

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS



by

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Chapter 1

THE INTUITIVE AND THE EXPLORATIVE STAGE OF RELIGION

This is the first day of Sadhana Week, and it is to continue for seven days, concluding on the 25th of this month. Usually, during these periods of the Week of Sadhana, practically every year, it has been a tradition of this Ashram to ask me to pinpoint whatever I say to a kind of sequential development of thought in the manner of an exposition of a central point of view which may form a kind of mini-textbook. This has been going on since many years, and I have been asked again this year what I will speak. I have always avoided answering this question because I did not know what I would speak. Anyway, some novel idea struck me yesterday evening of something which you might not have heard up to this time, though not entirely unknown to you, may be endeavoured to be presented in a brief outline. Though the theme that is attempted is profound enough as it is a coverage of the whole gamut of Indian religious thought, it will, I believe, at the same time, provide a philosophical foundation for the entire process of the development of the religious consciousness in the mind of man.

Religion, to be defined, is the longing of the soul for the Self of the Universe. From the earliest time onwards this inner aspiration of the human individual seems to have developed itself through five stages of what we may call the religious or the spiritual approach. The *first* stage may be considered as the intuitive and the explorative stage, the *second* the ethical and legalistic stage, the *third* the epic and the theological stage, the *fourth* the mystical and the ritualistic stage, and the *fifth* the logical and the philosophical stage.

We have, throughout the history of the religions of the world, a feature discoverable in the minds of people which got pressurised from within to look upon the world of perception as being governed by forces or powers, because it

was not easy for any sensible or investigative understanding to account for the phenomena of the world: the rising of the sun, the setting of the sun, the rising and the setting of the stars, the seasons, the rainfall, and the various astronomical permutations and combinations taking place causing varieties of repercussions, individually and socially. It was incumbent on the part of every human mind to question the possibilities of there being causes behind these phenomena. If rain falls, there must be a reason why the rain falls. If the sun rises, there must be something to explain why the sun rises at all. If there are seasons changing and differing one from the other, there is also to be a reason why they change. Why is it hot? Why is it cold? Why is it spring? Why is it autumn? Is it a medley of chaotic operations taking place in the world, or is there a sensible explanation behind these operations? This question is itself a religious question. It is an asking for the presence and activity of something that is not to be seen in this world, because what we see in this world is only the effect. The rainfall, the drought, the heat of the sun, the coming and the going of things, the seasons, the stellar operations, the winds, etc. – these themselves are not their own explanations, since these operations are in the form of effects observed in sense perception. The world as a whole is an object of our perception. It seems to be modifying itself, undergoing transformations of different kinds every moment. We know that the earth is rotating on its axis every minute. It revolves around the sun and it also tilts, causing summer and winter. These are the processes of nature which are not explained by the processes themselves. The earth does not tell us why it is gyrating in the manner that it does, though it is a fact that such an operation takes place.

An inherent trait of the human being is to discover causes behind effects. If something happens, we must know why it happens. If someone is ill, we must know why the person has fallen ill, in order that proper medical treatment may be administered. The 'how' of a thing is supposed to be the field of scientific investigation, and the 'why' of a thing is

transcendent to scientific observation. Yet, the 'why' is a persistent question with us. The early religions of the world have attempted an answer to these queries, positing varieties of controlling powers behind the several natural occurrences.

There is a controlling power which causes the dawn in the morning, there is another which causes the evening sunset, and there are many other powers of this kind. Every bit of event or occurrence is embodied in a central operation. A nucleus has to be there to condition the operations, whatever they are. There can be any number of operations, and there should also be any number of causes behind them.

Now, this brings us to a question of there being many causes for the events that are many in this world. It is something like modern medical science which is accustomed to specialisation in hundreds of fields of physical treatment, opining that every ailment has a particular cause. If we sneeze and catch a cold it has one cause, which is different from the cause of an ache in the stomach. If we have trouble breathing, the cause of that trouble in the breathing process is not the same as the cause of palpitations in the heart. If we have a boil on the foot, the cause of it is different from the cause that brings about pain in the ear. This is the modern system of specialisation, so that a person who can heal our foot cannot heal our ear, and so on. This is not to be regarded as an advanced form of understanding of the physiological system of the human being, because later on we will realise that the aches which are many in number, which are different from one another, are really interconnected by a dislocation that is taking place in the whole system which is the primal cause of all the other minor secondary causes appearing to be at the back of the ailments mentioned, physiologically speaking.

In a similar manner, there has been a development of religious thought. In the earlier stages, it is common for anyone who is capable of seeing things through the sense

organs to consider that every event is independent of every other event. Something that is taking place in India need not necessarily be attributed to the causative factors of something taking place in another country. Geographical, national and circumstantial causes are generally considered as historically different from the causes of even similar events in other parts of the world – though there is much more to say about this than what appears on the surface.

The winds of the cosmos do not blow only on India or on any part of the country. They envelop the whole earth. The cosmic forces, or the rays as we call them these days, have such an impact upon every particle of dust on the earth in this world that we cannot say that events are capable of segregation in the manner that ordinary commonsense would permit.

Anyway, in earlier stages we can say that man was a commonsense individual and it was necessary, therefore, to envisage a commonsense cause behind the varieties of occurrences. It is impossible for us to rest quiet without questioning the causes behind events taking place in the world. If there is a cyclone or a tornado, why has it taken place? Could it have been avoided? As we say, if there has been an illness, perhaps it could have been avoided by certain measures that we could have taken earlier, etc. These are ways of positing causes behind effects.

Inasmuch as a cause behind an effect should be intelligent and purposive, it was also called a divinity – a divinity because of the fact that it is not earthly and it is not capable of confinement to this physical world. We always call that thing divine which is not of this world. A super-physical phenomenon is generally regarded as heavenly, celestial or divine.

Thus, causes which were supposed to be behind the multifarious events and occurrences in the world were endowed with intelligence, and they constituted a heavenly world of the divinities we call gods. So there are gods in the

heavens, as there are people in this world. The necessity to posit gods in the heavens arises for the same reason that we posit a nucleus in an atom. An atom is the world, and there is a nucleus in the centre of it, which explains the movement of the particles that constitute that atom.

Why should there be a nucleus? It may not be there; let the atom be there. As we say, why should there be a God or divinities in the heavens? Why should there be celestials, or superintending forces? Why is the world not enough? Many people are satisfied with this world. As a gross, inexperienced scientist may say, the atom is a self-explanatory phenomenon. That it is not self-explanatory is something that is discovered much later. That is to say, the atom is conditioned by a nucleus which itself does not actively participate in the action of the atom – as the activities of the world are totally controlled and conceived by the solar orb shining in the sky, yet the sun in the sky does not take part in any of the activities of this world. In the same way, this central nucleus in the atom is responsible for the gyration, the revolution of the electrons, which constitute finally the so-called shape of the atom. The nucleus is there, and it has to be there, as the central ‘sun’ that causes the movement of these electrons and also causes the atom to appear as it ought to be.

The sun makes the world what it is. Because of the sun, the world is what it is; otherwise, it would have been something different. Yet, the sun does not participate in the activities of the world. Similarly, the gods do not participate in the action of the world. Heaven is unconnected with this tragic world of suffering and sorrow – not connected at all – in the same way as the sun in the sky is not connected with the sorrows of people here. Yet, there would not be people at all to sorrow if the sun were not there. The people themselves would not exist, so the question of sorrow would not arise. Therefore we may say that in a way, secondarily, the sorrows and joys and the events of the world are caused

by the sun in the sky – but only in a way, not really, because the sun does not actually act upon the world individually or by actual participation. So is the case with the gods, the causes of natural phenomena. The envisagement of the divinities behind the cosmos as existing behind each event and occurrence in the world is like the positing of a nucleus behind every atom, yet not permitting the participation of the nucleus in the activities of the atom.

Here we have the first conclusion of religion, among many other conclusions that are to follow – namely, a heavenly world must exist, and gods have to be there populating this heavenly world in the same way as nuclei have to be there in atoms. And as the world consists of an infinite number of atoms containing these nuclei, which are also infinite in number, the gods are, therefore, infinite in number. The worship of divinities in various forms, various shapes, and various possibilities and potentialities is supposed to be the first phase of religion. We pray to a god of this particular occurrence or that particular occurrence.

There are many religions in this world. There are at least four major Semitic religions and four major Eastern religions. The four major Semitic religions are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. The Eastern major religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. We can add several more, such as Sufism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism. So we have about twelve religions in this world. Each one of these religions has a peculiar uniform characteristic of positing divinities behind physical phenomena.

Gods are looked upon as residing in heaven. The Judaic God or the Christian God or the God of Islam is in heaven: the Father in heaven. We look up to the skies and offer our prayers because of this transcendent character that we attribute to God, as we look to the sun above in the sky – though we ourselves are a part of the solar system and the sun is not above us, physically speaking. The concept of there

being something above is due to our spatial isolatedness from the central structure which is the whole solar system. In a similar manner, we conceive of a god or a heavenly world transcendent to the physical world, notwithstanding the fact that these gods have also to be immanent as well as transcendent – immanent because of the fact that they are present inside us also. They are not merely inside some phenomena taking place outside us as observed facts of nature; they are inclusive of everything that we ourselves can be and are, because we ourselves form part of the natural world. Our incapacity to consider ourselves as part of the world is the reason why we consider the gods as transcendent and look upon them as something existing in the skies. But the moment we begin to feel our presence as integral participants in the structure of the whole world, the immanence of the divinities also becomes clear, and God becomes transcendent and immanent at the same time.

Here we have the second stage of religion, where the transcendence which is emphasised in certain religions, especially the Semitic ones, later on also permits the immanence, as emphasised in Eastern religions, to further develop into a blend of both the transcendent and the immanent. The trait of looking upon the divinities in the heavens as something above us, casting our eyes to the skies – looking up to the heavens in prayer – is something ingrained in us on account of our incapacity to feel a oneness with the world outside, with the society of people, with anything whatsoever. We appear to be always observers, perceivers of the world; we are not part of the world.

Here is a sentence that we have to underline. We always emphasise, wrongly, that we are observers – lookers upon, and visualisers of the world. We never believe that we are part of the world. If we concede that it is impossible for us to stand outside the world because our own physical individual personality is constituted of the very same stuff as the world is – then, if that is the case, no event in the world is caused by

something that is outside us. We are also partly responsible for anything that is happening in the world. We cannot say, "Somebody did something," "He is responsible for the evils of the world," "Such a thing has happened due to that man's mistake." These statements cannot be wholly true, because a little bit of contribution has also been made by us for the existence of these troubles, inasmuch as we cannot stand outside the world totally.

Nevertheless, we want to stand outside; the world is to be considered as an object of perception. We cannot regard ourselves as anything but subjects looking upon the world. But how can there be a world of perception at all if it is totally segregated from the perceiving consciousness?

So, religion rises again from that initial impulse to recognise causes behind effects as constituting the nuclei of events taking place in the world, as operating transcendent to the visible phenomena, as being intelligent and purposive in their nature because of the fact that they are super-physical. They are gods and divinities and celestials. These were the initial concepts of religion everywhere in the world, in all the phases of religion right from the beginning of the history of mankind. These concepts developed gradually into the recognition of it being necessary for the heavens to come down to the world for our immediate succour - the incarnations, as we speak of: the God coming, the Christ coming, the Messiah coming, the Avatara coming. These ideas are the subsequent development of a more mature religious consciousness that wants God to come to the earth also; He cannot remain only in the skies, transcendent and unconcerned with the affairs of the world. Thus the transcendent cause, multifarious in its nature and multiple in its existence, becomes, at the same time, an operative individual and immanent cause. The gods become individuals in heaven, becoming conscious of everything that is taking place in the world.

Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, Surya – whatever *devata* we hear of in such scriptures as the Rig Veda Samhita – are gods originally considered as transcendent beings looked upon in the sky, as it were, beyond the earth, but later on recognised as controlling forces of nature. We have the Varuna Sukta of the Atharva Veda, which is a marvellous composition of the Veda Samhita, where the total God is made picturesquely presentable before our eyes, as it were, controlling the whole cosmos within and without – the transcendent and the immanent becoming closer and closer until they become one Absolute.

There are varieties of the developments of this initial explorative stage, as I call it. I mentioned that there are about five stages of religion. I purposely intended to designate these stages in my own way as explorative, ethical and legal, epic and ethological, mystical and ritualistic, and philosophical and logical.

As I mentioned, I will try to scan these stages as far as possible within these few days. This is an interesting subject, and it is not merely a glib investigation of a scientific and philosophical nature. It is a practical touch that is given to the very religion that you are practising, so that this little knowledge that you would be able to imbibe within these days may actually energise your personality by convincing you that the heavens are not outside you; they are operating inside you. The Kingdom of God is within you.

Chapter 2

THE ETHICAL AND THE LEGALISTIC STAGE OF RELIGION

Yesterday during our session we had occasion to notice that a historical development of religious consciousness may be classified under five stages or phases. I designated these stages as the intuitive and the exploratory firstly, the ethical and the legalistic secondly, the epic and the theological thirdly, the mystical and the ritualistic fourthly, and the logical and the philosophical fifthly.

We took enough time to cover the gamut of this initial endeavour of the human mind to posit a super-physical reality in a multi-formed presentation of controlling powers directing and superintending over the phenomena of nature – whatever be the number of these occurrences, processes or events. It was felt that nothing can happen unless it is caused to happen; and this cause must have a purpose, an intention and an understanding as to what it is doing and why it is doing it when it directs the multifaceted phenomena of nature.

Through the history of religions, we observe this particular phase of the adoration of divine beings. We have the most ostensible form of this kind of envisioning divinities above humanity and physical nature in the original concept of the Greek religion, which posited the gods as living in Mount Olympus with Zeus or some such divinity ruling the destiny of all people. They did not go higher to the latterly conceived heavens populated by the gods. Their gods were very near, on the mountain top. And we have other instances of this kind in different religions where the gods, like the ones described in the Iliad of Homer or the Odyssey, are more human than divine. They can speak human language. Divinities like Athena, the great guiding divinity of Greek religion, could order the march of the Greek army against the Trojans and also instruct Odysseus how he had to come back after the war was over, and so on.

The gods were considered as capable of speaking in human tongues, thinking as human beings would think, and being endowed with emotions and even prejudices which characterise human nature, generally speaking. Some of these traits are found even in the gods of the Veda Samhitas. Many they can be, endless they are, to control whatever man considers as the composition of nature, placing the gods somehow or other above human thought, sometimes above human reach, and perhaps above the physical world.

Yet, as we noticed yesterday, the coming of the gods into accessibility by human beings creates a doubt as to the manner in which this descent can take place, because a super-physical divinity that is outside and beyond the world cannot maintain that beyondness or distance from the physical world when it has also the duty to take care of the physical world – people living on the earth – every day, or constantly, we may say. The Jews established covenants with the Supreme Being. For every little trouble they would invoke Him. And, God posited in that manner has His own loves and hatreds. He can punish and curse and destroy; and He can also bless and elevate.

But the coming of God from the transcendent super-physical realm – the divinities as they were considered earlier – associates these divinities with another characteristic of immanence, because that which is beyond the physical world, reigning transcendentally with a distance maintained between the physical world and the heavenly world, can have its arms reaching the earth of human beings only if there is a possibility of that arm reaching the earth at all. This power associated with the divinities, by which they can remain above the physical world transcendentally and also reach out to the littlest difficulties of humanity, makes them nearer also and not just farther. They are transcendent, and are also immanent.

Yesterday I cited the Varuna Sukta of the Atharva Veda which is the highlight, I should say, next only to the Purusha

Sukta, of the summoning of God as a Universal Immanence permeating and percolating every atom of the cosmos and counting every breath of a human being, and knowing every movement that is taking place even in the corner of the world. The Veda Samhitas are the nearest examples of this positing a heavenly world populated by divinities – gods over nature, gods in heaven with their own emblems, functions, locations, powers, and limitations. They come down. The Upanishads go further in an elucidation of the manner of this coming down, though formalistically it can be considered as an incarnation – a descent from the skies like an angel dropping or as rain would fall. This is a picturesque presentation of the childhood stage of man where humanised gods are conceived as coming down physically, visibly, with an intelligible and visible form associated with them, and doing the work for which they have come.

This relationship of a heavenly transcendence and earthly immanence brought before the eyes of the sages of the Upanishads a concept of the Universal which is not just transcendent, and not just immanent. It is the coming together of that which is above and that which is below. The remotest thing becomes the nearest thing, in which process of the remote and the near coming together there is a universal immanence together with its transcendence brought before the mental eye of religious apprehension.

If you study the Veda Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads with a historical perspective before your mind, you will notice the stages of the development of the recognition of gods as necessary guides, friends and philosophers of people, leading gradually to the highest concept of it being not possible for these divinities to be away at all – because even if they are a little away, they may not listen to our prayers. The smallest distance between us and the gods may cause a delay in the coming of the god to the succour of people. The divinities are supposed to act instantaneously, in a timeless manner. The very thought of

Indra, Mitra or Varuna is enough to bring that divinity to action just at that moment.

Hence the gods, notwithstanding the fact of their superiority as super-physical beings, had also an element of timelessness in them which would, at the same time, be inseparable from spacelessness. These questions were raised in the Upanishads many a time and in various ways, right from the Isa up to the Svetasvatara Upanishad, in a movement of thought considering this characteristic as feasible now, and considering the other characteristic of the divinity as practicable and necessary at other times, and so on. This ended finally in the glorious conclusion of the highest proclamations of the Upanishads, delineated again in the Bhagavadgita, that every quality can be attributed to the divinities that finally form a hierarchy of ascent and descent – not constituting individually located, isolated persons, but functions of an otherwise omnipresent existence.

Here we have the earliest thought of religious awareness, bringing us from the super-physical transcendence down to the inconceivable immanence of an otherwise-universal eternity. Though these descriptions can be briefly stated in these few words taking just a few minutes of time, the development actually took ages. Large tomes of exposition have been published as researches into the methods and the processes involved in the movement of this religious awareness from point to point until it became complete and perfect and there was no necessity for it to move at all.

Many Western thinkers consider Indian thought to be stagnant – that it has come to a stop, that it cannot develop further – whereas Western thought even now is on the march forward, it is moving and progressing, and it is innovating. Every day there is a new finding in thought and action in the Western cultural pattern, whereas it is felt that Indian thought has stopped. It stopped with the Upanishads, it stopped with Acharya Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and today we have nothing more to say. Why should we have

endless progress, when progress has to reach the destination one day or the other? Are we always only walking, without reaching the destination? What is the point in thinking that progress is the watchword of nature, and it should not end anywhere at all? This criticism of Western thought is short-sighted and fallible, because there cannot be only progress and process without reaching anything finally. It is the glory of Indian thought that it has reached the apex of possibility in human consciousness. The river has reached the ocean, and it need not move further. Thus it is not stagnant, as is wrongly attributed to the perfection of Indian thinking. It is a completion that has been achieved, a perfection and a stability that characterises the achievement of the goal itself.

When religion is mainly concerned with God-consciousness, whatever be the shape, characteristic or form earlier attributed to God – plurality, duality, hierarchy, group, or unity, whatever the case may be – one thing is common in all these processes of development of religious thought: namely, there has to be a divinity. The divinity may be one or it may be manifold. It may be anywhere, but it has to be somewhere. And it is not enough if it is somewhere; it has also to be accessible to the summoning individual. And it should not take time to come; it has to act instantaneously. These were the gradual modifications made to the characterisation of the divinities by human thinking, with various links and gaps in the middle, finally forming a continuous chain of development ending in the concept of the Absolute – the Brahman of the Upanishads, the Ishvara or the Purushothama of the Bhagavadgita.

As it is said, the Indian concept of religion has somehow or other come to a stop on account of its conviction that it has reached its goal. If this is so, it is up to this consciousness of perfection to see how it can become part and parcel of the law and order of the world. A word is mentioned briefly in the Veda in relation to order and law in the world. *Rita* is the word used in the Samhitas, which is supposed to be the

temporal manifestation of the eternal *sanatana* law – which is *satya*, God Himself. The ordering of the human life in the light of this recognition of a God operating transcendently as well as immanently becomes the next question, which is the *modus operandi* of human existence: how you and I should conduct ourselves – how we have to live in this world when faced with this great concept of ruling divinities which are all-pervading.

Here the system becomes introduced into social existence. Anthropologists tell us that originally there was no society. It was a state of nature – that is, just individuals living totally isolated, like beasts. Some political scientists, even stalwarts, were of the opinion that originally man was like a wolf. Perhaps he is like a wolf even today. And every wolf is afraid of every other wolf because each has the same power as the others. One can tear the other. But who will tear whom is a question which cannot be decided by anyone. I am mentioning here the theory of Thomas Hobbs, the great political scientist who conceived the origin of government as the coming together of wolves in a pack and speaking to one another, saying: “This state of affairs is not satisfactory. I am afraid of you; you are afraid of me. How long can we live like this? We must have a system.”

The ethical governmental principle of law and order seems to have originated on account of it being impossible for wolves to live together unless there is some agreement or understanding among them. What is the agreement? The wolves told one wolf, “You should tell us how we should behave, and whatever you say will be law for us. If you say something is not proper, we shall not do it. If we make any mistake, you have the power to punish us; and if we do the right thing, you have the power to bless and grace us.” The wolf replied, “How can I control you? You are so many in number and I am only one.” “We shall give you a group of us that will protect you,” they said. This is the army and the police. And this one wolf is guarded and protected and kept

secure by a batch of wolves that sees that the majority of wolves do not attack and destroy or shake the position of this chosen, elected wolf. This is a political concept of the beginning of law.

But religion does not think that law and order originated in the manner that the contract theory of political science would tell us. The necessity to introduce law into the world arises on account of there being a God who is omnipresent. It is not because we are wolves; that is not the reason. Inasmuch as there is an omnipresence controlling even the littlest modicum of physical existence, it follows automatically as a corollary that this all-pervading omnipresence should also determine the give-and-take policy and the mutual relationship of people in this world. My attitude towards you or your attitude towards me should not in any way contradict the presence of an omnipresent reality; and it is up to us to draw conclusions from the fact of there being such a thing as an omnipresence reality.

How would we conduct ourselves in this world if there is an omnipresence permeating every cell of our body and every atom of the physical world? We have many weaknesses, together with the great aspirations that we have at the same time – namely, the power to recognise that there is such a thing as omnipresence. It is not a small achievement, of course. The brain of the human being should be immensely powerful and capable of accommodating impossible ideas such as the ideas of eternity and infinity. Philosophers sometimes humorously tell us that what is wonderful and surprising is not that God exists; what is surprising is that the little brain of this puny human individual is capable of conceiving such a thing as God. That is the marvel – not just the existence of God. There is a miraculous potentiality in the little brain of the human individual which is the vehicle of a consciousness that is commensurate with omnipresence itself.

The weaknesses of human nature are also taken into consideration while framing laws and regulations in the world – which is the second stage of ethics and legality. It is not enough if we consider only our strengths and our greatnesses, which also should always be taken into account, of course; but a little margin and a little bit of concession has to be given to the weaknesses of human nature – namely, desires. The concept of God is a power and a potentiality of great magnificence in the human mind, no doubt, but it has other capacities also, such as running to sense objects, wanting a lot of land and property and money, the grabbing habit of wealth, intensely working hard for maintaining this physical body by hook or by crook, and the vehement longings of an emotional nature – together with the final philosophically-concluded aim of unity with the omnipresent God.

From Manu onwards these features – among the many possible weaknesses of human nature – were broadly classified by the legalistic ethical codes called the Smritis, and these human potentials were grouped into a fourfold category known as *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. *Moksha*, of course, is the well-known consequence that follows from there being such a thing as infinite and omnipresent existence – without which, even breathing is not possible – and unity with which, of course, has to be the be-all and end-all of all human life. It is taken for granted that *moksha* is our aim.

But, what about the other things? “My desire for money and land, my hunger and thirst, my emotional requirements; what do you say about them? Provision also has to be made for them.” You can have money, you can have land, you can have ahouse; we do not object to that. Fulfil your aesthetic sense also. All the fine arts may give you satisfaction, enjoyment; we do not object to this also. *Artha* and *kama*, let them be with you. But please listen that this permission that you can enjoy material comfort and you can have emotional

satisfaction is given to you under a proviso of law that, on the one hand, your permission to enjoy material and emotional comforts should not in any way deprive another person from having the same facility as you would like to have. That is, there should be a proportionate distribution of this permission that is granted, in the light of there being many people in the world – not only one or two. Otherwise, you will become a thief or an exploiter. An exploiter is one who takes for one's own self more than what can be conceded in the light of the existence of many other people also in society.

So, on the one hand, the gracious grant given to you should not in any way tilt the balance heavily only on your side. You should take into consideration the harmonious relationship that you have to maintain with other people also. If you have to eat, others also have to eat. If you have to live, others also have to live. And if you want to enjoy, others also would like to enjoy. Live and let live. This should be your motto.

This is one side of the matter, socially. But on the other side, the permission given to you to enjoy physically and emotionally should not contradict your movement towards the Absolute. You should not become a fallen angel, a weakened individual, an incapacitated seeker deprived of the facility necessary for contacting the supreme goal, which is omnipresence.

So while you are given the permission to live comfortably in this world, materially and emotionally, two things have to be borne in mind. You should not hurt, injure or exploit other people around you. They should also be as happy as you are, or you can be. But, more important than this is that God should not be angry with you. That is to say, the higher Self, which is the omnipresent Reality, should not in any way feel defeated or ignored in your over-indulgence in physical comforts and emotional enjoyments.

This restriction that is heavily brought upon the otherwise-beautiful permission granted to enjoy physically

and emotionally is *dharma*. The law of harmony is called *dharma*. Law, order, system, harmony, symmetry, method – keeping everything spick and span, clean and neat, also may be considered as *dharma*. *Dharma* is a cohesive force which brings together into a state of harmony and equilibrium parts which are otherwise separate. Two persons cannot become one person, and yet it is necessary for two persons to live in society as if they are one person. Partnership, family, government, community, nation – all these imply two living as if they are one, though physically, genetically, anatomically, and physiologically two cannot become one. Two people are two people. They have got two different stomachs, but they have to live as if they are one. That is the spirit of organisation, which commences the moment one is compelled to live with another person. When it is impossible for you to live alone and another person also has to be with you for some reason or other, a law-and-order situation arises and the question of *dharma* also starts. Administration, institutional management, governmental enactments – everything starts from there being another, other than one's own self.

Society is a quality which has been ingrained into the very stuff of the human individual. Therefore, many a time we are told that man is a social animal. Because of the weaknesses of the physical body and the frailties of the human personality, generally speaking, and the weaknesses of the mind, it is necessary for us to live with other people. Totally isolated, individual, physically independent existence is very difficult, even if you live in Uttarkashi or Gangotri. You have to eat a little food which you have not grown with your own hands. That is to say, there is support necessary from another, other than your own self. This is a kind of social life. So while social life is incumbent upon human individuals because nobody can live totally physically independently on account of the frailties of the very construction of the human individuality, it is necessary to concede that there is law operating and must be operating in

the midst of human society. Hence *dharma*, the law of regulating relationships among people, comes into relief even in the midst of these permissions granted for a comfortable living, physically and emotionally. Thus, here come *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama* in the light of *moksha*. I need not repeat the word *moksha*, because it has now become very clear that the very conclusion drawn by the highest reach of religious consciousness is that God exists, and it is an omnipresent existence. Because of the presence of that Almighty power permeating everything inside and outside, social regulations become necessary, and individual discipline also is called for.

Social stratification and individual discipline also follow from the concept of the *purusharthas*. These four aims mentioned – *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* – are known as the *purusharthas*, or the aims of the human individual. *Artha* is a final aim, and *purusha*, of course, is human individual. The final aim of life is of this fourfold character – *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* – which has to be implemented and achieved in society while living in the midst of family, in a community, in a country, or even in an international brotherhood. For this purpose, the *varnashrama dharma* was further conceived as an additional development of this original concept of the *purusharthas* – *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*. Each person should work, should contribute something to society. Nobody can sit idle. Inasmuch as every person requires amenities from society, keeping quiet without doing anything is impossible, not merely because the Bhagavadgita says so, but even economically; and from the point of view of common sense, it follows that we have to make some contribution. In what way can we make this?

There are four ways in which we can make a contribution to human society: by our knowledge, wisdom, understanding and intellection – our scientific, philosophical, educational capacities, number one; by the power of our arms and strength of physicality in administration, hard work and

organisation; by producing economic goods by tilling and trading, etc.; and by actual manual labour. This concept of the fourfold capacities and possibilities of contribution from people to society was originally designated as that traditional concept of *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* – whose meaning has been very much abused these days, though they have a philosophical and ultimately a spiritual connotation, as one could notice by careful observation.

This is the social stratification conceived for the purpose of commanding every individual to be in a position to contribute something to society in the place and station which is occupied by that particular individual – *guna karma vibhagasah*, as the Gita would say – according to our quality and our potentiality to work. While this is very important – a social collaboration is necessary and each one has to participate in this collaborative activity individually and collectively – there is also a need for personal discipline. We are not only to work horizontally with people, but we are also to work inwardly for an upward ascent for the sake of a universal realisation in the end.

This concept of the vertical ascent was stratified in the concept of the other fourfold phase: *brahmacharya*, *garhasthya*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa*. Studentship, study, continence, discipline under a teacher for several years is *brahmacharya*. Then the living of a family life for working for a livelihood and gaining experience in the world is *garhasthya*. Thereafter, a gradual detachment from involvement of every kind in the world of social life is *vanaprastha*. Then a complete dedication of the mind for God-realisation is *sannyasa*.

So we have here, in the ethical institutions introduced by the Smritis, a legalistic approach also. It becomes a command from inside and, therefore, it is ethics and morality. It becomes a command from outside also, so it becomes law and order and enactment. It is both moral and legal – moral because it is an impulsion that has to arise from within us,

and it is legal because it is a compulsion that is being pressed upon us by the necessities of social existence.

The Smritis – Manu, Yajnavalkya, Parasara, and other Smritis – go into great detail into the structure of human society and the duties of man, both by way of the fulfilment of the *purushartha* – *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* – in a well-harmonised manner, in giving due proportion to considering the station, the strength and the weakness of the individual concerned, and also the need to work in society through the *varna dharma*, and finally to work for the salvation of the soul through the *ashrama dharma*.

Chapter 3

THE EPIC AND THE THEOLOGICAL STAGE OF RELIGION

Religious instruction is supposed to come in three ways or methods, known as Prabhu Samhita, Suhrit Samhita and Kanta Samhita. The first one is an instruction that comes directly as if from a court, which compels a person to do a thing on account of the strictness and the precision of the order. The proclamations in the Vedas and the Smritis come under this category: "This has to be done, and this should not be done." Whether or not we are able to appreciate this instruction and accommodate it to our practical life voluntarily, of our own accord, is immaterial to the giver of the instruction. It has to be done whether we like it or not; and, also, it has not to be done, whether we are agreeable to it or not. Prabhu is the overlord, an authority, a ruler giving the instructions. Such a text, such religious literature comes under what is usually known, in Hindu tradition, as Prabhu Samhita.

The second category is instruction coming from a friend to a friend: "It should be done like this. It is good for us because many have done it in this manner. Look at the other people. They have behaved like this, did this kind of thing and they succeeded, so it would be proper for us to do this also." This is an instruction not coming like a court order but as a mutually agreed understanding of common consent. This kind of religious literature comes under the category of Suhrit Samhita.

There is a third variety, an instruction that comes from the lover to the beloved or from the beloved to the lover. They are of a different category altogether. They are more intimate in the manner of communication of ideas – not like the ideas that come from a court or a king, not even like a friend speaking to a friend, but something of a different character altogether. This category of literature is called Kanta Samhita.

As I mentioned, the basic religious texts of the world come under the category of Prabhu Samhita. Whether a Bible or a Veda or a Koran or whatever be the basic text of a religion, it tells us what has to be done and the way in which it has to be done. Most religions in the world consider God as a lawgiver, a superior authority over us – and we know what an authority means. It is a scientific approach which need not necessarily be connected with feeling or even the appreciation of the circumstance or condition prevailing in another person.

Judicial authority is like that. It does not bother as to what will happen to a person in case the order is executed, because the order is according to the principles laid down and, therefore, it has to be communicated. There is no friendly relationship between an authority and the one over whom the authority is exercised. It is, therefore, a parental attitude. In religions, in the beginning stages at least, there is an odd relation between oneself and one's maker – that is to say, we look upon our God with tremendous fear, and we are awestruck by the might and the power that the divinity wields and the work that can be wrought by the divinity either in favour of or against anyone.

The stages of religious consciousness that we have been discussing for the last two days concern themselves mainly with the Prabhu Samhita aspect of religion: the scriptural and the codified legal methods of religious communication. In India, this system is followed in the Vedas and the Srutis and Smritis. But human nature, which has to react entirely for the purpose of a religious awakening, should not be allowed to withdraw some aspects of it in answer to a particular religious call on account of the fact that there are certain aspects of our nature which are not evoked into action by the religious mandate. For instance, our affections, our little difficulties, our longings, our loves, our dislikes, which are part of our very existence, cannot be thrown away into the dustbin as if they do not exist at all merely because

we are religious students. Religion cannot become an order issued in a concentration camp, though such appears to be the codified instructions apparently coming from a mighty authority above – at least from the point of view of what we hear through the scriptures, which are said to be orders issued by God Himself or by a prophet come as an ambassador of God.

Religion is not mere obedience to authority. It is something more than that. Though obedience to authority forms part of the religious submission in the practice of spiritual life, it is not merely surrender of oneself unwilling to an authority that is press heavily upon oneself. It is a willing offering of oneself entirely, from every side of one's nature, to the meaning involved in the instructions that have come from above.

Voluntary acceptance of an order is different from an involuntary obedience to it due to fear. Religion cannot be merely an outcome of fear. It is much more than that. It has to be actually a voluntary undertaking by the individual due to a longing inside, an aspiration, and affection for the authority – not fear of authority, but affection for authority: love. The scriptures mentioned have very little scope for the manifestation of human affection in terms of God Almighty, who has to be invoked day in and day out for the redress of grief and suffering of every kind in the world.

The gods come in the form of an incarnation, or *avatara*, whenever the call of humanity summons them. We also noticed this earlier – the battle with evil and overcoming, with the power of the *avatars*' wisdom and energy, all the causes of evil in this world, which are the sources of sorrow in private life as well as in public life. A heroic aspect of the religious presentation is the occupation of the epics, or the great heroic poems of the world. We have great heroic poems in India – the Ramayana and Mahabharata. There are heroic poems of a religious nature in other countries also – for instance, the Iliad and the Odyssey of Homer. They are

religiously orientated war-like poems, as also the case with the Ramayana and the Mahabharata – highly religious, no doubt, but militant in their diction and their approach, generally speaking. We have other epics like ‘Paradise Lost’ and ‘Paradise Regained’ of Milton. They are highly religious in nature but spiritedly present the power of God as opposed to the power of evil, Satan, whom He subdues persistently in a battle that perpetually goes on, as it were, from endless beginning to endless end.

The Puranas tell us much more about this battle of the divine powers with evil forces. It is not merely Ravana and Kumbhakarna, or Duryodhana and his colleagues that are the themes of the heroic poems. This heroism of religious spirit has been inculcated right from the time of creation itself. For instance, the Markandeya Purana tells us that there was a war between Vishnu, or Narayana, and Madhu and Kaitabha, who are the earliest conception of evil in the world.

When we depict a personality as an embodiment of evil, we always bring them in two characters: Madhu and Kaitabha, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu, Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Sisupala and Dantavakra, etc. They do not come singly. The dual aspect implies on the one hand their capacity to attack the psyche of a human being and also society as a whole. They also imply the double character of evil in the world – namely, direct wickedness which goes by the name of the well-observed inequalities of life, and the subtle operation of the evil spirit which does not necessarily come in the form of an observed wickedness or source of dislike, but is painted with a colour and a gorgeous presentation of what may look like an attractive and desirable object.

The whole world is evil, in one way, because it is a tantalising phenomenon which cannot promise anything worthwhile, and all its promises are futile in the end. It dangles a piece of carrot in front of our nose, as the adage goes, and the carrot will never enter the mouth because as

we move forward in the direction of that carrot, the carrot also moves forward. In the world, we have an experience of this kind. Promises are made but they are never kept. The world cannot serve us the goods that it intends to purvey through the temptations that it injects into us through our sense organs. The mind, which is a subservient slave, as it were, of our senses, acquiesces in the wrong reports that the senses give that the world is presentable and it is going to bring heavenly joy when we come in contact with it. But this presentation is false. It is a camouflage, a phantasm, a will-o-the-wisp; it is mirage water. It is like the horizon appearing to be only two kilometres away from us so that we can touch it; but when we move toward it we find that the horizon recedes and it is as far away as it was earlier. However many kilometres we move is immaterial. So is this world. It is very near – very, very near and dear to us, as if we can have anything that we want. But, we will never get it. We will be made to feel that we are getting what we want, but we will really get nothing but sorrow – pinpricks and an exhaustion wearing out the whole body and the sense organs, ending finally in decay and death. Evil comes, therefore, in two ways. There may be other reasons also for this dual presentation of evil.

The epics, by their heroic diction, stimulate our feelings and sometimes make us war-like. This is especially so in the case of the Iliad and the Mahabharata, which bring to the surface of our waking consciousness certain submerged potentialities, all which have to come to the light of day. There should be nothing inside us which we cannot actually perceive with our eyes.

It is necessary for the religious student to know what is inside himself. It is not enough if we see the world outside. It is necessary to see what is inside. There sometimes appears that there is nothing inside. Everything seems to be okay and fine, but a careful investigation into the inner composition of the psyche will reveal that it has fears, hopes, expectations,

frustrations, potentialities for future actions, intense affections and intense hatreds. They are all inside us. They are like little evil genies sitting cosily in the corners of our unconscious mind and germinating into action when the occasion for it demands.

As a good psychoanalyst would work, so the Epics and the Puranas work. These speak in a friendly way, and that is why I said they come under the category of the Suhrit Samhita. "Once upon a time there was a great sage called Vasishtha. He had an encounter with Visvamitra. Visvamitra was a great sage. There was a great Lord called Rama. There was Sri Krishna. There was Harischandra. He did this. This happened. Why do we not also do that?" This is a friendly chat, as it were, without having the sting of the unpleasant authority that is characteristic of the earlier codified texts of legalistic interpretation and significance.

Apart from that, the Epics and Puranas – the heroic poems and the mythological enunciations in these texts – bring out the potentials of human feelings. Feeling is stronger, many a time, than rational understanding. Logically we accept everything that is said in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita and the Smritis but our feelings many a time resent it. It is impossible for us to obey these instructions from the bottom of our heart. But the heart has to be there if the work is to be executed perfectly. Where the feeling of the heart is not there, we are also not there. That is to say, if we perform a work or a ritual or any kind of worship even, ourselves not being present in it, it is as good as it having not been done at all. Unwillingly done work is not work – that is, it is a work mechanically conducted by the reflex actions of the physical limbs but not with the heart or the feeling of a person.

We have to love God with a feeling from the heart and not merely as a logical deduction that follows from philosophical consideration. We concluded that there should be divinities. Gods in heaven must be there, and the Almighty has to be

there because it is impossible to account for the varying phenomena of the world unless such an authority is accepted. God has to be, in order that there may be sense and feeling in the world. There is a philosophical acceptance, no doubt, but what do our feelings say? The feelings have their own inner grumbings and rumbling tension arising from the absence of opportunities provided for the basic instincts of human nature, which is partly human, of course, and also partly animal.

When we have risen from the lower level to the upper levels in the process of evolution, we do not completely sever our connections with the lower levels. Something of the tail end of the earlier stage remains when we go up. Sometimes we are like stones; sometimes we are like trees and plants, and our behaviour is purely biological; sometimes we are instinct-ridden, like animals. Sometimes we are human, of course – very compassionate, very understanding, very sociable and very cooperative. That is our human character. But we are also resentful, very selfish, cut and dry in our approach, very pungent in our speech, and barbed-like in our feelings. That also we can be. That is the animal nature. And we are immensely hungry and thirsty sometimes; our stomach burns with appetite. At that time all affection goes; all consideration for people also dies because the stomach is burning with appetite, with hunger and thirst. This is also a biological instinct. We brought it with us when we came. It does not mean that the tree has gone, the animal has gone, etc., when we become human beings. We are partly trees, partly animals, and partly bricks and stones, also.

So the ascent of the human spirit to God-consciousness, which is the aim of religious instruction, is to also take into consideration all the potentials. They have to be brought up into the surface of human consciousness. We should not be unconsciously stone, unconsciously trees, unconsciously animals; we should be consciously that. When there are potentials in us that are undesirable in comparison with

human nature, they are to be brought before the daylight of human understanding so that we can see our own selves openly and publicly in the light of the sun, as it were, and not search for them in the darkness of the ignorance of the heart. The Puranas have effectively dealt a blow to these inner rumblings of unfulfilled desires, and as a friend speaks to a friend they tell us how we have to conduct ourselves and the manner in which our psychic potentialities can be brought out.

When we read about the lives of kings, heroes and prophets, and about the lives of incarnations and deities, and so on – even of demons, as it is delineated in the Epics and the Puranas – we practically become them, for the time being, by an *en rapport* association with that about which we are reading, as it happens when we witness a good dramatic performance or even a movie. We get changed. A cathartic action takes place in our psyche when that which we like is presented very poignantly before us, and it becomes completely overt. Many a time our affections are hidden on account of social taboos. They are brought out very perspicaciously in the presentations of dramatic actions.

This is the case with the Epics and the Puranas, which are dramas written by the ancient masters, where evil that is dark and affection which is persistent are both presented vividly before us and we see ourselves, as it were, by an externalised projection of our own psyche in the personalities that act in the drama. We vibrate in harmony to the music and the gesticulation. We nod our head, our eyes shed tears, and our whole body vibrates. Did you have this kind of feeling? Did you have this kind of reaction in your mind when you read the Ramayana for instance, or the Mahabharata? It titillates you, it throbs you, it energises you, it enraptures you. It makes you a completely different person because, for the time being, you are Yudhishtira. You feel like crying by the observation of the righteousness that has gone to the extreme in a personality like Yudhishtira. By the

indomitable strength of Bhima, you become like an animal – that is, like an elephant, as it were – when you go on seeing, again and again, the portrait and the actions of Bhima. The dexterity, the wisdom, the agility and the success of Arjuna, the divinity of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, Rama’s greatness, and also the epics of the West that I mentioned, all present actually in a visible form, in a concrete presentation, as it were, all that is inside us.

The Epics and the Puranas have this specific function to perform – namely, to bring out our psychic potentials into overt action. That is to say, we must physically see what is inside us. It can be seen by actual dramatic enactment in a theatre. But no theatre can be larger than the Mahabharata or the Ramayana, and the actors there exhaust every potentiality. The hundreds of personalities about whom we read in epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata or even the Vishnu Purana or Srimad Bhagavata, etc., complete the list of all the possible potentialities and expressions of human nature. We become cleansed completely, as it were, after the study of these Epics.

Very few of us might have read them. We read only abridgements, *précis*, etc., and we know some little titbits or episodes of these Epics. They should be read in their entirety. We will feel that we have been completely washed, in and out. Also, God who was a distant authority, high in the heavens, is made to come down to the level of a real beloved Sri Krishna with his Radha, or Rama and Lakshmana who are the well-wishers of people.

The purpose of these Suhrit Samhitas, or the Epics and the Puranas particularly, is to make God an affectionate object. The worship of God is an act of love that we manifest in our personal life. It is not an instruction coming from an authority or a boss that we are obeying – as is the case with the Smritis and the Vedic Samhitas – which is a different matter altogether. We do it, but that is not enough because our feelings are drying up inside while our understanding is

enhancing itself in philosophical considerations. The feelings cannot dry up. They will be like dry seeds, ready to manifest one day or the other, to our own detriment, if they are not taken care of intelligently.

Therefore, the great sages who were the masters of religious instruction thought it proper to also bring out the feelings of the human being in religious awakening. God should be a friend, philosopher and guide, and an object of beauty. Do we consider God as a beautiful person? Has anybody thought over this? God is a dread, a Justice of the highest court. He is a legal enactor. He is a person who imposes Himself on others. Do we like such a person? For fear of consequences, we may like that person; but fear of consequence is not really our whole-hearted submission. God is not merely power and authority, but also beauty and attraction.

The fact that we relegate God only to the realm of power and authority and completely ignore His beauty and attraction is a peculiar stigma, we should say, in the presentation of proper religion. Religion becomes painful, bitter, difficult to practise, and we have no time for it, generally speaking; it is somehow or other reluctantly undertaken as a kind of necessary evil. This should not be the attitude. It is an attraction that pulls, it is so beautiful and grand, and millions of full moons cannot compare with the beauty of the face of God. Some of these facets have been brought out in the Srimad Bhagavad Mahapurana where is described the grandeur and the beauty and the attraction of the *avatara* Bhagavan Sri Krishna.

We cannot imagine God as a beautiful person because we have been brainwashed into the feeling that He is an authority. He is a creator, He is a power, and He insists on what He thinks is right, whether we like it or not. This kind of idea has gone into our head wrongly. God is a compassionate mother: *mata dhata pitamahah*. He is the supporter, and kind like a mother, though He is very strict like a father. Not only

that – apart from His being the abode of truth and goodness, He is also beautiful.

The three values of life are supposed to be embodied in the great values called truth, goodness and beauty – i.e., philosophical accuracy, ethical confirmation and aesthetic beauty. All these three should be blended together in order that something be finally acceptable. If it is philosophically justifiable but ethically not good, that would not be complete. Ethically good but philosophically not acceptable is also not good. If both are there but it is not attractive, then also it is not good. The Puranas present a picture of God before us as ultimate truth, ultimate ethicality, morality and justice, and the greatest attraction, beauty and taste. *Raso vai sah*: God is tasty, nectar-like, honey. We can drink Him. Who can think of God like this? Thayumanavar, a great Tamil Saint, sang “*ananda tene*: O Honey of bliss!” This is how we have to cry to God. Not “O Lord, controller of the heavens!” or “O Justice of the Supreme Court, the Terror!” This is not necessarily the way of looking at God. “O Honey that I can drink!” “O Milk that flows!” “O Heart of my heart!” “O Apple of my eyes!” “O Beauty of beauties!” The Bhagavata, the Epics and the Puranas have done great justice to bring out these potentials of human beings where we well up in the totality of our personality and we cease to be that little potential of animal and vegetable. We become completely human. Not only that, but the divine potentialities also are brought out in the Sūrit Samhitas.

Much more can be said about these Epics and Puranas. Every student of religion should read these epics. Not merely the Mahabharata and the Ramayana – even the western Eddas, Aeniads or the Iliad or the Odyssey of Milton’s Paradise Lost – all these are wonderful things which will bring your heart in consonance with your philosophical understanding. An intuitive grasp will be generated in your personality and you will know that religion is not merely an occupation, or a performance, or a way of living among many

other possible ways of living; it is the only way possible for living in the world. That is the only manner in which you have to conduct yourself. It is *en rapport* of your personality with the Ultimate Reality of life which is the best in every form, every way.

The Srimad Bhagavata Purana excels the other Puranas in this respect because it gives a complete picture of the whole of the creative process including the *avatars* of Narayana, which are about twenty-four in number, and also the genealogy of the rulers of the Solar and the Lunar lines, concluding with the end of the world itself. The Srimad Bhagavata is considered as one of the noblest of religious texts available in the world.

Vidyavatam bhagavate pariksha is another viewpoint of the Srimad Bhagavata. It is not merely *rasa*, or taste; it is also a literature that tests the ability of a scholar. If you want to know whether a person is really scholarly or not, give him the Srimad Bhagavata Purana and ask him to expound it. It is difficult not only because of the complexity and toughness of the Sanskrit style but also because of the implications, the profundities and the hidden meanings behind the great verses. The pinnacle of the Srimad Bhagavata is reached in the tenth *skanda* where the threefold phase of Sri Krishna's life – the Vrindavana lila, the Mathura *lila* and the Dwaraka *lila* – is described. The Kurukshetra *lila* is mentioned very little in the Bhagavata. For that, you have to go to the Mahabharata. These will tell you how a perfect gentleman, how a perfect hero, a perfect *yogi*, a perfect householder, a perfect *sannyasin*, a perfect god lives in the world. Purana Purushottama, the complete incarnation, is delineated there – not because we have to hear the story of the great man, but because we have to mould ourselves into the possibility of becoming such a kind of person. He is the example of the great superman of the East; and, man is to become superman. You, I, everybody – one day or the other we have to become

supermen. We cannot exist merely as men crawling on the earth like insects.

Why are these great stories of the power of Rama, the greatness of Krishna, the goodness of Yudhisthira, the strength of Bhima, and the agility of Arjuna told to us? We have to become like that, so that we become perfect – expert in action like Arjuna, strong like Bhima, good like Yudhisthira, great like Krishna, and indomitable like Rama. The Epics and the Puranas tell us these stories in a touching way, breaking the cords of our hearts and making us religious even without our wanting it. Such is the greatness of the second category of scriptures in India, the *Suhrit Samhita*, apart from the well-known *Prabhu Samhita* which consists of two aspects, as I mentioned – the *Veda Samhitas* and the *Smritis*. And in other countries also there is the *Torah* and the *Talmud* in the Jewish religion, the Christian dogma and its mysticism, the original traditional Shia and Sunni and Sufism in Islam, and there are many other aspects of this kind of dual presentation of the traditional and mystical aspects of religion. India has every aspect of religion and is considered to be a repository of religious consciousness of all these, blended in abundance; and as I particularly mentioned to you, the epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, together with the *Srimad Bhagavata Purana*, will fill you with joy.

Religion has to fill you with joy; otherwise, it is not religion. If somehow or the other, unwillingly, you have to get up in the morning and wipe your eyes and take a cold bath because it is told in the scripture, this is not religion. It is joy; it is good: “It does me good; I am happy; I am healthy; it is my duty. I invoke God in the early morning hours. *Suryanarayana* is rising in the east; prostration to Him! He is the life and the soul and the well-being of everybody, the *prana sakti*, the very *prana*, the life breath of people, rising in the east! Prostration to Him!” Joy, happiness, bliss, freedom, release from tension of every kind and making you a healthy

individual both inwardly and outwardly is the function of religion.

Chapter 4

THE MYSTICAL AND THE RITUALISTIC STAGE OF RELIGION

We observed that the manner of religious instruction can be classified under a threefold *modus operandi* known as Prabhu Samhita, Suhrit Samhita and Kanta Samhita. The order of an authority is the principle behind Prabhu Samhita. The friendly advice from a friend and well-wisher closely related to oneself is the principle behind Suhrit Samhita. Generally speaking, there is a big gap between the authority issuing orders and the recipient of the order. A mandate coming from a king or an enactment of parliament may be an obligatory duty imposed upon all people, whether or not it is intelligible to everybody or even acceptable to many people, with no consideration whatsoever for the individual recipient's reaction, and based entirely on the peremptory will of a central ruling principle. Instructions, when they are issued, keep the authority at a distance from the recipient of the order. There is obedience to the order due to the fear of consequences, not because it is palatable and voluntarily accepted.

There is a nearness and a greater closeness of relation among friends. A friend does not behave like an authority towards a person who is also a friend. There is a relationship of superiority and inferiority between authority, such as government, and the recipient of the order, but there is a sense of equality between friends. The distance between the source of the instruction and the recipient thereof is narrowed down in friendly concourse.

In the Suhrit Samhita, even the distance between man and God, in the field of appreciation of religious values, is brought down to a minimum. The God of the Vedas and the Upanishads seems to be very far away from us – as potentate ruling from the heavens like a judicial paramount authority, thinking and acting only from his point of view and not necessarily taking into consideration another's point of view.

The friendly attitude is a mutual give and take of ideas; and the distance between the authority and the recipient of the order from the authority, which was considerable in the field of instruction known as Prabhu Samhita, becomes narrowed down to practically an absence of it. There is a concourse between two parties. God comes to the earth as an incarnation, as a friend and a redeemer, a well-wisher, a compassionate physician of the soul.

The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Smritis, in Indian religious parlance – and similar codes of scriptural authority and ethical mandate in other religions also – come under this category of a fatherhood of God who resides in heaven above; and He has not yet become a friend of man. The father is not a friend of the son -though he, of course, is a well-wisher of the son. You know the difference between the father and a friend. That is the difference between the originally conceived scriptural concept of God in heaven as the Father Supreme, and the dear and near God who is close to our heart and capable of approach and appreciation in love, affection, comradeship and close intimacy. These are the first two categories: Prabhu Samhita and Suhrit Samhita.

There is a third category known as Kanta Samhita. I compared it to the instruction that is received by the beloved from the lover – and vice versa, the instruction received from the beloved by the lover. Compare the relationship between the authority ruling from the throne of the country and the peasant in the field who has to obey that order. Compare the relationship between one friend and another friend. Compare the relationship between the lover and the beloved. All three categories imply some kind of relation, but they qualitatively differ from one another in the sense of the closeness between the two sides or the distance maintained by the two parties.

Usually, traditionally speaking, the term Kanta Samhita is used to describe the contents of the great Mahakavyas, the elegant literature of the great poets like Kalidasa,

Bhavabhuti, Magha, Sriharsha, etc. Raghuvamsa, Kumarasambhava, Kiratarjuneeyam, Sisupala Vadha, Naishadeeyacharita – these are the polished elegant literary works known as the Mahakavyas, whose method and way of speaking is known mostly as the field of Kanta Samhita. But, in religious literature there is also a Kanta Samhita aspect.

The methods of spiritual practice, the ways of religious organisations, and the public proclamations of the religions of man in regard to God that are commonly known to the people in the world – these are only of the category of Prabhu Samhita and Suhrit Samhita.

In Western circles, the Kanta Samhita aspect of religious instruction is rarely seen, though it is seen very feebly in mystical circles even in such religions as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is the mystical inner circle which is totally different from the outer forms that religion takes in terms of the literal meaning attached to the word of the scripture or the word of the concerned prophet. There is an inner circle, an esoteric aspect of religion in Islam that goes by the name of Sufism; and there are mystical philosophers in Judaism, like Philo the Judea; and there are Christian mystics.

In India, the esoteric aspect of religion can be seen in the Agama Sastra, which is categorised into the Vaishnava, Saiva, and Sakta sections. These are names with which we are very familiar, but their contents are not easily accessible to the public. The Agama Sastra is Vaishnava, Saiva or Sakta, as I mentioned. The easy and more widely known Agama belongs to the Vaishnava, which is principally of the nature of the Pancharatra doctrine. This is worship of Bhagavan Narayana or Vishnu, not necessarily as one residing in Vaikuntha far off, above the world, but as descended through incarnations and conceived in terms of certain descents called *vyuhas*, or groups of divine associations, widely known as Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, the meanings of which are known only to the esoteric Vaishnava circles.

The Vasudeva aspect is the transcendental aspect, Samkarshana is the immanent aspect, Pradyumna is the operative aspect, and Aniruddha is the visible aspect. God can be worshipped as the universal all-pervading Being. God can also be worshipped as the creator supreme of this universe. God can be worshipped as the incarnation, *avatara*, of Vishnu. God can also be worshipped in idols or images which we keep in temples and houses as emblems of the presence of the Almighty.

These categorisations are purely a part of Vaishnava theology, bringing God's relation to man closer than what is found in the Suhrit Samhita circle. This is because in the esotericism involved in this concept of God as related to man in the Agama method, the closeness is not like the closeness of friend and friend; it is closer still. I gave a little hint yesterday of it being possible for us to absorb God into our own selves as a verily desirable aesthetic object of enjoyment. The Agama converts religion into an aesthetic, beautiful, architectural, sculptural, musical beauty. For instance, it is the Agama's role to decide how a temple is to be built, and the other Samhitas do not touch this aspect.

Beauty is to be introduced into the worship of God because beauty attracts more than anything else in the world. Law may attract us, morality may attract us, but aesthetics attracts us more. Music and dance, architecture and sculpture, painting and drawing, elegant literature and poetry arouse the soul more effectively than hearing stories of the exploits of the gods in the Epics and Puranas or by submission to the order and law of an authority. All worship through the Agama, which is called Tantra in the case of the Sakta type of worship, is involved in certain well-known processes – *mantra*, *tantra* and *yantra*. These are words with which we are also familiar, but their basic esotericism is not always clear. The theoretical and the philosophical aspect of Agama and Tantra are known to many students of philosophy, especially since some of the great texts in this

line were translated into the English language by pioneers in this field such as Sir John Woodroff, but nobody will tell us how actually the practice takes place. How do we worship God through the Agama Sastra?

Even in the Vaishnava circles, which mostly keep God at a distance, a subtle transcendence of God is emphasised together with the possible immanence of Him. There is a secret doctrine of Vaishnava worship which is called Sahaja Marga – a word which many of us might not have even heard, and the meaning of which is even less known. It is impossible to describe what this system of worship can mean to a spiritual seeker. As I mentioned, they are esoteric and secret, and they are not supposed to be declared openly in public – as the relationship between husband and wife cannot be declared in public. Everyone knows what that relationship is, but we cannot explain it because the moment we explain it, it becomes profane. The divinity, the unity and the closeness which is characteristic of a soul melting into soul gets diluted into a prosaic approach of a legalistic and moralistic way of thinking when the relation between the lover and the beloved becomes a textbook subject or a theme for a public lecture.

In a similar manner, the basic principles involved in the Agama and Tantra Sastra is never to be seen in any printed book. It is a closely guarded secret, as is the secret between the lover and the beloved. Nobody will say what it is, and nobody is expected to say what it is, because revealing that secret is something like revealing the inner content or core of an atom or a nuclear secret being released to the public through the newspapers. There is a danger in the practice of this aesthetic method of the contemplation of God in relation to the human individual – though it is considered by many a seeker as the best method possible. The Kanta Samhita method of religious worship is supposed to excel in its quality in comparison with the Prabhu Samhita aspects or the Suhrit Samhita aspects.

The excellence consists in the fact that the worshiper is practically inseparable from the object of worship. The *mantras* that are chanted, the *yantras* that are drawn, or the *tantric* rituals or the methods adopted in the form of worship are extremely personal due to it being necessary for the student in this field to transmute the visible world of material presentation into the very spiritual object of adoration. For the Agama and Tantra in their higher reaches, there is no such thing as bad, evil, ugly or sinful. These words are really abominable for a moralist or ethical student, because we do see evil in this world. There are bad things, there are ugly things, and there are many wicked things which are ethically condemnable; and the world abhors them from the bottom of its heart.

It is true that the abomination that is associated with the wickedness of the world and the evil that we think of as present everywhere is, of course, a visible phenomenon which has to be taken care of in a legalistic, ethical or socially ordained manner. But the esoteric circles go beyond this legalistic approach to the behaviour of the world which we call evil by going into the very reason behind it. Why does the world appear as evil?

Generally, people who condemn evil cannot answer this question. Why should a thing appear bad – though everyone knows what a bad thing is? Is it necessary for a thing to appear bad always? Are there eternally bad things? Is there such a thing called eternal damnation in the sense that a person involved in an evil which is supposed to be there permanently cannot be relieved from the trammels of its clutches?

The inner circle of the Agama and Tantra is concerned with the very reason behind the existence of such a thing that can be considered abominable in the world. That is converted into the causative factor thereof, in which case poison turns into nectar. The poisonous aspect or the evil aspect of things, the materiality in objects of the world, we

may say, arises on account of a peculiar wrong presentation of things. Evil and wickedness, we may say, is an erroneous juxtaposition of values – a maladjustment of the parts of a whole – and they do not exist outside, independently, as an object that can be photographed by a camera. A camera cannot photograph evil. Evil is not visible anywhere, yet it is everywhere. We say: “The whole world is corrupt,” “The whole world is evil,” “Everything is utterly ugly and bad,” “Things are degenerating to hell”. This is what we generally say. A camera cannot photograph corruption; it cannot photograph evil, badness, ugliness, etc. It can only photograph what is there, physically speaking.

The values attached to the world through the sense organs – which the mind also takes as a finally valid way of thinking about the world – is, also, usually the method of popular religious practice. Most of the religions in the world are legalistic or moralistic. They are compulsive introductions of precise methods of behaviour – an order that is introduced into the religious way of approach without actually explaining why that order is necessary.

Coming to the point, the rectification of the common belief of the world being evil, or a Satanic production, is taken into consideration in a very, very serious manner by the Agama and Tantra Sastras. The distance that keeps the evil world away from us is narrowed down to an intimacy that makes it impossible for the evil to exist outside the perceiving consciousness. This includes the vagaries of material existence, the pricking pieces of earth which do not look beautiful to us and are considered as objects of renunciation. Do we not say that the world has to be renounced? Every religious doctrine tells us that for the sake of the attainment of God, the world has to be renounced, but it does not tell us what kind of world it is that we are going to renounce. Are we going to renounce the mountains, the trees, the rivers that are flowing, the oceans, the sun and the moon and the stars? What are we renouncing when we are told

that the world is to be renounced for the sake of the realisation of God? And we know that the world consists of only these things that I have mentioned, and there is nothing else about it. Or are we renouncing people? Apart from trees and mountains, there are also people. Does renunciation of the world mean rejection of everybody in the world except oneself? Perhaps that is what is in our minds.

Are we able to justify this attitude of our being religious merely because we consider ourselves to be superior to other people – and the only thing that should not be renounced is our own self, and everybody else has to be renounced? We know very well that renunciation cannot be the renunciation of the earth – the ground on which we are sitting. It also cannot be the renunciation of trees and mountains. It has to be the renunciation of people, family relations, brothers, sisters, and so on. But why should we renounce them? What is wrong with other people? What is the mistake that parents, brothers, sisters, friends, etc. have committed that we consider them as abominable things that have to be rejected?

Now, do we consider that we ourselves also are human beings – that a part of humanity, which is supposed to be renounced in the practice of renunciation, is our own self? Are we able to renounce ourselves also? The renouncer does not renounce himself. Here is the peculiarity behind the popular concept of renunciation. I am mentioning here the esoteric aspect of renunciation that is told to us through the Agamas and Tantras. No one who has not renounced himself first can renounce the world, because the renouncer is inseparable from the world of renunciation; the people whom we are going to reject are not in any way different from what we are. After all, they are human beings like us and whatever evil that we impute to them may be in us, also- perhaps in a larger measure.

So, renunciation, like charity, begins at home. Renounce your own self first and then you will see that everything

connected with you goes with it because when you yourself have gone, all things connected with you also go. Why are you worrying about the renunciation of the world, of people? You are not there, because you have renounced yourself; because of the fact that you have renounced yourself, other things that are apparently connected with you, or were connected with you, also go. When the dog goes, the tail also goes. It cannot be there, separate from the dog.

This is hard for the mind to absorb. What on earth do you mean by saying that you have renounced your own self? Spiritual renunciation, in order that it may become really a divine transmutation of values and not merely a public show or an adumbration of religiosity on the part of a person, has also to be a transmutation of one's own materiality in the form of physical values – desires connected with the physical world related to this body – and the very existence of the spiritual seeker should enlarge its dimension from the material encrustations into a spiritual dimension. Then you will realise that if there are bad things, all things are equally bad because you can see the same badness in everything, if you want to see it. If you think that certain things are evil in this world, there is nothing in this world which is not evil; and if that is the case, what is good in the world, including yourself? You also are included in this category of everything being evil, because there is certainly some defect in every structure of material configuration in the world, including human beings.

So, the evil character that is attributed to objects that are supposed to be renounced is to be seen ubiquitously, seen everywhere, and yourself and the world vanish in one stroke. This cannot be achieved easily unless you know the relationship between the world and yourself. In usual public moralistic and legalistic ways of religious worship, the relationship basically obtaining between oneself and the world is not taken into consideration, because in all these ways the world is always considered as an outside something

and God is there as the transcendental creator of the world. The relationship between the world and yourself is so close that you must be able to appreciate the fact of the very building bricks of your body being the same as the building bricks of the world outside. The five elements – earth, water, fire, air and ether – which are the constituents of the world of matter, the whole of nature outside, are the constituents of your body also. Your attitude towards the world, therefore, cannot be justified unless it is also an attitude that you adopt in regard to your own self.

So, whatever you think of the world is also what you think of yourself. This is generally not done because we have one philosophy for our own selves and another philosophy for the world of objects and people outside. This categorisation of duality between the observer of the world and the observed object is broken down completely and the rise of the soul from the lower to the higher values of life is not considered as a rise from evil to good, from untruth to truth, but as a rise from a lesser good to a larger or greater good. From a lesser truth you rise to the higher truth. The world is not evil; it is a lesser good in comparison with the highest reality and highest values, which are the final good. You may consider the lesser ones to be inconsiderate in their values and their interference may look, of course, like an evil.

When there is a serious parliamentary discussion going on, if a little child crawls in and starts screaming and runs to sit on the lap of its father who is a member of parliament, that occurrence may look like an evil – a totally unexpected thing taking place in the public performance of parliamentary affairs. You would not like a dog to bark there, or a cat to sit on somebody's head. You do not necessarily consider these events as evil in themselves, but they become evil because of the wrong juxtaposition of one thing to the other. The things are where they should not be. Even a right thing may look wrong if it is a projected at a wrong place. The right thing has to be done in the right manner, in the right

procedure, in the right place, because unless all the factors connected with rectitude are there, rightness may become wrongness, and truth may become untruth. There are occasions when untruth may become truth and that which is considered as totally unnecessary may become a very valuable thing.

Have you not heard in Aesop tales that a mouse saved a lion? Can you imagine that a mouse can save a lion? The lion laughed at this little urchin telling, "After all, great master, one day I will be of some service to you". "Oh! You can serve me!" the lion grinned in contempt. Such is the way we condemn the world. Do not do that. The smallest mouse or the worst of things in this world can become a first rung in the ladder of the evolution of the soul to the higher realities, and the ugliest of things in the world may assume the most beautiful form if they are put in the proper place. The worst of things can even become the best of things under certain given conditions. You cannot find fault with anything.

I remember a little verse: "There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it ill behoves any of us to find fault with the rest of us". This is because the contempt that you attribute as a quality to things that are abominable to you, ethically or legally, are finally not permissible attitudes in the spiritual realm. Iron becomes gold, and matter becomes consciousness in the Tantra Sastra method. As I mentioned, the details of the practice cannot be explained. This is only an introduction into the theoretical side of its transcendental character in comparison with the Prabhu Samhita and Suhrit Samhita. Nowhere will you be told how this practice is to be actually conducted. It is a secret between the Guru and the disciple; and, also, the Guru would not like to put a sword in the hand of an inexperienced student. He will give it only to a soldier. The Narayanastra was not to be given to inexperienced people; Dronacharya was reluctant to give it to anybody, but unfortunately he gave to Asvatthama, an inexperienced man, and it wreaked havoc.

Thus, the method of Tantra is supposed to be the quickest and the most potent method of self-transmutation, provided its techniques are properly understood; otherwise, it will be like dynamite which will blow off your head, and even what you have will be lost.

The Agamas are also great textbooks of temple worship, the procedure of actual adoration of God through the well-known methods of *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana*. Briefly, they simply imply the entry of the soul into the inner modes of worship, from the outer circles. *Charya* is the outermost, *kriya* is inner, *yoga* is still more inside, and *jnana* is the finale where the worshipper becomes one with God. But the way in which the entry is sought from the outer circle to the inner circle is a purely esoteric one, and the tremendous incongruity that apparently seems to be there in the behaviour of these great worshippers can be observed in the lives of the great Nayanars and Alwars of southern India, whose religious outbursts and fantastic behaviour with people, and with God Himself, can best be described only as totally incongruent to the legal or moral world of behaviour.

The Vaishnava Agama method is easier to understand, though it also has an inner circle of Sahaja Marga, as I mentioned to you. The Saiva Agama is a little more esoteric than the Vaishnava. The Sakta Tantra is the most esoteric, where the consideration of the student is the immediate task of transmuting matter into divinity, object into subject, externality into internality, the devil itself into God. Can you imagine such a possibility? It has been undertaken, and it has to be undertaken because there cannot be a devil before God. As long as God sees a devil in front of Him, He would not be a complete god.

Therefore, we should not go on harping on the existence of Satan, evil, badness, and ugliness, etc. in the presence of the Almighty Lord because in His presence, evil cannot be there. If evil is not there in the presence of God, how does it become something real in our eyes? Where is Satan sitting?

Where is the place for the demon to sit? Is he inside the kingdom of God, or is he outside it? Is he organically connected with the God's universality, or is he outside the universality? These questions – which are esoteric and deeply secret in their nature – will completely transform the whole world of religious practice. The popular concepts of religion will get transmuted into the gold of an inner circle, which is so difficult to understand. Religion is much more than outer behaviour.

Hence, this is the secret that is between the lover and the beloved, as I mentioned earlier. This does not conform to the social mandates of courts of law or textbooks of ethics, which are public and social in their nature. Rather, they are interior – concerned with the soul of a person in relation to another soul – and this aspect is totally ignored in practical social life, public life, and legal life. Spirituality is much more than ordinary common religion. It is an inner attitude of consciousness, and is not merely a public performance even in the form of adorations, scriptural studies, *japa sadhana*, etc.

Here we have to distinguish between public religious modes of worship and inner spiritual states of transmutation, which is a matter to be decided between the Guru and disciple only. Nobody can be spiritual unless he is initiated into these techniques, and mere textbooks will not help in this matter.

I am not revealing what the secret of this practice is. I am just mentioning that there is such a thing as a transcendent inner circle of behaviour of the soul in relation to God where you become the lover and God becomes the beloved; or you become the lover and world becomes the beloved; or you become the lover and the whole humanity becomes the beloved. If such attitude can be developed in your soul, you have become a transmuted, illuminating spark of divinity walking in this world.

Chapter 5

THE LOGICAL AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL STAGE OF RELIGION

The Vaishnava Agama method of worship conceives approach to God in five different ways, designating God as Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Archa and Antaryami. In one sense, God is the unapproachable Absolute. This character of God keeps us away from Him, viewing the situation from one angle of vision, because there is nothing in the human being that can be compared with God's glory. Submission, *saranagati* – utter humiliation of one's own self in the presence of the mighty God – is one of the special emphases laid in Vaishnava Sastras. *Kimkaryam* is the word they generally use to represent their attitude towards the Almighty: servitude, the attitude of a humble servant.

This follows from the transcendence, the *para-tattva* of Bhagavan Narayana who, in addition to being that unapproachable Creator, is also, due to His compassion, capable of coming down, especially as Krishna Avatara, so that we can worship him in a form. Herein the Vyuha concept arose – known as Vasudeva, Samkarshana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha – which has an exoteric meaning as well as an esoteric meaning. Esoterically, it is comparable to what we know in philosophical parlance as Brahman, Isvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virat. But exoterically, Vasudeva is Sri Krishna; Samkarshana is his elder brother, Balarama; Pradyumna is Sri Krishna's son; and Aniruddha is his grandson.

The entire family of Bhagavan Sri Krishna was brought together into a hierarchy of adoration. A Vaishnava is a devotee of the *avatars* of Vishnu, principally the *avatars* of Rama and Krishna, and many a Vaishnava *bhakta* includes the Narasimha *avatara* as a part of his adoration, due to an inner psychological admiration. A dualistic system of Vaishnava worship is the Madhva Sampradaya of the Udupi Mutt, which brings the Narasimha-tattva together with the

Vishnu-tattva and combines these two aspects, perhaps with the intention of blending two faces of God: the fearsome and the benevolent.

According to the Vaishnava Agama, the attitude of the devotee towards God is a manifestation of five feelings: the feeling of relation between father and son, between master and servant, between friend and friend, between parent and child, and between lover and beloved. These *bhavas*, or feelings, are actually supposed to be rising in an ascending order of closeness to God until in the *madhurya bhava* – the unity of the soul of the devotee in the *rasa*, or the essence of God – he becomes ecstatically maddened. That is the only thing we can say: He becomes ‘God-mad’. Some of these illustrations of God-madness and crying for God, as a person who is raving in his conscious separation, can be seen in the Divya Prabandham of the Alvar saints, the most important being the Tiruvaimozhi of Nammalvar. It is an ecstatic pouring. Words cannot adequately express the feeling of the devotee who pours himself into God. *Pouring* is the word to be underlined. It is not the *gauna-bhakti* of a ritualistic type – collecting flowers, waving lights and offering a formal presentation of gifts, etc., to God, as we do in the temples. This excels. *Ragatmika-bhakti* is superior to *gauna-bhakti*, the secondary devotion which requires external appurtenances of worship.

For instance, we feel we cannot worship God unless we have a place to sit and there is an idol in front of us. A little shrine must be there; some *prasadam* should be offered; a garland of flowers should be on the deity; incense sticks must be lit; light must be waved in front of the deity. If these items are not there, we feel that the worship cannot be done. This is an externalised – *gauna* – ritualistic type, a secondary type of devotion where we feel the need for something other than our own self in the worship of God.

Ragatmika-bhakti is that inner attunement of the deepest essence in us. ‘*Raga*’, ‘*rasa*’, ‘inner essence’ are all feeble,

apologetic terms to suggest what the devotee actually feels. Vaishnava devotees like Saint Tulsidas, Surdas and Mirabai had also risen to this level of an ecstasy of *raga*, but it is only in some of the songs of the Alwars that we find *ragatmika-bhakti* reaching its apex. These are poems expressing the outburst of the soul for the immediate entry of God into oneself. Not tomorrow, not the next moment – it is here, just now.

The Divya Prabandham is written in the Tamil language, and the importance attached to these songs is such that it is called Dravida Vedam, the Veda of the southern countries, equal to the Veda Samhitas – Rig Veda, Yajur Veda or Sama Veda. These great souls were Godmen, as I mentioned. God had entered them; they lived in God. They saw God. They could speak to God, and they had nothing else but God power – power which automatically followed from their love of God, sometimes manifesting itself in queer behaviour.

There are stories of the odd behaviour of these Vaishnava saints, the Alwars, and also of the Nayanars, the Saiva saints. Their devotion sometimes goes to such extremes that it looks fantastic to us, but it is fantastic only to the limited approach of the human legalistic viewpoint. In the devotee's envisagement of God, there are no boundaries and no limitations. We cannot set a limit for the devotee's behaviour. "Thus far and no further" – we should not say that. Sometimes their behaviour, due to being inundated by God's presence, becomes so very incomprehensible that they may not look fit even to live in human society.

These Nayanars could go to Lord Siva in Kailasa, and come back. As we go to Delhi for some business or commitment of ours and then return, they could go to Kailasa, speak to Lord Siva and harangue before him, and return to their houses. And Siva came in any form whatsoever – sometimes in a visible form, sometimes in an intriguing form. The relationship between Lord Siva, the Supreme Being, and the Nayanar devotees was more

intimate than the relationship we have among ourselves here. Any time the Nayanars could chat with God. They could go physically, and come back.

So was the case with the Alwars. They were not only filled with God inwardly, but also outwardly. It appears there was an Alwar who was caught up in a heavy rain and he had to find a little shelter while it was pouring. He lay down on a small bench projecting from a wall, waiting for the rain to stop. While he was lying there, another Alwar came and asked, "Is there some space?" The first Alwar said, "One can lie down, but two can sit. All right, let us sit." After some time a third came, "Is there some space? It is raining." They said, "Well, two can sit but three can stand. Let us stand." A fourth one came: "Is there space?" They said: "There is no space." "I do not require space to exist," said that fourth one, and he vanished from that place. Then the outpouring started, because only Narayana Himself could say, "I do not require space to exist."

Throughout the history of the lives of these people, there were occasions galore for such outpourings. This is also the case with Mirabai and Surdas. They did not sit down and write poems; their poems were outbursts -automatic outpourings that manifested spontaneously, on various occasions, from the soul. There must be some stimuli from outside to evoke that particular sentiment; then immediately something comes out which specially, in a very, very poignant and significant manner, describes a new character of God.

Among these Nayanars to which I made reference, four of them are supposed to be most important. They are known as the Samaya Acharyas—that is, the progenitors of a procedure or mode of worship. These Samaya Acharyas, or the four great Nayanars, are Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar and Manickavachagar. These four great devotees are supposed to represent the methods of *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga*, and *jnana* that I mentioned yesterday, with Manickavachagar representing

jnana, the highest outpouring through wisdom – that is, the knowledge of God. An old Tamil saying is “He who cannot be touched by the words of Thiruvachagam – which is the masterpiece and *magnum opus* of Manickavachagar – cannot be touched by any word uttered by anybody.” Thiruvachagam is a masterpiece of Tamil literature and spiritual outpouring of devotion.

These songs of the Nayanars and the songs of the Alvars constitute a twofold presentation before us of the highest peak that devotion can reach, transcending all limitations and *gauna* ritualistic modes of worship. They need nothing with which to worship God except God Himself. “What do I need for worshipping God? I want myself and God. I don’t want anything else. That is enough.” And what is it that is going to be offered to God? “Myself.” And what is it that you are expecting from this offering? “God Himself.” Do you want anything from God?” “Nothing!” What do you want? “God only!”

The *gauna bhakti* type of worship sometimes utilises God in order to fulfil certain longings. That is, in our adoration of God we have, more often than not, a subtle longing to obtain the blessings of God in the form of varieties of comforts that we would like to have in this world. But *ragatmika bhakti* or *sahaja bhakti*, the final type which is *mathura rasa*, wants nothing from God. This is because, as we know very well, to expect something from God, and not God Himself, is to utilise God as an instrument for the fulfilment of our desires – which are connected to something other than God Himself. We consider our object of longing as somehow superior to God Himself when we say, “God must give me this.” Otherwise, why would we ask for it? It is difficult for the soul to appreciate the greatness of God, especially because people are earth-bound, sense-bound, object-bound, instinct-bound, and desire-bound.

I was referring to certain esoteric systems, secret methods of worship through the Agama and Tantra. They

become secret and difficult merely because of the fact that it is impossible for an ordinary human being to conceive this system of practice. Man is just what man is; he cannot be other than what he is. He is a bundle of apprehensions, prejudices, loves and hatreds, expectations, and all things connected with this earthly mortal continuance of life. This mischievous desire that is at the root of the continuance of mortal existence through this body has to be cut and severed asunder. There should be nothing left – not even a trace of this kind of love for the body and the earthly existence – if we are to be initiated into this great esoteric doctrine of God wanting the soul of the devotee and the soul wanting only God and nothing else.

The Agamas, as I mentioned, are mostly of three types – the Vaishnava, the Saiva and the Sakta. But there are also other Agamas, such as the Ganapatya, the Saura and the Kaumara. The Agamas or systems of worship instituted to adore Maha Ganapati are known as Ganapatya Agamas; those connected with the worship of Suryanarayana are called Saura Agamas; and those connected with the worship of Skanda or Kartikeya are called Kaumara Agamas. These are all inaccessible to ordinary academic approach. The Agama and Tantra method are not philosophical, logical or intellectual. Everything that boasts of human pride should be set aside when we approach God in the inner recesses of our heart, where the intellectual eminence of a person becomes just a husk, another form of ignorance which has to be shed – the earlier, the better.

Varieties of methods are suggested for purifying the human soul in order that the soul may become fit to envisage or encounter God. Unless we have some quality of God in us, we will not be able to see God. *“Devo bhutva devam aradhayet”* is an old saying which means that we have to become God in order that we may see God. Animals cannot visualise God, because similars attract each other and dissimilars repel each other. The attraction that the soul can

have for God, or the attraction that God can have for us, is the pull of the similar in respect of the similar.

Is there in any one of us some quality which can be called a quality that is in God? Go deep into your own hearts. "Have I in myself some spark of quality which I can say is also the quality of God?" We will find there is nothing in us. We are topsy-turvy in every way, and bound hand and foot by the *pasa*, the bonds, as we tie a beast. *Pasa* is a word used in Saiva Siddhanta. The *pasa*, or the bondage, the rope of Varuna described in the Veda Samhitas, is the inscrutable tie of three knots – called Brahmagranthi, Vishnugranthi and Rudragranthi – with which the beast of the individual is tied to *samsara*, this earthly torturous existence. This *pasa* is to be loosened and the dirt, which is known in Tamil as *anavamalam* – the defect of the seed-like potentiality in the human individual that confines its consciousness only to its body – is opened up and the dross therein is completely cleansed through these *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana* methods by a processional approach and a sequential ascent of the soul in the act of purification that is conducted gradually.

The Tantra Sastra, especially of the Sakta type, has various stages of self-purification known as Vaishnavachara, Saivachara, Dakshinachara, Vamachara, and finally ending in Kaulachara, the perfection of the soul where it becomes identical in its character with God. The Vaishnavachara stage constitutes the ritualistic method. The earliest stage of religion is ritual, a kind of performance that is exteriorly manifested by gesticulations of offering, dancing, singing, chanting, etc., which is the *gauna bhakti* that I referred to; this categorisation of *bhakti* is called Vaishnavachara. It becomes more and more inward and esoterically more sublime and deeper in the Saivachara.

The Saivas have fewer scruples than Vaishnavas. Vaishnavas are very orthodox people. We have only to see a Vaishnava in order to know what kind of a person he is – a

very fanatic type. There was a venerable lady who was an utter, out-and-out, hundred-percent Vaishnava devotee, but due to her *prarabdha* she had to live in a room which was very close to a Siva temple. She somehow accommodated herself to it. She had to live there; no use of complaining. One day a Vaishnava Iyengar came to see her. He was shocked: "You are staying here, near a Siva temple? Are you not ashamed that you are living near a Siva temple?" This is the fanaticism of Vaishnavas.

A Vaishnava lady from Karnataka used to go to Badrinath. When asked if she would also visit Kedarnath, she covered her ears. They cover their ears when such words are uttered, because Kedarnath is Siva's temple. This fanaticism is characteristic of the intense orthodoxy of the dualistic Vaishnava theology – partly in the Shrivaisnava type, and much more in the dualistic Madhva type, who go to the extreme of orthodoxy. We have to see them in order to believe how extreme they are.

But when we enter into the circle of Siva worship, the restrictions of the type of orthodoxy that is imposed on us externally by society or by ourselves are diminished. Saivas are more and more informal, free, and personalistic rather than socialised in their worship. In the Sakta modes of worship there is complete freedom. Even the little restriction imposed on us by the Saiva methods goes.

As I mentioned, these are all intricate things, like the manufacture of an atom bomb. The procedures cannot be explained. We cannot understand what God actually requires of us unless we know how far we are from God in the qualities that constitute our individual personality compared to the qualities that we expect to see in God.

Omnipresent is God; we are in one place only. Omniscient is God, and we are ignorant. Omnipotent is God; we are very feeble and weak in every way. God has no desires; we have only that, and nothing but that. God is immortal; we are subject to destruction. God has no external; for us, everybody

is outside ourselves. There is no quality in us that can be compared with God's quality. By scrubbing off these limitations which are physical, social, legal and even ethical in the social sense, we become more and more personal in our nature. We do not go on describing ourselves in terms of what we are not.

"I am the son of so-and-so, father of so-and-so, working in such and such office," etc., are descriptions of ourselves in terms of what we are not. But can you tell me what you are, dissociated from all these connections that you have with the world – with office, with work, and with family? You will find that it is very difficult to describe. You are always something in terms of something else. This is an alienated form of description of yourself – the ritualistic type of defining one's own self, I should say, which gradually gets weaned out in this methodological approach into the higher and higher levels of *sadhana*: Vaishnava, Saiva, Sakta, Ganapatya, Saura, Kaumara, or whatever it may be called.

What happens is that we become super-human, unsocial – even appearing to be anti-social. Though they are not anti-social, the unsocial character and the purely personalistic approach of these people to the realities above the world sometimes makes them look like people not wanted in this world. And their behaviour can sometimes be so anomalous, so totally different from the expectations of society, that they may not be able to live in this world at all. They may be burnt at the stake or crucified or impaled – which has happened in the case of many of Sufi saints, as we hear. They become unwanted in the world, and they want to be unwanted by the world because the more we are not wanted here, the more will we be wanted there.

But, we wish to be wanted very much here. We would like to be the rulers of this earth – head of the United Nations or king of the whole world. The instinct of self-respect, self-adoration, is so very piercingly rooted in the recesses of our hearts that we could go for many days without food more

easily than bear one word of insult, because insult exactly touches the point which we consider as being ourselves.

A verse from the Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad says that a highly advanced spiritual seeker should ask for insult and detest praise. Wherever you are praised, run away from that place. Do not hear a word of any encomium or eulogy about your own self. When the ego is already fat enough, why do you want to plaster it further with more and more encomium falsely poured on you? Those who praise you are actually treacherous people because they can also cut your throat one day or the other. Therefore, lean not on the support of social wealth or self-recognition. Highly advanced spiritual seekers do not expect a weaning from society to take place by the historical process of automatic evolution; they deliberately invoke this condition on themselves by poverty, obedience and charity. These are the great points that are seen in advanced devotion, as totally distinguished from ordinary devotion.

I mentioned the five *bhavas* of the Vaishnavas. They are in the ascending order, where you melt completely in the end. Devotion has to be a means of melting yourself into liquid before the ocean of God Almighty, and you cannot remain as an outside something – because if you are there, God is limited. Let the unlimitedness of God swallow you completely. May you be prepared for this kind of self-annihilation in the glory of God.

I mentioned various *acharas* which are worth studying by any serious student of spiritual practice. These Sastras, Agamas and Tantras – Vaishnava, Saiva, Sakta, Saura, Ganapatya, and Kaumara – are so very touching, so very enlightening, so very enrapturing in their method of approach and instruction, that you will want nothing else afterwards. That is the reason why the whole text is kept as a guarded secret.

Even a book like Yoga Vasishtha, which comes under the Agama section, was kept secretively by Swami Sivanandaji

Maharaj. He would not allow that book to be in the library. There was an abridged edition called the Laghu Yoga Vasishtha, translated into English by Narayanaswamy Iyengar, which Gurudev read many times and underlined sentences in red pencil, but he removed the book from the library saying that it is not to be read by everyone.

The Ashtavakra Gita was a favourite text of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, but if anybody came near, he would thrust it under the bed so that people may not know that it was there. The Ashtavakra Gita, Avadhuta Gita, Yoga Vasishtha and Tripurarahasya are all Agama Sastras because they tell us something which nobody will tell us and nobody is expected to tell us. That is the secret that Christ told on the mountaintop, to a selected few. To others he spoke in parables, but he revealed the secret to his twelve disciples; it is called the Sermon on the Mount. Buddha said the same thing to his devotees: "I know much more than what I have told you, but this is not the time to tell you what it is." And Sri Krishna said the same thing in the Bhagavad Gita: "I know everything. Arjuna, you don't know anything. I shall tell you something in brief."

So here, in this approach which is totally inward, totally spiritual, totally soul-filled, totally informal, totally non-ritualistic, totally unsocial, one seems to be a child, as it were, born just now, with no cult or religion whatsoever, and not even sex consciousness. A little baby does not know to what gender it belongs. We become children before the majestic eye of God when we are cleansed completely of the biological, anthropological, and even human aspects. A baby has no such qualities at all; a baby is only a baby. We cannot describe it in any other way except that it is a baby, and we should not say anything else about it. We become like that. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad tells us to shun all learning and become a child – which is to say, not the first childhood of ignorance and crawling in a state of helplessness, but another childhood that we are assuming, a childhood of

simplicity, self-sufficiency, goodness, beauty and utter minimum of existence, minus the ignorance and other limitations of a child.

Great saints and sages are like babies: they speak like babies, behave like babies; children they are. Verily they are children of God, as a child is dear to everyone, whoever be the mother or father of that child. Would we be happy to see a little baby on the road with no one to look after it? We would not say, "It is somebody's child; why should I bother?" We would be attracted to that little compound of existence which is called a child because of its simplicity, egolessness and perfection of presentation. Such a thing is the quality of a saint and sage. He becomes beautiful, grand, powerful, childlike. 'Godman' is the word to describe him.

This kind of achievement is the aim that is expected by worships that are wholly internal. In the beginning, it is an outward mode of worship through the Prabhu Samhita. It then advances to the Suhrit Samhita, as I mentioned. We want large quantities of substance to offer to God: huge temples, large bells, many books and much chanting, etc. In the beginning all these things are necessary so that we may be roused into a religious mood of the presence of God. Gradually we feel no need for these things; we require ourselves only. We can be anywhere, and we will find God there.

These stages of religious development from scriptures like the Veda Samhita, Smritis, Itihasas, Puranas and the Agamas constitute the whole gamut of religious development. The entire religion is here in what we have been discussing during these days. The original master-like, father-like concept of God, the friendly, more intimate relationship that one establishes with God, and a merger of feeling with God – these constitute the three stages of perfect religion.

While this is so, as history advanced and people became weaker and weaker, it was not easy for people to be truly

religious in this sense. The opponents to religion denied God. They did not want any religion at all and felt that the religious approach is somehow or other totally dissociated from social existence in the world. Philosophical counterblasts and social oppositions arose at that time, which diluted religious development. Finally, when the masters vanished from the earth and the great saints and sages who could speak to God were no more available, and the Godmen vanished completely – when the very root of religion was threatened on account of socialisation, economisation, politicisation, etc., of the life of people in the world – it became necessary for those remaining in the field of religious practice to defend themselves. This defence started, both in the West and in the East, through philosophical arguments. In the West, the religion of Christ was defended by Saint Thomas Aquinas, and he is sometimes considered as the Western Sankaracharya. The great polemics that he discharged against all opposition to Christ's religion through his great works like the Summa Theologica, all which were written in Latin, were necessary for proving the existence of God. In the earlier stages, proof for the existence of God was not necessary. There was a spontaneous feeling that He must exist. Afterwards, this feeling became the great necessity in practical life and, finally, it was the reality in which we are sunk completely. But now it has become a great need for us to prove that He exists, which is a great travesty indeed; but that is the state of logical, metaphysical, and argumentative philosophy.

In India, the arguments of philosophy started with Buddhist metaphysicians like Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, and Sankaracharya highlighted it. Sankaracharya was a master logician and philosopher who lived and died for sake of proving that God is, and God only is. So is the case with Western argumentators. The philosophical systems of the West as well as the East, confining themselves to the work of establishing the truths of religion and spirituality, constitute

the last phase of the development of religion. We shall speak a few words about this tomorrow.

Chapter 6

ARGUMENTS AND PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Religion began with the authority of the scriptures and the prophets. It moved gradually in the direction of the substantiation of religious consciousness in literature, with heroic poems like the Epics and the genealogical history of the religious teachers as is found in the Puranas in India, and stabilised itself in the deeper involvements of the spirit of man in its inner relation to God as a Universal Being. Mysticism and internal worship became the culmination of religious experience. Here we have a complete picture of the procedural movement of religious consciousness, we may say, logically or historically. But, the various phases through which human history passes present many more features of the human vision of things which wavers between one excess and another excess – sometimes going to this extreme and sometimes going to that extreme – on account of the preponderance of the inner needs of the individual caused by conditions which may be political, sociological, geographical, or even by natural circumstances.

Modern times are famous for an intensified form of externalisation of human behaviour which is involved in technological, scientific and mechanised conceptions of life – that is to say, we are moving more and more outwardly, distancing oneself from one's own self, recognising values of life not in one's own self, but in that which is not one's own self. Where are the values of life today? They are in machines; they are in money; they are in land and property; they are in national consciousness; they are in the preparation for warfare; and they are in the inward longing to conquer physical nature by an outward movement in space and time. All this indication of the modern-day mind is a counterblast, I may say, to the originally intended religious awareness that took for granted the existence of a God as the creator of the world and confirms the necessity to involve oneself in this consciousness of a God ruling over all

things, making God-realisation the be-all and end-all of all things.

The word 'God' implied and included anything and everything. But these developments of today – which are a rationalisation of human thought, compelling every conclusion to be a necessary corollary of an inductive or a deductive process of argument, and insisting that whatever is real has to be capable of observation and experiment – turned the tables around. Empiricism took a vengeance, as it were, upon the religious aspiration of man, and today we are modernised technological seekers of a reality which has to be confirmed in its nature through observation and logical argument.

Religion had to defend itself against the onslaughts of the pressure exerted on the human mind by sensations and the need for purely sense-oriented methods of proof for the existence of any value that is ultimately final. The first blow came upon God Himself. The doubt was concerning the very meaning that we attach to a thing called God, or the creative principle of the universe.

Does God exist? Where are the proofs? All the proofs that people speak of, philosophically or rationalistically, are actually certain conclusions that are expected to be drawn from already-assumed hypotheses. The logically thinking mind forgets the fact that hypotheses themselves are not proven facts, because something has to be taken as the basic fundamental assumption in order that we can argue on the basis of that assumption – either arguing from particulars to generals, or from generals to particulars.

Philosophers in all the religions of the world girded up their loins, and intricate metaphysical arguments and defensive processes were created in both Western and Eastern circles. Yesterday I mentioned the saint Thomas Aquinas, who found it necessary to justify the Christian religion by philosophical methods and to advance proofs for the existence of God.

The philosophers' methods for establishing the existence of God have been mostly classified into five major methods of thinking. What is the proof that something other than the world process really exists? The first argument is simple. It is called the argument from the contingent nature of things. We see that everything in the world is relative, conditioned, limited, finite in all ways, restless in its nature, and has a tendency in itself to overstep its limitations. There is nothing in the world – including human nature – which would not like to break through the finitude in which it is shackled. Is man satisfied with himself? There is no satisfaction.

The absence of satisfaction with existing conditions is an inductively argued proposal for there being some state of affairs where finitude can be broken completely. If finitude is the final reality, there would be no consciousness of finitude. We cannot know that we are limited if limitation itself is the final truth. The idea that there is limitation, circumference, boundary, finitude is proof of there being something that is beyond the boundary. Unless we are aware that there is something beyond the boundary, there would be no knowledge of there being such a thing called boundary. Finitude, limitation and the changefulness of all things through the process of evolution suggests that these changes – these ideas of finitude and experience of limitations of every kind – are sufficient arguments to prove that there is something other than what is finite, other than what changes, other than what is limited. The contingency of all things in the world – right from the atom to the solar system – is a proof for the existence of that which is not involved in the process of nature.

The second argument is known as the henological argument. We ask for more and more things. Whatever we get is not satisfying. If we get something, we want more of it; if we get more of it, we want even more. Where will this 'more' end? Unless there is a final cessation of this asking for more, the very idea of asking for more does not have any

sense. We cannot have only asking without getting it. So, there must be a state of affairs where we are getting what we are asking for; and we are asking for more of things, endlessly. Finally there must be a cessation of this asking for more and more; and asking for more cannot end until there is a limitless possession of every kind of value in the world. Until we reach the Infinite, the asking for more will not cease; therefore, a thing called the Infinite must exist. This is the henological argument.

But there are more famous arguments, such as the well-known ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, which are the highlights of modern philosophy especially. The ontological argument is that which fixes itself on the nature of existence itself. There is such a thing called existence, and everything has to be. Existence is commonly present in everything that we regard as existing, but it is not an existence of this thing or that thing as a table exists, a chair exists, a mountain exists, the sun exists, the moon exists, I exist, you exist. Existence itself seems to be a universally permeating principle, and it is not limited to any particular object. The generality of existence is the proof of there being such a thing as a consciousness of the generality of existence. Consciousness has to be there attending on this generality of existence because if one is unaware of this existence, it is as good as it not existing at all. So the generality that is attributable to all things should also be a content of consciousness. Therefore, general existence should be attended with general consciousness. This is the same as the Absolute Universal Consciousness. It has to exist.

Apart from that, there is a consciousness in every person of such a thing called the Infinite. We can think of something endless; and the capacity in the human mind to contemplate that which has no boundaries is, again, attended with the consciousness of there being no such thing as boundary. Consciousness is attached to this possibility of there being no

boundary to existence. The boundless character of existence is here again associated with the consciousness thereof.

I am conscious of the existence of something which cannot have a boundary. This consciousness cannot stand apart from this boundaryless existence, because that which has no boundary cannot have a consciousness outside itself; and, vice versa, consciousness cannot be outside a boundaryless existence. That which is limitless can associate itself with consciousness only by the factor of identity. *Tadatmyata*: consciousness and limitless existence are identical. We say *sat-chit*: existence is consciousness.

Therefore the eternal Infinite, which is the same as consciousness, must exist. This Pure Being has to be there ontologically – which means to say, finally, the cosmological argument is the argument from effects to causes. Everything seems to be an effect that is coming from something else. A potter makes a pot, a carpenter makes a table, a mason builds a house, an architect raises a great structure – something happens on account of something else also happening at the same time. There has to be something causing the operation of things in the world. Neither the flow of the river, nor the rise of the sun, nor the movement of air – no action of nature can be explained unless there is a cause behind it. It may be any kind of cause – physical, astronomical, cosmological, or whatever it be. That there is a cause behind effects is the proof that there must be a final cause for all the effects of the world taken together, because if the effects are scattered hither and thither without any organisation among themselves, there would be no world at all. There would be no universe; there would be a complete chaos.

The conception of a universe which is internally organised within itself is also associated with another conception of all effects being connected with causes which finally have to merge into one cause only. Otherwise, if there were many final causes, there would be no relationship

among them and, again, there would be a chaos of causes. This argument leads to the acceptance of a final cause which has to be universally comprehensive to include within itself every other relative cause. Such a cause has to be there, and it has to be associated with consciousness. Again, God exists.

Another argument is the teleological argument, which makes out that there is an end and a purpose seen in all things. Purposeless movement is not seen in nature. We do not do anything at all without a purpose, whatever it may be. There is some meaning, some sense of the achievement that is to follow from what we do. The very evolution of the universe seems to be conditioned by a purpose, and we have seen that there has already been evolution from matter to plant, plant to animal, animal to man. There is an apparently visible scheme recognisable in the working of things; and such a scheme – such order, such symmetry, such beautiful precision of working in nature – cannot be accounted for unless there is an intelligence guiding it.

There is an architect of the cosmos, just as there is an architect of a huge building. And this architect is responsible for the system, the aesthetic beauty and the presentation in perfect symmetry and order that we see in this world. Such an architect has to be there, and if that architect is not to be accepted, the beauty, symmetry, system, precision and mathematical order that we see in the working of nature cannot be explained. God, therefore, has to exist, the philosophers argue.

There are varieties of philosophies, all arising from a gradational movement of consciousness from sense perception to Pure Consciousness. In India we have the Vaiseshika and Nyaya philosophies, which grounded themselves on pure reason only. They established that there should be a God because even if the world is supposed to be constituted of atoms, as the Vaisesika and Nyaya hold, these atoms have to be arranged in a particular order, and there should be juxtaposition of these atoms. Then one must

become two, two must become three, etc., until they form a molecule, and then an organism, and then a large object – which process cannot be accounted for unless there is somebody who does it.

There is, therefore, a Maker of all things Who is above all things in the world – as there cannot be a pot unless there is somebody who has made it. But, the Vaisesika and the Nyaya made the mistake of imagining that God exists beyond the world, extra-cosmically – as a potter exists outside the pot, and the carpenter outside the table. But can God also be like that, like a carpenter or a potter, above the world? They thought that it has to be this way. God looks at the world from a distance and arranges things according to the needs of the time – as a good architect, a good carpenter, a good potter or a good engineer would organise things.

The difficulty with this concept is that a manifold substance, an atom, cannot be accounted for unless there is a necessity to reduce the whole cosmos into a multiplicity of such a character as atoms. From where comes this necessity at all? If ultimately they have to be organised into a single organism and made one whole so that the world may look single, what is the purpose of dividing them into little bits and then organising them once again into a whole?

Apart from this difficulty, there is the difficulty of the relation between God and the world. What is the connection between the potter and the pot? There is absolutely no connection. The pot is made and the potter goes away somewhere, unconcerned with what is happening to the pot. Is the God of the universe like the potter? Does He create the world and then is not concerned with it? God seems to have a great concern. He does not merely create the world; He sustains it.

The sustaining principle that is associated with God together with creativity implies that He has a hand in the operation of the world. But the hands of God cannot reach the world if He is extra-cosmic – that is, unconnected with

the universe. There is some kind of connection. If that connection is not to be accepted – if the two things, the world and the Creator, are totally different – then nothing in the world can reach God because of the disconnection of one from the other. Nor can God have anything to do with the world, because of the same disconnection between Him and the world.

Advanced thought proceeded further on in the direction of finding a simpler explanation for what is happening in the world. Finally it appears to us that there is no point in assuming that there are many things in the world, because all these so-called many things appear to be basically constituted of matter, atoms, molecules or whatever we may call them. Even physical organisms are basically constituted of material substances. So, why not just say that there is matter in the universe instead of unnecessarily listing the existent objects?

It was thought that it is enough for us to accept that there is only one thing in the whole world, and that is matter. The perception of matter also is a great question. Who perceives matter? When we say that all things are only matter, who is making the statement? Matter itself cannot say anything because matter is the name we give to unconscious existence – pure stability, brute existence. There must be an awareness of there being such a thing called matter. The awareness is the state which we call consciousness. This consciousness has to be differentiated from matter because, if it is identical with matter, matter itself would be conscious, or consciousness itself would be the same as the essence of matter. The consciousness of there being such a thing called the material universe implies a duality: the seeing consciousness, and the seen object. This is the point made out in the Samkhya doctrine, which simplified the complicated arguments of the Vaiseshika and Nyaya. Instead of many realities to be controlled and organised by God who is above the world, we have only two things: the seeing side

and the seen side – the consciousness that observes things, witnesses the phenomena, and then the phenomena itself which is material in its nature.

But, the Samkhya landed us in another difficulty. What is the relationship between consciousness and matter? Are they different? Naturally, if they are different, how do we explain the factor of consciousness being aware of the object that is in front of it? The consciousness of an object implies a relationship between the knowing consciousness and the object outside, as totally different things are not capable of blending themselves into a consciousness of unity. If the so-called material object is totally disconnected from consciousness, there would be no consciousness of the world at all. We would not know that there is matter. How do we know it? The material object has somehow or other become a content of our consciousness. It has involved itself in our consciousness, and it has become inseparable from consciousness.

This inseparability leads us to another conclusion. It is not true that there is a perceiving consciousness that is entirely cut off from the object; there is an underlying current of continuity between the perceiver and the perceived. The continuity between the perceiver and the perceived is itself not perceived because if the continuity which is the process of perception also becomes an object of perception, there will be no object of perception. It will all melt down into a single Being-Consciousness. There is no intermediary consciousness that is other than the consciousness of the subject and of the object.

This is the acceptance of a transcendent element in consciousness containing within itself both the subjective side and the objective side, and at the same time rising beyond both. Here we have practically entered the field of what goes beyond the Samkhya and the Nyaya-Vaisesika doctrines. It is the Vedanta system, which is founded finally

on the Upanishads – the concluding quintessential part of the Veda Samhitas.

The Vedanta is a term that is used for a doctrine which accepts that God does not merely exist. God does not merely create and sustain and dissolve the world; God is the aim and *summum bonum* of all life. All philosophies which consider the realisation of God as the ultimate aim of life can be considered as Vedanta. It is not enough if we merely accept the existence of God as the maker of things, as the architect of the universe. He must have some hand in the operation of the things in the world, and we must have some connection with Him. He should be the fulfilment of all our longings. Only when God is the consummation of all the values that we can imagine in our life does He become the Ultimate Reality. Otherwise, God would be a relative reality, conditioned by the processes of space, time and objectivity; and we would be utilising God for the purpose of fulfilling a purpose which is other than God Himself.

Thus, the Vedanta doctrine is finally a doctrine of the preponderance of the God element in everything in the world. To sum up the conclusion, we live for God. The whole universe exists for God, and the process of so-called evolution is a movement towards God for the establishment of itself in God consciousness.

The doctrines of Vedanta have been classified into various categories on account of deviations in the very concept of God Himself. The differences among religions in the world arise on account of the differences in the concept of God. I feel that if we had a uniform concept of God there would be no difference among religious conceptions and the ways of social life based on religion.

What do we mean by 'God' when we say – accepted, of course – that God-realisation is the aim of life? Here we have umpteen conceptions of God, all differing one from another on account of the emphasis laid by the sensations, by the intellect and, finally, by an act of intuition. God-conception

can be sensorily oriented, intellectually oriented or intuitively oriented.

A famous verse which is oft-quoted by people in connection with this difference in the concept of the nature of God is the answer which appears to have been given by Hanuman to Rama when Rama queried Hanuman as to who he is. Hanuman replied, it seems, *Deha-buddhya tu daso'smi, jiva-buddhya tvadambakah, atma-buddhya tvamevaham iti me nischita matih*: You are asking me, Lord, who I am. If you regard me as a body, I am a servant of yours; if you consider me as a little consciousness, a *jiva*, I am a part of you; but if you think I am the Pure Spirit, I am yourself.

The idea is: How do we contain in our minds the concept of God? We have the predilection to see things in terms of sense perception. Many things there are in the world; and the senses conclude that diversity is a fact of reality. So the organising principle, which is the final God-consciousness, has to account for this diversity because our feeling justifies the existence of the multiplicity of things. Nothing in us tells us that all things are one. Everything seems to be different. Even the physiological organs are different, one from the other. The world is constituted of so many varieties of colours, sounds and touches that we cannot say that anything has any connection whatsoever with anything else. God-consciousness, or the concept of the creative principle, has to finally account for this duality. And God transcends and also acts as an immanent principle – accepted. It is the Vedanta doctrine that God is transcendent and immanent at the same time. Yet it is maintained, together with the acceptance of the transcendence and immanence of God, that there is a need to accept the multiplicity of things.

God permeates all things, as water permeates every thread of a cloth that is dipped into a bucket of water. A unity of the movement of the water principle through every fibre of the cloth is accepted; yet the differences among the threads and the fibres also has to be accepted, at the same

time. There is unity in diversity. The cloth, the fibres, the threads do not merge into the single water principle merely because they are permeated by the water principle. The unity of the principle of water that is everywhere in every fibre of cloth is somehow or other compatible with the cloth being independent of it. The world is different from God. This is the Vaishnava dualistic concept of everything being different from everything else. The world is different from God; the individual *jiva* also is different from God; matter is different from God; one *jiva* is different from another *jiva*; and one part of matter is different from another part of matter.

Molecules differ from one another; one molecule cannot be the same as another molecule. This dualistic concept of the world in all its multifarious varieties went together with the idea that God is, finally, the aim of life. But what is meant by 'the aim of life'? What do we do with this God who is somehow or other transcendent, together with His apparently being immanent? The Madhva doctrine says that we can reach God, come in contact with God, in the same way as particles of rice and sesame contact each other when they are mixed together. If a quintal of sesame and a quintal of rice are mixed together, they are all together in a state of unity – but they are not actually united. Every grain is different from every other grain. Thus, the *jiva* may attain God in the same way as sesame attains rice and rice attains sesame; they will not be identical. Man can never become God. He is always a created substance. Man is the servant of God; he is a *dasa*, a humble follower of the decree of the Supreme Creator.

The doctrine of the perfect duality was not satisfying for a long time because it looked as if we cannot have an intimate relationship with God – another way of saying that we shall be always limited. Finitude is our doom and we are damned forever to be in this shackle of existence of limitations of every kind, inwardly as well as outwardly. Then why do we have this aspiration for unlimitedness? How

does this desire arise in us to become infinite, to become immortal? Immortality cannot be associated with any kind of relative existence. That which exists outside something as a localised object is perishable one day or the other because it is a visible thing. *Yad drisyam tannasyam*: Whatever is visible has to perish one day or the other. Therefore, it is necessary to bring about a further coordination and harmonious relation among the very particulars of the created world, with God as the Supreme One.

There is a unity of purpose between God and the world. They are organic to each other. They do not touch each other like sesame and rice, but like milk and water. Milk and water can combine, and we cannot know where the milk is and where the water is. Yet, water is water, and milk is milk. Similarly, the world is the world, and God is God; yet, there is organic connection. We have a soul and we have a body. We know very well that the soul cannot be identical with the body, and the body cannot be identical with the soul. Physically speaking, the body is material. It is unconscious in its essence and is made to appear conscious on account of the entry of consciousness through the cells of the body. The body and consciousness are two different things.

In a similar manner, God and the world are basically to be conceived as one and the same as, for all practical purposes, we consider our soul and body as one. When we eat, when we walk, when we speak, when we do anything whatsoever, we do not keep the body somewhere and the mind somewhere else. They are related to each other as if they are inseparable, though they are really not inseparable. This is the Sri Vaishnava concept of the Visishtadvaita system, where oneness is conditioned by a kind of qualification. It is Advaita, no doubt, but Visishta-advaita. It is an *advaita*, or a non-dual, character of the world and *jivas* with God – with a qualification that they are really not one. It is an organisation where every member is one with the other member, without which there cannot be an organisation; yet,

we know that no member is identical with any other member.

In a parliamentary session, in a national consciousness, the members sitting together to constitute a single body of an organisation all imply a single unity of existence. Nevertheless, every part is different from the other part. We can dismember the organisation, and all the organisations can be dissolved one day or the other, and the parts can be separated.

Therefore, here again we have a difficulty. Is it organically explicable that the world is related to God in an externalised fashion and it exists externally outside God, as the body is in relation to the soul? Thus, the world perishes as the body perishes. God can visualise the destruction of the world, as the soul can visualise the destruction of the body. Does the world exist at all, finally? If the world is perishable, *nasvara*, and it will not be there after some time, then there will be no creation whatsoever. God alone will be there.

The perishability of the things in the world, the fragility of everything that the world is made of, shows that its essential nature of fluxation cannot be identified organically or in any sense whatsoever with God, Who is not a flux. The fluxation of things and the temporality of the world, in every way, would totally dissociate the world of relativity from God as if the world does not exist at all because the destruction of the world would mean the end of all things, and God alone would be there. Also, God must have been existing even before the creation of the world. This cannot be denied by any religious philosopher.

Before the creation of the world, where was God? He was not in space, because there was no space; He was not in time, because there was no time; He was not in creation, because creation did not take place. He existed only in Himself. Therefore, God originally existed as only God, and not as something in terms of relation which is created on account of the created universe. He is not omnipresent, He is not

omniscient and He is not omnipotent, because these qualities are attributable to God in terms of what He has created afterwards; but prior to creation, He was Pure Existence.

Therefore, the unity which is God's existence is highlighted further on in the philosophies, the seeds of which were sown by great thinkers like Gaudapada and Acharya Sankara and his followers, who spoke in such diverse ways and put forth such a multitudinous variety of arguments that it has been very difficult for people to make out what actually the Advaita doctrine means. It is not a negation of the other values of life. The so-called Advaita of Sankara, for instance, does not refute Visishtadvaita. It does not refute the Madhava doctrine of duality. It only says that there is a gradation of the perception of the unity of things, and all these gradations are to be considered as degrees of reality, ultimately converging in a degreeless Universality.

The lower is not refuted by the higher. The lower is not negated, and it cannot be regarded as untrue; it is true in its own way. Every experience is true when it is experienced. The truthfulness of an experience lies in the fact of it being experienced. If it is not there at all, we will not experience it. Therefore, the world exists conditionally. It is not illusion as people think, like the horns of a hare or the tail of a human being. Such a kind of illusion or annihilation is not attributed to the world by Sankara either, though we may say that the world is totally absent only in the existence of God. Because God is all, there cannot be any world in front of Him.

This is an acosmic concept. Acosmic means no cosmos. From the point of view of God Himself the world cannot be there, because otherwise He would be seeing a world as a dual counterpart in the form of an object in front of Him. The infinity of God would be stultified by the presence of a world in front of Him. Hence, from the point of view of God Himself, God only is. Therefore, there is no creation. But once we accept the fact of creation, there becomes a necessity to explain the degrees of evolution of consciousness from the

lowest perception through sense organs and intellect until it reaches the intuitive grasp of the Absolute as one single Reality.

Thus, these are the tripartite concepts of Vedanta: Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita. There are further modifications like Suddhadvaita, Dvaitadvaita and Achintya-bhedabheda, etc. Even the Vedanta types of Saivism and Saktism also have their own predilections. The philosophical point made out in these arguments is that the intellect has to somehow come to the succour of the faith that is originally religion, because of the fear that religion can be completely wiped out from the world by materialistic doctrines that stand on argument, observation, and scientific experiment, with sensory perception being given the uppermost value; and when the senses revolt against the reason and insight of the human being, there will be no spiritual value left.

This is why religious organisations, religious philosophies and religious leaders arose. Prophets, teachers, saints and sages made it their mission to prove even to the unbelieving senses and the intellection of modern man that it cannot explain even the littlest thing in the world without first introducing into that little thing a principle of universality. Everything – even that which is only particularised, entirely finite, localised somewhere, unconnected with something else – cannot be explained except in terms of there being a universal organisation behind it. Otherwise, we cannot know that one thing is different from the other.

The difference that we see between one thing and another is a consciousness which is not to be identified either with this thing or with that thing. The thing that knows that one thing is different from another thing does not belong to either this thing or that thing; it is a third thing altogether. Therefore, there is a universal principle of consciousness involved even in the perception of duality.

Even when we say that duality is there, multiplicity is there, many things are there, we are unconsciously assuming that there is some transcendent element – because if this consciousness were not to be there, who will tell us that there are many things? The many things themselves cannot say that there are many things. There must be something which is not manifold, not differentiated, not dualistic in order that the very concept of duality and manifoldness can be justified. Therefore, ultimately, consciousness is the Reality. *Chit* is Supreme. God's essence is Pure Consciousness. God knows Himself. And what does He know? He knows Himself as Knowledge only: pure *chit*. Consciousness is not an attribute of something, nor is it a process of knowing something else. Consciousness is an ontological existence. It alone is, and nothing else can be.

These are some of the various facets of philosophical arguments. I have touched upon the features that are especially prevalent in India – that is, the Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya and Vedanta. I discussed the Mimamsa and the Yoga System here because they stand apart from these gradational arguments of the philosophical type, though we need not enter into these complications just now. Suffice it to say that religion has once again found that it is necessary for it to stand on a four-legged pedestal, as it were: the authority of the scriptures and the prophets, the great Epics and the Puranas, the Agamas and the Tantras, and the philosophies which are metaphysical in their nature.