

21 VEDANTA: ITS THEORY AND PRACTICE

1. Materialism says, the voice of freedom is a delusion. Idealism says, the voice that tells of bondage is delusion. Vedanta says, you are free and not free at the same time; never free on the earthly plane, but ever free on the spiritual,
2. This philosophy is very, very ancient; it is the outcome of that mass of ancient Aryan literature known by the name of the Vedas. It is, as it were, the very flower of all the speculations and experiences and analyses, embodied in that mass of literature-collected and culled through centuries. This Vedanta philosophy has certain peculiarities. In the first place, it is perfectly impersonal; it does not owe its origin to any person or prophet; it does not build itself around one man as a centre. Yet it has nothing to say against philosophies, which do build themselves around certain persons.
3. The Vedanta Philosophy, as it is generally called at the present day, really comprises all the various sects that now exist in India. Thus there have been various interpretations, and to my mind they have been progressive, beginning with the Dualistic or Dvaita and ending with the non- dualistic or Advaita.
4. Vedanta and modern science both posit a self-evolving Cause. In Itself are all the causes. Take for example, the potter shaping a pot. The potter is the primal cause, the clay the material cause, and the wheel the instrumental cause; but the Atman is all three. Atman is cause and manifestation too. The Vedantist says, the universe is not real, it is only apparent. Nature is God seen through nescience. The Pantheists say, God has become nature or this world; the Advaitists affirm that God is appearing as this world, but He is not this world.
5. The Vedanta claims that man is divine, that all this which we see around us is the outcome of that consciousness of the divine. Every' thing that is strong, and good and powerful in human nature is the outcome of that divinity, and though potential in many, there is no difference between man and man essentially, all being alike divine. There is, as it were, an infinite ocean behind, and you and I are so many waves, coming out of that infinite ocean; and each one of us is trying our best to manifest that infinite outside.
6. Another peculiar idea of the Vedanta is that we must allow this infinite variation in religious thought, and not try to bring everybody to the same opinion, because the goal is the same, as the Vedantist says in his poetical language: "As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight, and at last come into the ocean-so, all these various creeds and religions, taking their start from different standpoints and running through crooked or straight courses, at last come into Thee."
7. Vedanta does not take the position that this world is only a miserable one. That would be untrue. At the same time, it is a mistake to say that this world is full of happiness and blessings. So it is useless to tell children that this world is all good, all flowers, and milk and honey. That is what we have all dreamt. At the same time it is erroneous to think,

because one man has suffered more than another, that all is evil. It is this duality, this play of good and evil that makes our world of experiences. At the same time the Vedanta says, "Do not think that good and evil are two, are two separate essences, for they are one and the same thing appearing in different degrees and in different guises and producing differences of feeling in the same mind."

8. The Vedanta system begins with tremendous pessimism, and ends with real optimism. We deny the sense optimism but assert the real optimism of the Supersensuous. That real happiness is not in the senses but above the senses; and it is in every man. The sort of optimism which we see in the world is what will lead to ruin through the senses.

9. "The theme of the Vedanta is to see the Lord in everything, to see things in their real nature, not as they appear to be.

10. The Vedanta says that you are pure and perfect, and that there is a state beyond good and evil, and that is your own nature. It is higher than good. Good is only a lesser differentiation than evil. We have no theory of evil. We call it ignorance.

11, Vedanta declares that religion is here and now, because the question of this life and that life, of life and death, this world and that world, is merely one of superstition and prejudice. There is no break in time beyond what we make. What difference is there between ten and twelve o'clock except what we make by certain changes in nature? Time flows on the same. So what is meant by this life or that life? It is only a question of time, and what is lost in time may be made up by speed in work. So, says the Vedanta, religion is to be realised now. And for you to become religious means that you will start without any religion, work your way up and realise things, see things for yourself; and when you have done that, then, and then alone, you have religion. Before that you are no better than atheists, or worse, because the atheist is sincere; he stands up and says, "I do not know about these things', while those others do not know but go about the world saying, "We are very religious people"

12. Materialism prevails in Europe today. You may pray for the salvation of the modern sceptics, but they do not yield, they want reason. The salvation of Europe depends on a rationalistic religion, and Advaita-the non-duality, the Oneness, the idea of the impersonal God-is the only religion that can have any hold on any intellectual people. It comes whenever religion seems to disappear, and irreligion seems to prevail, and that is why it has taken ground in Europe and America.

13. I make bold to say that the only religion which agrees with, and even goes a little further than modern researches, both on physical and moral lines, is the Advaita, and that is why it appeals to modern scientists so much. They find that the old dualistic theses are not enough for them, do not satisfy their necessities.

14. Another peculiarity of the Advaita system is that from its very start it is non-destructive. This is another glory, the boldness to preach; "Do not disturb the faith of any, even of those who through ignorance have attached themselves to lower forms of

worship." That is what it says, do not disturb, but help everyone to get higher and higher; include all humanity.

15. The Dualists all the world over naturally believe in a Personal God who is purely anthropomorphic, who like a great potentate in this world, is pleased with some and displeased with others. He is arbitrarily pleased with some people or races and showers blessing upon them. Naturally the Dualist comes to the conclusion that God has favourites, and he hopes to be one of them. You will find that in almost every religion is the idea, "We are the favourites of our God, and only by behaving as we do, can you be taken into favour with Him. Some Dualists are so narrow as to insist that only the few that have been predestined to the favour of God can be saved; the rest may try ever so hard, but they cannot be accepted. I challenge you to show me one Dualistic religion which has not more or less of this exclusiveness. And, therefore, in the nature of things Dualistic religions are bound to fight and quarrel with each other, and this they have ever been doing.

16. This idea of reincarnation runs parallel with the other doctrine of the eternity of the human soul. Nothing which ends at one point can be without a beginning and nothing that begins at one point can be without an end. We cannot believe in such a monstrous impossibility as the beginning of the human soul. The doctrine of reincarnation asserts the freedom of the soul.

17. Those that come out of zero will certainly have to go back to zero. Neither you, nor I, nor anyone present, has come out of zero, nor will go back to zero. We have been existing eternally, and will exist, and there is no power under the sun, or above the sun, which can undo your or my existence, or send us back to zero. Now this idea of reincarnation is not only not a frightening idea, but is most essential for the moral well-being of the human race. It is the only logical conclusion that thoughtful men can arrive at. If you are going to exist in eternity hereafter, it must be that you have existed through eternity in the past: it cannot be otherwise.

18. The Atman never comes nor goes, is never born nor dies. It is nature moving before the Atman, and the reflection of this motion is on the Atman and the Atman ignorantly thinks it is moving, and not nature. When the Atman thinks that, it is bondage, but when it comes to find it never moves, that it is omnipresent, then freedom comes. The Atman in bondage is called jiva. Thus you see that when it is said that the Atman comes and goes, it is said only for facility of understanding, just as for convenience, in studying astronomy you are asked to suppose that the sun moves round the earth, though such is not the case. So the Jiva, the soul, comes to higher or lower states. This is the well-known law of reincarnation, and this law binds all creation.

19. The aim and end in this life for the Jnana-Yogi is to become this Jivanmukta, "living-free". He is Jivanmukta who can live in this world without being attached. He is like the lotus leaves in water, which are never wetted by the water. He is the highest of human beings, nay, the highest of all beings, for he has realised his identity with the Absolute, he has realised that he is one with God.

20. So, what is left attached to the man who has reached the Self and seen the truth, is the remnant of the good impressions of past life, the good momentum. Even if he lives in the body and works incessantly, he works only to do good; his lips speak only benediction to all; his hands do only good works; his mind can only think good thoughts; his presence is a blessing wherever he goes.

21. There are some who do not understand Advaitism and make a travesty of its teaching. They say, what is Shuddha and Ashuddha, what is the difference between virtue and vice- it is all human superstitions- and observe no normal restraint in their actions. It is downright roguery, and any amount of harm is done by the preaching of such things. This body is made up of two sorts of Karma consisting of virtue and vice- injurious vice and non-injurious virtue. A thorn is pricking my body, and I take another thorn to take it out and then throw both away. A man desiring to be perfect takes a thorn of virtue and with it takes off the thorn of vice. He still lives, and virtue alone being left, the momentum of action left to him must be of virtue. A bit of holiness is left to the jivanmukta and he lives, but everything he does must be holy.

22. If I teach you, therefore, that your nature is evil. that you should go home and sit in sackcloth and ashes and weep your eyes out because you took certain false steps, it will not help you, but will weaken you all the more, and I shall be showing you the road to more evil than good. If this room is full of darkness for thousands of years and you come in and begin to weep and wail, "Oh the darkness" will the darkness vanish? Strike a match and light comes in a moment. What good will it do you to think all your lives, "Oh, I have done evil, I have made many mistakes"? It requires no ghost to tell us that. Bring in the light and the evil goes in a moment. Build up your character, and manifest your real nature, the Effulgent, the Resplendent, the Ever-Pure, and call it up in everyone that you see. I wish that everyone of us had come to such a state that even in the vilest of human beings we could see the Real Self within, and instead of condemning them, say, ^Rise thou effulgent one, rise thou who art always pure, rise thou births and deathless, rise almighty, and manifest thy true nature- These little manifestations do not befit thee." This is the highest prayer that the Advaita teaches. This is the one prayer, to remember our true nature, the God who is always within us, thinking of it always as infinite, almighty, ever-good, ever-beneficent, selfless, bereft of all limitations. And because that nature is selfless, it is strong and fearless; for only to selfishness comes fear. He who has nothing to desire for himself, whom does he fear, and what can frighten him? What fear has death for him? What fear has evil for him? So if we are Advaitists, we must think from this moment that our old self is dead and gone. The old Mr., Mrs., and Miss So-and-so are gone, they were mere superstitions, and what remains is the ever-pure, the ever-strong, the almighty, the all-knowing;- that alone remains for us, and then all fear vanishes from us. Who can injure us, the omnipresent? All weakness has vanished from us, and our only work is to arouse this knowledge in our fellow-beings. We see that they too are the same pure self, only they do not know it; we must teach them, we must help them to rouse up their infinite nature. This is what I feel to be absolutely necessary all over the world. These doctrines are old, older than many mountains possibly. All truth is eternal. Truth is nobody's property; no race, no individual can lay any exclusive claim to

it. Truth is the nature of all souls. Who can lay any special claim to it? But it has to be made practical, to be made simple for the highest truths are always simple, so that it may penetrate every pore of human society, and become the property of the highest intellects and the commonest minds, of the man, woman, and child at the same time. All these ratiocinations of logic, all these bundles of metaphysics, all these theologies and ceremonies may have been good in their own time, but let us try to make things simpler and bring about the golden days when every man will be a worshipper, and the Reality in every man will be the object of worship.

23. The Vedanta says that not only can this be realised in the depths of forests or caves, but by men in all possible conditions of life. We have seen that the people who discovered these truths were neither living in caves nor forests, nor following the ordinary vocations of life, but men who, we have every reason to believe, led the busiest of lives, men who had to command armies, to sit on thrones, and look to the welfare of millions-and all these, in the days of absolute monarchy, and not as in these days when a king is to a great extent a mere figure-head. Yet they could find time to think out all these thoughts, to realise them, and to teach them to humanity. How much more then should it be practical for us whose lives, compared with theirs, are lives of leisure? That we cannot realise them is a shame to us, seeing that we are comparatively free all the time, having very little to do. My requirements are as nothing compared with those of an ancient absolute monarch. My wants are as nothing compared with the demands of Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, commanding a huge army; and yet he could find time in the midst of the din and turmoil of battle to talk the highest philosophy and to carry it into his life also. Surely we ought to be able to do as much in this life of ours-comparatively free, easy, and comfortable. Most of us here have more time than we think we have, if we really want to use it for good. With the amount of freedom we have we can attain to two hundred ideals in this life, if we will, but we must not degrade the ideal to the actual. One of the most insinuating things comes to us in the shape of persons who apologise for our mistakes and teach us how to make special excuses for all our foolish wants and foolish desires; and we think that their ideal is the only ideal we need have. But it is not so. The Vedanta teaches no such thing. The actual should be reconciled to the ideal, the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal

24. We want to worship a living God. I have seen nothing but God all my life, nor have you. To see this chair you first see God, and then the chair in and through Him. He is everywhere saying, "I am". The moment you feel "I am", you are conscious of Existence. Where shall we go to find God if we cannot see Him in our own hearts and in every living being? "Thou art the man. Thou art the woman. Thou art the girl, and Thou art the boy. Thou art the old man tottering with a stick. Thou art the young man walking in the pride of strength. Thou art all that exists, a wonderful living God who is the only fact in the universe. This seems to many to be a terrible contradiction to the traditional God who lives behind a veil somewhere and whom nobody ever sees. The priests only give us an assurance that if we follow them, listen to their admonitions, and walk in the way they mark out for us-then when we die, they will give us a passport to enable us to see the face of God? What are all these heaven ideas but simply modifications of this nonsensical priestcraft? Of course the Impersonal idea is very destructive; it takes away

all trade from the priests, churches, and temples. In India there is a famine now, but there are temples in each one of which there are jewels worth a king's ransom! If the priests taught this Impersonal idea to the people, their occupation would be gone. Yet we have to teach it unselfishly, without priestcraft. You are God and so am I; who obeys whom? Who "worships whom? You are the highest temple of God, I would rather worship you than any temple, image, or Bible... .But what is more practical than worshipping here, worshipping you? I see you, feel you, and I know you are God. The Mohammedan says, there is no God but Allah. The Vedanta says, there is nothing that is not God.

25. Vedanta teaches the God that is in everyone, has become everyone and everything.... The kingdom of heaven went from Vedanta hundreds of years ago. Vedanta is concerned only with spirituality. ... God is spirit and He should be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

26. These are what Vedanta has not to give. No book. No man to be singled out from the rest of mankind-you are worms, and we are the Lord God!"-none of that. If you are the Lord God, I also am the Lord God. So Vedanta knows no sin. There are mistakes but no sin; and in the long run everything is going to be all right. No Satan-none of this nonsense. Vedanta believes in only one sin, only one in the world, and it is this: the moment you think you are a sinner or anybody is a sinner, that is sin. From that follows every other mistake or what is usually called sin. There have been many mistakes in our lives. But we are going on. Glory be unto us that we have made mistakes! Take a long look at your past life. If your present condition is good, it has been caused by all the past mistakes as well as successes. Glory be unto success! Glory be unto mistakes I . . . You see, Vedanta proposes no sin nor sinner. No God to be afraid of. He is the one being of whom we shall never be afraid, because He is our own Self. There is only one being of whom you cannot possibly be afraid; He is that. Then isn't it really the most superstitious person who has fear of God? There may be someone who is afraid of his shadow; but even he is not afraid of himself. God is man's very Self. He is the one being whom you can never possibly fear. What is all this nonsense, the fear of the Lord entering into a man, making him tremble and so on? Lord bless us that we are not all in the lunatic asylum! But if most of us are not lunatics, why should we invent such ideas as fear of God? Lord Buddha said that the whole human race is lunatic, more or less. It is perfectly true, it seems. No book, no person, no Personal God. All these must go. Again, the senses must go. We cannot be bound to the senses. At present we are tied down-like persons dying of cold in the glaciers. They feel such a strong desire to sleep, and when their friends try to wake them, warning them of death, they say, "Let me die, I want to sleep". We all cling to the little things of the senses, even if we are ruined thereby; we forget there are much greater things.

27. What does Vedanta teach us? In the first place, it teaches that you need not even go out of yourself to know the truth. All the past and all the future are here in the present. No man ever saw the past. Did any one of you see the past? When you think you are knowing the past, you only imagine the past in the present moment. To see the future, you would have to bring it down to the present, which is the only reality-the rest is imagination. This present is all that is. There is only the One. All is here right now. One moment in infinite time is quite as complete and all-inclusive as every other moment. All

that is and was and will be is here in the present. Let anybody try to imagine anything outside of it-he will not succeed.

28. Therefore the Vedanta formulates, not a universal brotherhood, but universal oneness. I am the same as any other man, as any other animal-good, bad, anything. It is one body, one mind, one soul throughout. Spirit never dies. There is no death anywhere, not even for the body. Not even the mind dies. How can even the body die? One leaf may fall-does the tree die? The universe is my body. See how it continues. All minds are mine. With all feet I walk. Through all mouths I speak. In everybody I reside.