

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS



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## **ABOUT THIS EDITION**

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## Chapter 1

# THE AWAKENING OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

A dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions arises by a comparison and contrast with an ideal which is supposed to promise full satisfaction. This principle, this finding, may be regarded as the origin of what we may call the religious consciousness.

We have to draw a distinction between religion and religious consciousness. To give a popular, homely example, electricity is a common operative force which can heat, which can freeze, which can cause motion and perform many functions. The variegated differences in these technological operations do not make electricity itself a multiplicity in its constitution. The electric power is a compact, integrated operation which can act in many ways, according to the medium through which it is made to express itself. So is the case with religion and what I would like to call the religious consciousness.

There are many religions in this world, with which everyone is familiar. The differences that we observe among these various religions arise due to factors such as the geographical, cultural, ethnic, and anthropological backgrounds of people in whose proximity these performances, gestures and activities called religion originate. Religions are conditioned forms of the religious consciousness, just as the technological activities of an electric current are conditioned operations of an otherwise single force called power.

We have to deeply consider what all this means, finally, in our life. What are we asking for? This question cannot be fully answered by any person. Ask anyone, "What do you want? What are you seeking? What is it that you need?" Though everyone knows that there is a want, a requirement, and a need, no one can explicitly describe the nature of this

requirement fully. No one can answer the question, "What do you want?"

It is surprising that while we know there are various needs felt in our life, we cannot name them. We just nod our heads a hundred times and cannot say anything about our actual requirements, because these requirements are like chameleons, changing their colours and contours under different conditions when we pass through the historical process of time. It is not that we want anything in particular always, but we need everything at one time or the other. We do not want anything particularly at all times, but we require everything under different conditions in the process of history.

This is the reason why we are unable to give a compact and concentrated answer to the question of what we want. However, if we go into the psychology of this phenomenon of a dissatisfaction with things in general, we will realise that it arises because of the perception of something beyond us and above us. It is only when we recognise the presence of something that is more than what we are that we are dissatisfied with the present condition of existence.

There is something above us, more than us, transcending us, and which has a larger dimension than our present personality. The presence of such a thing, vaguely felt in the mind, disturbs everyone's heart because the feelings describe this condition as a contrast between what is and what ought to be. The 'ought' is a disturbing factor. The 'must' or the 'must be' is always interfering with what is and what we are experiencing. How does this 'ought' arise in the consciousness of a person? Why should we say, "it ought to have been like this", "it must be like this", or "it should be like this"? Why do such ideas arise in our minds? Why are we not content with whatever is the present state of affairs?

There is a double personality in each individual. This is not known to any person. Each one of us belongs to two different realms of existence, as it were. On the one hand, we

seem to be inhabitants of this world, conditioned and constrained by the laws operating here, which compel us to behave and act in a particular prescribed manner. But anything that conditions is detested. No one likes to be restrained by any kind of regulation, because that regulating principle stands above the one who is restrained and conditioned. What we cannot tolerate is the presence of something above which conditions us, commands us, and obliges us. We do not like to be obliged. These words are painful. Why should I be obliged to anybody? That makes me a dependent of someone else. Dependence is death, virtually; independence is life. The Manu Smriti says, "Self-dependence is freedom and happiness, and dependence on somebody else is veritable hell." Under no circumstance would we like to subject ourselves to the commands of another, because that would not be freedom.

There is, for instance, legal freedom granted to us by the nation to which we belong. If we obey the laws of the constitution of a particular nation we are given a freedom, but it is a freedom conditioned by the obligation on the part of the individual to obey these restraints prescribed by the constitution—so there is, even in the granting of freedom, a conditioning factor. There is an 'if' or a 'whereas' that is behind even the freedom granted. We can walk on the road freely. Nobody objects to that, but there is an if and a condition even in using the road. There is even a rule how to walk on the road. We are free, but not entirely free. We are told, "It must be like this." We are told that we must speak only in this way. It does not mean that we can say anything to people. We have to do things in this manner only. We have the freedom to do, and to act; in that sense we are liberated individuals. But the freedom is conditioned by a law that it is possible only under these circumstances.

Every individual is free. Put a question to your own self: Is it possible for every person to be wholly free? For all people in the world to be entirely free would be like asking

for an infinitude in each person. The whole is the infinite. Would you like to be infinitely free or finitely free? You do not like the word 'finite'. You would like to be unbounded in your freedom. But the very existence of another person beside you limits your existence.

Thus, the freedom that we can have, and are supposed to be enjoying, is to the extent that we are able to give this freedom to another also; and the obligation on our part to give freedom to another limits our freedom, so we are not entirely free. The asking for perfect freedom is a chimera; it is a hobgoblin; it does not exist. Life looks wretched, if this is the state of affairs. We can never have real freedom. Politically, socially, in every manner, we are restrained, with the camouflage of a satisfaction that under these obligations we are free.

People have no time to think along these lines. We have to get on somehow. "*Chalta hai*," [so it goes], we say. We are actually dragging on our life every day, and not really living it. We are getting on, as they say. Getting on in life is somehow a kind of satisfaction. "I'm getting on." But we cannot really be happy with simply getting on. We should not be vegetating. Trees and plants also exist; they grow, they multiply. We do not want to live like that. We want a sensible, meaningful life. Here, another question arises: What is the meaning of "a sensible and meaningful life"? Are we now living a meaningless life? Here is the philosophical profundity and the in-depth secret of our personality coming up to the surface of our awareness, telling us that human beings are really wiseacres. Vainglorious, egoist consciousness prevails in their minds. Each one pats himself or herself on the back: "Things are getting on all right." But, it is not getting on all right.

When a pain is removed by a particular treatment, that treatment may cause another pain, for which we may require a second treatment. Philosophy is the capacity of a person to investigate into the deepest roots of nature and the in-depth

constitution of existence itself. The ultimate cause, which is the determining factor of all effects and phenomena in life, has to be probed into. Philosophy is the search for the ultimate causes of everything, not the tentative causes. Why does it rain? It has a cause. The heat of the Sun converts the sea water into vapour, and the wind blows in some particular direction, converting the vapour into water particles, and then due to ecological laws, rain falls. This is a tentative answer as to the cause of rainfall. By why should the Sun be so interested in vapourising the water of the ocean? Why should the wind cooperate in this work? Why should the water particles collide and create lightning and thunder? What is the meaning of all this? This requires a further probe into the causes behind these apparently clear causes.

There is a cause behind every cause. There is a concatenation of causal factors, one behind the other. We cannot even know who is the origin of our parentage. Who are your parents? So-and-so. Who are the parents of these people? Somebody. Who are their parents? Go on like that. Let us find out from where this heritage starts—who was the first parent, from whom the lineage began—until we reach our immediately visible parents, through whom we appear to have been born into this world. Even here there is failure. We cannot even know the origin of our parentage.

We cannot even know why our name is what it is. Who told us that our name is what it is? We cannot give a clear answer. "My name is this." But how do we know that? Here again, we are caught in a dilemma. Somebody in our childhood pumped some sound into our ears: "Your name is this, your name is this." The child goes on hearing this again and again, and accepts that the name is this. So, the name that we are associated with comes from an action that is outside ourselves; therefore, the name cannot be our intrinsic quality. Likewise are the difficulties in finding out the causes of things.

We generally wonder at the phenomena of nature. We can explain nothing. Why does the Sun rise in a particular direction? Why do the planets revolve around the Sun? What are the stars? How far away are they from us? What is the role that the Earth plays in this family of the revolving planets? Why does one planet not fall on another planet? Why does the Sun not fall on our head? We do not know. We cannot say. We do not speak about these things.

According to modern discoveries, everything is in a state of motion. It is not merely that the Earth is rotating on its axis and revolving around the Sun; all the planets are doing the same thing in this organisation called the Solar System, which in its totality is also supposed to be rushing forward, onward, in some direction, together with the Milky Way—in the direction of something which we cannot easily decipher.

There is some other pull causing this perpetual activity in the cosmos, in the astronomical universe. Some centre of gravity of the whole cosmos is compelling everything, right from the atom to the galaxies, to move in a particular manner. What is this compelling centre? People say it is a centre which is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere. Every point is a centre of the universe. It is not far away, above us. The centre of a circle is a little away from the periphery or the circumference, but this centre is not away from the circumference. Every point in the circumference is also a centre. If we touch anything, we are touching the centre of the universe. Philosophically, this centre is designated as the Atman, or the soul of things. The soul is not somewhere, because it is the centre. The soul is not only in the human being; there is a soul in everything. Even the atomic structure, which integrates itself into an organisation, requires a pulling, pivotal centre, call it by any name. We may consider it as a soul.

Our personality, our physical body, is constituted of little pieces of physiological cells, one different from the other. We seem to be like a house constructed out of many bricks, but

we do not feel that we are a house made with many bricks. We never feel that there are an infinite number of cells which constitute this totality of our individuality. The house does not know that its inner components are diversified items like bricks, cement, mortar, iron, etc.

If we can imagine that the house has a consciousness of its own, so is the case with our own selves. Why do we feel a unity and an integration in our personality, and never feel that we are made up of diversified elements? This is the centre which operates in every discreet particle, and obliges this so-called discreet particle to harmonise itself with the centre—which is everywhere, to repeat. Our soul does not sit somewhere, in some location within our body. It is an indescribable centripetal force that compels every organ and every cell to subject itself to its centre, so that the whole body is a centre only.

We are not made up of particles; we are made up of a totality of centres. As we cannot conceive a totality of centres because centres cannot be more than one, we are flabbergasted even by thinking that we are existing as a total, integrated human being. This is why we cannot understand what we are made of. There is a tremendous mystery operating in everything, even in a plant, a tree, a leaf, and in the formation of a fruit. Everything is a mystery.

It is said by historians of religion that early man wondered at creation. What is all this? Every day we see something. There is sunrise and sunset. I asked a little boy: "In the morning you see the Sun on this side, and in the evening it goes to that side and sinks somewhere. How does it suddenly come back to the east in the morning?" The boy naively replied, "When we are fast asleep, it must jump back to the east, so that without our knowledge, it finds itself in the east." This is a very nice answer.

The wonderment of creation arose in the initial stages of the very birth of human individuality. Philosophy is supposed to originate in wonder or in doubt. In Greece, for

instance, philosophy commenced with wonder. The wonder of creation evoked the minds of people into an investigation of the causes of these wonderful phenomena. There were so many Greek philosophers, and each one had something to say. All were right in their statements, but not entirely right. There was a gradual development of thought through the history of philosophy, yet it was not finally satisfying.

We may wonder at a thing and imagine that there must be a cause behind this wonderful phenomenon. The idea that there should be a cause behind every phenomenon is, again, some peculiar faculty ingrained in us. Why should there be a cause for anything? Cannot anything exist by itself? The mind will not permit this kind of thinking. Space, time, and cause is a threefold united activity ingrained in the mind itself, and it cannot free itself from the clutches of this threefold compelling factor. Everything must be somewhere, everything must be at some time, and everything must be caused by something else. This is how we think, generally. We cannot think in any other manner.

Why should we be able to think only in this way? Even those who went deep into these compelling psychological phenomena could not finally answer this question. They were satisfied by saying, "Our knowledge is limited to space, time, and cause." The people who declared that our consciousness is limited to these factors of space, time, and cause did not go further into an investigation as to how anyone came to know that we are limited by the presence of space, time, and causation. A limited thing cannot know that it is limited. We call a particular thing a circumference or a barricade because there is something outside it. Therefore, it is no good merely saying that we are limited entirely to the compelling factors of space, time, and cause.

Who says this? Here is a moot question. There is something in us which is beyond space, time, and causation, which tells us in its own secret voice that we could not know that we are limited to space, time, and cause unless we are

something more than space, time, and cause. This is the beginning of religion: the awe and the wonder that we feel at the explanation of anything in the world. Everything is awesome; everything frightens; everything compels us; everything dissatisfies.

These factors arising from the wonderment at perceptual phenomena created doubt: "How is it possible for a limited individual to know that the individuality is limited?" Here is a bottleneck before philosophers. Some tried to answer this with a fear that what they say may not be correct. Some had the courage to say that there are no such boundaries. The fact that there are boundaries cannot be gainsaid. We know that we are limited, but we also know that it is not possible to know that we are limited unless there is a call from an unlimited Being. This is the phenomenon of the religious consciousness. It is not religion as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc. It is the power behind the process of thinking itself, from the deepest recesses of human individuality.

As every person is time-bound, culture-bound, language-bound, tradition-bound, and bound in many other ways, this consciousness got cast into the mould of these limiting factors of geographic, ethnic, and linguistic conditions, and we have many religions in different parts of the world. We have a set of religions called Semitic religions, which look up to the skies, to the high heavens, for discovering the ultimate cause of creation—a Transcendent Being. In the Eastern religions there is a mitigating factor of the discovery that a totally Transcendent Being cannot touch this world; therefore, the world can have no relationship with that Transcendent Being. That which is disconnected above us cannot connect us with it. Therefore, the high aspirations for God, and the attainment of ultimate perfection, if God is transcendent, will be unreachable because of the dichotomy between God's location and the location of the world in which we are.

Thus, Eastern religions discovered this lacuna in holding on to mere transcendence, and declared that this Transcendent Being should also be immanent. It should be intrinsically present, and not merely extra-cosmically operative. This is the reason why we have many religions in this world. Knowing not the reason why there is such multiplicity of religions, to stick to the dogma of a particular fundamentalist attitude is foolhardy. That tragic condition should be obviated, if humanity is to survive. There ought to be a thing called human brotherhood and a cosmical society.

People go on saying they are Hindu, Christian, etc. That is a different thing altogether from the common denominator present in everyone at the back of these externalised forms—which is the aspiration of the soul to reach ultimate perfection. The longing of the finite for the Infinite is the religious consciousness. It may be through Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism; it does not matter. We can eat our meal on a plate or a leaf on the ground, or even from our hands, but a meal is a meal, nevertheless. So, to emphasise too much the exterior factors of religion, and become dogmatists and engage in warfare in the name of religion, is only to concede that the barbaric instinct in the human being has not subsided completely. Man is still a wolf, as some political philosophers tell us. That wolf is still present in the camouflage of a cultured human being.

Religious consciousness is the divine element operating in us. It is not a social phenomenon. It is not something that we are asked to do by human society or the government. It is an inner compulsion, a morality and ethics which is based on God's integral existence. It is a great marvel. Our existence is a marvel by itself. It is not merely that the world is a marvel; we ourselves are a marvel, as an inseparable part of this total marvel.

Every one of us is a wonder; every one of us has a tremendous meaning and glory imbedded in the deepest roots of our being. We are heirs apparent to the Kingdom of

God, to put it properly. We are bound to achieve it, because our finitude cannot stand apart from the Infinite, to which it is organically related. Here is the beginning. Here is the picture and the design pattern of what I designated as the religious consciousness, about which I will speak to you further.

## Chapter 2

### THE DESCENT THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS CREATIONISM AND BIG BANG VS. THE ASCENT THEORY OF DARWINIAN EVOLUTION

In continuation of what I said previously, we shall go into further detail of the development of religious consciousness through the process of history. Every religion and every scripture proclaims that human beings have come from God. No religion accepts the Darwinian theory of the ascent of man from lower species. We have to consider why there is such a contradiction of opinions. Who is right, and who is wrong? Are we descending, or are we ascending? What is actually happening?

The method of deducing particulars from accepted universal propositions is called the deductive method. Religions accept that there is God. They need not have to prove the existence of God. If the existence of God itself was a question of argument, there would be no religion in the world. It is an indubitable hypothesis, a proposition taken for granted, once and for all times. Various religions have their own theories of the coming down of the human being from God Almighty. To take the example of the well-known Indian religions, the Supreme Being is described as having contemplated the potentials of a future creation. In the Rig Veda there is a *sukta*, or a great hymn, called the Nasadiya Sukta. There was a potential, which looked like a universal darkness. This ubiquitous, all-pervading dark potential is supposed to be the concentrated will of God proposing to outline in His own mind the details of the creation yet to be.

This great declaration in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Rig Veda may be compared with the Big Bang theory of modern physicists. There was one indescribable point, the nucleus of the would-be expanding universe. That nucleus was not in space and not in time, because space and time had not yet been created. It was a *bindu*, as the Tantra Sastra tells us. It is a point, but it is not a geometrical point which requires a

space in order to locate itself. This is a point which is neither logically conceivable nor geometrically describable; that is why philosophers tell us in an enigmatic manner that it is a centre which is everywhere, with circumference nowhere. It is as if the centre of this circle has become the circumference itself, and the whole circle is the centre only. Geometrically, from the Euclidian point of view, we cannot imagine such a circle. How can the periphery, the circumference, also be the centre? Therefore, this centre, which is the pre-Big Bang condition, is as indescribable and enigmatic as the dark potential of the would-be creative process presented before us by the Nasadiya Sukta.

Surprising indeed is what comes out of this proposition. There was no space and time before the Big Bang took place; therefore, there was no distance of one thing from another. We have come from a distanceless point, which means to say that even now, at this moment, when we appear to be far, far away—inconceivable light years of distance from that point—we are still sitting at that point only. We will be flabbergasted to think like this. Even at this moment, we are sitting at the very same point where we were before the Big Bang took place. If we go deep into this mystery, we will realise that creation is an illusion. Otherwise, how after millions of years of the developmental process of spatial expansion and incredible distance can we still be at the same point where we started? That means creation has not taken place. Even modern physics can confirm this, to its own chagrin, though creation is not its field of enquiry.

The first verse of the Manu Smriti says that there was a darkness prevailing everywhere. The pre-Big Bang condition was darkness, we may say, because there was no sunlight at that time. Solar light manifested itself as a concentration of energy subsequent to the occurrence of the Big Bang, whereas prior to the occurrence of the Big Bang, there was an all-pervading, equally distributed energy, without any excess of concentration anywhere. When energy is equally

distributed, it is all darkness. There is no light. If the heat and light of all the stars in all the solar systems everywhere become distributed throughout the cosmos, there will be no light.

Hence, there is a point in saying that before creation it was darkness, but it was darkness due to the excess of light. It was not really darkness. The light potential was so much that it could manifest itself as millions of shining suns and galaxies. We are accustomed to perceivable light which can be visible to the eyes. If the eyes cannot catch a particular vibration which is called light waves, we say there is no light. Even if there is light, the eyes cannot catch that frequency if it is too high.

Bhagavan Sri Krishna showed the Vishvarupa several times. The splash of light was such that hundreds and thousands of suns were rising, as it were, blinding the eyes of all people, and they saw darkness everywhere. Why go so far? Gaze at the Sun with open eyes for a second. We should not do this always, of course. I am just mentioning this as an illustration. If we look at the Sun, its brilliance impinges on the retina of the eyes; then afterwards, when we look anywhere, we see only pitch dark or dark spots. We will not see the light of the Sun; we will see darkness. Even if we gaze at the Sun for some time, the force of the energy waves impinging on our eyes will be so intense that the Sun may look dark. This means that our idea of darkness and light is sensorially oriented. Even if we behold the light of God, we will consider it to be pitch darkness.

This is a small comparison between the modern physical theory of the Big Bang and the indescribable, incredible consequences that follow from this wonderful discovery where the subsequent spatial expansion has not in any way contradicted the abolition of this distance which was prior to the Big Bang, making out thereby that we have never been born at all. We are still in the same place that we were before the Big Bang took place—which means that we are immortal.

Neither were we born, nor can we die, because that centre cannot be born. The expanded universe is an illusory, indescribable, enigmatic phenomena which no human being can conceive. No human being can conceive it, because human beings are involved in the very process of this incredible manifestation.

Scriptures in India also have this doctrine. Brahman the Absolute condensed Itself into the point of a universal will of potentiality to outline the process of the would-be creative universe. Brahman becomes Ishvara; Ishvara becomes Hiranyagarbha; Hiranyagarbha becomes Virat. This is what the Vedanta doctrine tells us.

How this great Virat manifests Himself is described in the Puranas, especially in the Third Skanda of the Srimad Bhagavata, which describes how Brahma created the world. This universal concrete manifestation known as the Virat divides itself, as it were, into a threefold appearance called *adhyatma*, *adhibhuta*, and *adhidaiva*—the universe of perception, the subjective perceiving centres, and the connecting link of divinity operating between the subjective side and the objective side. That is to say, if we are to see something outside, the outsideness of the thing that is to be perceived precludes our knowledge of there being such a thing at all. A thing that is totally outside us cannot be known by us. Therefore, on the one hand, in order to know anything, that thing must be outside us. Secondly, it should not be entirely outside us; there should be a connecting link. This connecting link is the Virat Himself, which links up the subjective side and the objective side.

According to the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana, Brahma concentrated himself in the form of creation. Brahma first created his sons, called the Kumaras: Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, Sanatkumara, and Sanatsujata. All mythology, all Puranas, and all scriptures describe processes of creation which we cannot fully understand. Brahma is supposed to have told the Kumaras, "Help me in further creation." These

Kumaras were *brahmanisthas*; they were united with the Supreme Being. They told Brahma, “We are not going to help you in creation. We are absorbed in the mighty Supreme Being.”

The Bhagavata Purana tells us that the Creator, Brahma, got annoyed. “My own sons are disobeying me.” His anger manifested itself as a dark spot between his eyebrows, but he could not cast that anger upon them because they were mighty children, centred in the Universal Absolute, so he held it. When we are raging with anger towards somebody who is stronger than us, we are unable to manifest it. It is like getting angry with an elephant. What is the use of being angry with it? We have to hold it in. But it cannot be held in; it has to come out. So Brahma released that anger outwardly, and a being sped out from it and roared. That roaring individual is called Rudra, who shouted, “Why did you bring me here? Give me work!” He was speaking like that because he was born of anger.

Brahma said, “Please create.” Then Rudra created demons, *bhutas*, demigods—all creatures which Brahma did not expect. So Brahma said, “Enough of this creation.” “Then give me a duty to perform!” Rudra spoke very violently because he was born of anger. Naturally, anything that is born of anger will behave in that manner.

Brahma said, “Please go to Kailash mountain and do meditation there. That is your duty now. Do not create anything.” Siva went, and even now he is meditating there. That chapter was over, but the creative process was not complete. Brahma failed with the Kumaras, and he also failed with Rudra. He then created nine Prajapatis—Daksha and others. Nine people, beginning with Pulastya and Vasishtha, and ending with Narada, were created. These nine Prajapatis, as they are called, are the progenitors of humanity. But they created celestials. Human beings were not created.

Then Brahma created the first man, just as we have it in the Bible that God created Adam, the first man, and Eve, the

first woman. Just as Adam and Eve were practically inseparable from the stuff out of which they were made, so is the story in the Srimad Bhagavata. A being was created as a diminished, concentrated form of Brahma himself. He was Manu, the progenitor of humanity. He was the first man, we may say, and his consort was Shatarupa. Manu and Shatarupa correspond to Adam and Eve, and through them came the entire creation of human beings. This is one description found in the Puranas and the epics of India, making note thereby that we have come from the higher levels of reality, and we have not come from animals, plants, and trees.

God is implanted in the heart of man. The human being is supposed to be the last creation. The first creation, of course, was Sanatkumara, etc; then came Rudra, then the Prajapatis, then all the gods in heaven—the angels, Indra, and others—then Manu and Shatarupa. Last was the human being. In the history of creation, human beings came last, not first.

Then, what about the Darwinian theory? Is it acceptable or not? He says something quite opposite. There is also a point in that theory. The scripture does not really contradict it, if it is properly understood.

In the Aitareya Upanishad, we have an answer to this question. The Supreme Being created space and time first. The vibrations set up in space and time condensed themselves into the potentials of the would-be five gross elements called space—*akasha* or sky, we may call it—then air, fire, water, and earth. These gross elements did not come out suddenly from the vibrations of space-time. Intermediary forces, called *tanmatras* in Sanskrit, known as the potentials of *sabda*, *sparsa*, *rupa*, *rasa*, and *gandha*—hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling—were there. They were potential electrical forces, as it were, if at all we can make that comparison, which concentrated themselves, hardened themselves into the physical elements of earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Up to this level, we may say it is God's creation.

Says Swami Vidyanaraya in his Panchadasi, "From the original conception of Ishvara, down to this lowest level of creation in the form of the earth plane, we should consider it as God's creation." Earth, water, fire, air, ether, etc., have not yet been created.

Now, the answer comes as to why Darwin said what he did. There is also some truth in what he said. Here, we have to revert to the Taittiriya Upanishad. From that Universal Atman, space emanated. Space gave birth to air; air gave birth to heat and fire; fire gave birth to water; water gave birth to earth. Earth produced vegetables, plants, herbs—edibles of the organic kingdom. These, when consumed by individuals, became the substance of their bodies. Our physical body is the outcome of the food we eat. Foodstuff, including the water that we drink and anything that we take inside, becomes the stuff of this body. Consciousness gets merged in this body consciousness. The Supreme Consciousness, which descended gradually through space, air, etc., until it condensed itself into earth consciousness, became body consciousness when it was individualised. Individualised earth consciousness is the same as isolated individual consciousness. We have a fraction of earth consciousness, elemental consciousness.

"We rise out of the elements, and perish into them when we die," says Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. This is a very great subject, which is discussed in the Brahma Sutras. We have arisen out of the elements. Now comes Darwin. From the lowest potential of physical elements, there emerged the potential of individualised life. It is not the cosmic life which the scriptures speak of; that is over with the manifestation of the earth. A complete oblivion of the universality of consciousness took place when God's creation ended with the earth element. With these principles of the five gross elements, the fourteen levels of creation manifested themselves: *bhurloka*, *bhuvraloka*, *svraloka*, *maharaloka*, *janaraloka*, *tapaloka*, and *satyaloka*. Fourteen

levels of creation are described in the Puranas, one above the other in their subtlety and degree of manifestation of reality.

But there was no individualisation at that time. When this cosmic creation, ending with earth consciousness, diversified itself into little individuals, it became inanimate matter and organic matter such as plants, trees, shrubs, herbs. By gradual evolution, life expanded itself into the capacity to perceive, understand, and react to external conditions. The peculiarity of individual life is the capacity to react to conditions prevailing outside. We succeed in living because we are able to properly react to the external conditions of nature, and thus maintain a harmony between our individual existence and the existence of nature outside. If there is no coordination between nature's activity and individual activity, the individual will perish. Right from the lowest creatures like crustaceans, fungi, etc., this instinct of survival continues. But what kind of survival? It is not survival as universal potential, but as isolated individuality.

The Aitareya Upanishad tells us that a catastrophe took place. Creation is a great joy when we consider that it is a systematic descent from the Almighty down to the earth level; but it is a terrible hell, actually, that broke when there was a further upside-down activity that took place after the earth level was created. The individuals are not merely vertical fractions of the Universal Existence, but topsy-turvy individuals. When we were isolated from the Cosmic Substance, we did not stand on our feet; we stood on our heads, with legs up. This is the reason why we perceive everything as topsy-turvy. The world that is prior to us, and has caused us, from which we have developed our individualities, looks like an object outside us, subsequent to our perceptual process. We feel that we are the determining factor of the perceiving process, and we decide the fate of the consequences of perception of an externalised world.

That the world is considered as external explains the tragedy that has taken place. We are external to the universe, to the created world. It is the world that considers us as objects of its own universal perception. It was prior; we were posterior. The world should be considered as the subject and the individual creatures should be considered as the objects, but the reverse process has taken place. We, in our isolated egotism of confirmed individuality, regard ourselves as the observers of nature, and the seers, controllers, and deciders of the fate of everything. Such is the height of egoism that has arisen in every little individual.

Every insect, every creature, wishes to maintain its individuality in the very condition in which it is. A frog would like to continue only as a frog; the desire to become an elephant will not arise in its mind. There is so much attachment to the particular form that consciousness enters into by tremendous pressure of self-assertion, which is called ego. Every tree has an ego of its own. One tree will not become another tree. They will eat each other with their anger and hunger.

From the material level of the earth plane, in a cosmical sense, the Universal split itself into individualities with a topsy-turvy perception—the right looking as left and the left looking as right—just as when we see our face in a mirror, the right looks left and the left looks right. And worse still, if we stand on the bank of the river and look at our reflection, we will find that our head, which is the highest, looks like the lowest. This is what has happened to us. Our head is the lowest, actually, though we think it is the highest. Our feet are planted on the earth, yet we cannot isolate ourselves from the earth plane. We cannot look at the world vertically. We look in an inverted manner, so that we appear to be the subjective side of perception; and the world, which is actually the Universal Subject, looks like an object.

This is the beginning of the earth potential in our own individuality gradually manifesting itself into self-

consciousness, into the living regions of biological existence, plants and trees; then, slowly it rises up to animals, and then we rise above the animal level to the human level. Here we are in agreement with Darwin, and it is not completely opposed to the story of creation because there is a double edge of presentation in the scriptures, especially in the Upanishads, as I mentioned. There is a descent from divinity and an ascent from the material source. First we come down, then we go up. The going up is the process described by Darwin. The coming down is the process described in the scriptures. Both are correct. This goes up gradually, gradually, gradually, until human nature, in its crude form, manifests itself.

We have the primitive man, as we call it—the crude perception. Primitive man has no tools or implements with him. His perception is intensely selfish. Physical survival is the only instinct that is prevalent there; physical existence, under any cost, should continue. There is no intellectual activity. It takes ages and ages of development in order that this crude individual self-assertion recognises that there are also other such creatures. In an intensive form of selfishness, that selfish individual would not even be conscious that there are other individuals external to it, so much is the self-centredness. It is not merely turning a blind eye; it is unconscious, totally.

In the Yoga Vasishtha, seven levels of ignorance are described. There is general darkness, worse darkness, greater darkness, greatest darkness, incredible darkness, and hell itself. These are all levels of darkness. But because this hard-boiled individual, crude that he is, comes from the highest divinity, there is also a promise of higher development. We rise to a kind of social consciousness: "There are people like me." In intensely selfish existence, social consciousness does not exist. Each one is for himself or herself, and the devil take the hindmost. Like animals in the forest, they are concerned only with themselves. The

stronger eats the weaker. Might is right. It is the law of the jungle, the law of the fish; the larger fish eats the smaller fish, and the lion eats the other animals. This law of the jungle prevails when the development from the earth plane into the selfishness of organic life and animal life takes place and no social consciousness arises.

There is a kind of social consciousness even among animals. Cows go with cows; elephants go with elephants; snakes go with snakes; lions live with lions. But still, it is not that they have any kind of compassionate consideration for each other. It is a biological instinct that is manifested even in these groups of animals. It is only in the higher life of the human level that social consciousness arises. Social consciousness is a highly developed form of individuality where each individual realises that total selfishness cannot work. An individual who totally isolates himself from everything outside cannot exist. The cooperation of other individuals is necessary in order to survive.

This was realised in a greater advancement in social evolution: "I require another in order that I may survive." Now, requiring another for the purpose of one's own survival is not any kind of unselfish gesture or a love that is extended. It is, again, a selfish utilisation of the next person for the sake of one's own survival. It is impossible for one to exist without the cooperation of the other. This expectation of cooperation from the other, and extending cooperation to the other from one's own side, is not an unselfish activity, though it looks like that, because it is a survival instinct that is asserting itself. Selfishness is at the core of even social cooperation.

But then, this will not abide for a long time. Freedom is not possible by this kind of egoistic consideration of social values. Even when hundreds of people are cooperating with us and seeing to it that we survive, we are not free persons, because our survival is dependent upon the cooperation of so many other people. We are dependent, nevertheless. The individual is a servant of all those people who are

responsible for his or her survival. Even a king is a servant; he is a slave, depending totally on his bodyguards, his army, and his police. By himself, he has no strength. The king is as much a slave as anybody else, considering the fact that he is totally dependent on others. Independently, intrinsically, he is as good as nothing. So, selfishness, individuality, continues still, even when we reach the position of an emperor.

But this inverted consciousness of human egoism and individuality goes further still, and realises that there is an expectation on the part of other people that is of a similar nature as the expectation present in one's own self. This is a more altruistic attitude of human nature. Here it is not a question of utilising others for one's own benefit, but a larger charitable feeling that what I expect for myself, others also expect. At this point, the principle of loving one's neighbour as one's own self arises. We can love our neighbour so that our neighbour may take care of us and protect us. That is not unselfish activity. But 'as myself' is the term. Why should we love our neighbour? There are two ways of loving our neighbour. One is because the neighbour is a useful person for our comforts; that is not unselfishness. But another way of loving our neighbour is because he is exactly like us. There is no difference of any kind in the substance, emotion and needs between ourselves and another; I am just like that person, and that person is just like me. Here, unselfishness arises. There is someone like me, and I am not the only one that has to exist.

The conceding of the value of the existence of other people, other things, is a higher form of unselfishness arising from the lower levels where others are just tools or means to an end. To utilise the world as a means to our own individual purposes would be to convert the world into an instrument of action. But to accept that the worth of existence in one's own self is inseparable from the worth of existence of other living creatures—other human beings, everything else—would be to gradually manifest the universal potential from

which we have descended gradually. Then, an unselfish society consciousness arises in the person. Usually, society consciousness is selfish, because no two people will cooperate with each other unless there is an ulterior motive behind it. But to realise that ulterior motive is not the reason for the cooperative activity of people, rather the reason is a universal principle operating among all individuals, is a higher development of consciousness.

Here, organic life, biological existence, exceeds its own limits and enters into a higher level of psychological existence. We are not brute animals, and not plants and trees. We are not animals; we are not cavemen; we are not selfish individuals. We are society-conscious, and are capable of recognising in the individuals of society the very same element that is present in everyone else. Thus, every human being becomes an end rather than a means. No human being can be utilised as a means to somebody else. You are as important as I am, and I am as important as you are. Neither of us is an instrument for another. Cooperative activity does not mean utilisation of one by the other. That is a poor concept of cooperation. It is the recognition of the end principle present in all beings. We are living in a kingdom of ends, not means.

Everything regards itself as very important. Nobody regards oneself as inferior. The idea of being inferior is abhorrent. Nobody likes to hear such a word. I am as important as anybody else. Especially in a democratic society, a tea shop owner considers himself to be a very important person, as important as someone with a Doctor of Literature, though there is a difference between their perceptions. The Doctor of Literature gives one vote; the shopkeeper also gives one vote. This is democracy of a peculiar type: "I am as valuable as anybody else." Well, however we may interpret this equality of people, the consciousness of equality is a very great advancement in the development of human psychology. It is not animal

psychology, not plant psychology; it is human psychology, which is a highly complicated and very deep subject. This is a result of the rise of human nature from lower levels, consequent upon the descent from God Himself. Hence, the deductive process of the coming down of particular individualities from the Universal is not in any way contradictory to the inductive level of the rise of the particular to the Universal by gradual evolution.

Therefore, the scriptures are right, and Darwin is also right. Both are correct, because they are speaking from two different points of view. Evolution and involution take place in a multitudinous variety of ways, with upward and downward currents. The movement of nature in the process of evolution is not a straight-line movement, as on a beaten track or a tarred road. It is a circular movement, where each one is everything at some particular time and in some particular context. The Yoga Vasishtha tells us that once upon a time we were Brahmas, Vishnus, Rudras, Sivas, and we can be Brahmas, Vishnus, Rudras once again. We can be anything. There is nothing that prevents us from being anything at any time, in any form whatsoever, because we have descended from That which is anything, everything, and all things. Though we have inverted ourselves in the process of topsy-turvy creation, it does not prevent us from being conscious of That from where we have come.

This return process is called *vama margā* in Tantric language, though people condemn that word, thinking it is the left-hand path. *Vama* does not necessarily mean 'left hand'. It also means 'return process'. The Tantric doctrine of the development of consciousness from the lowest level to the higher is a highly advanced technique which modern, impure minds cannot understand. There are some philosophers of modern times, such as Sri Aurobindo, who consider Tantra as superior to the Vedas and even to the Bhagavadgita, if properly understood. But it is the worst of things if we do not understand it, because Tantra does not

recognise impurity anywhere. There is no dirt or ugliness in any object. There are no ugly things, no dirty things, no impure things. They look like that because we have put them in the wrong context.

Cow dung is beautiful when it is manure in a field which grows rice and wheat, but it is very impure if it is thrown on our dining table. A rose plant in a field of rice plants is a weed, and we want to pluck it out. But a rice plant in a garden of rose plants is a weed, and we pluck it out. So, which is the weed, and which is the worthwhile plant? Which is beautiful? The beautiful and the ugly, pain and joy, all these are conditioned by certain reactions set up by the relationship of the individual to universal processes of evolution taking place. There are no pains and no joys, nothing beautiful and nothing ugly; nothing of the kind is there, but they exist when the individual is unable to properly align itself to a particular level of evolution.

We are expected to participate in the process of evolution, and not oppose it or assert our own selves. This is what Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita. Karma yoga is participation in the work of nature, and not doing something independently. We are not asked to do anything except participate. When we participate in the work of nature in the process of evolution, every experience becomes a happy experience. All things look beautiful. But if we do not cooperate, and assert our independence, then the compulsion inflicted upon us by the laws of upward evolution will cause the experience of the necessary or the unnecessary, the joyful and the sorrowful, the beautiful and the ugly, etc. The consequences that follow from our non-cooperation with the universal expectation of the process of evolution cause these phenomena known as beauty, ugliness, pain, happiness, etc. They do not exist by themselves; they are just reactions. Beauty is a reaction; ugliness is a reaction; joy is a reaction; pain is a reaction. By themselves, they do not exist.

Everything is pleasure, everything is beautiful, everything is wonderful, provided that we are able to consciously participate in each level of the evolutionary process of nature. This is actually the principle of yoga—unity. It is union with Reality, and union with every step of the evolutionary process. Then, the world takes care of us. This is perhaps one of the meanings that we can attribute to a great verse of the Bhagavadgita. The universe says, “I shall take care of you, do not worry. Cooperate with me, and think of me. Be one with me.” It may be Lord Krishna speaking, or God speaking, or nature speaking; it does not matter who speaks. The idea is, “Be one with me. I shall protect you, take care of you, provide you with everything.” But you say, “No. I am independent. I do not care.” Then, a kick comes and you see everything as ugly, everything becomes topsy-turvy, and rebirth takes place.

These are some of the phenomena of observation that arise out of our deep consideration of the historical process of the development of the religious consciousness, to be considered in various ways. If we are honest, sincere and catholic in our perceptions and acceptance, we will find that all religions tell the truth. There is no fundamentalist attitude in any religion. All religions tell some truth in some way, in some degree, in some aspect, in some facet, and we should have the charitable nature to accept what aspect it is that is presented.

A child’s blabbering also has some meaning. It is not something idiotic that he is speaking. The blabbering arises on account of one stage in the evolutionary process. Everything is to be appreciated. A sage is able to appreciate everything in its own level, not in another level. You should not compare a baby to an adult and say it is idiotic. In its own level, it is as great as an emperor; there is nothing wrong with it. But we have an idiocy in our mind that we always compare and contrast: “In comparison with this, it is no good.” Why do you compare? Take everything in its own

context, in its own level, as it stands, and be one with it. Then, you will find the kingdom of ends manifests itself—or, we may say, the Kingdom of God manifests itself.

## Chapter 3

### THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS; KANT, HEGEL, DESCARTES AND SANKARACHARYA

Religious awareness arises due to the recognition of a 'beyond oneself'. There is something which makes everyone feel that they are not complete in their own self. The incompleteness of one's personality and the mode of existence suggest that there should be something where the expected completeness would be realised.

The incomplete always considers the would-be completeness as an 'ought' or a 'must', rather than an 'is' or a present condition. The Beyond, which is inseparable from the acceptance of one's limitations and finitude, always recedes further and further when we try to pursue it, like the horizon which seems to be far and beyond; and if we move in the direction of the horizon to reach it, we will find it has gone further onward, and we can never find it.

In religious and philosophical circles, the nature of this Beyond has been designated in different ways. Some philosophers have concluded that the Beyond will always be beyond, and it can never become an actual fact of present experience. The modus operandi of human perception is incompetent to reach that which is beyond its own possibilities. There is always an unknown content permeating the whole world—a distressing and disturbing presence because it cannot be denied that it exists, nor can one be sure that it can be really attained.

When we say, "Something is beyond me," we have already accepted that we are incapable of contacting it. Philosophers and psychologists of religion have tried their best to explain this peculiar situation which is inexplicable and yet unavoidable. Something is there; otherwise, we would not feel dissatisfied. Where is that 'something'? There are various arguments, called arguments for the existence of

God, or we may say the existence of That which is the completeness of our finite existence. This great Beyond exists. It must exist; otherwise, it cannot beckon us, summon us, and keep us in its tentacles. How do we conclude that there is a Beyond which is complete in itself? Very difficult is the answer to this question. This particular manner of thinking is called, especially in Western circles, the ontological argument. Ontology is the science of being. It is not the being of this thing or that thing, but Being-as-such—Pure Being.

People have not found a suitable word to describe the nature of this Being. In their eagerness to be very precise and not commit any mistake in defining it, they have sometimes attempted to condense this word 'Being' into 'Be-ness'. 'Be-ness' is a strange word which has been coined by philosophers. It must be existing. It must be existing as a complete answer to the incomplete quest of the human individual. Completeness is a reality, because it exists.

The concept of this completeness involves the relationship between thought and reality. This is a moot point in the field of philosophy. Can thought contact reality? It has already been mentioned that present conditions of the psychological apparatus cannot contact the Beyond, because the apparatus of cognition and perception is limited to certain areas of operation, and it cannot transcend those areas. But another question arises. If it is impossible to even conceive what is beyond the possibility of human perception, how does this idea arise at all? This is a very serious question that was raised by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. His whole book is a commentary on this theme. In the history of philosophy, people have argued for him and against him.

He concludes that the idea of a Perfect Being, as he calls it, is an idea of reason. It is not to be identified with the area which is covered by human understanding or sensory perception. His book is divided into three parts: aesthetic, analytic, and logic, or the idea of reason. Kant's contention is

that the idea of reason is also conditioned by the limitations of the understanding, which is subject to certain categories.

Great is the mind of Kant; but something is missing in his investigations. Even the idea that there should be a Perfect Being should be explained in its content. His argument is that idea cannot be an existence. Idea only defines the external features of a possible existence, and a description of a thing is not the thing-in-itself. Nobody can contact anything directly because everything is cast in the mould of the perceptual and cognitional categories.

Here we have a rescuing factor coming from persons like Rene Descartes, a French philosopher. The idea of finitude is a summon to the idea of the Infinite. The consciousness of finitude is an indication of the possibility of exceeding the limits of finitude. The consciousness of there being a fence shows that there is something beyond the fence. Therefore, the idea of reason should not be regarded as merely a conjecture of the category-bound understanding.

Whether or not thought can contact reality is a different thing altogether, a question which Kant could not answer. He was more of an epistemologist than a metaphysician. His conclusion is that thought cannot contact reality. But Hegel went beyond it, and had no problems of this kind. Hegel said that the thing as it is in itself, which Kant considered as impossible of contact, is itself the source of the manifestation of the categories. You yourself are the thing-in-itself—what you may call Atman, in Indian philosophical circles.

That you cannot contact the thing as it is, is another way of saying that you cannot contact your own self. It is true that you cannot contact your own self, because there is no means of contact. The contact of oneself, by oneself, is not an epistemological phenomenon. It is something different altogether. To contact yourself, you do not require a means of knowledge, such as perception, inference, scripture, or other things. That thing, which is objectively conceived to be non-contactable as the thing itself, happens to be the pure subject,

which Kant calls the transcendental unity of apperception—not perception, but apperception.

The thing which cannot be contacted is transcended. When you call a thing transcendent, you mean that it is impossible of contact; but it happens to be your own self. All things in the world are near, but you are the most distant thing to your own self. You can catch anybody or anything, but you cannot catch yourself. The means of catching yourself is absent. You can use scientific technological instruments to contact the Moon, the stars, the Milky Way, nebulae, and so on, but where is the means of contacting your own self? Can you climb on your own shoulders? This subject has been the in-depth consideration of Indian philosophical thinkers, especially the Vedanta.

Kant and Hegel are the modern representations of something like Plato and Aristotle in ancient times. Both are engaged in a race of who will reach the destination first. Both are equally great; yet these two mammoths of philosophical profundity basically differ from one another, because what Kant considered as the categories of the understanding in a subjective fashion became the objective structure of the universe itself for Hegel. The categories mentioned by Kant in his analytics are not psychological apparatus. It is a metaphysical system. It is the nature of the Absolute itself. The manner in which Kant describes the categories of understanding is actually to be taken as the manner in which the Absolute operates within itself.

This is a great advance in thinking. There is some similarity between the in-depth considerations of Plato and the findings of Kant and Hegel. Plato is a complete philosopher. We can find everything in him, like the Upanishads. We may call him the Upanishad of the West. Everything, every subject, has been thoroughly considered in one way or the other. This is why the great modern philosopher Alfred North Whitehead felt that the whole history of philosophy consists in footnotes to Plato. He has

said everything, and nobody can say anything more than that. This can also be said in regard to Acharya Sankara's philosophy in the Vedanta circle—that everything any Indian philosopher has said is a footnote to Acharya Sankara, if only we would try to understand what he has written.

The vast literature attributed to Acharya Sankara is incapable of easy grasping. The unknown content of the universe, the 'beyond you', is yourself. You yourself are the Beyond; you are beyond yourself. A similar reference can be found in the Bhagavadgita: *uddhared atmanatmanam*. Here is the Bhagavadgita in half a sentence. The self has to be raised by the Self. The transcendental unity of apperception, which is the higher Self, should raise the empirical self, which is involved in the phenomenal categories.

Rene Descartes, a French philosopher, tells us the consciousness of finitude establishes the existence of the Infinite. We cannot be aware that we are limited unless we are simultaneously aware that there is something unlimited. The limited and the unlimited are not apart from each other by spatial or geometrical distance. The distance is only logical. They collide with each other, coincide with each other; they are two wings of the same bird, as it were. Therefore, the Infinite must exist.

If the Infinite does exist, what is its nature? Again we come to Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." *Cogito ergo sum*. Or we may say, "I am, therefore I think." Our thinking, or our being conscious of our finitude, is simultaneously associated with the possibility of transcending the finitude, which also is an object of consciousness. So, the consciousness of the Infinite must be existing. As consciousness cannot be a quality of the Infinite, describing it as an external phenomenon is not a whitewashing on the wall, but it is the substance of the wall itself. Thus, the nature of the Infinite is pure consciousness.

Consciousness and being cannot be separated from each other. When we say, "I am here," we are actually saying, "I am

conscious of my being here.” Our consciousness is not different from our being. Our being is our consciousness of our being. *Sat* is *chit*; *chit* is *sat*. Because it is the great freedom that we attain, it is also called bliss—*ananda*. Therefore, *sat-chit-ananda* is the Ultimate Reality.

Here we have an excursion through the fields of Kant, Hegel, Plato, Acharya Sankara, and Descartes—a great congregation of masters who have delved into the depths of reality. We now conclude that the idea of reason, which Kant dubs as phenomenal, as is the case with understanding, is the ambassador of the thing-in-itself.

The light of the Sun is an indication of the existence of the Sun. The idea does not arise from phenomenal categories, because anything that is phenomenal can never conceive that which is not phenomenal. There is a contradiction in the statement that the phenomenal categories cannot conceive the non-phenomenal noumenon. There is a non-phenomenal element present even in phenomena. God is in the world, though He is above the world.

This is a slight variation that I have made in connection with the ontological argument—a more descriptive form of it, as we have it in Rene Descartes and even Hegel, to some degree. God exists. The Infinite exists. The summoning of the Infinite is the call of the religious consciousness. We cannot rest quiet until we contact it.

There is another argument, known as the causal argument or the cosmological argument. Everything seems to be a process of conditioning, an effect. Anything that is in a process should have behind it a non-process, or a changelessness. The world is changing, and the concept of change involves the concept of that which does not change. When the railway train moves, it implies that the rails do not move. If the rails also start moving, there will be no movement at all. So, there cannot be change, transformation, phenomenality, fluxation or momentariness unless there is

the opposite of it at the background. Therefore, there must be a cause.

Every cause has a cause behind it. If we reach the summit of this chain of causation, we will find that there is no end to it. The causal concept breaks down if there is no ultimate cause which itself cannot be considered as an effect of something else. This causeless cause may be called God—the Unmoved Mover, as Aristotle says. The effect, which is changing, proves the existence of a cause which is not changing. A thing that is contingent in its nature establishes the fact of a non-contingent existence.

The third argument is called the teleological argument—argument by the design, the perfection, and the order in which things are operating. You see that everything in nature moves perfectly, systematically, with mathematical precision. There is no chaos anywhere. Everything adjusts itself to another thing, like the large number of parts of a machine cooperating with one another to bring about the output of this mechanical process. Though the number of parts of the machine may be many, the end result is one, and centralised. The parts could not have worked in such harmony unless someone has arranged them in such a manner, as in the case of a watch, for instance. The watch works systematically in a perfect design, implying thereby that somebody's mind created the design of the watch—or nature as a whole, which operates systematically. This designer may be called the architect of the universe, the fashioner of all existence; call Him God.

There is another argument, called the henological argument, which was advanced by St. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval philosopher. The term 'henological argument' was coined by him. The concept of 'more' leads to the concept of 'more and more'. As the causal concept leads us finally to a causeless cause, the concept of 'more' should lead us to a state where it is not necessary to move the 'more' further on. We say we want more and more of things. Any amount of

benefit that is granted to us will still leave a 'more' behind it. Whatever be the salary that we get, even if it is a hundred million dollars a month, we would like to have even more than that. There is no limit for this 'more'.

We cannot consider the human mind to be idiotic—that it thinks erratically, without any meaning. It has a system of its own. Its acting is an indication of a great mystery and perfection existing beyond itself. The mental operations are indications and, therefore, they have a system of their own. The mind is holistic in its operation. It is a Gestalt. Thoughts are not a chaotic, slipshod action of the mind. The mind is a great organisation; it is a whole by itself.

In the henological argument, this psychological whole suggests the existence of a metaphysical cosmic Absolute whole. There are many other arguments brought forward by Indian Nyaya philosophers such as Bodayana Acharya, the details of which I am not entering into now. The idea behind it is that the consciousness of a Beyond is the reason for the development of the religious consciousness.

Generally, in conditions of life which we usually call primitive, a wonder behind the operations of nature became the impulse for adoration of that thing which is the cause of wonder. Why are the stars moving in this manner? Why is there rainfall? Why is there summer? Why is there winter? Why is there wind? How is it that the Sun rises in this manner? As every effect is considered to have a cause behind it, the mind cannot free itself from the necessity to think in terms of causes. Every event has a cause behind it. As the events are beautifully organised, the causes behind these beautiful organisations should be intelligent existences. These are the original concepts of the gods behind nature.

The prayers of the Rig Veda Samhita, right from the beginning to the end, seem to be approving this phenomenon in religious history—that the senses, which are the main perceptual apparatus in the human being, see a vastness spread out before them; and because this vastness, which is

multitudinous in nature, requires an explanation in terms of something that is behind this multitudinousness, in the beginning we may concede that every item of the multitude has a divinity behind it. This is why it is sometimes believed that there are many gods in heaven. We call it heaven because it is beyond natural phenomena. The cause should be beyond the effect; so, the cause is transcendent. We may consider the cause of natural phenomena as a heavenly operation—a kingdom of gods. Many things are there, so there must be many gods behind each one. This is supposed to be the beginning of religious awareness, if we are to believe the findings of historical researchers in the rising of the religious consciousness. We cannot say that this is the only way of looking at things; this is one way, the empirical way, the inductive method, which modern historians of religious philosophy employ.

The Rig Veda has all the features of this kind of perception of the consequences of the divine operations behind everything. But the quest did not end there. The inquisitiveness of the human mind is so deep that it can never be satisfied. It goes on asking more and more questions, again and again, “How is it? Why is it like that?”

If there are many different divinities, an angel operating behind everything, all which is endless in its variety, then what would be the relationship between these divinities? They will be like scattered existences, with no concourse or relationship among them. A higher advance in the consciousness of these many gods felt like accepting that these divinities must be working in groups. Just as a single human being cannot achieve anything, and for that reason people join organisations, societies, institutions, etc., a single god cannot be the explanation for any phenomenon. There must be group gods—Vishva Devas, as they are called in the Rig Veda Samhita. Many gods must be in collaboration, as a group or a society of gods. Here also, the quest did not end.

While there can be many groups, what is the relationship of one group to another group? In a national setup, if there were many villages and missionaries operating independently, there would be no unity in the concept of the nation. The districts and the missionaries and villages, etc., have to be brought together into a larger concept of the national administration. So, this group psychology, or the idea of group gods, was not found satisfying, finally. We may say that it took centuries for the human mind to go on advancing itself gradually, stage by stage. It is not that every day a new thought comes. For centuries, one thought may continue; after some centuries, another thought in an advanced form begins.

We can accept that there is also a unity among the community of gods. Indra is the ruler of the gods, we say in mythological epics. Why should there be a ruler of the gods? Are the gods not complete in themselves? Are the collectors and the commissioners and state secretaries not complete in themselves? Maybe they are complete, but they require coordination from a higher authority, which is the concept of the constitution of the government. It is the central pivotal determining factor. Many gods, or even groups of gods, cannot satisfy us. The government can be only one; we cannot have two governments.

Even today, when there are many governments in the world, people are not satisfied. There are statesmen who dream of what may be called a world government. Why should we have many governments? If there were a world government, there would be no conflict of any kind. Everything would be interrelated beautifully, harmonised perfectly. Maybe there would be no wars and conflicts of any kind, and all contention would cease. This is the hope of humanity.

The mind is not satisfied with anything. It wants to be complete in every way; and we cannot have two complete things together, like two great men, because two great men

cannot join unless there is a third thing greater than these two great men. This brought the religious quest to the concept of monotheism: there is one God. One God rules the whole universe. He is the creator, the preserver, the dissolver, and the destroyer. We in India, in Hindu circles, call it Brahma-Vishnu-Siva. Every religion conceives God as having a threefold function: there is a perpetual creation going on, there is a continual sustenance and maintenance in perfect order of what is created, and there is a dissolution taking place.

At every moment there are new productions of cellular activity in our body. New cells are formed; creation takes place every moment in our body. These cells are maintained in a perfect order, in an anabolic fashion, constructively, and they have to transform themselves into a newer setup of greater advancement in the structure of our personality. There is a catabolic activity taking place, because otherwise we would have the same cells always, and would not grow at all. So, Brahma-Vishnu-Siva are operating not as one thing today, another thing tomorrow, and a third thing on the following day. The three gods act immediately, simultaneously, if we can conceive of such a possibility.

At every moment there is creation, preservation, and destruction. Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva are one God only, finally—three functions of the one God. Monotheism is the doctrine of one God. In India, the great teachers of monotheism are Acharya Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Sri Krishna Chaitanya Deva, and the great protagonists of the Saiva Agamas, and even the Sakta Agamas. There is one divinity finally, they say. Still, there is no full satisfaction. God has created the world; all right, we accept it. But is God inside the world or outside the world?

The Nyaya and the Vaisesika philosophers in the East have considered that God is extra-cosmic. God is above the world, unconnected with the world, transcendent to the world, and therefore extra-cosmic. This is the Nyaya and the

Vaiseshika. Even the Ishvara propounded by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras is of that nature. Ishvara is only an apparatus. He does not enter the world. He operates the world from a distance, like a carpenter making a table or chair, or a potter fashioning mud pots.

The relationship between God and the world is not clear. Many thought God is inside the world—the whole world is God. Western philosophers dubbed this kind of thought as pantheism, which means ‘all God’. The whole world and creation is only God. But this is considered to be a foolish notion, and not acceptable finally. We cannot say that God has become the world as milk becomes curd or yoghurt, because curd cannot become milk once again; so if God has exhausted Himself in this world, there would be no such thing as reaching God afterwards because He has exhausted Himself here in the world. So, great thinkers later on coined this word ‘pantheism’. God may be immanent, but He is not pantheistic; He is also transcendent, at the same time.

Difficult is this concept. How would God be inside, as well as not inside? Here philosophical argument fails; reason cannot go further. It says, “Thus far, and no further.” When intellect fails, true religion begins. Religious perception, or religious awareness, is an intuitive process. It is a self-identical recognition of Being-as-such, or God knowing God. The theistic concept also brought these problems. When did God create the world? This question follows when we accept that God created the world, because creation is a temporal process. Space and time are necessary in order that the world may be created, so God must have created space and time first, before creating the world.

But space and time also are products of the process of creation. And so, how do we explain creation? What is the substance out of which the world is made? Call it space-time, or whatever—this substance out of which God has created the world should have a relationship to God. This relationship is inexplicable because if we say He has

fashioned a thing out of a material, like the Prakriti of the Samkhya, then there would be no connection between the Creator and the created. Samkhya tells us that Purusha has no connection with Prakriti. If that is the case, people who are involved in Prakriti cannot contact Purusha.

Theism has many difficulties, such as the perception of evil in the world, chaos, and ugliness. Everything is not beautiful. Who created evil? If God created the world, He must have also created evil and sin. But this is abhorrent; we cannot say that. No sensible person will say God created evil and sin.

Then, when God created the world, He did not create sin. Who created it? No individual can be called the creator of sin, because sin is an aberration from the Universal Whole, and unless the aberration has already taken place, the individual cannot come into existence. Therefore, we cannot say it exists in the individual. It cannot exist in God, also. These problems arise due to the theistic conception of God.

Beyond that is the monistic conception, the conception of the Absolute. In the West, Hegel represents this mode of thinking; and in the East, the Upanishads and principally Acharya Sankara give a presentation of this to some extent. The whole thing ends in monism, the acceptance of an indescribable, incomprehensible, astounding Absolute. Religion leads to this final conclusion in its aspiration for perfection. Since the Absolute cannot be outside the seeker of the Absolute, the very consciousness of the Absolute is a kind of freedom attained. "Knowing Brahman is being Brahman," say the Upanishads. To know the Absolute is to be the Absolute.

Minds which are impure, which cannot free themselves from the various prejudices inseparable from human nature, cannot conceive the Absolute. Therefore, a great many disciplinary processes have been prescribed before entering into the argument of God as the Absolute. They are called the *yamas* and *niyamas*. Here we are faced with a danger of

touching an impossible thing, if the means of this touch or contact is not strong enough. That is why the seeking soul, which is the seeker of the Absolute, is not the mind that seeks it. The Absolute, planted in the human individual as the Atman, seeks it. That is why they say the Atman is Brahman, the Self is the Absolute.

Here religion reaches its climax in an astounding manner. If it is pursued vigilantly, with sincerity and purity of heart, it will end this turmoil of transmigratory existence, and we will attain what is called final liberation, or Moksha.

## Chapter 4

### THE ASCENT OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE BHAGAVADGITA

There are three things which always need deep consideration. Firstly, we are here as ourselves. Secondly, there is something which we consider as other than ourselves. Thirdly, there is another thing which we regard as above ourselves. We are daily pitted against the world as an 'other than ourselves'. The world includes all people, all things—every living creature, with whom we cannot identify ourselves. There is an 'other' everywhere. The whole problem of life is this 'otherness', whose meaning is never clear to the human mind.

What makes anything appear as an 'other than one's own self'? The otherness also implies a kind of inscrutable relationship between one's own self and what we call the 'other'. This relationship is inscrutable and inexplicable without admitting another thing altogether, namely, the 'above'—that which is above ourselves, as well as above that which we regard as other than ourselves.

In the context of the ascent of the religious consciousness, we may consider the Bhagavadgita as the crowning edifice among the documents on this great subject. It would be interesting to note that the first six chapters of the Gita are concerned with ourselves—the 'I', the 'me', the individual. The next six chapters are concerned with the 'other than what is I'—the whole world outside. The last three chapters are related to what is above both the 'I' and the 'other than what is I'. Those who have studied the Bhagavadgita would have observed that a gradual ascent of the process of self-discipline is inculcated in the verses of the first six chapters, commencing with utter turmoil, chaos, and social and political confusion, as depicted in the first chapter.

Everything is odd. This is what one may remark about things in the world, and about people anywhere. Everything is at sixes and sevens. Nothing is in the proper place. All

things are out of context. Life is a misery. It cannot be understood. It is a suffering imposed upon oneself and everyone by something whose nature is inscrutable. All life is misery. It is utter sorrow and agony.

Any kind of attempt at understanding this problem is self-defeating. This was the condition in which Arjuna found himself—a great warrior, an indomitable generalissimo in the army whom nobody could face, as we read in the documentation of his exploits in the Mahabharata. He could conquer the gods, but now he was faced with his own self. We can conquer the whole world, but when it comes to our own self, we will find that we are our own greatest enemy and an incomprehensible opponent of our own self. In the first chapter, he was in chaos.

When a person is honestly and sincerely determined in seeking an answer to this problem which is otherwise yawning before oneself in everyday life, the light within has to light itself up and show the path. Sri Krishna of the Bhagavadgita is this light. Arjuna is the human individual. Whatever be the vainglorious feeling of the importance of a human individual, when it is faced with the realities of life it pales, like the famous Uttara Kumara of the Mahabharata—all boast and patting oneself on the back. We are not able to face even a mouse if it starts jumping on us.

What we learn from the predicament described in the first chapter is that the importance of the human individual is a chimera. But the more inscrutable element, known as egoism in human nature, does not permit the acceptance of the fact that the self-esteem associated with the human individual is a phantasm. Human individuality is constituted of various factors, as a house is made up of small elements such as bricks and mortar, cement and steel, etc. There is no such thing as a house by itself; it is a shape that is taken in the spatio-temporal context by the elements which are other than the house itself.

So is the case with the human individual. Incalculable factors beyond the comprehension of human understanding contribute to bring about a cohesion of factors into the form of the human individuality, as a house is built with material not belonging to the house itself. Even the rays of the stars contribute a large percentage of our constitutional makeup. The winds and the waters, the Sun and the Moon and the stars, and earth, water, fire, air and ether all join together in different proportions in order to make up this peculiar setup of the human individual. By itself, it does not exist.

This is the reason why many thinkers have told us that life is a fluxation rather than a being by itself. It is a movement, not an existence. We flow, rather than exist as self-identical identities. There is so much confusion in the mind because the mind is itself a part of this chaotic conglomeration of particulars which make up the human individuality appearing to be a solid person, a permanent entity.

I am not going to comment on the Bhagavadgita here, but am just introducing the process of the development of thought in the different chapters of the first section of the Gita, until it reaches its pinnacle in the sixth chapter, where self-discipline becomes complete. Every kind of discipline is a process of self-integration. Our thoughts, our mannerisms, our behaviours, the way in which we speak, and our activities dissect our personalities. They dismember us and convert us into shreds and fragments of isolated particulars, and we feel that we are somewhere else, other than in our own selves.

The bringing together of these shreds of components into a focusing attention of indivisibility is what we call integration of personality. The social impetus, the physical impulses, the mental distractions, the intellectual vagaries, and many other subconscious pressures, all speaking in their own language at different times, for different purposes, as it were, have to be boiled down into the menstruum of a single cementing factor which converts human individuality into an

indivisible being, and not a complex of structural individualities of various other elements, as they appear to be.

Whenever we think anything, we go out of ourselves. Unless we, as a centre of awareness, mentation, and consciousness, reach out external to our own selves to a thing which is the object of our awareness, we would not know that the thing exists at all. So, in every perception of an object, whatever it be, there is an alienation of self-consciousness. We become other than what we are and, therefore, every perception of any kind of object is a delimitation of the integrated indivisibility of self-consciousness.

In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras we find that every *vritti*, which is the attempt of the mind to know what is outside, is an obstacle in yoga. We should not imagine that the perception of an object like a tree, or anything whatsoever, is a harmless action taking place in the mind. "I am looking at the tree. What does it matter? All is well with me." We cannot know that there is a tree unless we have moved towards the tree, entered the tree, made our consciousness part of the tree, and to that extent, diminished our integration of personality. The more we think of things outside, the less are we integrated inside. So, Bhagavan Sri Krishna, especially in the sixth chapter, highlights the importance of meditation and centralising the consciousness in itself: *atma-samstham manah krtva na kinchid api cintayet*. And in the second *sutra*, Patanjali tells us that centralisation of consciousness in itself is the art of self-integration: *yogah cittavrtti nirodha*.

Here is a great point before us. How would we centralise consciousness in itself unless we know where consciousness lies? Consciousness by its very nature is to be considered indivisible. The division of consciousness is unthinkable. If we imagine that consciousness can be divided into parts, the division of two parts cannot be known except by consciousness itself. Even the isolation of one part of

consciousness from another part—imagined, for practical purposes—is inadmissible inasmuch as the separating gap cannot exist unless it becomes a content of consciousness, which proves the fact that consciousness is universally pervasive. Thus, self-integration in the context of meditation would mean finally an attempt at centralising consciousness in its own universal context. Here, we conclude the sixth chapter.

Then there is a leap, like the leap of Hanuman across the sea to the other shore. The 'other', which is the world, has to be explained and made one's own. We cannot be safe and comfortable in life as long as there is an 'other' in front of us. *Dvitiyad vai bhayam bhavati*, says the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Whenever there is another beside you, you are frightened, because you do not know what that other will do to you. Unless you are reconciled to the so-called other, life will end in misery. The other is anything conceivable. It may be a human being, or it may be a thing; it may be the whole world, and the Sun and the Moon and the stars.

The reconciliation of oneself with this otherness of the large expanse of the universe before us again highlights the necessity of finding our own universal centre in everything that is apparently outside. The outsideness is not permissible, because in order that one thing be outside, there must be someone to know that something is outside. And who will know that, except our own selves? So we have to become the outside first, in order to know that there is something outside. Is this not a self-contradiction? How could there be an other than ourself, while we cannot know that such a thing exists at all until we have become that which is other than ourself? Every day we are bungling in our very thinking itself.

To bridge the gulf between the individual and the Cosmic Substance, Bhagavan Sri Krishna introduces the seventh chapter, where the whole cosmology of existence is described, until the great apocalypse, the Vishvarupa,

concludes the great message. Many interpreters and commentators of the Gita think that the Gita really ends with the eleventh chapter, and there is nothing more to be said. *Mat-karma-krin mat paramo mad-bhaktah sanga-varjitah; nirvairah sarva-bhutesu yah sa mam eti pandava* is the last verse of the eleventh chapter. Acharya Sankara says in his commentary that this is the final word and there is nothing more to be added.

But, it appears that there is also something else to be told. Something remains. What is the something that remains? You have seen the Vishvarupa, and what else do you want? There is some subtle thing which escapes notice. Bhagavan Sri Krishna mentions in a few words in the eleventh chapter: *jnatum drastum ca tattvena pravestum parantapa*. You must be able “to know, to visualise, and to enter into”. The Vishvarupa has been seen; it has been known, to some extent. Yes, it has been visualised—but it has not been entered into.

Arjuna never entered into the Vishvarupa. He was beholding it as a great wonder, so there was a kind of ‘otherness’ here, also—the great ‘otherness’ of God Almighty, as the Creator of the universe. We always say that God is in heaven. Here is the ‘otherness’ of not merely the world, but of the Almighty God Himself. He is an ‘other’ to ourselves; and, again, we have to bridge the gulf between ourselves and God. This is an endless exercise. Indeed, it will never end.

Briefly stated, the concluding six chapters are an answer to this problem of the otherness that seems to be persisting even after beholding the Vishvarupa, or even accepting the existence of a Creator of the universe. God is in the high heaven; we cannot say that God is sitting on our nose. Nobody says that, though there is nothing wrong even in accepting that. But we reject every idea, repel every thought of the excessive intimacy and nearness of God to our own selves, because there is a fright which is indescribable. This gulf has to be bridged, nevertheless.

Thus, the first six chapters are a process of self-discipline. In the next six chapters we have the bridging of the gulf between one's own self and the otherness of the universe. The last six chapters deal with the bridging of the gulf between not only ourselves and the otherness of the world, but between ourselves, the world, and the Almighty Himself, so that the One Alone remains. One Alone remains, but who knows that One? We do not know that One because if we say, "I know that One," we create a gulf between ourselves and the One by converting It into an object of our awareness. The One knows Itself as the only That-Which-Is.