and again into an indefinite series of universes. The history of a particular individual, the number of times he experiences rebirth, or reincarnation as it is called, depends entirely upon the quality of his will, upon the moral effort he puts forth. As he rises in moral and spiritual stature

CHAPTER 2

SAMHITĀS, BRĀHMAṆAS, ĀRAṆYAKAS

The work portion of the Vedas, immensely important though it has been to the concrete practice of religion in India, has less interest for us today than the knowledge portion. Still, we must not fail to obtain some further idea of it, and especially of the first of its three divisions—the Samhitās.

SAMHITĀS

The Samhitās are collections of mantras, or hymns, most of which sing the praises of one or another personal god. Sometimes the god is conceived as little more than a magnified man. In one hymn, for example, Indra, the god of rain, has a body clad in golden armour, is very strong, and descends to earth, where he lives and eats with his votaries, fights and overcomes their enemies the demons, and establishes his dominion. Similarly Varuṇa, in another hymn, is described as a mere nature god, presiding in anthropomorphic form over air and water. But, again, the god—even at times the same god that was just now so much a man—becomes nothing less than the Supreme Being, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent—and that within which the visible world is contained. Thus Varuṇa:

Wherever two together plot, and deem they are alone,
King Varuṇa is there, a third, and all their schemes are known.

This earth is his, to him belong these vast and boundless skies;

Both seas within him rest, and yet in that small pool he lies.

created, who is the source of happiness—unto him we offer our sacrifice!’³

In the following famous hymn, the Puruṣa Sūkta, the Supreme Being, or God, is represented as at once concrete (‘infinite heads’, ‘unnumbered eyes’) and in the highest degree abstract—‘beyond all predicates’. He both is and is not the created universe, for while the created universe is a part of his being it is not the whole of it:

The Universal Being has infinite heads, unnumbered eyes, and unnumbered feet. Enveloping the universe on every side, he exists transcending it. All this is he—what has been and what shall be. He is the lord of immortality. Though he has become all this, in reality he is not all this. For verily is he transcendental. The whole series of universes—past, present, and future—express his glory and power; but he transcends his own glory. All beings of the universe form, as it were, a fraction of his being; the rest of it is self-luminous, and unchangeable. He who is beyond all predicates exists as the relative universe. That part of him which is the relative universe appears as sentient and insentient beings. From a part of him was born the body of the universe, and out of this body were born the gods, the earth, and men.⁴

In the passage, it may be observed in passing, there is a definite rejection of pantheism: ‘Though he has become all this, in reality he is not all this.’ The words are characteristic of all Indian thought, and will be echoed and re-echoed in later pages of this book. There is, properly speaking, whatever appearances may sometimes suggest to the contrary, no pantheism in India. The Hindu sees God as the ultimate energy in and behind all creation, but never, either in ancient or in modern times, as identical with it.

It is a far cry from the rain-god Indra, with his golden armour, to a Universal Being who envelops and transcends the world; but a step still remained to be taken, and this also the *Saṁhitās* took. Indra and the Universal Being had one thing in common: they were both personal gods. It is true

³ *Ibid.*, x. 121. 1–2. ⁴ *Ibid.*, x. 90. 1–5.

injunctions of the Vedas. This is particularly true of the ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death. In the words of Professor S. N. Das Gupta, 'The laws which regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs and rites of the Hindus even to the present day are said to be but mere systematized memories of old Vedic teachings, and are held to be obligatory on their authority.' Every brāhmin repeats daily the Vedic prayer called the Gāyatrī mantra, which is a verse from the Ṛg-Veda. It runs as follows:

Om bhur bhuvaḥ swaḥ tat savitur vareṇyam, bhargo devasya dhīmahi, dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt, Om. (May we meditate on the effulgent Light [or power] of him who is worshipful, and who has given birth to all worlds. May he direct the rays of our intelligence towards the path of good.)

and the Gītā does not condemn them, but it is also certain that it does not teach them as karma yoga. Granting that these ideals are recognized in the Gītā, unless they are spiritualized they have no relation to karma yoga. Not karma, mere action, but karma yoga, union with God through action, is the essence of the teaching of the Gītā on this subject.

Thus, not sacrifice for humanity, but service to humanity as a sacrifice unto God, whose image we learn to see in man, is the true ideal. No political activities undertaken with a selfish motive, but such activities performed as worship of God; not merely family life and the performance of the ordinary domestic duties, but a life of nonattachment in the midst of these duties, combined with knowledge of the nature of one's immutable, eternal Self—this is the real message of the Bhagavad-Gītā. It is only as worldly affairs are spiritualized and transformed that they become a part of karma yoga. In short, temporal life and spiritual values stand in a relation of harmony; they constitute one divine life—as the Gītā tells us. Insistence on the performance of svadharma, or one's secular duty, in the spirit of yoga, is indeed often met with in the Gītā, but this insistence ceases to have force and meaning with the growth of higher knowledge. Sri Aurobindo makes this issue abundantly clear when he says:

'An inner situation may even arise, as with the Buddha, in which all duties have to be abandoned, trampled on, flung aside in order to follow the call of the Divine within. I cannot think that the Gita would solve such an inner situation by sending Buddha back to his wife and father and the government of the Sakya State, or would direct a Ramakrishna to become a Pundit in a vernacular school and disinterestedly teach little boys their lessons, or bind down a Vivekananda to support his family and for that to follow dispassionately the law or medicine or journalism. The Gita does not teach the disinterested performance of duties, but the following of the divine life, the abandonment of all dharmas, *sarvadharmān*, to take refuge in the Supreme alone, and the divine activity of a Buddha, a Ramakrishna,

a Vivekananda is perfectly in consonance with this teaching.¹⁰

The Battlefield of Kurukṣetra

The great poem opens with a description of two armies arrayed against each other. The scene is laid in the field of Kurukṣetra, where, accompanied by his divine charioteer, Kṛṣṇa, stands Arjuna, the hero, about to give battle to the host of the Kauravas. As Arjuna views both the armies he is filled with melancholy. The horrors of war and the terror of death overwhelm him, and he turns to Kṛṣṇa, who urges him to carry on the fight against his enemies, the enemies of righteousness and truth. Arjuna's feeling of revulsion against useless slaughter meets with Kṛṣṇa's stern rebuke. 'Arjuna,' he says, 'is this hour of battle the time for scruples and fancies? Are they worthy of you, who seek enlightenment? Any brave man who merely hopes for fame or heaven would despise them.'¹¹

So, at the very beginning of the great book, we are astonished to see one of the supreme teachers of spiritual truth supporting war. How is this to be explained?

As we proceed, we discover that the way of realizing the divine consciousness, and attaining eternal life and infinite peace, is through complete detachment and self-surrender. We can understand the Gītā as a holy scripture and Kṛṣṇa as a divine teacher only when we consider that this war is but an occasion for bringing spiritual truths to our attention. But it is still difficult to understand how the actual war, and Kṛṣṇa's urging to wage it to the end, can be reconciled with any spiritual teaching. The Gītā's ideal man is certainly not the superman of Nietzsche's imagination, who would crush all opposition in his struggle for power. Quite the contrary, it is he 'who delights in God', like a yogi (one who practises yoga), whose spiritual practices correspond to the life of contemplation which Aristotle considers the highest attainment of man. Yoga, or union with God, has been defined in the Gītā as follows:

¹⁰ Ghose, *op. cit.* (First Series), pp. 45-6. ¹¹ II. 2.

predominates determines the group, or caste, to which he belongs.

There is no denying that human society is a graded organization. Since men have different mental constitutions, they cannot all follow one and the same ideal. Swami Vivekananda has made this wise remark upon the subject:

‘Two ways are left open to us—the way of the ignorant, who think that there is only one road to truth and that all the rest are wrong—and the way of the wise, who admit that, according to our mental constitution or the plane of existence in which we are, duty and morality may vary. The important thing is to know that there are gradations of duty and morality, that the duty of one state of life, in one set of circumstances, will not and cannot be that of another.’¹⁶

All this does not mean, however, that the universal ideal of nonresistance, purity, nonattachment, tranquillity, and the like—in short, the ideal of living in the consciousness of God—has to be adapted to the individual temperament; for the high spiritual goal of life must be kept in view by all men.

But at the same time different levels of being must be recognized, so that everyone may be enabled, step by step, sooner or later, to attain to supreme good.

Indian systems of morality and religion have stressed this fact from the earliest times, and in the Hindu scriptures and books on ethics different rules of conduct are formulated for different types of men. The Gītā insists that a man should shape his ideals according to the type to which he belongs, and thus endeavour to follow his svadharma—to do his duty according to the state of his growth. This is a surer way to progress than that of taking up other men’s ideals, when these are so unsuited to one’s temperament that they can never be fully realized. One should not be expected to perform a task beyond one’s strength. ‘For instance,’ to quote Swami Vivekananda, ‘we take a child and at once give him the task of walking twenty miles; either the little

¹⁶ *Complete Works of Vivekananda*, vol. I, p. 35.

ceive the multiple universe or perform any service to humanity?

Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, to whom samādhi, or transcendental consciousness, may be said to have been as natural as is normal consciousness to us, and who yet continued to live for the good of humanity, explained this problem as follows:

'Some retain the sense of ego as "the servant I" or "the devotee I"—the sense "Thou art the Lord, I am Thy child"—even after attaining samādhi. The "I" of a devotee does no harm to any living creature. It is like a sword which, after touching the philosopher's stone, is turned to gold. The sword retains the same form, but it does not cut or injure anyone.³¹ The dry leaves of the coconut tree drop off in the wind, leaving marks on the trunk; those marks only show that there were leaves there at one time. Similarly, only the form or mark of ego is left in one who has reached God. Also his passions remain only as empty forms. He becomes simple and pure like a child.'³²

'Śaṅkara and spiritual teachers like him came down to the consciousness of "ego" for the teaching and good of humanity. . . . The bee buzzes until it alights in the heart of the flower. It becomes silent as soon as it begins to drink the honey. Then again, after it has drunk its fill, it makes a sweet humming sound.'³³

'Few can stay long on the roof. Those who reach samādhi and attain Brahman return to the lower plane of consciousness and then realize that it is he who has become man and the universe. The singer cannot hold to the highest note very long. He comes down to the lower notes. Similarly, the man of realization comes back from the transcendental consciousness and perceives the world of relativity, and, though he sees the world, he sees Brahman everywhere.'³⁴

A liberated man overcomes the world of karma, and though he continues to live and work, he is not bound or

³¹ *Kathāmṛta*, vol. I, p. 146. ³² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 91.

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 10. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 11.

Thus he will take his leave: and now, with the life-force
 Indrawn utterly, held fast between the eyebrows,
 He goes forth to find his Lord,
 That light-giver, who is greatest.

'Now I will tell you briefly about the nature of Him who is called the deathless by those seers who truly understand the Vedas. Devotees enter into Him when the bonds of their desire are broken. To reach this goal, they practise control of passions.

'When a man leaves his body and departs, he must close all the doors of the senses. Let him hold the mind firmly within the shrine of the heart, and fix the life-force between the eyebrows. Then let him take refuge in steady concentration, uttering the sacred syllable Om and meditating upon me. Such a man reaches the highest goal. When a yogi has meditated upon me unceasingly for many years, with an undistracted mind, I am easy of access to him, because he is always absorbed in me.

'Great souls who find me have found the highest perfection. They are no longer reborn into this condition of transience and pain.'³⁷

The Gītā raises one more problem, this time with reference to the man who struggles to attain perfection and fails to realize it in this life. Arjuna says:

'Suppose a man has faith, but does not struggle hard enough? His mind wanders away from the practice of yoga and he fails to reach perfection. What will become of him then?

'When a man goes astray from the path to Brahman, he has missed both lives, the worldly and the spiritual. He has no support anywhere. Is he not lost, as a broken cloud is lost in the sky?

'This is the doubt that troubles me, Krishna; and only you can altogether remove it from my mind. Let me hear your answer.'

³⁷ VIII. 9-15.

impersonal—are realized and experienced by those whose eyes have been opened.

Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, the greatest mystic philosopher of our age, having realized God in all his aspects, utters this truth concerning the conception of an impersonal-personal Godhead—a conception present also in the Gītā:

‘The jñāni, or one of philosophic mind, analyses the universe of the senses, saying “Brahman is not this, not that”, and gives up all worldliness. Thus does he reach the knowledge of Brahman, just as the man who climbs a stairway leaves each step behind and so reaches the roof. But the vijñāni, who gains an intimate knowledge of him, has his consciousness extended. He knows that the roof and the steps are all made of the same substance. He who is realized as Brahman by the process of elimination is also realized as becoming man and the universe. The vijñāni knows that he who is without attributes in one aspect is, in another aspect, the repository of all blessed attributes.

‘The true knower knows that he who is Brahman is the personal God; that he who is impersonal, attributeless, and beyond the guṇas, is again the personal God, the repository of all blessed qualities. Man, the universe, mind, intelligence, love, dispassion, knowledge—these are the expressions of his power and glory.’⁴⁶

The conception of a personal God contained in the Gītā has been identified by certain modern Indian thinkers with theism, whereas some Western writers have called it pantheism. But it would be a great mistake to identify the teachings of the Gītā with any Western system. God, to traditional Hindu thinkers, is not a mere intellectual abstraction, nor a mode of thinking; he is a being realized and realizable. Western theism and pantheism are at their best intellectual concepts, or convictions of the mind, whereas God, as has been clearly asserted in all Hindu scriptures, is beyond mind and thought. When this being beyond thought is given by the seers a name within the domain of thought, this name may resemble theism or pantheism, yet it signifies

⁴⁶ *Kathāmṛta*, vol. III, pp. 11 f.

‘ . . . first and foremost, . . . they [the avatārs] are born free. The endless struggle and hardship which they undergo to discover the hitherto unknown path to superconsciousness are prompted to them always by their desire to enrich the lives of their fellow beings, and not by any selfish motive whatsoever. Indeed, every action in their lives proceeds from a beneficent motive. Secondly, they are born endowed with perfect memory. This enables them to remember their former births and the deeds which they accomplished in those. It helps them besides to remember always the utterly transitory nature of human life and its enjoyments, and makes them run to the goal as fast as possible. And by means of this power they are able moreover to compare the present with the past and find out the direction along which the development of people’s minds has proceeded hitherto, and the means which would help them to grow and reach the goal quickly in the future. Thirdly, they are the discoverers of new paths in the field of religion. Fourthly, they are able to transmit knowledge to their fellow beings simply by a touch or even by an act of will. Fifthly, they are able to perceive clearly, at the very first sight, the samskaras, or tendencies, produced by past karmas of their fellow beings, although they are never eager to make a show of that power to others; and this ability helps them to know instantly what would aid one to reach easily the highest stage of superconsciousness. Thus they are the born spiritual guides of humanity. And, lastly, they are conscious of their mission throughout their lives.’⁵⁵

Ethics and Moral Disciplines

We have already seen that the purpose of life should be to break down the barrier of the ego and realize Brahman, the innermost Self in all beings, and that the means to this end is to see the one Self revealed in all and to love all equally. So the man who aspires to the divine state devotes his life to the service of God in humanity.

⁵⁵ Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1920), vol. I, pp. 25-6.

Even a mind that knows the path
Can be dragged from the path:
The senses are so unruly.
But he who controls the senses
And recollects the mind
And fixes it on me,
I call him illumined.⁵⁹

This alternative is in short the direction of the thoughts and energies of the mind towards God. Direction, rather than repression, is the method of the Hindus for achieving self-control.

The uncontrolled mind
Does not guess that the Atman is present:
How can it meditate?
Without meditation, where is peace?
Without peace, where is happiness?
The wind turns a ship
From its course upon the waters:
The wandering winds of the senses
Cast man's mind adrift
And turn his better judgment from its course.
When a man can still the senses
I call him illumined.⁶⁰

A further distinction is made in the Gītā between the divine man and the asura, or demoniac man. The one moves towards the attainment of liberation, while the other moves away from God to plunge down to lower births and deeper sufferings.

'A man who is born with tendencies toward the Divine, is fearless and pure in heart. He perseveres in that path to union with Brahman which the scriptures and his teacher have taught him. He is charitable. He can control his passions. He studies the scriptures regularly, and obeys their directions. He practises spiritual disciplines. He is straightforward, truthful, and of an even temper. He harms no one. He renounces

⁵⁹ II. 60, 61. ⁶⁰ II. 66-8.

The teachings of the Gītā emphasize a 'whole-souled devotion' to the Supreme. As this devotion grows, the sinner becomes a saint.

Though a man be soiled
With the sins of a lifetime,
Let him but love me,
Rightly resolved,
In utter devotion:
I see no sinner,
That man is holy.

Holiness soon
Shall refashion his nature
To peace eternal;
O son of Kunti,
Of this be certain:
The man that loves me,
He shall not perish.⁷⁵

The culmination of bhakti yoga, and in fact of all the yogas, is the complete unconditional surrender of the lower self, or ego, to God, or the Supreme Self. When the barrier of the ego is removed, by following the path either of knowledge, or of work, or of love, or of meditation, or by following all of them at once, the omnipresent, omniscient, immortal Lord of the universe becomes revealed as the Lord of the heart—the Supreme Self.

SELECTIONS FROM THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Arjuna

Is this real pity that I feel, or only a delusion? My mind gropes about in darkness. I cannot see where my duty lies. Krishna, I beg you, tell me frankly and clearly what I ought to do. I am your disciple. I put myself into your hands. Show me the way.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ IX. 30, 31. ⁷⁶ II. 7.

He knows peace who has forgotten desire.
 He lives without craving:
 Free from ego, free from pride.
 This is the state of enlightenment in Brahman:
 A man does not fall back from it
 Into delusion.
 Even at the moment of death
 He is alive in that enlightenment:
 Brahman and he are one.⁸⁴

Arjuna

But, Krishna, if you consider knowledge of Brahman superior to any sort of action, why are you telling me to do these terrible deeds?

Your statements seem to contradict each other. They confuse my mind. Tell me one definite way of reaching the highest good.⁸⁵

Sri Krishna

I have already told you that, in this world, aspirants may find enlightenment by two different paths. For the contemplative is the path of knowledge: for the active is the path of selfless action.⁸⁶

The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally, and be free from all attachment to results.⁸⁷

Perform every action with your heart fixed on the Supreme Lord. Renounce attachment to the fruits. Be even-tempered in success and failure; for it is this evenness of temper which is meant by yoga.⁸⁸

The yoga of action, say the ignorant,
 Is different from the yoga of the knowledge of Brahman.
 The wise see knowledge and action as one:
 They see truly.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ II. 71, 72.

⁸⁵ III. 1. ⁸⁶ III. 3. ⁸⁷ III. 9. ⁸⁸ II. 48. ⁸⁹ V. 4.

CHAPTER 7

JAINISM

What is Jainism?

The words Jain and Jainism are derived from the Sanskrit root ji, which means to conquer. A Jain is one who believes in conquering the flesh in order to attain to that supreme purity which leads to infinite knowledge, infinite happiness, and infinite power—the same conquering the flesh and the same self-liberation that all other religions of India have taught. It is said that Jainism is as old as the Vedic religion. Vardhamāna, known also as Mahāvīra, or the supreme spiritual hero, whose name has come to be identified with Jainism, is but the last in a long series of inspired prophets, or seers.¹

According to its tradition, Jainism goes back to the beginning of time and its truths were gradually revealed to certain divine men called tīrthaṅkaras. Its cosmogony has paralleled that of other Indian faiths in that it postulates a series of cosmic cycles, consisting of utsarpiṇī, or ages of expansion, and avasarpiṇī, or ages of contraction, or decay—our own age being one of the latter. During the present period of contraction, twenty-four tīrthaṅkaras have appeared

¹ It is customary among Western scholars to discover points of similarity between the lives of Mahāvīra and Buddha, who were contemporaries, and in consequence of this and of the further fact that both Jainism and Buddhism lay emphasis upon ahimsā, or noninjury, they look upon Jainism as an offshoot of Buddhism. But these two religions are really independent of each other, though parallel in their development. Mahāvīra is not the founder of Jainism but only, as remarked above, the last in a long succession of sages and seers. Parśwanātha, who lived two centuries before the time of Mahāvīra, is another in this succession and also a historical figure.

The ontological argument of the Jainists runs thus: When a man breaks the bonds of his karmas by subduing his passions and realizing the supreme purity of the soul, and there is revealed to him in his own soul infinite knowledge, bliss, and power, he becomes at once a Paramātmān, or Perfected Soul. Since all souls are potentially divine, there are many that have achieved perfection and many more that are on the way to achieving it. The following is a typical prayer of a Jain devotee:

'Him who is the revealer of the path to salvation, who is the remover of mountains of karmas, and who is the knower of all reality, him I worship, in order that I may realize his qualities within myself.'

So we come to the conclusion that the Jains are believers in man-God, though the concept is not quite the same as the Hindu avatār or the Christian Son of God. The object of their worship is the man-God, and they consider that the best way to worship him is to become, themselves, Sons of God—Paramātmāns, supreme perfected spirits.

It is true that souls rank variously. He who has become perfect by realizing his divine nature, who has so overcome the world that he is not touched by the good and evil in it, is in the highest rank. Such a man is called Siddha Parameṣṭhin. Next in the scale of being is the Arhat, one who has not as yet attained final liberation, but who has received illumination, has a desire to serve humanity, and looks upon his fellows with love and kindness. Such a soul reveals the eternal truths of religion to struggling humanity. Arhats enter into human life at certain cosmic periods for the good of all. The three next gradations are composed of ordinary human teachers. These have gained some conquest over the flesh and some knowledge of the divine nature of the soul. Each of the five stages of individual evolution represents the supreme goal of life at a certain level of illumination.

The highest perfection, Siddha Parameṣṭhin, can be described as a state absolutely unconditional, a state of pas-

sionless peace, in which one is released from action and is without desire.

Metaphysically, mokṣa is liberation from the bonds of karma and rebirth. Like all other schools of Indian thought, Jainism accepts karma and reincarnation, but unlike the others, it conceives of karma as something material, which, uniting with the soul, binds a man to the world and its attractions. Though it is regarded as a material substance, karma is yet so subtle that it is unperceivable by the senses. It is in this karma that the soul is bound, and it is for this reason that the soul is embodied in the substance of a being and that it is embodied from a beginningless past. But, though this bondage has no beginning, it may definitely have an end, for the soul is essentially free and divine, and just as soon as its true nature is realized karma disappears. The Vedāntic doctrine of avidyā, or ignorance, also holds that individual ignorance, though it may end, has no beginning.

This bondage of the soul to karma is not caused by anything extraneous, but by karma itself. As the soul comes into contact with the world outside, certain psychic conditions arise, such as the desire for enjoyment, which lead to ignorance of the soul's true nature, and cause the karmic molecules to 'flow in' towards it and in the process to surround it. This 'flowing in' of the subtle matter of karma is peculiar to Jain metaphysics, and is technically known as āsrava, the first stage in karmic bondage. The next stage is the actual bondage, known technically as bandha. In this the molecules become settled and build up a subtle body known as the karmaṇa śarīra, and the soul is weighed down by its own karmas. The physical body dies with death, but the karmaṇa śarīra, which corresponds to the subtle body in Hinduism, lingers on until the final liberation.

Freedom from the weight of karma is gained first by saṁvara, self-restraint, for when this is exercised no fresh karma is attached to the soul. Then by self-discipline, both ethical and spiritual, there is induced a state known as nirjara, or the shedding of all past karmas. At this point rebirth ceases, and a certain preliminary liberation is attained,

but the next two (and last) stages must precede mokṣa, the final liberation. The first of these is Arhat, in which the enlightened soul, freed from karmas, continues to live in the world, actively engaged in the service of humanity yet no longer tainted by good and evil. This state is comparable with that of the jīvanmukta, free while living, of the Hindu ideal.

In the next stage of its progress, the soul transcends the world. Here, where there is no more activity, it attains the perfect state, characterized by infinite knowledge and infinite peace. This, the final state, is known as Siddha Parameṣṭhin.

The Way to Fulfilment

Mokṣa is achieved through triratna—the three jewels of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct.³ The three together make a single unit. Right faith is unshaken faith in the teaching of the Jains; right knowledge is true understanding of their principles; and right conduct is practical living in accordance with these principles. The first of these, right faith, is the foundation of the ethical and spiritual life. Before one can have right faith, one must be free from ignorant superstitions—the idea, for example, that spiritual merit may be acquired by bathing in a river said to be sacred, or by propitiating imaginary gods, or by observing certain external rites. Freedom from superstitions, as well as from pride or arrogance or conceit, is the primary necessity for developing right faith. With right faith arises right knowledge—enlightened understanding of the truths of religion—which in turn must be united with the third jewel, right conduct.

Right conduct comprises the five vratas, or observances: (1) ahimsā, or noninjury—great emphasis being laid on this principle, which requires not only that one do no harm to living creatures but also that one show them kindness; (2) satya, or truthfulness; (3) asteya, or nonstealing—understood to extend to the prohibition of covetousness; (4) brahma-

³ Compare the way to salvation through the offices of the Roman Catholic Church: faith, instruction, and works.

carya, or chastity in word, thought, and deed; and (5) aparigraha, or nonattachment to the world.

When applied without limitation, these vratas are known as the mahāvratas—the supreme vows taken by the monks. Thus Jainism makes a distinction between conduct prescribed for its monks and that prescribed for its lay brethren.

Great emphasis is placed by Jainism, as by all other Indian schools of thought, upon human birth as a means to the attainment of divine perfection. Even the gods and angels, who partake of celestial joys in some kind of heaven, must appear on earth in human form if they would reach the ultimate goal. Blessed, therefore, is human birth.⁴

*Jain Metaphysics*⁵

The difficult subject of Jain metaphysics is involved in the Jain view of life. Reality, which is uncreated and eternal, is defined as that which is 'characterized by birth and death in the midst of permanence'. That is, it maintains its identity and permanence through the process of continual change—through birth and death. Changes in appearance are the

⁴ Edward Washburn Hopkins (*Religions of India*, p. 297) caricatures Jainism when he says that it is 'a religion in which the chief points insisted upon are that one should deny God, worship man, and nourish vermin'. One can caricature any religion. Jainism denies the existence of an extracosmic God and of an all-pervading Spirit, but it accepts the immortal soul and the kingdom of God within. Moreover, it believes in man-Gods—saints who have realized perfection. Such a man-God was Christ, who is worshipped by many millions of men. Again, Jainism insists upon noninjury. 'Thou shalt not kill'—a commandment very imperfectly observed by the West—is simply extended to protect all living creatures.

Perhaps in this connection it should be pointed out that the Jains, true to the characteristic spirit of Indian religion, do not regard theirs as the only true religion. They believe that non-Jains, if they truly follow the precepts of their respective religions, may in their own way arrive at mokṣa, the goal of all life. The whole truth cannot emerge from any one teaching, and we need, therefore, to be tolerant of ways of salvation not our own. We shall return to the Jain theory of religious tolerance in the section 'Jain Logic and Theory of Knowledge'.

⁵ The general reader may wish to omit this section since it is highly technical in nature.

A table may facilitate the comprehension of this difficult subject:

Tattwas (Ultimate reals)	{ 1. Jīva (spirit) 2. Ajīva (nonspirit)	
Dravyas (Substances)	{ 1. Jīva (spirit) 2. Pudgala (matter) 3. Dharma (principle of motion) 4. Adharma (principle of rest) 5. Ākāśa (space) 6. Kāla (time)	} Ajīva (nonspirit)

The first five dravyas, called astikāyas, are spatial; kāla is non-spatial.

Tattwas (Principles)	{ 1. Jīva (spirit) 2. Ajīva (nonspirit) 3. Āsrava (the flowing in of karmic molecules that bind the jīva) 4. Bandha (bondage to the karmaṇa body) 5. Saṁvara (the checking of fresh karmas for the jīva) 6. Nirjara (the shedding of karmas) 7. Mokṣa (salvation as the jīva realizes his true nature)
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When puṇya (merit) and pāpa (demerit) are added to the seven principles mentioned above, we obtain the nine padārthas (categories) of Jain metaphysics.

Jain Logic and Theory of Knowledge

Since the jīva is by its very nature pure consciousness, infinite knowledge is its inherent possession. But this knowledge is overlaid by ignorance created by the karmic body. While dwelling within the bonds of karma, the jīva can express only finite knowledge; but as the impediments to greater knowledge are removed, infinite knowledge is manifested, and the true nature of the soul is revealed. These impediments are the desires and passions, and as the soul frees itself from these and from its egoism, and learns the lesson of self-restraint, there comes greater and greater knowledge. Five different kinds or types of knowledge appear as the jīva passes

through various stages of unfoldment: *mati*, *śruti*, *avadhi*, *manahparyāya*, and *kevala*.

Mati is ordinary cognition, including sense perception, memory, and inference; and since the soul is dependent for it on the senses and the ordinary operations of the mind, it is known as *parokṣa*—indirect knowledge. This last is in contradiction to Western psychology, which regards the knowledge obtained from the senses as immediate or direct.

Śruti, testimony, is revelations of the scriptures—also called *parokṣa*, indirect knowledge, since the revelations were not made to ourselves.

Avadhi is knowledge derived from the psychic power of clairvoyance and clairaudience—the perception of things and events at great distances of time and space. This knowledge, since it is not dependent upon the senses coming into contact with objects, is known as *pratyakṣa*—direct or immediate knowledge.

Manahparyāya is the direct and immediate knowledge of others' minds.

Kevala is the perfect knowledge which the *jīva* gains when he is completely free from the bonds of ignorance and has realized his inherent purity. This knowledge is direct, immediate, and independent of the senses and the mind, and can only be felt and experienced—cannot be expressed in logical terms. This *kevala*, knowledge of the soul, is equivalent to the transcendental knowledge of the Upaniṣads and the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddhists.

Of the five types of knowledge, the first two are in the possession of every normal man, and the third and fourth may be developed in anyone who will practise self-restraint and concentration; but the fifth is granted only to him who in meditation has attained to absolute purity—an illumined soul.

Both *jīvas* and *ajīvas* are, as we have already noted, realities. They are not interdependent for their existence. External objects possess reality independently of *jīva*, the perceiving subject. Appaswami Chakravarti explains the matter in this way:

'The function of jñāna [knowledge] is merely to reveal, on the one hand, the objective reality which is already existing, and also to reveal itself on the other hand. Knowledge, therefore, is like a lamp which on account of its luminosity reveals other objects as well as itself, the objects so revealed being real. The external objects so known are independent, inasmuch as they exist by themselves and yet are related to knowledge as they are revealed by knowledge. Similarly, in the case of the soul, it is both the subject and the object of knowledge in one; this inner experience is able to reveal the nature of chetana [conscious] entity—the soul.'¹²

Jainism may be called pluralistic realism, since it asserts the reality of both spirit and nonspirit as eternal and uncreated substances, these being many in number and existing independently of one another.

Jain logic, and indirectly Jain metaphysics, would not be complete without an explanation of their peculiar system of predication, a system strangely anticipatory of the new doctrine of relativity in Western physics.

This system declares that both positive and negative predication may be made about the same thing. This is known as asti-nāsti—the thing is and is not. The apparent absurdity will reveal, when closely examined, a genuinely logical implication. An affirmative predication about a thing is dependent upon four conditions: *sva-dravya* (its own substance), *sva-kṣetra* (its own locality), *sva-kāla* (its own time of existence or duration), and *sva-bhāva* (its own modification); and correspondingly the negative predication about the same thing depends upon four conditions: *para-dravya* (alien substance), *para-kṣetra* (alien locality), *para-kāla* (alien time of existence, or duration), and *para-bhāva* (alien modification).

Let us illustrate by a concrete instance. If you wish to describe an ornament made of gold, you can do so in the following ways:

¹² *Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I, pp. 209–10.

trained in the Math at Belur, have been established in many parts of the world, especially in Western Europe and in North and South America.

Easily the most characteristic aspect of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa's doctrine can be summed up in the words tolerance, reconciliation, harmony. The ideas the words stand for are not of course new to Indian religion, which, from its remote beginnings, as we have seen, has seldom been narrowly exclusive or dogmatic; but in Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa they found a comprehensive and seemingly definitive embodiment. He not only brought into agreement the diverse views of Hinduism, but also managed somehow to include in his native faith all the faiths of the outside world. The idea of the unity of the religious sentiment could hardly be carried further.

In the ultimate reaches of Hinduism, there were, to be sure, no diverse views to be reconciled. When the aspirant attained his ultimate goal, views, of whatever kind, ceased to exist. He was absorbed in *turiya*, the transcendental consciousness, he had become one with God. But at lower levels, where the mind tried to determine the nature of God and the universe, differences early arose. Some said that God was *personal*, some that he was *impersonal*; some said that he was with form, some that he was without form. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, bringing to bear his own mystic experiences, dissolved, in his simple way, all such oppositions:

'Infinite is God and infinite are his expressions. He who lives continuously in the consciousness of God, and in this alone, knows him in his true being. He knows his infinite expressions, his various aspects. He knows him as impersonal no less than as personal.'²⁴

'Brahman, absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss, may be compared to an infinite ocean, without beginning or end. As through intense cold some portions of the water of the ocean freeze into ice, and the formless water appears as having form, so through intense love of the devotee the formless, absolute, infinite Existence manifests himself before

²⁴ *Kathāmṛta*, vol. I, p. 71.

Equally present,
Knows his own Atman
In every creature,
And all creation
Within that Atman.²⁷

Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa reconciled the two views of the universe, the one in which it dissolves in illusion, and the other in which it is one with God, in the following words:

‘In *turiya*, the universe of plurality becomes annihilated—there is attained oneness with Brahman.

‘When, having attained the nondual Brahman in *samādhi*, one comes back to the plane of the ego, one realizes that it is Brahman who has become this universe of plurality. To get to the flesh of the fruit you discard its skin and seeds. But when you want to know the total weight of the fruit, you must weigh them all together. The skin, the seeds, the flesh—all belong to one and the same fruit. Similarly, having realized the unchangeable reality—the one absolute Existence—one finds that he who is the absolute, formless, impersonal, infinite God is again one with the relative universe. He who is absolute in one aspect is relative in another aspect, and both aspects belong to one and the same substance. . . .

‘The sacred syllable *Om* is explained in the scriptures as a combination of the sounds A, U, M, representing creation, preservation, and dissolution respectively. I compare the sound of *Om* to the sound of a bell that dissolves in silence. The relative universe dissolves in the imperishable absolute—the great silence. The gross, the subtle, the casual—everything visible and invisible dissolves in the Great Cause. Waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep, the three states of consciousness, are dissolved in the *turiya*, the transcendental. Once

²⁷ VI. 29. To see God in the universe, to see Brahman in all, was considered by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa to be the highest spiritual attainment. Once when a young disciple came to him, the Master asked him what his goal of life was. When he received the reply ‘To see God everywhere’, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa remarked, ‘Well, my boy, that is the last word of religion.’

sider myself as a physical being, thou art the master, I am thy servant. When I consider myself as an individual being, thou art the whole, I am one of thy parts. And when I realize myself as the Ātman, I am one with thee.'³¹ Thus Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa pointed out that dualism, qualified monism, and nondualism are not mutually exclusive and contradictory concepts but successive steps in realization—the third and last being attained when the aspirant loses all consciousness of self in union with God.

Thus, in a way more or less peculiar to himself, through attention mainly to the mystic experience, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa harmonized conflicting notions of God and the universe and of their relations to each other. But this was not his only way. Another, still more peculiar to him, might be called, in current terms, pragmatic. Any idea of God, any mode of worshipping him, that *worked*—that led the aspirant to the ultimate goal—must be valid and true. But how could one be sure that an idea or a method is really thus effective? Clearly, by trying it oneself. And that, in all simplicity and sincerity, is what Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa did. He practised the teachings of many divergent sects within Hinduism, and through each of them achieved the same supreme realization. But even this was not sufficient. What of the Mohammedanism that had long been alive in India? What of Christianity? The story of his experimental contacts with these religions we have already told. In the end he arrived at the grand conclusion with which the ancient ṛṣis began, and which we have more than once recalled: *Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*—in Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa's words, 'So many religions, so many paths to reach one and the same goal.'

In defining this goal Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa was of course at one with all his spiritual ancestors. It was simply to realize God within one's own soul. Śaṅkara declared that 'Study of the scriptures is fruitless so long as Brahman has not been experienced'; and 'He is born to no purpose,' says Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, 'who, having the rare privilege of being born a man, is unable to realize God.'

³¹ *Kathāmṛta*, vol. III, p. 13.

to be directed towards God; and for a follower of bhakti yoga discrimination, dispassion, and all the other virtues unfold easily and naturally. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa used to say: 'The more you move towards the light, the farther you will be from darkness.' He told his disciples how he himself prayed for devotion during a period of intense spiritual disciplines:

'O Mother, here is sin and here is virtue; take them both and grant me pure love for thee. Here is knowledge and here is ignorance; I lay them at thy feet. Grant me pure love for thee. Here is purity and here is impurity; take them both and grant me pure love for thee. Here are good works and here are evil works; I lay them at thy feet. Grant me pure love for thee.'³³

But whatever path the aspirant chiefly follows, according to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, meditation is the most important aspect of his spiritual life. Somehow or other he must keep his mind fixed on God. Meditation is performed not merely with closed eyes but with eyes open as well.

There are many ways to meditate and many forms of meditation. For the jñāna yogi, for example, there is the meditation on the identity of Ātman and Brahman; he tries to live in that identity. There are many means to achieve this end, the one best for a particular aspirant depending on his temperament.

For the bhakti yogi there is meditation on a chosen ideal of God, which may be with or without form. To those who preferred to meditate on God with form, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa said:

'Wash away all the impurities of your mind; then let the Lord be seated within the lotus of your heart. Meditate on him as a living presence. Tie your mind to the feet of your Chosen Ideal with a silken thread, but remember not merely to think of him while you are formally meditating: keep recollectedness at other times. Don't you know that in the shrine of Mother Durgā a light burns continually before the

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 54.

image, and the housewife sees to it that the light never goes out? Keep the light of awareness always burning within your heart. Keep your thoughts awake. While engaged in your daily activities, occasionally gaze inward and see if the light is burning.'³⁴

To those who preferred to meditate on God in his formless aspect, he said:

✓ 'Think of him as an infinite, shoreless ocean. You are like a fish swimming in that ocean of existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute, or like a vessel dipped in it with that Presence inside, outside, and everywhere.'³⁵

✓ 'Some devotees approach God by going from the aspect without form to that with form; others by going from the aspect with form to that without form. To realize that he is both with form and without form—that is best.'³⁶

Two watchwords Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa set before mankind were renunciation and service.

Spiritual aspirants can follow either the way of the monk or the way of the householder, but renunciation is an ideal which the two ways have in common. The monk's renunciation must be external, however, as well as mental. The householder renounces mentally.

But what, really, does renunciation mean? It is deification—which means seeing God everywhere and in everything, knowing for oneself the truth expressed in the Īśa Upaniṣad: 'In the heart of all things, of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord. He alone is the reality. Wherefore, renouncing vain appearances, rejoice in him.'

Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa used to tell his householder disciples to live in the world in a spirit of detachment, keeping their minds on God. Gradually they would begin to realize that all objects and persons are parts of him. The aspirant, he said, must serve his parents, his wife, and his children as manifestations of God. He who lives in the world in this manner, renouncing all sense of possession, is the ideal householder. He overcomes

³⁴ *Līlāprasāṅga*, Guru bhāv, Pt. I, pp. 89–90. ³⁵ *Kathāmṛta*, vol. III, p. 256. ³⁶ *Līlāprasāṅga*, Guru bhāv, Pt. I, p. 90.

all fear of death. But in order to reach this ideal the aspirant must occasionally go into solitude, practise contemplation, and yearn to realize God.

In connection with the ideal of service taught by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, I shall mention a very interesting incident from his life. One day, in a state of ecstasy, he was recalling the precepts of another great saint. One of these preached compassion for mankind. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa repeated several times the word compassion. Then he exclaimed: 'Compassion! Who am I to be compassionate! Isn't everyone God? How can I be compassionate towards God? Serve him, serve him, serve him!' In this way Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa elevated the ideal of philanthropy to the worship of God in every being.

He considered the attainment of liberation for oneself to be a low ideal. Swami Turiyananda, one of his disciples, used to say that nirvāṇa was the highest state of realization and was rebuked for what his master called a 'mean conception'. Naren, later known as Swami Vivekananda, one day was asked by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa what his ideal was. When Naren answered that he wanted to remain immersed in samādhi and return to normal consciousness only in order to keep his body alive, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa exclaimed: 'Shame on you! I thought you were greater than that!' And he taught him the twin ideal on which Vivekananda later founded the monastic Order of Rāmakṛṣṇa: liberation for oneself and service to God in man. ✓

Concerning this same Swami Vivekananda a story is told which illustrates the extraordinary means to which Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa sometimes resorted in order to advance the spiritual welfare of his disciples. When young Naren first came to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, he was a member of the Brāhmo Samāj, an Indian reform movement which believed in the ideal of theism. Recognizing in his new disciple an aspirant with the capacity to follow the difficult path of jñāna yoga, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa asked him to read treatises on advaita Vedānta and made him sing a song expressing the nondual conception. Naren complied with his master's wishes, but he could not accept the doctrine of nondualism, for to him it seemed

blasphemous to look on man as one with his Creator. One day he laughingly remarked to a friend: 'How impossible! This vessel is God! This cup is God! Whatever we see is God! And we ourselves are God!' At this moment Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa came out of his room, smiling, and touched Naren. The effect of this touch Naren described as follows:

✓ 'That strange touch immediately caused a complete revolution in my mind. Wherever I looked I saw Brahman and Brahman alone. I lived in that consciousness the whole day. I returned home, and that same experience continued. When I sat down to eat I saw that the food, the plate, the server, and I myself—all were Brahman. I took one or two morsels of food and again was absorbed in that consciousness. . . . All the time, whether eating or lying down, or going to college, I had the same experience. While walking in the streets I noticed cabs plying but did not feel inclined to move out of the way. I felt that the cabs and myself were made of the same substance. . . . When this state changed a little, the world began to appear to me as a dream. While walking in Cornwallis Square I struck my head against the iron railings to see if they were real or only a dream. After several days, when I returned to the normal plane, I realized that I had had a glimpse of nondual consciousness. Since then I have never doubted the truth of nondualism.'³⁷

To sum up the message of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, especially in its relation to practice, we perhaps could do no better than quote the following words of the distinguished swami to whom we have just listened:

✓ 'Do not depend on doctrines, do not depend on dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in man, which is divine; and the more this divinity is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that spirituality first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does

³⁷ *Līlāprasaṅga*, Divya bhāv, pp. 161, 162, 163.

which is God; it is knowledge that the Ātman is separate from the body. Dispassion is nonattachment to the objects of sense.⁴

The true hero is he who can discipline his mind by devotional exercises while living in the world. A strong man can look in any direction while carrying a heavy burden on his head. Similarly, the perfect man can keep his gaze constantly fixed on God while carrying the burden of worldly duties.⁵

A boy holds on to a pillar and circles round it with headlong speed. While he is spinning, his attention is constantly fixed on the pillar. He knows that if he lets go his hold upon it he will fall and hurt himself. Similarly, the wise householder holds on to the pillar of God: keeps his mind fixed on him, and performs his worldly duties. Thus is he free from all dangers.⁶

Let the boat stay on the water: there is no harm. But let not water get into the boat, lest the boat sink. Similarly, there is no harm if the devotee lives in the world, provided he lets not worldliness enter into his mind.⁷

Clay in its natural state can be moulded into any form, but burnt clay cannot. Similarly, spiritual truths cannot be impressed upon hearts that have been burnt by the fire of lust.⁸

To bring one's heart and one's speech into accord is the goal of all spiritual discipline. If you say, 'O Lord, Thou art my all in all,' while in your heart you believe the objective world to be all in all, your devotional exercises are bound to be fruitless.⁹

Countless are the pearls lying hidden in the sea. If a single dive yields you none, do not conclude that the sea is without pearls. Similarly, if after practising spiritual disciplines for a

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 37 f. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶ Swami Brahmananda, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Upadeśa*, pp. 49 f.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50 f. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65. ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

little while you fail to have the vision of God, do not lose heart. Continue to practise the disciplines with patience, and at the proper time you are sure to obtain grace.¹⁰

✓ Strike a match, and the light disperses all at once the darkness of a room, even though accumulated for centuries. Similarly, a single gracious glance of the Lord disperses the accumulated sins of innumerable births.¹¹

✓ The magnetic needle always points towards the north, whatever the direction in which the ship is sailing; that is why the ship does not lose her course. Similarly, if the mind of man is always turned towards God, he will steer clear of every danger.¹²

There is only one God, but endless are his aspects and endless are his names. Call him by any name and worship him in any aspect that pleases you, you are sure to see him.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 124 f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

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