

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

K.P. BAHADUR

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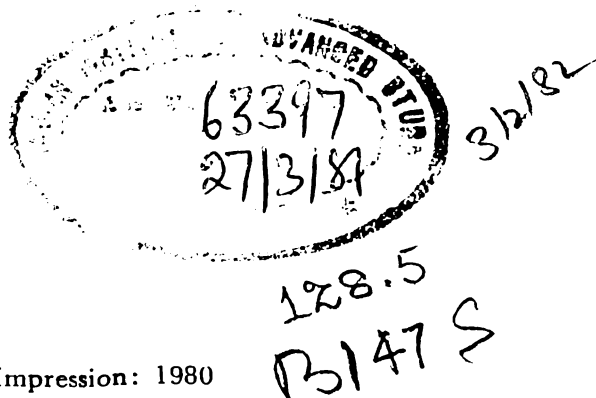
THE SEEN
AND
THE UNSEEN

K. P. BAHADUR



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THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
MY BELOVED DAUGHTER
SANDHYA

16 October 1963—17 March 1979

'Gar kuchha jahan aur hain kahin
Usko dua yeh hai meri
Koi use aisa mile
Pura kare meri kami*

*If there is another life
This is my blessing for her
May she find someone
Who may do for her all that I could not.

PREFACE

‘The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God*’.

Psalms, 14 : 1

Time is vital to existence. Days pass by, morning and night, night and morning. The hours come and go, sometimes swiftly, sometimes with dismal slowness. The seasons come in their turn. Childhood, youth, old age—these make their eternal rounds for everyone, and before we have fully realised it, we are in the valley of death.

Of existence there is very little we can call our own. Most of it is spent in sleeping, in performing the necessary functions, and in working for a living. In the few hours which are left to us, we engage ourselves in vain talk and the gratification of the senses. Thus time passes, and when Death knocks, the dance and the song are still going on. It is a rude intrusion. ‘Open up’ Death says, ‘your hour has come’. For a moment the music stops, and a hushed silence falls on the assembly. The ill-fated man is taken by the pall-bearers to his place of rest. There are polite condolences. Then the dancers resume their merriment. The cold dead corpse in the grave is quite forgotten.

In this pursuit of wealth and pleasure, hardly anyone has the time to think of the hereafter: ‘To the careless child befooled by the delusion of wealth, the path of the hereafter never appears. “This is the only world and there is no other”—he who thinks thus, falls into Death’s control again and again’.¹ Occasionally, however, some lone person breaks from this routine, and thinks about the other world. The moment he does so he has embarked on the quest for which he really came. This might appear, at first sight, senseless, because the world we live in, is the only one we have known. Even if one believes in rebirth, this merely implies that one comes into the world again and again. If life on earth is the only one there is, why should the other concern us? But

1. *Kāṭha Upanishad*, II : 6

it isn't. We see people dying around us—our friends, relations, and those whom we have casually met and known. It is equally certain that the same fate awaits all of us. Death ever was and ever remains, a mystery: 'Aye but to die and go we know not where'. What happens afterwards nobody knows. As an Arabic philosopher has said, life is like a book of which the last and first pages are missing. We know, however, that there is another life, because the soul does not die with the body. As a nest abandoned by the bird, the body has fulfilled its purpose. But like the bird which has flown, the soul lives on in other worlds and in other bodies. Therefore, the man who has turned away from the music and the dance has done well. For he has turned away from the darkness to the light, from the unreal to the real, from the ephemeral body to the eternal soul.

'If the heats of hate and lust
In the house of flesh are strong,
Let me mind my house of dust
Where my sojourn shall be long'.²

The waking world is not the only one. The very fact that we wake up to it, and sleep away from it, should make this obvious. Nor can the waking world be denied, for it is very much there in its own right whether we are asleep or awake. How then shall this riddle be solved? How can the world be affirmed and at the same time denied? In truth there are realms of consciousness. Consciousness is of the nature of light. When the wick of a lamp is raised its light spreads more and more; even so the light of consciousness spreads out or gathers its rays within itself. As a lotus closes up in the night and opens its petals when it is day, the soul spreads out its consciousness and then we are 'awake'; and when it withdraws it we are 'asleep'. It is not we who control sleep and waking. It is the soul which controls it, and we merely obey its command. That is why sleep does not come when we will but when the soul wills.

As we turn to the soul, so, sooner or later, we turn to God. A Hindi poet has said 'All persons think of God when they are in distress, but none when they are happy. If they remembered

2. A. E. Housman

Him in the hours of happiness, why should they have grief at all?' It is true that we turn to God in the hour of sorrow, when we find no one in the world to help or console us. The *Bhagavad Geeta* acknowledges this. Lord Krishna says, 'The virtuous ones who worship me are of four kinds: the man in distress, one who seeks knowledge, one who is after wealth, and the man of wisdom'.³ In the same way Jesus Christ says: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'.⁴ St. Paul says, 'For God sometimes uses sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek eternal life'.⁵ Others seek God out of fear—the fear of poverty, the fear of misfortune, and the ever haunting fear of death. As the Bible says: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'.⁶ They too make a beginning in the quest for God. However he begins, man turns to God sooner or later as surely as the sunflower turns to the sun.

Few people are given the chance to actually see God. Diderot says, 'If you want me to believe in God, you must make me touch Him'.⁷ In the same way, after his Resurrection, Jesus appeared to his beloved disciples:

'And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you.

'Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side; and be not faithless, but believing.

'And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

'Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed'.⁸

3. B. G., VII : 16

4. 2 Corinthians, 7 : 10 (*The Living Bible*)

5. St. Matthew, 11 : 28 (Authorised Version)

6. Psalms, CXL : 1 (Authorised Version)

7. Denis Diderot, *Letters on the Blind*

8. St. John, 20 : 26-29 (Authorised Version)

Only to a handful has been given the blessedness to see God as Thomas saw Him, or as Moses saw Him at Mount Sinai, or as Arjuna saw Lord Krishna, and the people of Ayodhya saw Lord Raama. Most of us have to believe in God, *if* we believe, without seeing Him. It is for these that Christ said 'blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed'.

Belief does not depend on sense cognition. If it did, a man could only believe in persons he has met and places he has seen, which after all is a very tiny segment of the world. Therefore a man who says, 'I will believe only what I see and touch', while claiming to be a realist, is in fact a visionary. The reality is that we accept many things on trust. If we did not a blind man would deny the existence of form and colour, a deaf one the existence of words and music. Belief in God is only an extension of this same principle of trust. Therefore, such belief is logical. What shall we say of a man who believes in the existence of a film star because some insignificant person who has met her has told him, but who will not believe in God even on the evidence of sages and the scriptures? What shall we say of one who believes in the existence of his pen-friend because he has read his letters, and refuses to believe in that Being whose writing is spread everywhere—in flower, bird, beast, the moon, star and sky, in this wonderful world of nature and man?

Why should one have belief in God? Belief is not like air, water or food, without which man cannot exist. Life is possible without faith in God. The loss lies in the absence of moral values, lack of carefreeness, and want of a support. As the Bible says, 'Man doth not live by bread alone'.⁹ A life of sexual pleasure and sensual enjoyment may be momentarily joyful, but it is not likely to be mentally satisfying unless moral values are maintained. That is why we are cautioned against adultery in the Bible. Secondly, the votary of God moves through life with a light heart and a carefree mind. He has consigned his worries to God. He has made God his advocate. The godless man is like a passenger on a train who keeps on concernedly clutching his baggage, but the man of God lets the train carry it and

9. *Deuteronomy*, 8 : 3 (Authorised Version)

cheerfully relaxes. Finally, the God-believer always has a support, which the godless man lacks. To the devotee, God is like a father. In fact he is father, mother, brother, friend and relation combined: 'Thou art mother, and thou art father too; relation art thou and friend. Thou art knowledge and wealth too. Thou art everything, O my Lord'.¹⁰ Therefore the man of God is never helpless. Even if friends and kinsmen turn against him, or parents do not give him their love and care, he has the Lord to turn to—the Lord who is parent, friend and kinsman combined.

Man is faced with the seen as well as the unseen. The seen is the wonderful body with which he is endowed, and the world of living creatures into which he is born. Because he does not live in a vacuum, he has to adjust himself with his fellow beings. The way in which he does this is important for him. He may care only for his own pleasure and advancement, obtained even at the cost of others, or on the other hand he may live a life of sacrifice and service. He may live a life which is selfish or one which is selfless. The choice is his, and so are the consequences; for as one sows, so will he reap. The *Bṛihadaaranyaka Upanishad* says: 'A man becomes good by good deeds and bad by bad deeds'. The conduct one shows in his dealings with his fellow human beings, determines his status both in this world and the next. By our works shall we be judged. How then should one act? When someone asked the great sage, Vyaasa about duty (*dharma*), he expected some intricate formula. But all that he said was: 'Hear in brief what duty is. Hear and practise it. That which causes hurt to thee or that which is harmful to thee—do not do that to others'.¹¹ In other words 'Do as you would be done by'. The *Bhagavad Geeta* praises the way of desireless action. Every action which is performed carries its consequence which has to be expiated in this life or in the next. While one expiates the fruits of past actions, he keeps on performing new ones. Thus he has to enter into successive rebirths, for unless the fruits of action are exhausted salvation is not achieved. Desireless works, however,

10. *Tvameva maataa cha pitaa tvamevaa; tvameva bandhushcha sakhaa tvamevaa; tvameva vidya, dravinam tvamevaa; tvameva svarnam man deva devaa.*

11. *Shrutyataam dharma sarvasvam, shrutvaa chaivaava dhaaryataam, aatmanah prati koolaani pareshaan na samaacharet.*

do not result in fruit. Such actions are like burnt seed which will not sprout. By their performance the individual does not need expiation, and therefore does not need rebirth. Once the cycle of births and deaths is broken, salvation is achieved. But desireless actions have another purpose too. They confer purity of soul on the performer. Thus he benefits not only others but himself also. The *Geetaa* says, 'To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits'.¹² One should keep on doing good without expecting a reward. Philo Judaeus also says 'They who give, hoping to receive a reward, such as praise or honour... are doing nothing more than trying to strike a bargain'.¹³

Action is far reaching in its consequence, and so is faith. While action concerns the individual and those around him, faith is his own body. Faith is a gift. It is what one gets by the grace of God. While the man of reason talks and talks, parading his knowledge, the man of faith is silent. When one fills a vessel with water, the water makes a gurgling noise; but when it is near filling the noise stops. So the man of faith does not speak, for he knows. When asked by King Vaaskali to explain the nature of God (*Brahman*), Baahva kept silent. When the King repeated his request, the sage said 'I tell it to you, but you do not understand it—this *Brahman* is peaceful, quiet'. The lucky man who is endowed with faith goes through life with a firm conviction in God and His world. The sweat of reason is saved for him. For what he knows, he does not need to argue. But the other, the man of reason, has painfully to acquire conviction. Some acquire it some don't. The purpose, however, is worthy of the struggle. When at last the light dawns, the man of reason enjoys the same bliss as the man of faith—the bliss that passeth understanding. For the man thus arrived, reason is like the ladder by which he has climbed. Since there is no need to descend, he may as well kick it away.

Et quasi cursores, vitae lampada tradunt—'Like runners handing on the lamp of life' is this cycle of existence.¹⁴ Where does it all lead to? Religions have given various views, often conflicting,

12. *B. G.*, II : 47

13. *On the Cherubim*. 34

14. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, II : 73

about the end of worldly existence. But all of them agree that men shall be judged according to their deeds, and that for those who have found God there is no return. This merging of the soul with God is the end of all existence. Buddhism calls it *nirvaana*, Hinduism *moksha*, Christianity salvation. The soul is of the nature of God. Therefore, it is natural that it should go back to Him as the wave goes back to the river and as the river goes back to the sea. When the seeker of God has achieved perfection in thought, speech and action, the fetters that bound him fall apart. No one *reaches* God. God, who ever exists, is only revealed. It is like a lamp suddenly lighting up and disclosing what was there always, but was not seen because of the darkness. It is like the lifting of a veil. It is in a flash that God-revelation comes, but the flash comes after ages of endeavour and toil: 'Life after life sages endeavour to seek God, but at the moment of death even His name comes not to their lips'.¹⁵

Liberation is the final goal of existence. Out of millions of souls which are struggling, only some rare ones achieve it:

'Lord, Thou hast lifted all my sorrow, with the vision of Thy face,
And the magic of Thy beauty has bewitched my mind:
Beholding Thee, the seven worlds forget their never ending woe,
What shall I say, then, of myself, a poor lowly soul'.¹⁶

Therefore every human being must set himself on the path to God, lest he depart after doing everything except that for which he was sent in the world:

'I depart having spent my precious life without profit
I have done all for the gratification of these senses
I have given my heart whatsoever it asked
Nothing have I done for that end for which Thou didst create the world'.¹⁷

15. *Kishikandhaa kaanḍa*, 9 : 2 *Raamacharitmaanasas*.

16. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*.

17. W. G. Orr, *A Sixteenth Century Indian Mystic*, Lutterworth.

In this book an attempt has been made to discuss things seen and unseen in a rational and comprehensive manner. The views of religions on these subjects have been stated. Quotations have been given only to support what is considered to be the correct viewpoint. The book is in the form of aphorisms, each aphorism being amplified and explained by notes and illustrations.

Lucknow, 1980

K. P. BAHADUR

A NOTE ON THE APHORISM STYLE

This book is written in the form of aphorisms, which used to be a popular form of writing in ancient India as early as the sixth century B. C. The Sanskrit for 'aphorism' is *sootra*, which means 'a thread' or 'a string'. Thus aphorisms are short pithy sayings which thread together various ideas. A *sootra* is a kind of key sentence, the nucleus of a thought. It needs to be expanded and interpreted before it can be understood. Often a *sootra* consists of just a word or two, for example, *Jnaanaat muktih*; which means 'through knowledge release'.¹ Fully expanded this would mean 'Release or emancipation of the soul can be obtained by the discrimination achieved through knowledge'. Sometimes (as in the aphorisms embodying the Indian philosophy of the Six Systems), a hypothetical opponent (called a *Poorvapakshin*) is introduced, who advocates objections to the author's arguments. In this way by considering possible objections and refuting them, the author strengthens his own viewpoint.

The terseness of the *sootras* caused many learned scholars to write detailed commentaries explaining them (and often interpreting them according to their own individual convictions). The *Brahma Sootras*, for example, have been interpreted differently by various scholars, of whom some believed in a God with form, while others, like Shankara, strictly opted for a formless God.

One reason for using the *sootra* form was the ease with which it could be memorised. Ancient Indian doctrines were committed to memory for purposes of transmisson, rather than being read. It was a favourite style for embodying philosophical concepts, as well as statements about rules, institutes and codes of conduct. All the Six Systems of Indian philosophy—Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Saankhya, Yoga, Meemaansaa and Vedaanta are presented in the form of aphorisms.² There are the *Kalpa sootras* relating to ritual,

1. Kapila, *Saankhya-Pravachana-Sootram*, 3 : 23.

2. Gotama's *Nyaya Sootras*, Kanaada's *Vaisheshika Sootras*, Kapil's *Saankhya-Pravachana-Sootram*, Jaiminee's *Poorva-Meemaansaa-Sootras*, and Baadaraayana's *Brahma Sootras*.

the *Grihya Sootras* relating to domestic rites and the *Saamayachaarika Sootras* relating to conventional usage.

Each aphorism in this book condenses the relevant idea, which is further amplified and explained in the note below it. This ancient style of writing is particularly suitable for a book of this kind in which an argument has to be gradually developed, and likely objections to it considered and answered in the process.

PRONUNCIATION OF SANSKRIT WORDS

Simplification has been the objective in transliterating Sanskrit words. Diacritical marks have been avoided as far as possible. English equivalents are as follows:

a sounds as *o* in *come*

aa sounds as *a* in *far*

i sounds as *i* in *girl*

ee sounds as *ee* in *seen*

u sounds as *u* in *pull*

oo sounds as *oo* in *moon*

A dot beneath a letter means that it should be pronounced with a hard sound, e. g., *ṭ* sounds as *t* in *tire*. Ordinarily *t* and *d* are soft as in French.

In case of doubt it would be quite all right to pronounce the word as in English.

PART ONE: GOAL AND ENDEAVOUR

CHAPTER—I : THE AIM OF LIFE

*'Do lovely things, not dream them, all day long;
And so make Life, and Death, and that For Ever
One grand sweet song'.*

—Charles Kingsley

1. **The aim of life is to understand the seen and the unseen'.**

The seen is what is cognised by the senses. Nyaaya philosophy considers the means of knowledge as perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony. Saankhya admits three, *viz.* perception, inference and verbal testimony; the Bauddhas two, *viz.* perception and inference; and the Chaarvaakas (materialists) only one—perception. Nyaaya defines perception as 'knowledge which arises from the contact of the sense with its object, and which is determinate, unnamable and non-erratic'.¹ The seen normally implies what one can know by one's senses. For example, we see a vase on the table, touch it, know that its surface is smooth and smell the perfume of the flowers in it; or we hear a clock striking, or feel the taste of a pudding when we eat it. All these come within the scope of the seen.

If one admits something more than perception as a source of knowledge, he believes in the unseen as well as in the seen. The generality of philosophers admit the unseen, the exception being the materialists, hedonists and atheists. These believe that perception is the only means of valid knowledge. They admit, therefore, only what is seen or known by the senses. They do not believe in the soul as something which survives death, rather that its existence is because of the way in which the elements combine to produce the body. These elements, according to them, are earth, air, water and fire (they leave out the fifth, *aakaasha* or ether, as

1. *The Sacred Books of the Hindus*, Vol. 3 Indian Press, 1913 (All references to Nyaaya are quoted from this book)

something which is not self-evident). For them the world is an accident, without any order or system. Feelings like pleasure and pain are to the materialists properties of the body only. All that exists is the present life, and so the aim of existence is to enjoy it as much as one can, without bothering himself about moral considerations. The most revolutionary conclusion of the materialists is that there is no soul and no hereafter.

There is another segment of the seen world which is not actually 'seen' in the normal sense. This is that which we know to exist, but have not seen. For example, a person who lives in America and has never seen India, none the less knows that it exists. Thus, though he hasn't seen India, he can't deny its existence, because others have seen it, it is on the map, and one can ring up a person living there. This segment of the 'unseen' must, therefore, be also included in the seen.

The unseen is that of which while people may speak, no one has really known or seen it in the ordinary way as one sees a place, person, or thing. The unseen—like God, the soul, and the hereafter—can be taken on trust from saints and supermen on their word. For example, Christians believe God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, and that Jesus was the son of God. Swaamee Raamakrishna told Vivekaananda, his favourite disciple, that he had seen God. The *Bhagavad Geetaa*, a Hindu Scripture, testifies to the soul's existence, and describes the vision of God as given to the warrior, Arjuna. Another way of knowing the unseen is through inference, as for example, the inference that the soul exists because even after waking from deep sleep, when there is complete absence of consciousness, we know we have slept.

In any case the aim of existence is not only to know the *seen* but also to know the *unseen*; all the more because if one is content merely with the *seen*, many things which happen in life appear to be unreasonable and unfair.

2. Some say there is only this world, and no other.

The materialists and hedonists are meant. Since they believe that there is nothing apart from the world, a God governing the universe, a conscience guiding men's actions, or fear that evil will inevitably be punished, does not exist for them. Of the four

aims of life which Hindu philosophy asserts, *viz.*, performance of duty (*dharma*), acquisition of wealth in the rightful manner (*artha*), enjoyment of sensual pleasures (*kaama*), and emancipation (*moksha*); the hedonist recognises only two, *viz.* the acquisition of wealth and sensual pleasures. The *Kaṭha Upanishad* speaks of the materialists who seek only wealth and pleasure thus: 'The ignorant man, befooled by the delusion of wealth does not discern a future life. "This is the only world" he says, "no other". He who thinks thus takes birth and dies again and again'.²

Most religions believe that there is something more than the world. Hinduism in an after life, Judaism and Islam in the Day of Judgement and the Resurrection, besides the universal belief in a heaven and a hell.

3. **Men are not born equal. If this was so, they would be endowed with equal assets.**
4. **Some say that equal assets are merely the creation of human beings. Certain persons are given more benefits by society than others.**
5. **People born in the same family and circumstances, having equal opportunities, fare differently.**
6. **Which soul is born in which family is predestined, because there is no other reason to explain it.**

Equality is a wider concept than is evident on the surface. There are various kinds of equality one can think of. There is equality of status, wealth, opportunity, and so forth, which could be said to be conferred by the society in which one is born. For example, in certain countries there are wide gaps between the rich and poor, while in others there are no such great differences. To this extent we can hold society responsible. But there is nothing to explain why a particular soul is born in a rich household where opportunities given to him to rise are great, and why another soul takes birth in a poor household. A child born in a labourer's

2. *Kaṭha Up.*, II:6

(*Naa saamparaayaḥ pratibhaati baalam. Pramaadyantam vitta mohena moodham. Ayam loko naasti paritti maanee. Punah punarvasheḥ maapadyate me.*)

family in India may not enjoy the privilege of good education, while a child born in the house of a rich businessman can get the best education available.

Another thing which can't be explained is why with equal opportunity, one child succeeds and another fails. Inequalities of intellect, the phenomenon of genius, success and failure both arising from equal opportunity and endeavour, are things which cannot be explained by worldly circumstances or be attributed to differences in social conditions. The inevitable conclusion is that they are the results of some kind of reward or punishment. Reward and punishment cannot be arbitrary. So the soul suffers the fair and deserved consequences of actions performed in other lives.

- 7. Children may be born with a deformity. If this was the only world, it would be unreasonable to suppose that they were meant to suffer for nothing.**
- 8. Some say that this is due to a defect in the embryo.**
- 9. It is not reasonable to suppose that the defect would arise only in a particular embryo.**
- 10. Even if it arose from a defect, why should the defect lie in that particular embryo, and not in others?**

A new born baby may suffer from a deformity by birth. He may be born blind or with a diseased limb, and so forth. If we believe that the deformity or disease is just accidental, it would mean that the child is punished without fault. The only possible explanation can be that it is the result of some evil actions for which the soul of the new born child was responsible, thus pointing out to a past life, for it is only in living that actions can be performed. It might be argued on the contrary that the deformity is not the fruit of any past actions, but merely caused by some fault in the embryo or in its growth. Even if this is conceded, how can it be explained why that particular soul has been picked out for suffering the consequences of the deformity and not another? It can be said that the accident of having a deformity can happen to anyone without intending a particular person. As for example, if a car accident has to take place, it

will obviously occur to one of the many cars on the road. The particularity is determined only *after* the occurrence of the accident. In other words, there is nothing like destiny. When something actually befalls someone we say, 'it was his destiny'. In that case a further question arises: Why the accident (or deformity) at all? Surely it is not essential that such a accident or deformity *must* occur. Its occurrence for a specific person denotes discrimination, and if an individual is singled out for suffering, there must be a reason. So the only possible explanation is that he has been punished for his past actions.

11. **And the new born babe knows what fear is. If he had not known death, how could he know fear?**
12. **Some say this is instinctive, like a stag immobilised in the forest.**
13. **Human beings are endowed with reason, therefore, fear cannot be instinctive.**

These aphorisms explain why the rebirth of the soul must be accepted. The new born babe takes instinctively to his mother's breast, even though he has known no mother till the time of his birth. This could only be due to the remembrance of a mother in previous life. As the *Nyaaya Sootras* of Gotama say: 'The soul is to be admitted on account of joy, fear and grief, arising in a child from the memory of things previously experienced...A child's desire for milk in this life is caused by the practice of his having drunk it in previous life...The desire in a new born child is due to the ideas left in his soul by the things he enjoyed in his previous lives'.³

Besides this, a new born babe knows fear. If one takes him to the roof of a house and swings him, as if to throw him down, he shrinks, and shows fear. This would not be so if there was no past life. The memory of the fear of death persists due to the experience of death in the previous life. One may say that this fear is 'instinctive'. But instinct is also based on past experience.

3. *Nyaaya Sootras*, III : I : 19,22 & 27

If one had no experience of burning, he would not instinctively run from fire.

Rebirth is one of the fundamental beliefs of Indian religion. Some people criticise this belief on the ground that if there was rebirth we would remember past experiences. But this is not necessary. Past experiences have effect on the present life, but they need not be remembered, just as our waking experiences are reflected in our dreams, though while dreaming we do not remember them. The lessons learnt in boyhood are forgotten when we are old, but they do affect old age. Another possible objection is that experience can be had only while there is a body. How can these experiences be remembered when the body is no more? The reply to this is that Indian religion believes in a subtle body (different from the gross one), which accompanies the soul from one body to another. The other arguments in favour of rebirth may be briefly summarised as below:

- (i) All men are born with certain predilections which, not being traceable to the present life, point to a past one.
- (ii) Why should a particular child be born in a particular family?
- (iii) Sometimes the sight of a beautiful thing, or the sound of sweet music makes a person wistful instead of joyful. This can be explained as being due to recollection.
- (iv) The Self being immortal, it must have eternal pre-existence.
- (v) Rebirth is a corollary of deeds (*karma*) and liberation (*moksha*).
- (vi) A man must reap what he has sown, and this cannot be accomplished in a single lifetime.

14. There is incongruity of suffering.

15. This cannot be due to the constitution of society because the advantages and disadvantages have equal bearing.

16. If society is ill based, one evil person has similar chances of success as another. But one person who is evil may suffer, another may not.

We see good men constantly suffering in the world, and often those who are evil, prosper. What can be the reason for this? If the acts one performed in this life were the basis for enjoyment of fruits, and there was no other life, the men who performed evil acts would be suffering, and those who did good would prosper. Since this is not always so, and indeed often it is the reverse, it must be admitted that there is a previous life also.

According to the *Nyaaya Sootras*, 'fruits are produced by activity and faults'.⁴ It is the enjoyment of pleasure which everyone wants, and the suffering of pain which everyone wishes to avoid. The fruits of action are not immediate but after a lapse of time.⁵ Thus the consequences of the actions of one life take effect in future lives. It is for this reason that we cannot understand the seemingly irrational distribution of happiness and suffering. We see only a part of life. It is as if we saw only five minutes of a movie. In that five minutes we see someone kill an innocent person, a virtuous girl lamenting, and the killer enjoying himself. It has all a reason and background. But we can know it only if we saw the entire movie.

But someone may say 'The pain and suffering of men is not due to actions done in past lives. It is society which is responsible for richness and poverty. The rich are happy and prosperous, the poor are always suffering, and the variance is because society has created a chasm between them. Richness and poverty, learning and ignorance, opulence and wretchedness, are the results of the working of such a society, and it is only to bring mental comfort to those who suffer that the philosopher says that suffering is due to evil acts committed in past lives'. In reply to such an argument it may be pointed out that even granted that suffering and happiness are the results of the society we live in, two things are still not explainable: firstly, it is not necessary that a rich man may be happy. In fact it may be the other

4. *Nyaaya Sootras* I: I: 20

5. *Nyaaya Sootras* IV: I: 45

way round. It is also not necessary that a poor man may be miserable. Diogenes, the philosopher who lived in a tub, was more contented than the great emperor, Alexander. Power and riches bring with them anxiety and worry. Possessions multiply and cause uneasiness to the owner. A story related by Shree Raamakrishna illustrates this point: 'There was a *sannyasi* whose only possession was two pairs of loin-cloths. One day a mouse nibbled at one piece. So the holy man kept a cat to protect his loin-cloths from the mouse. Then he had to keep a cow to supply milk for the cat. Later he had to engage a servant to look after the cow. Gradually the number of his cows multiplied. He acquired pastures and farm land. He had to engage a number of servants. Thus he became, in course of time, a sort of landlord. And, last of all, he had to take a wife to look after his big household. One day, one of his friends, another monk, happened to visit him and was surprised to see his altered circumstances. When asked the reason, the holy man said, "It is all for the sake of a piece of loin-cloth!"'⁶

The Bible says, 'Blessed be ye the poor for yours is the kingdom of God',⁷ and 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God'.⁸

Secondly, even if we grant that the differences in status and wealth are due to the ills of society, what is there to explain that one evil person suffers, while another prospers? If society was so constituted that evil men prospered, then all evil men should be well off. The advantages and disadvantages of society should have equal bearing on the prosperity or otherwise of the rich and the poor, the good and the evil. But we find there are differences. One good man may prosper and the other come to grief. One evil man may be happy but another miserable. Thus these things can be explained only by supposing that the joys and sufferings of people have a deeper cause than either the constitution of the society in which they are born, or their acts in their present lives.

6. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*

7. *St. Luke*, 6: 20 (Authorised Version)

8. *St. Mark*, 10: 25 (Authorised Version)

17. Diseases attack some and do not attack others.

18. The cause of this does not lie in inner resistance.

Disease affects different people differently. Two persons may be stricken by the same ailment, say tetanus. One dies, but the other recovers. Doctors say that this is due to the mortality factor of diseases. Every disease has a certain percentage of mortality, depending on its nature. But what can't be explained is why a particular person dies of that disease and not another. A parable of Shree Raamakrishna illustrates the point: 'God laughs on two occasions' he says. 'He laughs when two brothers divide land between them. They put a string across the land and say to each other, "This side is mine, and that side is yours". God laughs and says to Himself, "Why, this whole universe is Mine; and about a little clod they say, "This side is mine, and that side is yours."

'God laughs again when the physician says to the mother weeping bitterly because of her child's desperate illness, "Don't be afraid mother. I shall cure your child". The physician does not know that no one can save the child if God's will is that he should die'.⁹

Someone may say that the reason why one man succumbs to a disease, and not another, is their varying resistance factor. The weak man falls prey to it, while the healthy one does not. This, too, is belied by experience. Often the strong man falls ill in an epidemic while the weak one is unaffected. The conclusion, therefore, is that it is not due to strength or weakness, or lack of resistance, but rather that suffering is ordained for one and not for the other. And this is dependent on past actions.

19. There is inequality in the span of living.

20. This is not due to the functioning of the body, because there is no relation.

21. Equipped with the same body, human beings have different life periods.

9. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*

The span of man's life is fixed, and nothing can alter it. It may be argued that this is not so, and the period of man's life is dependent on the kind of food he eats and the extent of tension and worry he undergoes. If this was so, persons who get a good diet would always die later than those who lived on bread and salt. But often this is not so. In countries where people get a wholesome diet, young men also die; while in the poorer countries men living on just bread and pulse may live up to an old age. Tension is a cause of early death, and yet a person who has no tension may die earlier than one whose life is nothing but tension. In some cases babies die at birth, or soon after they are born. The element of diet and worry does not at all touch them, yet they die. When fire breaks out in some huge building, some are absolutely unharmed, others die. In the most serious accidents there are miraculous escapes. Thus the span of human existence cannot be dependent on diet, or human factors. People with weak hearts and lungs live on, and those with perfectly sound organs die. The period of life is destined.

Hinduism and Buddhism both consider life as suffering. The *Yoga Sootras* say, 'All is pain to the discriminating'.¹⁰ Similarly Lord Buddha says: 'What do you think, O monks! which may be more, the flow of tears you have shed on this long way, running again and again to new birth and new death, united to the disliked, separated from the liked, complaining and weeping, or the water of the four great oceans? . . . But how is this possible? Without beginning or end, O monks, is this round of rebirths. There cannot be discerned the first beginning of beings, who sunk in ignorance and bound by thirst, are incessantly transmigrating and again and again run to a new birth. And thus, O monks, through a long time you have experienced suffering, pain and misery, and enlarged the burying ground; truly long enough to be disgusted with every kind of existence, long enough to turn away from every kind of existence, long enough to deliver yourself from it'.¹¹

According to Saankhya, life has three kinds of pain (*trividha duhkha*). These are (i) That originating from the sufferer

10. *Y. S.*, 2: 15 (*dukkhameva sarvam vivekinah*)

11. *Samutta Nikaya*

himself (*aadhyaatmika*), so called because it arises from the *aatmaa*, i. e. one's own self. This consists of disease and mental suffering. (ii) That caused to the sufferer by other living creatures, like birds beasts and so forth (*aadhibautika*), so called because it arises from created beings=*bhootas*. (iii) Suffering caused by the supernatural forces, like the ill effects of stars and planets, evil spirits and the like (*aadhidaivika*), so called because such suffering arises from *daivas* or *devas*=the gods.¹²

Life in the world is meant for the expiation of former misdeeds and the enjoyment of the fruits of past actions. When this purpose is accomplished, the body dies; the soul (conducted by the subtle body) departing to expiate again the works of the being from which it is sundered, by inhabiting another body—the chain being broken only when, having attained emancipation, there are no more deeds for it to expiate. Consequently the period of stay of each individual (which signifies the period of sufferance of pain), is limited and variable. In opposition to the theory that all life is suffering, it may be argued that this is not so because periods of pleasure are interspersed with stretches of pain. This argument is considered and answered in the *Nyaaya Sootras*: 'Birth is a pain because it is connected with various distresses'.¹³ To the objection 'One cannot deny pleasure because it is produced at intervals',¹⁴ the author of the *Sootras* says: 'Distresses do not disappear from a person who enjoys one pleasure and seeks another; and because there is conceit of pleasure in what is another name for pain'.¹⁵ In other words birth is painful because it is connected with the body, which is a source of pain. Although life has pleasures, they too must be regarded as pain, because a person who enjoys pleasures is tormented by various distresses. His desires may be completely unfulfilled, or they may be obtained partially, leaving him pining for what he could not get: 'The desire that outruns the delight'.¹⁶ He who pursues pleasure, therefore, does in reality pursue pain.

12. *Saankhya Pravachana Sootram*, I: I: 1

13. *N. S.*, IV: I: 55

14. *Ibid*, IV: I: 56

15. *Ibid*, IV: I: 57-8

16. Swinburne, *Dolores*, st. 14

22. The world, therefore, is merely a link in the chain of existence.

The world is a temporary sojourn for experiencing the fruits of actions performed in past lives, as well as the stage for performing actions which will bear fruit later. The *karma* theory is an integral part of Indian philosophy, even as rebirth which is its corollary. To a devotee who asked Ramana Maharishie what *karma* was, the sage said: 'That which has already begun to bear fruit is classified as *Praarabda Karma* (past action). That which is in store and will bear fruit is classified as *Sanchita Karma* (accumulated action). This is multifarious like the grain obtained by villages as barter for cress (greens). Such bartered grain consists of rice, ragi, barley etc., some floating on, others sinking in water. Some of it may be good, bad or indifferent. When the most potent of the multifarious *karma* begins to bear fruit in the next birth, it is called the *Praarabdha* of that birth'.¹⁷ Our life in the world is thus only a link in a chain of lives. That is why, while understanding some things, there are others we do not understand. As Shakespeare says:

'All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.'¹⁸

23. The seen is what is apprehended with the senses. The unseen is what cannot be so apprehended, but still exists.

24. The unseen are God, the soul, and the hereafter. The seen is the corporate world and all that exists in it.

The seen and the unseen are the two broad classification of things. The seen is that which can be cognised by the senses, for example the world and all it contains—rivers, hills, valleys, seas, men women, beasts, birds, creatures of the sea, cities, houses and so forth. The unseen covers things we do not see. We may believe in such things, or not believe, according to our conviction. There are, for example, God, soul, intellect and after

17. *Talks With Shree Ramana Maharishie*, Vol. I, p. 65

18. *As You Like It*, ii: 7

life, and all those things which may be seen by others but for us are unseen—as for an Indian who has not been abroad, America and Switzerland. Thus the unseen may be further divided into two parts (i) That which is generally unseen, like God, soul, and after life, and (ii) That which is unseen for the individual in question, even though it is seen by many others and can readily be seen by him as well. In this category will come cities and countries one has not visited, and people one has not seen or met.

Both the seen and the unseen come within the scope of knowledge. For example *Nyaaya* considers objects of right knowledge to be 'Soul, body, senses, objects of sense, intellect, mind, activity, fault, transmigration, fruit, pain and release'.¹⁹

The difference between the seen and the unseen is mainly that the seen can be known by the senses (we can see a clock, smell the perfume of a rose, taste a dish, feel the touch of a book, and hear a song); while the unseen is not directly known thus, and so requires proof or conviction. In the case of those categories of the unseen which are unseen only for the individual, like foreign countries and people, a very little amount of assurance, and no proof, is required. But for the other category, like God, soul and so forth, one requires a lot of conviction and also proof. There are two ways of obtaining conviction for the unseen: faith and reason. The efficacy of these two methods will be examined in the chapter which follows.

19. *N. S.*, I: I: 9

CHAPTER—II: FAITH, REASON AND WORKS

'Faith apart from works is barren'.

—*Epistle of St. James* (R. V.)

1. The triple way to God realisation is through faith, wisdom and works.

Every religion preaches (1) Faith in God (2) The acquisition of wisdom, and (3) The performance of good works.

1. *Faith*—In the *Bhagavad Geeta* Lord Krishna says to his disciple, Arjuna, 'I consider them to be the best *yogees*, who endowed with supreme faith, and ever united through meditation with me, worship me with mind centred on me'.¹ Further the Lord says 'Arjuna, the faith of each is shaped to his own mental constitution. Faith constitutes the very being of man; therefore whatever the nature of his faith, that verily he is'.² And 'If any worshipper whatsoever, seeks with faith to worship a celestial form, I make that faith of his steady'.³

The above may be taken as fairly representative of the Hindu viewpoint, because the *Geeta* is the essence of the Hindu Scriptures.

Christianity also speaks of faith. The Bible says: 'What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead. By faith—by believing God—we know that the world and the stars—in fact, all things—were made at God's command; and that they were all made from things that can't be seen'.⁴ Jesus Christ says '*Anything* is possible if you have faith',⁵ and 'Everyone who asks,

1. *B. G.*, XII : 2.

2. *Ibid*, VII : 21.

3. *Ibid*, XVII : 3.

4. *Hebrews*, 11 : 1-3. (*The Living Bible*).

5. *Mark*, 9 : 23.

receives; all who seek, find; and the door is opened to everyone who knocks'.⁶

About faith the *Quraan* says, 'Surely we help Our apostles, and those who believe in this world's life and on the day when the witness shall stand up'. Again, 'He alone will taste the sweetness of faith who possesses the three qualities: the love of God and the Prophet comes to him before everything else; he loves whom he loves solely for the sake of God; the idea of going back to apostasy after he has embraced Islam is as repugnant to him as being thrown into the fire'.⁷

Says the Prophet, 'None of you can be an honest Muslim and a true believer unless his love for me exceeds the love he has for his parents, children or any other human being in the world'.⁸ And, 'He will not enter hell, who has faith equal to a mustard seed in his heart'.⁹

Soloman ben Judah ibn Gabirol has something to say about faith. The sage was asked, 'Why do we never perceive in thee a trace of anxiety?' He replied, 'Because I never possessed a thing over which I would grieve had I lost it'. He also said, 'Everything requires a fence'. He was asked, 'What is the fence?' He answered 'Trust'. 'What is the fence of trust?' he was asked; and he replied, 'Faith'. To the further question, 'What is the fence of faith?' he answered, 'To fear nothing'. Who refuses to accept the decree of the Creator, there is no healing to his stupidity. Who is the wisest of men and the most trusting? He who accepts things as they come and go.¹⁰ Thus we see that faith is universally recognised as one of the ways of coming near to God. It is an essential ingredient of devotion.

2. *Wisdom*—Wisdom is particularly extolled in the *Geetaa*. Lord Krishna says: 'Even if you are the most sinful of all sinners, you will cross over all sins by the raft of wisdom. For as a blazing

6. *Luke*, 11 : 10.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Kidwai, *What Islam is?*

9. *The Sayings of Muhammad*, John Murray.

10. Lewis Browne, *The Wisdom of Israel*, Michael Joseph.

fire reduces the fuel to ashes, Arjuna, even so the fire of wisdom reduces all actions to ashes. In this world there is no purifier like wisdom.'¹¹

Muhammad says, 'God hath not created anything better than Reason, or anything more perfect, or more beautiful than Reason; the benefits which God giveth are on its account; and understanding is by it, and God's wrath is caused by disregard of it'.¹² The Bible extols wisdom: 'Wisdom gives a long, good life, riches, honour, pleasure, and peace. Wisdom is a tree of life to those who eat her fruit; happy is the man who keeps on eating it... If you exalt wisdom she will exalt you. Hold her fast and she will lead you to great honour; she will place a beautiful crown upon your head'.¹³

3. *Works*—This will be dealt with in detail in the chapter on God (see aphorisms 6-8 of that chapter). The *karma* theory believes in reward and punishment according to works. Therefore, the importance of good works has been emphasised in Hindu religion. In the *Bhagavad Geetaa*, Lord Krishna says: 'Arjuna, perform your duties dwelling in Yoga, relinquishing attachment, and indifferent to success and failure.'¹⁴ 'As the unwise act with attachment, so should the wise man, seeking maintenance of the world order, act without attachment'.¹⁵ 'Your right is to work only, but never to the fruit thereof. Let not the fruit of action be your object, nor let your attachment be to inaction'.¹⁶

Thus the *Bhagavad Geetaa* makes certain distinctive points about performance of works. These may be summarised as follows: 1. The performance of works is inevitable and essential. Man, nay even God, must perforce engage himself in works. Without works neither man can get along, nor God. If God did not perform action (even though He has no need to), the world would perish. 2. Action should be performed without expectation

11. *B. G.*, IV : 36-8.

12. *The Sayings of Muhammad*, John Murray.

13. *Proverbs*, 3: 17-8 & 4: 9 (*The Living Bible*).

14. *B. G.*, II : 48.

15. *Ibid.*, III : 25.

16. *Ibid.* II : 47.

That is to say the performance of desireless action is advocated. If action is performed with self-interest its consequence will have to be borne in life on earth; but if the action is desireless (*nishkaama karma*), like burnt seed which will no longer sprout, it does not bear any result. When action is thus devoid of consequence, no life on earth is needed for it to bear fruit, and liberation from the world is automatically obtained.

Islam also enjoins good works, as for example, charity, almsgiving, hospitality and so forth. Muhammad says: 'That person who relieveth a Muslim from distress in this world, God will in like manner relieve him in the next; and he who shall do good to the indigent, God will do good to him in this world and the next'.¹⁷ Again he says, 'Be persistent in good actions'.¹⁸ Charity is conceived of by Islam in a broad sense. 'Every good act is charity' says Muhammad.¹⁹ The importance of virtuous action and truth is emphasised: 'When you speak, speak the truth, perform when you promise; discharge your trust; commit not fornication; have no impure desires; withhold your hand from striking, and from taking that which is unlawful and bad. The best of God's servants are those who, when seen, remind of God; and the worst of God's servants are those who carry tales about, to do mischief and separate friends, and seek for the defects of the good'.²⁰ Alms should be given without any trace of egoism and in a humble manner: 'The best of alms is that which the right hand giveth, and the left hand knoweth not of. The best of almsgiving is that which springeth from the heart, and is uttered by the lips to soften the wounds of the injured'.²¹ Similarly, of hospitality, Muhammad says: 'He who believeth in one God and in a future life (i. e. a Muslim), let him honour his guest'.²²

The Bible upholds good works. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus Christ praises the men who are humble-minded, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. About charity he says, much in

17. *The Sayings of Muhammad*, John Murray, p. 84.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *The Sayings of Muhammad*, John Murray, p. 59.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

the spirit of Islam, 'But take care not to do your good deeds in public for people to see, for, if you do, you will get no reward from your Father in heaven...when you give charity, your own left hand must not know what your right hand is doing'.²³ Both faith and good works are necessary, as St. James says: 'Dear brothers, what's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will *that* kind of faith save anyone? If you have a friend who is in need of food and clothing, and you say to him, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat hearty," and then don't give him clothes or food, what good does that do?

'So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. You must also do good to prove that you have it. Faith that doesn't show itself by good works is no faith at all—it is dead and useless'.²⁴ 'Just as the body is dead when there is no spirit in it, so faith is dead if it is not the kind that results in good deeds'.²⁵

Thus the major religions of the world are agreed that faith, wisdom, and good works are necessary for salvation. Good works should be performed selflessly, without hope of reward, and without ostentation. Faith, wisdom and good works are the pillars of religion and morality, without which the edifice won't stand. They are the three pathways to God.

2. The conferment of faith is by God.

Why does one person have faith in God, while another has not? Men are equipped with the same instrument of understanding, yet they are divided into agnostics and believers. The explanation of this is firstly, that faith is not a rational process, and secondly, it presupposes belief in things which are unseen. Man has been given the faculties of the mind and the intellect. Their function (except in the dream state, but then the mind is quiescent), is limited to analysing and accepting what can be proved or that which appears credible. Faith does not obviously come within the former process, and as regards credibility, this is

23. *The Wisdom of Israel*, Michael Joseph, p. 146-7 & 149.

24. *James*, 2 : 14-7 (The Living Bible).

25. *Ibid.* 2 : 26.

elastic and varies from one individual to another. What may appear possible to one, may not appear so to another. Faith in God and in the unseen is of a different variety from faith in daily events, like sleeping and waking and so forth. When one goes to sleep he is fully convinced that he will wake on the morrow. When one takes a voyage he is certain he will reach. But faith in the unseen is not based on the law of probability, and therefore it falls outside the pale of reason. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth', and faith, too, like that is given to whomsoever God wills. Bratzlaver says, 'A man should believe in God by virtue of faith rather than miracles'.²⁶ Vivekaananda (also known as Narendranath) was won over to faith by an incident inexplicable by reason. In fact he had an analytical mind and had developed grave doubts about God's existence. The incident is mentioned thus: 'This time he had an occasion of witnessing, to his utter dismay, the wonderful potency of Raamakrishna's touch, which made everything about him swim and spin before his eyes and dissolve into empty space. He felt as if he was facing space and cried out in consternation, "What are you doing? I have parents at home". This drew a genial laugh from the saintly wizard of Dakshineswar and made him pass his hand over Narendranath's breast with the remark, "All right. Let us leave it at that for the moment". Immediately, to his infinite surprise and relief, Narendranath regained his normal vision'.²⁷ So too was the sudden realisation of Gautama Buddha, whom faith caused to abandon his wife, child and home, in the quest for truth. Shree Ramana Maharishee, the sage of Southern India, suddenly left his home 'In search of his Father'. Similarly the Bible says: 'Noah was another who trusted God. When he heard God's warning about the future, Noah believed him even though there was then no sign of a flood, and wasting no time, he built the ark and saved his family. Noah's belief in God was in direct contrast to the sin and disbelief of the rest of the world—which refused to obey—and because of his faith he became one of those whom God has accepted.

'Abraham trusted God, and when God told him to leave

26. *The Wisdom of Israel*, Michael Joseph, p. 471.

27. *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 2, p. 546-7.

home and go far away to another land which he promised to give him, Abraham obeyed. Away he went, not even knowing where he was going. And even when he reached God's promised land, he lived in tents like a mere visitor, as did Isaac and Jacob, to whom God gave the same promise. Abraham did this because he was confidently waiting for God to bring him to that strong heavenly city whose designer and builder is God'.²⁸

Instances can be multiplied to illustrate the point. The ingredients of faith are unquestioning belief and implicit trust.

3. The intensities of faith are the higher and the lower.

There are many grades of faith, as the wick of a lamp which becomes brighter the more it is raised. Broadly however, there are two distinct zones. The penumbra of faith is that in which faith has still to be perfected. It is the stage when man has not yet acquired complete trust in God. He prays, but is not fully convinced of the efficacy of prayer; he worships God but is not confident that such worship will yield the desired result. In the *Raamacharitmaanaasa*, Lord Raama says: 'He calls himself my devotee, and yet has expectation from man. Say then, how can he be said to have faith?'²⁹ It is not that one should make no effort to achieve a certain end. For example, if one desires to get a job he will have to go about to prospective employers and try to get himself fixed up. In fact unless he does so, no one is going to give him a job while he sits at home. As the *Geetaa* says, 'Surely none can remain inactive even for a moment. Everyone is driven helplessly to action'.³⁰ But this does not mean he should have expectation from the men he approaches. Instead he should have hope in God alone. What is needful is that while making effort one should not make the mistake of thinking that it is man who delivers the goods. Poet Khaankhanaa, who was one of the influential ministers of the Mughal Court, would help everyone who came to him. But when the man got what he wanted, and came to thank him, the poet would be embarrassed and gaze towards the ground. One day someone asked him 'You

28. *Hebrews*, 11 : 7-10 (*The Living Bible*).

29. *Uttara Kaanṛa*, 45: 2.

30. *B. G.*, III : 5.

do great favours, but when one whom you have helped comes to express his gratitude, why do you look down?' The poet said:

'The One who gives is another; He gives day and night:
But people say it is I; so with shame my eyes droop'.

Shree Raamakrishna says, 'The feeling "I am the doer" is the outcome of ignorance. But the feeling that God does everything is due to knowledge. God alone is the Doer; all others are instruments in His hands'.³¹ God does not mind His creatures asking favours of him, even though they may be asking them for their own selves. The *Geeta* says: 'The virtuous ones who worship me are of four kinds: the man in distress, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the man of wisdom'.³² Thus one who selfishly worships God for attaining riches and such things, or for avoiding misfortune, is not to be condemned. Jesus Christ says in the Bible: 'If you stay in me and obey my commands, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted!'.³³ And again, 'Ask and it shall be given you; seek ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be open'.³⁴ When his apostles asked Jesus how to get more faith, he told them, 'If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine (mulberry) tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you'.³⁵

Thus it is clear that for those who have complete faith everything is possible. Complete faith means absolute dependence on God, and unwavering trust in Him. This is the higher faith, the umbra; which is attained after one ceases to pin his hope on human beings, although he may approach them to achieve his end. When this kind of faith is achieved, one ceases to test it by events. The novice in faith prays to God for something. His prayer is answered, and that strengthens it. But the risk is that if once he does not get what he wants, his faith may flag. This is

31. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*.

32. *B. G.*, VII : 16.

33. *John*, 15 : 7 (*The Living Bible*).

34. *Luke*, 11 : 9-10 (A. V.)

35. *Ibid*, 17 : 6 (A. V.)

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not so with the man of higher faith. He does not test faith in this manner. He accepts everything as the will of God. Beset with sorrows his faith remains unshaken. Such a man indeed God too protects. Having reached the stage of complete faith, the devotee experiences no sorrows. Ultimately the higher faith reaches an intensity in which the devotee sees none else but God. This is the perfection of faith, the bull's-eye of the umbra—the faith of saints and divines. When 'faith has reached the state of perfection when the human soul forgets its own self, the eyes see nothing but Him—the sight of all sights, the ear hears nothing but the sound of His flute which fills all space and every touch is His. The senses in fact instead of leading to the consciousness of many, make the devotee aware of the presence of Him only, so absolutely that he forgets his own existence.'³⁶ Such was the devotion of the Aarvaars (devotees of Lord Vishnu).

No kinship with the world have I
Which takes for true the life not true
For thee alone my passion burns
Rangan my Lord !
No kinship with this world have I—
With throngs of maidens slim of waist
With joy and love for thee I cry
Rangan my Lord !³⁷

4. Faith is sustained by the company of holy men, by religious discourse, and such like.

Faith is a gift of God and is conferred by His grace. Nevertheless, as the seed once sown, is nurtured by water and manure, so is faith preserved by the company of saints, the instruction of preceptors, devotional reading of the Scriptures, and so forth. It is a misconception to think that in the initial stage, faith can be sustained without effort. The devotee has strenuously to avoid a relapse into the arrogance, egoism, or vanity which he has shaken off. Even a genius has to assiduously achieve success. So too the devotee. He has to guard the gift of faith with zeal. For

36. D. C. Sen, *Chaitanya and His Age*.

37. Das Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*.

this he should move among the saints and holy men, listen to religious discourses, be reverential to his guru, and so keep the light of faith burning. The *Raamacharitmaanasa* lays down the following steps: serving the saints, love for listening to the deeds of the Lord, sitting at the feet of the guru without pride, singing the Lord's praises with simple heart, complete faith in God and chanting His name, going beyond the senses, having a noble nature and dispassion, the company of holy men, seeing the whole world immersed in God, contentment and absence of fault-finding, simplicity, equal regard for all men, complete dependence on God, and indifference to joy and sorrow'.³⁸

5. God is equally drawn to His devotees.

Faith and devotion can win over God, for He is particularly attached to His devotees. Complete surrender to God sets into motion a process whereby the devotee receives His complete love and protection also. To Keshab Sen, who wanted to know why he could not see God, Shree Raamakrishna said, 'You do not see God because you busy yourself with such things as name and fame and scholarship. The mother does not come to the child as long as it sucks its toy. But when after a few minutes it throws the toy away and cries then the mother takes down the ricepot from the hearth and comes running to the child'.³⁹ The sage explains the relation between the devotee and God by a parable: 'Once Lakshmi and Narayana were seated in Vaikuntha (heaven) when Narayana suddenly stood up. Lakshmi had been stroking His feet. She said, "Lord, where are you going?" Narayana answered: "One of My devotees is in great danger. I must save him". With these words He went out. But He came back immediately. Lakshmi said, "Lord, why have you returned so soon?" Narayana smiled and said: "The devotee was going along the road overwhelmed with love for Me. Some washermen were drying clothes on the grass and the devotee walked over the clothes. At this the washermen chased him and were going to beat him with their sticks. So I ran out to protect him". "But why have you come back?" asked Lakshmi. Narayana laughed

38. *Aranya Kaṇṭha*, 34 : 4 & 35 : 1-3.

39. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*.

and said: "I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at them. So I came back!"⁴⁰

Lord Raama says in the *Raamacharitmaanasa*: 'If a man who is accursed in all the sentient and insentient world is awed by his guilt and comes to me for shelter, abandoning vanity, attachment and all kinds of deceit, very soon I make him saint like'.⁴¹ The *Geetaa*, as we have seen, also subscribes to the view that God strengthens the faith of His devotees. Lord Krishna says: 'I bring full security to those who worship me alone with perseverance, and personally attend to their needs'.⁴² When Peter said to Jesus Christ, 'We have left our homes and followed you', Christ told him, 'Yes, and everyone who has done as you have, leaving home, wife, brothers, parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God, will be repaid many times over now, as well as receiving eternal life in the world to come'.⁴³

Thus it is evident that true faith is a two way affair, just as true love. It is something deeper than mere belief. It is the establishment of an eternal bond between the devotee and God.

6. Faith is the short cut to salvation, for it begins where reason ends.

The *Raamacharitmaanasa* describes faith as the easier way. Lord Raama says: 'Wisdom is difficult to acquire, and there are many hindrances in acquiring it. The way to it is hard, and the soul finds no support as it proceeds on the path'.⁴⁴ Lord Krishna tells his disciple, Arjuna: 'Certainly more rough is the path of those whose mind is seeking the Unmanifest, for it is very difficult for one having a body to identify himself with it. On the other hand, those who, being completely devoted to me, surrender all to me, and worship and meditate on me with single minded devotion; these souls, O Arjuna, who have their minds fixed on me, I speedily rescue from the ocean of births and deaths'.⁴⁵

40. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*.

41. *Sundar Kaandaa*, 47 : 1-2.

42. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, IX : 22.

43. *Luke*, 18 : 28-30.

44. *Uttara Kaandaa*, 44: 2

45. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, XII: 5-7

Although the paths of reason and faith equally lead to God, faith is what we may call a short cut. The process of reasoning is long and cumbersome. When finally one succeeds in understanding that there is a God, he has already undergone a torturous and sustained exercise of the mind. Marshalling arguments, rejecting them; now doubting, now banishing doubt; the man of reason struggles painfully along. He is like the hare. When he reaches, he finds his friend the tortoise—the man of faith who has trudged steadily without wavering—already at the goal!

7. Wisdom is intellectual insight into a thing which is already true.

It is obvious that we cannot gauge things unseen by reason. For example, however much one may reason, it is impossible to conclude what exactly happens after death. In the same way one may argue inconclusively about the existence of God and soul. There will always be opposing views. One who is in favour of God will adduce convincing reasons for His presence. On the other hand one who is a disbeliever will also muster up arguments to show there is no need of God. Thus reason is a double-edged weapon. But the kind of reason which we call 'wisdom' (this will be made clearer in the next aphorism), is not argumentative. It is penetrative or revealing. Wisdom is like a lamp, which by its light illuminates what was dark and makes it known. This is the sense in which wisdom has been mentioned and praised in the Scriptures of various religions. Not in the sense of mere argument and discussion. The *Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad* says: 'Let him not seek after many words, for that is mere weariness of tongue'. Wisdom is thus intellectual insight. As Browning says of the musicians:

'But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know'.⁴⁶

8. Wisdom is superior to reason, and reason is higher than knowledge.

A distinction is necessary between the three—wisdom, reason

46. *Abt Vogler, St. 11*

and knowledge. Wisdom (which has been referred to in the previous aphorism) is intuitive insight achieved by intellectual effort. For example one uses his intellect to discriminate between the belief that God exists and the belief that He doesn't, and concludes that God exists. The difference between this kind of wisdom, and faith, is that while faith comes without the intervention of the intellect, wisdom is obtained through it. Intellect is not opposed to intuition. It is only supplemented by it. And where the two work for a common purpose, wisdom is born.

Reason is the discriminative faculty of the mind. It decides a course of action or belief in a certain view by means of rationality. Its inferiority is in the sense that while it can rationally determine issues, the cognisance of higher things is beyond its reach. It is unable to grasp the real 'from which' as the *Taittiriya Upanishad* says 'all speech with the mind turns away, unable to reach it'—which is spoken of in the *Kena Upanishad* as 'that where eye does not go, nor speech nor mind. We do not know. We do not understand. How can anyone teach it?'⁴⁷

Knowledge, which is the lowest in the scale, is mere learning—the acquisition of facts and figures relating to various subjects like science, philosophy, economics, religion and so forth. The knowledgeable man is able to speak well on all subjects of which he has made a study, but with all his knowledge he may not be a man of wisdom:

'Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connexion'.⁴⁸

9. Wisdom is also a way to God.

The man of wisdom also ultimately reaches God. A devotee asked Shree Raamakrishna 'Shouldn't we reason any more then?' The sage replied, 'I am asking you not to indulge in futile reasoning. But reason, by all means, about the Real and the unreal, about

47. *Kena Up.*, I: 3

48. Cowper, *The Winter Walk at Noon*, l. 59

what is permanent and what is transitory. You must reason when you are overcome by lust, anger, or grief'.⁴⁹ Again, the sage said: 'Listen to a little Vedaantic reasoning. A magician came to a king to show his magic. When the magician moved away a little, the king saw a rider on horseback approaching him. He was brilliantly arrayed and had various weapons in his hands. The king and the audience began to reason out what was real in the phenomenon before them. Evidently the horse was not real, nor the robes, nor the armour. At last they found out beyond the shadow of a doubt that the rider alone was there. The significance of this is that *Brahman* alone is real and the world unreal. Nothing whatsoever remains if you analyse'.⁵⁰

Thus wisdom also leads to God, but it should be wisdom applied to some noble purpose, not reason purely for reason's sake.

10 Works lead to God by breaking the rounds of rebirths.

Birth and rebirth are the consequence of actions performed on earth. As we have seen, the performance of works, is an essential part of existence. This being so it is open to everyone to perform good works and shun evil ones. Since actions are done by everyone throughout life, they present an easy means of salvation. Faith has to be conferred by God, and wisdom requires much effort, but actions are within the reach of all. If a man keeps doing good throughout his life he can realise the supreme, as Abou Ben Adhem: 'And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest' ⁵¹ The *Geetaa*, as we have seen, emphasises the performance of desireless action (*nishkaama karma*). Such a state, however, is not attained suddenly. First one needs to renounce selfish acts. Then, constantly performing desireless action, one's mind and heart gets purer and purer, till there is complete peace and contentment—the state which leads one God-ward. This does not mean to say that one ceases from all works. All that he does is to cease from works that bind—those which are

49. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*

50. *Ibid.*

51. James Henry Leigh Hunt, *Abou Ben Adhem and the Angel*.

motivated by gain and greed. As Vinoba Bhave says: 'If one is at some distance from his home he does not reach home by chanting "Home, home!" He reaches home by steadily walking. So one should keep on doing *saadhanaa* and not worry about *moksha* (liberation)'.⁵²

11. Works are mental as well as physical.

Works do not mean merely good acts like charity, helping others, and public service. They include kind words, kind thoughts, courtesy and so forth. If a man speaks rough he injures the feelings of another, if he thinks ill of someone, he harms not only that person but himself too. Thus good works mean goodness in speech, thought and action.

Buddhism has evolved a comprehensive code of good conduct—the eightfold path (*atthangika-magga*). This is, right views, right mindedness, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavour, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Jainism, too, believes in a discipline which is fivefold. This is (1) Certain views like non-injury, truthfulness, abstinence from stealing, chastity, and non-acceptance of objects of desire. (2) Avoiding injury to insects, gentle and holy talk, receiving of proper alms, and so forth. (3) Restraints of body, speech and mind. (4) Habits of forgiveness, humility, straightforwardness, truth, cleanliness, restraint, penance, abandonment, indifference to loss or gain, and continence. (5) Meditation on subjects like the transient character of the world, soul and non-soul, and such matters.

Thus man is not judged by acts alone, but by every word that he utters:

'Every word man's lips have uttered
Echoes in God's skies'.⁵³

52. Vinoba Bhave, *Talks on the Geetaa*. *Saadhanaa* has no exact English equivalent. It means 'devotion' or effort towards liberation.

53. A. A. Proctor, *Words*

12. Of the three, works are superior.

The superiority of works lies in this, that through them one benefits others as well, while faith and wisdom are for his own upliftment. The *Bhagavad Geetaa* says: 'Knowledge is better than practice (carried on without proper insight), meditation is superior to knowledge, and renunciation of the fruit of action is even superior to meditation; for peace immediately follows from renunciation'.⁵⁴ Advising Christians Paul says, 'They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those who need, always being ready to share with others what God has given them'.⁵⁵ Lord Raama says in the *Raamacharitmaanasa*: 'Nothing is difficult in the world for those who are always mindful of the good of others'.⁵⁶

13. But the three aid each other.

The three, faith reason and works, cannot be separated into watertight compartments. They are, in fact, inter-connected, inasmuch as when one has faith in God he does good works also. The performance of good works aids faith. So too, the man of wisdom develops faith in God, and, shorn of his ego, is kind and considerate to others. Thus all the three assist each other in carrying the seeker to his goal.

14. Except by these, salvation is not attained.

Salvation, liberation, emancipation, *moksha*, *nirvaana*—whatever one calls the attainment of God, is achieved by these three alone, viz. faith, wisdom and good works. There is no other path to God. At the end of the *Geetaa*, Lord Krishna says: 'He whose mind is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, and whose thirst for enjoyment has completely disappeared, attains through the path of wisdom freedom from bondage of *karma* through God-realisation'.⁵⁷

54. B. G., XII: 12

55. Timothy. 6: 18 (*The Living Bible*)

56. *Aranya Kaanda*, 30: 5

57. B. G., XVIII: 49

The aspirant who pursues assiduously either of these three paths of faith, wisdom, or works, progresses onward, and reaches God. There is no turning back for him, for he has the Lord's eternal promise: 'Know it for certain, my devotee never falls'.⁵⁸

58. *Ibid*, IX: 31

PART TWO: THE SEEN

CHAPTER I: THE WORLD

*‘Be in the world like a traveller, or like a passer on; and reckon
yourself as of the dead’*

—Sayings of Muhammad

1. Some say that the world is merely a dream, like a rope mistaken for a snake.

The reference in the aphorism is to the Vedaantic theory of the illusoriness of the world. This is the idea that the whole plurality of phenomena, the entire world of name and form, is from false knowledge (*mithyojnaana*). It is a mere illusion which is refuted by perfect knowledge, just as the illusion that there is a snake where there is only a rope, is refuted on closer examination, and leaves one no longer in doubt. Thus the entire world is only illusion (*maayaa*) which the Supreme Being *Brahman* projects from Himself like a magician (*maayaavin*), and by which he is not affected, as the magician is not affected by the magic he performs. Shankara (the renowned Hindu saint and philosopher) says: ‘Just as some one should, out of confusion, understand a rope to be a serpent, so an ignorant man, leaving aside the truth, sets up this material transitory universe in its place. The cord being fully known the serpent disappears at once : so the great substance and support of the universe being known, the universe reduces itself to nothing’.¹

The doctrine of complete illusoriness of the world, however, is not convincing. The world of waking is definitely different from the dream world. The absolute denial of the world of senses is not logical. When one is awake the objects have an indisputable reality. How can they be denied? Even Shankara had to change his stand later on. Between the time he wrote his commentary on Gaudapaada’s *Kaarikaa* and on the *Brahma Sootras*, there was a change in the view about the illusoriness of the world.

1. *Aparokshaanubhooti*, verses 95-6.

In the former (as also in the *Aparokshaanubhooti*), he definitely held that world experiences were like dreams, but in the *Brahma Sootras* he allowed that the world of objects and senses has some sort of existence outside thought, which indeed is more logical. In the *Brahma Sootras* he says: 'Owing to the difference of nature in consciousness between the waking state and the dream state, the experience of the waking state is not like dreams'.² Again, he says in the *Sootras*: 'But the dream world is mere illusion, an account of its nature not being manifest with the totality of the attributes of the waking state'.³

2. The world cannot be unreal because it is perceived by the senses.

The external world exists because it is perceived by the senses. We see objects like a table or a chair. We see flowers and insects and birds. We can feel objects and substances with our hands—their hardness, softness and fluidity. How can all these be negated as illusory and not existing? As the *Nyaaya Sootras* say: 'The non-reality of things is demonstrated neither by evidences nor without them. . . . This cannot be proved as there is no reason for it'.⁴ Similarly Saankhya says: 'The world is not mere idea because there is intuition of objective reality'.⁵ To deny the external world would in effect be to negate the senses. Even if one accepts the illusory theory of the rope and the snake, he can't escape from the conclusion that while he is under the delusion that the rope is a snake, it is to him, in effect, a snake. It has the same effect on his emotions as a snake would, and if he accidentally steps on it he will feel as though the snake has bitten him. He may even die of shock.

3. Material things are made of atoms, but atoms are solid substances, however small. So material things have shape, form and magnitude. They exist.

Someone may argue that atoms are infinitely small and so

2. *Vaidharmyaat na svapnaadi vat. Brahma Sootras*, 2:2:29 (Trans. Swami Vireshwarananda).

3. *Ibid*, 3:2:3.

4. *Nyaaya Sootras*, VI : II : 30 & 33.

5. *Saankhya Pravachana Sootran*, I : 42

things do not really have form and shape, for a mass of atoms would be without size. But this argument is fallacious. However small in size the atoms are, they are material and can be seen in a mass, as in a jar, a vase etc. The *Nyaaya Sootras* bear this out: 'The perception of a "whole" bears analogy of a collection of hairs by a person affected with dimness of sight'.⁶ The idea is that just as a person of poor vision cannot perceive each hair on the head of a woman separately, but can perceive them in a mass, one cannot perceive atoms separately due to their being very small, but they can be seen in a mass in a jar or vase.

4. **Every seen thing has a dual existence. It exists in itself and it exists for the living being who has cognisance of it.**
5. **The former existence is absolute and beyond any dispute, for the thing-in-itself exists independent of the cogniser.**

Things and objects have a dual existence. For example, for a blind man there are no sights, even though they exist. There may be a vase on the table full of flowers, but the man who is blind can't see it. It is there, yet (for him) it is not there. Let us visualise a man all of whose senses have been lost. He is deaf, blind, tongueless, and without the sense of smell or touch. Such a man would still live, but the world of sights and sounds would be meaningless for him. Thus the world remains, but for such a man it is not. The truth, which is testified by reason and experience, therefore lies in this: Every material thing has (1) An existence in its own right—the thing-in-itself. This is irrespective of its cognisance or experience, and (2) A dependent existence. This has relation to cognisance and the cogniser. For a sleeping man, or a man who is unconscious, material objects have no existence in the latter sense. They are there, but he knows them not.

6. **Some say that worldly existence is not indisputable because objects seen are not real. Their existence is like that of objects seen in a dream which cease to exist when the dream is gone.**

6. *N. S.*, IV : II : 13.

7. **The objects of waking consciousness cannot be identical with those of the dream state, because the former are cognised by the senses when active, while the latter are cognised when the senses are not active.**
8. **The identity is not established also because the objects of the waking state exist even when the waking state is no more.**
9. **The objects of the waking state have order and arrangement, while the objects of the dream state are indistinct, and have no logical sequence.**

These aphorisms have been considered before also. The Bauddha and the Vedaantic concepts are that life has no reality and is merely an illusion or a dream. Tulsidaasa says in the *Raamacharitmaanasa*: 'In a dream a king becomes a beggar and a beggar a king, but on waking neither the beggar gains anything, nor the king loses anything. So it is with this life'.⁷ The Bauddhas say that the external world is non-existent. It is like the 'horns' which one might say, existed in a hare. Since everything is in a flux of change, there can be nothing called the present. Objects exist only as ideas. The Vedaantists consider the world and all existence to be a dream from which one will awake to reality. They would say with Shakespeare:

'We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep'.⁸

Shankara says: 'Just as the body at work during dream is a mere illusion, so also is this our physical body. How, then, can an illusion, be said to take birth, and when it does not take birth, how again can it be said to exist?'⁹

But the analogy of existence with a dream is not quite suitable. This has indeed been admitted by Shankara himself in the *Brahma Sootras* (see note to aphorism 1 *ante*). The nature of

7. *Ayodhya kaandā*, 92.

8. *The Tempest*, IV : 1,

9. *Aparokshaanubhooti*, verse, 93.

dreams is far removed from the world of reality. The objects seen in it are hazy, ephemeral, insubstantial, and often deformed and devoid of rationality. For example we may see snakes flying in the air, or a house moving along like a train, a monster with the face of a lion, emitting fire, and so forth. If we list the similarities and the dissimilarities, we find the latter far outnumbering the former:

Similarities

1. Both exist at the moment of experience.
2. Both have some kind of emotional response on the experiencer.
3. Both have a beginning and end.

Dissimilarities

1. Dreams are confused and hazy, without any rational order. The waking state is clear, rational and distinct.
2. The objects seen in the waking state last even after being seen. Those in dreams vanish with the dream.
3. The cognitions of the waking state are clear and each object is cognised distinctly by its particular sense. Sounds are heard, perfumes smelt, food tasted, objects seen and felt. In dreams there are no such distinctive cognitions.
4. In the dream state the senses are dormant and inactive. In waking they are alert and active.

In view of the sharp differences between the two states (the waking and the dream) it cannot be said that there is likeness between the two.

10. **It may be said that the comparison is only by way of illustration.**
11. **Comparisons cannot be accepted unless they point to some similarity. In the case of objects of the dream state and those of the waking state, there is no similarity.**

It may be said that the analogy of dream to the waking state has been given only as a comparison, not to thereby impute that the two stages are the same. To this it must be replied that comparisons are useless and of no value if they do not bring out a likeness. Since, as has been shown, there is hardly any likeness between the two states, the comparison of the waking state to the dream state has no validity, and the waking world cannot be negated by considering it to be a dream.

It is true that when one dies, the world is no more for him. But where he goes, and what the hereafter is, is not known, as also whether the hereafter and the world can have any relation as between the dream and the waking states. In any case, even after a man is dead the world goes on. Its reality persists, despite the fact that it no more exists for him.

12. It may be said that objects can be recollected even without being cognised by the senses.

13. The same objection applies to such objects.

An objection may be made that objects can be recollected by the mind. In that case it is not necessary that they should be cognised by the senses. For example, one may recollect the face of someone whom he knows, or a familiar incident of his life. Such recollection is possible, and sometimes it may have a surprising clarity, but it suffers from the same defect as a dream. As objects seen in a dream are transitory and momentary, even so are the objects imagined. They do not have a reality of their own as waking objects of the world have. They are not so clearly seen, and the moment the mind shifts back to the reality of the waking world, they vanish. The objects of the waking world, on the other hand, last even when the cogniser is no more cognising, as for example when he is asleep, absent, or dead.

14. The cognisance of objects for the living being cognising them, is partially of the nature of existence of dream objects and objects of recollection.

This point has already been discussed in the preceding aphorisms. For the cogniser or knower, objects of the world have a relative existence only. They can be seen and known by the

senses, and so when the senses are not functioning, these objects do not exist for the cogniser. Thus to this extent the existence of objects *can* be likened to dream existence, i. e. they are there if they can be cognised, and even while existing they do not exist for the cogniser in case of defect of the senses or non-cognition. This semblance to dream objects and to objects seen in imagination or recollection, however, is only partial. If a cogniser does not cognise or fails to cognise objects, they do not exist for him. But when he does cognise them he sees them in a state different from that seen in dream or imagination. The objects of the waking state are clear, firm, rational and free from confusion. Thus the dream analogy is true only to the extent—*that as objects seen in dream or imagination are no longer seen when the dream or imagination is no more, even so objects of the waking world are not seen when cognition is absent.*

15. Cognition is a composite process in which the senses, the intellect, and the soul take part. If either of them is absent cognition is not possible.

This aspect is discussed in detail in the *Nyaaya Sootras* (Book III, Chapter II). What really is the process of cognition? As the *Nyaaya Sootras* say: 'An object is never perceived by itself'.¹⁰ The waking objects are cognised through the senses and each particular sense has its function in relation to cognition. For example, if there is a vase on the table full of perfumed flowers, the eyes see it, the nose smells the perfume, and the hands feel the hardness of the vase and the smoothness of the petals of the flowers. The *Nyaaya Sootras* say, 'Senses are five because there are five objects'.¹¹ The five objects are colour, sound, smell, taste and touch; and these are cognised respectively by the eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. At the same time it is possible for the senses to cognise an object simultaneously. One can hear a sound, at the same time see an object, smell a perfume, taste a sweet, and so forth. Once the senses cognise the object, they convey the impression to the mind. Even though the mind can receive all these impressions simultaneously, it does not mean there are many

10. N. S., III: I: 73 ('*tenaiva tasya agrahanaat cha*').

11. *Ibid*, III: I: 58.

minds. The mind is only one. The *Nyaaya Sootras* say: 'The appearance of simultaneousness is due to the mind coming into contact with different senses in rapid succession, like the appearance of a circle of firebrand'.¹² But the mind alone cannot cognise by itself. If this was so even a dead man could cognise all objects as in the waking state. Neither can the mind cognise objects without the objects being there, or without the activity of the senses. If this was possible a sleeping man or a man who is unconscious could also cognise objects. The conclusion is that it is with the combination of something other that cognition is possible—and this is the soul. The soul, however, cannot cognise objects by itself, as some philosophies hold. Without the objects or the intermediate agency of the mind, the soul is powerless to cognise. Thus for cognition to take place there must exist (1) The object cognised, (2) The senses which cognise it, (3) The mind, to which the senses convey the cognition, and (4) The soul which interprets the cognition and gives it meaning. If any of these elements are missing, cognition is not possible. The process of cognition is as follows: The senses absorb the object and convey cognition. Therefore, the function of the senses is conveying, or acting as a carrier. The mind's function in cognition, is reception. That is why if the mind is inactive, as for example when engaged elsewhere, cognition is conveyed by the senses but not received. The soul's function is to give the cognition meaning. If the sense carried the impression, and the mind, being active, received it, there still remains the job of making known what the impression is. The knowledge 'This is a jar', 'That is a perfume of roses', 'This is the taste of tea', 'That is the sound of a helicopter',—is given by the soul. Minus the soul, sounds, perfumes, tastes, sights and touches, could neither be distinguished nor identified. It is for this reason that the *Nyaaya Sootras* say, 'Knowledge is the quality of the soul'.¹³

16. Some say that cognition is independent of the senses, and the mind and soul alone can cognise objects, as in recollection.

12. *Ibid*, III: II: 62.

13. N. S., III: II: 42 (*Parisheshaadi yathoktahetuh upapatteshcha*).

17. Recollection and cognition are dissimilar.

It has been stated above that cognition is not possible without the senses and the mind. The former are necessary to convey the cognition of the object. The latter receives the cognition. Cognition is not possible by soul alone without the aid of the senses and the mind, as a photograph cannot be projected on a film or plate without a lens and the presence of the object photographed.

Someone may say, however, that the soul can cognise by itself because of its capacity for recollection. But as there is a difference between the dream world and the waking world, so too there is a difference between recollection and wakefulness. In recollection the object is recalled to the mind with various degrees of vividness. Recollection is dependent on memory of the object as seen before. As Poet Wordsworth says of the daffodils:

‘For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils’.¹⁴

Recollection is indirect cognition. The objects recollected do not have any reality or existence of their own. They exist only so long as they are recollected, and they can be seen by the person recollecting alone, by none else. In cognition they exist even after the senses have stopped cognising them. Besides, the objects are in the mind only. They cannot be touched even if one recollects what the touch was like, or tasted even if he recollects the taste, and so forth.

18. Some say the senses cannot cognise objects simultaneously.

If the senses could not cognise objects simultaneously one would not be able to see a vase and feel it at the same time, and also while seeing it, smell the perfume of the flowers, and at the same moment hear the wall clock striking the hours.

14. Wordsworth, *I wandered lonely as a cloud*.

As the cognisance of objects takes place by the senses which project them on the soul by way of the intellect, the intellect can act as a valve which shuts out the flow of cognition from the passage of a particular sense. It is in such cases alone that cognitions cannot be simultaneous. To give an example, if one is gazing intently at a vase and the flowers in it, he may fail to hear the clock strike. It is not that the ear does not carry the sense of sound to the soul. But the valve of the intellect cuts off its passage, while admitting the cognisance of the vase and flowers through the organ of sight.

- 19. For the cogniser objects have existence only (1) If the senses are fit enough to cognise them, (2) If the intellect is fit enough to transmit them to the soul, and (3) If the soul is conjoined with the body.**

Three conditions are necessary before cognition can take place. The senses must be fit. If the eye is diseased, one can't see an object properly. When one has a cold his sense of smell is impaired. Under local anaesthesia the sense of touch disappears and the portion becomes dead to sensation. Thus if the senses are diseased, cognition is affected, or even ceases completely.

After the senses have done their work, the intellect receives the impressions. If the mind is not alive and alert, the impressions of the senses are conveyed, but the mind fails to catch them. It is as if the antenna of a TV was defective. The transmission is there and the studio relays the programme, but due to the defective antenna it is not received, or there is faulty reception. Thus if one says something but the listener is inattentive, the message is not put across.

Thirdly, even if the senses transmit the impression properly and they are faultlessly received, if the intellect is not in unison with the soul, cognition is not possible.

- 20. If a sense is diseased, there is incorrect cognisance of the object. If the sense ceases to exist, there is absence of cognition.**

The meaning is clear. In case some defect arises in the sense there will be imperfect cognition. This has already been explained

in the previous aphorism. The senses are the windows of the soul. If a window is only partially open the view outside is impaired, and if the sense is destroyed or completely damaged, the window is closed, and the view is altogether screened off—as Milton says on his blindness:

‘And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out’.¹⁵

If the sense is completely destroyed, the particular cognition for which that sense was responsible, is not possible.

21. If the intellect is deranged there is incorrect cognition, as in the case of a madman.

As with the senses, so with the mind. If the intellect is faulty as in the case of the mind of a madman, cognition is not clear. Similar is the case of a man who is drunk. His mind is so overpowered with alcohol that his consciousness is dimmed, and such a man cannot have perfect cognition of things. He may see two things where there is really one, or he may fail to see at all; and whatever he sees is blurred.

22. If the intellect is suspended there is no cognition, as in amnesia and unconsciousness.

In the case of a person who is unconscious or who has had amnesia due to some shock, the function of the mind is temporarily suspended or interrupted. In the former case the unconscious person is unaware of the external world, and even though all the senses are present and in order, due to the non-functioning of the intellect, cognition is not possible. In amnesia the mind’s function of recollection is suspended and the person does not remember past things. In both cases, therefore, the mind’s impairment has a direct bearing on cognition. It is obvious thus that the mind is an essential organ in the process of cognition.

23. The soul is free from imperfection and disease. Therefore for it there is no incorrect cognition.

The idea of the aphorism is that while imperfections may exist in the senses and the intellect (as already explained) the

15. *Paradise Lost*, III: 32.

soul is free from them. This may seem a contradiction, as we observe that the soul craves, lusts, is swayed with desire and aversion, and suffers pain and disease. But it is not really the soul which is so affected. The sufferer identifies the soul with himself when he says 'I am ill', or 'I am infatuated', and so forth. It is as though a transparent piece of glass would appear red when placed on a red cloth. The glass is not really red but only appears to be so. The moment it is lifted from the cloth the 'redness' is no more. So does the soul appear to take part and be coloured with lust, desire, aversion, suffering and so forth. In reality it is unaffected by these. Shankara says, 'Just as to one sailing in a boat everything appears to be in motion, as a jaundiced eye sees everything yellow, as with eyes which are as it were by nature in delusion everything appears illusory, as the circle made by a firebrand, appears like the disc of the sun, as things which are prodigiously large appear small because of distance, as the smallest objects appear very large when magnified, as a floor of glass may be taken to be filled with water, and water seem to be a floor of glass, as a shining object may be mistaken for a jewel and a jewel for a shining object, as the moon appears in motion though it is really the clouds which move, as someone through confusion loses all distinction of the different points of the compass, as the moon on account of being reflected appears to an observer to be moving under the surface of water; in this manner, then, arises the delusion of matter in the spiritual soul'.¹⁶

While the senses and the mind can suffer from incorrect or imperfect cognition therefore, not so the soul, which is beyond imperfection. It only *appears* to enter into life's drama.

24. The material world does not exist for a living being all of whose senses have been destroyed, even though it continues to exist in itself.

This again conveys the duality of existence of the material world—the existence in itself, and the existence for the cogniser (see aphorism 4 *ante*). It would be interesting to visualise how the world would appear to a person all of whose senses, sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing—have been lost. Will the world exist

16. *Aparokshaanubhootih*. 76-87.

for him or not? In a way it exists, and in a way it does not. Such a person can hardly know what the world is, for his senses do not know. Even the faculty of memory, imagination and recollection, will be dormant in him, for not having seen or known anything he will not recollect. Perhaps his life will be much like that of a man who is asleep, and his world will be much like the world of dreams.

25. The material world also ceases to exist with the severance of the soul from the body.

The material world is for us only while the soul is conjoined to the body. What happens after—whether there is any other material world for the soul—takes one into the realm of conjecture. Even if there is, the soul can only take part in such a world if it gets a body. Though belief in spirits (i. e. souls without bodies) exists for some, in any case the experience of the material world entails the entering of the spirit in a body. The evanescence of the world, therefore, is twofold. Firstly it is in the destruction of all things—as Lord Buddha says:

‘Decay is inherent in all component things’, or as a poet says:

‘The boast of heraldry the pomp of pow’r
And all that beauty all that wealth e’er gave
Awaits alike th’ inevitable hour
The paths of glory lead but to the grave’.¹⁷

Secondly, even though the world lives on, the man perishes. Thus for the individual, existence is ephemeral:

‘The world’s a bubble; and the life of man
Less than a span’.¹⁸

17. Gray, *Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard*, VIII: IX

18. Francis Bacon, *The World*

CHAPTER II: THE BODY

*'Having been born, he lives whatever the length of his life may be.
When he is dead, they carry him to the funeral pyre whence he
came, whence he arose'.*

—*Chhaandogya Upanishad*¹

1. **Some say the body is made of the five elements, with the element of earth predominating.**
2. **The body is not made of the elements; for the elements are contrary in nature.**
3. **There is nothing in the constituents of the body to show that it is formed of the elements.**

According to the Nyaaya philosophy the body is defined as 'the site of gesture, senses and sentiment'.² This means that the body strains to get what is desirable and avoid the undesirable. It is the abode of the senses, and sentiments, such as pleasure and pain. The *Nyaaya Sootras* also consider the body as earthy: 'The body is earthy' it says 'because it possesses the special quality of the earth'.³ It also tries to prove the earthiness of the body by the authority of the Scriptures: 'In virtue of the authority of the Scripture too'.⁴ This is apparent in such texts as say 'May the eye be absorbed into the sun, the body into the the earth', and so forth. Should this view—that the body is earthy—be accepted? Aayurveda, the Hindu science of medicine, conceives of the body as being inhabited by *vaayu* (wind, or the phenomenon of motion), *pitta* (bile, or metabolism and heat production), and *kapha* (phlegm, or the function of cooling and thermolysis etc.) In our experience we see that the body is made of blood, fat, muscle, veins, nerves, bones, tissue and so forth, and it is nourished by food, water and air. Thus the belief that the body is earthy is not borne out by experience.

1. Translation: Swaamee Nikhilaananda

2. *N. S.*, I: I: 11 (*Chestanidriyaartha shrayah shareeram*)

3. *Ibid*, III: II: 28

4. *N. S.*, III: II: 29 (*Shruti pramaanayaa cha*)

Besides, the elements (air, water, fire, earth, and ether) cannot form the body because these are opposed and contrary to each other. Fire is opposed to water, earth to air, and ether is completely different from these four because it occupies space and is non-material. Such opposing elements cannot come together to form the body. Then again, there is no proof to demonstrate that these elements constitute the body. In the absence of such proof it cannot be accepted that such is the case.

The allusion to earth while speaking of the body, is purely symbolic. For example, the Bible says 'For dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return',⁵ or 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life'.⁶ Pope says:

'A heap of dust alone remains of thee,

'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be'.⁷

A Latin proverb says 'All things are dust and all things are nothing'.⁸ According to Horace 'We are but dust and shadow'.⁹ In the same vein the *Raamacharithmaanasa* says, 'This vile body is made of earth, water, fire, air and ether'.¹⁰

Thus we see that the body is frequently believed to be of the nature of dust and earth, but these comparisons are figurative, and all that they mean is that the body perishes and is non-eternal. They should not be taken literally. The utterance of the *Raamacharithmaanasa* consists of the words of Raama meant to comfort the widow of Baali, whom he had slain (according to some, with deceit). Thus it is also a kind of apology and not meant to be taken in its literal meaning. If we are really to believe that the body is of the nature of earth, then adverting to the Scriptural authority quoted by Nyaaya 'May the eye be

5. *Genesis*, 3: 19 (A. V.)

6. *Book of Common Prayer*

7. *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, line 69

8. *Omnia pulvis et omnia nil sunt.*

9. *Odes*, Book 4, 7, 16 (*Pulvis et umbra sumus*)

10. *Kishikindhaa Kaanda*, 10: 2

absorbed into the sun, the body into the earth', this would mean that if the body goes back to the earth, the eyes go to the sun, or the light of the eyes goes to the sun, both of which statements cannot be borne out, because the eyes perish with the body and they have no such light in themselves which they can surrender. If the body returned to the earth, as the Scripture says, then the body's cremation could not be accounted for, seeing that when it is cremated the body is burnt up and does not return to the earth.

4. The body is built of food, and thrives on air and water. Without these three its existence is not possible.

5. The most essential to existence is air; then water; then food.

Food, air (for oxygen) and water are the three things the body subsists on. Without them its existence is not possible. They are to it what water is to fish. The fuel for the human machine consists of the food that is consumed. The body burns the food at a low temperature. Food serves two important purposes. It supplies building materials for growth and repair, and it provides the energy that is necessary for all life processes. Water is necessary to prevent dehydration, and it is a kind of food for it accounts for seventy per cent of the body's weight. The loss of ten per cent of body water is serious, and twenty per cent loss is usually fatal. Air is essential for the body's existence because we breathe in air containing oxygen, and the oxygen is absorbed by the body. The body cells, having received fuel for energy, must also obtain a supply of oxygen, because like a flame, combustion cannot take place in cells without it. The blood carries this oxygen for nourishment. Air (with about twenty per cent oxygen) enters the lungs when we breathe in, and the oxygen in it diffuses through the cells lining the lungs as air gradually diffuses from an inflated balloon. The oxygen passes into the blood and the body cells take it from that for burning the food. If one is deprived of air he may last a few minutes but not more. Thus air, water, and food are the elements essential for the body's existence. Air is the most important for without it the body cannot last for more than seven or eight minutes. Next comes water without which it can last only two

or three days, particularly where there is a lot of perspiration, and lastly there is food without which one may live a couple of weeks or a little more; but in the end, deprived of nutrition, the body dies.

6. The body has no life apart from the soul; but the reverse is not true.

7. When the body can no longer be a receptacle of the soul, the subtle body is its vehicle.

The body may live for various periods of time without the essential requirements, water, food and air, but without the soul it can't live an instant. It may be said that the destruction of the body is caused by such factors as the cutting off of the oxygen supply due to which the body's cells die. The causes of death are stated by medical science to be various, like shock, coronary thrombosis, hemorrhage, heart failure and so forth, but there is nothing to explain (1) why it happens to some and not to others, and (2) why it happens at different ages. There are miraculous escapes, and conversely deaths occur most strangely. For example a case was reported in which an old man died because a truck, while passing on the road, snapped off the overhead telephone wires, and the man, who was on a cycle, got entangled in the wire and was pulled some distance by it because the truck didn't stop! On the other hand a man may survive a serious plane crash or a burning blaze from which escape is next to impossible. A youth who is hale and hearty may suddenly die. In many cases the cause of death, too, remains undiagnosed and unknown. It must be admitted therefore that death is not caused by physical factors, but occurs the moment the soul abandons the body.

While the body cannot exist a moment without the soul, the converse is not true. The soul can exist without a body. When death takes place and the soul leaves the body, it carries with it the subtle body (*sookshma shareera*). Baadaraayana says in the *Vedaanta Sootras*, 'The subtle body exists because firstly the Scriptures testify to it, and secondly because of its being observed'.¹¹ He says that the *Kaushitaki Upanishad* mentions a

11. V. S., IV: II: 9 (*Sookshma pramaanatah cha tathaa upalabdheh*)

colloquy with the Moon and others held by the departed soul of an enlightened person (*vidvaan*).¹² Some sort of body must be existing in which the soul was contained, otherwise this conversation could not have been possible. The *Vedaanta Sootras* further say, 'And to that very subtle body belongs the warmth'.¹³ The meaning is that when we touch a human body which is alive we find it is warm, but the same body when dead, feels cold. This is because in the former case the subtle body was present in the human body (and it was that which gave it warmth), while in the latter case the body was cold due to the absence of the subtle body. This again proves the subtle body's existence. If we believe in the theory of rebirth, the subtle body is a logical conclusion. For the soul to go from one body to another, it must need a vehicle to enable it to be mobile. That vehicle is the subtle body.

8. The body is a composite unit.

Although the human body carries within it a number of major and significant organs, each performing a specific and vital function, for example the heart, lungs, brain kidneys, liver, intestines and so forth, it acts as a unified whole. The cells functioning together for a special object combine to form tissues. These tissues, having special functions are arranged in an intricate but orderly manner which enables them to co-operate with one another. Several kinds of tissues grouped together form an organ, and a number of organs working together form the unit of the body known as a system, for example the digestive system, the nervous system, the respiratory system and so forth. The complex nervous system with its receptors reacts to outside objects and environment. The human brain integrates these sensations and interprets them into useful information. The system also provides for naked nerve endings which, being the receptors of painful sensations, are able to send a signal to the brain. The brain directs action, like the movement of an arm or leg, by the voluntary nervous system. Then there is the autonomic nervous system which co-ordinates all the internal activities of the

12. *K. U.*, I: 3

13. *V. S.*, IV: II: 11 (*Tasya eva cha upapattih ooshmaa*)

human body and carries them on (e.g. digestion, respiration and so forth) even when the man is unconscious or asleep. Finally there is the reflex action in which thinking is not done in the brain, but in one of the small groups of nerve cells along the spinal column. Reflex action empowers the body automatically to move away from a source of pain, as the squinting of the eyes when suddenly flooded by bright light.

All this shows that the body acts as a unified whole. Threatened by disease, called to an emergency by accident, overcome by emotion, the body's defences come into play as vigorously, fiercely and determinedly as a cohort of valiant warriors rallying to the fray.

9. The body is a living organism, but its life is not its own.

It is obvious that the body depends on another—the soul, for its existence. Medical science has not been able to produce a living body, and it is difficult to visualise a stage when it can. All life comes from life. If the body was not dependent on the soul for life, it would last for ever, its span would not be disproportionate, and even after the exit of the soul (which we call death), the body could be revived. It is the inevitableness of dying, the exit of the soul, which makes all races to dispose of the body after death. Right from the beginning of the existence of human life, man has known that death is final, and that it is caused by something which is beyond control. Therefore the body has no independent life. As the world is enveloped in darkness when the sun shines no longer, and gets light when it shines, even so it is the soul which gives life to the body, and this life is withdrawn with the soul's departure. The *Kaṭha Upanishad* says, 'Nothing remains in the body when the soul, its owner goes out of it'.¹⁴ The *Kena Upanishad* describes the soul as 'The spirit by whose power the ear hears, the eye sees, the tongue speaks, the mind understands, and life functions'.¹⁵

14. *Kaṭha Up.*, 5 : 5.

15. *Kena Up.*, 1 : 2.

10. The birth of one body and the death of another is explained by the soul.

One sees people dying around him, and others being born. The event of birth and death is really a common occurrence despite one's feeling emotionally moved by it when he is closely and intimately concerned with the individual who dies or is born. When Arjuna, the beloved disciple of Krishna, was given a vision of the Lord, he saw: 'As moths rush with great speed into a blazing fire and are killed, even so all these people are rapidly entering your mouth for destruction'.¹⁶ If one spends some time at a cremation or burial ground, or at a maternity hospital, he will observe the truth of this. Every minute mourning friends and relations bring their dead to the cremation ground, while at the hospital the cry of new born babes and the arrival of pregnant women whose delivery time has come, is continually observed. The exit of the soul, and its new entrance, is made possible because of the existence of the body. The soul passes out of the body for which it has no further use, having exhausted the fruits of its actions, and goes to inhabit another, for exhausting the fruits of actions further performed. The expiation of the fruits of action is the cause of the body's production and existence, as the *Nyaaya Sootras* say: 'The body is produced as the fruit of our previous deeds'.¹⁷ That the body is not produced without purpose or that it is produced for a specific purpose, can be seen by the fact that conception does not follow each sexual intercourse. It is only a particular union that results in conception, and this must be supposed to be that in which a soul is timed for entering the body which is to be born. In this respect, too, the *Nyaaya Sootras* say, 'There is desert (i.e. fruits of previous deeds) because of uncertainty even in the case of union'.¹⁸

11. The body has a natural connection with the seed, for the seed of one kind of body cannot give rise to another.

12. The seed and the body have a mutual dependence.

The body and its seed are intimately connected. The seed

16. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, XI: 29.

17. *N. S.* III: II: 64 (*Poorva krita phalaanubandhaat adutpattih*).

18. *N. S.*, III: II: 64 (*Praptaau cha niyamaat*).

of one kind of living being or organism can develop into that only, that of an animal only to that particular species of animal of which it is the seed. Similar is the case of lower life trees and plants. The bunyan seed will grow into a bunyan tree, that of a mango into a mango tree, and so forth. This is one notable point about the relation between body and seed. The other is that the seed cannot produce its particular body by itself. It needs a receptacle or another organism or element for its reproduction. The spermatozoa needs the ovum for fertilisation, the seed of a tree or plant needs the earth for its growth. The apparent reason for this is that God has created a system in which the work of creation is carried out voluntarily and irrevocably because the sexual union of the male and female being is a source of infinite pleasure and is sought eagerly by both. Many couples would perhaps not be keen for a child when they copulate. But in the quest for pleasure men and women fulfil the work of the Creator also.

- 13. Various creeds have given different explanations for the origin of creation.**
- 14. It is logical to assume that the body can be created by a means other than its seed.**
- 15. A human being can fashion things of shape and form and endow them with movement, light and energy.**
- 16. Therefore a superhuman Being can fashion a human body and endow it with life.**
- 17. The body contains its seed for multiplication, therefore after initial production by the Superman it reproduces by itself.**

Most theories of creation advanced by religions postulate a male and a female principle. The seed comes from the parent, and the parent comes from the seed. Therefore, this is a beginningless chain. Either the seed or the being must be made the starting point, or we will be involved in a 'which came first, the chicken or the egg' kind of problem. It is more reasonable to suppose that creation begins with the first man and the first woman. It is common experience that man can manufacture

machines, instruments and toys, and give them movement and activity. In the same way a Creator with superhuman power can fashion a living being. Since the beings have within themselves the mechanism of reproduction, once created, creation goes on and on. This, however, needs an explanation. An objection can be made that if one considers creation to be mere multiplication, the divinity of the soul is negated. But this is not so. It is as though one may manufacture a tube light or a bulb, and fix it. But it will not yield illumination unless the power is switched on. In the same way the reproduction of the body is a physical process, but it is only when the soul, which is the power emanating from the divine Power House, enters the body that it gets life.

After describing the creation of the earth and the seas, day and night, evening and morning, the stars and the firmament, the Bible says:

‘Then God said, “Let the waters teem with fish and other life, and let the skies be filled with birds of every kind”. So God created great sea creatures, and every sort of fish and every kind of bird. And God looked at them with pleasure, and blessed them all. “Multiply and stock the oceans”, he told them, and to the birds he said, “Let your numbers increase. Fill the earth!” That ended the fifth day.

‘And God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of animal—cattle and reptiles and wildlife of every kind.” And so it was. God made all sorts of wild animals and cattle and reptiles. And God was pleased with what he had done.

‘Then God said, “Let us make a man—someone like ourselves, to be master of all life upon the earth and in the skies and in the seas”.

‘So God made man like his Maker.
Like God did God make man;
Man and maid did he make them.

‘And God blessed them and told them, “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; you are masters of the fish and birds and

all the animals'.¹⁹

The Vedas give only a hint of the mystery of creation.

The *Rig Veda's* Song of Creation says:

'Then there was neither Aught nor Nought, no air nor sky
beyond.

What covered all? Where rested all? In watery gulf profound?
Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor change of night and day.
'That one breathed calmly, self-sustained; nought else beyond
it lay.

Gloom hid in gloom existed first—one sea, eluding view
That One, a void in chaos wrapt, by inward fervour grew.
Within it first arose desire, the primal germ of mind,
Which nothing with existence links, as sages searching find.
The kindling ray that shot across the dark and drear abyss—
Was it beneath? or high aloft? What bard can answer this?
There fecundating powers were found, and mighty forces strove—
A self-supporting mass beneath, and energy above.
Who knows, who ever told, from whence this vast creation rose?
No gods had then been born—who then can e'er the truth
disclose?
Whence sprang this world, and whether framed by hand divine
or no—
Its Lord in heaven alone can tell, if even he can show'.²⁰

The Vedic concept of creation is somewhat hazy, as the concluding four lines show. This view was crystallised in the Upanishads which state in unmistakable terms the origin of creation much in the same spirit as the Biblical account. The *Aitareya Upanishad* says about creation: 'In the beginning all this verily was Aatman only, one and without a second. There was nothing else that winked. He bethought Himself: "Let Me now create the worlds." He created these worlds: Ambhah (the world of

19. *Genesis*, I: 24-28 (The Living Bible).

20. *Rig Veda*, X: 129 (Trans. J. Muir).

water-bearing clouds), Marichi (the world of the solar rays), Mara (the world of mortals), and Ap (the world of waters). Yon is Ambhah, above heaven; heaven is its support. The Marichis are the interspace. Mara is the earth. What is underneath is Ap. He bethought Himself: "Here now are the worlds. Let Me now create world-guardians." Right from the waters He drew forth the Person (in the form of a lump) and gave Him a shape. He brooded over Him (the lump). From Him, so brooded over, the mouth was separated out, as with an egg; from the mouth, (the organ of) speech; from speech, fire (the controlling deity of the organ). Then the nostrils were separated out; from the nostrils, (the organ of) breath (*praana*); from breath (the controlling deity of the organ). Then the eyes were separated out; from the eyes, (the organ of sight, *chakshu*); from sight, the sun (the controlling deity of the organ). Then the ears were separated out; from the ears, (the organ of) hearing (*shrotra*); from hearing the quarters of space (the controlling deity of the organ). Then the skin was separated out; from the skin hairs (i.e. the organ of touch); from the hairs, plants and trees (i.e. air, the controlling deity of the organ). Then the heart was separated out; from the heart, (the organ of) the mind (*manas*); from the mind, the moon (the controlling deity of the organ). Then the navel was separated out; from the navel, (the organ of the) *apaana*; from the *apaana*, Death (i.e. Varuna, the controlling deity of the organ). Then the virile member was separated out; from the virile member, semen (the organ of generation); from semen, the waters (the controlling deity of the organ).

"These deities, thus created, fell into this great ocean. He (the Creator) subjected that Person (i.e. Viraat in the form of a lump) to hunger and thirst. They (the deities) said to Him (the Creator): "Find out for us an abode wherein being established we may eat food." He (the Creator) brought them a cow. They said: "But this is not enough for us." He brought them a person. The deities said: "Ah, this is well done, indeed." Therefore a person is verily something well done. He said to the deities: "Now enter your respective abodes." (The deity) fire became (the organ of) speech and entered the mouth. Air became breath and entered the nostrils. The sun became sight and entered the eyes. The quarters of space became hearing and

entered the ears. Plants and trees (i.e. the deity air) became hairs and entered the skin. The moon became the mind and entered the heart. Death became the *apaana* and entered the navel. The waters became semen and entered the virile member'.²¹

In the same manner it is mentioned in the *Brihadaaraṇyaka Upanishad*: 'In the beginning this (universe) was the self (Viraaj) alone, in the shape of a person. He reflected and saw nothing else but His self. He first said: "I am He". Therefore, He came to be known by the name *I* (*Aham*). Hence, even now, when a person is addressed, he first says: "It is I," and then says whatever other name he may have. And because He, before (*purva*) the whole group of aspirants, burnt (*aushat*) all evils, therefore He is called Purusha. He who knows this verily burns up him who wishes to be (Viraaj) in advance of him. He was afraid. Therefore people (still) are afraid when alone. He thought "Since there is nothing else but Myself, what am I afraid of?" Thereupon His fears were gone; for what was there to fear? Assuredly, it is from a second (entity) that fear arises. He was not at all happy. Therefore a person (even today) is not happy when alone. He desired a mate. He became the size of a man and wife in close embrace. He divided this body into two. From that (division) arose husband (*pati*) and wife (*patni*). Therefore, as Yaajnavalkya said, the body (before one accepts a wife) is one half of oneself, like the half of a split pea. Therefore this space is indeed filled by the wife. He was united with her. From that (union) human beings were born. She reflected: "How can he unite with me after having produced me from himself? Well, let me hide myself." She became a cow, the other (Manu) became a bull and was united with her; from that (union) cows were born. The one became a mare, the other became a stallion; the one became a she-ass, the other became a he-ass and was united with her; from that (union) one-hoofed animals were born. The one became a she-goat, the other became a he-goat; the one became a ewe, the other became a ram and was united with her; from that (union) goats and sheep were born. Thus indeed, he produced everything that exists in

21. *Aitareya Upanishad*, I: I: 1 to I: II: 4. (Trans., Swami Nikhilananda).

pairs, down to the ants'.²²

These accounts from two different religions testify to the theory of creation, which indeed is the obvious and reasonable one. Thus was the human race given to the world by the Lord. As Ovid says:

'Then, that no region of the universe
Should void of life remain, the floor of heaven
Was peopled with the stars and godlike forms,
The seas became the abode of glittering fish,
Earth took the beasts and mobile air the birds.
A holier animal was wanting still
With mind of wider grasp, and fit to rule
The rest. Then man was born'.²³

To the man who believes everything to be due to chance, the magic of existence is meaningless. But the regular recurrence of day and night, the return of the seasons, the position of the sun, which if it were a little way more off would leave the earth too frozen for life, and if it were just a little closer would burn it up, the miracle of life and existence, the stars, the planets and the sky; all these cannot be due to chance:

'Who can believe that all these mighty works
Have grown unaided by the hand of God,
From small beginnings? that the law is blind
By which the world was made?'²⁴

22. *Brihadaraṇyaka Upanishad*, I: IV: 1 to 6.
(Translation, Swami Nikhilananda).

23. *Metamorphoses*, I: 72.
(*Neu regio foret ulla suis animantibus orba, Astra tenent coeleste solum formaeque deorum, Cesserunt nitidis habitandae piscibus undae, Terra feras cepit, volucres agitabilis aer. Sanctius his animal, mentisque capax altae Deerat aduc, et quod dominari in caetera posset. Natus homo est*).

24. Manilius, *Astronomicum* I: 490.
(*Quis credat tantas operum sine numine moles Ex minimis, caecoque creatum foedere mundum?*)

PART THREE: THE UNSEEN

CHAPTER—I: GOD

‘Happy the man who puts his trust in the Lord’.

—Proverbs, 16: 20

1. God exists as POWER

Religions have their own individual concept about God. The atheists deny His existence. The Lokaayitikas, one of the atheistic schools of Indian philosophy founded by Ajita Kesha-kambalin, believe that when one dies everything is ended. There is no God who judges our actions, for if He did, He would be guilty of partiality or cruelty. So it is better not to have a God at all than to have a cruel and partial one. There is no such Being as an all-powerful God, the guardian and governor of the world. The other atheistic schools also rejected God. The Chaarvaakas, whose founder was the philosopher of that name (*chaarvaaka*=‘speech which is entertaining’), believed in the doctrine ‘Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die’. They said ‘As long as a man lives, let him live happily; even borrowing money let him drink ghee (clarified butter)’. The Naastiks, whose founder was Purandara, were heretics, and attacked the Vedas and their ritual. They too negated God, and preached the indulgence of the senses.

There are those who can’t believe in God without proof of His existence. There are others who do not believe in Him at all. Yet others treat the subject whimsically as Euripides and Plato, who said ‘He was a wise man who originated the idea of God’.

The major religions, however, with the exception of Buddhism and Jainism, believe in a God. Even Buddhism later on veered towards God worship, while Jains believe in the Teerthaankaras. Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and other religions believe in God.

The *Quraan* says, 'Allah is He who created the heavens and the earth, and causeth water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and maketh the ships to be of service to you that they may run upon the sea at His command, and hath made of service unto you the rivers;

'And maketh the sun and moon constant in their courses, to be of service unto you, and hath made of service unto you the night and the day. And hath given you of all ye ask of Him, and if ye would count the bounty of Allah ye cannot reckon it. Lo! Man is verily a wrong-doer and ingrate'.¹

Further the *Quraan* says: 'Unto Him belongeth whosoever is in the heavens and the earth. And those who dwell in His Presence are not too proud to worship Him; nor do they weary; they glorify Him night and day; they flag not'.²

Christianity, too, conceives of an omnipotent God—a God of kindness and mercy, who helps those who believe in Him. The Bible says: 'That man is a fool who says to himself "There is no God!"'³ 'The Lord has made the heavens His throne; from there He rules over everything there is'.⁴ 'God's laws are perfect. They protect us, make us wise, and give us joy and light. God's laws are pure, eternal, just'.⁵

According to Hinduism also God is the highest and most powerful. The *Shvetaashvatara Upanishad* says of Him: 'To whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger'.⁶ Again, 'I know that Great Person, luminous as the sun, and beyond darkness. Only by knowing Him one passes over death; there is no other way. The whole universe is filled by Him, to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger. He stands alone in His

1. *Quraan*, XIV: 32-4 (S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi).

2. *Ibid*, XXI: 19-20.

3. *Psalms*, 14: 1 (The Living Bible).

4. *Psalms*, 103: 19 (The Living Bible, Tyndale House, 1971),

5. *Ibid*, 19: 7-9.

6. *Shvetaashvatara Up.*, III: 9,

glory, motionless as a tree'.⁷ Similarly in the *Bhagavad Geeta* Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: 'There is nothing whatsoever higher than I, O Arjuna. All this is threaded on Me as rows of pearls on a string'.⁸

Thus all religions conceive of an all-powerful God whose existence they admit. The proofs for God's existence as stated in Hindu philosophy, are as follows: (1) God is pure Being. If we say He came from another Being, this would be absurd, for how can Being come from Being? (2) We see from experience that it is from the One that differences arise, as vessels are made of clay. The reverse is not true. Therefore, the diverse worlds come from God. (3) God can never be said to come from the non-existent. If we say He had an origin then that origin will have another origin, and we will be faced with a regressus in infinitum. So God is the origin of all. (4) Everything has a maker. The potter makes pots from clay. So all matter must be guided by an Intelligent Power—God. (5) Everything is proved by the Lord, so He is the basis of all proof. Therefore one can't deny Him. One can question something which comes to him from outside, but not that which is his own being, as fire cannot question its own heat.

In fact the existence of God is proved not by one factor alone, but by the sum total of the world of existence which we see around us. The entire creation, from the meanest worm to a human being, from a blade of grass to the mighty banyan tree; the myriad creatures of land, sea and air; stars, planets, constellations, moon and sun; the shifting regions of consciousness—waking, dream and sleep; the miracle of life and the mystery of death; all these are pointers to God. To deny His existence would be to deny all these, and many more things like the wonderful gifts of thought, speech and emotion.

The proof of God's existence can only be by verbal testimony (which is one of the means of right knowledge), for in this case inference and perception are not possible. Verbal testimony, has been defined as 'the assertion of a reliable person' (see Chapter

7. *Ibid*, III: 8-9.

8. *B. G.*, VII: 7.

on Soul, aphorism 2-3). Therefore, for proof of God we have to rely on the evidence of the saints and sages.

In the Book of Exodus in the Bible it is mentioned that God appeared to Moses at Mount Sinai: 'Moses climbed the rugged mountain to meet with God, and from somewhere in the mountain God called to him and said, "Give these instructions to the people of Isreal . . ." After Moses had acquainted the people of Isreal with what God had said, and went back to report to Him, the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in the form of a dark cloud so that the people themselves can hear me when I talk to you, and then they will always believe you". After this God appeared again. On the morning of the third day there was a terrific thunder and lightning storm, and a huge cloud came down upon the mountain, and there was a long, loud blast as from a ram's horn; and all the people trembled. Moses led them out from the camp to meet God and they stood at the foot of the mountain. All the Mt. Sinai was covered with smoke, because Jehovah descended upon it in the form of fire; the smoke billowed into the sky, as from a furnace, and the whole mountain shook with a violent earthquake. As the trumpet blast grew louder and louder Moses spoke and God thundered his reply. So the Lord came down upon the top of Mt. Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses ascended to God.'⁹

Thus we see that the Bible bears witness to God's existence through the account given in the Book of Exodus, and Moses as well as the people of Isreal were given the opportunity to see Him. Similarly a great and profound Hindu sage, about whose testimony there can be no doubt, bears witness to God's existence. He is Swaamee Raamakrishna. His renowned disciple was Vivekaananda, who, to start with, was a votary of reason, representing the analytical, rationalistic, truth seeking, vigorous spirit of the modern West. Vivekaananda was more like a doubting scientist or agnostic than a spiritual aspirant. His meeting with the sage was in this manner: 'Shortly afterwards Narendranaath (Vivekaananda) visited the saint within the golden shell of his sanctuary and tried to vivisect him with his scalpel of reason,

9. *Exodus*, 19: 2-3, 9 and 16-17 (The Living Bible).

which had been sharpened so carefully on the whetstone of modern thoughts. With all his critical faculties on the alert, he observed Raamakrishna minutely, weighed his words and thoughts cautiously, and scrutinised his conduct as thoroughly as he could. He put before the sage his straight, earnest and crucial query, tersely and pointedly: "Sir have you seen God?" He expected, perhaps, a negative, dubious or devious reply, as he had so long received from all acclaimed seers whom he had approached with his challenge. This time, however, the young rationalist was stunned by a prompt, unexpected and amazingly unambiguous reply in the affirmative: "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a sense much more intense". In a state of bewildering surprise he listened to what followed: "God can be realised; one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth and property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself". This simple, clear and spontaneous outpouring of Raamakrishna's heart had the effect of impressing the sincerity of his conviction upon Narendranaath, though of course he was not yet prepared for accepting all that he had said. Narendranaath has left a record of his impression in the following words: 'For the first time I found a man who dared to say he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. As I heard these things from his lips, I could not but believe that he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realisations'.¹⁰ Another renowned Hindu sage, Shree Ramana Mahaarishee, who had a number of disciples, both Indian and foreign, had a conversation with one of the visitors to his *ashram* about God, as follows:

Visitor: Are the gods Eeshvara or Vishnu, and their sacred regions, Kailasha or Vaikuntha, real?

Mahaarishee: As real as you are in this body.

Visitor: Do they possess a phenomenal existence, like my body? Or are they fictitious like a hare's horn?

10. *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol, 2 p. 546-7.

Mahaarishee: They do exist.¹¹

The accounts given above are authoritative, and proceed from saints. They must be given credence. As has been stated, the proof of the unseen lies only in inference or verbal testimony. The testimony of such reliable persons as quoted above, must be taken as trustworthy, and should leave no one in doubt of God's existence.

2. God is both personal and impersonal.

On this point there is considerable difference between religions. Christianity and Islam do not subscribe to a personal God. The Book of Exodus mentions that in the edict God issued to Moses, He said, 'I am Jehovah your God who liberated you from your slavery in Egypt. You may worship no other god than me. You shall not make yourselves any idols; any images resembling animals, birds, or fish. You must never bow to an image or worship it in any way; for I the Lord your God, am very possessive. I will not share your affection with any other God'¹² Islam too, is against idol worship. Other religions, however, like Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and so forth, believe in the worship of images of God.

Is the existence of God formless or with form? Hinduism subscribes to both views. God is with form as well as formless. We have already seen that God is energy or power. Reverting to the example of electricity, we experience that it is both seen and unseen. When passing through a wire it cannot be seen, but when it lights up a bulb or makes the wires of an electric stove or heater red hot, we can see it. It can also be seen in a streak of lightning which zigzags across the sky. In such a case power is manifest. Another example is given by Swaamee Raamakrishna: 'God has form and again, He has none. Do you know how it is? *Brahman*. Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is like a shoreless ocean. In the ocean visible blocks of ice are formed here and there by intense cold. Similarly, under the cooling influence, so to speak, of the *bhakti* of Its

11. *Talks With Shree Ramana Mahaarishee*, Vol. I, p. 51-2.

12. *Exodus*, 20: 2-5 (The Living Bible)

worshippers, the Infinite transforms Itself into the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. That is to say, God reveals Himself to His *bhaktas* as an embodied Person. Again, as, on the rising of the sun, the ice in the ocean melts away, so on the awakening of *jnaana*, the embodied God melts back into the infinite and formless *Brahman*'.¹³ Giving another example to explain the point, the Swaameejee says: 'You were talking of worshipping the clay image. Even if the image is of clay, there is need of that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in the different stages of knowledge. The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it—pilau, pickled fish, dried fish, and so on—to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion'.¹⁴ In the *Bhagavad Geetaa*, Lord Krishna says: 'Whatever may be the form in which a devotee worships Me, I make his faith steady'.¹⁵ Thus a God with form, and a formless God are both possible, as in a coin there is the head and also the tail.

3. The inevitableness of a God is because of death and sleep.

There are, as we have seen, two kinds of beliefs in relation to God's existence—namely the materialistic which does not believe in a God at all, and the theistic one, which does. There are two things, however, which are unexplained by the former, viz. death, and sleep. One may doubt that there is a God, or that there is an after life, or that the soul takes rebirth again and again in the world; but one cannot doubt or deny death, which is witnessed by all, and undergone by every living being who is born on the earth. The presence of death makes one aware of the fact that there is something over which he has no control, and this leads him to the inevitable conclusion that there is a higher power. In the *Katha Upanishad*, Nachiketas was offered by Yama, the god of Death, all the riches and temptations of

13. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, p. 846

14. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*, page 5

15. *B. G.*, VII: 21

the world, if only he would cease to ask about death. But the wise boy refused to be so tempted, and said: 'All these enjoyments are transitory. They cause the decay of the senses of man. The longest life is short. Therefore, keep your dancers and singers. Wealth satisfies no one. So long as you do not so command no one can take away my life. I only wish to know about life and death'.¹⁶

Death remains a mystery—a mystery that proves the existence of the power which is God. So too is sleep. The occurrence of sleep, and of dreams which accompany it, is a mystery that happens to everyone, day in and day out. The world of dreams shows that there is something more than the waking world we see around us; a world which has a reality of its own, even though it is beyond our conscious control. The presence of dreams, which are only half understood by us, despite mankind having lived millions of years, also points to a Higher Power and Wisdom which is beyond our comprehension.

4. Belief in God makes no difference to Him.

Whether one believes in God or not, it makes no difference to His existence. If there is a vase on the table and we deny it is there, the vase does not vanish. Suppose on a very cold day there is a blazing fire in the fire-place. Some people sit close to it and bask in its warmth. Others stand a little further away. They do not get the full benefit of the fire, but still avoid the cold to some extent. Yet others go away from the outside without being warmed at all. Thus people benefit by the fire to varying degrees. But the fire burns on, whether one seeks its warmth or not.

5. Since the object of human life is liberation, the object of creation is the merging of the world in God.

Religions have given various views about the object of creation. Buddhism evades the question by saying it is not necessary to know such things: 'The Buddha was once staying in a Simsapa forest in Kosambi (near Allahabad). He took a few leaves into his hand, and asked his disciples: "What do you

16. *K. U.*, I: 26-7

think, O bhikkus? Which is more? These few leaves in my hands or the leaves in the forest over here?"

"Sir, very few are the leaves in the hand of the Blessed One, but indeed the leaves in the Simsapa forest over here are very much more abundant".

"Even so, bhikkus, of what I have known I have told you only a little, what I have not told you is very much more. And why I have not told you (these things)? Because that is not useful . . . not leading to Nirvaana. That is why I have not told you those things"'.¹⁷

Hinduism believes that the world is God's *leelaa*, or sport. The *Raamacharitamānasa* says: 'God's ways are very strange and contradictory. He first creates the world and nurtures it, and then destroys it. The wisdom of God is as senseless as child's play'.¹⁸

Another idea of Hindu philosophy is that the *raison d'être* of the world is the need for action. Lord Krishna tells his disciple, Arjuna, in the *Bhagavad Geetaa*: 'Arjuna, there is nothing in the three worlds for me to do, nor is there anything worth attaining, unattained by me; yet I continue to work. Should I not engage in action, unwearied, at any time, great harm will come to the world; for, Arjuna, men follow my path in all matters. If I do not perform action, these worlds will perish'.¹⁹ Hinduism believes in cycles of the universe's existence. 'The basic cycle is the *kalpa*, the "day of Brahmaa", lasting 4,200 million years. In mythological terms it is said that at the beginning of each cosmic day Vishnu lies asleep upon the enormous thousand headed cobra, Shesha, a symbol of endless time, who is in turn cradled by the primeval cosmic ocean. From Vishnu's navel grows a lotus, and from the unfolding petals of the lotus is born the god Brahmaa, the demiurge. It is Brahmaa who creates the world, after which Vishnu awakes and governs it throughout the *kalpa*. At the end of the *kalpa*, Vishnu once

17. *What the Buddha Taught*, Walpola Rahula, Fraser

18. *Ayodhya Kaanda*. 281 : 1

19. *B. G.*, III: 22-4

more sleeps, and the universe is absorbed into his body. The cosmic night is equal in length to the cosmic day. Three hundred and sixty such days and nights form a year of Brahmaa, and the life of Vishnu lasts one hundred such years. He is now believed to be in his fifty-first year. When the hundredth year of Brahmaa is completed, Vishnu, and the potential universe contained within him will merge with *Brahman*, the impersonal Absolute which is the ultimate entity of the universe, until once more the World-Soul develops a personality, a new Vishnu is born, and the process is repeated'.²⁰

According to Zoroastrianism the history of the world is a conflict between good and evil, which ends in the triumph of good. In this conflict man is God's helper. Man is created neither for sport, nor to manifest God's glory (as in Christianity), but the two—God and man—need each other's help. Zoroastrianism believes that the world lasts twelve thousand years. The first three thousand are the period of original creation, the second three are dominated by Ohrmazd, the god of goodness, the third three thousand years are a mixture of good and evil, and in the last three thousand years the forces of evil (represented by Ahriman) will be defeated. In this way, too, other religions have given their own interpretations.

The creation of the world must bear an analogy to the creation of the individual. A human being is born, lives his life and then dies, and his body is absorbed into the earth or becomes ashes. After many lives his soul is liberated. In the same way the emanation of the world must be from the Father of the world, i.e. God; and as man's soul is ultimately liberated, so the world must similarly be absorbed into the God who created it. Thus the world proceeds from God as the many proceeds from the One, and thereafter it is absorbed again in that One. Why should this process go on? The answer to this is that there are only two things possible—action or inaction, striving or rest. Therefore, as man's life is a striving between two points of rest—birth and death; even so the world's existence is a period of action between two points of quiescence.

20. *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Living Faiths*, Hutchinson, London, 1959

6. God distributes the fruits of actions.

The object of existence of the body, and its span of existence is dependent on the expiation of past deeds. Are these fruits given by God strictly according to performance of deeds, or does He favour His devotee? There are varying views about this. One, which is expressed by the Upanishads is that man reaps what he has sown: 'A man becomes good by good deeds and evil by evil deeds'.²¹ This view is also held by saints such as Shree Ramana Mahaarishiee. He says: 'The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their *praaarabdha karma* (destiny to be worked out in this life, resulting from the balance-sheet of acts done in past lives). Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen do what you may to prevent it. This is certain'. The same view is emphasised by Buddha:

'According to the seed that is sown
So is the fruit ye reap therefrom.
Doer of good will gather good
Doer of evil evil reaps;
Sown is the seed, and thou shalt taste
The fruit thereof'.²²

On the other hand there are those who believe in God's grace. This implies that He may, according to His own will favour His devotees over others irrespective of their works. In the *Raamacharitmaanasa* Lord Raama says to Sugreeva, 'Though a man has incurred the sin of killing millions of Brahmins, I do not forsake him if he comes to Me. The moment the soul is before Me, its sins of million of lives are destroyed'.²³

There are two questions which follow from the above contrary beliefs. (1) Are the fruits of actions strictly according to deeds performed, or can punishment for evil deeds be mitigated or wiped out by God in certain cases? (2) If everything is destined (as in the view expressed by the Mahaarishiee and others)

21. *Brihadaaraṇyaka Upanishad*, III: 2, 13

22. *Sangyutta-Nikaaya*, I: 227 (Trans. Mrs Rhys Davids)

23. *Sundar Kaṇḍa*, 43: 1

why should one make effort at all? These questions are answered in the succeeding aphorisms.

7. Effort is because of ignorance of the future.

Even though things are destined and must happen depending on goodness or evil of works, what is significant is that the performer of action does not *know* what is in store for him. If he did, he may not strive at all. But since he does not, he tries to make efforts to further his own ends, even though quite often 'man proposes and God disposes'. This has been expressed by the Mahaarishee himself. He says: 'It is no use to "kick against the pricks"—to oppose destiny which cannot be averted. But this does not mean that no effort should ever be made. The man who says "Everything is predestined, therefore I will make no effort", is intruding the false assumption "and I know what is predestined". It may be that he is cast in a part in which effort *has* to be made. As Shree Krishna told Arjuna in the *Geetaa*, 'his own nature will compel him to make effort'.²⁴ Thus everyone is driven to works. The selfish person does acts which are selfish, the charitable person selfless acts, the evil man indulges in wickedness, and goodness proceeds from the virtuous being. Each one, in his own way, is inexorably driven to perform action, while destiny keeps on unfolding itself, sometimes favouring the doer, sometimes disappointing him.

8. God's grace lies only in His being the Impeller of good and evil actions.

This aphorism answers the first of the two questions raised in aphorism 6. God cannot be considered to be the unjust or arbitrary judge of people. Therefore, we cannot conceive Him of being favourable to the evil-doer in any circumstances whatsoever. The idea that God favours His devotees implies that a devotee can never be evil. If he was evil he would never become God's devotee. This may seem like arguing in a circle, but it is really not so. In the *Raamacharitmaanas* Lord Raama makes it

24. cp., *Bhagavad Geetaa*, II: 5, 'Surely none can remain inactive even for a moment. Everyone is driven to activity by qualities which proceed from his nature'.

absolutely clear that devotion cannot be obtained by a person unless he has banished arrogance, deceit and other such vices : 'Unless a man drives off deceit from his speech, thought and action, and becomes the Lord's devotee, he can never be happy although he may try a million ways'.²⁵ Again he says to his general, Sugreeva, 'Only the gentle and straightforward being can obtain My devotion. I like not cunningness and deceit'.²⁶ Kaakbhushundi says to Garura, 'Shree Raama never lets vanity remain in the mind of his devotee'.²⁷

It is clear, therefore, that God banishes evil from the hearts of those whom He chooses as His devotees. This being so, the devotees of God cannot perform evil actions. It is in this sense that they enjoy His grace, and in favouring them no injustice is involved on His part. How does God instil goodness in the minds and hearts of those whom he chooses as His devotees? The next aphorism will answer this question.

9. God is the Ruler of the soul.

Since God is the master of the human soul, and thereby the controller of the mind, He directs and influences the thoughts of human beings. If He so desires the mind of the person thinks good thoughts, if He does not so desire, evil thoughts enter the mind. That God is the Dweller within the soul, is borne out by the Hindu Scriptures. The *Brihadaaryanaka Upanishad* says, 'He who dwells in the earth, in the water and in the fire, and whom the earth, water and fire do not know, whose body the earth is, and the fire is, and who pulls (rules) these three within, he is thy Self, the puller (ruler) within, the Immortal'.²⁸ Again the same *Upanishad* says, 'There is no other seer but he, there is no other hearer but he, there is no other perceiver but he, there is no other knower but he. This is thy Self, the Ruler within, the Immortal'.²⁹ The *Subaala Upanishad*, too, says, 'Within the body, placed in the cavity is the Unborn, the Eternal, whose body is

25. *Ayodhya Kaanda*, 107

26. *Sundar Kaanda*, 43

27. *Uttara Kaanada*, 73B: 3

28. *Brihadaaryanaka Upanishad*, III: 7: 18

29. *Ibid.*, III: 7: 23

the earth, who moves within the earth, whom the earth does not know'. The *Geetaa* also says, 'The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings'.³⁰ God says in the Bible, 'Therefore I will bring upon you all these further evils I have spoken of. Prepare to meet your God in judgement, Israel. For you are dealing with one who formed the mountains and made the winds, and knows your every thought'.³¹ Similarly when Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, he asked Simon Peter thrice if he loved him. When he repeated this the third time, Peter protested 'Lord you know my heart, you know I am (your friend)'. Thus Peter referred to the fact that God dwells in the hearts of human beings.

We see, thus, that God dwells in the human soul. Therefore, He can turn one's mind towards Himself or away from Himself; and action follows from thought. In this sense God is the sole power which governs the thoughts, actions and destinies of human beings. The meaning of His grace is that it turns the mind of a certain individual towards goodness. That individual (who is in this way God's devotee), does good acts and reaps goodness, ultimately getting on the path of liberation, and finally achieving it.

10. Man progresses not from sin to sinlessness, but from the Godless to the Godly.

Many religions divide things into the sinful and the sinless. The idea of sin (*paapa*, in Hindi) finds frequent place in the Bible. Ezekiel (a priest, son of Buzi) says: 'Then the Lord's message came to me again... my rule is this: It is for a man's own sins that he will die'.³² St. Paul says, 'But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, evil men who push away the truth from them',³⁴ and 'He (God) will punish sin wherever it is found'.³⁵ So also in Islam: 'The Koranic commands and

30. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, XVIII: 61

31. *Amos*, 3: 12-3

32. *John*, 21: 17

33. *Ezekiel*, 18: 4.

34. *Romans*, 26.

35. *Ibid*, 12.

prohibitions are of course absolute, and cannot be questioned without incurring the guilt of sin, unless they are qualified in some way by the Koran itself'.³⁶

Where sin denotes something accruing from an act performed, it becomes very dubious, because an act can be performed under varying circumstances, and while it may be considered evil in one case, the same act may not be evil in another. For example, killing a man is evil, but when a soldier kills an unknown person in his enemy's ranks, it is considered a valorous and commendable act. Causing pain is evil, but when it is done to cure an ill, like operating a sore, it is good. Violating a virgin girl is a crime, but if the two are married and then the act takes place, it is not evil. What then is to be considered as evil and good? The answer is, whatever takes a man towards godliness is good and whatever takes him away from godliness is evil. The idea that one is a sinner is not correct. As Shree Raamakrishna says: 'But to feel that one is a free soul is very good. By constantly repeating, "I am free, I am free", a man verily becomes free. On the other hand, by constantly repeating, "I am bound, I am bound", he certainly becomes bound to worldliness. The fool who says only, "I am a sinner, I am a sinner", verily drowns himself in worldliness. One should rather say: "I have chanted the name of God. How can I be a sinner? How can I be bound?"'³⁷ Man advances from materialism to spiritualism, from the enjoyment of the senses to the bliss of contemplation, from bondage to liberation. On this journey onwards, all that must be considered evil which retards the wayfarer's progress, and all that is good which spurs him on. As the *Brihadaraṇyaka Upanishad* says: 'Lead me from the unreal to the real; lead me from darkness to light; lead me from death to immortality'.³⁸

11. The major events are in the hands of God.

The matter of fate versus free will has always been controversial. Between the extreme view that man is the sole architect

36. *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Living Faiths*, Hutchinson.

37. *The Gospel of Shree Raamakrishna*, p. 214.

38. *asaṭomā sad gamaya, tamaṣo maa jyotir gamaya, mṛtyormā amṛtam gamaya. Brh. Up.*, I: 3: 27.

of his destiny—‘I am the master of my fate I am the captain of my soul’³⁹ and the one according to which, ‘All the actions that the body is to perform are already decided upon at the time it comes into existence: the only freedom you have is whether or not to identify yourself with the body’,⁴⁰ there are a number of views apportioning the share of free will and destiny. If one believes that God is responsible for all actions performed by man, then man is rendered a mere mechanical puppet, with no significance attached to his power of discrimination and wisdom. On the other hand if we ascribe control of all acts to man, there is nothing like destiny. The difficulty in the former view is obvious. If everything done by man is God’s doing, man cannot be held responsible for his actions, and in that case to punish or reward him for his acts is meaningless. The *karma* theory is not possible, and moral law is set at naught. If man has no responsibility for his acts, a thief or a murderer can cheerfully commit the crime and disown his accountability for it. Goodness will cease to have incentive. On the other hand if one believes man to be the ‘master of his fate’ one can’t explain why, when he does actions to achieve a certain end, that end is not achieved. For example, if one was the controller of his fate every businessman should be successful and every suitor should get his girl. But we find that this is not so. The *Bhagavad Geeta* wriggles out of the dilemma by saying ‘To action alone have you a right, never at all to its fruits’.⁴¹ That is to say one has a right to whatever course of action he prefers according to his wisdom, but the result of that act is not in his hands. More specific is the view of Tulsi-daasa who says in the *Raamacharitamaanasa* ‘Loss and gain, life and death, honour and dishonour, are in the hands of God’.⁴² This means that over these man has no hold. One may strive for gain, but incur loss instead; seek honour but get dishonour. And of course over birth and death one has no control.

The rational view about fate versus free will therefore is that firstly action is in our hands, not its result, and secondly, barring

39. Henley, *Echoes, Invictus*, 4.

40. Osborne, *Shree Ramana Mahaarishee*.

41. *Karmanyevaa dhikaaraste, maa phalesu kadaachana*. B. G. 2: 47.

42. *Ayodhyaa Kaanda*, 171.

major events and conditions like life and death, loss and gain, dishonour and honour, in the rest man has freedom and he can act conclusively according to his wisdom.

12. The ego is the greatest hindrance to God realisation.

A common proverb runs, 'He is so full of himself that he's quite empty'. Seneca says 'The avenging god follows in the steps of the proud'.⁴³ C. S. Lewis says, 'As long as you are proud you cannot know God'.⁴⁴ The greatest obstacle to God realisation is the ego—the I-sense. The *Raamacharitamaanasa* says 'Hear the unaffected nature of Shree Raama. He never lets vanity enter the mind of his devotee, because vanity is the root of this world of life and death'.⁴⁵

The ego comes in between man and God, because while man is absorbed in himself, he cannot even think of Him. The destruction of the ego is the first step towards God realisation, and the most difficult. It is only when I-ness vanishes that man turns to God. In the *sad-darshanabhaasya* Shree Ramana Mahaarishee says: 'On reaching the interior of the Heart through search, The ego bows its head and falls'.⁴⁶ And in the *Upadesha Sarah*:

'When the ego is extinguished, the Real shines forth
This indeed, is great *Tapas*, so says Shree Ramana'.⁴⁷

Writing about the ego a disciple of Shree Ramana, Major Chadwick, says 'You are like the shadow of a leaf cast by the moonlight, intangible, unsubstantial, and in fact non-existent. And as the shadow is a purely negative phenomenon, is in fact nothing but a shutting out of light, so is the ego and everything else, only a shutting out of the light of the Self'.⁴⁸

The reason for the destruction of the ego as a condition of

43. *Hercules Furens*, 389 (*Megara*).

44. *Merc Christianity*, Collins.

45. *Uttara Kaanda*, 73B: 3.

46. *Sad darshanabhaasya*, verse 30.

47. *Upadesa Saram*.

48. *Golden Jubilee Souvenir on Shree Ramana Mahaarishee*, p. 245.

God realisation is that unless one approaches God with humility, realisation is not possible. In fact when the ego is uppermost, it drives off every other thing. The egoistic man is so busy with himself that he has no room for God.

13. The quest of the soul is release.

Being indestructible and eternal, there can never be a time when the soul ceases to exist. The goal of all material and produced things is destruction, but since this cannot be the fate of the indestructible soul it must remain in existence even at the end. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that after having gone through worldly existence in successive bodies, the soul finally returns to its Maker and merges with Him.

The God-like nature of the soul has been acknowledged not only by Hinduism but by other religions as well, such a Christianity. In the Bible Jesus Christ says: 'The Kingdom of God isn't ushered in with visible signs. You won't be able to say, "It has begun here in this place or there in that part of the country". For the Kingdom of God is within you'.⁴⁹ Again addressing his disciples Jesus tells them that they will have to undergo arrest and stand trial before governors and kings for advocating the Christian doctrine, but 'when you are arrested, don't worry about what to say at your trial, for you will be given the right words at the right time. For it won't be you doing the talking—it will be the Spirit of your heavenly Father speaking through you!'⁵⁰ Thus the soul is of the nature of God, and when it has achieved its purpose it returns to Him.

14. Such release is in the form of liberation.

The release of the soul from the trammels of existence is an event which is brought about with great effort and perseverance, and there are few who reach the goal of their endeavour. As the *Geetaa* says, 'Hardly anyone perceives the soul as marvellous, scarce another likewise speaks thereof as marvellous, and scarce another hears of it as marvellous, while there are some who

49. *Luke*, 17: 20-21 (The Living Bible).

50. *Matthew*, 10: 19-20 (The Living Bible).

know it not even on hearing of it'.⁵¹ The *Kaṭha Upanishad* similarly says, 'Even to hear of it is not the lot of many; and those having heard of it cannot comprehend. Wonderful is its teacher, and wonderful indeed is he who knows it when taught by an able teacher'.⁵²

Some people think that liberation (*moksha* in Hinduism, *nirvaana* in Buddhism), means a state of nothingness. It is not that. It is rather a state of perfect peace and rest, devoid of all sensations. Two Buddhist disciples were talking about liberation: 'O friend', Sariputta said, '*nirvaana* is happiness! *nirvaana* is happiness!' Then Udaayi asked 'But, friend Sariputta, what happiness can it be if there is no sensation?' 'That there is no sensation itself is happiness' Sariputta answered. Thus liberation is a state of cheerful serenity and well-being. It gives the rest and calm that the soul grievously lacked in its restless activity on earth, and for which it strove:

When God at first made Man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by—
Let us (said He) pour on him all we can;
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

So, strength first made a way,
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said He)
Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

51. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, 2: 29.

52. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 2: 7.

Yet let him keep the rest,
 But keep them with repining restlessness;
 Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
 If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
 May toss him to My breast.⁵³

The *Dhammapada* says: 'Countless are the births wherein I have circled and run seeking, but not finding, the builder of the house; ill is birth again and again.

Now thou art seen, thou builder of the house; never again shalt thou build (me) a house. All thy rafters are broken, shattered the roof-plate; my thought is divested of the *samkharas*; the extinction of craving has been won'⁵⁴.

The *Anguttara-Nikaya* describes the state thus: 'This is good, this is excellent, to wit, the calming of all *karma*—activities, the renunciation of all the bases (of rebirth), the destruction of craving, passionlessness, ceasing, *nibbaana*'. The Upanishadic view is as follows: 'As the flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing name and form, so does a wise man, freed from name and form, go to the divine person who is beyond, all'⁵⁵ 'All these become one in the highest imperishable *Brahman*',⁵⁶ and 'He becomes established in the supreme *Atman*'.⁵⁷ The *Mundaka Upanishad* also says, 'He becomes omniscient and becomes all'.⁵⁸ In the *Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad* the sage Yajñavalkya says to Maitreyee: 'For when there is as it were duality, then one sees the other, one smells the other, one tastes the other, one salutes the other, one hears the other, one perceives the other, one touches the other, one knows the other; but when the Self only is all this, how should he see another, how should he smell another, how should he taste another, how should he salute another, how should he hear another, how should he touch another, how

53. George Herbert, *The Pulley*.

54. These words were uttered by Gautama Buddha in the moment of his enlightenment.

55. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3, 2, 8.

56. *Ibid*, 3, 2, 7.

57. *Prashna Upanishad*, 4, 9.

58. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 4, 10.

should he know another? How should he know Him by whom he knows all this?⁵⁹

Thus liberation is a state of activity, complete freedom and perfection. It is not a state of nothingness, or death, or annihilation. When it comes the soul is absorbed in God as a ray of sunlight in the sun, or a wave in the ocean.

59. *Brihadaaraṇyaka Upanishad*, 4, 5, 15.

CHAPTER—II: THE SOUL

‘Space is enclosed by earthen jars. Just as space is not carried along with the jar when this is removed from one place to another, so the soul when contained in the vessel of the subtle and gross body, like infinite space remains unmoved and unaffected’.

—*Amritabindu Upanishad*

1. **The soul is either existent or non-existent; eternal or transitory; contained in one part or all-pervading; one or many; material or ethereal; with a vehicle or without it; identical with God or different; stationary or migrating; the object of revelation or the object of knowledge.**

The opening aphorism gives the various possibilities of the nature of the soul. The soul comes within the category of things unseen, unlike the world and the body. Various descriptions of it find place in the Scriptures. The *Kaṭha Upanishad* says: ‘the knowing soul is not born, nor does it die nor comes into being. This unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient One suffers no destruction, even when the body is destroyed . . . Knowledge of the soul cannot be attained by the study of the Scriptures, nor by the intellect, nor even by much learning. It is attained by one who is chosen for such knowledge. To him the soul reveals its own real form . . . Having realised that (soul) which is soundless, touchless, formless, imperishable, and also without taste and smell, eternal, without beginning or end, even beyond the unmanifest, one is released from the jaws of death’¹

There is much more about the *Atman* (as the soul is called in Indian philosophy) in this and various other Upanishads, but the foregoing may be treated as fairly representative. The *Bhagavad Geeta* says: ‘The soul is never born, nor does it die; nor does it exist on coming into being. For it is unborn, eternal, everlasting and primeval. Even though the body is slain, the soul is not . . . Weapons cannot sunder it, nor fire burn it. Water

1. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 2: 18 & 23; 3: 15

cannot drench it, nor can the wind make it dry . . . For this soul is incapable of being cut; it is proof against fire, impervious to water and undrivable as well. This soul is eternal, omnipresent, immovable, constant and everlasting'.² The qualities of the soul which emerge from these Scriptural observations, are (1) It is eternal i.e. without beginning or end, (2) It is non-material, (3) It is omnipresent, and (4) It is the subject of revelation, not that of learning.

This aphorism merely states the various possibilities about the soul. Which ones are more likely on the basis of Scriptural testimony has also been stated in the above note. The aphorisms which follow will amplify these observations.

Reason can be employed even for things unseen. For example, if someone comes along with a fanciful tale which is completely fantastic, the mind at once rebels against it. But if the account is plausible, even though it may not be seen by the person to whom it is related, it can be believed. Therefore even though the soul is unseen, and perhaps different from whatever we may conceive it to be, it is still worthwhile examining the various alternatives.

2-3. The unseen can be established by inference, or by reliable testimony, or by both.

A thing does not stand disproved because of being unseen, as for example the wind.

The seen needs no proof, for it is already there, cognisable by the senses. The unseen, even though it cannot directly be appraised by the senses, can be established to some extent by means such as inference and verbal testimony.

There is no agreement between the different schools of Indian philosophy about the number of the sources of cognition. The Chaarvaakas (materialists) take it as one only, viz., perception. The Vaisheshikas as well as the Buddhists recognise two—perception and inference. Saankhya believes in testimony in addition to these two. Nyaaya adds comparison, thus

2. *Bhagavad Geeta*, 2: 20, 23 & 24.

recognising four sources of cognition, viz., perception, inference, verbal testimony and comparison. The Meemaansaa school has five, for it adds to these, presumption. The Vedaanta believes in six sources, adding non-apprehension to the existing number. The Pauraanikas add two more viz., tradition and inclusion, while other schools of Indian philosophy extend even this big list to include gesture and elimination, thus recognising as many as ten sources of cognition.

A detailed discussion of the means of cognition is out of place here. It will suffice to say that there are more than one, and so we can be sure 'there is more than meets the eye'. As Shakespeare says:

'There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy'.³

The existence of what is not seen can't be denied. One can't see the wind, but nevertheless it blows. The unseen has to be accepted where it is proved by inference, as for example when one sees smoke he knows there is a fire. A thing can also be established by verbal testimony, which Nyaya defines as 'the testimony of a reliable person'.⁴ Such reliable persons are those who have had experience of the thing which is sought to be established, sages and persons of wisdom. It is on this basis that the doctrines of the religions of the world are to be accepted. Scriptural authority is not mere hearsay. Scriptures contain the testimony of persons of divine origin—Krishna, Christ, Buddha, the Vedic seers and so forth. Their sayings are not mere words. They are surcharged with intuitive perception of the truth. What they profess they have known and experienced. So when the Scriptures say that God and soul exist, it is not as though any Tom, Dick or Harry said it. The assertion is made with authority emanating from insight into reality.

Both the sources of cognition—inference and verbal testimony, can be combined also in order to reach a conclusion. For example, we may infer that the soul exists, and this inference is made stronger by Scriptural testimony.

3. Hamlet

4. *Nyaya Sootras*, 1: 1: 7

4. **Death proves that there is a soul.**
5. **Some say that the functions of the body are stopped, as in a machine.**
7. **It is not so because a machine can be made to function again, but not so the body.**

When death takes place everything remains as it is, and yet the body does not function. In a few minutes rigor mortis sets in, and the body begins to disintegrate. What really happens at the moment of death? Medical science says that the supply of oxygen which the human organism gets from the air, is cut off. Without this vital element the organism speedily decays. But why is the supply cut off? If we go on analysing more deeply we will keep on arguing in a circle. The air is cut off because the man can no longer breathe. He cannot breathe because his heart has ceased to function. The heart has ceased to function because of lack of oxygen, which is because of the suspension of breathing. Thus we reach again where we started. Ultimately we have to admit that something is missing—something which organised, guided and commanded the body. This is what Scriptures have called the body's owner, in other words, the soul.

What happens at death, and after, is described by Hindu Scriptures thus: When the soul of the person goes forth, speech is merged in mind, the mind in breath, the breath in fire, and fire in the highest God. Men die at the time which is destined for them, and pass according to the merit or demerit of their deeds, knowledge and devotion, either by the way of the gods (*devayaana*) to the worlds of *Brahman*, or by the way of the fathers (*pitriyaana*) to the moon.

The path of the gods is through the world of the gods to the sun, then to the moon where the soul is tested, and if found worthy, continues its journey on to lightning. From lightning the soul proceeds to the world of *Brahman*, being led by a person made of mind not human. In the course of its progress the soul sheds its good and evil deeds, the former falling on the relatives he loved, and the latter on the relatives he hated.

The way of the fathers is to the atmospheric world (*bhuvvarloka*) where the soul becomes a disembodied ghost till the death ceremonies are completed, when he gets into an adequate body and takes his place among his fathers in their realm. From there again the soul enters space, then to the moon, where he remains till his merit is exhausted. Thence he goes again into space, from there to the wind, smoke, mist, cloud, rain, earth and vegetable life. From there the soul passes into the destined form through anyone who eats the vegetable. Those good are born in higher castes, and those not so good in lower forms like worms, moths, fish, pigs, dogs and so forth.

There are others, who being very wicked, dwell in hell and suffer age-long torments; and if even then their wicked deeds are not exhausted, they are hurled into regions lower, below the earth. Those whose children fail to perform the funeral ceremonies, become ghosts.

About the process of death Swaamee Nikhilaananda says: 'When a person dies, the aggregate of the *praana* and the organs, controlled by the soul, reincarnates in another body. First his speech merges in his mind, and his relatives say: "He does not speak any more". Then his mind stops functioning and merges in his *praana*. The relatives surrounding the dying man say: "He does not know". When his *praana* merges in fire, the relatives say: "He does not move". They are not sure if he is living or dead; they feel the body, and finding it warm they say: "He is warm, he is alive". Then the fire merges in the Highest Being. If the man departs from this world with his thoughts fixed on Pure Being, he then reaches Pure Being and does not migrate into another body. But if he is ignorant of Pure Being, like one arising from deep sleep, he again enters, after death, into the meshes of a physical body'.⁵

These accounts are imaginative, but what happens after death, on one knows; and even if someone were to come down after having known he would not be believed. As Swaamee Raamakrishna says, 'Suppose God comes to you as a man and says "I am God" will you believe it then? After his death

5. *Note on Chhhaandogya Upanishad*, 6, 8, 6 (*praana* means 'the soul')

Lazarus said to Abraham "Let me go back to the earth and tell my friends and relatives that hell and after life exist". Abraham replied: "Do you think they will believe you? They will say it is a charlatan who is telling them such things".⁶

The analogy of death to the sudden stoppage of a machine is not logical. The machine can be restarted or repaired and then made to work. Not so, at death, the body. When one dies no doubt is left in the minds of those he leaves behind that he is gone for ever. That is why the body is speedily burnt or buried. Besides, a machine has got a certain normal period of performance. Not so the human body. Death may take place at any time after birth. Babies and children die. So do young men and women. When the purpose of life on earth is exhausted, they are removed from the face of the earth.

8. There is no difference (between the two—the body and the machine) say some, because the body too consists of parts.

The argument is that just as a machine has various parts as for example a car engine has spark plugs, carburettor, pistons, valves and so forth, even so the body has a number of parts, like the heart, lungs, intestines, etc. Because of this similarity the body is nothing more than a machine, and there need not be a soul contained in it. This argument is refuted in the next aphorism.

9. This is not so because of the cohesion of parts.

Although it is true that the body consists of different organs, each performing a specific function, it has a kind of unity which is not found in a machine. If a thorn enters the foot, the pain is felt by the entire body even though one says 'My foot pains'. Pain is often symptomatic or sympathetic i.e. caused by something in one part and felt in another. Pain is described as 'the warning siren that some part of the body is under stress or attack. However the site of the pain does not explain the cause of the pain; nor is it always a very good pointer towards what ought to be done to get rid of the pain permanently. For example, pain

6. *The Gospel Shree Raamakrishna*

in the joints may be the end result of a long-forgotten or neglected venereal disease; and the treatment may consist essentially of injections into the muscles'.⁷ This shows that pain is not felt individually by parts.

10. And because feeling does not belong to the parts, there must be a soul that feels.

The entire human body is made up of various organs like the heart, the lungs etc., and of constituents like blood, bone, muscle, skin and so forth. The organs have their individual entities. For example the lungs draw in the air and expel it, the heart pumps blood and the kidneys eliminate urea. One part cannot feel the pain or defect in the other because these parts perform their respective functions like those of a machine. But since (as has been said in the previous aphorism), there is unity of feeling, and pain in one part is felt all over, there must be something which feels the pain in each part because that thing is diffused all through the body. It can only be the soul which can be such a thing. If there was no soul there could not be such a unification of feeling.

11. The feelings, some say, belong to the blood, skin, and so forth.

An objection might be made that it is not necessary to postulate a soul for feeling pain, for the blood, skin etc., are constituents which connect up all the organs, and these may carry the feeling of pain from one part to another. In this manner the feeling of pain or injury in one part can be communicated all over. So why should there be a 'soul' to feel the pain?

12. If it were so pain would continue to dwell in the dead and unconscious body.

If we admit the argument contained in the previous aphorism that the constituents connecting the various parts of the body can carry the feeling of pain inflicted on one part, it will mean that when a man is dead, a pin inserted in his body would cause him pain. Also we know that when the doctor anaesthetises a man

7. Justus J. Schifferes, *Family Medical Encyclopedia*, Permabooks 1959

for performing an operation, even deep cuts made with the surgeon's knife do not cause any pain. If the skin or blood could convey pain from one part of the body to the whole, despite the body being under anaesthesia, such operations could not be performed.

13. The soul's existence is also proved by the four states of consciousness.

The states of consciousness are the waking, sleep and dream states, to which Hindu philosophy adds a fourth, namely the *tureeya*. The waking, dream and deep sleep states need no explanation, and everyone goes through them every day and night. The waking state is one in which the senses are alert to cognise objects and carry out various worldly activities like talking, moving about, performing tasks and cultivating hobbies. The day is usually the period in which the waking state is experienced, except while performing night duty as in a telephone exchange, factory etc., and in countries where there are long periods of day and night (in the polar regions). The dream state is when one is asleep but the sleep is not perfectly sound and dreams are seen. The dreamless sleep state is the state of sound sleep. The *tureeya* state is quite different from these. When asked by a disciple what the *tureeya* state was, Ramana Mahaa-rishee, the renowned South Indian saint said: 'There are three states only, the waking, dream and sleep. *Tureeya* is not a fourth one; it is what underlies these three. But people do not readily understand it. Therefore it is said that this is the fourth state and the only Reality. In fact it is not apart from anything for it forms the substratum of all happenings; it is your very Being. The three states appear as fleeting phenomena on it and the sink into it alone. Therefore they are unreal.

'The pictures in a cinema show are only shadows passing over the screen. They make their appearance; move forward and backward; change from one to another; are therefore unreal, whereas the screen all along remains unchanged. Similarly with paintings: the images are unreal and the canvas real. So also with us: the world-phenomena, within or without, are only passing phenomena not independent of our Self. Only the habit of looking on them as being real and located outside ourselves is

responsible for hiding our true being and showing forth the others. The ever-present only Reality, the Self, being found, all the other unreal things will disappear, leaving behind the knowledge that they are no other than the Self.

Tureeya is only another name for the Self. Aware of the waking, dream and sleep states, we remain unaware of our own Self. Nevertheless the Self is here and now, it is the only Reality. There is nothing else. So long as identification with the body lasts the world seems to lie outside us. Only realise the Self, and they *are not*.⁸

14. An objector might say there are only three states, not four.

There is no fourth state, or the state of *tureeya*, says the objector. That is to say there is no Self or the soul according to him. Normally, too, only three states are acknowledged—waking, dream and deep sleep.

15. The fourth state exists because without it the other three are not possible.

The first state is the waking one, in which one sees and knows the objects of the world. Cognising is a process which involves the object, the sense organ by which the object is cognised, and the cogniser. The co-ordination of all the three is necessary. If the object is not there at all, obviously the question of seeing it does not arise. If the eyes are diseased or faulty they will not see the object clearly or truly, and a blind man will not see it at all. But even if the object is there, and the eyes perfectly all right, cognition is not possible without attentiveness. If one is engrossed in some thought or pondering over a problem, he may fail to see a vase on the table even though it is there. Thus without the knower, cognition is not possible.

In the dream state, too, when one sees a particular dream which he recollects on waking, it shows that there was a Witness who was aware of the dream even in the sleeping state. If this was not so how could the dream be recollected?

8. *Talks With Shree Ramana Mahaarishie*, 1955 Vol, 2 pp. 440-1

This is all the more so in the state of deep sleep. When one wakes up from deep sleep, he *knows* he has slept. In deep sleep there is no consciousness of the world. This being so, the sleeping person could not know he has slept unless there was something in him which remained awake even while he was sound asleep. Unless there was this Witness, it would not be possible for the person to know that he had slept because during deep sleep there is complete lack of consciousness of the external world, or of any world (like the world of dreams). This Witness is the Self or soul which is ever awake. It is he who experiences the three states of dream, deep sleep and waking; it is he who is the eternal Witness, and without him the three states could neither exist nor be proved.

16. Some say it is the mind which undergoes the states of pain and consciousness.

The objection is on two scores. Firstly, that pain, both physical and mental, is suffered not by the soul but by the mind or intellect. It has been shown that the body is not the seat of pain (see aphorisms 9-12 *ante*). But might it not be the mind instead of the soul? The second part of the objection is that it is not the Self or soul which is the eternal Witness, as stated in the previous aphorisms, but the intellect. This being so, the mind can prove and make possible the three states of consciousness, and there is no need to postulate a soul. The answer to this kind of objection is given in the aphorisms which follow (nos. 17-19).

17. The mind cannot be the seat of pain because pain is felt even in dreams.

It has been said that the soul is the seat of pain. 'Might it not be the intellect instead?' says an objector. If this were so, how do we account for the fright which a fearful dream causes? When we are asleep the mind is not working, yet the pain or fright such dreams cause, is felt. If the mind were the seat of pain, we would not feel such pain or fright produced by bad dreams. It is clear, therefore, that it is the soul which is awake even in the dream state, which feels the pain.

18. If the mind was Witness to the three states its activity in the waking state would not preclude the other two.

It is common experience that suppression of the mental process is a prerequisite to sleep. If one starts thinking of a problem, or if the mind remains engaged in mental activity, sleep does not come. The idea of the advice to the insomniac to count 'sheep' is based on this principle—the belief that such monotonous counting will still the working of the mind. So too is the principle underlying meditation or concentration. If we consider the mind, and not the soul, as the waking Witness of the three states, why should mind-activity elude sleep? If the mind is the Witness of the waking state as well as the sleeping state the transition from waking to sleep would not be hampered by its activity. It would remain as awake in the sleep state as in the waking state. Mind-activity being a hindrance to sleep establishes that the mind is not Witness to the three states. Such a Witness can only be the soul.

19. Moreover if mind were the eternal Witness, amnesia would result in death.

The condition known as amnesia causes loss of memory and forgetfulness of the past. If we believe that mind the eternal Witness, then if the mind were erased by amnesia the person concerned would die. But we know that amnesia can also be cured, and memory and remembrance of the past can revive. Thus it would be wrong to say that the seat of consciousness and the Self or the eternal Witness is the mind or intellect.

20. There must be a soul for suffering the consequences of evil works and enjoying the fruits of good ones.

All actions performed have their consequences. The *Quraan* says: 'He who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it'.⁹ Again 'Whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought'.¹⁰ If we do not believe that evil actions are

9. *Quraan*, 99: 7-8 (Trans. Muhammad Ali)

10. *Ibid.*, 42 : 30

punished and good ones rewarded, much of the suffering of this world will have no explanation. The *karma* theory has been propounded to explain this. In the *Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad* Jaarat-kaarava Aartabhaaga asks the sage Yaaajnavalkya 'When the speech of this dead person enters into the fire, breath into the air, the eyes into the sun, the mind into the moon, the hearing into space, into the earth the body, into ether the self, into the shrubs the hairs of the body, into the trees the hairs of the head, when the blood and the seed are deposited into the water, where is then that person?' Yaaajnavalkya said: 'Take my hand, my friend. We two alone shall know of this; let this question of ours not be discussed in public'. Then the two went out and argued, and what they said was *karma*, what they praised was *karma*, viz., that a man becomes good by good work and bad by bad work.¹¹

This shows the importance of *karma*. Without *karma* the world cannot continue. In the *Bhagavad Geetaa* Lord Krishna tells his disciple: 'Arjuna, there is nothing in the three worlds for Me to do, nor is there anything worth attaining unattained by Me, yet I continue to work. Should I not engage in action, unwearied, at any time, great harm will come to the world; for Arjuna, men follow My path in all matters. If I do not perform action, these worlds will perish'.¹²

The performance of action being inevitable, there must be an order and pattern in it. How much of this performance is in the control of man and how much is not, is a complicated question. Tulsidaasa says, 'Loss and gain, life and death, honour and dishonour, are in the hands of God', meaning thereby that apart from these, the shaping of one's destiny is in his own hands. One might not perhaps agree with W. E. Henley:

'It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul'.¹³

11. *Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad*, 3 : 2 : 13 (Trans. Max Muller)

12. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, 3 : 22-4.

13. W. E. Henley, *Echoes*, *Invictus* 4.

This would be denying the hand of God altogether and cannot explain why, despite desiring and working for certain ends, one still fails to obtain them. The *Geetaa's* interpretation is as follows: 'To action alone have you a right and never at all to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, neither let there be in you any attachment to inaction'.¹⁴ This does not mean that man does not get the fruits of his action. He gets them either in this life itself or in another, but that should not be the motive of his action. He must act without thought of reward (which he automatically gets). If he acts in this way, action does not bind.

Expiation of all acts is not possible in one lifetime. Therefore there must be several lives. And if there was no soul, the significance of being punished for bad deeds and being rewarded for good ones would be lost.

21. It might be thought that it is the intellect that experiences joy and sorrow.

The objection is that it is the intellect and not the soul which experiences the fruits of action, so there is no need to postulate a soul to account for this. The reply to this objection is given in the next aphorism.

22. The intellect changes (while the soul is constant). So there is no connection.

The intellect keeps changing. The mind of the infant is engaged in crying for milk. When he grows into a child he is engrossed in toys. The mind of the youth gets entangled in love and romance. Old age brings its worries and disillusion. Thus the intellect changes constantly, and at death it perishes with the body; for that which is changeful cannot last. The soul is, on the contrary, constant and changeless. It experiences the different levels of consciousness—wakefulness, sleep and deep sleep—right from birth to death. Thus the soul alone can form the connection between one life and another, for to expiate action it must be a transmigrating soul. As the *Bhagavad Geetaa* says: 'The soul is never born; nor does it exist on coming into being.

14. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, 2: 47.

For it is unborn, eternal, everlasting and primeval; even though the body is slain the soul is not'.¹⁵

23. The soul is eternal because none has ever seen it die.

There is striking resemblance between the state of death and that of deep sleep or unconsciousness. But there is difference in respect of the beating the heart and breathing. The heart of a man in deep sleep goes on beating, and the man breathes; but it is not so in death. Obviously therefore, in death the soul either escapes or dies with the body. But while one sees the body dying by visible signs such rigor mortis, putrefaction and so forth, no one sees any such condition of the soul. One may not see a thing perishing in his lifetime as for example an oak tree might die after the person's death, but someone or the other will surely see its destruction. Everyone alive will be seen dead by someone who outlasts him. As Lord Buddha says, 'Decay is inherent in all component things'. Since no one has seen the soul die it must be assumed to be eternal. Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Geeta* 'Arjuna, this soul residing in the body of all living beings, cannot be slain'.¹⁶

24. Also because it has neither beginning nor end.

That the soul has no end is amply demonstrated at the time of death. As has already been stated, when the body dies its end is apparent, but there is nothing to show the end of the soul.

The soul is also beginningless. If it had a beginning it would begin to function at the moment of conception. But life comes to the embryo at a later stage. Thus the soul has no beginning. Besides whatever is endless is also beginningless. As the soul has no end, it has no beginning too.

25. So too do the Scriptures speak of it.

The soul is described as beginningless and endless by the *Bhagavad Geeta*: 'The soul is never born, nor does it die.... This

15. *Bhagavad Geeta*, 2: 20.

16. *Bhagavad Geeta*, 2: 30.

soul is eternal, omnipresent, immovable, constant and everlasting'.¹⁷

26. The soul is diffused throughout the entire body. It has the capacity to expand and contract at will.

The soul is that through which all the five senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching—act. This is clear, otherwise when a man is dead he would still be able to see, hear, smell, taste and touch, because in the case of natural death all the organs of the senses are present immediately after death. It is the conjunction of the soul with the senses which makes their operation possible. Of the five senses four are concentrated in the head—the portion of the body above the neck. These are taste, sight, smell and hearing. But the fifth sense, viz., that of touch, is diffused all over the body. Therefore, the entire body must be considered to be the soul's abode. In sleep, however, the soul's consciousness is gathered up and is concentrated in the region of the heart because the two functions of breathing and the beating of the heart are continued. When one is asleep the senses are dormant. The noise is there, but the sleeping man cannot hear it, the perfume of incense fills the room but he cannot smell it, the objects are there as before but he can't see them. The soul has, therefore, withdrawn itself from these sense organs. But in a moment it can instantaneously again expand and be joined with them. On waking up the senses are again alert. Therefore the soul must be thought of as pervading the body, but capable of withdrawing itself too at will.

27. The heart is the soul's abode.

Although the soul can expand, and is diffused all through the body, it inhabits the heart. This is natural because, as has been said in the previous aphorism, when a man is in deep sleep the heart keeps on working. Therefore the soul must, after withdrawing its consciousness from the entire body, rest in the heart which makes all the other functions of the body possible. If the soul leaves its abode i.e., the heart, the heart stops beating, and this means death of the body.

17. *Bhagavad Geeta*, 2: 20 & 24.

28. The Scriptures also consider it such.

The Scriptures confirm that the soul's abode is in the heart. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* we are told, 'There is the ether within the heart, and in it there is the Person (*purusha*) consisting of mind, immortal, and golden'.¹⁸ In the same way the *Prashna Upanishad* says 'In the heart dwells the *aatman* (soul)'.¹⁹

29. Some say that if the heart is the abode of the soul, it will die when the heart is dead.

It may be said that the soul dies at death, because its home, which is the heart is no more. But this is not reasonable. When one's house is no more, he seeks a new house. When the bird's nest is destroyed it flies to another. So also the soul does not perish, but at the death of the body, leaves its abode to find a new one. As the *Bhagavad Geetaa* says, 'Like a man discarding worn out clothes takes new ones, the embodied soul, casting off worn-out bodies, enters into others which are new'.²⁰

30. The soul does not die with the heart. It is because of the soul's parting that the heart dies.

We see this everyday with our eyes. People die, and the body shorn of the soul does not last even a day. It is self-evident and needs no proof. As the *Katha Upanishad* says : 'What remains here of that owner of the body (the soul)—of him who dwells in it—when separated and freed from the body (after death)? This is verily that'.²¹ Some philosophies (like the Saankhya) consider the soul to be many. The Saankhya aphorisms say 'By the allotment of several births etc., it follows that there is multiplicity of souls'.²² On the other hand the Vedaanta thinkers consider the soul to be one and part of the eternal *Brahman* : 'The soul is a part, because the Lord is described as having manifold relations with the souls, and also because some texts record him as identical with *Brahman*, like slaves and

18. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1: 6: 1.

19. *Prashna Upanishad*, 3: 6, (*hridi hvesha aatmaa*).

20. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, 2: 22.

21. *Katha Upanishad*, 5: 4.

22. *Saankhya Pravachan Sootram*, 1: 149.

fishermen etc.’²³ The *Muṇḍaka Upanishad* says: ‘Two birds, inseparable companions, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating’.²⁴ So too the *Atharvan Shruti (Brahma-Bindu Upanishad)*: ‘As a space enclosed in a jar remains in its own place even when the jar is moved to another locality—for it is the jar that is moved, not the space—or as a jar enclosing a space may be broken into pieces and destroyed, but the space remains the same and of it there is no destruction; so is the soul like space’.²⁵ Saankhya considers this view absurd: ‘It would be an absurdity to say that bodies are different but the soul is one’.²⁶

31. It is possible that views appearing contradictory, are in reality two aspects of one truth.

Often persons in disagreement are really only seeing different aspects of the same thing, as for example the seven blind men who went to see an elephant, and each handling a particular part thought the beast was like that. One views the head’s side of the coin, the other the tail’s, but it is the same coin. Similarly one says the cup is half-empty, the other it is half-full. Thus it may be possible that both the views—regarding the oneness and the multiplicity of the soul are correct, and really two aspects of the same truth.

32. The soul is many in the sense that each body is endowed with a soul.

Since there are separate bodies, the souls must be separate also, because each body must necessarily have a soul. The soul is essential to enable the individual to proceed on the path of liberation and to achieve it.

33. It is one in the sense that all souls are of the same nature and divinity.

The souls are limited by the bodies, but only in a temporary

23. *Vedaanta Sootra*, 2: 17: 41.

24. *Muṇḍaka Upanishad*, 3 : 1 : 1.

25. *Brahma-Bindu Upanishad*, verse 13.

26. *Saankhya Pravachan Sootram*, 1 : 151.

and figurative way. The soul is eternal, divine, yoked to the body and, yet free, and removed from the trammels of existence. Its eternality is proved by the fact that it exists in all stages—dream, sleep and waking. It has no beginning and no end. Death is in the body, not in the soul. Moreover there are Scriptural texts about the soul's eternality e.g., the *Kaṭha Upanishad* says, 'This experiencer of different pleasures and sorrows is not born, nor does it die. It sprang from nothing, nothing sprang from it. This ancient one is unborn, eternal, and everlasting; he is not killed when the body is slain'.²⁷ The *Shvetaashvatara Upanishad* says, 'There are two, one knowing (*Eshvara*), the other not-knowing (*jeeva*), though both unborn, one strong, the other weak; there is she, the unborn, through whom each man receives the recompense of his works; and there is the infinite Self (appearing) under all forms, but Himself inactive. When a man finds out these three, that is Brahma'.²⁸ The *Kaṭha Upanishad* speaks of the soul as '*nityonityaana*' (the Eternal among eternal).²⁹ The *Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* says, 'On being born the soul assumes a body, and becomes united with all evils; on dying he departs from the body, and leaves all evil behind'.³⁰ The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* says, 'This body verily dies when the *jeeva* (soul) abandons it, but the *jeeva* never dies'.³¹

The divinity of the soul is proved by the presence of conscience. Whenever a man does something wrong he feels upset. His conscience worries him. This shows that the soul is of the nature of blessedness. If it was not, we would not be endowed with a conscience.

Souls are only seemingly restricted by the body. The association is temporary and does not limit the soul. Saankhya gives the example of the lame man being carried by the blind: 'As a lame man and a blind man deserted by their fellow travellers, who in making their way with difficulty through a forest, had been dispersed by robbers, happening to encounter

27. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 1 : 2 : 18.

28. *Shvetaashvatara Upanishad*, 1 : 19.

29. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 2 : 5 : 13.

30. *Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, 4 : 3 : 8.

31. *Chhāndogya Upanishad*, 5 : 11 : 3.

each other, and entering into conversation, so as to inspire mutual confidence, agreed to divide between them the duties of walking and of seeing. Accordingly the lame man was mounted on the blind man's shoulders and was thus carried on his journey, whilst the blind man was enabled to pursue his route by the directions of his companion. In the same manner the faculty of seeing is in the soul though not that of moving—it is like the lame man; the faculty of moving is in *prakriti*, but not of seeing, which resembles therefore the blind man. Further, as a separation takes place between the lame man and the blind man, when their mutual object is accomplished and when they have reached the end of the journey, so *prakriti* having effected the liberation of the *purusha* ceases to act; and *purusha*, having contemplated *prakriti* obtains freedom; and so, their respective purposes being effected, the connection between them is dissolved'.³²

The need of the association between the soul and the body is firstly to further creation, and secondly to enable man to obtain liberation. If the soul did not associate thus with the body, creation could not be possible, and how would the world of living creatures exist? The aim of existence is also to provide an opportunity for liberation. If there was no soul there would be no existence, and consequently there would be no release from it. That the soul is free, and not bound by the body, is also asserted by Saankhya: 'The nature of the soul is to be forever free'.³³ The *Vedaanta Sootras* say, 'The souls are not similar because their *karmas* are various'.³⁴ It is not the soul, however, which does good or evil, it is the individual. The souls are neutral agents. It is like a white cloth which has no colour. One may colour it yellow, the other black, and a third crimson. It is not the cloth which is yellow, black, or crimson, but the hue which makes it so. *Karma* is performed neither by the body, nor by the soul, individually. It is the result of the joint endeavour of the soul, body and intellect. For example if one sees a wasp, and fearing that it will sting him, is minded to kill it, the mind may say 'The wasp is dangerous. It may sting you. So it is better to kill it'. The soul may, however say 'It is a sin

32. *Bhaasya* on *Kaarikaa*, page 21 (*prakriti*= nature; *purusha*= the soul).

33. *Nitya-mukta-tvam*.

34. *Vedaanta Sootras*, 2:11:49 (*adrishhta aniyamaat*).

to kill living creatures. You only *fear* the wasp will sting you. But if you let it be, it will fly away without doing any harm'. Thus the hand which moves to strike it dead, is stayed, and the wasp flies away. Or taking another example, there is a young girl whom one wishes to take advantage of. The soul, impelled by conscience, holds the man back, but the mind says 'How can anyone come to know about it? I will have my pleasure'. The body also assists the mind in its endeavour. Conscience is overpowered, and the sin committed, generating evil *karma*. If it was the soul alone which performs action and is responsible for it, the soul of a person who had done evil works in past life would be born without a conscience. But this is not so. Therefore the soul is ever pure and unaffected by the dirt of existence. As Shankara says, 'The soul is the illumination of the universe, and purity itself'.³⁵

34. The soul is contained in one part, and is also all-pervading.

It has already been said that there may be two different views of the same thing and both may be correct (see aphorism 31 *ante*). We have seen that the soul is one and also many (see aphorisms 32 and 33 *ante*). Another such seeming contradiction is that the soul is contained in one part, yet all-pervading. That it is contained in one part has been stated in aphorisms 27 and 28 *ante*. The heart is the soul's abode. But this does not mean that the soul is confined to dwell in the heart's cavity. The various levels of consciousness through which we experience ourselves to pass—waking, dream and deep sleep, are proof of the fact that the soul can gather itself up at one place or diffuse itself throughout the body. When it is diffused we experience the waking state in which all the senses and the parts of the body are fully conscious and alert. When the soul withdraws itself, we experience the state of dream or deep sleep, according to the extent of the withdrawal. Therefore, we find both the conditions of concentration and withdrawal mentioned in the Scriptures: 'The soul, the size of a thumb, the lord of the past and the future, is like a light without smoke. He is verily the same today and

35. *Aprokshaanubhootih (aatmaa prakaashakah-svachchho)*.

tomorrow'.³⁶ At the same time we are told that the soul is greater than the greatest and moving everywhere; 'The soul is smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest, and dwells in the hearts of creatures. The desireless one being free from grief, realises the glory of the soul through the purity of the senses and mind... Though sitting he travels far; though lying down he goes everywhere'.³⁷ Thus the soul can be concentrated as well as diffused. It can stay in one part of the body or the whole of it, like a lamp which spreads its radiance further and further when its wick is raised, and gathers the rays back when it is lowered.

35. The soul is not material because it does not subsist.

The question posed is whether the soul is ethereal or material (see aphorism 1 of this chapter). If the soul was material it would remain in the body at the time of death because a material thing cannot move by itself and cannot escape without being seen. Of the elements the non-material ones are air and ether. The others, which are material, (earth, water and fire), are seen by the naked eyes. Besides, of themselves they do not have the power of motion. Water moves because of the difference in slope, e. g., in a river bed, or because of gravity as in the case of rain. So with earth and fire. If the soul was material it could be seen by the eyes when a post-mortem was conducted on a dead body. As the doctor, cutting through such a body can observe the lungs, heart, intestines, and so forth, so would he be able to observe the soul.

The soul is therefore ethereal. As ethereal the soul can be (1) of the nature of light, or (2) of the nature of space, or (3) of the nature of air, or (4) of the nature of energy. If the soul was of the nature of light, we would be able to see a soul escaping from the body when one dies at night when it is dark all around. Even if it was like some kind of invisible rays like X-rays, its presence could be detected by scientific means. But this is not possible. If the soul was of the nature of air, it could be captured inside an air-proof receptacle, as one of glass, when it escaped from the body at the moment of death. If the soul was of the

36. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 4: 12 and 13.

37. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 2: 20-21.

nature of ether it could enter one human body after relinquishing another without the aid of a subtle body. The soul, therefore, is of the nature of energy. It is like electricity moving in a live wire. It cannot be captured or contained, except where it is particularly directed. It needs the subtle body as its vehicle just as electricity needs a wire to convey it from one place to another.³⁸

It may be thought that there is no need for God to transfer one source of energy (one soul) to another body. He can just shut off the power from the source as the manager of a power-house shuts off the power from a certain line, and re-generate that power into another body. But as a good organiser of power distribution will transfer the power from one feeder to another through readjustment in the grid, even so it is rational to suppose that God makes such readjustment in the soul-energy, despite the fact that His resources are unlimited. Thus the theory of rebirth is a rational one. The moment of conception is so arranged that when the embryo is ready to receive a soul there is the exit of the soul from another body—that soul which will put life into the prepared embryo.

36. The soul requires a vehicle for its movement.

This matter has been considered before also (see chapter on the body, aphorisms 6-7). The soul's vehicle is mentioned in the Scriptures as the *sookshmam shareera*—the subtle body. The soul needs a subtle body because in order to withdraw from the gross human body it requires a vehicle of material nature. Without such a material base nothing can live or move. This base is called the *deha veejaani*, *bhoota sookshaami*, or *sookshamam shareeram*, i. e., the fine parts of the elements which form the seed of the body. Vedaanta believes the soul to have several sheaths: (1) the physical body (2) the vital force (3) the astral body (4) the animal soul (5) the human soul (6) the spiritual soul, and (7) the *aatman* or spirit. The first four disintegrate at the moment of the body's death, while the last three comprise the soul which departs. The outgoing soul takes with it the seed (comprising of heat and all the elements) of the body it quits.

38. The need of the soul for a subtle body is explained in the next aphorism (No. 36).

The subtle body is called 'subtle' because it departs through the veins, having as its nature extension and the capacity of locomotion on the one hand, and transparency on the other. It is for this reason that it meets no obstacle in departing and is also not seen by those standing round. The subtle body is responsible for bodily warmth, and so while the soul is in the body, the body keeps warm, but the moment, propelled by the subtle body, it departs, although everything remains unchanged, the body loses its warmth.

The subtle body accompanies the soul in its journey out of the body, and exists so long as the soul is not liberated.

Someone may say that the soul can go on its journey of itself, why should it need a subtle body? In answer to this it may be said that nothing can move by itself. Everything that moves must either be impelled to move like a player kicking a football, or must have a vehicle, like passengers on an aeroplane. Therefore to move out of the body and undertake its journey to another one, the soul needs a vehicle. Secondly, as we have seen in aphorism 35 *ante*, the soul is power or energy. To be conveyed, energy needs a medium, as electricity requires a wire for transmission. For this reason, too, the soul needs a vehicle.

37. While the soul is not identical with God it is of His nature.

The soul (called *aatman* in Vedaanta), is of the nature of God (*Brahman*); but the soul cannot *be* God. The soul cannot be God just as the domestic connection of power in one's house cannot be the power-house itself, or the ray of sunlight entering a room cannot be the sun. It may be admitted that in nature both are the same. The power contained in the power-house has the same characteristic as that flowing in the wire in one's house, but the two cannot be equated. The power-house is the producing end and the other is the receiving end. If the person in charge of the power-house puts off the switch the power will be cut off, but the reverse is not possible. One may put off the main switch of his house, but it has no effect on the power-house.

This matter has been considered in Hindu Scriptures. The Vedaantic view is that the soul and God (*aatman* and *Brahman*)

are identical, but only appear to be different due to ignorance. Once this ignorance is removed the 'difference' disappears. Vedaanta subscribes to the doctrine that the *aatman* (soul) = *Brahman* (God), or 'I am *Brahman*'. This is conveyed by the expressions *tat tvam asi* (That thou art)³⁹ and *aham brahma asmi* (I am *Brahman*).⁴⁰ In the *Shvetaashvatara Upanishad* the soul and God are compared to two birds sitting on a tree, the one (soul) tasting the fruits of existence, and the other sitting on carefree without tasting them: 'Two birds of beautiful plumage, who are inseparable companions, are perched on the same tree. Of these, one eats with relish the fruits of the tree, while the other looks on without eating'.⁴¹

The other view, which is more plausible, is the one contained in the *Vedaanta Sootras* of Baadaraayana. According to this the worshipper (the individual soul) is different from the worshipped (God). If the two were identical, devotion would not be possible for one is devoted to some Being other than himself. He can't possibly be devoted to himself. It may be argued by the votaries of the view that God and soul are identical, that since the soul is a reflection of God, the two are the same: 'As many images of the sun are seen in different vessels full of water, so in this world various souls are to be considered as the reflection of the Supreme Self'. Or as the *Brahma-Bindu-Upanishad* says, 'The *Bhoota-aatman* is indeed one, existing in every being. It appears as one or many, like the moon's reflection in the water'. In reply it may be said that this, in fact proves the difference between soul and God, not identity, because that which is reflected cannot be the same as the reflection. If this were so the reflection of a knife would cut a substance in which it was reflected, and if fire was reflected it would start burning that object. Further the Vedaanta says, 'The soul is not a reflection of God like the sun reflected in water, because it is not so perceived'.⁴² The reflection of the sun in water is not a suitable analogy for God and the soul, because the sun is far away, but the Supreme pervades

39. *Chhaandogya Upanishad*, 6: 8: 7f.

40. *Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad*, 1: 4: 10.

41. *Shvetaashvatara Upanishad*, 4: 4.

42. *Vedaanta Sootras*, 3: 2: 19.

everything and hence no object can be at a distance from Him. This also proves that the soul is not a reflection of (i. e., identical with) the Supreme God. But, say the *Vedaanta Sootras*, the comparison can be considered appropriate in a different sense viz., that the reflection of the sun is very small while the sun itself is very large, even so the Supreme God is infinite and the soul infinitesimal: 'The comparison is not appropriate in its primary sense, but in its secondary sense of participating in increase and decrease; because the purpose of the Scripture is fulfilled thereby, and thus both comparisons become appropriate'.⁴³ This observation confirms that the soul is not identical with God. At the same time there is an affinity between the soul and God inasmuch as (1) the soul is of the nature of God, and (2) it proceeds from God, like the power emanating from the power-house and (on being emancipated) is ultimately absorbed into Him, as power is cut off from the power-house when the main switch of a domestic connection is put off. It is in this sense that the *Chhaandogya Upanishad* says: 'Now however the light which shines beyond the heavens, behind all things, behind each, in the highest worlds, the highest of all, that is absolutely the light which is here within men'.⁴⁴

38. The soul is migrating in the ultimate sense.

We have already seen that after death the soul passes from the body and takes different paths according to the deeds of the individual—the path of the fathers and that of the gods (see notes on aphorisms 4—7 *ante*). The soul is, therefore, migrating. This is also borne out by the *Bhagavad Geetaa*: 'As a man discarding worn-out clothes, takes new ones, even so the disembodied soul, casting off worn-out bodies, enters, into others which are new'.⁴⁵ This does not imply, of course, that the soul is always on the move. After having dwelt in a body for a certain period which depends on the time taken for expiation of past deeds, the soul goes forth to new bodies. The theory of transmigration is an essential ingredient of Hindu religion. The reasons for this

43. *Ibid.*, 3: 2: 20.

44. *Chhaandogya Upanishad*, 8: 1: 3.

45. *Bhagavad Geetaa*, 2: 22

belief will be found in the appropriate chapter (see chapter 1, The Aim of Life, aphorisms 11—13n).

If one were to ask, 'What happens after death? there can be three answers—(1) annihilation (2) reward in heaven or punishment in hell, and (3) transmigration. The first answer is that of the materialists, who believe only in the present existence and in what they can know by their senses alone. If all that awaits life is annihilation, moral standards are meaningless. Whether a person lives a life of sensual enjoyment or renunciation, it is all the same. Stretched further such a creed would justify murder, robbery, dacoity, theft and such other crimes, and leave no incentive for generosity, charity and munificence. The second possibility presupposes that a man is either an angel or a devil, which are extremes in human nature. Usually, however, he is a mixture of good and evil, and to find out the residue, after subtracting points for evil and adding for goodness is a complicated process. Heaven and hell can be only for those who are either wholly good or wholly evil. Besides the ideas of heaven and hell conjured up by various religions show that the reward and the punishment meted out in these places will be out of all proportion to the deeds done. Thirdly, the concept of heaven and hell is superfluous. All the ills, bodily and mental, are present on the earth itself as well as all the joys and pleasures. Reward and punishment are possible in the world itself. A man who dies in a fire which breaks out in a building, or one who suffers the agonies of cancer, experiences all the suffering which hell can inflict, while peace following contemplation, the sense of well-being and a contented life, are adequate reward.

The third alternative, therefore, i.e., transmigration, is the one which can be acceptable. This is also confirmed by the Scriptures. The *Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad* says: 'As a leech moving on a blade of grass reaches its end, takes hold of another, and draws itself together towards it, so does the Self, after throwing off this body, take hold of another support and draw itself together towards it'.⁴⁶

46. *Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad*, 4 : 4 : 3

CHAPTER—III: THE HEREAFTER

‘Deal gently with the people, and be not harsh; cheer them and condemn them not. Ye will meet with many “people of the book” who will question thee, what is the key to heaven? Reply to them (the key to heaven is) to testify to the truth of God, and to do good work’.

*The Sayings of Muhammad*¹⁷

1. Religions have belief in a hereafter.

The hereafter is one of those things which come within the head of the unseen. No one has come back after death to narrate or describe it. Yet in almost all religions there is belief in life after death, either a life of pleasure, which we call ‘heaven’ or a life of torment called ‘hell’. Before going into the question whether a hereafter is likely to exist or not, the beliefs of some religions about it may be examined.

We have already seen the view of Hinduism about the path of the soul after it leaves the body (see chapter on The Soul, aphorisms 4-7). As soon as a human being dies, the soul withdraws into itself all the permanent atoms, beginning with speech and ending with *praana*, and there occurs a sudden lighting up of the whole region of the heart. This illumination takes place in the hearts of all persons at death, whether they are wise or ignorant. But in the case of the wise man the soul is able to see and select the particular artery known as the *sushumnaa* (the hundred and first artery) by which his soul escapes. The reason why such a soul is able to spot the *sushumnaa* artery is that he is assisted in three ways, viz., (1) by devotional knowledge (2) by the favour of the Lord Hari, and (3) through the memory of the *aatvaahika devas* (gods who have conducted the soul on the God-ward path). After the outgoing soul is able to muster this triple assistance, the Lord points out to it the location of the

47. Trans. Allama Sir Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, John Murray

sushumnaa artery and the soul is able to make its exit through it. Regarding this the *Chhaandogya Upanishad* says: 'There are one hundred and one arteries of the heart, one of which pierces the crown of the head. Moving upward by it, a man reaches the immortals. Others serve for departing elsewhere, yea, elsewhere'.⁴⁸ Thus the *sushumnaa* artery carries the departing soul of the wise man who attains immortality (by residing in Brahmaloaka), and the other souls of the not wise, who are attached to worldly existence, go out of the other arteries for rebirth in the world again. (The attainment of immortality here does not mean liberation, but only sojourn in the land of the gods). The *Bhagavata Puraana* says that the *manas* of human beings is permeated by their deeds and their causes, and the *manas* passes from one body to another. The soul follows the *manas*. Through the destiny of karma the *manas* meditates over the things seen and heard and gradually loses its memory in regard to them. This *manas*, entering into another body, thus ceases to remember the experiences of previous bodies. Thus death is ultimately absolute forgetfulness.⁴⁹

Hinduism also believes in *narka* (hell) and *swarga* (heaven), but it has many schools which do not subscribe to such concrete forms of heaven and hell. *Swarga* is the heaven of Indra, the abode of the inferior gods and the beatified mortals. It is believed to be situated on Mount Meru, while *narka* is a place of torture to which evil souls are sent, Manu enumerates twenty-one hells. Other authorities mention different numbers.

Christianity believes in heaven and hell and the Day of Judgement when everybody will be judged. St. Paul says about life after death: 'For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself, and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies which we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies. These earthly bodies make us

48. *Chhaandogya Upanishad*, 8: 6: 6

49. *Bhagavata Puraana*, 11: 22: 37

groan and sigh, but we wouldn't like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us and, as a guarantee, he has given us his Holy Spirit.

'Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus'.⁵⁰

About heaven St. Paul again says: 'Fourteen years ago I was taken up to heaven for a visit. Don't ask me whether my body was there or just my spirit, for I don't know; only God can answer that. But anyway, there I was in paradise and heard things so astounding that they are beyond a man's power to describe or put into words'.⁵¹

Islam believes that there are three stages after death, (1) From death to Resurrection—the Barzakh, in which the outgoing soul is questioned by angels about his spiritual state, as a consequence of which the truthful and virtuous are assured of happiness till the Last Day, and the untruthful, hypocrites, infidels and unbelievers are given dreadful punishment lasting till the Day of Reckoning. (2) The Last Day and Resurrection, when the entire material world is destroyed by God and everyone is raised up again. This is the Day of Reckoning when everyone will be asked to render full account of his doings on earth. The good will be assigned to paradise and the evil to hell. (3) In the last stage those assigned to hell will suffer unmitigated misery and distress while the dwellers of paradise will enjoy a state of eternal bliss.

The Islamic paradise is an abode of cool shady groves, having every enjoyment. There are all things in it which the souls could desire and the eyes delight in; rivers of water incorruptible, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes; rivers of wine of joy to those who drink; rivers of honey pure

50. 2 *Corinthians*, 5: 1-6 (The Living Bible)

51. 2 *Corinthians*, 12: 2-4 (The Living Bible)

and clear, and all kinds of fruits. No sense of fatigue shall touch the dwellers of heaven. In hell, on the contrary, fire will burn the faces of the dwellers of hell, and they will therein grin with lips displaced. There will be a fire whose smoke and flames will hem them in, like the walls and roofs of a tent. If they implore relief they will be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces. The *Quraan* vividly describes the tortures of those who dwell in hell: 'But those who deny (their Lord)—for them will be cut out a garment of Fire; over their heads will be poured out boiling water. With it will be scalded what is within their bodies, as well as (their skins). In addition, there will be maces of iron (to punish) them. Every time they wish to get away therefrom, from anguish, they will be forced back therein, and (it will be said), "Taste ye the Penalty of Burning!" Verily the tree of Zaqqum will be the food of the sinful,—like molten brass; it will boil in their insides, like the boiling of scalding water. (A voice will cry:) "Seize ye him and drag him into the midst of the Blazing Fire! Then pour over his head the Penalty of Boiling Water". And he is given for drink boiled fetid water. In gulps will he sip it, but never will be near swallowing it down his throat: death will come to him from every quarter, yet he will not die; and in front of him will be a chastisement unrelenting.'⁵²

The Zoroastrians, too, believe in a heaven and hell, residence in which is the culmination of the soul's fate after its judgement by God. They believe that after death the soul hovers round the body for three nights. 'The first night it contemplates the words of its past life, the second the thoughts, and the third the deeds. These three nights are a time of regret for the soul, regret at the death of the body, and a time of yearning for the reunification of the body with the soul. During this time the demons lurk close at hand, ever eager to inflict suffering and punishment regardless of whether it is justified. The soul, therefore, needs the protection of the just Sraosha (the god of Obedience or Discipline), protection effected by the offerings and prayers of the relatives of the deceased. The three nights are also a time of anguish and consolation—anguish at the thought of the soul's misdeeds in life,

52. Mohammad Asif Kidwai, *What Islam Is?* page 125-6

consolation at the thought of its merits.⁵³ After this the soul, according to Zoroastrian belief, goes to be judged. If the good outweighs the evil, the soul goes to heaven, and if it is the other way round, to hell. If both are equally balanced it goes to an intermediate place. The journey of the souls after being judged in this manner is described thus: 'As the souls leave the place of judgment they are met by a guide. The righteous are met by a fragrant wind and a maiden more beautiful than man has ever met before. Astounded at her beauty the soul asks who she is and whence she came. She replies, "I am the Conscience of thine own self". She is the manifestation of the soul's own thoughts, word and deeds. The wicked soul, on the other hand, is met by a foul stench and a naked most loathsomely diseased old hag, the manifestation of its thoughts, words and deeds'.⁵⁴ The Zoroastrian heaven is a series of stations one higher than the other. The soul which has been allotted heaven passes successively to these stations which are four—the star station, the moon station, the station of the sun, and that of the god Garodman. Hell on the other hand, is a place of intense cold and heat, dimly dark and with an unbearable stench. 'Everyone in hell is packed in so tight that life is intolerable, yet all believe that they are alone and time drags so slowly that after three days they believe that the nine thousand-year period of the world has elapsed. Everywhere there are vile creatures seemingly as high as mountains, which tear and seize the souls of the wicked. The miserable wretches suffer from the extremes of driving snow and the heat of the brisk-burning fire, from foul stench, stones and ashes.'⁵⁵

Thus belief in the hereafter is a common one with most religions. They believe that the soul does not die with the body, but lives on to experience some kind of existence, which according to some religions (like Islam and Christianity) is some kind of suspended animation awaiting final judgement. Others (like Zoroastrianism) favour speedy reward and punishment, and yet others a brief existence ending in rebirth (or in rare cases) liberation.

53. John R. Hinnells, *Persian Mythology* Hamlyn, 1973

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

2. The concept of after life is for the expiation of works.

From the accounts of after life, heaven and hell, we see that the fundamental reason for conceiving them is to reward men for good deeds and punish them for evil deeds. As the Bible says, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap'.⁵⁶ The vivid descriptions of heaven and hell contained in different mythologies are to act as a deterrent on evil and an incentive to goodness. There are two major points which these accounts signify, (1) that our works will be judged evenly and fairly by God, and (2) that reward and punishment, as the case may be, is inevitable and cannot be escaped. In the *Quraan* the Prophet says, 'We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgement, so that not a single soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it into account! and enough are We to take account'.⁵⁷ The punishment for an evil deed, too, is inevitable. The *Dhammapada* says:

'Not in the heights of the heavens, not in the depths of the sea
Not in the caves of the mountains, taking a refuge there,
Nowhere at all may be found a single corner of the earth,
Where, taking footing, a man may be loosed from his evil
deeds'.⁵⁸

3. Since the expiation of actions can be accomplished in this very life, there is no need for another.

To conceive of life as existing on places other than our own is perfectly justified. One cannot be so sure or self-centred as to insist that life exists on earth alone. There can be other forms of life also, forms higher than our own. There has been a lot of speculation, for example, about the likelihood of life on Mars or Venus. There may be other worlds than our own, or again there may not be. All this is in the realm of speculation. The point to consider however, is that since joy and suffering exist in great and low degrees in worldly life itself, what is the necessity of

56. *Galatians* 6.

57. *Quraan*, 30: 47 (Trans. Mohammed Asif Kidwai).

58. *Dhammapada*, 127.

postulating a heaven and hell for such a purpose? Since actions can be expiated here on earth itself, it is superfluous to postulate a heaven or hell for this purpose. The world itself is the ground for the soul's punishment and reward. The fruits of action are obtained in life itself, for life can provide opportunity both for suffering and enjoyment. According to Islam also 'Heaven and hell are not places of enjoyment and torture to be met with only after death; they are realities even here'.⁵⁹ 'When the Prophet was asked where hell was if paradise extended over the whole of the heavens and the earth, he replied: "Where is the night when the day comes?" This clearly shows that paradise and hell are more like two conditions than two places'.⁶⁰

4. There is fullness of expiation in worldly existence.

One may object that the opportunity provided for punishment in life on earth is not commensurate with the evil action that human beings perform. For example a man may murder, torture or rape, and such acts require the extreme punishments described in the accounts of hell in various religions (see aphorism 6 of this chapter). The sufferings of life on earth may not be such as to adequately punish such utterly depraved and evil persons.

This argument has no force because suffering is not merely physical. It is mental also. Mental anguish can be of greater intensity than even extreme physical pain. Therefore, human life can provide an effective field for the punishment of evil deeds.

5. The human body is necessary for experience, therefore expiation can only be on earth.

Although various religions have given graphic descriptions of hell and heaven (see aphorism 1 *ante*), one point which has to be taken into account is that experience can be obtained by the soul only in a body. It is only when the soul finds a body and combines with the intellect that experience is possible. Unless this is so there can be no punishment in the form of suffering or

59. Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Quran*, Introduction page lv.

60. Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Quran*, Introduction, page lxiii.

reward in the form of enjoyment. Both joy and sorrow presuppose a body and a mind. When the soul goes out of the body it is bodiless. Therefore it is difficult to conceive of its undergoing joy or suffering. As we have seen when St. Paul bears witness to heaven in *Corinthians* he says, 'Don't ask me whether my body was there or just my spirit, for I don't know; only God can answer that'.⁶¹ The punishment in hell or enjoyment in heaven, therefore, is for the disembodied soul. But, as we have seen, the soul is eternal and beyond experience (see chapter on The Soul, aphorism 23). The *Bhagavad Geeta* says, 'This soul is incapable of being cut, it is proof against fire, impervious to water, and undrivable as well. This soul is eternal, omnipresent, immovable, constant and everlasting'.⁶² Thus all the punishments by fire, water and so forth, described in the hells by religions, which the soul is made to undergo at some time after escaping from the body, cannot effect the soul, and without a body such punishments are not possible. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that expiation of works is not possible in heaven or hell, but in the world itself.

6. A God of mercy and love cannot inflict punishment which is barbaric and torturous.

The punishments which are described as awaiting the evil soul in hell are more in the form of torture than of ordinary punishment—burning with fire, bathing in seas of pus, being made to drink boiling water and so forth. Zoroastrianism, for example, describes the following punishments:

'A woman who had committed adultery was suspended by the breasts to hell; and noxious creatures seized her whole body.

'A man who had given false measure in trading they ever forced him to measure dust and ashes, and they ever gave him to eat.

'A ruler who was unmerciful was held in the atmosphere and fifty demons ever flogged him before and behind with darting serpents.

61. *Corinthians*, 12: 3.

62. *Bhagavad Geeta*, 2: 24.

‘A man who had ever been selfish with many riches remained stretched on a rack, and a thousand demons trampled upon him with great brutality and violence’.⁶³

Some of these tortures are so harsh indeed that it is difficult to imagine the human body being able to bear such barbarous treatment. Even if it is believed that the soul is endowed with a body when it undergoes such punishment in hell, how can the body remain alive with such torture? (It has already been stated that such physical punishments cannot affect the soul—see the previous aphorism).

God is conceived in most religions to be a God of mercy and love; qualities which are not opposed to justice. Of mercy Shakespeare says:

‘It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice’.⁶⁴

In the *Quraan* the al-Faatiha itself begins thus: ‘In the name of the One God, the Compassionate One, the Merciful’. Hinduism also subscribes to this idea. In the *Raamacharitamaanasa* Lord Shiva says to his consort, Paarvatee, ‘There is no one in the world who is so benevolent as Lord Raama—neither guru, nor father, nor mother, nor brother, nor master. Even the love of gods, men and sages, is selfish, and they love only for their advantage’.⁶⁵ In the same manner the Bible says, ‘Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his lovingkindness continues forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his lovingkindness continues forever’.⁶⁶

A God who is so loving and kind cannot be conceived of as causing the tortures described by various religions on men who have erred. The same object can be served by tying souls to the wheel of existence. Life on earth itself has all imaginable suffer-

63. John R. Hinnells, *Persian Mythology*, Hamlyn.

64. *The Merchant of Venice*, 4 : 1.

65. *Kishikindhaa Kaanda*, 11 : 1.

66. *Psalms*, 136: 1-2 (The Living Bible).

ing, as the *Nyaaya Sootras* says, 'Birth is pain because it is connected with various distresses'.⁶⁷ So the world itself is the means of man's reward and punishment.

7. The hereafter signifies merely the state of bliss which follows liberation.

Shakespeare says:

'Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead'.⁶⁸

All existence on earth is bondage. Life is, in the last analysis, full of sorrows (see chapter on Aims of Life, aphorisms 19-21). Joys bring the disappointment of their passing away, and pleasure brings satiety:

'For pleasures are like poppies spread
You pluck the flower, the bloom is fled'.

When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, God said to Eve: 'You shall bear children in intense pain and suffering', and to Adam He said, 'All your life you will struggle to extract a living from it (the soil). It will grow thorns and thistles for you, and you shall eat its grasses. All your life you will sweat to master it, until your dying day'.⁶⁹ In the *Kaṭha Upanishad* Yama, the god of Death, tells Nachiketas, 'Fools dwelling in the very midst of ignorance, yet vainly fancying themselves to be wise and learned, go round and round staggering too and fro, like blind men led by the blind. To the careless child, befooled by the delusion of wealth, the path of the hereafter never appears. "This is the only world and there is no other"—he thinks, and falls into my clutches again and again'.⁷⁰

The way out of the misery of existence is to get rid of the rounds of births and deaths, and this can be achieved by emancipation, which is the final goal of life. According to Paatanjali

67. *Nyaaya Sootras*, 4: 1: 55.

68. *King Lear*, 4: 7: 46.

69. *Genesis*, 3: 16-19 (*The Living Bible*)

70. *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 2: 5-6.

emancipation is the state in which 'The qualities, having fulfilled their object, cease to cause a succession of changes'. He says 'Absolute freedom comes when the qualities, becoming devoid of the object of the soul, become latent; or the power of consciousness becomes established in its own nature'.⁷¹ When the soul, because of its desireless action, no longer needs to be punished or rewarded in a worldly existence, it finally is not reborn, and merges with God. In this sense the hereafter exists. It means not the presence of life after death, but the absence of life on earth. Such a hereafter is not for the purpose of punishment. It is rather a state in which the soul, annulled from the grief of worldly existence, dwells in eternal peace.

8. The soul exists as spirit only during its journey from one body to another.

Although religions mention ghosts and spirits, as for example, Hinduism believes that those whose children fail to perform the funeral ceremonies, and those who worship ghosts, become ghosts; yet there is no reason to suppose that a soul exists as a spirit, good or evil, for a sustained period of time. After death the soul, as we have seen (see chapter on The Soul, aphorisms 4-7) escapes from the body to inhabit another one. During this brief period of transition it may be bodiless, though not in the strict sense, for even then it is encased in the subtle body. But for this, the concept of ghosts and evil spirits is purely imaginary, and to believe that such spirits affect human beings is fantastic. If we closely analyse and question stories of ghosts etc., we will find ultimately that they are all hearsay accounts, and no one has actually seen them.

9. And apart from the soul's journey from one body to another, there is no need for it to wander bodiless.

It is necessary for the soul to journey from its old body which it leaves at death, to the new one which it inhabits. With this exception, the soul always finds for itself a body, till the stage of liberation when it has no longer to take birth in the world (see chapter on God, aphorisms 13 and 14). The concept of bodiless

71. *Yoga Soolras*, 4: 32 & 34.

spirits, ghosts and so forth, is therefore quite irrational.

Whether the soul can revert to a lower form of life after inhabiting a human being, is an interesting question. Hinduism seems to believe this is possible. The *Chhaandogya Upanishad* says: 'Those whose conduct on earth has been good will soon get a new birth as a Brahmin, Kshattriya or Vaisha. But one who has committed evil deeds will soon get an evil birth as a dog, pig, or outcaste. One who has practised neither meditation nor has performed rituals is given the birth of an ephemeral creature (like a moth, a fly, or a mosquito)'.⁷² The rational view, however, would be that once the soul takes birth in a human body it cannot be reborn in a lower form of life. Firstly, the progressive development of life from plant life to man, would be against such a view. Secondly, the descent into lower life is not necessary because punishment for evil is possible to the soul while it is in a human being. It is possible that an animal may be more content than a man. A proverb says, 'The best metal is iron, the best vegetable wheat, and the worst animal man'.

10. The supernatural is nothing else than the power of God.

While magic is mere sleight-of-hand, the supernatural is an act of a super-human being. The deeds of saints, for example, like the miracles of Sai Baba, Ramana Mahaarishee and so forth, need explanation. Some persons dismiss these as trickery, and even challenge to prove them as untrustworthy. The performance of miracles by saints, and by supermen like Raama, Christ, Buddha and others, cannot be brushed aside in such a manner. We have already seen that God dwells in the human soul (see chapter on God. aphorism 9). This being so His power can be manifest in man as well. Vivekaananda defines religion as 'the manifestation of the Divinity that is already in man'. In the same way Shankara says: 'As the water in the tank covered by a collection of moss does not show itself, so the soul enveloped by the five sheaths, produced by its power and beginning with the *annamaya* (the outmost sheath of goodness) does not manifest itself.

72. *Chhaandogya Upanishad*, 5 : 10 : 7-8.

Upon the removal of the moss is seen the pure water capable of allaying heat and thirst, and of immediately yielding great enjoyment to man. When the five sheaths are removed the pure *pratyagatman* (the logos), the eternal happiness shines forth'.⁷³

Thus the power of God is contained in man; only it is veiled. When that veil is removed, it shines forth. The performance of miracles is, therefore, possible for one in whom this power is released, because then the human being is more God-like than human.

73. *Crest-jewel of Wisdom*, 151-153.

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