



THE VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

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THE
VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

By
SWAMI ABHEDANANDA



RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH

CALCUTTA

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This lecture was delivered by Swàmi Abhedânanda, before the Philosophical Union of the University of California, at Berkeley, U.S.A., in 1901. Hitherto it remained unpublished in book form, as the complete text of the speech was not available. Very recently we got the report of the speech in its entirety, through the courtesy of the editor, *Vedânta and the West*, published from 1946 Vedânta Place, Hollywood 28, U.S.A., and the authorities of the University of California, and is now published in its present form, being critically edited. The speech is a memorable and historical one, and it covers all the central idea and discussions on the Vedânta Philosophy of India. Two pictures of Swàmi Abhedânanda, besides those of Professors G. H. Howison, Josiah Royce, and William James, the University Building of California and the Lecture Hall of its Philosophical Union adorn the edition of the book.

We hope that the book will be appreciated by all lovers of knowledge.

*Râmakrishna Vedânta Math,
19B, Râjâ Râjkrishna Street,
Calcutta—6, India.
Dated the July, 1957.*

PREFACE

Swami Abhedananda accepted Swami Vivekânanda's invitation and sailed from Calcutta to London in August, 1896. His first lecture was before the Christo-Theosophical Society of London, on the Advaita philosophy of *Pañchādasi* of Mādhava-Vidyāranya. In 1897, at the request of Swami Vivekânanda, he crossed the Atlantic and landed at New York, to take charge of the Vedânta Society, started by Swāmiji. Swami Abhedânanda lived in America for more than twenty-four years, delivering lectures and holding classes on various subjects, and preaching the lofty ideas and ideal of his Great Master, Râmakrishna Paramahansa Dev. There he became familiar with all the distinguished and leading artists, educationalists, journalists, scientists, Christian Fathers and clergymen as well as professors, William James, Josiah Royce, G. H. Howison, Lanmann, Jackson, Shaler, Seth Low, Harsel C. Parkar, Dr. Janes, Dr. Ross, Rev. Heber Newton, and others.

The lecture, *Vedânta Philosophy*, which is now published in book form, was delivered in the Philosophical Union, established by Professor Howison, in the University of California, at Berkeley. Prof. Howison was the chairman of the Philosophical Union, and he taught philosophy at the said University, from 1884 to 1909. He was a philosopher of note in his day. Announcement columns of the old news-papers indicate that the lecture was scheduled for a special meeting of the Philosophical Union, in a lecture room of the Philosophy Building of the University of California at Berkeley, at 8 P.M., on September 6, 1901, Friday. Swami Abhedânanda delivered the lecture on the Vedânta Philosophy, at the request of Prof. Howison. From the comment of the editor of the *Vedânta and the West* (Jan-Feb., 1956) of the 1946 Vedanta Place, Hollywood 28, California, it is known that no report of the lecture itself has been found, since it was on this very day that President William McKinley was assassinated, the Newspapers thereafter for some time being mostly given over to the news of this event.

From the personal statement of Swâmi Abhedânanda, we come to know that one afternoon he went to the California University, at Berkeley, to hear Prof. Howison's lecture accompanied with Dr. Logans. The subject of the lecture was John Fisk's *Through Nature of God*. The lecture being over, he had a talk on Vedânta with Prof. Howison. Prof. Howison was very much impressed with the learned discussion of the Swâmi, and requested him to deliver a lecture on the Vedânta philosophy, in the Philosophical Union of the University of California, at Berkeley. The Swâmi was pleased to accept his request. So, after a month, he, together with Dr. Logans and Dr. Ross, went to the said University, in the evening, on the 6th September, 1901, after finishing their luncheon at the Fraternity Home.

It should be mentioned in this connection that the Philosophical Union, at the California University was a unique creation of Prof. Howison. The lectures were arranged in the Union, after every three years, or from time to time. The first lecture, so far as it is known, was delivered on the *Conception of God* by Prof. Josiah Royce, in the year 1895, and it was published in book form in 1897. In 1885, his book *Religious Aspect of Philosophy* created a sensation. The next lecture, in the Philosophical Union was delivered on the *Principle of Pragmatism* by Prof. William James, in the year 1898. This lecture was given on the central idea of the lecture on *Pragmatism*, delivered by Prof. Price, twenty years ago whence Prof. James delivered his lecture, in a new and novel way. Prof. James' lecture on *Principle of Pragmatism* was also published in a book form. After three years, Swâmi Abhedânanda was invited to deliver his lecture on the *Vedânta Philosophy*, in the said Union, and it was so arranged that he would deliver, his lecture at 8 P.M., on Friday, the 6th September, 1901. Prof. Howison was in the chair. The Swâmi, delivered his lecture, for one hour and a half. After the lecture was over, Swâmi Abhedânanda was warmly congratulated by almost all the noted 400 professors of different Universities, assembled there, and especially by Prof. Howison himself:

This lecture so long remained unpublished. But fortunately we found a short pencil note of the lecture, in Swâmi's own handwriting, in his Almirah. It was published in the Pûjâ Number of our Bengali Monthly, 'Visvavâni, in the year 1955. It has been mentioned in the note that after the deliyerence of the lecture, when he came back to his residence at the Vedânta Society, California, he noted down a summery of the lecture, from his memory, at his leisure hour. And we are glad to inform our readers

that in 1956, we got a letter from 1946 Vedânta Place, Hollywood, U.S.A., that the complete lecture of the Swâmi was in their possession, and they enquired whether any copy of the same lecture was lying with us, in India. On the receipt of the letter, we requested them to send the copy of the lecture to us. But they informed us that they would be glad to send it after publishing it in their own journal, the *Vedânta and the west*. The complete lecture was thereafter published in 1956, in the January-February issue of the above journal, and a copy of the same was forwarded to us.

Now, how the lecture, delivered in the Philosophical Union, California University, in 1901, came to their possession, has been reported by the editor of the journal, *Vedânta and the West*, at page 2 of the said journal thus:

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA was a direct disciple of Sri Râmakrishna. He taught in the United States from 1897 to 1921. The manuscript of his lecture on 'Vedânta Philosophy' (pages 11 to 25 of the present issue) was given to *Vedânta and the West* by Ida Ansell, before her death on January 31, 1955, who stated that the corrections, found in it, were made by the Swâmi in his own hand. In so far as can be determined, the lecture has never been published".

Now, after we got the complete lecture, through the courtesy of the *Vedânta and the West*, we also wrote a letter to Mr. Clark Kerr, the President of the University of California, for sending a copy of the said lecture, if preserved in the Library, for comparing the text of the lecture. We got the reply from Mr. Stanley E. McCaffery, the Vice-President—Executive Assistant, on the 25th March, 1959, with a microfilm of the complete text of the lecture, delivered by Swâmi Abhedânanda, in 1901, in the Philosophical Union of the University of California. The copy of the letter is given below:

"THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

Seal

Berkeley 4, California

Clark Kerr
President.

Stanley E. McCaffrey
Vice-President—Executive Assistant

March 25, 1959

Swami Prajnanananda
Ramakrishna Vedanta Math
19B, Raja Rajkrishna Street
Calcutta—6, India.

Dear Swami Prajnanananda:

I am pleased to respond on behalf of President Clark Kerr to your letter to him of February 17, 1959 concerning the 1901 lecture of Swâmi Abhedânanda.

Enclosed with letter you will find a microfilm of the complete text of the speech.

We have all the other material which you desire but, unfortunately, there is some expense involved in making copies. Since we have no budget for this service, the money involved would have to come from your office.

• • • • •

If you still wish any of this material despite the expense involved, please advise me and I will be glad to arrange it.

I hope the enclosed microfilm will be of use to you. Thank you for your interest in the University.

Yours sincerely
(Sd.) Stanley E. McCaffrey.

Enclosure

cc: Miss May Dornin

Now, let us offer our thanks to the editor of the *Vedânta and the West*, 1946 Vedânta Place, Hollywood, U.S.A., for helping us by sending the copy of the lecture, in printed form. We also express our gratitude to the authorities of the University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A., for helping us by sending the microfilm of the text of the lecture, together with the necessary materials.

However, we are also giving in this preface, the summary of the lecture as noted down in pencil, by the Swâmi, from memory. The summary runs as follows:

"Before entering into the subject of my discourse of this evening, allow me to thank Prof. Howison, through whose kindness I have been honoured with this privilege of addressing the talented audience that have assembled here tonight.

I have been requested to give the general doctrines of the Vedānta philosophy. I suppose very few of us present here are familiar with the doctrines of this most ancient system of philosophy which have helped mankind in solving the most intricate problems of life and death, and which have led the truth-seeking minds of all ages and climes to the threshold of the abode of the absolute Reality of universe.

A student of Vedānta philosophy, after studying the different philosophical systems of ancient Greece and modern Germany, finds that the ultimate conclusions of the modern philosophers are like the faint echoes of the thundering expressions of what the ancient Vedic Seers of Truth realized, at least 2000 years before the Christian era. The monistic systems of modern evolutionists like Le Conte, Romanes, and Haeckel find their place in the utterances of the Vedic philosophers of ancient India. The first conception of the unity of existence that was ever expressed before the world, is to be found in the Rig Veda, the most ancient scripture of the world: *'ekam sad viprā vahudhā vadanti'*.

The truth-seeking minds of the Vedic philosophers did not stop at their researches until they could unify the diverse phenomena of the universe into absolute oneness. After discovering the one ultimate source and goal of the universe they tried to explain through logic and science the process by which the eternal one appears as manifold when looked through the limitations of time, space and causation. In their attempt they discovered the law of evolution which governs the cosmic phenomena. The philosophers who came later developed from these conclusions different systems of philosophy of which Sāṅkhya system of Kapila and the Vedānta philosophy, stand most important. Kapila is called the father of evolution theory in India. He was the first who gave the most logical and scientific explanation of the process of cosmic evolution. Kapila said that the eternal energy is called *Prakṛiti*. Prof. Huxley admits this fact when he says the doctrine of evolution was known to the Hindu sages long before Paul of Tarsus was born. Well has it been said by Sir Moiner M. Williams that the Hindus were Spinozites before Spinoza was born.

It will be interesting to mention that the theory of special creation out of nothing was refuted by a Vedic sage as early as 1500 years before Christ, and he was Kapila, the most scientific philosopher. Kapila said: '*katham asatât sad jâyate?*,'—'how from a nonentity entity comes out? It is not possible. Existence always exists, it never becomes a non-existence'. So, it is true that Vedânta philosophy did not teach the theory of special creation, rather it condemns and refutes this absurd theory.

The fundamental principle of Vedânta is oneness. There is one Existence, one Life, one Spirit, one Being in the universe. The idea of separateness is unreal. Vedânta does not teach, as some people think, that the phenomenal world is a mere illusion, but it teaches that the underlying reality of the universe is the absolute Being which is one and one without the second—'*ekamevâdvittiyam*'. What is regarded as illusion or delusion in Vedânta is not the phenomenal, but the attribution of true substantiality or essentiality to the phenomenal without the recognition of the underlying unity. It is generally known as nescience (*ajñâna*) that hides the glory of the absolute Being. The absolute Being is called by various names. It is Brahman in Vedânta. The same absolute Being was called by Plato the *Good*. It is the *Substantia* of Spinoza, *Ding-an-Sich* of Kant, the *Unknown and Unknowable* of Herbert Spencer. Some call it *Noumenon*. Schopenhauer calls it the *Will*. Emerson calls it *Oversoul*. But Vedânta differs from these systems by unifying the subject and object in Brahman.

The thing-in-itself is a pure assumption of Kant, a superfluity, not in any way justified by Kant's own data. Hence it is that the successors of Kant were forced to reject the Kantian thing-in-itself and set up pure rationalism as opposed to transcendentalism. The chief defect of the Kantian system is the unnatural separation of the thing-in-itself completely from the plane of experience.

But Vedânta philosophy brings the thing-in-itself within the plane of experience and recognizes it in the conception of entity, *sat* (Existence) which has all other things as attributes or relations. The same Brahman is *sat* from the objective point of view, and *cit* or pure intelligence from the subjective standpoint. It is the infinite source of knowledge; it is the eternal knower of the universe. The same Brahman, when qualified by cosmic self-consciousness, omniscience and omnipotence, appears as the ruler of the universe. When qualified by the individual consciousness and

imperfect knowledge, it constitutes the individual soul, and when qualified by total absence of self-consciousness, it forms the object or what we call 'matter'.

Thus Vedānta philosophy recognizes three entities in the universe, God, soul and matter. The God of Vedānta philosophy is not an extra-cosmic something, but it is the inner and underlying reality of the cosmic world, it forms the background of the world, and it exists both inside and outside of the world. Vedānta philosophy gives also a rational foundation to religion which harmonizes with the modern conclusions of science and philosophy. It teaches that the soul is immortal and divine, and the knowledge of the soul brings emancipation to man. Vedānta philosophy teaches that emancipation of the soul (i.e. individual soul) is freedom from the bondages of selfishness and other imperfections. The ethics of Vedānta philosophy is entirely based upon the attainment of God-consciousness which means the recognition of oneness of the individual soul with the absolute Brahman".

It had been our long cherished wish to publish this memorable lecture, and we are now presenting it to our readers of the Orient and the Occident, in printed form. Though the lecture is short, yet it covers the whole range of the central idea of the Vedānta philosophy of India. In this connection it may be mentioned that while editing, we have made as few changes as possible.

SWAMI PRAJNANANANDA

*Rāmakrishna Vedānta Math,
19B, Rājā Rājkrishna Street,
Calcutta—6, India.
Dated the July, 1957.*

VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

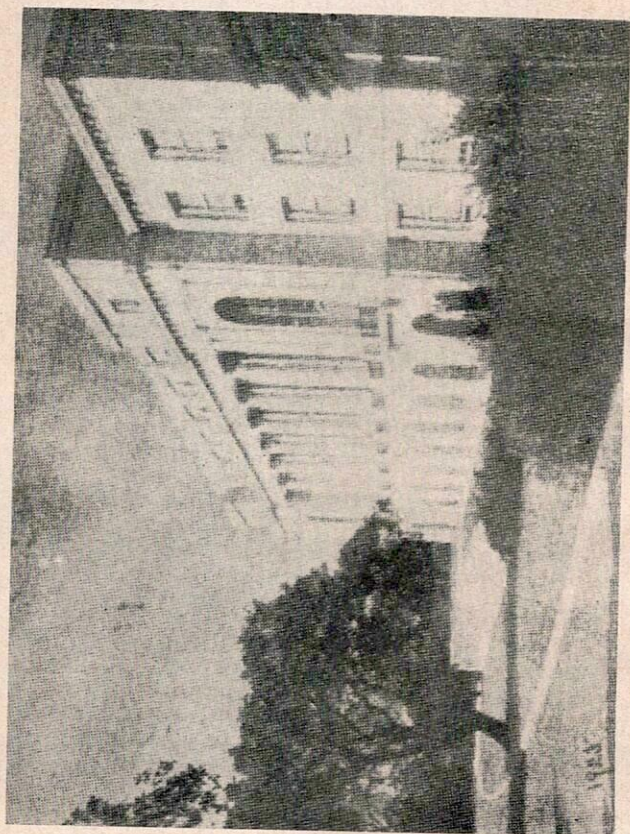
SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

PROFESSOR HOWISON, ladies and gentlemen: Before discussing the subject of this evening, allow me to thank Professor Howison, through whose kindness I have been honored with this privilege of addressing the talented audience that has assembled here tonight.

I have been requested to give an outline of Vedanta philosophy, which is the most ancient of all the philosophical systems of India. I suppose there are very few amongst those present who are familiar with this ancient philosophy that has helped mankind in solving the most difficult problems of life and death, and has led the truth-seeking minds of all ages and of all climes to the threshold of that shade of eternal Truth which is the end and aim of our life.

The student of Vedanta philosophy, after studying the ancient philosophical systems of Greece and the modern philosophies of Germany, finds that the ultimate conclusions of the modern philosophers are like faint echoes of the thundering expressions of what the ancient Vedic seers of Truth realized, at least two thousand years before the Christian era. The monistic systems of Professor Le Conte, of John Fisk, of Hegel, and other philosophers of Western countries and modern times, found their prototype in the utterances of those ancient philosophers. The first expression of this idea of monism that was ever experienced before the world we find in the Rig Veda, the most ancient of all scriptures of the

Microfilm print of the lecture, delivered by
the Swami



Wheeler Hall of the California University, where the Swami delivered his Lecture.

CHAPTER ONE

VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

PROFESSOR HOWISON, ladies and gentlemen,

Before discussing the subject of this evening, allow me to thank Professor Howison, through whose kindness I have been honoured with this privilege of addressing the talented audience that has assembled here tonight.

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Truth-seeking minds of these ancient philosophers did not stop at their researches until they could unify the diverse phenomena of this universe

1. *Ekam sad viprâ vahudhâ vadanti.* — Rik-Veda.

into that absolute oneness, and when they discovered the one source and goal of the phenomenal universe, they tried to explain the process by which this One appears as manifold. In their attempts they developed different systems of philosophy, of which the Sāṅkhya system of Kapila and this Vedānta philosophy stand most prominent. The later philosophers took up the conclusions arrived at by the great thinkers of ancient times and developed systems of philosophy, and through logic and science explained the phenomena and mystery of the universe.

They discovered the doctrine, the law of evolution, that involve the phenomena of the world. It was Kapila who was recognized as the father of the theory of evolution in ancient India. He lived about fourteen hundred years before the birth of Christ. It was he who expounded the doctrine of evolution most scientifically and most logically. This fact was admitted by Professor [Thomas] Huxley when he said that this doctrine was known to the Hindu sages long before Paul of Tarsus was born. Well has it been said by Sir Monier Williams that the Hindus were Spinozites more than two thousand years before the existence of Spinoza; Darwinians many centuries before Darwin; and Spencerites many centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the scientists of our time and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world.

Standing on that firm rock of evolution, the ancient thinkers of India explained the cosmic process by which the phenomenal universe appears to our senses, by which we come to perceive the objects of sense. The Hindu philosophers, especially the philosophers of the Vedāntic school, do not believe in the theory of a special creation of the universe by some extracosmic being. In one of the writings of the ancient philosophers, we read that a great Vedāntic sage was teaching his own son, and he asked this question: 'My beloved son, some² tell us that this world was created out of nothing, but my dear child, how can something come out of nothing?'

This idea of the impossibility of something coming out of nothing, we find in Herbert Spencer's philosophy and almost all the scientists of modern times accept it as a fact; but this was first taught in India about two thousand years before the Christian era. So the fundamental principle of the Vedānta philosophy is oneness, and that oneness is on the highest spiritual plane.

2. *By 'some' who dwells outside of the universe.*

There is one Life which exists, one Spirit, one Truth, one Reality. Some people think that the Vedânta philosophy teaches that this world is an illusion, but Vedânta philosophy does not teach that the phenomenal world is such. What is regarded as illusion in Vedânta philosophy, is the attribution of substantia and sentience to the phenomena, without recognizing the underlying unity, and that unity of Being, or Existence, or Light, or Spirit, is called by various names.

In Vedânta, it is called Brahman, which means literally a vast expanse—infinite expanse. It was called by Plato 'the Good', by Spinoza the 'Substantia', by Spencer 'the Unknown and Unknowable', by Kant the "Transcendental thing-in-itself". Schopenhauer called it 'Sufficient Reason', Emerson the 'Oversoul'. But Vedânta philosophy differs from these systems of Western philosophy, by unifying the subject and the object in Brahman or the absolute Reality.

When we study the Kantian system we find the mention of that *thing-in-itself*, but if we study a little more critically we find that it is only an assumption on the part of Kant—that this *thing-in-itself* is a pure assumption of Kant, a superfluity that cannot be supported by any data. In fact, Kant believed in that transcendental *thing-in-itself* which cannot be brought into the realm of experience, and the great defect of Kant's system lies in that unnatural separation of the *thing-in-itself* from the plane of experience.

But Vedânta philosophy, accepting the transcendental *thing-in-itself* as Reality, brings it into the realm of experience, and connects it with everything that can be perceived by the senses of human beings. The one Brahman, when appears as pure existence of all things that exist in the universe, is called *sat*, pure existence. The same Brahman appears as pure intelligence, when it becomes the subject or knower of the object. It is then *cit*. The same Brahman or absolute Truth, when qualified by the cosmic self-consciousness, omniscience, and omnipotence, appears as the ruler of the universe—the *antaryâmin*, the inner ruler of the universe.

He is called *Isvara*, which means the ruler and preserver of the universe. There is no such title as the Creator of the universe in Vedânta, because a creator is impossible when we admit the doctrine of evolution. When we see that all the various manifestations of the universe are nothing but the expressions or the result of the evolution of one eternal Energy, called in Sanskrit *Prakriti* and in Latin *Procreatrix*, we do not need any being whom we can call the Creator of the universe.

But there is room for a personal God. There is room also for an impersonal One, and also for the absolute Truth, the absolute Reality, the absolute One, which is the highest ideal of all the philosophies of the world. When the same Brahman is qualified with limited self-consciousness and partial knowledge, it becomes the soul or appears as the individual soul of man; and when the same Brahman is qualified by the absence of self-consciousness it appears as matter. So the nature of these three things is discussed in the Vedānta philosophy—the nature of God, of the soul, and of the material universe. But all these three are different expressions of one.

The dualistic thinkers believe in a personal God who is outside of this universe, who is outside of us, but they are afraid to discuss the nature of that personal God. What kind of personality does that personal God have? If you ask this question of the dualistic believers, they shrink from answering. They say: 'We do not know'.

But Vedānta philosophy is not afraid of discussing the nature of God. Most of the conceptions of God which we find as common amongst the masses, as taught in the different schools and temples, are anthropomorphic conceptions. We project our own thought and ideas, magnify them, and create our own ideals according to our thoughts and then we worship them. As, in ancient time the Jews believed in a Jehovah, who was cruel, and who had some qualities, which perhaps we would not like to give him. But all this can be explained clearly by this anthropomorphic conception of God.

So all the ideas of personal God are more or less anthropomorphic. We are human beings. We like to think of the creator of the universe as a human being. He is sitting somewhere, as we sit. He has two hands as we have, though he may not have two hands in reality. We find a beautiful description of that impersonal Being, appearing as personal to the devotee in one of the ancient writings of the Vedas: 'He has infinite heads, an infinite number of eyes, an infinite number of hands. He works through all hands of all living creatures. He thinks through all brains of all living creatures and at the same time he is beyond all thought. He is beyond all work, yet the whole universe is his body. The sum total of our minds is his mind'. The sum total of the intelligence that is manifested in this universe is the intelligence of God. We live and move and have our being in God. He is immanent and resident in nature.

Last Friday evening when I was listening to Professor Howison's remarks on John Fiske's *Through Nature to God*, I was surprised when he said that God cannot be immanent and resident in Nature; the indwelling God would make Him responsible for all the evil deeds of human beings. Of course, he used different language. I cannot recall his words.

That difficulty does not arise in Vedânta philosophy, although it believes that God is dwelling in each of our souls. He is dwelling within us, yet remains unaffected by our deeds, good or evil. On one side, Vedânta philosophy gives expression to the highest ideal of all philosophy, and on the other, it gives a foundation to a system of religion which is the most rationalistic of all systems and it harmonizes with the ultimate conclusions of modern science and philosophy.

Vedânta philosophy says that this Absolute cannot be worshipped, but when that Being is qualified with the eternal Energy, when He appears as the omniscient and omnipotent Being and ruler of the universe, He can be worshipped as *Isvara*. He can be loved, and He loves human beings. But we do not understand the meaning of the word 'love'. It is used very frequently, and has a very deep meaning.

We must not forget the expression: 'God is love', and when we think of love, we should remember that it is divine. It is not like the love which we see manifested in our ordinary everyday life. It is something deeper—something higher, and in that sense the term can be applied to, the word love can be used for God. Vedânta says love means expression of oneness. And wherever there is love, there is unity. Love means the attraction between soul and soul. The same attraction is manifested in the physical world, in the form of gravitation or chemical affinity or molecular attraction. When it is manifested on the soul plane, or two souls are attracted, it is called love and is divine.

In describing the nature of the individual soul, Vedânta philosophy teaches that the soul is immortal and divine. It is birthless and deathless; it has no beginning, it has no end. It is eternal. Ordinarily we think that the souls of human beings were created at a certain period by some being, and those souls will continue to exist until eternity. But there is a fallacy in that statement which we do not consider ordinarily.

We must remember that which has birth, must die. If the souls were created, they cannot be eternal and immortal, because birth is followed by

death and death by birth. There is no absolute destruction or annihilation of anything. By studying modern science we have learned that even matter is indestructible, force is indestructible, and if there be such a thing as the source of consciousness, how can that be destructible? If matter has no beginning, if force has no beginning, how can the souls have beginning? These souls existed before these bodies were born, and will exist after the dissolution of the bodies. Death means only change of form.

'As we throw away old garments and put on new ones, so the soul, after throwing away the old garment of body when it has fulfilled its purpose, puts on a new one³ and fulfills other purposes and desires that are still unfulfilled. The doctrine of evolution when pushed a little farther, gives foundation to the doctrine of reincarnation.

Of course Western philosophers do not admit the continuity and identity of that germ of life, which is going through the different stages of evolution. The moment they admit it, they would accept the doctrine of reincarnation. The doctrine of reincarnation is supported by the Vedānta philosophy. As the soul is indestructible and as all the desires cannot be fulfilled during three score years, what would become of those desires still unfulfilled? They cannot be crushed out and destroyed. They need future manifestation for their fulfilment. So the souls will reappear and take other forms and they take these forms in harmony with their thoughts.

We mould our own future, we create our own destiny, by the fruits of our works. We are responsible for all we have today and all we shall have in the future. No one else is responsible. Vedānta does not say that the soul is born a sinner, but on the contrary it teaches that the soul is a child of immortal bliss. One of the most ancient seers of truth in India, proclaimed, in a trumpet voice, before the world: 'Oh, ye children of immortal bliss, listen to me. I have discovered the eternal Truth, and by knowing that alone, one may cross the ocean of life'.⁴

3. In the *Bhagavat Gītā*, (II.22) it is said:

*Vāsāmsi jirnāni yathā vihāya navāni grihnāti naro' parāni
Tathā sharirāni vihāya jirnānyanyāni sanjāti navāni dehi*

4. *Shrinyanvanti visve amritasya putrā, dya dhāmāni divyāni
tasthuh.* — *Svetāsvatara-Up.*, II.5

What a sweet and heart-consoling expression like children of immortal bliss is! We are all children of God. There is no such thing as devil or Satan who is tempting us all the time. What we ordinarily call sin, according to Vedânta, is nothing but selfishness and that is the result of the ignorance of our true divine nature. The moment we realize, that divinity is full within us, that very moment we are divine and free from all sins.

Vedânta does not require any mediator for the absolution of sins. Vedânta philosophy teaches that the highest ideal of our life is to fulfil the purpose of life. There is also a purpose behind the process of evolution. We have come into existence, not as a mere freak of nature, not accidentally but are bound by certain laws—are governed by the law of causation. We are the result of our past, and our future will be the result of our present.

Parents are not responsible for our faults. We should not blame our ancestors. Parents are nothing but the principal channels, through which the soul finds proper environments for manifestation of the powers, latent within it. So Vedânta philosophy does not blame the parents. It does neither blame God, nor Satan. It believes that each one of us is responsible.

You can undo what you have done today, if you know that you are the doer. You can make your future better, by living the right kind of life. There comes the necessity of religion. Religion does not mean, according to Vedânta, the belief in a certain dogma or a creed, or following the doctrines of a certain denomination or church, but it is the science of the soul.

That which teaches us what we are, who we are, what we were before, what we shall be in the future, and what our relation is to the universe and to that supreme Being which is Absolute and Eternal, is called religion. Morality and ethics have their foundation on religion. We find, in Western philosophy, a great discussion about the true basis of morality, but we find the answer very clear and simple in Vedânta. For instance, we often hear the answer that Jesus the Christ, taught the highest ethical law: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'. The question is generally asked: 'Why should we love our neighbour as ourselves? What for? Why should we not kill him?' From the utilitarian standpoint we ought to kill him for our benefit, if we can get any good out of it. But morality which is based upon utilitarian principles, cannot explain this difficulty. The answer to the question we find in the Vedas, as Professor Paul Deussen of Kiel University has said in his *Elements of Metaphysics*: 'Why should we love our

neighbours as ourselves? The answer is '*tat twam asi*' — That thou art! Because we are one with our neighbour in Spirit.

By hurting our neighbours, we hurt ourselves. By injuring them, we injure ourselves. That is the law. Therefore we should not hurt our neighbours. By loving them, we better ourselves, we unfold our higher nature, and live on a higher plane. We should love our neighbours not for their good deeds, not for their meritorious acts, not for their beauty, but for their souls—for that oneness in Spirit, which cannot be separated by anything of this phenomenal universe. There we find the foundation of ethics which cannot be shaken by agnostic or materialistic thinkers of the East or of the West.

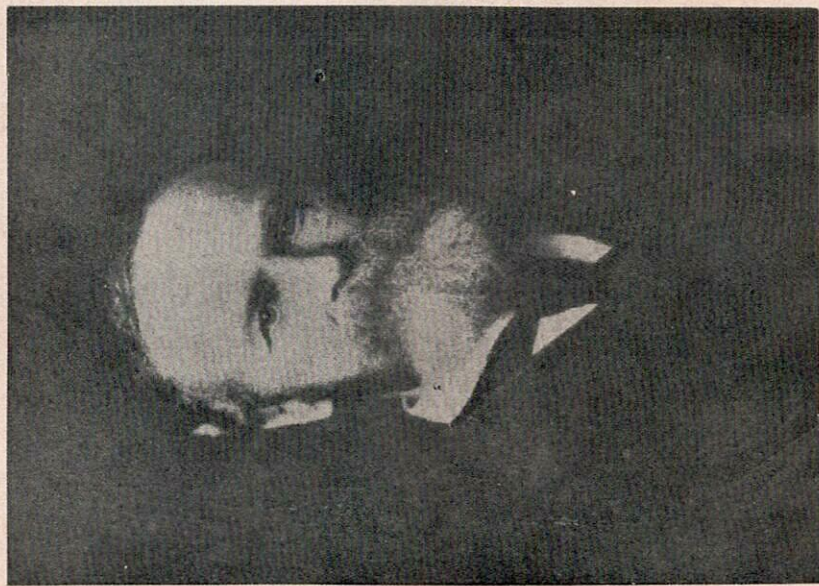
Vedânta philosophy teaches that the highest ideal of life is attainment of freedom and emancipation from the bondages that have kept us down on this animal plane, the plane of sense, and that freedom or emancipation comes when we realize Divinity within us, when we feel that we are one with God, that God is the prime mover of the universe, and we are nothing but instrument in the hands of that almighty power or will, which is working in nature. The moment we feel that, we cannot do anything wrong. How can you do anything wrong when you know that your will is not separate from the universal will? It is impossible. But the moment you forget that oneness, the moment you think of yourself as separate from the universal, you are ready to do any wicked thing, for your own selfish purpose. But when that selfishness disappears, you reach perfection, and that perfection is the goal of evolution.

Evolution ceases when perfection is reached. I mean, the evolution of that particular individual ceases when that individual reaches perfection, but it will continue to operate in relation to others who have not reached that state of perfection. What do we mean by perfection? It means the attainment of God-consciousness or perfect freedom. When we are not bound by anything that is within the realm of time, space, and causation, we are free.

In reality, we are always free, but we do not know it. If we are not free in reality, if that freedom does not exist in each soul potentially, we cannot reach freedom by any means. Apparently we are bound. We are bound by our own desires just as the silkworm makes the cocoon out of its own thread, and later on thinks itself bound. And we may try to explain the cause of that cocoon, existing outside of itself. Of course, it will be a



Prof. G. H. Howison



Prof. William James



Prof. Josiah Royce

mistake, but when the silkworm gets the power of cutting that cocoon, it comes out as a beautiful butterfly, and is free to go anywhere.

So the human soul is bound at present by the desires, by the tendencies, by the different ideas, imperfections, and all kinds of selfishness, but when that soul realizes Divinity within itself, it becomes free. It attains to God-consciousness and afterwards becomes perfect in itself. That emancipated soul is called by different names, such as Christ or Buddha.

The word 'Christ' means a state. It does not mean any particular individual. The real name of the person was Jesus. He attained to that state which is called Christ—the state of realization of Truth. So the title 'Buddha' means enlightenment. Shâkyamuni Gautama attained to that oneness and became Buddha. So each one of us will become Christ, will become Buddha, when we reach that attainment of Godconsciousness. Then we shall be able to say boldly before the world as Jesus the Christ said: 'I and my Father are one'.

How many of you have the courage to say that boldly: 'I and my Father are one?' Who can say it? He alone can say it who has realized that oneness. The Hindu philosopher will say: 'I am He. I am that absolute Being who is in the sun, the moon, and the stars, who is the infinite source of knowledge, existence, and the ultimate goal of the universe'. Vedânta philosophy teaches that that state is the ideal. We must have it. We must struggle to attain it in this life, and, therefore, we should live the life which is in harmony with the ideal and purpose of evolution, and thus we shall be able to attain it very quickly.

Vedânta philosophy is not separate from science, philosophy, logic, or religion. There is one peculiarity of Vedânta philosophy that it takes in all that has been, all the truths that have been discovered by the different philosophers or thinkers of the world, any by the different scientists of different countries. It tells us that which is illogical, unscientific, or unphilosophical, cannot be religion.

Religion must not be separated from philosophy, science, or logic. The goal of science is to find out truth, and the goal of philosophy is also to discover truth. By logic we try to express what we realize, so that we may not make mistakes in our expressions. Religion also deals with Truth, and we must not forget that Truth is one. By knowing that Truth, one attains to freedom as Jesus the Christ said: 'Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free'. That is the only way of attaining freedom.

Vedānta philosophy can be developed into dualistic, qualified nondualistic, and absolutely nondualistic systems. So those who believe in a personal God, are not discouraged by Vedānta philosophers. They say it (dualism) is one of the stages, in the process of spiritual evolution. There is growth in spirituality and that growth is admitted in Vedānta philosophy.

A child, in the spiritual life, cannot understand the highest ideal of nondualism. He will have to go through different stages. First he will think of God, as extracosmic. Then he will gradually come into a conception of God who is immanent and resident in nature or intracosmic. And when he can rise a little higher, he will realize that God is absolute Being, the Reality, the Soul of all souls.

There has never been religious persecution in India, on account of the belief in any certain doctrine. The Hindus would not molest anyone, on account of his belief, nor persecute him, because he does not believe as they do. They accept all these different systems and creeds as different paths that lead to the same goal.

As one coat cannot fit all bodies, each one will have a coat which fits his or her body. If I go to the market and say: 'Now my friend, I have a coat and you will have to put it on, and if it does not fit, you will have to go without', then I must be a fool. So Vedānta philosophy recognizes that each individual must have his own ideals and beliefs, but all these ideals and beliefs have one goal and that goal is the attainment of Godconsciousness, of perfection or freedom or emancipation of the soul. Therefore the Vedānta philosopher never persecutes.

Thousands of Mohammedans came to India and persecuted the Hindus by holding the sword in one hand and the *Korān* in the other, just as the early Christians did, by holding a gun in one hand and the Bible in the other. But still the Hindus did not take revenge upon them. They said they (Mohammedans and Christians) were working out their own salvation in that way. Of course they resisted but nonresistance is the ideal. Who can do it? Not the man who is struggling for bread and butter, or for name and fame and who is the slave of ambition, but he who has risen above all these things, can do it.

Vedānta philosophy teaches that all these different religions are like so many roads, which lead to the same goal, as there are many roads by which you can come to San Francisco. One can come from the north, another

from the south, and so forth. So we may attain to that state, that highest ideal of life, by different paths, and all the different paths are but methods to the attainment of Godconsciousness.

Each method is called a *yoga*. There is one, *rāja yoga*, the method of concentration and meditation, one *bhakti yoga*, the method of devotion and worship, one *jñāna yoga*, of discrimination and knowledge, and there is *karma yoga*, the method of work.

By doing work in a right way, by understanding the secret of work, we can attain to that goal very easily. The secret of work lies in working for work's sake, without thinking of results. Those who have read the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which has been translated by many of the Oriental scholars, under different names, such as Sir Edwin Arnold's *Song Celestial*, will understand what I mean by the secret of work. The *Gītā* states: 'To work you have the right, but not to the fruits thereof.'⁵

It is a very deep problem, but I cannot dwell long on it tonight, as our time will not permit us to discuss deeply. By making all our works as worship, we can make our life much better than it is at present. And that way one can attain to the goal by the method for which he is best fitted.

One, who is of a meditative nature, should practice concentration and meditation. Concentration and meditation upon what? Upon that Spirit, that divine Nature, which is dwelling in us. We must try to make our minds introspective, and think of what is going on within. We are constantly trying to know things outside of us and we neglect that which is nearest and dearest to us, and that which is within us.

Therefore Vedānta philosophy says: 'If you wish to know Truth, do not seek it outside. Search within, there alone you will find Truth'. It has been expressed beautifully by one of the Vedic sages, who is known as a seer of

5. *Karmanyevādhikāraste mā phalesu kadācana.*

—Bhagavat Gītā, II.47.

Truth: 'That eternal Being, that absolute Truth, is smaller than the smallest, is larger than the largest. It dwells in each atom as well as in the largest solar system. It dwells in the cave of our hearts. Whoever realizes it in the cave of his heart, obtains unbounded peace and eternal happiness, in this life'.⁶

6. *Anoraniyān mahato mahiyān
 ātmasya jantornihitam guhāyām.
 Tamakṛatuh pashyati vitashoko
 dhātu-prasādān mahimānamātmanh*

—Katha-Upanishad, II, 20.

CHAPTER TWO

The Supreme Lord says:— "The Votaries of the gods or angels go to the gods; to the ancestors go the ancestor-worshippers. The spirit-worshippers go to the spirits; but those who are devoted to Me attain to Me and reach perfection." — *Bhagavad Gita, Ch.ix., 25.*

SPIRITUALISM AND VEDANTA

MODERN spiritualism claims to have a supernatural origin, like all other great religions of the world which have been founded upon supernatural revelations. It has played its most important part in toning down the dogmas of Christian theology, in reforming the religious beliefs of the vast majority of the American people, and in starting fresh inquiries and investigations in the realm beyond the grave.

Within the last fifty years modern spiritualism has given wonderful demonstrations regarding the existence of disembodied spirits who continue to live even after the dissolution of their gross material forms, and has brought comfort and consolation to the hearts of many people who were suffering from the evil effects of scepticism and unbelief concerning a future life, caused by the dry theories of the atheistic, agnostic, and materialistic thinkers of the past century.

Through the help of modern spiritualism many of the educated and uneducated people of this country have now arrived at the conviction that there is such a thing as the human soul, a conscious entity which continues to exist after the death of the physical body. Modern spiritualism has taught that the souls of the dead are not destined to suffer eternally, but that they are comfortably situated, and that they do not forget their earthly friends and relatives, but on the contrary, like guardian angels, they watch over their beloved ones and are always anxious to help them and protect them from the dangers and misfortunes that surround their earthly lives. Modern spiritualism has taken away the horror of the postmortem condition of life, and has enabled human minds to look upon death as the threshold of that wonderland, the inhabitants of which enjoy new lives, new experiences, renewed pleasures and happiness. Thus, having established a belief in the life after death modern spiritualism has claimed to lay the foundation of a religion under the direction of those spirits who have control over the mediums, or of those wise spirits who visit the spiritualistic seances, whether private or professional, with a desire to enlighten the minds of the sitters by imparting the knowledge of supernatural things.

The attempts of modern spiritualism to thus establish a religion upon the experiences gathered through the communications of departed spirits remind us of those ancient times when the primitive races were groping in the darkness of ignorance, when their minds were struggling hard to see a ray of light in that thick mist which veiled the realm beyond the threshold of death. In fact, the study of modern spiritualism leads us back to that age when the religion of the primitive tribes consisted in keeping up the memory of their dead relatives and friends; when after seeing ghost-like apparitions of the deceased they came to believe that their ancestors were alive even when their bodies were mouldering in the grave. It also takes us back to that age when the principal form of worship was to please the departed spirits by doing such acts as they had liked most during their earthly career. This kind of ancestor-worship was the ancient form of spiritualism, and many scholars of modern times maintain that it was the beginning of all religions that are supposed to have a supernatural origin.

Ancestor-worship of course, as we all know, means a belief in the spirits of departed ancestors and in the supernatural powers which they possess, as well as our constant remembrance of them and our services in their memory, either by following their directions, or by seeking to rouse their sympathy and kindly feelings that they may help us during the distresses and misfortunes of our earthly lives. This ancestor-worship is to be found in almost all religions. After studying the ancient religions of different countries we find clear traces of this old form of spiritualism among the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Chinese, Parsees, Hindus, and other races inhabiting other parts of the world.

The ancient Egyptians, like the modern spiritualists, believed in departed spirits. Their idea was that within the physical body of man there was a soul having the shape of the gross body in every respect, with similar hands, feet, and other limbs. It was like the double or the counterpart of the physical man. When the physical man died, his counterpart, or the double, went out of the body and lived. The life of the double, according to the Egyptian belief, depended upon the condition of the material body, that is, so long as the gross form remained intact, the form of the double would remain perfect, but if any part of the dead body was mutilated or injured, then the similar part of the double would also be injured or destroyed. It was for this reason that they cared so much to preserve the dead bodies by making mummies and building pyramids. This belief was the fundamental principle of the spiritualism and ancestor-worship of the ancient Egyptians.

The Babylonians and Chaldeans also believed in departed spirits, but not exactly in the same manner as the Egyptians. They believed in the wandering shade of the dead, which was called "Ekimmu," that is, a spectre. It was like the shape of the physical man with similar form; but they thought that it would meet with great misfortunes if the dead body were not buried with proper ceremonies, so they observed a great many ceremonies in order to make the departed souls free from all misfortunes. The Babylonians believed that the souls of those dead bodies which were not buried with proper ceremonies could not enter the house of the dead, called "Arallu," that is, the underground abode of the dead. It was like the Sheol of the Hebrews; therefore, the Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians took special care in burying the dead. The embalming of the dead body, the building of monuments and tombstones, the decorating of them with flowers, wreaths, flags, and other grave offerings, which are practiced to-day by the Christian nations in Europe and America, are but the remnants of the ancestor-worship of the ancient Babylonians and Chaldeans. These customs have been handed down to us, and we now blindly follow them without knowing their original meaning.

In the same manner it can be shown that the religion of the ancient Chinese was purely ancestor-worship. The Chinese have always believed in the spirits of their departed ancestors and relatives. They invoke them, seeking their help in time of need, and pray to them for welfare and prosperity. Even to-day the departed ancestors in China are honoured with titles and praises for the meritorious acts performed by their descendants.

The ancient Parsees believed in the spirits of their dead forefathers and called them "Fravashis," or Fathers. According to their belief, the spirits of the righteous were raised to the rank of angels, archangels, and gods. The Parsees used to invoke them, praise them, pray to them, and ask help and blessings of them; they used to offer them food and other offerings in memory of the "Fravashis," or Fathers. Thus we see that ancestor-worship, or the ancient form of spiritualism, gave foundation to the religion of the Parsees as well as of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Chinese.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Mahometanism traces of ancestor-worship have been discovered by modern scholars and the higher critics of the Scriptures. In the 28th chapter of I Samuel in the Old Testament we read that Saul went to consult with the witch of Endor, who had familiar spirits. At the request of Saul the witch invoked the spirit of Samuel, who

appeared and gave him good counsels. The witches and wizards of the Old Testament were nothing more than the mediums of modern spiritualism. If the spiritualistic mediums of the present day had lived about four centuries ago, they would have been condemned by the Church as witches, and perhaps would have been hanged or burned at the stake.

The Hebrew word "Elohim," which has often been translated as God in the English Bible, was applied also to disembodied spirits. It is said that the witch of Endor saw Elohim ascending out of the earth; here "Elohim" was used in the sense of disembodied spirit of the dead. It was a kind of materialization of the departed spirits such as is to be seen in séances to-day. Do we not find a clear trace of ancestor-worship in Judaism when we read: "And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did obeisance." (I Samuel, Chap. XXVIII, verse 14.)

The saint-worship among the Roman Catholics is another form of ancestor-worship, or a remnant of ancient spiritualism. If we go to Rome or to any other part of Italy, we see the statues of canonized saints over their tombs, which are decorated with flowers and lighted candles, and the spirits of those saints are invoked with prayers and offerings. In fact, the beginning of the altars of churches and temples can be traced back to the graves of ancestors who lived righteous lives. The offerings and sacrifices in the name of God likewise originated in the belief that the departed ancestors had hunger and thirst just as they had when they were in flesh and blood. That which was at first the food and drink for the dead developed into the form of sacrifices. The Holy Communion, the offering of thanks, and the Eucharist of the Christians are only the relics of the ceremonies connected with the ancestor-worship or spirit-worship of the primitive people. Similar ceremonies still prevail among heathen races who have never heard of Christ or of his crucifixion. They were the spontaneous expressions of human minds which revered and honored the memory of their departed ancestors. The chants and praises which were used by primitive people to describe the virtues and the heroic qualities and deeds of their dead ancestors have gradually taken the forms of hymns of praise which are sung in churches and temples. Both Christ and Mahomet believed in departed spirits, saw angels ascending and descending over their heads, and received revelations through those who were but the spirits of the righteous.

In India from very ancient times the belief in departed spirits has played an important part in shaping the religious ideals of the Hindus.

This belief found expression in the oldest scriptural writings of the Vedic period. As early as the time of the Rig Veda, which goes back at least five thousand years before the birth of Christ, this idea was very common, and there we read many hymns with invocations addressed to the "Pitris," or departed Fathers. They were invoked, praised, and invited to accept the offerings made to them at the time of the Shrâddha. The Sanskrit word "Shrâddha" means anything done in the memory of departed ancestors. It includes prayers, praises, and offerings. One of the daily duties of Hindu householders is to spend a few minutes in thinking of their departed ancestors, and in doing some good works in their name. They will feed the poor and hungry, or give clothes to the needy, or make pilgrimages in the name of their dead relatives. The Hindu belief is that the fruits of such good works, when performed in the name of the departed spirits, will go to them and help them in their onward progress. All virtuous deeds performed by the relatives and friends of the departed ones in the name of their ancestors will surely bring good results to them.

According to the religion of the Vedanta, the souls of ordinary mortals remain "earth-bound" for some time after their death, and expect help from their relatives and friends who are left behind. Good thoughts and good deeds of the living help the departed spirits in obtaining release from the earth-bound condition, and thus they are enabled to rise higher and enter into the realm of the Pitris, Manes, or Fathers, in order to reap the fruits of the virtuous deeds done either by themselves or performed for them or in their name by their descendants, friends, and relatives.

The realm of the ancestors is called "Pitri Loka," where the departed spirits of the ancestors enjoy heavenly life and celestial pleasures. This realm is ruled by the first of the mortals who through good works raised himself to that state of consciousness. He is called in Sanskrit "Yama." Those who have read Sir Edwin Arnold's "Secret of Death" are familiar with the word. Yama, the Ruler of the realm of the Pitris, Manes, or Fathers, bestows all comforts and happiness according to the deserts of those who reach that plane of existence. The realm of the Fathers, or ancestors, corresponds to the heaven of the modern spiritualists. To go there is the highest ideal of ancient ancestor-worship as also of modern spiritualism. Spiritualism, whether ancient or modern, cannot describe any stage beyond the realm of the Fathers. The religion which the modern spiritualists preach and claim as the true religion does not take us further than this belief that we shall meet our departed ancestors, friends, and relatives, rejoice in their company after death, and enjoy all the pleasures

of life. The same ideal has been maintained by the ancestor-worshippers of all countries. The heaven of the ancestor-worshippers of ancient times is the heaven of the modern spiritualists. It is the realm of the Fathers. Many people may doubt its existence, but there is no reason for such doubts. Spiritualism leads human minds only a step beyond the grave in the world of phenomena and opens the way to the belief in this realm of departed spirits. Where the ideal of ancestor-worship or the heaven of modern spiritualism ends, there is the beginning of the higher religion of Vedanta, which points out the path that directs the individual souls to the Eternal Truth which is beyond all phenomena, beyond heaven, above the realm of the Fathers, and even far beyond the reach of the angels or bright spirits or gods.

After ages of investigations into the nature of the life that one can possibly lead in the "Pitri Loka," the Vedantic Sages and Seers of Truth have discovered that the heaven of the Fathers is not the highest abode of Eternal Truth, that it is phenomenal and subject to the laws which govern the phenomenal universe; that the inhabitants thereof are bound by the law of Karma, that is, by the laws of cause and effect and of action and reaction, and that their stay on that plane is temporary, although it may last for thousands of years. The Vedantic Seers of Truth say that the ancestors, or Fathers, do not know the highest Truth, or the absolute reality of the universe, and being bound by desires, they cannot reach the plane of Divinity; consequently they cannot teach the Divine truths which they do not know themselves.

These ancient seers of Absolute Truth, having realized through their own experience that the inhabitants of the spirit world, or the heaven of the ancestors, or the realm of the Pitris, do not and cannot know the highest Truth on the plane of Divinity, and that, therefore, they cannot teach others, have warned their disciples, followers, and seekers after truth in general not to waste their time and energy in seeking spiritual help from those departed spirits who have no knowledge of truths that exist beyond the world of psychic phenomena, and who do not possess the power of helping any seeker after Divine realization.

Disregarding such wise warnings, the American spiritualists of modern times have been spending their time and energy and wasting their money in the vain hope of gaining the favor of those departed spirits, of learning the mysteries of life and death from them, and of solving the problems which trouble most human minds. Modern spiritualists claim to establish

the foundation of a true religion upon the imperfect knowledge derived from the communications of the foolish, deceitful, idiotic, and ignorant earth-bound spirits who control the mediums and pretend to know everything regarding the realms beyond death. The students of Vedanta often wonder how sensible men and women can sit in public séances night after night and listen with great admiration and rapturous attention to the senseless prattle of ignorant spirits who are supposed to control the weak minds of the mediums.

Having spent some time with the mediums of all kinds that exist in America, I wish to say a few words regarding my experience. I have been invited by the spiritualists to speak for them, and to attend their seances. I have accepted their invitations with great pleasure in order to make some investigations for my own satisfaction. I have seen many materialized spirits and have spoken with them. I have had long conversations with some who spoke through tin trumpets, and have asked them many questions; but I have not found a single spirit in any séance, nor a single medium, who could answer my questions satisfactorily. I have asked them about the life after death, the origin of the soul, the true nature of the soul, its relation to the Universal Spirit, etc.; such questions, however, have never been answered by them; on the contrary, on many occasions they have confessed their ignorance, and have said: "We do not know; you know better than we can tell you." Some spirits have often referred to me for my approval of their answers to the questions which they were asked by other sitters. A few years ago I was amused to hear from the spirit-control of a materializing medium in a public séance: "Oh, here is a thinking-box; what can we say before him?" This exclamation came from an American Indian spirit. I was sitting next to the husband of the medium, and, as he was a friend of mine, I asked him the meaning of such a remark. He said, "She refers to you." I inquired, "Why?" He replied, "She thinks you are very wise, and she cannot show her power." And I am sorry to say that the séance was not successful that evening.

On another occasion I had a long talk with a spirit, and asked her many questions regarding the mode of living in the spirit world, and her answers to my questions were perfectly idiotic. The spirit said she went to schools and studied books. I asked, "What books do you read? Can you mention the name of any book you read?" "No," she said, "I do not know the names."

Sometimes, however, I have noticed that telepathically my own thoughts, my own ideas and very expressions were reproduced as perfectly as if I were answering my own questions. I was also pleased to hear the remarks which the spiritualistic mediums made after hearing my discourse on "Reincarnation." Some of them congratulated me, and said: "My spirit-guides have taught me exactly what you have explained." But other mediums did not like the idea of reincarnation at all, because they had not learned it from their spirit-controls.

Supposing all the phenomena of spiritism to be true and genuine, what have the spiritualists gained by these communications, outside of the satisfaction of their idle curiosity? Have they learned any of the higher truths? Have they understood any of the laws that govern the spiritual nature of man? Have they known why human beings come to this earth, and why they go away suddenly? I have asked many of the mediums, as well as their spirit-guides, and have found that they do not know anything regarding the origin of the soul. Their answers are always based upon the dogmas of Christian theology which they learned in their childhood in Sunday-schools. They say: "God creates the soul at the time of birth, and the soul continues to exist forever." If one asks, "How do you know that the soul did not exist before the birth of the body?" they do not answer.

Although many of the spirit manifestations and spirit communications have been exposed as fraudulent, and many of them can be explained by telepathy and thought-transference, still there are some genuine phenomena which cannot be explained by any other theory than that of the communication of disembodied spirits. On many occasions the audience is fooled by the spirits, some of whom are neither wise nor truthful. In some cases they take the appearance of some other spirit and deceive the sitters. The poor, innocent mediums may not know that such tricks are played upon them by their dishonest spiritguides; they are not to be held responsible for the fraud in many cases; the spirits are to be blamed. Therefore, how can we expect to learn the Absolute Truth from these spiritualists whose controls and guides themselves are ignorant, deceitful, and not wiser than the mediums. Vain is the hope of those spiritualists who expect to know the Absolute Truth through communications from earth-bound spirits. In India the seekers after the Absolute Truth do not go to any spiritualistic medium to obtain knowledge of the soul or of God, because they are taught from their childhood that the spirits who do communicate with ordinary mortals through mediums are ignorant and earth-bound. They need our help more than they can help us in any way.

These seekers after truth do not seek wisdom from the Fathers or departed ancestors, because they know that the inhabitants of the spirit world, or heaven, or "Pitri Loka," the realm of the Fathers, are not perfect; but that they go there, being bound by desires, to enjoy the fruits of their good works for some time, and at the expiration of that period are forced to come down from that plane to this world; that eventually they are bound to reincarnate as human beings in order to fulfil the other human desires which are latent in them, and to reap such results of works as are to be obtained on the human plane alone. No individual remaining on the plane of human desires can escape this wheel of birth and rebirth which covers all the stages between the highest heaven on one side and the earthly existence on the other. So long as desires remain in us, we are bound to go through changeful conditions and existences and meet such environments as are subject to change. Those who enter into the heaven of modern spiritualists are similarly subject to the laws of Karma or of cause and sequence and of action and reaction. Being bound by that law, they must remain there until they have reaped the results of their good deeds and good thoughts. They will then come down to this earth and will be reincarnated again as human beings in order to satisfy their human desires and human tendencies on the human plane. Cycle after cycle the individual souls remanifest themselves on different planes of existence in accordance with their thoughts, desires, and works. They may go to the heaven of the Pitris, or ancestors, or any other higher realm of the spirits.

Having understood this grand law of Karma, the Vedanta philosophers and the seekers after Absolute Truth in India searched for that subtle path by which the individual soul can escape the wheel of rebirth in this world, and transcend all laws and all the stages of phenomenal universe, from the heaven of the spiritualists and ancestor-worshippers up to the highest realm of the Devas or gods. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord says: "Even the inhabitants of the highest heavens are subject to the laws of rebirth and reincarnation. He alone is free from birth and rebirth and transcends all phenomena who, after knowing the Absolute Truth, after realizing the Supreme Spirit, becomes one with the Divinity."

The path which leads to the realization of the Absolute Truth, to the abode of the eternal and unchangeable Reality of the universe is different from that which leads to the realm of the Fathers, or the heaven of the spiritualists or of other dualistic religions. The entrance into the heaven of the ancestor-worshippers depends upon good and righteous works; it comes as the effect of good thoughts and good deeds. But the performance

of good works and good thoughts cannot produce as their result the attainment of God-consciousness, or that freedom or divine realization or Absolute Truth which is the highest ideal of all religions. No amount of good thoughts and good deeds can produce as their effect that which is beyond thoughts and mind, and consequently beyond the reach of their effects; because divine realization is not within the realm of psychic phenomena, nor can it be reached by mind, intellect, or sense powers. And the path which leads the individual soul to the realization of the Absolute is neither through righteous works, nor through the belief in departed spirits, nor by the worship of the spirit of ancestors, but through self-knowledge and the knowledge of the relation which the individual soul bears to the Universal Spirit. That path is called in Vedanta "Devayâna," the Divine path, or the path which leads to Divinity. The travellers on this path are those who are the most sincere and earnest seekers after the Absolute, who do not care for phenomena, whether physical or psychic, whose souls soar high above the clouds of desires that cover the light of the spiritual sun in ordinary mortals; but whose highest aim, loftiest aspiration, and deepest longing of the soul are to realize that unchangeable Truth which is beyond mind, beyond intellect, which the Fathers in the heavens of the spiritualists cannot reach. We must go there in order to find the correct solution of all problems concerning life and death. True religion does not depend upon any of the psychical phenomena that are to be seen in seances, nor is it based upon ancestor-worship; therefore the religion of the Vedanta tells us not to seek divine wisdom from departed spirits, not to waste our time and energy by going after them, because the result will not be successful. The spiritualists who seek the highest wisdom from communications with departed spirits are deluded; they do not know the limitations of those earth-bound souls.

Such earth-bound souls may take the form of a great wise man or a sage and appear in a seance and pretend to give the highest truths, but sensible persons will easily find out how deceitful some of them are. We must be very careful in dealing with the spirits. I have seen people who, after investigating spiritualism and seeing all these phenomena, have lost all faith and have become atheistic in their ideas. The modern spiritualists are like babies in this line of thought. The seekers after truth in India have searched and gained experience for thousands of years in studying the characters of the earth-bound as also of the higher spirits. The Hindus do not allow anyone to become mediumistic; they say that those who go into that condition are committing a great psychological crime, by making their own minds and bodies, which they have gotten for their own

development, subject to the influences of other spirits for the fulfilment of their desires.

We know that mediums are more or less moral and physical wrecks in the end. If spiritualism can enlighten the minds of people as they claim, why do we see that many of these mediums are ignorant and idiotic? They do not understand the moral and spiritual laws that govern our souls. They have lost the power of self-control; they cannot control the trance-like condition when their animation is suspended and their mind, brain and the whole body are at the mercy of another power outside of themselves.

The will power of the mediums is weak; their vital energy, their life force and their intellectual powers are used by other spirits which have control over them. Once I asked a good materializing medium, how she felt after coming out of the mediumistic condition? She replied: "I feel as though there were nothing in me, as if all vitality and life had been taken out of me, all empty inside. I cannot think or do anything for some time." Is not this a pitiable condition? It is for this reason that in India the Hindus do not encourage anyone to become a medium. On the contrary, if they find a person going into mediumistic condition, they make strong efforts to bring him out of it. These earth-bound souls who are trying to get possession of weak-minded mortals are delighted to find anyone who seeks their help.

The genuine phenomena of spiritism may do some good in the way of satisfying the curiosity of certain people, or of bringing the assurance that there is a life after death; they may foretell some petty, trivial events in connection with our business or daily life, but they cannot bring to us the highest wisdom and happiness which come to the soul through Divine Communion. These spirits are not angels, as the spiritualists claim, but they are in reality earth-bound spirits. Modern spiritualism may encourage the hope of meeting the departed spirits of our friends and relatives, and may bring consolation in the minds of those that doubt their existence, but it cannot give us the realization of the Absolute Truth or the attainment of God-consciousness; it cannot lift us above the realm of the Fathers or the ancestors who are dwelling in the "Pitri Loka." The aim of the religion of the Vedanta, on the contrary, is to make the individual soul realize its own true nature, to bring its reunion with the Universal Spirit and to transform it into the Divine Being, which transcends all limitations of time and space, all the laws which bind us to this earthly plane. The aim of

the religion of the Vedanta is to make us realize the Eternal Truth in this life, and be perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect.

The attainment of God-consciousness is the highest ideal of Vedanta. It shows the way by which we can reach the ultimate goal of all religions, manifest divinity in the actions of our daily life, and becoming free from selfishness and independent of physical and mental conditions, how we may live as a living God. For this reason, it is said in Vedanta: "You may read the scriptures or repeat scriptural passages day after day; you may offer sacrifices, prayers and invocations to the spirits or angels for help, or worship the spirits of departed ancestors for wisdom and knowledge; but so long as you do not realize the true nature of your Self, so long as you do not feel that reunion of the individual soul with the Universal Spirit, you shall not attain to spiritual freedom and perfection."

