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Dear Seeker!

This must be said of this book: It is the authentic Voice of the Divine Phenomenon, that is setting right the moral codes and behaviour of millions of men and women today. And, so, it merits careful and devoted study.

The Lord has declared that when ethical standards fall and man forgets or ignores His glorious destiny, He will Himself come down among men and guide humanity along the straight and sacred path. The Lord has come; He is guiding those who accept the guidance; He is calling on all who have strayed away to retrace their steps. Baba's love and wisdom know no bounds, His grace knows no obstacle. He is no hard taskmaster; His solicitude for our welfare and real progress is overwhelming.

Bhagavan has announced Himself as the Divine Teacher of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. By precept and example, through His writings and discourses, letters and conversations, He has been instilling the supreme wisdom and instructing all mankind to translate it into righteous living, inner peace, and universal love. When the Ramakatha Rasa Vahini, the uniquely authentic nectarine stream of the Rama story, was serialized in full in the Sanathana Sarathi, Bhagavan blessed readers with a new series, which He named Bharathiya Paramartha Vahini (Stream of Indian Spiritual Values). While these precious essays on the basic truths that fostered and fed Indian culture for ages before history began were being published, Bhagavan decided to continue the flow of illumination and instruction under a more comprehensive name, Sathya Sai Vahini - "The Stream of Divine Grace", the Ganga from the Lotus Feet of the Lord. This book contains the two Vahinis merged in a master stream.

Inaugurating these series, Bhagavan wrote for publication in the Sanathana Sarathi, "Moved by the urge to cool the heat of conflict and to quench the agonizing thirst for 'knowledge about yourself' with which you are afflicted, see, here it comes, the Sathya Sai Vahini, wave after wave, with the Sanathana Sarathi as the medium between you and me." With infinite

compassion, this Sathya Sai incarnation of the Omniwill is freeing millions of people in all lands from disease, distress, despair, narcotics, narcissism, and nihilism. He is encouraging those who suffer gloom through wilful blindness to light the lamp of love to see the world and the lamp of wisdom to see themselves. "This is a tantalizing true-false world; its apparent diversity is an illusion; it is ONE, but it is cognized by the maimed multiple vision of humans as Many", says Bhagavan. This book is the twin lamp He has devised for us.

Lord Krishna aroused Arjuna from the gloomy depression into which he led his mind, at the very moment when duty called on Arjuna to be himself - the famed warrior, ready and eager to fight on behalf of right against might. Krishna effected the cure by reminding him of the Atma that was his reality and of Himself being the Atma that he was. Bhagavan says that we too are easily prone to get caught "in the coils of cleverness and the meshes of dialectical logic. The key to success in spiritual endeavour (and what is life worth, if it is not dedicated to that high endeavor?) is philosophical inquiry and moral advance, both culminating in the awareness of the Atma, the source and sum of all the energy and activity that is." We are all motivated by fear, doubt, and attachments, just as Arjuna was. We are all hesitant at the crossroad between this and That, the wave and the ocean.

But, created by Him, we are "the miracle of miracles". Bhagavan says, "What is not in man cannot be anywhere outside him. What is visible outside him is but a rough reflection of what really is in him." "The Atma is free. It is purity. It is fullness. It is unbounded. Its centre is the body but its circumference is beyond the beyond." Man has been endowed with a superintellect, which can recognize the existence of the Atma, strive to bring it into his awareness, and succeed.

However, very few are human enough to seek to know who they are, why they are here, wherefrom, and where they go from here. They move about with temporary names, encased in evanescent ever-changing bodies.

So, Bhagavan accosts us, "Listen! Children of Immortality! Listen! Listen to the message of the sages who had the vision of the most majestic Person, the

Purushothama, the Foremost and the First, who dwells beyond the realms of illusion and elusion. O ye human beings! You are by nature ever full. You are indeed God moving on earth. Is there a greater sin than calling you 'sinners'? When you accept this appellation, you defame yourselves.

Arise! Cast off the humiliating feeling that you are sheep. Do not be deluded into that idea. You are Atma. You are drops of nectar, immortal truth, beauty, goodness. You have neither beginning nor end. All things material are your bondslaves; you are not bondslaves, as you imagine now." Bhagavan says, "Through the unremitting practice of truth, righteousness, and fortitude, the Divinity quiescent in the individual has to be induced to manifest itself in daily living, transforming it into the joy of truly loving." "Know the Supreme Reality; breathe It, bathe in It, live in It. Then It becomes all of you and you become fully It." A material object is not self-expressive. It depends wholly on the capacity for knowledge (chith-sakthi) of the individual Atma for its manifestation (prakasa). The relative world of objects is dependent upon the relative consciousness of the individual Atma (jivi). When the object is further scrutinized and the true basis of the Plurality is grasped, Brahman or the Oversoul as the first Principle is acknowledged as a logical necessity. Subsequently, when sense control, mind cleansing, concentration, and inner silence are achieved, what appeared as a logical necessity dawns upon the purified consciousness as a Positive Permanent Impersonal Will (Prajnanam Brahma), whose expression is all this.

Sathya Sai Vahini reveals to us in unmistakable terms that the self in man is "no other than the Overself, or God". We are told that this is true not only of mankind but of all beings. Everywhere and anywhere! In fact, "Will causes this unreal multiplicity of Cosmos on the One that He is. He can, by the same Will, end the phenomenon." "Being (God) is behind becoming, and becoming merges in being. This is the eternal play." says Bhagavan.

As Bhagavan writes, "the supreme end of education, the highest purpose of instruction, is to help us to become aware of the universal immanent Impersonal." Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in His role as the Teacher of Teachers, is instructing us herein for this supreme adventure of the soul. Seekers on this

pilgrimage have in Him a compassionate guide and guardian, for He is the embodiment of the very Will that planned the Play.

As we are led through the valley of this Vahini by Bhagavan, holding us by the hand, He exhorts us to admire, appreciate, and adore the seers and sages of many lands who pioneered this realm and laid limits, bounds, preparatory disciplines, and practices to smooth the path and hasten the discovery of truth. He writes of the Vedas and later spiritual texts, of the forms of worship that have stood the test of centuries of loyal acceptance, and of disciplinary codes for the four stages of human life and for humans with pronounced inborn characteristics - the vertically uplifting pure (sathwic), the horizontal expansive emotional (rajasic), and the declining dull (thamasic).

He clarifies the role of karma (action) and its consequence. "Like a frail ship caught in a stormy sea, man climbs up a gigantic wave and reaches its froth-edged peak. The next moment, he is hurled into the trough, only to rise again. The rise and fall are both consequences of his own deeds. They design the palace and the prison for man.

Grief and joy is the resound, the reflection or reaction of one's own actions. The individual soul (jivi) can escape both by cultivating the attitude of a witness, not involved in the activities it has to do." Bhagavan writes of yoga as the process of "coming together of the individual soul (jivatma) and the Highest Atma (Paramatma), the Self and the Overself". He elaborates on the path of love (devotion, bhakthi), of selfless activity (karma), of mastery over the mind, of sublimation of consciousness (wisdom, jnana). Bhagavan analyses the rights and responsibilities of the individual and society and reveals to us that they have the one underlying purpose of spiritual fulfilment.

To sum up, Sathya Sai Vahini is the Gita given to us by the Person who, as the eternal charioteer (Sanathana Sarathi), is eager and ready to hold the reins of our senses, mind, consciousness, ego, and intellect and to guide us safely to the Abode of Supreme Peace (Prasanthi Nilayam), the goal of all mankind.

May we all be blessed by His love and grace.

N. Kasturi

1. The Supreme Reality

The process of living has the attainment of the Supreme as its purpose and meaning. By the Supreme is meant the Atma. All those who have grown up in the Bharathiya (Indian) culture know that the Atma is everywhere.

But when asked how they have come to know of this, some assert that the Vedas (most ancient spiritual revelations) have taught them so, others quote spiritual texts (sastras), and others rely on the experiential testimony of the great sages. Each of them bases their conclusion and proves its correctness according to the sharpness of their intellect.

Many great people have directed their intelligence toward the discovery of the omnipresent Atma and succeeded in visualizing that Divine Principle. In this country, Bharath (India), those who have tried earnestly to pursue these goals have had evidence of their successful realization placed before them by preachers, pundits or scholars, aspirants, and ascetics. However, among millions of people, we can count only a few who have been able to visualize the Universal Atma or the Self in All.

No living being, except the human, has been endowed with intelligence and discriminative faculty, heightened to this degree, in order to enable it to visualize Atma. This is why humanity is acclaimed as the crown of creation and why the scriptures (sastras) proclaim that the chance of being born as a person is a very rare piece of good fortune. People have the qualifications needed to seek the cause of creation; they have in them the urge and the capacity. They are utilizing the created universe for promoting their peace, prosperity, and safety; they are using the forces and things in nature for promoting this happiness and pleasure. This is approved by the Vedas.

Vedas reveal the Supreme

The Vedas are the authority for the faith of millions. They are the very words of God. The Hindus believe that the Vedas had no beginning and will have no

end. In the Vedas, God speaks to humanity. They are not books written by authors. They are revelations, conferred by God on many inquirers, of the ways of earning the Supreme Goal. They existed before they were revealed as valid paths and will continue to be valid even if people forget the paths. They did not originate at any period of time, nor can they be effaced at some other time. The dharma (supreme law of conduct) that the Vedas allow us to glimpse is also without beginning or end, for it refers to the Supreme Goal.

Of course, a few may argue that, though it may be conceded that the dharma relating to the Supreme Goal has no ending, surely it must have had a beginning. The Vedas declare that the cycle of creation-dissolution has no point where it begins and no point where it ends. It is a continuous wheel, and there is no change in the quantum of cosmic energy - either increase or decrease; it is ever the same, ever established in Itself. The Created and the Creator are two parallel lines, with their beginnings unknown and their ends incomprehensible. They are moving at equal distances from each other, forever and ever. Though God is ever active, His will and the power behind it are not clear to the human intellect.

The Supreme, according to the inheritors of Indian (Bharathiya) culture, is Vastness Itself. It rises to the high skies and roams free in that expanse. It was declared in clear terms long prior to the historical period. The study of the concept of the Supreme and the propagation of this concept suffered serious setbacks in the course of history, but it has confronted each of these setbacks with success and is today asserting itself, alive and alert. This is proof of the innate strength of this revelation.

The conceptions of the Supreme Goal as laid down in Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism endeavoured to subsume into their categories the Indian (Bharathiya) concept and transfuse it as part of themselves. But the Indian concept did not accept an alien status in its own "birth place"; on the other hand, it clarified for those religions themselves their own concept of the Ultimate, emphasized the unity of all viewpoints, and established cordiality on the basis of the absence of difference. While the stream of knowledge regarding the Supreme Goal discovered by the Indian saints flowed on, the

concepts of the other faiths remained as pools beside it.

In India itself, many sects were born like mushrooms from out of the main faith. They tried to pluck by the roots or to cause mortal damage to the basic concept of Hinduism regarding the Reality, the Supreme. But, as in a terrific quake of land the waters of the sea recede only to return with thousand-fold fury, roaring back upon the shore it had seemed to quit, this stream of Indian (Bharathiya) wisdom was restored to its pristine glory when it rose above the confusions and conflicts of history. When the agitations subsided, it attracted the varied sects that distracted the mind of people and merged them into its expansive form. The Atma principle of the Indians is all embracing, all-revealing, all-explaining, and all-powerful.

The Atmic principle of Love

Developing faith in the Atma principle and loving it earnestly - this is the real worship. The Atma is the one and only Loved One for humanity. Feel that it is more lovable than any object here or hereafter - that is the true adoration one can offer to God. This is what the Vedas teach. The Vedas do not teach acceptance of a bundle of frightfully hard rules and restrictions; they do not hold before one a prison house where one is shut in by the bars of cause and effect. They teach us that there is One who is the sovereign behind all those rules and restrictions, One who is the core of each object, each unit of energy, each particle or atom, One under whose orders alone the five elements - ether, air, fire, water, earth - do operate. Love Him, adore Him, worship Him, say the Vedas. This is the grand philosophy of love as elaborated in the Vedas.

The supreme secret is: people must live in the world where they are born like the lotus leaf, which, though born in water, floats upon it without being affected or wetted by it. Of course, it is good to love and adore God with a view to gain some valuable fruit either here or hereafter, but since there is no fruit or object more valuable than God or more worthwhile than God, the Vedas advise us to love God with no touch of desire in our minds.

Love, since you must love for love's sake; love God, since whatever He can give is less than He Himself; love Him alone, with no other wish or demand. This is the supreme teaching of the Indians (Bharathiyas).

Divine Love

Dharmaja, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, as depicted in the Mahabharatha, is the ideal of this type of lover. When he lost his vast empire, which included all India, to his enemies and had perforce to live in caves among the Himalayan ranges with his consort Droupadi, she asked him one day, "Lord! You are undoubtedly the topmost amongst those who follow the path of dharma unwaveringly; how did such a terrible calamity happen to you?" She was stricken with sorrow.

Dharmaja replied, "Droupadi! Do not grieve. Look at this Himalayan range. How magnificent! How glorious!

How beautiful! How sublime! It is so splendid a phenomenon that I love it without limit. It will not grant me anything, but it is my nature to love the beautiful, the sublime. So here, too, I reside with love. The embodiment of this sublime beauty is God. This is the meaning and significance of the love for God.

"God is the only entity that is worth loving. This is the lesson that the age-long search of our Indians (Bharathiyas) has revealed. This is why I am loving Him. I will not wish for any favour from Him. I will not pray for any boon. Let Him keep me where He loves to keep me. The highest reward for my love is His love, Droupadi!

My love is not an article in the market." Dharmaja understood that love is a divine quality and has to be treated so. He taught Droupadi that love is the spontaneous nature of those who are ever in the awareness of the Atma.

The love that has Atma as its basis is pure and sublime. But, since people are bound by various pseudo-forms of love, they believe themselves to be just

individual souls (jiva), isolated and individualised, and deprive themselves of the fullness and vastness of divine love. So, people have to win the grace of God. When a person secures it, the individual soul will be released from identification with the body and can identify itself with the Atma. This consummation is referred to in the Vedas as "liberation from bonds (bandha-vicchedana)", or "release (moksha)".

Divinity within each one

To battle against the tendency of body identification and win the grace of God as the only means of victory, spiritual exercises have been laid down, such as philosophical inquiry, as well as sense control (dama) and other disciplines of the six-fold spiritual discipline. Their practice will ensure the purification of the consciousness; it will then become like a clean mirror that can reflect the object, and the Atma will stand revealed clearly. For the attainment of the highest wisdom (jnana-siddhi), the cleansing of the consciousness (chittha-suddhi) is the royal path. For the pure in heart, this is easy to achieve. This is the central truth of the Indian search for the ultimate reality. This is the very vital breath of the teaching.

The Indian (Bharathiya) approach is not to waste time in discussions and assertions of faith in dogmas. The Indians do not delight in the sight of empty oyster shells thrown upon the beach. They seek to gain the pearls that lie in the depths of the sea; they would gladly dive into those depths and courageously seek the pearls. The Vedas show them the ideal to follow and the road that leads to the realization. The ideal is the awareness of the supreme truth, which lies beyond the knowledge gained by the senses. The Vedas remind one that the nonphysical Atma is in the physical "them" and that embodiment of truth is the supreme Atma (Paramatma). That alone is real and permanent; the rest are all transitory, evanescent.

The Vedas took form only to demonstrate and emphasize the existence of God. The Indians who attained the highest goal of spiritual exercise have all traveled along the Vedic path and carried on their investigations according to Vedic teachings. The scriptures (sastras) contain authentic versions of their

experiences and the bliss they won. In the scriptures, and in the Upanishads, they assert, "We had the awareness of the Atma." Indians (Bharathiyas) do not aim at confronting a dogma or theory and scoring a victory over it; they aim at testing that dogma or theory in actual practice. Their goal is not mere empty faith; it is the stage reached (sthithi), the wisdom won (siddhi). The life-aim of the Indians is to reach, through constant spiritual exercise, the fulfilment that comes from the awareness of one's divinity. Mergence with the Divine is the attainment of fullness. This is the supreme victory for the Indian.

2. From Truth To Truth

Questions may be asked and doubts expressed by many about the state of a person after attaining fulfillment, the fullness of awareness. The person's life life will be saturated with unexcelled divine bliss (ananda).

The person will experience oneness of thought, emotion, and knowledge with all. The person will be in ecstasy, immersed in the One and Only, the eternal divine Principle, for that alone can confer joy during the process of living. Genuine joy is this and no other. God is the embodiment of eternal ever-full joy. Those loyal to Indian (Bharathiya) culture, whatever sect or faith they claim as their special mould, accept this axiom: God is the highest source of joy. This conclusion (matha) they accept as dearest and most pleasurable (abhimatha).

Self is fullness and bliss is wholeness

Fullness means wholeness. Wholeness implies One and not two or three. There cannot then be any place for the individual. When an individualized Atma or soul (jivi), the particularized differentiated self, has become whole and full, there is no possibility of its return to the consciousness of the objective world - such doubts may arise in the minds of many, but these doubts are not correct. When the individualised soul becomes fixed in the totality (samashiti), it loses all ideas of distinction and is ever in the consciousness of the totality, the One that subsumes the many. The person will then be aware that the Reality of each is the Reality of all and that that Reality is the One Indivisible Atma. The person will not exhibit any consciousness of distinction between individuals.

The Divine that it knows as the core of each "thing and being" is now recognized by it as the Divine that it itself is, so it will be deeper than ever in the fullness of bliss (ananda). How can it then experience separateness?

No, it cannot. The rays of that bliss illumine all religions. The sages and great

wise people (rishis) became aware of the bliss. They communicated that experience to the world in easily understandable language. The unreachable moon is made known by pointing a finger in the direction where it can be seen! So too, they brought within the purview of people the truth that lies beyond the reach of mind and speech, according to the state of consciousness that each of them had attained. Their teachings were not only simple but varied to educate and elevate all levels of understanding.

Merging of the individual in the Total

One feels happy when one has the knowledge that this one little body is one's own, right? Then, when one knows that two bodies belong to one, shouldn't one be twice as happy? In the same way, with the knowledge that one has an increasing number of bodies, the experience of happiness goes on increasing. When the whole world is known to be one body and world consciousness becomes part of the awareness, then the bliss will be full. To get this multi-consciousness, the limited egocentric prison walls must be destroyed.

When the ego-self (or jivi) identifies itself with the divine Atma, death will cease. When the ego-self identifies itself and merges with the bliss of the One, sorrow will cease. When it merges with spiritual wisdom (jnana), error will cease. "Material individualness is born out of delusion; this body, which creates that impression, is only an ever-evolving atom of a boundless ocean; the second entity in me is the other form, namely, the embodied Self; when the ego of mine merges with the divine Self in me, then the delusion disappears through the upsurge of its opposite, supreme knowledge." When one's thought matures in the process of time, undoubtedly all schools of thought have to reach this conclusion.

Significance of idol worship

A tree's value is estimated with reference to its fruits. Take idol worship, for example. Moralists, metaphysicians, philosophers, adherents of the path of devotion, and the foremost among the virtuous in all parts of the world have all agreed that idol worship is highly beneficial. As long as attachment to the

material body and possessions persists, worship of a material symbol is necessary. It is but a means, but many decry it as a superstition.

This is not correct. It is not the right approach. Such an attitude is just an outburst of foolishness.

Is it not a fact that the belief in one's being the body is a superstition? Can the body last forever? Is it not a skin doll with nine apertures, in which life is so perilously existent that a sneeze may cause collapse? Again, should we not characterize the life people lead, believing in the reality of this world, as another superstition? Isn't all the self-importance assumed by people who have positions of power and a great quantity of riches another foolish pose?

But acts done on the basis of faith in the Atma, the Reality within, can't be dubbed as superstitious or foolish.

For every opinion one expresses, if proper reasons are given, all will rejoice. But to declare as superstitious all that one doesn't like is a sign of frenzy, foolishness, or egotism.

We will find it impossible to love God or adore Him unless we meditate on some form; this is as essential as breathing is for sheer living. This is a necessary stage in the process of living. One has to accept it as such.

Childhood is the father of old age. Can old age condemn childhood or teenage as evil? To experience the divine Principle, idol worship is and has been a great help to many. How then can the aspirant and the practitioner of spiritual disciplines condemn idol worship after passing through that stage and deriving benefits from it? That would indeed be very wrong and inappropriate.

The Indian (Bharathiya) march toward the supreme Reality is not from untruth to truth. It is from truth to truth, from incomplete truth to complete truth, from a partial truth to full truth. For what are spiritual exercises?

Every effort made by people, from remote forest dwellers and unsophisticated tribals who adore the gross forms of Divinity to highly evolved seekers who adore the Full and the Absolute, is a spiritual exercise. Each such effort will take one a step forward in progress.

Each individual soul (jivi) is comparable to a bird; by longer and higher flights, it can rise up into the sky.

And a stage may finally be gained when it can fly right up to the full splendoured orb of the sun.

Eschewing dogmatism and violence

The basic truth of nature is the One in the many; that is the key to its understanding. The Indians (Bharathiyas) grasped this truth; they held fast to this key. People of other countries were content to lay down certain axioms and enforce belief in them. They insisted on acceptance of these axioms and observance of rules and regulations that arose out of them. They held one single coat before the individuals of the society where they lived and required every one to wear that same coat; there was no alternative coat for people it did not fit. They had to live without a coat to protect them against the chill wind.

The Indian approach was quite different. For each aspect or variation of feeling and thinking, volition and action, they made available a distinct name and form and provided modes of worship and ways of adoration in accordance with the emotional needs and intellectual calibre of the aspirants and devotees. Of course, a few had no need for such special consideration and treatment, but many took advantage of this concession and advanced in their march toward spiritual wisdom and liberation.

For one thing, never was it laid down as part of the Indian spiritual endeavour that idol worship is a must or a stage that has to be gone through. But there is one fact that each one must preserve in their memory: Indians may have attachment to their bodies, they may be attached to the upkeep and

development of their standards of living, but they would never yearn to cut the throats of others. Indians who are fanatic about religion would rather immolate themselves in flames raised and fed by them than, through hatred, burn alive those who do not accept and revere their religion. Indian spirituality negated the destruction of the Atma, the One inextinguishable Truth.

The message of India (Barath)

The ancient Indian religion fostered the faith that the Self in a person is no other than the Overself, or God.

Indian religion directs long journeys by men and women toward the goal of the splendour of God consciousness or the consciousness of the Divine - through varied paths, confronted and controlled by varied circumstances, but encouraged and enlightened by various types of faith.

Although the practices and rites might appear on the surface to be crude, they are not opposed to the ultimate truth. The seeming contradictions have to be interpreted as incidental to the need to inspire people with varied intellectual, moral, economic, and social backgrounds. For example, the light that comes through a tiny piece of coloured glass is of the same origin as bigger, clearer light. The extent, clarity, brightness, etc. of light depends only on the medium. The source of all light is the One Truth, the Source of all, the Basis of all, the Goal of all, the Reality in all, and the Centre in all. Like the thread on which pearls are strung as a rosary, God or the Overself is interpenetrative in all beings. In all beings. That is the message of India (Bharath). All beings everywhere, anywhere!

Examine carefully all texts and scriptures that deal with Indian culture and traditions. Find out whether any of them mention that liberation (moksha) or the highest realization is available only to Indians and not to others.

Can you produce a single statement on those lines? It can be emphatically asserted that you cannot. Indian spiritualism has limitless vastness and

immensely high ideals; it is a full stream of sanctifying ideations, flowing along with no decline or diminution, straight and smooth to the ocean of divine grace. The journey is direct, along a royal road toward the supreme goal.

Another point: The source of all spiritual principles recognized and revered by Indians (Bharathiyas) is God; He is the one supporting pillar. Therefore, no other support is needed for faith. Ancient Indian spirituality is the very foundation of all other faiths; it stands on the very summit. It has achieved victory over many opposing faiths, confronting them with many valid arguments and theories. Indians have no need to follow any religion or spiritual discipline besides their own, for nowhere else can one secure a discipline or truth that is not existing herein. Other faiths have adopted only some one or other of its beliefs and principles and placed them before people as ideals to be adopted.

What has to be borne in mind is this: Indian (Bharathiya) texts on spirituality are the most ancient in the whole world; they are the earliest studies and discoveries of the Atma, of personal and impersonal God, and of codes of conduct, individual and social, based on those revelations and discoveries. In no other country, among no other peoples, have such ancient teachings seen the light. There may be some misty ideas or brief glimpses, but they do not deserve the name "spiritual text" or "literature". The Vedic literature pictures not only spiritual inquiries by the sages and spiritual aspirants and their results but also their lines of thought, their yearnings and aspirations, their secular struggles and temporal problems.

3. The One Alone

The very first experience in the history of Indian thought is the thrill of wonder. This is expressed in the hymns (riks) found in Rig-veda, the earliest revelations of the Indian mind. These hymns are all about the demigods (devas) or the Shining Ones. There are many such deities - Indra, Varuna, Mitra, and Parjanya to name a few. They appear in these hymns, one after the other. Of these, Indra, with the thunderbolt (vajra) as his weapon, is the chief. He is the mighty one who confers rain upon the earth. Indra is so called because he is the master of the senses (indriyas), that is to say, he is the mind that handles the senses. He is also known as Puruhutha - puru meaning "often", hutha "invited", and the entire name meaning "the God who is most called upon".

The mind (which is identified with senses, since it masters them) is also adored in the Vedas as Rudra. The mind contacts the objective world and experiences it through the instrumentality of the five senses; this aspect of the mind is the Indra aspect. It has another capability. It can master the senses and become aware of the universal inner truth of the multiplicity called the objective world. This aspect of the mind is designated "Rudra". This is why the Vedas describe Indra and Rudra as the One with two names.

One God with many names

It is possible to quote many such descriptions about the other Gods. Yet, ultimately, all descriptions lead to the same conclusion. First, the hymns (riks) adore deities as presiding over some function or other. Then, these latter get transformed into different names and forms of the One God who has all the worlds in Itself, who is the Witness, resident in all hearts, and the Sovereign of all creation. Gradually, all other meanings and reactions are suppressed as not relevant.

For example, an element of fear is associated with the deity Varuna. Fear sprouts and spreads in some hymns, but soon the wisdom of the Aryans

(noble seekers) subjugates the fear. Many hymns are prayers to Varuna from people afraid of being punished by him for their sins. But the idea of a terrorizing God cannot flourish on Indian soil. Nor can many Gods of many natures. Indian culture and spiritual outlook upheld the One God or Iswara.

There is the One God (Iswara)! This axiom, that there can be only One and not many, has been current in India since very ancient times. Even in the ancient Vedic and Samhitha literature, this faith is already evident as an age-long belief.

But the notion of a personal God struck the thinkers and practitioners of this land as rather elementary, a kind of unripe stage in spiritual progress. It did not satisfy their highest aspirations. This attitude, found in the revelations of sages (rishis), has not been understood or appreciated by scholars and writers of other countries who have studied and commented on the Vedas and affiliated texts. They still dwell on the earlier belief in "many gods" or the later belief in "one personal God". Ignorance of this kind brings a smile to the lips of the Indian (Bharathiya).

Daring search for the Supreme Oneness

Really, even those who learn in their mother's laps to put faith in a God equipped with attributes, known by a name and having a recognizable form, have later to rise to a stage higher than this and become aware of the One, which is spoken of as "having many names and many forms". The spiritual disciplines (sadhanas) are directed to the realization of this truth. "The ONE - in Him alone is all this flux, all this changing cosmos established. He is the guide and guardian of every consciousness." All such denotations touch only the fringe of the ONE. Westerners said that one's intelligence can succeed in this venture. But the seekers of this land showed a heroism that could not be measured or limited - a fact that cannot but be accepted. Western philosophers, renowned for their daring insights into the realms of the spirit, have shown only a tiny spark of this heroism, so they are amazed at the intuitive and experiential heights reached by the sages of India.

This feeling of wonder was charmingly expressed by Professor Max Mueller. "Into whatever unknown realms of experience their causative and positive inquiry led them, the Indian seekers ventured boldly therein. For the sake of success in this adventure, they never hesitated to discard whatever they felt as an encumbrance. They were not affected by fear of how others might judge them." Max Mueller exhorted people to involve themselves in the nectarine stream of the search for the Supreme, flowing in India, for he felt that the Indian spiritual aspirants pursued the path of right, the path of truth.

"One alone is; the wise speak of It as many (Ekam sath; viprah bahudha vadanthi)." This indeed is most sublimely meaningful. This is the basic truth behind the spiritual efforts of India (Bharath) for ages. Even the theistic principle and practice that will spread all over the world with unprecedented benedictions in the coming years have as their basis this great axiom laid down by the sages of India, long long ago.

Unity in diversity

Hymns (riks) arose on various deities and divine forces because the sages (rishis) knew that each person can cognize "One alone is" only from their own viewpoint and that it is different for different persons, depending on the stage reached in clarifying and purifying the vision. The sages announced through that statement their discovery that the One is the subject that all the sages and saints, seers and poets, hymnists and composers adored and praised in various languages, during various moods, through various styles of expression.

Thus, consequences of the highest value to the world emerged from the declaration quoted above, "One alone is; the wise speak of It as many." For example, many are surprised that India is the one country where religious fanaticism is absent and no one hinders or harms the religious observances of another. This country has theists, atheists, dualists, nondualists, monotheists, and others; they live together in peace and harmony, without causing or suffering injury.

Materialists stood on the steps of temples (held sacred by brahmins and used by them for worship) and defamed and denied God. They called upon all to follow them. They declared that the idea of God is but an insane fancy. They condemned God, scriptures, codes of morality, righteousness, and guiding principles and said that they were all superstitions designed and developed for selfish aggrandizement by the brahmins. They roamed the land and propagated these conclusions. No one hindered them.

Buddhism, which systematically slighted Hindu rites and religious beliefs, was allowed to coexist in an atmosphere of respect. The Jains too did not accept the Vedas and the Vedic Gods. They asked in derision how such Gods could exist and be believed in. Examples of the spirit of tolerance rooted in the revelatory statement quoted above are innumerable. Until the ravaging Muslims sprang on this country, no one in this land of India (Bharath) knew what violence meant. Only when foreign hordes fell upon them and resorted to violence did the people come to know how intolerant humanity can be.

Hindus helped Christians to build churches in India. They showed readiness to cooperate with Christians; this is evident all over India. There was no bloodshed at any time in dealing with Christians. The stream of thought directed to the supreme Truth would not allow itself to be polluted by violence. To confirm this fact as well as to understand the validity of this attitude requires clear thinking and strength of intellect.

Buddhists, who were the very first propagators of religion, spread their faith by traveling over the world.

That religion entered all countries famed in those days as civilized. The monks who ventured into those lands were tortured; hundreds were killed by imperial decree. But soon, good fortune smiled on Buddhism. Buddhism taught that violence has to be eschewed. Buddha was accepted as a God, as another Name for the One, who has many names, according to the Vedic dictum,

Ekam sath; viprah bahudha vadanthi
One alone is; the wise speak of It as many.

He was Indra, He was Rudra. That was the unifying effect of the basic revelation of the sages.

May this declaration be ever in the memory of people!

Indians (Bharathiyas), grown up in the culture of India, have deep faith in the equality of all faiths. Whether it is Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, or Christianity, they believe that no one should talk lightly of the worship of God. They believe that when anyone talks lightly of any one of the names of god or any of the forms of God whom others adore, they are insulting the one God. This was the message held forth by the Indian way of spiritual life. Those who have learned this truth and adhere to it are the real sons and daughters of India.

This truth is beyond the grasp of all; not all can achieve this knowledge: Who is the ruler of the Universe?

Who is it that stands outside it and guides it? What is the cause of the existence of this cosmos? Whence did this originate? How did it happen? What caused this existence? The Vedas have many hymns (riks) dealing with these mysteries. Indians have probed them.

Differences due to past actions

Creation involves putting substances together; what is put together must come apart in course of time and get liberated. The individual is created, so disintegration and death will happen. Now, some are born happy; some enjoy healthy, happy lives. Some are born miserable; others are born without hands or legs. Some are born feeble-minded or as defectives. Who hurt them or

injured them? God is proclaimed as just and kind. How can such a God be so partial and prejudiced! How can such differential treatment come into the realm ruled by God? Such doubts are natural. But the vision of the sages of India who moulded the thought of this land revealed to them that God is not the cause of these differences; they are the consequences of the acts indulged in by the individual in lives previous to the present one. They result in happiness and misery, health and handicaps.

Good and bad are self-made, the effects of what was done in previous lives. Can the bodies of people and their conditions, the ups and downs people meet in life, can they not be the accumulated result of hereditary impacts and tendencies? Two things stand like parallel lines before us when we consider this subject: mental and material. If satisfactory solutions can be found in materialism for the problems relating to human nature and its special qualities, then there can be no basis for believing that there is a factor called Atma or the divine! But it is impossible to demonstrate that the capacity to think, for example, has evolved out of physical matter.

When an item of work is done again and again, it becomes a habit, a skill; doesn't it? Therefore, the skill or habit that a newborn exhibits must be due to constant repetition indulged in long ago. Of course, such practice must have taken place in a previous life or many lives. So, it is necessary to posit the validity of the belief in past and future lives, for all living beings. This is a basic belief in Indian spiritual thought.

4. The Miracle Of Miracles

The children of India (Bharathiyas) believe that they are, each one, the Atma, the eternal Self. They are aware that the Atma cannot be cut in twain by the sword, that fire cannot burn It, that water cannot wet It, and that the wind cannot dry It. The Atma has no bounds. Its centre is in the body, but, its circumference is nowhere. Death means the Atma has shifted from one body to another. This is the belief that every Indian has firmly in mind.

The Atma is not subject to material or worldly limitations or laws. By Its very nature, It is free; It is Unbounded; It is Purity; It is Holiness; It is Fullness. But, since it is associated with material, inert, bodies, It imagines that it is also a product of material composition. This is the wonder, the mystery, the miracle that It manifests! To unravel this mystery and explain this miracle are beyond the capacity of anyone.

Atma is unbound, eternal, full

How could the Full (purna) Atma get entangled in the delusion that It is "not full" (a-purna), "a fraction", "incomplete"? Some people might say that the Indians (Bharathiyas) who declare that the awareness of incompleteness itself can never arise are attempting to wriggle out of an impossible situation. They might say that this is but a stratagem to cover up their ignorance of the Truth. How can the Pure, the Unpartitionable, lose Its nature to the slightest extent? The Indians are simple and sincere, and their nature is seldom artificial. They would never attempt to wriggle out of a situation by resorting to specious arguments. They have the courage to encounter in a brave way any problem before them.

Therefore, the answer to the question posed is: The delusion cannot happen! There is no basis for the error of imputing "incompleteness" for the "complete". The "full" entity called Atma can never imagine Itself as "wanting" or "less than full" or feel that It is limited or controlled by the material sheath whose core It is.

Everyone knows that they feel they are the body. Can anyone announce how this feeling arose and persisted?

No one can offer to answer this question. For, to say, as some do, that it is the will of God, is no answer at all. The plain statement, "I do not know" conveys the same meaning, as the statement "It is the will of God". One is no wiser at the latter statement than after hearing the first. What remains is this: "The Atma in the individual (jivatma) is eternal, immortal, full. There is no death; what appears so is the shifting of its centre." Past deeds affect the present. Our present condition and circumstances are decided by deeds done in previous lives. In a similar manner, the conditions in which we have to spend the future are determined by what we are doing now. Between one life and another, one death and the next, the individual either progresses or regresses, expands or shrinks. Like a frail ship caught in a stormy sea, one climbs the froth-rimmed peak of some gigantic wave and, the next moment, is hurled with terrific speed into the deepest trough. The rise and fall result inevitably from good and bad deeds.

O ye children of immortality! Listen!

Listen to the answer given in the message of the sages (rishis) who had the vision of the Most Majestic of Persons (Purushothama) who dwells beyond the realms of delusion and darkness

O, ye human beings! Brothers! The only means for you to liberate yourselves from the succession of deaths is "knowing Him".

Do not imagine that you are sinners, for you are heirs to eternal bliss (ananda).

You are "images" of God, sharers in undiminishable bliss.

You are by nature holy, ever-full; you are indeed God moving on earth.

Is there a sin greater than calling such as you sinners?

You are dishonouring and defaming yourselves when you acknowledge the appellation "sinners"!

Arise! Cast off the feeling that you are sheep. Don't be deluded into that idea.

You are Atmas. You are drops of divine nectar of Immortality, which know neither beginning nor end.

All things material are your bondslaves; you are not their bondslaves.

These are the words of the sages (rishis). How can those who have not themselves delved into this truth appreciate this Indian (Bharathiya) interpretation? Indians are the fortunate ones who have achieved great strength in spirit by holding God as father, mother, guru, friend, and the beloved. They have adored God as dearer to them than anything or anyone, here or hereafter. How can those who are aware only of mere sensual pleasure know this supreme truth? The craving for sensual pleasure veils the truth from the inner eye. That craving manifests in multiple ways, creating more and more desires and laying down more and more urges to action. These desires and urgings hide the truth like a thick curtain.

Inner search for breaking out of illusion

The recognition of this curtain is a big stage in spiritual progress. This is the illusion (maya) principle of Vedanta. From immemorial times, though the truth was self-evident, this curtain has hidden it from people. This was discovered by Indians ages ago as the prime obstacle. How to remove the curtain and cognize truth? Indians knew that the solution does not lie in the objective, external world, so it would be futile to seek it there. The search in the external world, even for ages, cannot ensure success. Only inner experience can guarantee conviction.

To gain experience, Indians entered into austerities and disciplined inquiry until they "identified" the Truth and announced it to the world. They discarded the urges of the senses and the manifold attractions of active involvement in

the objective world. They taught the world this lesson. The mind was the instrument for the Indian seekers to discover this secret, which is the basic principle of wisdom as treasured by them. It became imperative for them to use the mind itself and study its nature and characteristics. They realized soon enough that study of the external world led them nowhere. They diverted their attention to the internal "regions" of their consciousness.

Thus, they laid the foundation for the Vedantic structure; this was the beginning of Vedantic inquiry.

God at the core of our Self

There is no need to seek truth anywhere else. Seek it in people themselves: they are the miracle of miracles.

Whatever is not in humanity cannot be anywhere outside. What is visible outside people is but a rough reflection of what is really inside! The ancient belief was that God (Isvara) ruled over the world, with Himself being outside it; the Indian seekers tested this belief through spiritual practice (sadhana) and revealed that God was and is in the world and of it. This is the first contribution of Indians to the spiritual world: God is not external to people but is their very inner core. They declared that it is impossible to remove Him from the heart where He has installed Himself. He is the very Atma of our Atma, the soul of our soul, the inner Reality of each.

Bharath: unique region of God-loving people

Those who desire to grasp the supreme vision of Vedantic philosophy have to understand a few fundamental ideas. Philosophy is neither a book nor the work of one person. The supremely great Manu named this India as the region of Brahma (Brahmavartha), the spiritual area where the quest of the ONE immanent and transcendent Principle originated and succeeded. The festive cavalcade of saints engaged in the quest began its march over the continents from this India (Bharath) itself. Like mighty rivers from huge mountain ranges, the stream of spiritual discipline (sadhana) for the discovery of the higher

truth sprang from this land itself. This land announced to the world its spiritual message with the confidence and courage of thunder blasts emanating from the womb of clouds.

When inimical forces blasted into India, this holy land bore the brunt of the blow; it had to present its heroic chest before the attack and absorb the initial impact. Many times this land had to bear these invading thrusts and suffer fierce injuries. Yet, this land has not fully lost its fame and glory and its steadfast strength on this path.

From this land, Nanak the Great, the embodiment of equanimity and compassion, preached his highly wonderful message of love. His all-embracing heart blossomed in this land. The children of this land, inheritors of this culture, spread their arms to receive in loving embrace not only the Hindu or Vedic world but the Islamic world too.

Among those who shone as heroic supporters of the Hindu culture unto the last, the foremost was Guru Govind Singh. Undeterred by tortures that forced him to shed his own blood and the blood of his own beloved, deserted by those for whom he had undergone such torture, he did not utter a word of blame against his compatriots, but entered the Deccan and gave up his life, as the king of beasts does when his heart is hurt. May that great one's fame persist forever on earth. Such eminent leaders render the whole of mankind indebted to them, for they serve the best interests of all people everywhere.

Just as each individual is a unique entity, so each nation has a unique individuality. Each person is different from others in certain matters and is endowed with some special characteristics that are their own. So too, each nation has certain special features that are not found in others. Each individual has to play a role as part of the system, and their own previous activity (karma) has determined a special line or path for that individual. The history of nations is the same. Each nation has a role to play that is already laid down by its destiny. Each nation has to deliver a special message of its own to the world community.

Therefore, it is important that Indians (Bharathiyas) recognize, before everything else, the role this nation has to play, the tune it must sing in the world orchestra of peace and bliss. You must have heard, while listening to childhood tales, that there are gemstones in the hoods of some serpents and that as long as those gems embellish the hoods, killing the serpents is impossible. Keep this story in your memory; then, you can understand the most miraculous event in human history: the survival of Indian spiritual culture.

5. Basic Belief

For centuries, the Eternal Universal Religion (Sanathana Dharma) had to meet determined opposition from Islam. Political subjection to Muslim dynasties added to the problems. The cry "Allaho Akbar" rose to the skies and challenged the very existence of Indian culture, which had been fostered for ages by seers. No other nation suffered as long and deep from such fear. But the eternally fresh and vital dharma of this land stood the test, and even today, the Eternal Religion is as potent and valid as ever. It is ready to meet any challenge from any new quarter. From the signs of the times, it is evident that this culture is today dominant and powerful; why, it is prepared even to march forward and expand its area of constructive influence. Expansion is the sign of "life", isn't it ?

This day, the principles and practices laid down in Indian (Bharathiya) culture and the attitudes and feelings enshrined in it are not lying low within the boundaries of this subcontinent. Whether we like it or not, they cross over to other lands and establish themselves there. The main ideas, the essential outlooks penetrate the literature of those peoples and permeate their thought processes. In some lands, among some peoples, they have even won dominant roles, with no opposition. For, India (Bharath) is offering an invaluable body of spiritual wisdom as its contribution to the peace and prosperity of the world. This contribution is more elevating than that of any other country. It is more necessary, more basic, and more precious than what any other nation can give. This fact is becoming clearer to all mankind.

The ancients of this land were not averse to examining other problems, too. They tried, like other peoples, to unravel the mysteries of external nature. Even in this field, through the exercise of sharp intellect of these ancients, this amazing nation achieved results that are beyond the fondest dreams of people in other countries.

Never-changing supreme Reality

The supreme end of education, the highest purpose of instruction, is to make one aware of the "universal immanent Impersonal". This truth is loudly proclaimed in the Vedas. The seers and sages of India courageously entered upon this adventure. The ever-changing aspects of nature, the appearance and disappearance of its working, may be a fine subject for study. But the ancients of India proclaimed that the science of the "transcendent Principle" that permeates the universe, of the unchanging Eternal, of the embodiment of everlasting, ever-full bliss (ananda), of the residence of unaffected undiminished peace, of the ultimate refuge for all time of the individual (jivi) - that science is the highest knowledge that one must gain.

The knowledge of the principles governing objective nature can at best provide one with food and clothing.

It teaches ways and means of gaining them and leads to exploitation of the weak by the strong. If the people of India had bent their energies to discovering the secrets of the world, they could easily have acquired mastery.

But, very soon, the people of India (Bharath) recognized that this search was secondary and that the prime position should be assigned to the spiritual. They decided that pursuing the secrets of external nature was not the real sign of Indians. This resolution brought glory to this nation. Others cannot even approach the fringe of this problem. Like Prahlada of the legends, Indians have been able to survive ordeals of fire and escape unhurt from the torture of ages. Those who had no spiritual outlook or aspiration were not reckoned as Indians (Bharathiyas).

Many in foreign lands believed that Indians were more politically minded, an inference that was misleading.

They felt that only a small fraction of Indians were spiritually oriented. But India always insisted that a spiritually directed way of life was the first and foremost duty of every Indian. Whenever the chance offered itself, after discharging this duty, Indians felt that they should collect and confirm the spiritual potency that they had. This was exactly what happened in the past.

In those days, national integration meant the concentration and commingling of all the spiritual forces and urges that were scattered among seekers all over the land. In India, the word "nation" meant the grouping together of hearts that beat time to the same song and that responded by similar vibration to the same spiritual call. The basic truths that this faith expounded were as broad as the sky, as eternal as creation. Those truths were described in many subtle ways and commented upon very closely and deeply. But, as a result of the very breadth of the vision that discovered them and laid them down, it was inevitable that many faiths emanated on the basis of the beliefs they encouraged.

Unity in diversity

Diversities in attitudes and practices are natural and should be welcomed; there is no need for an ironclad, hard faith. There is no place for one over-all Faith. Rivalry among those following different paths cannot bring peace and prosperity to any country. Without the freedom to adopt faith, the world cannot progress.

India taught that a small group can never command the inexhaustible resources of the world, that for the effective functioning of the community it is necessary to divide the work of the community among sections of the people and allot the task of contributing its share of the common good to each section. This gave facilities for diversity and for mutuality. Diversities were approved for the sake of the practical application of spiritual powers and potentialities, so there is no need for factionalism and fights. The diversities are also only superficial; they are not really real. There is an entrancing sense of mystery that can explore these diversities and discover the key to visualize the ONE that underlies the many. This is what the ancient texts proclaim as the most precious revelation:

The One alone exists; wise people describe it in manifold ways (Ekam sath, viprah bahudha vadanthi).

Vedas: bedrock of universal spirituality

Therefore, it can be asserted that the faith of the Indians is the one faith that accepts and reveres all faiths.

When we shelter factionalism and fanaticism in our hearts in relation to our own specific faith or the faith of others, we, as descendents of those fathers, bring disgrace on ourselves. Whether we are adhering to the classical Vedantic faiths or are adopting recent trends in Vedantic thought, we have to bear in mind certain basic universally accepted truths. All those who bear the name Hindu have to believe in them and shape their lives accordingly.

May they have the will to do so.

1. **Indians (Bharathiyas) do not insist that everyone has to be bound to one attitude**, or that everyone must abide by only one interpretation or commentary to the exclusion of other possible explanations or points of view, or that the way of life with all its implications has to be the one approved by some one individual or group. The Indian culture lays down that it is a heinous sin to exercise force upon anyone in matters of the spirit.
2. **The Eternal Universal Dharma or Religion is taught by the Vedas**. The sacred body of teachings, referred to as Vedic, is coeval with creation, without ascertainable beginning or end. With it, all inquiry into the spirit and the ramifications of faith have to find fulfilment and close. If one studies and practises the Vedas, one cannot escape this conclusion.

For all problems involving differences in spiritual attitudes and aspirations, we can get convincing solutions from the Vedic texts themselves. The viewpoints differ about what portions of the Vedas are authoritative for each; persons affiliated with one sect might regard some portions of the Vedas as holier and more sacrosanct than others.

In spite of this, all are brothers and co-sharers of the teachings and

lessons imparted by the Vedas. All that is elevating and beneficial for us today, all that is holy and sacred to us, and all that is pure and ennobling has been made available to us from and through these wondrous texts of old. As long as we hold to this latter belief and proclaim it aloud, what can little differences of opinion over matters of minor importance do to cause rifts? For this reason, we have to announce these lessons and principles so that they spread beyond all horizons.

3. **The Vedas are concerned with and expound upon the Supreme Person (Iswara) who created this universe**, who fosters it, in whom It merges in accordance with the process of time, and in whom this amazing universe is again manifest as His Form.

We might have diverse beliefs concerning the nature and characteristics of this Lord. One person might picture Him as having human nature and characteristics. Another might believe that He is the embodiment of nonhuman attributes, formless, Lord (Iswara). Every one of these can find declarations supporting their viewpoints in the Vedas. Although they hold diverse views, they all have faith in the Godhead. That is to say, they believe that there is undoubtedly One transcendent eternal Power, that all this has originated from It, and that all this has to merge in It again. This belief is the hallmark of an Indian (Bharathiya). One who has not acquired this belief is not entitled to the name Indian and doesn't deserve to be called a Hindu.

No gradation for divine names or forms

Of what nature, with what characteristics, is the Lord (Iswara) you teach about? This question is irrelevant to us. It is not so important. Let us not dispute the various points of view that divide people. It is enough for us if the Lord is accepted and emphasized. For even though one description and delineation might be better and clearer than another, no delineation and description can be "bad". One declaration would be "good"; the second, "better"; the third, "best". But in the stream of Indian spiritual adventure, no description or picturization can be pronounced "bad and unacceptable". That is why the Lord confers grace on all those who teach as sacred and valid any Name and any Form that can attract and inspire mankind. May this faith grow

more and more, for the more it is acted upon, the more spiritual progress it brings. But the aspiration must be related to God (Iswara).

4. **For spiritual exploration and discovery, there can be no qualification like wealth or disqualification like poverty**. This truth has to be handed down to the children by Indian (Bharathiya) parents. Children have to grow up with this broad feeling.
5. **Indians (Bharathiyas) do not accept the belief, held by people belonging to other countries, that the universe was manifested a few thousand years ago and that it will be destroyed finally and forever, at some future date**. Indians will not accept the theory that the universe arose out of nothing. They believe that the universe or this objective creation is beginningless and endless. Further, according to the laws of evolution in time, it will recede from the gross into the subtle stage and, after being in that stage for some period, will again recede into the causal stage from which it emerged. From the One into which it merges, it will gradually manifest itself as Many, through the subtle and the gross stages of expression.

6. Religion Is Experience

This wave-like movement of proceeding and receding, of merging and emerging, has been happening since time; it will happen till time ends; it is eternal in its feature. This is the belief of Indians (Bharathiyas). A person is not just this gross body; in it, there is a subtle component called mind; inside it, as its prompter and spring, is an even more subtle principle called the individualized soul (jivatma). This soul has neither beginning nor end, it knows no death, it has no birth. This is the basis of the Indian faith.

One other article of faith, which is a unique feature of Indian mental equipment: Until the individualized soul gets liberated from the individualization and merges in the Universal, thus attaining liberation (moksha), it has to encase itself in one body after another and go through the process called living. This idea is held by no other people. This is the cycle-of-birth-death (samsara) idea, which the ancient texts or scriptures of India reveal and propagate. Samsara means "movement into one form after another".

The nature of Atmic reality

All the different schools and sects among the Indians (Bharathiyas) accept the fact that the apparently individualized souls (jivatmas) are eternal and unaffected by change. The schools and sects may differ in describing or denoting the relationship between the Atma and God. One school of thinkers may posit that the two are ever separate; another that the individualized soul (jivatma) is a spark in the universal flame of fire that God is; a third that the two are undifferentiated. But the truth remains that the Atma is beginningless and endless; since It is not born, It has no death. Its individualized image has to evolve through a series of bodies until it attains fulfilment in the human. All schools are one in upholding this faith, in spite of the variety of their other interpretations.

We now come to the foremost among the glorious truths, the most

astounding of the basic truths that the human intellect has attained in the spiritual field: the Atma is, by its very nature, purity, fullness, and bliss (parisuddha, paripurna, and ananda). This is the belief that animates all schools of thought, whether they are worshipers of Sakthi, Siva, or Vishnu or whether they are Buddhists or Jains. Every Hindu acknowledges it.

The dualists (dwaithins) believe that the fundamental genuine nature of the Atma is bliss (ananda); this is diminished and desiccated by the consequences of human actions in life after life, so it has to be restored and revitalized by the grace of God. The monists (a-dwaithins) believe that there can be no diminution or desiccation.

They assert that the Atma is fully splendrous; however, through the influence of the deluding effect of ignorance (maya), which superimposes false impression on what is really true, It appears as if it has diminished.

Whatever the differences in interpretation, when we take our stand on the central core of the truth on which all agree, a deep passage will be discerned between "East" and "West", where both do journey to the goal. People of the Eastern countries seek the realization of this gloriously beneficent consummation in the inner regions of themselves. While worshiping, we close the eyes and endeavour to visualize God inside ourselves. People of the West lift up their faces and visualize God in outer space, in the beyond. Indians believe that the Vedas - their sacred scripture - were the very breath of God conveying meanings to the sages who had installed Him in their hearts. Westerners believe that their scriptures were recorded by people under the direction of God.

Another point must be understood: We have to hold fast to the belief, always. Unless a belief is held unshak- en throughout night and day, it cannot be used to achieve victory. No success is possible otherwise. When a man asserts that he is low and mean and that he knows but little, he becomes low and mean and his knowledge shrinks.

We become what we believe we are. We are the children of almighty God,

endowed with supreme power, glory, and wisdom. We are children of immortality. When we dwell in this thought, how can we ever be low and ignorant? Indian spiritual culture enjoins on everyone to believe that the real nature of mankind is supreme and that one should be ever conscious of this truth.

The Indians (Bharathiyas) of past ages had faith in their great reality. They achieved victory in their endeavours as a result of this faith and rose to lofty heights. They reached the peak of progress. Today, we have slid down into the present decline mainly because we have lost faith in the Atma in us. This was the beginning of our fall.

For, loss of confidence in the Self (Atma) involves loss of faith in God Himself. That Omnipresence is the inner motivator of all, the warp and woof of our body and mind, our emotions and intellect. Strengthening faith in Him is the only means of realizing the highest goal of mankind. This is the lesson that Indian spiritual history longs to teach.

Children of immortality

Children of India (Bharath)! Teach your children this life-preserving, glorious, and heart-expanding truth from the early days of life. The sanctifying vision that Indians secured is this: the Atma is full and free. It is a wonderful discovery, a thrilling thought! The Atma is by its very nature full; fullness need not be attained or accomplished and added to it. If fullness could be added to it, it could also be subtracted by the passage of time; what is built up must disintegrate.

If one is impure by nature, even though one may succeed in achieving purity for five minutes, one has to wallow later in impurity, for the purity that comes in the middle will be easily swept away by circumstances. So, all Indian spiritual thinkers declared that purity is our nature and that fullness is our genuine reality. They said that we are never really "wanting". This is the lesson that Indians taught the world. This is the stream of spiritual strength that flowed from India and fertilized the world.

At the end of life, one should bring to consciousness the great thoughts one has attained in life, the high feelings one entertained; this was the directive of the sages of India. They did not demand that one should bring to memory the faults and errors one committed in life. These are inevitable and universal. But the sages declared that one should always be aware of one's reality, and one should ever be engaged in contemplating its grandeur and glory. That, they said, is the greatest step to progress.

We must pay attention to another fact, more than all else. For Indians, religion meant "experience" and nothing less. It is indeed pitiable that we so often forget this important fact. This secret must be imprinted on everyone's heart. Only then can one be safe and secure. Not only this. It is not the way of thought of an Indian to say that all things can be attained by self-exertion; the Indian knows that divine will is the basis of everything.

Religious principles have to be practiced and their validity experienced. Listening to their exposition is of no use; learning one set of arguments and conclusions and repeating them parrot-like are not enough. If the arguments appeal to one's intellect and are approved by it as correct, that will not help at all - they must transform us.

God is both Being and Becoming

Indians (Bharathiyas) posit God and declare that God is Being and Becoming, because that is their experience, which is the highest proof. The declaration does not originate from the head, from the faculty of reason (yukthi).

The forefathers asserted that the Atma is in each and that the Atma is but a spark of the universal Atma, for they had become aware of it, deeply and without doubt. There were, in the past, thousands who had sought the experience and won it. Even today, such people are not absent, and they will be present in the future, too. The experience is a thirst that affects mankind. Unless one contemplates God and confronts Him in bliss, unless one wins the awareness of Atma that is one's reality, one will be tormented by the thirst, the agony that one is "lacking completeness".

People must first grasp the truth. All religious factions and fights will vanish as fast as they grasp the Reality.

For, the name "follower of theistic code of morals" can be allotted only to one who has experienced God and realized His Glory. Only those who have realized Him in their hearts can have the bonds that chain their hearts to the wheel of birth-death broken. Mere platform orations do not indicate awareness of the Truth that has to be attained through religion.

Theistic faith is based on genuine experience. Once this is accepted, self-examination starts and one is able to measure how far one has journeyed toward or away from the goal. One will then realize that one is groping in the dark and dragging others into darkness to grope with one. Only then will people give up factional hatreds in the name of religious war on those professing different faiths.

Those who revel in religious wars should be asked: "Have you seen God? Have you become aware of the divine Atma? Otherwise, what authority have you to decry or deny this name of God? Are you, while struggling in the darkness, attempting to draw me into that darkness, too? Can a blind person lead another blind person along the road? That is an impossible task. Therefore, understand your truth before you defame or deny mine."

7. Be Yourself

One who has visualized the Atma principle that animates all can never condemn the religion of anyone. That one will never enter any religious squabble or conflict, never talk lightly or demeaningly of another's faith, and never disturb or despise the faith of another. Only the ignorant with no spiritual experience, only those who do not know the depths of truth will embark upon the condemnation of the faith of others. It is very unbecoming to indulge in or encourage religious conflicts, to ridicule the rites and ceremonies through which others adore God, and to label the religious practices of other people as superstitions. Each one has accepted the practice and holds on to it because of the bliss it confers!

By those who know, the ONE is spoken of as MANY. The same thing is seen and experienced in different ways, by different people, according to the angle of vision and the level of intelligence and awareness. Different people describe the same thing or experience differently. How can anyone declare that they should not do so? Or that what they describe is wrong? No one has the right to disparage or deny.

Unity in diversity

Only those who strive to transcend the here and now and become aware of the transcendent principle of Godhead deserve the name Hindu. Those who revel in hurting others do not justify the name.

The inner core of Indian (Bharathiya) culture is this realization of the unity-of-Atma principle, which fills each heart with universal love. Those who are aware of this unity and are well established in it are kith and kin of Indians, whichever country they may live in, whatever language is native to their tongues.

Many human communities have, as the basis of their beliefs, the theory that a person is a bundle of matter and that this matter is subject to the laws of

physics and chemistry. In the Western languages, death is denoted as "the act of giving up life (jiva)", whereas in the language of India, it is "giving up the body (deha)". This is due to the Westerner's faith of being the body and the faith of the Indian not being the body. The Indians assert and know that they have Atma as their reality, that the Atma is enclosed in a body. The two views are widely disparate.

A civilization that is built on the shifting sand of worldly pleasure can last only for a little while. It will disappear from the surface of the earth. On the other hand, the civilization of India (Bharath) and of the countries that value and follow the civilization of India have survived for centuries and are vital even today. They show new and refreshing signs of more creative life. This fact has to be kept in mind by the Indians who have dedicated their lives to the imitation of other civilizations and cultures.

Self-exertion, not imitation

Imitation cannot build a stable culture. It can never become "civilization". It is a sign of cowardice, not a quality that can ensure progress. It is the royal road to downfall. How can one draw inspiration for uplifting oneself if one is engaged in hating oneself and devaluing one's achievement?

Indians (Bharathiya) should feel no sense of shame in bringing back to memory their forefathers, elders. and teachers of the past who built the culture that nurtured them. Instead, they ought to feel proud of their forefathers and elders and teachers who shone among them. They must be proud that such people are their ancestors, that their nation is of such holiness, and that their country is endowed with such sacred characteristics. The children of India have to fill themselves with the proud consciousness that, in their native land, wise people were born who attained the heights of self-realization, as well as many others who rose to the peak of perfection.

Manifest the power that lies in self-exertion! Do not resort to the weak stratagem of imitating others. Instead, absorb the good qualities that others may possess. We plant a seed in the soil. Then, we supply it with the

ingredients it needs - water, air, manure. The seed sprouts, grows into a sapling, and becomes at last a huge tree. You will notice that it does not become soil, manure, air, or water. It makes use of these, but it sticks to its own nature and grows into a tree. May you live like that tree.

Of course, we have much to learn from others. There is no need to doubt this fact. Those who refuse to learn thus declare themselves fools. Whatever can promote your spiritual advance, you can learn from others. Imbibe them to the full, according to the lines laid down for your own progress in your own moral path (dharma).

You must live as you, not as someone else. Do not allow anyone to divert you away from your innate nature.

Be immersed in your God, in your own imaginings and feelings, in the bliss that springs from your own heart, and in the delight derived from your spiritual exercises (sadhana). When others try to prevent you from doing this, whatever plans they weave and whatever contrivances they employ, resist them at the cost of your own lives. Do not deny yourself that divine awareness, that divine ecstasy. This exhortation echoes through the stream of spiritual values of the Indians (Bharathiyas). Pull down the barriers that stand in the way and obstruct the free flow of the culture of this land, which confers such sweetness and strength. Clear the channels through which it flows and cleanse them. Then it can follow its course, unimpeded.

Sai's resolve and the message of God's love

Sai has willed that this country, India (Bharath), has this spiritual discipline (sadhana). For too long a time the theistic dharma of this land has stopped moving. For too long a time its characteristic has been static. Now, it has to be made dynamic. It must vitalize the daily life of every human being. It must enter and fructify the palatial king's dwelling and the lowly huts of the poorest in the land.

The theistic dharma is the treasure of everyone; everyone has the right to

inherit it and benefit by it; having been born as a human, one has a valid claim to share it. For this reason, Indians have to take it before every door and welcome everyone in every home to share it. Just as the air that we breathe in God's creation is available to all, the dharma of the awareness of God and His power and mercy has to be available to all. Indians must hold on to this wide outlook and the universality and unity of this message. The conflicts between disparate faiths and beliefs will disappear of themselves and peace and love will be restored on earth.

Imagine a house full of darkness for centuries. You may enter the house and pray to the darkness to leave the premises, or shower abuse on it for days, or frighten it by threatening force. The darkness will stay; it cannot be diminished at all. It will not yield to your tactics. It cannot be scared out. But light a lamp, and it will flee that instant. The lamp of wisdom can save a person from age-long darkness. One must recognize this truth and, once it is recognized, shape life accordingly.

People have an immensity in them; this is the core of Indian (Bharathiya) thought. It is really a mystery how anyone came to regard themselves as condemned to fall! A person might strike us as demonic or divine; in both, the Atma is the reality to the same extent. You can't say the Atma is less in one and more in the other. When faults are found in someone, you have to conclude that there are deficiencies in behaviour, that is all. Don't conclude that there is no divine Atma in that person. As a result of the company one keeps or the inefficiency of the society in which one grew, faults have grown. They are not native to one's nature, which is Atmic. You have to provide the person with good company and beneficial surroundings and persuade them to enter them. On no account should you condemn the person as a born incorrigible and keep them apart.

Gross and subtle bodies

The body is composed of cells, which are made up of atoms. The atoms are also physical phenomena. They are fundamentally inert matter (jada), composite and unfeeling. The Vedanthins speak of a subtle body, separate

from this gross body. That too is physical. It is the centre of subtle skills and force. It is in this body that all the subtle mental feelings and agitations take place. Each force can work only through some medium or other, which is physical. The same power that operates the gross body works through the subtle processes of thought. They are not two different entities. One is the subtle form of the other, that is all.

What is the source of these powers? If we delve deep, we will find that there are two things in nature: space (akasa) and the life force (prana). Space is the source of all the gross and subtle material one encounters; when the life force contacts it, due to the impact the space principle transforms itself into either gross or subtle, in varying proportions.

The life force is omnipresent, like space. It can also penetrate everywhere and everything. Like the blocks of ice that water becomes and that float and move about on water, the life force acts on space and bodies appear. The life force is the force that moulds the space into various forms. The gross body is the vehicle of the life force that it has shaped out of space. The subtle body is of the form of thought, feeling, etc.

When the subtle body is transcended, the awareness of the Reality becomes manifest. Just as fingernails persist as part of our gross body, however often we pare them, so too the subtle body is an integral part of one's makeup.

8. Bondage

People can discard as many gross bodies in which they take temporary residence as the number of times they pare their nails. But the subtle body cannot be changed; it lasts and persists. This is the most secret doctrine of Indian spiritual thought. Going further along this line of discovery, it can be revealed that person means: a complex of the gross body, subtle body, and individual soul (jivi). Vedantic philosophy would declare that the individual soul shares the quality of eternal, unchanging, everlastingness (nithya).

The objective world (prakriti) is also eternal, but with a difference: it undergoes perpetual change. It is never the same, but it persists forever. The basis for the objective world, namely the life force (prana) and space (akasa), are eternal, but they act and interact without rest and manifest variously and manifoldly.

The individual Atma (the jivatma) did not have its origin in either space or the life force; it is not material in nature. It is eternal, without change. It did not happen through the impact of the life force on space or space on the life force. Things brought together will disintegrate. But things that are themselves ab initio cannot so come apart. For, disintegration means resuming the original nature, becoming what it originally was, reducing itself to its native substance. The gross body is the result of the combination of the life force and space, so it dissolves itself into its components. The subtle body also dissolves, but only after a long long time. The embodied soul (jivi) is not brought together, so it cannot fall apart. It has no birth. It cannot be born. A unitive part-less being can have no moment of origin.

The objective world, consisting of billions of varied things, forces, and events, is governed by the will of God. God is all-knowing, all-penetrating, all-pervading; He is activating the objective world and acting through the objective world all the time. Creation is ever in His care. His sovereignty is beginningless and endless. This is the doctrine of the dualists (dwaithins).

Ignorance, the source of evil

This gives room for a question. When the world is ruled by God, how does He permit it to be so wicked and evil? The answer given is that God is not responsible for the grief and pain. The sins we commit are the progenitors of the grief we suffer. Joy and sorrow are the consequences of the good and evil that people perpetrate. God is the Witness. He doesn't punish or cause grief.

The embodied soul (jivi) is beginningless, that is to say, has no birth, but it involves itself in incessant activity and thus has to go through the inevitable consequences of that activity. This is the experience of everyone, the characteristic of everyone's mind. This is the unbreakable law of the objective world. Grief or joy is the image of the activity in which one engages. It is the resound, the reflection, the reaction. The individual soul can be the witness without concerning itself with the good and bad of the activity. When involvement happens, good has to be experienced when good is done; evil, when evil is done.

Vedanta asserts that the individual soul is, by its very nature, pure and unblemished. This is the accepted doctrine, according to Indian (Bharathiya) thought. But this truth has been befogged by ignorance and neglect, so illusion (maya) pollutes the experience, and the shade of ignorance breeds evil. But when beneficial activity is engaged in, the clouds of illusion are scattered and the reality of the Self is realized. All beings, all souls (jivis) are pure, by their very nature. Good acts can remove the taints of evil deeds and preserve this essential purity.

Then, the soul is led into the Godward path. The Godward urge will transform the thoughts, words, and deeds of the individual.

Solar and lunar paths of liberation

We cannot think without words; words are the essential material for thought. When the individual drops the body, the words enter the mind, the mind enters the life force (prana), and the life force merges in the Atma. The

embodied soul (jivatma), when it liberates itself, rushes to the region of the solar principle (the surya-loka). From there, it reaches the region of Brahma (the Brahma-loka). Having reached that region, the individualized Atma has no more concern with nature (prakriti). It will exist there till the end of time. It will experience boundless delight.

It will have all powers except the powers of creation.

The authority to rule over the cosmos is exclusive to God. God is free from desires of all varieties. One's duty is but to offer Him love and to worship Him through love. This raises one to the highest status among beings.

Those who are unaware of this status or are incapable of discharging their responsibilities belong to other categories. They also offer and worship; they also engage themselves in beneficial activity. But they crave the fruits they hope to gain; they perform acts motivated by a desire to benefit from the results that emerge therefrom.

"We have helped the helpless, so our path will be smooth and safe. We have uplifted the downtrodden, so we can avoid troubles on our road. We have busied ourselves in singing the Lord's Glory in chorus, so we are sure of Heaven." These are the calculations of people of this nature who engage themselves in "good acts".

When such people give up their bodies, that is to say, when such people die, their words will merge in their minds, their minds will merge in their life force, the life force thereafter will merge in the soul (jivi), and the soul will travel to the region of the moon principle (chandra-loka), that is to say, the world (loka) of the presiding deity of the mind - suggesting that they have to enter again the realm of the mind, with all its agitations and turmoils of wants and wishes. In this region, such souls experience some satisfaction and delight as long as the consequence of the good acts lasts. That is why the scriptures say, "When the acquired merit is spent, they reenter the world of mortal people (Ksheene punye, marthya lokam visanthi)". The soul encases itself in a body equipped with sense organs, etc. appropriate to the earned

consequences of the deeds of the previous body and starts another life career.

Heaven and Hell

The residence of the soul in the world of the moon is what the Hindus refer to as the time spent as a god (deva) in Heaven, or as an angel according to Christian and Islamic religions. The name Devendra, given to the Lord of these devas, is an indication of a position of authority. Thousands have risen to that position.

According to the Vedas, when the highest good is observed, that person is elevated to the position of Devendra-hood.

The soul raised previously to that position will descend to the earth and resume its career in human form. Just as on earth monarchs change, so in Heaven rulers cannot escape rise and fall. The residents of Heaven are also subject to the law of ups and downs. Only the region of Brahma is free from birth and death, rise and fall, ups and downs. This is the basic doctrine of Indian thought, its eternal nectar, administered to humanity.

When the individual soul is as a god (deva) in the region of the moon, it cannot manifest any karma. Only humanity can express itself through action (karma) that binds by its consequence. Karma means activity undertaken with desire, with an eye on the result. When the soul is in the region of the moon as a god, it is content and satisfied, so it will not crave activity for earning pleasure or achieving some success. Residence in that world is the reward the soul has secured for good deeds done by it in the past, or it may be the prize won for such goodness.

When the delight emanating from the good deeds is experienced and spent away, the balance of the consequence accumulated has to be suffered, so the soul has to come as a person on earth. Then, attaining the highest good and engaging in acts of highest potency for merit, the person can cleanse the heart and reach the world of Brahma (Brahma-loka), whence there no is

coming back.

Nondualism posits neither Heaven nor Hell

The word Hell (naraka) cannot be found in the Vedas. The conception of Hell is foreign to the spiritual thought of the Indians (Bharathiyas). The idea of Hell and the various descriptions of Hell are all later additions in the scriptures (sastras) and ancient tales (Puranas). The authors of these texts believed that religion would be incomplete if it did not posit Hell. They laid down diverse tortures as part of Hell, but they laid down one limitation to the pain Hell inflicts. They declared that there can be no death in Hell. Hell was created only to incite fear among people, in order to make them desist from sin.

But nondualism (a-dwaita) does not posit Heaven or Hell. It is concerned only with bondage and liberation, ignorance and illumination. It is known as Vedanta. There is no faith higher than what Vedanta stands for.

9. One With The One

The cosmos (jagath) was created by God out of Himself, so He is the originator as well as the material of the cosmos. As a result, He is full (paripurna). Creation is also full, as is the individual Atma. Therefore, many full entities are postulated. God made the cosmos manifest from Himself. When this declaration is made, the doubt may naturally arise: How could God become these walls, these tables? Here is another doubt that comes uppermost to some: God is supremely pure, so how could He become these impure things?

Humanity is fundamentally divine

Let us seek the answers. People are fundamentally Atma but they have the encasement of a body, right? From one point of view, a person is not distinct from the body, yes? In spite of this, however, one feels that one is not this body, that one's reality is distinct from it, that one is not the baby one was or the old man one is, that one is neither male nor female, and that one persists through babyhood, boyhood, middle age, and old age, masculinity and femininity, and all the other stages and changes. So too, the cosmos and all creation are but the billion bodies of God. He is all this and in all this, but He is changeless and eternal.

Nature is amenable to change. The Atma can also contract or expand, blossom or fade, shine or be befogged.

Bad deeds will diminish its splendour by clouding its brilliance. Its innate and genuine truth and wisdom may be hidden by evil thoughts and deeds. Acts and practices that can disclose the native splendour and glory of the Atma are termed "good".

Three schools of Vedanta

The Atma is "unbound" at first; but later it is seen as limited and restricted.

Through good deeds and activities, it resumes its vastness and boundlessness. Everyone, without any difference, has the opportunity to achieve this transformation. When the time gets ripe, everyone can succeed in this and liberate themselves from the bonds and bondage. But the cosmos (jagath) will not end. It is eternal, incapable of being destroyed. This is the explanation of the second school of philosophy in India.

The first school of philosophy is dualism (dwaitha). The dualists posit that the cosmos is a vast machine designed and operated by God. The second school is qualified nondualism (visishta-adwaitha). This second, higher, stage in spiritual enquiry and experience posits three entities - God, the Atma, and nature - and speaks of an integration of the three. The qualified nondualists declare that the cosmos is a phenomenon that is interpenetrated and imbued with the Divine. The third school, nondualism (a-dwaitha), asserts that God is not outside the cosmos, that He became the cosmos, and that He is all that is. There is nothing except God, no other, no second. This truth has to be accepted by all. This is the highest truth.

To say that God is the Atma and the cosmos is like the body in which He operates and lives is not correct. To assert that the Atma (God) is eternal and changeless but the cosmos that is His body can be subject to change and transformation is also not satisfying.

What does it signify when it is said, "God is the proximate cause (upadana-karana) of the cosmos"? Proximate cause means the cause that produced the effect. The "effect" is the "cause" in another form. It cannot be separate from the cause. Every effect that we notice is but the cause that has assumed a new form. The cosmos is the effect, God is the cause - these statements stress only the fact that the cosmos is but God in another form.

To the argument that the body is limited and subtle and that it leads one to the cause (God), or it was from God that it evolved and took shape, the nondualists would reply that it was God Himself who manifested in the form of the cosmos.

Integral unity of God, nature, and humans

It may be doubted that all this multiplicity of things and beings are really God. Yes - it is the truth. All these that the senses cognize, that come into the awareness, are God. There is nothing else but He. Our bodies, minds, intellects, consciousness - all are God.

Here, another doubt may arise. Why should God be so many individualized beings? Why should He be so many souls (jivatmas)? Will God, who is of one Form, manifest Himself as so many? How did this happen? If God had transformed Himself into the cosmos, He should have subjected Himself to change; all things in nature that are by their very composition subject to change suffer both birth and death. And, if God has come within the precincts of change, does it mean that He too has to die some day? Does he have to undergo change and ultimately end? Keep in mind this point also. Then, there is another point to be considered. How much of God, what portion of God becomes the cosmos?

The nondualists say the following. Whatever portion you may allot, or guess, remember this: The cosmos does not exist. It is an illusion. It never is, has been, or will be. The creation of the cosmos, the dissolution of the cosmos, these billions of individuals emerging and merging, all this is but a dream. There is no individualised soul (Atma) at all, no separated Atma. How can there be billions of souls? There is only ONE indivisible complete Absolute. Like the one sun reflected as a billion suns in a billion lakes, ponds, and drops of water, the souls are but reflections of the One in the minds on which it shines. This is what Indian (Bharathiya) thought emphasizes most clearly through the nondualist thinkers. Those who cannot grasp this truth are under the influence of delusion (maya), it can be said.

Cosmos, the dream of God

Dreams also have to be based on reality. Without a basic reality, the "dependent idea or fact" cannot exist.

Without a basic thing, subsequent things cannot emanate. Without a basic being, subsequent beings cannot manifest.

That base is God (Iswara). He is full; He is the mind, the body, the Atma. You are only as real as a dream. For the eye that can see reality, the cosmos is not this multiplicity of name and form, but mere being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda). Just think of your dream. It does not arise from somewhere outside you, nor do the varied images and activities disappear into some place outside you. They arise in you and disappear into you. While dreaming, you consider the events and persons as real, and you experience, as really as in the waking stage, the feelings of grief, delight, fear, anxiety, and joy. You don't dismiss them at the time as illusory.

The cosmos is the dream of God; it arises in Him and merges in Him. It is the product of His mind. These lives and repeated arrivals are all fanciful weavings of delusion (maya), unreal fantasies, illusory agitations, unreal appearances. You are the Full, you are God. God is you. Those who have experienced this highest wisdom can attain oneness with the ONE, here and now.

10. The Yogis

Three stages of philosophic discovery

There are three steps in the progression of philosophic enquiry (or Vedantic thought) in India: dualism, qualified nondualism, and nondualism (dwaitha, visishta-adwaitha, and a-dwaitha). It is not possible to advance beyond these three steps by human endeavour. Nondualistic thought is beyond the reach of the common person; it is not so easily comprehensible. To conceive it with the intellect is itself hard. To experience it, a powerful faculty of penetration is needed. Therefore, it is best to start with the dualist step and experience it as the reality behind things; then, the second stage of qualified nondualism is rendered easier to reach.

The individual must progress as fast or as steadily as the community. We pass through boyhood, childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, and old age; it is an imperceptible but inevitable progress. We experience each only when we are passing through it. So, too, with these three stages of philosophic discovery. Each view is latent in the rest, and each proceeds out of the experience of the previous stage. It is not possible to be aware of all three at the same time. Based on our spiritual discipline (sadhana) and the experiences gained therefrom, each viewpoint comes into the consciousness and forms the spring of action and thought.

Those who assert that the universe is real but declare at the same time that the existence of God is but a dream are only proving themselves foolish. For when the effect, namely the cosmos is real, it must have a cause - how can there be an effect with no cause? God can be denied only when the universe is denied. God can disappear only when the cosmos disappears. What now appears as the cosmos is really God; this is the vision that true spiritual aspirants will get when they succeed in their endeavour. As a matter of fact, the universe we experience is the dream. When we awake from the dream, the truth of its being God will shine in the consciousness. From the beginning of time, the God whom we posit outside ourselves has been the reality inside

us also. This truth will also become steady in the faith of people.

Meeting dogmatism and fanaticism

Of course, no existing philosophy can be satisfying to all types and levels of mental equipment. Each has a distinct value. The stages of intellectual development or the powers of reasoning are different from each other. So, the three schools of philosophical interpretation mentioned above (dualism, qualified dualism, nondualism) attain acceptance among different temperaments and different groups of people. No one school has the right to claim superiority and impute inferiority. Only those who are unwise will resort to such tactics.

When people approach us with fanatic views, we must meet them with a smile, eager and yearning, filled with devotion to God. One can get intoxicated, of course, but only as a result of quaffing the wine of love (prema).

When people frantic for work approach us, we must share our skill and strength and join with them in work. By this means, it is possible to bring harmony among followers of various faiths and philosophic thoughts. It will bring together schools of thought and belief. If only this principle of harmony and harmonious cooperation would become a permanent asset of each person, how excellent it would be! How happy the world would have been if everyone had this knowledge that their viewpoint can at best be only partial and that it requires the harmonious commingling of many other facets to posit truth!

Yoga, path of harmony

Yoga means "coming together". In India, where yoga has been flowing in the veins of everyone for ages, it is possible to have the harmonious coexistence of many faiths and beliefs, which is the ideal type of universal religion. Those who can heroically put their faith into daily living can accomplish this togetherness in the human community. Togetherness or union can be

established between one's outer behaviour and inner nature. The spiritual aspirant intent on the path of love can strive for union between themselves and the embodiment of love, namely God. The vedanthin, the nondualist, can achieve the union of all that IS in the one concept of God. The path of yoga is designated differently in Sanskrit under different contexts; but those who are able to conceive and execute the union are revered as yogis.

Those who strive through activities and achievements to establish the union are yogis of action (karmayogis); those who follow the path of love are yogis of devotion (bhakthi-yogis); those who strive to manifest their latent powers and canalize them are royal yogis (raja-yogis); those who stick to logical analysis and rational interpretations and attain intuitive perception are yogis of wisdom (jnana-yogis). In the Indian (Bharathiya) spiritual history, these four types recur again and again.

Karma yoga

First, the yogi of action (karma-yogi). The yogi adopts the path of establishing union with Godhead by elevating and sublimating acts. We meet in the world many who seem to have been born just to accomplish one particular mission or project. Their intellect is not satisfied with mere imagination or planning. Their minds are full of actual concrete achievements that they yearn to realize. For such people, a guidebook or scripture is needed to direct them along beneficial paths.

Everyone in the world is seen engaged in some activity or other, all the time. Yet, very few know the significance and worthwhileness of activity (karma) or how best to realize the best results out of this inescapable trait.

Hence, life is being made banal and barren. The yoga of action teaches the awareness of this significance and guides people along to achieve the maximum benefit out of the activity. Where, when, and how action (karma) has to be done, how spiritual urges can reinforce strength of mind in the performance of action, and how action is to be taken up so that spiritual development can result - these are taught by the yoga of action.

One great objection is raised by some people about this, and we have to pay attention to it. The objection is that the yoga of action involves too much physical strain. But, basically, it is the company one keeps that decides the strain and stress to which the mind and body are subjected. "I like very much to engage myself in only this task." "I sought only to do good to him, but he ignored my desire and tried to injure me." These are the usual causes for the strain and stress mentioned above. Such disappointment makes one lose interest in activity. One wants to do good, and one seeks to do good to someone in some way, hoping to derive joy therefrom and distribute joy. When such joy does not arise, despair sets in.

But the real yogi of action does activity without getting attached, without being aware of whom the action helps or how. The lesson that the yoga of action teaches is: do the action as action, for the sake of the action. Why do yogis of action fill their hands with work? Because that is their real nature; they feel that they are happy while doing work. That is all. They do not bargain for results; they are not urged by any calculation; they give but never receive. They know no grief and no disappointment, for they had not hoped for any benefit.

Yoga of love and devotion

The second path is the yoga of love or devotion (bhakthi-yoga). This is congenial for those who are emotionally oriented. It is the path for those capable of filling their hearts with love. The urge is to have God as the Beloved.

The activities will be different, for they relate to incense-burning, gathering flowers for worship, building shrines and temples where one could install and adore symbols of beauty, wisdom, power, etc.

Are you inclined to remark that this is not the right means of achieving union with divinity? Remember that saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and guides throughout the world have emerged just from this devotional and dedicatory stage of spiritual endeavour. Some faiths tried to imagine God as formless

and described worship of God through various such acts as blasphemy. They tried to suppress the cults of devotion, and in the process, they slighted the Reality and its power and majesty. The belief that God cannot be symbolized in a form is evidence of blindness; the charge that such worship is barren is hollow. The history of the world is witness to the efficacy of devotion (bhakthi). It is not proper to ridicule these activities, ceremonials, and rituals and the descriptions of the lives of spiritual aspirants who adhered to them in order to earn union with divinity. Let those who yearn after the joy of worshiping the Form do so; certainly, it would be a sin to shatter their faith and treat it as infructuous.

The glory of the great heroes of the spirit, those who have scaled the highest peaks of realization and those who attained spiritual fulfilment, is exercising immense influence on the mind of mankind. It is as a result of a long line of such seers that the spiritual message of India has attracted the attention of all nations. If India has been able to earn the reverence of the world, the reason has to be sought in the precious treasure that the seers have earned and preserved. Here, love of God and fear of sin have been the chief pillars of life and the everlasting guides for living. India (Bharath) has won a name for being a holy land, a land steeped in renunciation and in spiritual exercises (sadhanas) aimed at union with the Absolute, renowned for sacrifice (thyaga) and yoga. The urges that this culture encouraged were all directed to the conquest of the vagaries of the mind.

Can the explanations offered by this culture on the nature and characteristics of Reality be palatable to those afflicted by agitated feelings and passion? To the great builders of this culture, God was tangible truth, the one and only real Fact, the goal of their entire love. So the inheritors and followers of this culture treat the nihilist arguments based on inescapably limited "reason" as the fool is treated in the story. The fool saw an idol, and, eager to discover the God, he broke it to pieces with a hammer.

The yoga of devotion (bhakthi) will teach people the path of love. It will tell them not to love with a view to gain profit. Love all; love all as you love yourselves. No harm can come to you then. It will only spread joy and

happiness to all. God is present in all beings as love. So the love is directed to and accepted not by the individual but by God, who is resident there. The seeker of God who relies on the path of devotion and dedication soon becomes aware of this fact.

Some love God as the mother, some as the father, and some as "dearest and closest friend". Others regard God as the Beloved, the only desired goal. They all endeavour to merge their love with the ocean of love that God is. Wherever love is evident, take it that it is God's own love. God is the greatest lover of mankind. Therefore, when anyone decides to serve humanity, whom He loves, God showers grace in plenty. When the human heart melts at the suffering of others and expands as a result of that sympathy, believe that God is present there. That is the sign of the validity of the path of devotion (bhakthi-yoga).

Royal path of unitive wisdom

Now about the royal yoga (raja-yoga). Royal yoga means the process of establishing mastery over the mind.

One need not surrender one's intellect or follow the guidelines of religious leaders. There is no chance of being misled or mistaken. At every step, one has to rely on one's own intellect and experience, as tested by oneself.

Every being has three varieties of instruments for acquiring knowledge and, through that knowledge, wisdom.

The first is "instinctive"; this is very strong, active, and advanced in animals. This is the earliest, the lowest, and therefore the least beneficial of the three. The second is the "rational", the instrument that seeks the cause and the effect thereof. This is most evident in people. The instinct can operate only in the limited field of senses and sensory experiences.

In people, instinctive knowledge is largely subordinated by the rational instruments. The limits of the rational are very thin; reason can range over

vastly wider fields. In spite of this, reason is also capable only of very poor performance. Its reach is restricted; it can proceed only a certain distance; it cannot venture further. The road that logic takes is not straight. It is more circular, returning again and again to the place from which it started.

Take, for example, our knowledge of the objective world, of the elements and energies that compose it. That which urges and prompts the objective world and its components does not stop with just this much. It absorbs also that which is immanent outside the objective world. So, the extent that reason can spread over and explain is as the "consciousness" that is imprisoned in the tiny molecule as compared with the vastness and grandeur of the transcendent fullness.

To go across the boundaries of reason into the full, free realm of intuition, certain spiritual disciplines and exercises are essential. They can be grouped under the name God-propelled wisdom (jnana). For we have only three stages of wisdom: native, or derived from the senses of action and perception (sahaja-jnana); knowledge derived by the process of discrimination and evaluation; and God-induced knowledge, i.e. gained through grace by inner vision or intuition. The first of these is the knowledge possessed by animals; the second is the characteristic of humanity, and the third is the special treasure of high-souled individuals. It possible for everyone to foster, cultivate, and develop the seedlings of this third wisdom; the capacity is latent in all.

Another fact has to be borne in mind. The three are stages of growth, so they are not mutually exclusive types of knowledge. God-induced knowledge will not contradict discriminative knowledge; it will only bring to light what is unmanifest in discriminative knowledge. The later stage only confirms and elaborates the previous ones.

Afflicted by the vagaries of the mind and its fancies, some consider their distorted attitudes to be God-given or grace-induced. They may even call upon others to heed their counsel and lead people astray by their barren guidance.

These morons announce their absurd prattle as God-propelled.

True teaching can never be counter to discriminative knowledge - the conclusion arrived at by discrimination and evaluation. The yogas mentioned above are all established in consonance with this view. Royal yoga has to be practised mostly by the mind and its resolution. This is a vast subject, so we consider here only its central theme, something that is the only refuge for the lowest of the low and the highest of the yogis: single-pointed meditation. For the person engaged in research in a laboratory, one walking along a road, a scholar reading a book, or an individual writing a letter or driving a car, concentration of all their attention on the articles before them and the activity in which they are engaged is very important. The person understands the nature and peculiarities of the object being handled. The more intense the concentration, the more successful the activity. When the mental abilities are focused on one effort, knowledge can be acquired quicker and from a wider field. And, that is the only way by which knowledge can be earned.

Concentration will enable one, whoever one is, whatever the activity engaged in, to finish it much better than otherwise. Whether in material assignments, ordinary day-to-day work, or spiritual exercises (sadhana), concentration of mental energies is a must if success is to be achieved. It is the key that can open the treasure chest of wisdom (jnana). This is the most important aspect of royal yoga. It can even be said that it is the only important aspect of that yoga. Millions of unwelcome, unwanted, unnecessary, and even harmful thoughts enter our minds and confound their activities. These have to be kept out; the mind has to be guarded and controlled and kept under our rigorous supervision. Royal yoga is the one refuge for persons endeavouring to win this victory.

Yoga of supreme wisdom

The yoga of wisdom (jnana-yoga) is devoted mostly to the study of basic principles. This universe or cosmos, which we cognize as outside ourselves, can be explained by means of various theories of knowledge, but none of them can be convincing to the uninitiated. Wisdom-yogis weave many such

theories and hypotheses.

They are not convinced of the reality of any material object in the universe, or of any activity, or even of anyone else who propounds any other explanation. They believe that they should transcend the daily chores of life and not be bound by social or other obligations. In the vast ocean of ISNESS, or truth (sath), all objects are but drops, in their view. They are all struggling to move from the circumference to the center, from which they manifested through illusion (maya). Wisdom-yogis also yearn to merge in the centre, the core of reality, away from the tangle of apparent diversity. They exert themselves to become the Truth, not only to become aware of it. Of course, as soon as they are aware of it, they become it. They cannot tolerate the thought that they and truth are separate and distinct.

The divine is the only kith and kin of wisdom-yogis. They know none other. They entertain no other urge, no other attachment, no other desire. God is all, in all. They cannot be affected by grief or joy, failure or success.

They see and experience only one unbroken, unchallenged stream of bliss-consciousness. For the people who are firmly established in this state, the world and its ups and downs appear trivial and illusory. In order to stay in that consciousness, they have to counter the pulls of the senses and face the fascinations of the world without any agitation of mind.

Wisdom-yogis are vigilant against the temptations held before them by the senses; turning them aside, they approach the Divine and seek strength and solace there. They realize that the power and energy that vitalize the tiniest of the tiny and the vastest of the vast is the same divine Principle. Their actions, thoughts, and words reveal the vision that they have experienced: the Supra-vision (Paramartha-drishiti). They see all elements - earth, fire, water, wind, and sky - as the divine itself and all beings - humanity, beast, bird, and worm - as emanations from God and therefore fully divine.

Experience Godhead with faith in the Vedas

One fact has to be noted here. Just because people have this knowledge of the immanence of the Divine, and even of its transcendence, they cannot be honoured as people of wisdom (jnanis), for the knowledge has to be digested through actual experience. This is the crucial test. It is not enough if the intellect nods approval and is able to prove that Godhead is all. The belief must penetrate and prompt every moment of living and every act of the believer. Wisdom should not be merely a bundle of thoughts or a packet of neatly constructed principles. Faith must enliven and enthuse every thought, word, and deed. The self must be soaked in the nectar of the spiritual wisdom.

The intellect is a poor instrument, for what the intellect approves as correct today is rejected tomorrow by the same intellect on second thought! Intellect cannot judge things finally and for all time. Therefore, seek the experience. Once that is won, the Atma can be understood "as all this". That is the yoga of wisdom (jnana-yoga).

According to the Indian (Bharathiya) way of thought, the Vedas are taken as the voice of God. Thus, the Vedas are the primary source of all knowledge for Indians. Everything is tested on the basis of the Vedas. The ancient sages have laid down that what agrees with the Vedas is agreeable to people and what does not thus agree cannot agree with them. The Vedas were not spoken by humans or composed by men and women. They were heard and recorded by sages and transmitted by guru to pupil for generations by word of mouth. The guru recited, and the pupil listened and recited just as the guru did, with the same care and correctitude. Thus, the Vedas have been handed down for centuries. No one can determine the exact dates when the Vedas were first heard or recited.

Therefore, they are taken as eternal (sanathana).

Vedas: the voice of God in eternity

At this point, we have to keep in mind another important truth. All other religions prevalent in the world hold as authoritative communications made to

some holy persons by God Himself in His corporate Form, or through some superhuman personalities or embodiments of parts or portions of Divinity. Indians do not follow this line.

They declare that the Vedas are based on no human authority; they do not depend on any person for their validity.

They are emanations direct from God; they are primeval; they are their own authority and validity. They were not written down or composed, constructed, or put together.

The cosmos or creation is limitless, eternal, with no beginning or end. So too, the voice of God, namely the Vedas, have no limit; they are eternal; they have no beginning nor end. Vid, the root from which the word Veda is derived, means "to know". When knowledge began, the Vedas manifested. Sages (rishis) visualized and announced them. They are the "see-ers of mantras".

The Vedas have two major sections: the Karma-kanda and the Jnana-kanda. In the Karma-kanda, a number of different sacrifices are mentioned, in which oblations are offered in the sanctified fire. Most of them have been given up by Indians in recent times, since it has become difficult to perform them with the exactitude the Vedic rules prescribe. Some still continue in a very attenuated form. In the Karma-kanda, moral codes are insisted upon very much. The moral rules and restrictions regulating life and conduct refer to the student (brahmachari), householder (grihastha), recluse (vanaprastha), and monastic (sanyasa) stages. Also, the Karma-kanda declares what is right and wrong for people following various professions and occupying different statuses. These are being followed here and there, in some thin form, by people in India.

The Jnana-kanda is called the end of the Vedas (Vedanta), the goal, the finale. It is enshrined in the Upanishads.

Adherents of the dualistic, qualified nondualistic, and nondualistic (dwaitha, visishtadwaitha, and adwaitha) schools of philosophical thought, worshipers

of Siva, Vishnu, Sakthi, Surya, and Ganapathi - all accept the supreme authority of the Vedas. They may interpret the Upanishads and other texts according to their own predilections and intellectual calibre, but no one dare question the authority of the Veda or Vedanta. So, it is possible to use the words Hindu, Indian (Bharathiya), and Vedanthin for the same person.

Currently, the various schools of philosophical thought may appear difficult to comprehend or as derived from unripe understanding. But when the matter is thought over in quiet, or the texts are studied in silence or investigated without prejudice, it will become clear that they have all relied on the points raised and the conclusions arrived at in the Upanishads. The Upanishads are being symbolized and worshiped in image form in temples and in private shrines, as a tribute to this universal appeal. They have entwined themselves, inseparably, in our lives.

"The Vedas are endless (Anantho vai Vedah)." But they were reduced into four collations, and their essence was preserved in them. For promoting peace and prosperity in the world, the four were taught and propagated.

They are the Rig-, Sama-, Yajur-, and Atharvana-Vedas. They uphold righteousness (dharma), proclaim the reality, and promote peace and harmony by developing among people the attitudes of worship, music, and adoration and also by cultivating skill in weaponry and war. They present the ideal before people and exhort them to follow it.

Whether the Indian is aware of it or not, invariably, every right act of the Indian will have some Vedic injunction or prohibition behind it as the regulator or the illuminator. From marriage rites to funeral rites and even rites for the propitiation of the ancestral spirits, the Vedas are the guides. A true Indian should never forget the Vedas or be ungrateful to them. The dualists, qualified monists, monists - all direct their lives according to lines laid down in the past by sages. But they do not now know the origin and the purpose of these guidelines. If only they did, the fruit would be much more plentiful and permanent.

11. Values In Vedas

Knowing, knowledge, is Veda (Vetthi ithi Vedah). That is, from the Vedas, one can know the code of right activity and the body of right knowledge. The Vedas teach one's duties from birth to death. They describe one's rights, duties, obligations, and responsibilities in all stages of life - student, householder, recluse, and monk. In order to make plain the Vedic dicta and axioms and enable all to understand the meaning and purpose of the do's and don'ts, the Vedangas, Puranas, and epic texts appeared, in course of time. So, if one is eager to grasp one's own significance and true reality, one has to understand the importance of these later explanatory compositions also.

This is why the ancients taught the Vedangas and other related texts even before the pupils learned the Vedas.

This was a must in the hermitage schools of the past. In those days, the Indians (Bharathiyas) studied the Fourteen Spiritual Subjects (Vidyas). The Vedas were learned by rote. The master of the Vedas who had learned the Vedas in this manner was called inert (jada)! But the word did not convey the meaning that he had not known anything. It only meant that he had nothing more to learn and was therefore "inactive" and "content". Through the study of the Vedas, he had become master of all knowledge. In order to make this human career worthwhile, the study of the Vedas was considered very essential. The stream of Indian culture always emphasized the Vedas as the supreme authority for deciding the values of human living.

The Four Vedas

Of the Vedas, the first is the Rigveda. It is generally considered to be composed of ten sections. In the first nine sections, hymns in praise of God under the names Agni, Indra, Maruth, etc. are found. Historians and researchers have suggested certain theories to explain how these hymns of praise arose. People in those days realized that fire (agni), air (vayu), wind (maruth), etc. were far more powerful than them, so they described their

divine qualities and propitiated them.

The second Veda, the Yajur-veda, has two recensions (reviews): the Krishna (black) Yajur-veda and Sukla (white) Yajur-veda. This Veda refers to the river Ganga (Ganges) and its region. It is the source of the later (uttara) Mimamsa school of thought and interpretation. The people had by then demarcated the forest areas from the cultivable areas around the villages and had taken to habitation in the villages. A prominent reason prompted the separation of certain portions of the Veda into the Yajur-veda. The Yajur-veda had seven sections called forest texts (aranyakas), indicating by that very name that they referred more to disciplines and spiritual exercises that can be practised only in the seclusion and silence of the forest.

The third Veda is the Sama-veda. Many of the hymns (riks) of the Rigveda are repeated in it, but with additional musical notes so that they may be sung during Vedic rituals and ceremonies. So the Sama-veda is mainly musical notation. The Sama-veda is also referred to as the Bell Veda (Ghana-veda) in order to highlight its musical nature. All musical schools are derivatives of the styles that are marked out by the Sama-veda. All tones and notes are embedded in that Veda.

The Rigveda Aryans lived on the banks of the Sindhu river, while the Yajur-veda came to their awareness when they were on the banks of the Ganga. The Sama-veda songs are also visualizations of the same era, but the people seem to have occupied even the middle region of India.

The fourth is the Athar-vana or Atharvaveda. It has been described in many diverse ways. Some have even denied it the status of a Veda. Others say that it is made up of what remained after the collation of the rest. In the other Vedas, the might and mystery of the Gods are described. But this Veda mentions the possibility of acquiring certain powers and mysteries by one's own effort and exercises. This is its speciality. Hatha-yoga (the yoga of postures), the skill of rendering oneself invisible by repeating certain mantras, the eight parts of yoga or communion (ashtanga-yoga) - these are made available for humanity only in this Veda. Of course, by winning the grace of

God, one can acquire even skills that are otherwise impossible to attain.

In short, it must be realized that the Vedas are very important and that they cover the entire range of knowledge.

They are the source and spring of Indian (Bharathiya) culture. They are the recordings of visions and divine experiences; their source is not some one definite person. They were revealed by God Himself, of His own innate mercy. The Vedic inheritance has been preserved pure and unsullied even to this day, because it was handed down from master to disciple in regular succession. Since it is timeless and authorless, it is worthy of acceptance. No one can afford to neglect or deny its value.

The four goals of human life

Whatever may be the diversities in contents, commentators agree that the essential teaching of all four Vedas is the same. The sections dealing with rites, modes of worship, and conclusions of inquiry help to achieve the four goals of life: dharma, wealth (artha), desire (kama), and liberation (moksha). Since it is very hard to master the Vedas, we have developed a vast literature on traditional laws (smrithi) to expound these texts that were "heard" and passed down orally (sruthi texts) - the epics and historical legends (puranas and ithihasas). Farsighted seers composed these out of historical and legendary incidents and events.

Activity (karma) and spiritual wisdom (jnana) are related as cause and effect, so the sections of the texts and laws that emphasized activity led to the discovery of new facets of truth and rendered the ideas of a transcendent God clearer and nearer. So too, the discovery of clearer concepts of God through spiritual inquiry along the path of wisdom fed "activity" with better meaning and higher purpose. The benefit of activity was proportionate to the faith, and the faith in activity was proportionate to the awareness of God won through wisdom. For involving oneself in good activities, spiritual wisdom is an essential prerequisite. That wisdom has ultimately to be derived from the Vedas; it is based on the teachings of the Vedas.

Dharma: the cornerstone of spiritual life

Activity (karma) is, really speaking, the practice of dharma. The Upanishads give us guidance on what has to be done and what has to be avoided on the spiritual journey. They direct us to revere the mother as God, revere the father as God, revere the preceptor as God, and revere the guest as God. They also warn us that truth and dharma should not be neglected. So, there are both positive and negative instructions - follow these counsels, not others. Whatever conduces to your progress in goodness, accept; avoid other counsels. Thus do the Upanishads instruct.

In these centuries, the King himself studied in hermitages at the feet of Upanishadic sages and helped others to study by granting economic aid profusely to the centres of learning that shone as repositories of Vedic lore. As the king, so the subjects. Fostering the Vedas meant fostering the Vedic scholars and practitioners. At the present time, encouragement is afforded and scholarship is honoured in other branches of learning. Vedic scholars are not given similar encouragement and emoluments. This important aspect has to be attended to.

Dharma protects those who protect it (Dharmo rakshati rakshitah), says the scripture. If people come forward to foster the sources of dharma, that good act, by itself, will help foster those who do it.

Save the ageless Vedic culture!

The study of the Vedas has become today the task of the economically weak. People have reconciled themselves to this situation. They associate the study with such a sad and pitiable picture. Vedic studies have come down to this deplorable pass. The very pundits who have attained scholarship in the Vedas are using it as a commercial item that can be sold. They do not demonstrate the value of Vedic study in the peace and harmony of their lives and thus win reverence for the Vedas by personal example. The Vedas are being misused by them for earning a pittance, rather than for liberation and peace. This is

why dharma is receiving a setback and anxiety and fear are spreading among people. The world can win back peace and harmony only when such people are persuaded to practise the ideals laid down in the Vedas and thereby serve as beacon-lights to guide mankind aright. Otherwise, downfall is inevitable.

The Indian (Bharathiya) spiritual stream has, until the present times, fertilized Vedic learning and practice.

Its message has always been, "Journey forward along the Vedic path." One may dilate on Vedanta and Vedas, but unless one holds forth the value of these ideals on the basis of one's own experience and practice, it is a waste.

This truth has been forgotten by these people. Let them awake in time and save the traditions and values of the ageless Vedic culture.

12. Values In Later Texts

Soon after the propagation of Vedanta through the Upanishads and other texts, the sages (rishis), steeped in austerities (tapas) and spiritual experience gained therefrom, composed the codes of law (smrithis), expatiating upon the codes of conduct for the people during the various stages of life as well as when they occupied various statuses in society. The codes of law, however, did not acquire the authority that the Vedantic texts had, for they dealt with rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations.

Ancient law codes and Atmic reality

Such codes of law can be found in sacred scriptures adored by followers of other religions. They consider such social codes and individual guidelines given by their prophets and seers as valuable and binding. We, too, revere them and should continue to revere them as regulations set up for the good of society and the progress of humankind. For we must admit that they were framed by outstanding sages and well-wishers of the people.

But, in the process of time, the codes of law suffered change by omissions, additions, and differences in emphasis. The sages allotted for each era (yuga) a particular code of law as authoritative, for too many codes of law with divergent counsel caused confusion and doubt. They said that those in the Kritha era have to consider one code of law as specially laid down for them, those in the Thretha era have to follow the dictates of another, those in the Dwapara era have to observe the path prescribed in a third, and those in the Kali era have to resort to a fourth.

When centuries roll over the land one after another, new problems arise and new situations and predicaments confront one, so the laws and limits of the past have to be altered here and there. Indeed, such adjustments are a part of the design. The people have to be shown the path to spiritual progress under the altered circumstances, so the code of law that suits the new era is declared as binding.

Nevertheless the following has to be borne in mind and carefully noted in memory by the readers. The Atmadharma (divine dharma) enunciated in the Vedanta is eternal, unchangeable. It can never be watered down or "adjusted to the needs of the times". The lasting teaching is: Faith in the Atma as the core, the reality, the goal is true for all time. The truths of Atma-dharma are based on the eternal foundations of the core of a person and nature (prakriti), which is the projection of the divine will. So, they are beyond the reach of change. They are as relevant and as valid today as they were thousands of years ago. Even when a thousand more years roll by, their relevance and validity cannot be affected in the least. Vedanta will stand firm, regardless of the past becoming the present and the present flowing on into the future.

However, the moral codes and ideals of good conduct, the spiritual disciplines that one can adopt to control the mind and senses and purify the intelligence have to suit the conditions of the people and the bonds they cultivate among themselves and other groups. With the changing face of social conditions, they also have to undergo adjustments and modifications. They could be appropriate and beneficial under certain circumstances of time and space, but they might be not so under other circumstances.

For example, food regulations that are prescribed during certain periods are withdrawn and new rules are laid down during other periods. Climatic conditions dictate the type of food needed. Traditional codes of law (smrithis) recognize the need and allow changes in food habits, in order to maintain health.

The same attitude is also seen in other matters. For the same reasons, under modern conditions, it is desirable to have changes in the regulations and limits that govern society. Of course, the fundamental principles of dharma must remain unaffected. They can never be shaken or loosened.

Puranas, or lore of mythology

Now, about the Puranas. "The Puranas deal with historical incidents, of creation and evolution (Puranam pranjali kshanam)." The incidents are

chosen and narrated to provide illustrations of basic philosophic truths.

The Puranas were composed to expound the teachings of the Vedas and Vedanta to the common person through interesting mythological and legendary tales. The language of the Vedas is very ancient and contains many archaic elements of grammar and vocabulary. Even great scholars find it difficult to discover the age when the verses (riks) were formulated.

But the Puranas were composed in the language that was current and easily understood at the time. What we now know as Sanskrit is the language of the Puranas. Not only scholars but even ordinary folk could easily follow that language when the Puranas were written.

The Puranas have historical narratives of divine personages, great rulers, dynasties, and the fortunes of kingdoms and communities. Through them all can be seen shining examples of dharma and expositions of spiritual principles.

All the texts, scriptures, and holy books referred to are grouped under the one comprehensive name "Hindu Scriptures (sastras)." It is no wonder that the people who revered and composed such a vast and valuable literature of religion and philosophy over thousands of years were, in the course of time, divided and subdivided into sects and subsets, which owed preferential loyalty to special creeds and beliefs. Some of these had broad gaps between them.

We have no time now to elaborate on the fact that the differences between the sects are based on attitudes born out of the freedom of thought that was authoritatively allowed by the ancients. Nor is it necessary. What we have to grasp are: the truth accepted by all and the attitudes approved by all, that is to say, the principles that a person calling himself "Hindu" has to believe.

People are responsible for their fate

What exactly is the cause of creation? What is the nature of the original

substance that creation effected, and how was it effected? These questions are important not only for Indians (Bharathiyas) but for all people prone to inquiry. There can be no effect without a cause; there can be no structure without a base.

Well. It can be asserted that all this visible cosmos has Brahman as the root cause, but what is Brahman?

Brahman is eternal, pure, ever vigilant, omniscient, indivisible, formless; Brahman is the origin of this cosmos (jagath). Brahman is shaping, evolving, and fostering this cosmos.

Now, a few doubts might arise in people's minds: Why is so much partiality evident in creation? Some are born healthy; others, unhealthy. Some lead prosperous carefree lives; others toil throughout their lives in dire poverty. Certainly, it can be argued, there are signs enough of the partiality that creation or the Creator reveals.

It has to be made clear that life thrives on death. Life is based on death: One living thing consumes another in order to live. The strong trample the weak. This tale of terror continues unceasingly. It is the very nature of this world. Seeing this, people conclude that, if the world was created by God, He should be cruelty itself. Such inference appears justified from the ordinary person's point of view.

But the pure stream of Indian spiritual culture (Bharathiya Paramartha Vahini) declares that this is not true at all! God is not the cause of either misery or joy, of good fortune or bad, it announces.

Then who brings about evil and good? We ourselves, is the answer. Rain falls equally on ploughed and unploughed land. Only the ploughed land derives benefit from it. The clouds are not to blame. The fault lies in the ignorant idler who lets the land lie fallow. The grace of God is ever at hand, it has no "more or less", no ups or downs. We draw upon it, more or less, and use it for our good.

The question might arise: Why are some born in happiness and some in misery? They have done neither good nor evil, to be treated so unequally. True, they have done nothing in this life; they are only just born. But they had done good or evil in previous lives. The consequence of what was done in the previous life has to be experienced in this life.

Now, we can arrive at two conclusions on which all sects of Hinduism are agreed. The Buddhists and the Jains also accept these two. Every one of us has the firm belief that life is eternal. It could not have originated from nothing. That is impossible. If it had come out of inert slime or mud, it would have been inert and inactive.

All things put together will disintegrate. All that is bound by time will end in time. If life started only yesterday, it cannot last beyond tomorrow. If the tree has roots, the roots shall go dry and it cannot survive forever. Life must have existed ever since the Cosmos has been in existence. It does not require argument to understand this truth.

Do we not see that all modern sciences tend to confirm more and more assuringly and clearly the revelations made in the texts and scriptures of India? This too has to be accepted some day.

Triple texts of highest spirituality

As authoritative texts of the basic beliefs of Indian culture in the spiritual field, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutra, and the Bhagavad Gita - the Three Sources (Prasthanas) - have to be reckoned. Many in India feel that only the doctrine of nondualism (a-dwaita Vedanta) is correct, but this attitude is not correct. The Upanishads are the very voice of God. The Brahma Sutra is the supreme embodiment of the principles and doctrine propounded by Vyasa; it is the most important of the texts that depict philosophic doctrines. It harmonizes the entire body of philosophic beliefs; though it is based on earlier texts and dissertations, there is no conflict between the earlier and later. In the aphorisms of the Brahma Sutra, each conclusion attains fulfilment and reconciliation.

The Bhagavad Gita acts like a commentary provided by God, for Vedanta.

All sects of Hinduism that claim to be authentic and orthodox accept the Three Sources as their basic texts - whether they are dualists, qualified nondualists, or nondualists. Whoever desired to propagate a new interpretation or a new attitude or theory - Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwacharya, Vallabhacharya, or Chaithanya - had to propagate it through commentaries from that standpoint on only the Three Sources. Therefore, to assert that Vedanta can be used only with reference to the Upanishads and the doctrines that they teach would be a great mistake.

All conclusions drawn from the Three Sources are genuine and deserve the name Vedanta. Qualified nondualism as well as dualism have as much claim to be known as Vedanta as nondualism. This unity in diversity, this harmony of difference, is the core of the current Indian (Bharathiya) thought.

There is milk in the body of the cow. The milk has ghee (clarified butter) in it, but the cow cannot derive any strength through it. The milk has to be taken out of the animal, it has to be boiled, and a little sour curd has to be poured into it to curdle it. After the milk is transformed into curds, it has to be churned, and the butter has to be separated and rolled. Afterward, the butter has to be melted and clarified to get the ghee. The ghee thus prepared can be fed to the cow, and then it would be rendered stronger.

So too, consider: God is omnipresent, but He isn't amenable to people unless they do spiritual practice (sadhana).

Dualism and nondualist wisdom

Oil is in the sesame seed; butter is in milk; water is underground; fire is latent in wood. Similarly, the omnipresent God is in the human body and the human mind. When one seeks to separate Him and identify Him, one has to make efforts and do spiritual practice. Then, as a consequence of the effort and the spiritual practice one will realize that God is oneself and there is no difference between the two. This is liberation, wisdom, realization, according to the

process that Sankara calls the practice (upasana) of nondualism (a-dwaitha).

Now, about worship in qualified nondualism (visishta-adwaitha). Are seekers to consider the God whom they yearn to adore as different and separate from them or as part of them, associated somehow with them? This is the question.

Now for the answer. The jiva is the soul of the body; God is the soul of the jiva. Having one's faith fixed thus, adoring God is the means that Ramanuja has propagated. All this cosmos is part of Him; it is in Him. He is the inner Motivator and He is present in all. That Supreme Person can be won only through unflinching devotion (prapatthi) and total surrender (saranagathi). "You are my all, O my God of Gods. You are my only Master (Thwameva sarvam mama deva deva)" - this is the attitude one has to develop and make one's own.

The practice of dualism (dwaitha) - the soul-Supreme Self (jivatma-Paramatma) relationship - is as a wife-husband relationship. The full, free, supreme Vishnu is the husband, the master, the lord, the ruler, the provider; the individual is the ruled, the dependent, the wife. This method of spiritual practice was taught by Madhwacharya.

Without devoted attachment to the lotus feet of the Lord, that is to say, without devotion, liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara) and even purity of intellect and emotions are impossible to attain. For those who have the spring of ecstatic devotion to the presence of the Lord within them, though they may not have any texts to ponder over, the very contemplation of the beauty, grace, and power of the Lord will give them bliss of superconscious devotion. One cannot discover what prompts the experience. In that ecstatic mood, they discard all sense of shame and personality and yearn to become the beloved of God, in blissful union. They will then dance and sing aloud and be merged in genuine joy and bliss (ananda). Spiritual practices in conformity with this faith were laid down by Madhwacharya.

The agony of the lover to attain the beloved is the true sign of the path of dualism. This was elaborated in a thousand ways by others who came after.

Bhagavad Gita - Gospel of Krishna

The worship (upasana) laid down in the Gita is incorporated in the Mahabharatha, named as the fifth Veda.

This fifth Veda is a veritable treasure-house of gems illuminating the problems that confront people in worldly and spiritual matters. The Mahabharatha, a magnificent drama, was enacted by Sri Krishna on the stage called Dharmakshetra, where He had collected together all the items he needed for the production. Madhava, that is, Krishna, was director. He collected the participants, the cast, the songs each had to sing, and the words each had to utter and decided on the exits and entrances. He was the actor, the witness, the producer; all roles were He. On one side, immeasurable worldly power soaked in unrighteousness; on the other side, righteousness-filled, limited Atmic power. This is the essential charm of the Mahabharatha.

This is the Bhagavad Gita. The entire essence of the Mahabharatha is in it. "I shall do exactly as you order (Karishye vachanam thava)." "One can find safety and happiness doing one's own duties (Swadharme nidhanam sreyah)." These are the touchstones of worldly dharma.

Neglecting the path of devotion to God (bhakthi), which can add unto you all prosperity and progress, those who close their eyes and contemplate on "I am Brahma (Aham Brahmasmi)" and suffer from the egotism it confers get only misery as their reward. If the husk is pounded, no rice can be secured. Having no faith in Krishna's words and going as one's intellect dictates cannot be the road to ultimate Truth (Brahma-thathwa).

The Bhagavad Gita has itself taught beyond the possibility of doubt, by means of illustrative descriptions and incidents, that Krishna is the universal Absolute Brahma itself. It is the essence of all Vedantas. It is the repository of the nectar churned out of the entire collection of scriptures (sastras). It is the sacred stream of Indian spiritual thought, held in one text. Can anyone deny this?

13. The Avatar As Guru

God: source of time, creation, activity

The cosmos or creation, time, activity (karma) - all these are manifestations of the will of God and are bound to Him. They are considered by some as "false" and "unreal", but how can God, who is the very embodiment of truth (sathya), will anything not true? Therefore, it can be said that these two are true, in one way. When evolution changes over into involution and the ultimate stage of mergence of both the conscious and the unconscious is reached, God (Iswara) is the only One existent.

Time is the manifestation of the power of God, so it has no measurable beginning or end. Activity (karma) is also an important truth to be reckoned as such. God is no wayward force, unmindful of bounds and limits. He creates situations and environments strictly according to the activities in which people engaged during their previous lives. The creation, the time, and the action - all three are true in God and true along with God. They are instruments that He uses. They are bound to Him.

God (Iswara), though not ordinarily perceptible to the senses, becomes so perceptible to the devotee who has such deep attachment to Him that there is a yearning to merge in Him. Why? Such devotees perceive God as clearly as they perceive external objects. God is said to be formless; that is to say, He can assume or adopt any form. He has endless forms. Then, in what form does He grant a clear vision to the devotee? He manifests in the form for which the devotee yearns, the form that will grant the highest satisfaction. These forms are His Avatars.

God doesn't limit Himself when He thus manifests; He is fully present in every such Avatar; He manifests Himself with His full glory in every Avatar.

It is said that some manifestations are partial and others full, that some are temporary and others lasting. But these are called Avatars only by courtesy.

Narada, Sanatkumara, and other similar sages are referred to in some texts as such Avatars. They don't have all the divine characteristics, so they are not worshiped.

The individual soul (jiva) is by its very nature "eternal and immortal". It has no end or beginning that can be calculated. It has neither birth nor death. It is self-illuminating. It is the knower and the knowledge, the doer and the enjoyer. Whether bound or liberated, the individual soul has all these characteristics intact. But whatever it is, it doesn't have the freedom that God has. In every act, the individual soul has to involve the body, the senses like the ear, and the vital airs that operate in the body. All these coexist with the Divine in the individual.

Whatever it is, the individual soul is not a machine that has no will of its own. Just as the activities in this life are determined by the nature of the activities in previous lives, the activities of this life determine the activities of the next life. God (Iswara) decides the time and place, the circumstance, and the consequence in accordance with the nature of the activities presently undertaken. God has the power to shape the nature of people, but He does not exercise that power and mould it differently. He leaves it to the free will of the individual, which has to learn the lesson by experience.

God, nature, and people

The flake of stone that is chipped off the rock is a part of the rock, but the individual is not a part of God like that. In one sense, the individual soul (jivi) and the cosmos (jagath) are distinct and different from God. In another sense, they are inseparable. This mystery of separateness and identity cannot be grasped by means of reason and intellect. It can be understood only through the Vedas and their message. This is the main lesson that this "Stream of Indian Spiritual Values (Bharathiya Paramartha Vahini)" can instil.

Every child arrives in the world bearing the burden of unrequited consequences accumulated in previous lives. It does not drop from the lap of nature, as a streak of lightning from the clouds. It is born in this world in order

to experience the beneficial and the malignant consequences that are the products of its own acts in past lives. This is the explanation for the differences that are evident among people. This is the principle of karma.

Each person is the cause of their own fortune, good or bad. Each is themselves the builder, the architect. Fate, destiny, predetermination, the will of God - every one of these explanations is toppled by the principle of karma.

God and people can be reconciled and affiliated only on the basis of this principle of karma. When one realizes that God has no share in causing one's suffering, that one is oneself the sole cause, that no blame attaches to any other person, that one is the initiator as the beneficiary - the cause and the effect - of one's acts, that one is free to shape one's future, then one approaches God with a firmer step and a clearer mind.

If a person is afflicted by misfortune now, it is assuredly the result of their previous acts. Accordingly, one has to believe that happiness and good fortune also lie in one's own hands. If one decides, happiness and good fortune can be gained.

A person who is pure in spirit now is themselves the cause. Without yearning, a person cannot earn. So, it is clear that the will inherent in a person is beyond all stages and conditions, all formations and transformations. The freedom that it represents is the result of one's past acts; it is powerful, infinitely fruitful, and supreme.

The problem of liberation

The next problem is liberation (mukthi). The Atma is neither masculine nor feminine; it is not possible to impose these distinctions on it. They are merely physical attributes pertaining to the body. When talking about the Atma, ideas such as these are but signs of delusion. They are relevant only when the physical body is under discussion. The discussion of "age" is also a product of this delusion. The Atma is eternal. This ageless Entity is ever One and Only.

How did the Atma get incarnated? In the scriptures (sastras), there is just one explanation. For all this encasement and bondage, there is only one reason: ignorance (a-vidya), or absence of right awareness. Through ignorance, one gets bound, so wisdom is the cure. Only that can take one across. How can this awareness be accomplished?

There are three ways to acquire awareness. The first is through love (prema), through worship of God in full devotion and dedication (bhakthi), through loving service and adoration directed toward every living being - who is but a moving temple of God, for He resides in each one. Through such love and devotion, the false knowledge, the ignorance, can be scattered and the bonds made to fall off; the individual will then be released.

God with and without form

Two ideas about God are described in the scriptures (sastras): the idea that He is cognizable as having attributes and the idea that He is free from all attributes, so He cannot be described as thus and thus. These are the with-form (sa-guna) and the without-form (nir-guna) aspects. The with-form God is cognized as present everywhere, as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of everything and being, as the Father and Mother of the Universe.

Therefore, He is beyond and above all beings and things and eternally distinct and different from humanity. It is said by upholders of the with-form aspect that the very cognition of this attributeful principle brings about liberation (mukthi). Liberation is attained when one establishes oneself in this knowledge and lives in and through it.

The second way to acquire awareness is through contemplation on the attributeless without-form principle.

During this contemplation, the truth that the ascription of attributes to the divine principle is undesirable and inappropriate is realized and the attributes are shed from the concept of God. Then, the one universal attributeless person will alone remain in the consciousness. It can be referred to as the

Knower (Jnatha). For, wisdom (jnana) is relevant only in the context of the human mind and human consciousness. It cannot be designated as the inquirer, because inquiry is the mark of the weak. It cannot be related to the intelligence, for intelligence discriminates, and the attempt to divide and dissect is again a sign of unsteadiness. It cannot be designated the Creator, for creation is the activity of the bound, the limited. It or He has no bonds or limits. Activity implies a wish, a want, a desire; it does not originate from any other cause. All work has as its base some inner pain that is sought to be alleviated.

In the Vedas, the Divine is spoken of only as THAT. The reference is always to THAT. The word "He" is susceptible of provoking ideas of difference, so the word THAT is used to indicate that it is free from all limitations and bonds imposed by the ascription of attributes. This is the essence of the philosophy of nondualism, for attributes divide and distinguish.

Self liberation and fulfillment

It is the inescapable destiny of everyone to fulfil themselves. Every living being has to attain fullness in the end.

Each one is at present at a particular stage of this march, as a result of the activities engaged in during previous lives and the feelings entertained in the past. The future is being built by the activities being engaged in now and the feelings that urge and shape them. That is to say, what one does, feels, or thinks about at present are the basic reasons for the good or bad fortune that is in store.

The prompting to save oneself and the power to pull oneself up into liberation cannot be derived from books.

This strength has to come from the individual himself. One can spend an entire lifetime scanning profoundly written books; one might earn the highest rank among intellectuals. But at the end of it all, one might not have attained even some little progress in the spiritual field. To conclude that a scholar who

has reached the topmost height can therefore be considered ripe in spiritual wisdom will prove to be a great mistake. Scholars themselves might imagine, as they learn more and more from books, that they are progressing more and more on the spiritual path, but when they examine the fruit of their studies, they will recognize that though their intellects have become sharper and heavier, they have not been acquiring awareness of the Atma to the slightest degree.

Character: the core of spirituality

Many people have the skill to deliver wonderful discourses on spiritual subjects; but, really speaking, everyone has failed in living the life of the spirit, the highest Atmic life. What exactly is the reason for this sad state of affairs? Now, spiritual texts are studied to equip oneself with scholarship in the competitive race for superiority, to earn a livelihood, to pose oneself as an undefeatable upholder of some specific point of view, and generally to earn a reputation as a pundit. The scholar might write elaborate commentaries on the Gita. But, as a result of all that study, if in their character, behaviour, and conduct the scholar does not prove that the Gita has soaked in, all that panditry is but a burden to be carrying around. This is the lesson that Indian (Bharathiya) culture tries to impress.

The source from which this lesson emerges is the Guru, the soul (purusha) latent in you. The study of the scriptures and other texts can reinforce the spiritual urges already in you and induce you to practise the precepts.

Don't treat the learning you derive from them as so much fodder for the brain. It must be sublimated into bliss (ananda) for the individual. Envy, pompousness, egotism - such evil traits have to be driven out of the individual.

Qualifications of the preceptor

This spiritual treasure can be obtained from another too. However, the giver has to possess supreme attainment, and the recipient has to possess the

special merit that deserves the achievement. The seed may have life in it, but the soil must be ploughed and made fit to activate it. When both conditions are satisfied, the harvest of spiritual success is assured. One who instructs in the field of religion has to be of enthralling excellence; the listener, also, has to be of sharp and clear understanding. When both are surprisingly supreme and extraordinarily enthusiastic, the result will be spiritual awakening of the highest level. Otherwise, rarely can such results follow. The real gurus steal your hearts, not your wealth.

The pupil has to concentrate on service to the guru and ruminate over their teachings. The pupil must be eager to translate the teaching into daily activity and actual practices. The pupil must fill the heart with devotion and dedicate all their skill for the actualization of the guru's counsel. Such a person deserves the name pupil (sishtya).

When the thirst for liberation and the revelation of one's reality is acute, a strange and mysterious force in nature will begin operating. When the soil is ready, the seed appears from somewhere! The spiritual guru will be alerted, and the thirst will get quenched. The receiving individual has developed the power to attract the giver of illumination. That power is strong and full. Therefore, naturally the splendour that can confer illumination will get ready to bless.

Avatar: guru of gurus

Readers! Though gurus of the common type have increased in number, a guru is available for one who is far more supreme and compassionate than any or all gurus. He is none other than the Avatar of the Lord. He can, by the mere expression of His will, confer the highest consummation of spiritual life. He can gift it and get one to accept it. Even the meanest of the mean can acquire the highest wisdom, in a trice. He is the guru of all gurus. He is the fullest embodiment of God as a human.

A person can cognize God only in human form. This Indian (Bharathiya) Spiritual Stream has been declaring, over and over again, that adoring God in

human form is the highest duty. Unless God incarnates as a person, people can never hope to see God or listen to His voice. Of course, one may picture God in various other forms, but one can never approximate the genuine form of God. However much one may try, one cannot picture God in any form except the human.

People can pour out wonderful discourses and talks on God and the nature and composition of all that exists in the universe. They may satisfy themselves, asserting that all accounts of God descending in human form are meaningless myths. That is what the poor ordinary eye can discern. This strange inference is not based on wisdom (jnana). As a matter of fact, wisdom is absent in these assertions and declarations. What we can notice in them is only the froth floating on ego waves.

Who am I?

Who am I (Koham)? Why do I feel that I am the doer? What is the nature of consciousness that I am the enjoyer?

Why be born and die at last? How did I deserve this life? Can I be liberated from this series of entrances and exits (samsara)? The attempt to discover answers to these questions is what the sages (rishis) of old designated as "austerities (tapas)". When the intellect of the individual ripens into this steady inquiry, the individual enters the path of spiritual exercise (tapas).

This is the first step. As soon as people have ascended this step, the scriptures - the collective wisdom of seekers enshrined in sacred texts - welcome them. The traditional revealed scripture (sruthi, i.e. the Vedas) directs them to "listen, ruminate, and practise" the axiomatic counsel of the sages. The sages assure them that they will attain the goal of release and will free themselves from the delusive fascination for the visible world, portrayed for them by their own minds.

A proper guru is in God-consciousness

Only the Divine can be the guide, companion, and counselor on this lone journey of a person. Those styled gurus cannot help or rescue. The Vedas (Sruthis) advise people to approach gurus who are versed in the Vedas (are srotriyas) and in God consciousness (Brahma-nishtas). They warn people against resorting to others.

What does srotriya mean? It means a person who is unquestioningly loyal to the Vedas and who adheres to the rules prescribed and the limits imposed therein, without the slightest deviation.

Brahma-nishta means a person who is established in Brahma-consciousness. The person has no doubts to pester them, no diversion to distract, for the person has won steady faith in Atma. The person is unconcerned with the material world and sees all worlds as Brahma, as the manifestation of the Brahma Principle. Activities and movements are in consonance with this awareness. The vision encompasses all of time; the person knows the past, present, and future and is beyond all characterization; the three modes have no affect. The person has their being in the One and Only - the Atma. The person is unaffected by distinctions and differences, dualities and disparities and is perpetually in bliss (ananda).

The Vedas exhort the seeker to approach such a guru. But only one person has all these attributes: the Lord of All (Sarveswara). Scholars who have learned the truth or are proficient in principles are not in the category of practitioners of the Vedas (srotriyas) and Brahma consciousness (Brahma-nishtas). They are not the gurus you need.

The phenomenon of death

The Yoga-vasistha says that Sri Ramachandra asked sage Vasistha the question, "Divine Master! Is there a way to avoid death?" The same problem drove Gautama Buddha along the path of renunciation and forced him to give up all traces of attachment; it showered on him eternal fame, as supreme among people. Prahlada, foremost among the devotees of the Lord, addressed his fellow pupils, even as a boy, "Friends! Haven't you observed

that some boys of our own age fall dead and get burned or buried?" Thus, he drew their attention to the event of death and invited them to draw lessons from that inevitable fact. He taught them the higher wisdom.

Those who have the inner urge to achieve the higher wisdom that confers liberation have, therefore, to reflect upon and investigate the phenomenon of death. Death should arouse no fear. It should not be regarded as inauspicious.

You should not run away from the problem, imagining that death happens only to others and that it will not happen to you. Neither should you postpone reflections on death, judging that they are inappropriate now, and profitless, for inquiry into death is really inquiry into one's own reality. This truth has to be recognized.

Discrimination (viveka), the special gift to humanity, has to be employed to unravel the reality of the visible universe, its nature and validity. The fact of death is the prime cause that originates the problem "Who am I?" That fact ought not to be ignored as unworthy of attention. You should not flee from it in fear. For if you behave so, you land yourself on the first step toward stupidity (a-jnana) and plant in your mind the seedling of the tree of foolishness. You prop up the pillars of delusion (maya).

Dialogue with God of Death

Every mystery latent in human existence is entwined with inquiry into death. The glory and majesty of the Divine are fully revealed only when death is investigated. According to the Katha Upanishad, among the three boons requested by Nachiketas from Yama, the God of Death, the chief was the one relating to death. "Do people exist after death? Some declare that they do; others, that they don't. Each argues as their fancy leads. Which of these opinions is true? Solve this problem for me," pleaded Nachiketas. He insisted on an answer.

Yama tried to avoid his pleading. He said, "Son! Nachiketas. This is an

insoluble mystery. The sacred texts treat it as subtler than the subtlest. I find it impossible to make even the gods understand this phenomenon. Nevertheless, you crave this boon. Why should you be troubled by this problem? You are an innocent little boy. You deserve to live long, enjoying many a happy event. I shall grant you, as a boon, enormous riches; accept them and lead a life of unexcelled happiness. Ask for any quantity of material pleasure; they are yours. Come! Ask and reach the height of joy." But Nachiketas replied, "However vast the riches, however pleasant the experiences they confer, don't they have to receive your impact without a murmur? Nothing in creation can escape you, can it? Everything is immersed in death. Why then should I aspire for items that give only temporary relief? Grant me the boon on which my heart is set."

In the Mahabharatha, Dharmaraja is asked to name the greatest marvel in the world. He replies, "Though every day we see people dying, we do not think we ourselves will die. What can be a greater marvel than this?"

God is the true Guru

Similarly, the famous sage Yajnavalkya, after deciding that he would join the monastic order, called his two wives (Katyayani and Maitreyi) and told them that he had partitioned his movable and immovable properties equally, for both of them. On hearing this, the elder wife, Maitreyi, who was endowed with a high level of intelligence and insight, protested and said, with a smile on her face, "Lord! Can these riches you are handing over to me save me from death and render me immortal? If you assure me that they will do so, certainly I shall accept them, with due reverence to you." Yajnavalkya explained. "Riches make life pleasant and delightful by the chances they give you to live happily.

Do you say that you do not need such valuable riches?"

But Maitreyi persisted. "If what you say is true, you could have continued enjoying these riches and deriving happiness therefrom. Why have you decided to give them up and become a monk? No. It is not proper to cheat us

weak-minded women, holding these delusive trinkets before us. How can the riches that you refuse to keep give us peace and happiness? They are temporary objects; they are liable to destruction; they entangle us still further in bondage; they foster the ignorance that we yearn to discard; they are the chief promoters of anxiety and worry.

They are basically polluted, since they are not within the realm of the Atma."

When Maitreyi placed before him this truth, Yajnavalkya was silenced, and, not knowing how to proceed, he stood with his head bent before her. Then, Maitreyi fell at the feet of her husband and said, "Lord! You are master of all mysteries. You must have called us and placed before us this proposal in order to test our intelligence. I have no desire for luxury or even comfort. I do not crave riches and possessions. Instruct me about the path that can confer eternal bliss."

In fact, there is only ONE: the highest Brahman. The scriptures on nonduality proclaim that:

Brahma sathyam, jagath Mithya; Jeevo Brahmaiva naparam

Brahman alone is true; creation is a myth. The individual (jivi) is Brahman itself.

All that happens in the world is as unreal as the dream experience. Dreams disappear and appear again. The pleasures and joys experienced in life are like mirages appearing on the desert sands of hatred, envy, and selfish greed. Now, how can those people who believe that this mirage is real and run toward it become gurus? Will it be proper to address them as the wise (jnani)? They are installed on high seats of illusory authority. They teach what they do not practise. They hold forth ideals that they themselves ignore.

How can such people be examples to seekers who need spiritual progress? They are not genuine, for they have not even an iota of the guru principle in them.

The Lord alone (Sarveswara) is the genuine Guru. For all seekers, this is the path; let them hold fast to this faith.

14. This And That

Universal "I"

Every living being refers to itself as "I", "I am Rama", "I am Krishna", "I am Sita", "I am Radha". Each assumes the "I" as their own and uses it whenever they have to designate themselves. If birds, beasts, and other living things could speak, they would behave likewise and refer to themselves as "I". Even mountain peaks, hills, and trees might announce themselves as "I am a hill", "I am an anthill", "I am a tree", if they could speak.

When we spend some time thinking this over, it will be clear that some great mystery is embedded in the expression "I". The illiterate boor uses it; the sage who has secured the divine vision uses it; even God, it is said, announces Himself as "I". But who probes into this mystery? And among those who have dared probe, how many have succeeded in unraveling it? Even if a few have unraveled the mystery, how many among them have used the discovery to transform their lives? Have the celebrated intellectuals, the pundits, the realized sages (paramahansas) succeeded in delving into the meaning and significance of this "I"?

No. Let us see whether the exponents and commentators of the Bhagavad Gita, who can reel off the 18 chapters and the 700 verses in a continuous stream, have grasped the full implications and importance of the word "I".

In the Gita, in the following and similar declarations, Sri Krishna refers to "I", doesn't He?

I shall absolve you (Aham mokshayishyami).

Come to me, the One, for refuge (Mam ekam saranam vraja).

Know Me, as the knower of the body (Kshetrajnam cha api mam viddhi).

So this expression "I" is clearly omnipresent; it is the sign and symbol of all individual souls (jivatmas); it has unlimited forms and appearances. Like the string that passes through the rosary beads, it interpenetrates and holds together all names and forms.

However transient names and forms might be, the "I" persists without being affected. Therefore, one has to know this omnipresent "I" so that one can understand all that has to be known. He who has known it is the worldteacher (jagath-guru), the teacher of all beings (viswa-guru), the teacher to be followed (sadguru).

The body is only the container, the sheath. Nevertheless, imposing differences and distinctions based on physical characteristics and material considerations, some are elevated as "touchable" and some condemned as "untouchable"; some are classified as "high" and others as "low". Intellect cannot claim honour, and persons cannot claim to be pundits, if studies are directed to the amassing of money or earning the wherewithal for a comfortable living; nor can skill and excellence in argumentative scholarship be worthy of reverential mention. Really, when you dive into its significance, the word "I" leads you to the supreme Godhead. "That is you", "That is I", "I and that are One", this what the great Vedic dictum "That thou art (Thath thwam asi)" declares. This is the very core of all teaching, the grandest of counsels.

This sacred principle embodied in the "I" is beyond the grasp of the most learned scholars by means of lone inquiry, without guides and helpers. However, the guides have to be aware of the truth and be earnest in living the truth. It is beyond the reach of scholarship, logic, and grammar. Note that these are warnings administered by the Vedas and law codes (sruthis and smrithis).

Well. Whoever intends to learn in a general way about this "I" and its implications can be told the secret in just three sentences:

I am active in the daytime, when I am awake. I sleep at night, and experience dreams.

Thus, acting and experiencing both day and night, I die.

Koham: Who am I?

When one considers these statements of the individual, one can conclude that they are based on the individual's knowledge gained from this life. "The I begins, when I am born", one believes. But, did this "I" exist before birth? If it did, how can an existing thing be said to be born? Even if this objection is ignored, how did it exist, and where? Was it disembodied apart from name and form? Was it beyond the pale of the senses? Doubts such as these pursue the seeker in waves. It has to be understood clearly that the "I" is not related or affixed to one object, thing, or being, to one name and form. Remember this: when you identify and recognize the "I" or arrive at the true answer to the question "Who am I?", you have identified and recognized the entire cosmos and its mysteries.

It may be asked, what exactly the urgency is to understand the meaning of this "I", when there is an infinite number of topics in the universe that call for study. One can well try to unravel the secrets of the cosmos. Or, attention may be paid to understand what is meant by the "individual soul (jivi)" or by "God (Deva)". When such profound subjects as the universe, the individualized Divine, the Divine Itself - subjects that are incomparably important - are clamouring for attention, why give them up and investigate the meaning of expression used by common folk and children, this "I"? Of what benefit can it be, people may ask.

The expression is simple, of course, but its implications are infinite and fundamentally satisfying. This is why all great teachers exhort the seekers to "Know Thyself", "Inquire into yourself, since that alone can give you release". The scriptures also confirm this exhortation. "That, which when known, everything becomes known (Yad vijñānena sarvaṃ vijñānam bhavati)". The scriptures extol the importance and value of this inquiry and make it clear

that inquiry into the Atma is essential. The assurance is given that the Atma is you, yourself, as in the sacred axiom "That thou art (Thathwam asi)".

Therefore, to fulfil the yearning, you first have to inquire into this mystery of who you are. You can then realize that you are eternal (nithya), beyond the boundaries of time. The scriptures will help you cast away the ignorance (ajnana), the dark clouds of ignorance that now hide this truth from your awareness. Then, you can delight at the experience of the awareness of your genuine nature. The awareness comes when the truth is revealed with the dawn of light. But the scriptures (sastras) that guide people into the knowledge of these great mysteries and into the region where such bliss can be secured are not studied now; instead, people pursue with blinkered eyes their own silly notions. How then can they attain the Atmic principle? How then can they reach the very embodiment of bliss (ananda)?

Grace of God: the only hope of humanity

Mere worldly scholarship cannot delve into the meaning of the Vedas. The grace of God has to be won by devotion and dedication, and that grace alone, the compassionate glance of the eye of God alone, can instil in one the real meaning of the Vedas. Only people who are embodiments of divine wisdom and compassion can decide what exactly is helpful to the spiritual progress and well-being of humanity. Others only flounder and find it impossible to cope with the task.

For how can gurus who fail to save themselves help save others? The gurus of today endeavour to cleanse society while their own houses are unclean. The number of such gurus is increasing, so faults and failures are multiplying. Their haltings are justified and explained away, in various ways, so the confusion grows worse. As a consequence, endless argumentation ensues and reality is lost to view. These gurus interpret the scriptures to suit their prejudices and partialities, making them instruments for their aggrandizement.

Under these distressing conditions, the grace of God is the only hope of

humanity. That is the beacon to illumine the path. That is the compassion that rewards one for one's spiritual struggle. That is the strong, steady ship that can take one safely across.

Unity of individual Self with Supreme Self

Many preceptors and teachers declare that the path of inquiry into oneself is the path of liberation. "Selfinquiry leads to liberation (Swavimarso mokshah)" is the assurance. "That is the Atma; that is myself." "I and the Atma are not different." "The Atma and the Paramatma are not separate." The yarn "I" is both warp and woof of the cloth, the Atma. When the "I" yarn is found in different bodies and feels that in each body it is distinct from the rest, the Atma cloth can be said to disappear; but in both yarn and cloth, one substance persists forever, in spite of how each feels: that substance is "cotton". So too, the supreme Self (Paramatma) persists as the only truth in the "I", the Atma. Without the cotton, the supreme Self, there can be no "I" yarn; without the "I" yarn, there can be no Atma cloth. Those three - Paramatma, Atma, and I - are only names and forms for the ONE - the Paramatma, the ONE Atma, the DIVINE Atma, the Supreme Self.

15. Levels And Stages

The Hindu religion authorizes the worship of a variety of Gods; this has resulted in sectarian feuds and factions, which fill the land with fear and unrest. The unthinking verdict of many observers is that the insights and agitations in the country can be traced to this one basic defect. But this judgment is not correct. It is a flimsy flight of fancy, indulged in by people devoid of the faculty of reason.

Sectarian conflicts within a religion

In the West, the inhabitants of all lands are, more or less, adherents of the Christian religion. Though all of them adore one God, they have been slaughtering each other by methods far more horrible than wild animals resort to. Don't they wage wars in which peoples remote from the scene of conflict are wiped off the earth by merciless fire power, including innocent women, children, and the aged? Is their religion the basic cause for such heartless, disgraceful, stupid, and demonic devastation and fratricide? Of course, they belong to one religion and they adore one God, but there must be some poisonous trait lurking behind the facade of adoration, polluting the entire personality. Religion cannot be the cause, even to the slightest extent, for factions, fights, and wars.

Germany had no place for caste groups and sectarian conflicts. It had achieved extraordinary progress in science and technology. It shone in the forefront of nations by means of its strength, courage, and heroism. Such a nation was cut up into four bits by the four victorious powers, each bit being ruled by a separate nation! Japan, which has no problems of religious differences and sectarian conflicts, had to suffer the vengeance of the nations for some years! What was the reason? For the downfall of nations, religion alone cannot be the cause.

Differences are due to innate characteristics

No one can even imagine a world in which differences do not exist. Differences are born from the inner springs of intelligence based on the cumulative effect of impacts. The life of every being is the external expression of this intelligence and its effect. Inert as well non-inert entities are but manifestations on different levels of this intuitive intelligence. The parrot casts its eyes in a distinct way; the crow does the same, quite differently. The jackal reasons out situations differently from the dog. The nature of animals is of one type; the nature of human beings is of another.

Between person and person, there are differences in the knowledge gained. Even in physical characteristics and personal charm there are countless variations. Their likes and dislikes, their thoughts and feelings are shaped in diverse ways by the knowledge they have and the professions in which they are engaged. We have no need to go so far. Even twins growing together in the same womb are not often identical; they manifest different natures.

What is the reason for this? The reason lies in differences in the development of the intelligence.

Therefore, at no time can mankind be free from differences; universal equality is an impossible aspiration; the desire to have it established on earth is a fantasy; it is a search for flowers in the sky.

The animal lives with the awareness that it is an animal, the bird has the consciousness that it is a bird. A woman engages herself in the activities of the world, conscious that she is a woman; so also does man.

As you think, so you become

The consciousness one has, until sleep overwhelms, continues without change after waking from sleep. The living being continues activities as before sleep; so too, one continues in this life the activities broken off by death, from where they were ended.

One gives up the body at the end, remembering the feelings that moved one

ever so strongly (Yam yam vapi smaran bhavam, thyajathyanthe kalebaram).

And in the Gita,
One attains that status itself to which the feelings were all the while directed
(Tham thamaivethi Kauntheya, sada thadbhava bhavithah).

The nature of the next life is in accordance with feelings that occupy the mind when one casts off the corpse.

For those feelings will be in accordance only with the feelings that motivated the living days. On deeper thought, it will be evident that the basic truth is just this: everything depends on the progress attained in the sublimation of intelligence.

Outer forms express inner differences

Though in outer form a certain uniformity may appear, there exist vast and varied differences in inner nature.

A genus or species is decided mainly on outer characteristics, which are really the manifested expressions of the inner intelligence. An individual is primarily a form. Person, tree, hill, sparrow, fox, dog, cow, snake, scorpion - these "sounds" denote members of the species with these forms. The individuals may undergo destruction, but the species will continue. Many people die, but mankind persists. Trees may fall and be reduced to ash or dust, but the genus cannot ever suffer destruction. The living genus is eternal; total destruction can never happen.

If we analyze and inquire into even the small things that we experience in our daily lives, these truths will be clearly evident before us. We say that everyone in the human species has human characteristics, but when we evaluate one person, we pay special attention to their virtues and habits,

present status, and future prospects.

Cows - all of them - belong to one species, but when we want to purchase a cow, we try to find out its parentage. We look for auspicious marks on its body. It must give us plenty of milk; it must be a pretty little quiet animal. We purchase only cows with these desirable qualities. We are not attracted by the fact that it is a cow like the rest of the species. We do not purchase a barren cow or a wild unruly cow. Therefore, though all people are more or less uniform, each is to be evaluated only on the basis of their own qualities.

Innate qualities designed by divine will

When an inquiry in depth is made into another topic, it will be clear that feelings of difference between high and low are natural reactions. Though urine and feces are uniformly unclean, the urine of the cow is treated as holy. Sanctity is not attributed to the urine or feces of other animals; these are definitely unholy. Take the instance of fire (agni). Fire is fire, whatever the form. We light lamps at home; we have fire in our hearths. We have the sacrificial fire, rising up in flames. This fire is revered and worshiped; people prostrate before it. But the fire in the lamp and the hearth are not evaluated so highly. The flame of a fire used to burn a corpse on the cremation ground is not considered pure enough for any other use. No one will bake "rotis" over it; no one will revere it or offer prostrations before it. It is treated as low, unholy, polluted.

Similarly, though people have the same physical form, because of the peculiarities of each body and of the other sheaths in which each is encased, as well as the nature of their qualities and activities, distinctions among them have necessarily to be made. Some must be treated as "high", some as "low". Electric bulbs don't all emit the same quality of light; some are bright, some dull. There is the same current in every bulb, though some express it in full strength and others are not able to do so.

We have to accept that for the world to evolve, levels of awareness, stages of excellence, distinctions like high and low, holy and unholy, religious and

irreligious are essential requisites; they are inevitable. They are designed by divine will.

16. Mankind And God

For the consummation of human evolution and the realization by people of their highest goal, religion and spiritual discipline are very essential. Religion is the link between the individual and the universe, between the individual soul and God (jiva and Deva). If the link does not exist, life becomes chaos. A cow caught on a hill, wanting to go to the opposite hill but confronted with a flooded river in between, needs a bridge between the two.

That is what religion is. Between the hill of individual life and the region of the Universal runs the flooded river of nature, with all its confusions and complexities. It is difficult to discover where it comes from, how it accumulates all that uproar, and where it ultimately ends. But, fortunately, in every human community we have bridge builders who help people to cross.

Vedic religion sourced in God, non-Vedic religions in God-man

We may have more than one bridge, but the purpose of each is the same. The bridge built by the sages and seers of India is known as the bridge of Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma). It is called so because it is an eternal, everlasting bridge based on the ageless foundation of the Vedas, and it can be used reliably by all, in all countries and at all times. That is why it is sometimes called the Vedic bridge and the Vedic path, also as the Aryan Path. All attempts to trace those who have laid this path have failed. This is why people have given up the search in despair, characterizing the path as undesigned. They assured themselves that the Lord himself was the designer.

All religions and spiritual paths laid through the ages are indeed sacred, for they have all been designed by messengers of the Lord, chosen because they are the foremost of people. Buddha, Jesus Christ, Zoroaster, Mohammed - such names are known worldwide. Their doctrines, ideals, and thoughts have all become so valid for their followers that their names have been identified with their religions.

Since the ideal religion at the time of Christ was believed to be the message from God and since that message was communicated and spread by Jesus Christ, his name was given to it. So also the Buddhist religion was named after Buddha, since it was intuited and spread through him as the divine instrument. Mohammed, who heard the message of God, laid down doctrines and disciplines, and those who follow them are said to belong to Mohammedanism.

Therefore, it is not wrong to say that all these religions are products of the foremost among people and the most ideal messengers of the Lord.

Divine intelligence is universal and all-comprehensive. Human intelligence is confined within narrow limits.

Its range is very poor. The scriptures deal with only one goal, but they indicate different paths to reach it. Each path could be a definite religion, and its doctrines and disciplines could be considered different from the rest. So the statement that Rama, Christ, Zoroaster, Buddha, Mohammed, and others are one is not valid.

Doctrine of rebirth unique to Vedic religion

In the Christian religion, it is stated that individual beings were created as they are. It is said that Allah did the same. Even Zoroastrian and Buddhist religions describe creation more or less on the same lines. But Vedic religion has a different version. The individual is as eternal as God. He is a spark of God. If there are no beings (jivis) there is no God (Deva). This is especially emphasized in the Vedas. Followers of other religions are, in recent times, recognizing this truth. The present life of each is only an interval between previous and future lives. It is but a step toward the next. This is indicated in the Vedas. The Vedas instruct about the relationship between the previous and future births. No other religion has revealed so much about previous and future births.

Another point: Among the four objectives of life - right action, wealth, desire,

and liberation (dharma, artha, kama, and moksha) - various religions describe the stage of liberation in various ways. Each one lays down some doctrine and insists upon faith in it. Therefore, there is no agreement or identity between the experiences they describe. The Hindu description of the experience, however, can be gained by followers of all religions.

There may be agreement in the details of the descriptions in various religions, but the total experience is not described in the same manner. The reason is this: the Hindu religion, which has come down from the timeless past, is really supreme. Other faiths are based only on some of the doctrines of Hinduism selected by them and developed in accordance with the traditions and culture of their own region. Therefore, truths inherent in the Hindu faith often appear in those other faiths. Hinduism and Hindu culture have been flowing as one continuous stream.

Vedic rituals: stepping stones to God

In the Hindu religion, rituals and ceremonies were laid down, to be observed from sunrise to nightfall, without intermission. Many of them are elaborate ceremonies (yajnas), rituals (yagas), and sacrificial offerings to divine powers, appropriate to the baby growing in the womb until its death and the subsequent attainment of higher worlds. But these rituals and dedicatory ceremonies were not enough, and elaborate disciplines of living were also laid down. No other religion has so many and so elaborate rules of living. Therefore, it wouldn't be correct to declare that all religions are the same. They might have adopted a few or many of these rules of living from Hinduism, since Hinduism has laid emphasis on them from the beginning.

In order to carry out this heavy schedule of ritual or action (karma), one must have devotion, spiritual wisdom, and self control (bhakthi, jnana, and yoga). Dharma is the taproot of the great tree of religion. It is the eternal source of its strength. It is fed by waters of devotion; the leaves and flowers are renunciation and other virtues, and the fruit is understanding.

In these stages of growth, if there is any interruption or deficiency, that is to

say, even if any regulation is missed, the fruit of spiritual wisdom (jnana) that the tree yields will be affected adversely.

Such strict plans for spiritual progress can be found only in Hinduism and not in any other faith. For Hinduism is the nectar churned and prepared by the ancient sages (rishis) out of their own genuine experience. It is not put together from things available in books.

Past actions influence future births

It is not proper to adopt whichever faith or code that pleases one most at the moment, believing that life is a matter of just three days. One needs morality and self control. Life is a long journey through time, and religion confers peace for the present and encouragement for the future. We must believe that we are at present undergoing the consequences of our own activities in the past.

It is a great source of peace to be content with one's present conditions because one knows oneself to be the cause and knows that doing good and meritorious deeds now can build a happy future. This is great encouragement.

It is only when life is run on these two lines that morality and self control can have a place in life. The power to adhere to these two ideals consists in the encouragement and enthusiasm given by religion.

We cannot determine the origin or end of religion. So also, it is difficult to declare the origin and end of the individual (jiva). According to Hinduism, an individual is timeless, and the present life is but the latest of the series brought about by its own thoughts and acts. The individual has not come now as a result of either the anger or the grace of God. These are not the cause of this present existence. This is the declaration made by the Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma).

Vedic religion is holistic, not partial

Religion cannot be, at any time, a mere personal affair. It may be possible to assert so, since each one's faith is rooted in himself and since each one expresses that faith in their own behaviour and actions. But how far is that statement valid? It is not valid to assert that there is no God or religion or caste (varna), as many intelligent people do to their own satisfaction. We find a large number of people proclaiming the nonexistence of God and declaring that the directives to guide and sublimate one's activities that are laid down in all religions are superstitions. These people are not ignoramuses. They are not without education. When such individuals characterize spiritual beliefs and practices as superstition, what importance can we attach to their statements? If they entertain such convictions in their hearts, society need not complain, for it suffers no harm. But they don't stay quiet.

For example, intoxicating drinks like toddy and brandy are indulged in by others. Can this be dealt with as if it is a personal affair? Do others feel happy over it? However emphatically the matter is declared "personal", this evil habit affects society subtly and openly in various ways. It demonstrates its nefarious effects, in spite of everything. When ordinary people indulge in such harmful habits, the danger is not so considerable. But when elders who have won a name in society do so, the common people also follows the evil path.

The works of Vyasa and Valmiki are very ancient. Such writings of past ages are aptly called Puranas. But, though centuries have flown by since they were born, age is powerless to affect them. Had it been otherwise, they would not be loved and demanded even today by people residing all over the land from the Himalayas to Sethu.

The texts are so young and fresh; they are unaffected by the passage of time. Whoever desires bliss (ananda), at whatever place, whenever it is needed, can become immersed in it.

Manu's code of law is unequalled

The Manu Dharma Sastra is unique; no text compares with it in any country throughout history. Can anyone create a book of the same type at any time?

The doctrines of the Hindu faith and the scriptures (sastras) that enshrine them do not offer homage to material sciences. These sciences do, of course, progress from day to day, but the theories honoured one day are condemned the next day, and new theories are brought up to explain the same phenomenon. How then can the eternal and ever valid truths of the spirit honour the material sciences? The scientists of today call this attitude blind faith; they want it to be discarded. They want every subjective and objective fact to be examined and put to rigorous tests. They confuse themselves when they consider this as an independent path to the discovery of reality. That is not correct.

There is no need to dig up and lay bare new doctrines. Every principle and path is readily available. Understanding is the only thing we need aspire to. Western philosophers from Kant to Spencer have, in fact, only dwelt upon some facets of the dualistic, nondualistic, and qualified nondualistic (dwaitha, a-dwaitha, visishtadwaitha) schools of thought. Hindus have long ago delved into these matters and reduced their understandings to doctrines and principles.

17. Fourfold Social Division

Creation of caste

Hindu dharma and its rules of life are based on caste (varna) and stage of life (asrama). Let us take first the principle of caste in religion. The word illusion (maya) used in Vedanta discussions has generally been the target for indifference, neglect, and criticism. So too, caste. Caste and the distinctions based on it are condemned as artifices of humanity. Likewise, illusion is condemned as against all reason, for it disregards the world, calling it illusion. The codes of law (smrithi) declare, "The four castes are created by Me (chathur varnyam, maya srishtam)"; and the Vedas (sruthi) say, "The brahmin emerged from the face, the warriors rose from the arms, etc. (brahmanosya mukham aseeth; bahuu-rajanyah krithah, etc.)". It is clear that the caste system is created by the Lord. If it is propagated that the caste system has brought about disastrous distinctions, the fault lies in misinterpretation of the word.

Does society now have genuine castes (varnas)? What exactly is caste? Is any attempt made to discover that fact? No. Caste (varna) is just a word. Every word has a meaning, and caste should mean something too, shouldn't it?

Names and forms: handiwork of God

To prove that trees exist, the word "tree" is enough. A word is just sound, but it indicates something that exists.

The sound "elephant" is proof of the existence of that animal. So too, when the sounds "cat", "dog", "fox" are heard, the forms of those animals present themselves before the mind's eye. The sounds were there even before us. We were born into the tangle of sounds. We did not originate them. We require groups of people and things if there is a wish to originate sound and shape it into a meaningful word. So, for every current word, a meaning must adhere. We cannot impose on it the meaning we choose. The words with their

implications are there already, even before our birth. We just use them, whichever we want, whenever we need.

Word (pada) involves speech. In Sanskrit, every object in the world is called a "padartha (word-meaning)".

The hill is a heap of earth, indicated by the word "hill". Similarly, the words brahmin and labourer (sudra) inform us that there were persons answering to those words. The questions "Who is a brahmin? Who is not a brahmin?" are irrelevant in this discussion. What is being made known is only the conceptions of "word" and "meaning".

The entire cosmos is subsumed under "word" and "meaning"; it is sheer name and form (the name being the word; the form, the meaning).

The Vedas (sruthis) declare: "Name and form are one single indivisible unit (vacharambho vikaro namadheyam)", just as the following are: Siva and Parvathi, active and inert, object and image, the moon and moonlight.

Yet, for dealing with the world, the word is all-important. Word arises from thought; thought is shaped by experience; experience depends on desire; and desire springs from ignorance (a-jnana), delusion (maya), lack of wisdom (a-vidya) or nature (prakriti), which are also fundamentally based on the Divine.

Since they are based on the divine Lord, who is the splendour of wisdom and the repository of innate glory, the darkness of delusion, ignorance, or nature should not overpower us. Where light is present, darkness has no place. The Lord declared, "I shall become many," and that Will resulted in the cosmos and is directing it forever.

Therefore, name and form are the results of that Will, and not of any human will. It would be an absurd claim for people to pretend that they originated them. The All-powerful Lord alone has willed so. That is why He is designated as the Supreme. To the question, "Does God exist?", the existence of the word God is the indisputable proof.

The world consists of multifarious objects, each with a name. No one has discovered how or why these names got attached to these objects, nor is it possible to explain this. Even if an attempt is made, the result can be only a guess and not the truth. So it is best to conclude that it is divinely descended. Words used between birth and death, or current before birth or after death, words indicating mother and children, or words like righteousness (dharma), unrighteousness, heaven (swarga) and hell (Naraka) are certainly not human artifices but divine dispensations. The Vedas are the authority for this declaration.

Let us consider one point. Can anyone quote a single instance either in this world or some other of a mere word that does not convey a meaning? No. It is impossible. Each word has a meaning; that meaning denotes a decision by God. It is only when this is recognized by people that they can grasp the mystery of life.

So, when it is declared that the brahmin manifested from the face (brahmanasya mukham aseeth) or that the four castes (varnas) were created by Me (chathur varnaym maya srishtham), doesn't that also posit that there must have been castes that are denoted by the word and people who could be described as examples or representatives of that word? Don't these declarations make plain to us that the very God who created them grouped them on the basis of their tendencies and activities as castes?

Primal qualities created by innate desires

So the word caste (varna) can be understood in all its bearings only if deep inquiry is made and clear thought is directed on it. The meaning of caste, the most common among the people and current everywhere, is "colour".

But how this word came to be attached to that meaning is not known to many. This has to be known in order to grasp the true significance of the word. In the word varna, the root vri means description, elaboration, and also the process of counting. The roots r and rn that form words like ramana mean enjoyment, pleasure, etc., so varna signifies "accepting with pleasure after

elaborate consideration".

Regarding "colour", white, red, and black are the basic ones. Other colours are but derivatives. White symbolizes the pure (sathwic) tendency; red, the passionate (rajasic); and black, the dull (thamasic). That is the mystery of creation. Individuals take birth according to the tendencies they appreciate, aspire for, and adopt. So the castes into which they are born are determined by themselves and not by any external authority. Which particular tendency they choose to cultivate depends on their intellectual level. It is generally believed that desires shape the intelligence. Intelligence moulds the activities, and activities decide the character and nature of life. This is the correct interpretation of the expression Guna karma vibhagasah.

While the Vedas (sruthis) and the codes of law (smrithi) indicate so elaborately the causes that lead to the individual's birth, life, and death in particular castes, religions, families, and sections, people who are unable to understand them lay down theories according to their own limited intelligence and derive satisfaction therefrom.

What else is this but sheer ignorance? Or it may be egotist pride exhibiting that they know everything, for isn't egotism itself the progeny of ignorance? The conclusion is that caste, social status, family and even religion are determined by quality (guna) and karma. They are not amenable to human manipulation. The Vedas declare so; they posit that it has been so decided by divine Will.

India: Holy land of Godward action

India (Bharath) is designated as the Holy Land of Godward activity (karma-bhumi or karma-kshetra). All people everywhere are pilgrims trekking toward the Holy Land of Godward activity. Karma is the sine qua non of India; it holds forth the divinity of activity and turns all activity into spiritual discipline (sadhana). This is the reason for the names by which India is known.

The sacred scriptures (sruthi) of this land loudly proclaim that the individual is

the architect of their own fate, high or low status in society, luxury or poverty, liberty or bondage. "Whatever form the person craves now, while alive in this world, that form the person attains after death (Sa yatha krathurasmin loke purusho bhavathi; thathethah prathye bhavathi)", declare the Vedas. Therefore, it is clear that karma decides birth and that luxury or poverty, character, attitude, the level of intelligence, the joys and griefs of this life are the earnings gathered during previous lives. The inference is inevitable that the next life of the individual will be in consonance with the activities prompted by the level of intelligence that rules the person here and now.

Birth, progress based on desires, activities

Some people, though of noble birth, engage themselves in evil deeds. Others, though born in castes considered low, are engaged in good deeds. Why? This problem agitates us often. Some people born as brahmins perform bad deeds; in other words, they descend into passionate (rajasic) and ignorant (thamasic) levels. People born in inferior castes rise into the pure (sathwic) level and do good deeds. Brahmins of the type mentioned are brahmins by birth only and not by virtue of their deeds. The others are low only by birth and not low at all by virtue of their deeds. The Vedas require coordination of birth and behaviour in castes.

People of pure (sathwic) nature are rare in the world. People have mostly passion (rajas), which colours the pure character. Such individuals, having attained noble birth, are involved in passionate (rajasic) activities. They declare by their deeds that they are of mixed caste. The Vedas have not ignored such examples of mixed nature and the consequent effects on caste. The Vedas are impartial; they are not prejudiced against one and favourable to another. They do not elevate one set of people or discard another; they only proclaim the truth that exists.

Let us consider an example. Kausika was a warrior (kshatriya), that is to say, a person of passionate (rajasic) nature. However, as the result of his deeds in previous lives, pure (sathwic) tendencies and attitudes entered his consciousness, and he went about adhering strictly to truth. He transformed

himself and sublimated his consciousness into a pure state. The mantra that he uttered and that emanated from that level of consciousness is the Gayatri. He is known as Viswamitra, the friend (mithra) of all (viswa), for he became the well-wisher of the entire world! Brahmins have accepted and acclaimed that mantra as a divine gift; they have revered and recited it and derived immense bliss from it. Kausika was therefore a warrior by birth, but he became a brahmin by activity, and he was accepted as such by the Vedas, which emanated from the voice of God.

Thus, it is clear that the Vedas proclaim the path to all mankind without prejudice, partiality, or sense of distinction.

They pay attention only to the thoughts and acts of the individual.

Social divisions reflect time, place, circumstance

Modern thinkers may have some doubt about this. This is quite natural. Let us see what that doubt is. When it is said that divine will laid down the castes, should they not exist in all lands? Surely, they should not be confined to this country, India (Bharath), they say. But there is no rule that whatever is created is necessarily to be found to exist everywhere! It is not possible to realize that expectation.

It is only natural that restrictions and preferences concerning the process of living comprising the code have to be established with reference to each region, its atmosphere and climate, its peculiarities and specialities. There is no rule that trees that grow in India should be found growing in other countries also. We cannot argue that stars that occupy the sky should exist also on the earth! No compulsion insists that fishes that live in water should also live on hills.

Only God knows and decides what should happen to which, and where, and why. All else are powerless.

Events like birth are determined by circumstances of space, time, causation,

and the like. They are not bound by our needs or reactions, favourable or unfavourable. For this reason, mere observation and study of what is patent will only lead to confusing doubts about castes. Such doubts are inevitable, for they are bred by the ego. The core of reality is separate and distinct from the fabrications of the ego. When people start acting according to the whims of fancy and speak whatever comes to mind, we can only characterize them as models of sheer ignorance.

18. Activity And Action

Spiritual versus materialistic lands

The countries of the world fall into two categories: countries in which the people are devoted to activities with spiritual motivation (karma-bhumi) and countries in which the people pursue the pathways of the senses (bhoga-bhumi), with no higher purpose to guide them. The categories emphasize the ideals of the people down through the ages. India (Bharath) is the land of Godward activity, where the people have discovered the proper goal of all activity, namely the glorification of God resident within and without.

Activity (karma) is inevitable; it is immanent in every thought. It is of two kinds: material and spiritual, connected with this world and drawn from the Vedas or scriptural injunctions. Activities that merely sustain life are material. Activities that elevate the human into the divine are based either on the Vedas or on later sacred texts (sastras) or codes of law (smrithi). The activities can be mental, emotional, or physical. They are also determined by the activities that the individual has adopted in either previous lives or this life. Karma can be classified into three categories: the consequences of acts done in past lives that are affecting this life (prarabdha); activity engaged in now, which is bound to affect the future (agami); and the stored karma that is slowly being worked out by the individual in life after life (sanchitha).

Secret of actions and reactions

The Vedas (sruthis) and the codes of law (smrithi) of India have thus classified karma on the basis of the consequences it creates in the life of the individual. The word karma is short and crisp; it is used freely by all and sundry. But the idea and ideals it conveys are of great significance to mankind. Karma is not simply physical; it is mental, verbal, and manual. Each one can read into it as much value and validity as their reason can unravel.

Karma subsumes every activity of people - worldly, scriptural, and spiritual.

All three strands are, in truth, intertwined. The worldly karma entails merit or demerit; the scriptural karma is saturated with the experience of generations of good seekers; the spiritual devotes itself to the cleansing of the heart so that the indwelling God may be reflected therein. Karma is a stream that flows ever faster and faster, turning the wheel of life and keeping it incessantly active.

Karma means movement, or that which urges the movement. Air moves in space; the moving air results in heat. It is the friction caused by aerial motion that makes the latent heat manifest. Living beings are able to maintain the temperature of the body as long as air is breathed in and out. The quicker the breath, the warmer the body.

Warmth is the characteristic of fire. Fire is the origin of water. The Sun, as one can see, raises clouds. The particles of water get mixed with other elements and then harden into "earth" (ground, soil). The earth produces and fosters plants and trees, which feed and foster humanity, keeping people hale and hearty. These plants give the grain upon which people live, and the seminal fluid that produces progeny is the gift of the grain. Thus is the activity (karma) of creation effected and continued. This is how the codes of law texts (smriti) summarize the process.

In short, activity (karma) is observable here as movement, as progress, as evolution, and as hereditary effect.

Triple yearnings, triplets of divinity

It is only natural and reasonable to expect that this vast flow, this constant movement must have something fixed and unmoving as its base and support. This is exactly what is posited as Atma or the Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman). The very first vibratory movement on that base happened when the Supreme Brahman became the Highest Godhead (Parameswara) and expressed the three thirsts for wisdom (jnana), wish, and action. That very movement was known as the primordial act (karma), the act of Being, transforming itself into becoming, the act of creation (srishti).

The importance of action (karma) necessitated the triple aspects of Divinity: Brahma (who causes creation), Vishnu (who supports and sustains) and Maheswara (who dissolves and destroys). The law of karma rules the motions of the stars, the planets, the galaxies, and other heavenly bodies in space. The same law directs and controls all that happens in all the worlds. It is inscrutable in its very essence. No one can penetrate the time or space when karma was not. What, why, when, and how events happen is beyond the capacity of people to predict with accuracy. They are laid down from eternity to eternity.

Experience non-action in action and vice versa

Just as a work being done or an activity that is engaging one can be referred to as karma, no work being done and no activity being engaged in are also karma! On seeing people silent and calm, sitting quiet and doing nothing, we infer that they are free from activity. How, then, can they be described as doing activity? What is meant by saying, "They are not doing any work; they are not engaged in any activity"? That statement means only that "They are engaged in keeping themselves away from any work or activity." So, it can be affirmed that people sometimes are busy doing work and sometimes busy keeping work away from their attention; that is to say, they are engaged in activity (karma) as well as inactivity (a-karma). If they are not engrossed or attached with the action they do and are engaged in it as their duty, as their way of worship, and if they are not attached to the fruit of their action, then they can practise inactivity even in action. This is the highest spiritual discipline.

The very first act with which the career of a living being starts is "breathing and vibration of vital airs". When one thinks of it, it is wonderful how it happens. It is an amazing mystery. No human being resolves, at the moment of earthly life, to draw in and breathe out the air that exists around him. It proceeds without being willed or wished for. Not only people but every living organism is evidence of this great marvel.

Doubts may be raised: How can anything happen to people without their

knowledge or their resolution? It is best to answer this doubt by confessing that people can't unravel such secrets. Even if an attempt is made to reply that nature is the cause, the question still remains: What exactly is nature? Breathing begins when life begins; it is an automatic, natural act, it is said. But all this is only saying the same thing in other words. They do not explain anything. It can as well be said that we are ignorant how it happens just when it is most essential. It is indeed surprising that the act of breathing is a mystery even to the person who breathes.

As you think, so you become

When we reflect on the fact that yogis exercise their will and stop their pulse beats and their inhaling-exhaling process, we realize the power of will in inducing action (karma). Action, we can infer, is not something hanging loose in midair! Unless we become doers, deeds do not emanate. An axiom in the Nyaya Sastra says:

na jnathi, icchathi yathathe

As one knows, so one wishes; as one wishes, so one acts.

The Vedanta Sutras also proclaim the same truth.

yad-dhyayathi, thad icchathi

That on which attention rests, that is the thing wished for.

yad-icchathi thad karothi

That on which the wish rests, that is the thing for which deeds are done.

yath karothe, thadbhavathi

That for which deeds are done, that is what he becomes.

The manifest nature of the individual is moulded by desire. One shapes oneself in line with hopes, aspirations, attempts, and achievements. Even one's own future life is designed through one's decisions and deeds. The force that one's "reason" exerts on oneself and that directs one's will in specific directions is known as nature (prakriti). When once it is discovered that one's own level of intelligence is the prime factor in determining one's inclinations and desires, then, it is easy to follow the means by which one can win release from the hold of nature.

Perform work with dedication

Karma is generally known to mean "work". Transactions and actions of all kinds can be designated as "work". There are no levels of work, like low or high. All work is holy, if it has to be done for the upkeep and uplift of life. This is why work (karma) is praised as highly sacrosanct and desirable and as fraught with meritorious or deleterious consequences.

The Hindus ascribe good fortune and bad, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, to the inescapable fruit of work, so some have labeled as idlers those who do not resist and overwhelm distress, disease, and pain. This is a partial, paralytic, view, which ignores the guiding principles and underlying philosophy of work and knows it only as reflected in worldly, material activities. This view is adopted and emphasized to help particular sections to progress, that is all.

Take some examples from within your own experience. The commuter working in an office, the farmer who lives on his own toil, the porter who depends on his physical strength to gather the meagre means of livelihood,

the blacksmith, the potter, the carpenter, the washerman, the barber - they are conscious of the activities they have to follow and the sense of duty with which they have to follow them. They know that their lives cannot flow smoothly when they don't fill their assignments with dedication. Therefore, they engage themselves in their profession as best as their intelligence, skills, and aspirations allow. But where is the need to prompt such people into further activity, to warn them and encourage them? We have to undertake this task only when they are unable or unwilling to carry on their duties.

Caste averts confusion of duties

In the case of Arjuna, who was confused about his duty and who withheld from battle since he was befogged by a feeling of renunciation, Sri Krishna said, "You have only to concentrate on the act and carry it out as you can. To act and only to act is the duty imposed on you." That was the immortal nectarine advice of the Lord, and it is quoted by many. But it must be pointed out that this advice was given in the context of the restoration of righteousness.

It deals with activities approved by holy scriptures (sastras), and not with worldly, sensual, and animal activities like seeking food, shelter, and mates.

Dharmaraja and others were immersed in worldly affairs, and they were past masters in dealing with worldly situations. They were engaged constantly in following and fostering duties and responsibilities laid down for the four castes in society and the four stages of life. Why then should they be prompted and persuaded, counseled and commanded to engage in battle? Krishna advised only Arjuna to resume his bow and arrows, presenting before him many an argument.

"You are born into the warrior (kshatriya) caste, the caste entrusted by social norms with execution of one social duty: fighting against injustice. Engaging in battle against wickedness is your responsibility. Do not desert that duty and discard that burden. People are bound to the inclinations implanted in them by nature. Again, consider this. People have to be ever involved in some

activity or other; they can't live without it even for a moment.

Therefore, it is best that you act now, in accordance with the inclination and skill impressed on you by your ancestry and heredity." This is the lesson taught to Arjuna, the path of the caste or class to which he belonged.

Does "work" connote only acts by which food etc. are procured? Aircraft, ships, factories, hospitals are products of work. They can also be said to involve only worldly material "work". This type of work is important for living, and happy living here is preparation for spiritual advancement in the hereafter. The more faulty one's activities in worldly pursuits, the less success there will be for the individual, the society, and the nation. There can be no two opinions on these points. Nevertheless, people do not exert as efficiently and as enthusiastically for spiritual advancement as they do for worldly success and fame. This is indeed a pity.

19. Prayer

Relation between worldly and spiritual work

The relation between worldly and spiritual work (*karma*) has also to be examined. We plough the field deep and make it fit for the seeds to grow. We select good seeds and sow them in the furrows. We foster the saplings with care. We remove the weeds that hamper and harm them. We water the plants when they need it. We protect the crop by erecting fences. We keep vigilant watch and save the plants from pests. Take it that each of these crucial steps are carried out by us diligently and without delay, as and when required.

But how can we be certain, in spite of all these, that the fruits of our labours will reach our homes and can be stored by us for our use? The irrigation canal might go dry any day. The sky might pour down too much rain or withhold it altogether. Pests might prove too powerful to be eliminated; they might destroy the crop just when the harvest is in sight. But people should not, even when such disaster faces them, collapse, as if they had lost everything.

If rain doesn't come in time for the crop, one can venture to fly into the clouds and scatter chemicals, to induce showers by artificial means. But what guarantee is there that the rain thus produced will fall on one's own land? Artificial means cannot affect the mood of gods. They help or hinder according to their will. When all paths are closed and when, at last, one decides to pray to God for rain, how is the prayer to be framed? In what form should it be uttered? These problems confront one. The disaster is evident, and the only refuge is prayer.

"O God! The crop growing in my field is fast drying up on account of unbearable thirst for rain. The canal doesn't have even a drop of water to slake the thirst of people and cattle. Therefore, have pity on us. Give us rain, in plenty, soon." Meanwhile, another problem has arisen, let us say.

A neighbour has arranged for the celebration of some festival. Since rain will ruin the festival and cause great inconvenience to the participants, he prays equally fervently. "O God, keep the rains off until this celebration is over."

Harmonizing individual prayers

Both applicants are intense devotees of God, the one who clamours for rain and the one who opposes it. What is God to do under these conditions? Whose prayer is He to fulfil? Of course, answering prayers saturated with sincerity is the characteristic of the Divine, but when the prayers of devotees clash, how is He to shape His grace?

God is free; His will is law. But He is bound in some sense by His own love and compassion.

The monarch of a realm cannot satisfy the desire of all subjects; he cannot claim the power to fulfill all their needs. Why? He is unable to fulfill for himself all that he desires. If he attempts to satisfy every wish that arises in him, the subjects are certain to rise up against him and pull him down from the seat of power. That danger is always dangling over him. However mighty the monarch, he has to obey certain rules and honour some limitations laid down to ensure a just rule. These might have been laid down by the very monarch; but, once promulgated, he too is bound by them and has to honour them. If he casts them aside, transcends them, or oversteps them, chaos will result, for the subjects will also exercise their freedom to cast them aside or override them.

"As the king, so the subjects (Yatha raja, thatha praja)."

Author of a law must obey the law

The author of the law must himself obey the law. He cannot stay away. The

monarch must always hold the welfare and happiness of his subjects as his ideal. Their welfare and happiness are essential for his own welfare and happiness. They are so closely interrelated.

The inescapable duty of the monarch is to satisfy the proper and praiseworthy desires of his subjects. For this reason, in order to carry out his duties effectively and smoothly, the monarch assigns the task to many subordinate authorities, instead of himself attending to all matters concerning the kingdom and the subjects.

The rulers of worldly states have perforce to lay down hard and fast limitations, conditions, disciplines, and duties in order to ensure welfare, prosperity, and progress. Imagine, then, how many more such have to be imposed by the Lord, who holds Himself responsible for the entire cosmos! For the smooth and safe working of the various facets of nature, He has to prescribe flawless rules. Just contemplate how numerous and universal they have to be! They affect every activity and inactivity in nature. Each unit must have (and has) its own peculiar restrictions and regulations. Each unit is, more or less, itself within the larger framework. It has a separate head, with limbs of government for coordinating duties and responsibilities and cooperating with others.

Functional division of deities

Prayers for timely help or useful guidance are attended to only by the appropriate units. Therefore, if, through ignorance or want of care, the pleading is addressed to the wrong head, what can the head do? Only cast it aside, remarking that it is not of concern because it was wrongly addressed. So, prayers for specific benefits and bounties have to be directed to the departments with which they are related. The divinity concerned with rain is Varuna. So, prayers for rain or about rain have to be directed to Him. He alone is authorized to deal with such.

Similarly, Surya is the head of the realms of health and splendour. Ganapathi is the head of the department that deals with prevention of difficulties that

hamper good works. Bhudevi is the goddess in charge of vegetation.

Cultivated crops and medicinal plants are fostered by Chandra. Thus, each group of divine manifestations and expressions has a lesser divine authority empowered to supervise and manage it. They are referred to as deities.

Deities supervise, guard, and guide each one of the senses of people.

It may be asked, "God is One. Why can't He listen to and fulfil our prayers Himself?" This question is based on mistake; it is a sign of weakened faith. Of course, there is only one God. But, in the governance of the cosmos, different fields of activity have to be ruled and regulated. These have subordinate deities. If you write a letter to me and address it to another, it will reach only the addressee! It cannot be presented before the person whom you desire to approach. So too, you have to address the deity in charge, the one concerned with the fulfilment or denial of your desire. Then, that deity would be interested in your problem and initiate whatever steps possible to solve it.

Credentials for proper prayer

It is essential to inquire into the credentials one has before formulating the prayer. That inquiry will reveal whether or not one's thoughts and resolutions, hopes, and desires rise from firm faith. How do we test and discover the truth? People take a piece of gold and draw with it a line on a slice of stone; then they examine that streak and assess the quality. The test that will reveal the quality of your faith is whether you are practising sincerely the injunctions laid down by God. Your beliefs and actions must be expressions of faith. They must have holiness as their core. They must be so full of love and compassion that they attract to you the grace of God.

Activity emanating from such sacred belief and faith is the goal of the Karma segment of Vedic scriptures. It is the taproot of human progress; it is the very breath of happy human existence; it is the food that can alone allay the hunger of people; it is the life-sustaining water that can cure their thirst. Activity (karma) is as essentially bound with people as their need to discover

and realize their own reality. Therefore, the first and continuing duty is to engage oneself in activities that are taught in the Vedas or approved therein.

Three types of activity reach God and earn His grace:

1. Activity not prompted by personal desire,
2. Activity emanating from unselfish love, and
3. Prayer arising from pure hearts.

These are the items to which the Lord pays heed; they reach God direct. The rest are the concern of deities who preside over their disposal. Therefore, prayers have to be unselfish, saturated with love, and free from the taint of attachment to the gift that the prayer would bring.

Science of spiritual activity

The word sastra, used frequently to indicate scriptures, means "that which commands, orders, directs with authority". The sastras need not contain orders like "Before eating food, cook it well; before sowing seeds, prepare the soil through ploughing." Who commands and where is that command laid down that the newborn calf shall seek food at the udder of the mother cow, where it is already stored, to appease its hunger pangs? Birth takes place along with sustenance for those being born.

As a matter of fact, the sustenance is ready first, and the birth of the individual to be sustained takes place later. The individual's food and standard of living are dependent on the merit or demerit accumulated in previous lives while struggling for these two. One uses one's intelligence to overcome the obstacles and cultivate the skills needed to succeed in this struggle. But the really valuable guidelines for human progress are beyond the understanding of people and even the capacities of their intelligence.

Nevertheless, the characteristics of one's conduct and behaviour, one's

attitudes and aptitudes, are delineated in the Vedas and demarcated in the sastras. Activity is as essential on Vedic and sastric lines as they are for humans in the worldly level. The learned should realize that activities recommended in the scriptures promote the best interests of people here and lead to peace and harmony in the hereafter.

Service to fellow beings is service to God

In the art of beneficial activity, the goal of "service to mankind" occupies the foremost place. Of course, the individual pursuing the goal is also a beneficiary, since he is part of the living community that he serves. He is the co-sharer in the magnificent adventure. Knowing this and being aware of this truth when engaged in the service are themselves the highest urges for service.

Today, we hear everywhere slogans like:

Service to humanity is service to God (Manava seva is Madhava seva),
Service to the world is service to the Lord of the world (Loka seva is Lokeshva seva).
Service to human beings is service to God (Jana seva is Janardhana seva).
Service to the individual is service to God (Jiva seva is Deva seva).

Each one highlights the idea that service rendered to a person is worship offered to God. This idea is very true and very valid. But the method of service is not being well thought out by many. The call for service to mankind is heard and welcomed, but how and where that service is to be practised is not reasoned out and decided.

Each one follows their inclination and impulse. The most powerful impulse is self-aggrandizement camouflaged as service. In the name of service, neither worldly prosperity nor spiritual advance is furthered. More destruction than

construction is achieved. Helping one, cooperating with another, sympathizing with others when they suffer defeat, disease, or distress - all these must cater not merely for the individual but also for the harmony and happiness of the world.

The organization of the urge to serve and the directions into which these were channeled have prevailed for ages, as laid down by the sages who were the forefathers. The forefathers believed that the very observance of righteousness and justice (dharma) by the individual contributed to the welfare of the world and could be evaluated as service. The broad circular heavy footprint of the elephant can include and even obliterate the footprints of many an animal. So too, the imprint of dharma includes service to society and to mankind. This was the faith of the sages.

High ideals are inspired by dharma. The forefathers imbibed them along with the breast milk of their mothers.

Therefore, their practice of dharma was pure, praiseworthy, and productive of the highest good. It was believed in those ancient days that the festive feeding of the hungry, provision of houses for those without shelter, the construction of temples, the digging of tanks and wells, were all conducive to the happiness of people. Good people who propagated such ideals were discovered and gathered, fostered and fended; entire villages were earmarked for them and cultivable land allotted for their upkeep. The cool comforting moonlight of the fame of these leaders and guides has lasted even unto this day, providing unshakable examples of love, compassion and wisdom in the service of humanity.

20. The Primal Purpose

The very first step to ensure peace and harmony to mankind is for each one to observe the code of conduct (dharma) laid down for them in their own religion. If one holds one's own faith and its essential principles mandatory, one can serve oneself best and also serve others well. Dharma in this context means action in accordance with the traditions of the culture of the land. In every facet of the dharma of this country, the ideal of world peace and world prosperity is immanent.

"Now, for the inquiry into activity (athatho karma jijnasa)" - thus begins the intellectual probe into the mystery of activity (karma), which in our scriptures extends over vast fields. For example, to give away in charity and as a gift is a very proper type of activity, but one must be aware that egotism can pollute it and make it improper. It is laid down that plentiful charity now will ensure happiness in a future life, so that consideration of this advantage for oneself might well lead one to good activity. Even if many have no eye on the future, it can be asserted that most charity flows from egotistic motives. This fact is all too evident.

People feel proud that they have helped others. They are eager to be praised as beneficent and munificent.

This attitude reveals their ignorance (a-jnana); it springs from nonawareness of actuality (maya). In the Vedas and spiritual texts (sastras), the sages (rishis), while elaborating on do's and don'ts, stress nonviolence, compassion, service to the world, charity, etc. as virtues to be acquired. Saint Vidyanaraya named these as the very essence of Indian (Bharathiya) wisdom.

Virtue: the measuring rod of wisdom

Wisdom (jnana) is the precious ambrosia gathered from all sources of knowledge and all the arts of earning it. It is the sweet, sustaining butter churned and collected from the scriptures. Wisdom is not to be defined as the

capacity to discriminate and declare, "This is flat", "this is round", "this is a hill", "this is a house", or "this is a thorn". That is the common belief. This is only knowledge.

Next, we have what may be called good knowledge (sujnana), when one is able to distinguish between right and wrong or good and bad, when one can discover, "This activity is for my betterment and the betterment of others".

Both wisdom and good knowledge are confined to one's intellect.

There is a higher wisdom, when the heart is transformed by loyalty to truth, nonviolence, and compassion.

A person with this higher wisdom can understand themselves and their kinship with the cosmos and its Creator. The person lives in accordance with that understanding, without doubt or disharmony. Ignorance (a-jnana) breeds sorrow; higher wisdom (vijñana) confers joy. If one hesitates to call any experience the higher truth (vijñana), let that person examine whether it is material or spiritual on the touchstone "Does it give me unalloyed joy?" and then classify it as such. The yardstick for higher wisdom is dharma. The more dharma is put into practice, the more one gets rooted in the higher wisdom.

Eras differentiated by righteousness

Action through higher wisdom is evidenced by the peace and prosperity of the nation. The decline of dharma reveals the disappearance of higher wisdom. Eras are differentiated on the basis of adherence or aversion to dharma. When dharma, justice, and harmony prevail fully and fearlessly, it is said to walk securely over the land on four legs. The times when it is so observed are also referred to as the Kritha Era (Yuga). When justice and harmony prevail less and less, people feel that dharma has to limp its way on three legs! The times that suffer from this handicap are referred to as the Thretha Era. When justice and harmony prevail only a quarter as much as in the Kritha Era, dharma has to struggle on two legs. That is the Dwapara Era. When they have no respect paid to them and when they are largely nonexistent, dharma

stands on one leg, as it were. This is the Kali Era, the scriptures tell us.

Liberation is the prime goal

The wisdom of the Indians (Bharathiyas) is nourished by dharma. Though Indian thought asserts that the "objective world" is basically untrue and though it teaches us that our involvement with life and its problems is an illusive adventure that cannot affect our reality, the scriptures (sastras) that are the roots of that thought do not advise us to discard dharma. For, to grasp the highest and ultimate truth, dharma is indispensable. The four traditional goals of human endeavour (the purusharthas: righteousness, wealth, desire, liberation (dharma, artha, kama, moksha)) are laid down to cater to those who live in the belief that the objective world is "true".

It can be seen that even among the four goals, dharma has been placed first and foremost. The state to be earned by the first three achievements is moksha, which is mentioned last. The person who seeks riches and the fulfillment of desires along the path laid down by dharma can alone win victory; that way lies liberation, which gives people the highest bliss.

Nevertheless, since the individualized, limited self (jivi) is caught in the net of desire (kama), the goals of dharma and moksha do not enter its vision or arouse any interest. It takes delight in sinking and floating on the waves of material pleasures (wealth and desire, artha and kama). This is not strange in persons of that nature.

The search for food, the avoidance of fear, and the enjoyment of sloth and sleep - in these, people and animals are equally eager and equally involved. The search for moksha and the observance of dharma - these promote people to a level of existence higher than the animal level. If that yearning is absent, one cannot claim to be human.

India is acclaimed by her own people as well as by people of other countries for holding forth the ideal of the highest wisdom (vijnana). Here, there is faith that God exists in all lands. Here, there is constant effort to discriminate

between dharma and what is not dharma. Value is attached to justice and virtue. Compassion toward living beings and nonviolence are also held high as guides to conduct. Efforts are made to distinguish truth and untruth. Temples still flourish and are still replete with spiritual vibrations. Other countries have many houses of God constructed by people, such as churches and mosques, but they are not so ancient and charged so long and so deep with divinity.

Religions vary, not their essence

All religions are one, declares this land of India (Bharath). There may be a difference in the number and nature of the limbs, but the message each conveys is the same as all the rest. This is the discovery of India and her announcement to mankind.

For directing their prayers to God, one person uses a stone as a symbol; another, a piece of metal; a third, wood. But all attach great importance to prayer and believe in its beneficent effects. One person turns to the east while praying; another regards the west as really sacred. The prayer of both concerns the same wants and inadequacies.

This is the conclusion arrived at by Indian (Bharathiya) sages and thinkers. Each faith has its own scriptures and doctrines, but one must pay attention to the special features too. For example, God is so intimately felt as one's own that prayers are often addressed to God in the singular: "Can't you do this?" or "Are you incapable of protecting me?" or "Have you become weak of hearing?" This is a peculiar trait among Indians.

However one feels or thinks, one transforms oneself into the embodiment of those feelings and thoughts. If one is immersed in the truth that one is God, one can become divine. However, if one is immersed in the falsehood that one is the king of the land, one will be deemed mad or traitorous. One might even be beheaded for treason.

God will not treat you as insane or insubordinate. Every being is divine; this is the final judgement of the wisdom of India (Bharath).

Logic and intellectual investigation can give only partial accounts of the truth. Everything in creation has many phases and many angles. Reason can observe only from one angle; it can see only one phase. The intellect that has been purified and clarified through the activities (karma) laid down in the Vedas can succeed in observing both phases. Without undergoing the process of purification and clarification, reason can work only within the bounds of the materialist world, so the conclusions that it presents before us can be only partially true. But the intellect subjected to the processes of cleansing and sharpening in the Vedic way can serve us by presenting a picture of the full truth of the objective world. Most of the other faiths rely on principles reached by reason, not subjected to these disciplines taught by the Vedas. Indians (Bharathiyas) have the scriptures (sastras), which illumine far beyond the bounds and limits of the temporary and the temporal.

God, people, and creation

The universe is the macrocosmos (Brahmanda); the individual being is the microcosmos (pindanda). But the basic truth of both is One, the same. That One is independent and unrelated to any other fact or thing. When that One is realized in this manner, it can be called Brahman. When it enters the awareness as the universe, it is referred to as the Universal Absolute Brahman (Parabrahman). The basic truth of the universe is Atma. The basic truth of the individual is also Atma. All that appear different from Atma are of the region of delusion (mithya).

Delusion implies a condition that until inquiry appears real but on inquiry is known to be unreal. It is only an appearance, this universe and its supposed basis - an appearance caused by ignorance (maya). The power that deludes us into believing that the created cosmos is true and real is also an emanation from the Atma. When this power operates and the Atma is clothed with it, it is referred to as the Supreme Self (Paramatma).

Trifold primal qualities or energies

Atma is the truth-knowledge-bliss (satchidananda), treated as one

inseparable composite. Illusion is also a composite of the three natural modes or qualities (gunas) - dull, passionate, and pure (thamasic, rajasic, sathwic).

They express themselves in desire, deed, and wisdom. The quality called dullness (thamas) creates the appearance of diversity, hiding the basic ONE and Only. The quality called passion (rajas) explores the truth and pleasures of wisdom. The quality called purity (sathwa) is a clear mirror, giving a correct picture of things and events that happen before it. It reflects the highest Brahman and reveals God (Iswara). God thus manifested becomes the universe (jagath) created by His will. The reflected God does not have the capacity of delusion. Just as the clear lake water has froth and bubbles on its surface, so the Atma's essential nature seems to be tarnished by the deluding appearance of illusion (maya) and its product - the universe, with varied names and forms.

When the three modes of delusion (maya) are in balance and in a state of unruffled equipoise, the universe is termed unmanifest (a-vyaktha). This is termed the "seed state" since all subsequent variations are subsumed and latent in it. When dullness (thamas) and passion (rajas) have their impact, creation is caused and the cosmos comes about. They agitate living beings into activity. The deluding force is conditioned by the three modes, as and when each expresses itself and asserts its influence over the rest. When purity (sathwa) predominates, it is called Atma-maya; when passion (rajas) is ascendent, it becomes ignorance (a-vidya); when dullness (thamas) holds sway, it becomes dullness (thamas). When the Atma is reflected in the pure mode, the image becomes God (Iswara); when reflected in passion (rajas), it becomes individual being (jiva); and when reflected in dullness (thamas), it becomes matter.

It is the mould or container that causes the distinction between God (Iswara), the individual being (jiva), and matter; when there is no mould or container, all these are Atma. Since the universe is God, individual soul, and matter, it can be truly described as the composite of the three modes. The universe has manifested in order to serve the highest interests of living beings and of mankind, the most intelligent of them all.

While affirming that the Atma is reflected in the pure, passionate, and dull (sathwic, rajasic, and thamasic) modes, producing impressions of God, the individual and matter, one point has to be emphasized. The mirror that conditions the image has only limited capacity. It can reflect only objects that are opposite to it. But when the mirror is either convex or concave in surface or when its plain surface is soiled with dirt, the image will suffer contortion or fail in clarity. However, this does not affect the object; only the image is distorted or defaced. But the object itself is usually condemned on the basis of its reflection or image.

Cosmic spirit and individual Self

Brahman also appears distorted on account of illusion and ignorance, and this distortion, which is a superimposed characteristic, is wrongly supposed to adhere to Brahman itself! The image of the Supreme Godhead (Parameswara) is also a reflection in the mirror of illusion. Just as milk turns into curds, Brahman has turned into the universe (jagath). This transformation is the handiwork of illusion. Brahman is the master of illusion and not its subordinate. It releases the power of illusion and directs it. So, the personalized Brahman or Supreme Godhead is known as omnipotent and omniscient. The individual being (jiva), God (Iswara), and the elements or matter (bhutha) all contribute to the progress of the individual, each in its own way.

The Lord is the fulfilment of all desires; all objects of enjoyment in the universe emanate from His will, so He has no desire at all. He has manifested the universe not for the realization of any desire of His or filling any vacuity from which He suffers but entirely for the benefit of living beings. "There is no duty binding on me, Partha, in the three worlds (na me, Partha asthi karthavyam, thrishu lokeshu kinchana)," says Krishna. Creation, manifestation, or emanation is His very nature. Hence, the description "Reveling in play (leela vinodhi)" is often ascribed to Him. It is His will power that is filling all living beings with consciousness and helping them to be alert and active. He grants to each the consequence of thought, word, and deed and is therefore described as the Giver of the Fruit of Activity.

Without the intercession of the Lord, activity cannot result in consequence; nor can certainty arise that a particular act will result in an identifiable manner. Besides, the sages declare that activity (karma) is momentary.

The thought arises and the act is done. The act is followed by the fruit. It is not possible to predict when the fruit will be available or what its nature will be. Hence, we have to admit that it all depends on the Lord's command.

What cannot be interpreted by our limited intellect has to be ascribed to His command.

God, the eternal, universal witness

However long the interval, however many lives elapse, one cannot escape the obligation of suffering from the consequences of one's actions. There can be no place for inquiry into the origins of the act or when it happened, for one has to trace from the beginning of time itself. One cannot discover the beginnings of the Lord, the universe, the living being, activity, and ignorance; they are all beyond the beginning. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna declares, "The way of action is elusively subtle and difficult to discover (gahana karmano gatih)". The consequence might confront the person even after the passage of many lives.

The Lord is the eternal Witness, the Power that presides over every act. Looked at from this point of view, one has to realize and declare that the Lord and the individual are bound inextricably together. In the absence of living beings, there can be no Lord. When there are no children, how can the word "father" be meaningful? So it can be said that the Lord manifested the universe in order to provide living beings with fields of activity and to grant them the consequences of those actions. The five elements serve the same purpose; they also help constitute the physical vehicles of life, in accordance with the quality and quantity of those consequences. There are also regions (lokas) where beings that have accumulated great merit or gathered terrible sins have to be in the hereafter.

These have no relation to the regions or bodies that are visible to us.

Truth veiled by deluding tendencies

Life principle and individual principle mean the same. Both indicate that they have emerged from the absence of the awareness of the truth (a-vidya). This again is due to bondage to tendencies (gunas). The individual is marked by the presence of the active, work-prone, passionate mode (rajoguna), though it also has the seeds of the other two modes in its makeup. Creation (jagath) itself originated when truth veiled itself in delusion (a-vidya).

The modes manifested at that same moment, and individuals differentiated according to the predominance of one or other of the three chief modes, caused by the total effect of the activities (karmas) gone through in life after life.

One endowed more with the pure (sathwic) mode becomes God's own, inspired by devotion to God and engaging mostly in adoring and praising divine glory. Preponderance of active, passionate (rajasic) traits renders one strong, intelligent, and content, with no higher aspirations toward divinity. One ruled by the dull mode (thamasic guna) becomes as bound to the body and its needs as birds and beasts.

The living being (jivi), on account of an intellect caught in the coils of delusion, imagines that it is an "effect" and therefore bound to some "cause". This nonawareness of truth has to be conquered by Atmic wisdom, which urges toward this adventure and ensures success. It will destroy the distinction, now believed in, between the subject and the object, man and the cosmos (jiva and jagath).

To help people in this heroic duel and make them aware of the truth, the Vedas, in what is referred to as Karma-kanda, prescribe desirable activities (karmas). As long as one is caught in ignorance, the concepts of man and cosmos, the upper and lower worlds, dharma and injustice (a-dharma), karma, devotion, and wisdom have to be respected and one's life has to be

shaped accordingly. As long as one is established in the validity of the "diversity" apparent in the universe, one acts according to the limits imposed by the personalized God (Iswara).

For each individual soul (jivi), the universe is its own mental picture and nothing else, fundamentally. So unless one unravels the mind and its processes, the Brahma principle is difficult to understand. Those who have not understood the real nature of the sky will mistake it as a dome of smoke and dust; so too, the Atma is mistaken, through nonawareness of reality, to be enclosed in and embodied as intellect (buddhi), to be involved in activity and enjoyment of the results of activity, to be caught up in the twin bonds of joy and sorrow, and to be embroiled in happiness and misery and also in bondage and liberation. From the angle of change, the higher truth will naturally appear as different, though they are inextricably interrelated.

Space is one, but as a result of the diversity of vessels, it seems to be enclosed in the home, the pot, the building, and the canvas. There is no truth in this sectionalized existence; the One space exists in all these "containers" - houses, lakes, hills, etc. - which are shapes and forms, with distinct names attached to them and different modes of behaviour and use. So too, individual beings (jivas) have different names and forms, peculiarities, and specialities of use and behaviour. But, like the string that holds the beads, passing in and through each and holding them together, the Super-consciousness in all individuals is ONE.

Know thyself: Realize unity in diversity

That ONE is the Atma, which through ignorance is mistaken as I. As long as this truth is not won, one cannot release oneself from the hold of multiplicity and change. The scriptures communicate to us this reality and exhort us to realize it. What is it that, if known, everything else can be known? When the Atma is known, declare the revealed scriptures (sruthi), everything can be known. The cosmos (jagath) is only relatively real; it is partly false. Knowing it is unprofitable and unnecessary. It is not a legitimate purpose of life. Life is best spent and human effort best directed when awareness of the Atma

principle is sought to be attained.

The revealed scriptures warn people against other vain pursuits. The revealed texts and allied sacred literature, like the law texts (smrithis), historical legends (ithihasas) and Puranas, don't teach us how the cosmos was created or advise us to study and understand its origins and the process. They don't declare the absence of that knowledge as calamitous; they even assert that the task is impossible.

"Why worry how the cosmos was born or when it will die? Worry rather about yourself." That is the lesson emphasized by the scriptures. "Know Thyself." Once you know yourself, everything else will automatically be clear. You are a microcosm in the macrocosm (pindanda in the Brahmanda). Just as the knowledge of one single clay pot is enough to know all about all clay pots, when you know yourself, all else can be known.

Supreme reality is nondual

To persuade a child to stop weeping and regain joy, the nursemaid relates a pleasant fairy tale. The nursemaid's sole purpose is to calm the child; the fairy tale is only a means modeled on its intellectual level. In the same manner, the individual soul (jivi), fascinated by the beginningless attraction of illusion (maya) and bound by tendencies cultivated during many lives in the past, can't avoid inquiring into the origins of the universe that it encounters. The revealed scripture (sruthi) answers such inquiry in words that give temporary relief. For the question "how was the universe created" is on a par with the question "how is a dream created?" The dream originates from sleep (nidra); the universe through illusion (maya). Just as the dream has no order or law, the universe also is too full of mystery and illusion. There is only ONE, not two as often happens in a dream. This is the doctrine of nondualism (a-dwaita).

Very much like the question of the origin of creation, another problem that generally worries people is:

how did this ignorance happen? The solution was provided by the sage-

preceptor Vasishta to Sri Ramachandra.

"Rama!" he said, "rather than entangling yourselves in the inquiry regarding how ignorance entered people, I would exhort you to be engaged in efforts to get rid of it." This lesson is directed not only to Rama but to all mankind.

It helps all who do not possess the realization of the truth behind the objective world. Ignorance is the name given to ignoring what is one's own inner experience: the universe is an ever-changing phenomenon.

Why then are you troubled by this question? Be convinced that you have this ignorance; give up the struggle to get rid of attachment to this changing world, with its concomitant birth-death cycle. It is only another evidence of this ignorance to argue whether this ignorance adheres to Brahman or emanates from the individual soul (jivi).

Surely it is much more essential to concentrate on the methods by which the ignorance can be discarded. For it will certainly yield to wisdom (jnana). Wisdom is light; ignorance is darkness. Darkness can persist only until light shines.

21. The Eternal Truths

The Veda is the Mother of all the scriptures (sastras). The Veda emanated from God Himself as inhalation and exhalation. The great sages, who were the embodiments of the treasure gained by long ascetic practices, received the Veda as a series of sounds and spread it over the world by word of mouth from preceptor to pupil.

Since it was "heard" and preserved by generations, the Veda is known as sruthi, "that which was heard or listened to". The Veda is endless.

The Vedas: divine revelations

Who composed the Vedas? Until today, it has not been possible to unveil their names. Those who recited it had perhaps no desire to earn renown, for the names are nowhere seen mentioned in the Veda. Perhaps they attached no importance to their names, clans, or sects, or it is likely they had no kith or kin or clan. Whoever they may be, the sages were sure they were masters of all knowledge, for the sense of equality and equanimity found in the Veda is the innate quality of only such wise persons. So it is very appropriate to infer that the Veda was given to the world only by people endowed with all powers.

The word Veda originated from the root vid, meaning "to know". "That which reveals and makes clear all knowledge is Veda (Vidam thu anena ithi Vedah)." The Veda can be mastered neither by limited intellect nor by limited experience. The sacred Veda instructs in all that one requires for spiritual advancement. It instructs in the means and methods of overcoming all sorrows and grief. It instructs in all the spiritual disciplines that can give unshaken peace.

No one has understood correctly the beginning or end of the Veda, so it is hailed as beginningless and eternal.

Since the first and the last of the Veda are not known, it is everlasting

(nithya). The intelligence of humans is tainted, but since the Veda has no trace of taint, it is concluded that it cannot be a human product. So the Veda is also characterized as non-personal (a-pourusheya).

The Vedas: a unique source of all religions

The Veda is its own authority. Each Vedic sound is sacred because it is part of the Veda. Those who have faith in the Veda and its authority can personally experience this. The great sages were enriched by such experiences, and they have extolled it as the source of wisdom. These experiences are not bound by time or space. Their validity and value can be recognized not only in India but by people of all lands. It can be asserted that they lay down basic truths.

We don't know when the Vedic religion originated, but others came later. This is the difference. So, if the Absolute has to be known, it isn't possible to succeed with the help of the skill and strength that people have. Human intelligence can operate only within certain limits. (Buddhi-grahyam atheendriyam). But the Veda is beyond the reach of intelligence, which is restricted and can deal only with facts discoverable by the senses and experiences related to these. It can act only in the area of the visible, the viable.

The Vedas: source of all sciences

Mother Veda has been kind to her children - the human race. To sanctify its cravings and to uplift the race, she has posited the concept of time - and its components, the years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds.

Even gods were declared to be bound by time. The individual (jiva) is caught in the wheel of time and space and rotates with it, unaware of any means of escape. But, really, the individual is beyond the reach of time and space.

The Veda is bent upon the task of making it know this truth and liberating it from this narrowness. Mother Veda is compassionate; she longs to liberate

her children from doubt and discontent. She has no desire to inflame or confuse. Wise ones know this well.

Gravitation has existed on earth since we do not know when. It had its origin along with the creation of the Earth. The Earth and the force of gravitation are both inseparable, indistinguishable. Just because it is not recognized by a few or because it is not visible as such, it would be foolish to deny its existence in the Earth. But the fact is, no one knew the existence of this universal force, even though it was there along with the Earth! The force was operating even when one was unaware of it. At last, after analyzing various principles and observing various experiments, the Western physicist Newton announced that the Earth had the force of gravitation. The world accepted the statement and placed faith in its truth. But the force was operating all the time, even before Newton's announcement. It did not start operating all of a sudden, when the experiments demonstrated it.

The Vedas are Eternal Truths; they existed even before the people of this land discovered, practised, and experienced them. Just as Western physicists announced the existence of gravitation after their experiments, the ancients of this land demonstrated the innate authenticity of the Vedas through their own experience. Here too, the Veda existed long before it was discovered and put into practice. Newton's laws of gravitation benefited the whole world; they express universal truths applicable to all places and times and are not confined only to Western countries. So too, the Veda is truth, not merely for India (Bharath) but for all people on earth.

The Vedas: drawn toward India

It is not correct to claim that India (Bharath) is the birthplace of the Vedas. The utmost that can be said is that they were discovered by the people of India. To ask why a happening in one place did not take place in another place is also the sign of a confused mind. The Divine Author decides what should happen when and where. As the Divine Author decides, so it takes place. The atmosphere in India was congenial for the revelation and growth of the Vedas. The Vedas were drawn toward the hearts of the sages of this land,

this land of Godward activity, this land of yoga, this land of renunciation. Other lands pursued sensual pleasures (bhoga), so their atmosphere was overcharged with worldly aspirations and achievements. Therefore, the Vedic message couldn't be easily understood there. Since in India the spiritual quest was sincerely pursued, along with material objectives, people here had the good fortune of Mother Veda incarnating.

Of course, this does not mean that Mother Veda has not blessed other lands or is absent therein. It is like the force of gravitation present everywhere. The Veda is omnipresent.

The heroic sages of India (Bharath) were able to receive the Vedic message as a result of their spiritual practice (sadhana) of denial and detachment, as well as their capacity to concentrate and to experience the bliss resulting from practising it. They were so selfless and full of compassion and love that they shared with those who approached them what they had heard and enjoyed. Therefore, they are called "seers of mantras". Through the long line of their disciples, the message has come down the ages and spread all over the land. Like a continuing flood, the mysterious Veda was "visualized" by the sages as visionaries (drashtas). The Bharathiyas, people of this country, are well aware of this debt.

The scriptural texts of India - the Vedas, limbs of the Veda (Vedangas), Upanishads, law codes (smrithis), Puranas (didactic ancient legends), and historical epics (ithihasas) - are repositories of profound wisdom. Each is an ocean of sweet sustaining milk, sacred and sanctifying.

The waters of the ocean can never be diminished in volume, however many pumps you ply to drain them.

Enormous quantities of water are turned into steam by the hot rays of the sun, bundled into clouds, and returned to the earth as rain. This helps the harvesting of grain and renders the land green with vegetation.

The wonder is that in spite of this tremendous uptake and downpour, the level

of the ocean does not go down even by an inch. Furthermore, even though thousands of live rivers pour their waters into the seas, the level is not seen to increase. Similarly, those who have supplemented their knowledge of the scriptural texts with the awareness of their validity acquired by practising the lessons contained in them are not affected by praise or blame, whatever the source and quantity. Their hearts will stay pure, unaffected, and calm. The holy scriptures of India are strongholds of such sustaining lessons.

However, one can imbibe those lessons only to the extent of one's patience and intelligent skill. After mastering the texts and gaining experience in putting the lessons into actual practice, one can share the light and the joy with others. The texts of India insist on the value of actual practice and the need to confirm the truths by experiencing their impact.

Sanskrit: mother of all languages

A person who wants to understand clearly the sacred books and scriptural texts of India, to imbibe their message, must learn the Sanskrit language; that responsibility, that duty, cannot be avoided. The very mention of Sanskrit immediately arouses in many among us a prejudicial attitude. "It is the dead language of a dying culture; it is boosted by the fanatic attachment of antiquated conservatives", contemporary moderns declaim. They condemn the language as surviving only in meaningless formulae, in fast-vanishing rituals and ceremonies, in wedding rites and other futile exercises. It is a very difficult language to learn, it is said. Such beliefs have dug themselves deep into the minds of moderns. These banal opinions and false attitudes have to be exorcised from the minds of people.

Sanskrit is an immortal language; its voice is eternal; its call is through the centuries. It has imbedded in it the basic sustenance from all the languages of the world. Revere Sanskrit as the mother of languages. Do not ignore its greatness or talk disparagingly about it.

The Vedas reveal nature's secrets

When you yearn to slake the thirst for nectar offered by the Vedas, you have to learn Sanskrit. In order to interpret the Vedas and elaborate their inner meanings and mysteries, the sages have left behind textbooks of complementary sciences like grammar, poetics, philosophy, and astrology. Their researches and books range over several fields of knowledge like astronomy, geography, jurisprudence, ethics, epistemology, music, psychology, and rhetoric. Western scientists are struck with admiration at the wonders of astronomy they have unveiled and the truths they have unraveled in other sciences; they have benefited by the clues provided by these sages, and they are engaged in further research encouraged by the discoveries of these ancient seers. They have acknowledged that these sages (rishis) had advanced far more than the Greeks in their astronomical knowledge.

In the Vedas and the supplementary literature they produced, we can find already revealed many secrets of nature, hailed as revolutionary discoveries by modern science, like the existence and explosive possibilities of the atom. Many sections of the Atharvana Veda are found to be mines of such important information when examined by westerners. The Germans established special institutes and universities in order to conduct research on the contents of the tons of palm-leaf manuscripts of the Nadi texts and horoscopes, and on astronomy, medicine, chemistry, toxicology, mathematics, etc. They are learning Sanskrit so that this work may proceed successfully.

In America, Russia, and even Afghanistan, the universities are not only themselves eager to introduce Sanskrit as a subject of study but are being pressed by scholars to do so! Foreigners are revering these texts from India as gems of lucky discovery.

Science of yoga: a most unique contribution

The science of yoga was assigned great prominence in the past by Indians. Even now, in many countries of the world, this science is being studied and practised. Institutions where yoga postures are taught exist in great numbers throughout America and Russia.

In India, however, when the practice of yoga or meditation is mentioned, people respond with the feeling that it is a spiritual path related to the Vedantic school of thought. As soon as yoga is mentioned, many who hear the word get pictures before their minds of lone hermits in the depths of thick forests, wearing the ochre robe of monks and living on fruits, tubers, and roots. Their opinion is that the discipline of yoga is the ancient discipline practised by such homeless ascetics. This is an ignorant guess; it is not true at all. The yoga science is being probed today by physicists and others in Western countries.

In this era of technology, it is becoming increasingly difficult to lead peaceful lives. People are becoming the targets of various types of mental ailments. In countries on the front line of civilization like America and England, people have lost the delight of natural sleep at night. They experience only artificial sleep induced by the tablets they swallow. As a consequence of these and many other drugs taken to ward off other ills, they suffer more and more from diseases of the heart and blood pressure. In the end, they render themselves unhealthy wrecks.

Such lives are highly artificial. People are sunk in fear and anxiety; mentally on one side and physically on the other, they have no rest. Drugs, tablets, capsules, and pills are produced in millions, but the general health has not improved. Besides, new varieties of illness have emerged and are developing fast. A few intelligent westerners have realized that their only refuge is yoga. They have confirmed their conclusion by means of experiments; they have taken to yoga with increasing faith.

The Vedas are the oldest literary creations of mankind. Now, the word "literature" is used to connote writings scribbled while eager to find something to spend the time hanging on hand. They have no inner worth or significance; they destroy the traits of good character in the reader and implant bad attitudes and habits; they do not adhere to the path of truth. But literature is a term that cannot be applied to writings or poems that reel off tales that are false. It should not emerge from the egotistic fancies of the individual.

The Vedas: source of spiritual formulae

The Vedas are the soul that sustains the spiritual life of India (Bharath); they are the breath that keeps the people alive. They possess a divine power, amazing in its effects. They are charged with the vibrations of mantras, which can be experienced by those who go through the process scientifically. They can also impart the strength derivable through symbols and formulae of a tantric nature. Tantra means "the means and methods of utilizing the mantras for one's own good".

People have only physical and material power. Their action (karma) becomes holy and sacred when the mechanics (yantra) of life are ruled by mantra and tantra (holy thought process). The technique of this spiritual practice is in the Karma-kanda, the part of the Vedas relating to ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites. The ancient sages became aware of this and have preserved it for mankind in the Four Vedas.

Unable to grasp these truths, those who pride themselves as "moderns" proclaim that the Vedas contain only verses and mantras that are learned by rote and repeated by aged cronies. Not only "moderns" but even those who earned distinction as "the foremost pundits", those who expound to the people gathering fame, use the Vedas for promoting their material well-being and not for helping people on the spiritual path. They are unable to discover the sacred task for which the Vedas exist. Whenever the chance arises, they benefit by the scholarship, but they are not eager or able to use the Vedas to purify their daily lives.

As a result, "moderns" find it impossible to develop faith in the Vedas. When the pundits do not seek to practise the Vedas they have learned and parade their lack of faith by not instructing their own children on the glory of the Vedas, they naturally cause lack of faith in the entire society.

Many others, in spite of their ignorance of the meaning of the Vedic hymns, walk through busy places reciting the sacred texts in mechanical orthodoxy.

Foreigners - especially German scholars - though they have not learned the Vedas by rote, have realized that the mantras possess and transmit profound power. Over the centuries, they have carried portions of the Vedas to their own country and conducted patient and painstaking research on them. Consequently, they have unraveled strange mysteries. They found that the Vedas contain the secrets of all the arts that confer progress on people.

Many scriptural texts emerged as adjuncts to the Vedas. The Vedas (knowledge) of archery, of medicine (ayurveda for maintenance, prolongation, and preservation of life), of impact of planetary movements (Jyothirveda) - many such texts were composed and promulgated.

Infinite power of the Gayatri Mantra

Sage Viswamitra discovered the mantra that is named Gayatri, which is addressed to the energy of the Sun, Surya. This mantra has infinite potentiality. It is a vibrant formula. It has immense powers, powers that are truly amazing, for the Sun is its presiding deity. Students of the Ramayana know that the same sage, Viswamitra, initiated Rama into the mysteries of Sun worship through the mantra "the sun is the heart (Aditya-hridayam)". The Gayatri enabled Viswamitra to use rare weapons that bowed to his will when the mantra was repeated with faith.

Through the powers he attained in this way, Viswamitra was able to become a great scientist and create a counterpart of this cosmos.

A person who is able to increase the capabilities of their hands and senses is now considered a "scientist (vijñani)", but the term was correctly applied in the past only to those who developed spiritual power and discovered the formulae for delving into the Divine within, those imbued with faith and devotion who could spontaneously demonstrate that power in actual day-to-day living. On the other hand, the "scientists" of today know only a bit here and a bit there; they exaggerate and boast of what they have managed to learn. They are fond of pomp and proud display. They rise skyhigh on the fumes of praise. Such absurdities are quite contrary to the true behaviour of a

scientist, who is humble and meek. He is aware that, however much he knows, there is a far vaster field that he has yet to know. He is conscious that Divine Grace is responsible for what little he knows.

Galaxy of India's sage-scientists

Viswamitra was a scientist, who had recognized this truth. No scientist is greater than he was. But, though a sage of such immense eminence and with so expansive a heart lived in India, he is not remembered by the people of this land. They honour the foreigners who have glimpsed his greatness; they have not placed their faith in researchers who have elicited valuable lessons from the Vedas. The Veda is the Mother of India (Bharath), but the children don't revere the mother any more. They revere the stepmother and believe in her! This is the result of the anglicized educational system.

Probing further and further into the scientific attainments of the sages of ancient India, the construction of vehicles capable of flying in space (vimanas) is described by Sage Bharadwaja. Mental science had advanced so much that they could reproduce what had happened or predict what would happen. The science of medicine was highly developed in India. It was Sage Bharadwaja who taught this science for the benefit of mankind.

Sage Atreya took up the task of propagating this science and technique of healing. Saint Charaka compiled all the discoveries into a "collection (samhitha)" named after him. It deals elaborately with the diagnosis of diseases, methods of healing and cure, foetal development, and other essential but not easily discoverable facts of medical science. The doctors proficient in that science could, in those ancient years, surgically remove or correct various diseased parts of body when the illness could not be cured by drugs.

Sage Sushruta wrote in his compendium about many surgical processes. This text was discovered and is available for study. Dhanvantari, Nagarjuna, and other sages have brought to light many other medical discoveries of ancient India, made by adherents of the Vedic tradition of scientific research.

There are also many valuable texts on ethics, jurisprudence, and other social sciences that are invaluable treasures for all time, like Manu's text on dharma (Dharma Sastra) and Gautama's logical system (Nyaya Sastra).

Science of absolute truth

Vedanta is the legitimate property of every section, caste, community, and race, of the followers of any faith, and of people of both sexes. Vedanta means supreme spiritual wisdom (jnana). Wisdom relating to which field of knowledge? Knowledge of the Atma. This wisdom is the highest gain that can be earned in life. What greater gain can there be for a person than to become aware of their Self, themselves knowing themselves. Faith in the possibility of knowing oneself is necessary for every student of the Vedas (sruthi) and Moral Codes (smrithi).

The object seen is clearly separate from the subject who sees. This is a universally accepted truth. Who is this "I" that sees? All things that have form are recognized and seen by the sense organ, the eye. The eye sees the physical body, other individuals, even insects, worms, and things. It sees everything that is within its range. The body is also a thing that the eye sees, along with the rest. So, how can we conclude that the body is the I?

Then, who really is this "I"? Fire burns and also brightens. It burns things by heat and brightens them by the light it sheds. Fire is different from the things it acts upon. Now, who is it that knows this truth - the truth that fire and the things that burns are different? It is the Atma, the divine Self. When a log burns, the fire is present and active in all of it. Similarly, the Atma pervades the entire body and enables it to perform deeds and to move itself and its limbs.

The light of the lamp is the instrument that informs us at night: "this is the cup", "this is the plate". The eye, a similar instrument, informs us "this is a house", "this is a thorn", "this is a stone". The eye is not the Atma. In the absence of the lamp, the eye - or, in the absence of the eye, the lamp - cannot cognize the house, the thorn, the stone, the cup or the plate. Both the

lamp and the eye are media or instruments of "illumination".

The instrument, the eye, sees the body, where it is situated. The body that is seen cannot therefore be other than a similar instrument. The senses are the experiencers of hearing, tasting, seeing, touching, and smelling.

When the eye is known as an instrument, the other four senses also have to be recognized as tools. All these senses are under the control of the mind, which is their master. Even this mind is being controlled and conditioned by some other master. The mind cannot be the core of a person.

The intellect (buddhi) examines the information offered by the mind. It is the instrument that judges and decides. For example, imagine a sharp knife. However sharp, it cannot cut a fruit on its own initiative. Nor can it cut the thinnest thread by itself. It can do so only when it is held by the hand of someone. The intellect is similar to the knife. It is helpless without the inner spirit, Atma, which has to wield it.

Then, we have to consider another equipment of humanity: the vital air (prana). Let us consider whether we can nominate it as the Self. During deep sleep, a person is not conscious of breathing and that the vital airs are alert! Of the three states - waking, dreaming, and sleeping - though the vital air is existent in all, a person is not aware of the experiences of the waking state while dreaming, nor of the experiences of the dreaming state while in the wakeful state. During sleep, the vital airs do not activate the intellect or the memory. They appear to be quiescent. When the boss is active, the dependents cannot keep quiet. Since they are not always uniformly active, the vital airs (pranas) or the vital air principle cannot be considered as the inner Self or spirit, Atma.

Never-changing Self-reality

Now about the self, or "I". It operates in two fields, so it has two meanings: (1) egotism (ahamkara), the body consciousness, the exterior "I" and (2) the inner "I" (pratyagatma). People who do not know this distinction confuse

themselves and assert that "I" is applicable to the body consciousness, but this is wrong. As we have seen, the body is a tool, it is an object, it is the seen and not the see-er. How can the ego, identified with it, be the Atma? This ego also is of the "seen" category. It is absent in sleep and plays false in dreams. Truth has to persist unaffected, in the past, present, and future. How can that which is absent in two states be true?

As a result of this inquiry, it became plain that the senses, the mind, the intellect, the vital airs - not one of these can be accepted as Atma and accorded that validity. Therefore, the question arises: what else, who else is Atma?

It has no entry or exit, no hands and feet, no organs and limbs, no blot or blemish. It is the minutest among the minute, the hugest among the huge. Like space, it is everywhere. It is all, so it is free from "I" and "mine".

Atma is its own proof

The Atma is consciousness, as fire is heat and the sun is light. It has no affinity with distress or delusion; it is supreme everlasting ecstasy (paramananda). It is the core, the heart of all beings; it is the awareness in all. It is the see-er of everything "seen"; it sees all objects seen. Everyone, whatever their nature or stature, who declares, after being served by the senses, "I see", "I hear", "I taste", etc., is really only talking of lamps, of tools, and not of the Atma. The Atma is not a part see-er, a sequential or gradual see-er, a non-see-er or a pseudo see-er.

Like the moon, the intellect (buddhi) has no light in itself. Like the moon, it reflects light from another source adjacent to it, namely the Atma. The intellect can operate only by reflecting the cosmic intelligence, represented by the Atma.

The Sun is designated the cosmic eye (jagath chakshu), a name based on the Sun's involvement with and proximity to other objects. The Sun has no ego-sense, no sense of possession and property, no will or want or wish. By His

very presence, darkness disappears and light envelops the world. So, He is called the Enlightener.

But He is not consciously doing so, as if in duty bound. The Atma also has neither obligation nor application.

If asked how the Atma becomes a "doer", the reply is: is the magnet a "doer" simply because the needle in its neighbourhood moves?

The basic question may now be raised. Does the Atma exist? If it does, how and with what proof can it be established?

There is no need to prove that the Atma exists, for if it is capable of being proved by certain arguments and lines of reasoning, the existence of a person who uses those arguments and follows those lines of reasoning, has to be posited. That person will again be the Atma!

Of course, some people may reply that the Vedas are the authority for the existence of the Atma and that the Atma can be experienced and validated through the Vedas. The Vedas do prohibit certain activities as non-Atmic or opposed to the norms expected from a believer in the Atma; they do recommend certain other activities, like charity and moral behaviour, as Atmic. But the Atma is its own proof, its own witness. Its existence cannot be established by other facts or things.

The scriptures (sastras), which are texts supplementary to the Vedas, declare that God resides wherever six excellences are evident: enthusiasm, determination, courage, good sense, strength, and adventure (utsaha, sahasam, dhairya, sadbuddhi, sakthi, and parakrama). The inaugural prayer has to be directed to God (Ganapathi) to gain these six gifts, which can purify consciousness and reveal the Atma. One has to undertake the discovery of one's Atmic core with bravery in the heart; this is no exercise for cowards. Wicked people, waverers in faith, doubting hearts, woeful countenances, are destined to go through life as sick persons (rogis) and not dwellers in Atma (yogis).

This is the distinguishing mark that separates the wise (jnani) from the unwise. Krishna spoke, laughing with an outburst of joy; Arjuna listened, overpowered by sorrow. The wise one is always full of joy and laughs. The unwise one is afflicted with sorrow and weeps.

Self inquiry and four stages of life

In order to achieve victory while inquiring into the nature of the Atma, one has to pass through the asramas - the four stages of life recognized and recommended by the scriptural texts of the eternal Vedic religion (Sanathana Dharma). Each one, while passing through each stage, aware of the duties and responsibilities prescribed in the texts, learns for themselves a quantum of the knowledge that leads to Atmic awareness.

Only after the childhood years will the routine of the four stages have an impact. Until then, one cannot gather any special knowledge about one's duties and responsibilities. People have childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, and old age as stages of growth; there are also corresponding stages in the growth of wisdom.

In the first stage of childhood, one is led from ignorance and "innocence" into the world of knowledge, when one is accepted as a pupil by a preceptor (guru). After that, one has to serve and obey the guru, without feeling burdened and bound. In the second stage of youth, one has to share with society the means and measures for its progress and security; one has to start earning a livelihood and spending one's income with intelligent care; one also has the duty to provide examples to younger people and guide them into socially useful paths. At the same time, one must follow the footsteps of elders and learn lessons for one's own advancement from them.

In the third stage of adulthood, intelligent attention has to be paid not only to one's own advancement and the advancement of the family and society but also to the advancement of people generally. That too is the responsibility of the grown-ups, and they must acquire the necessary skills. They must have wider visions of the peace and prosperity of all mankind and try to contribute

to both, within the limits of their capacity and resources.

Old age is the fourth stage. By the time one reaches this stage of the journey, one must have discovered that joys available in this world are trivial and fleeting. One must be equipped with the higher knowledge of spiritual joy, available through delving into the inner spring of bliss. Through experiences, one's heart must have softened and be filled with compassion. One has to be engrossed in promoting the progress of all beings without distinction.

And one must be eager to share with others the accumulated knowledge and the benefit of experiences.

Occupations and attitudes

Thus, occupations and resultant attitudes have been assigned to the various stages of human life. Practice is as important for confirming one in wisdom as reading is important for confirming one in knowledge. Alongside of knowledge, youth has to cultivate the good qualities of humility, reverence, devotion to God, and steadfast faith.

Youth has to engage in good works and enjoy them for the sheer elation they confer. During adulthood, along with the earning of wealth and involvement in the improvement of society, attention must be paid to the promotion and preservation of virtues and to the observance of moral codes. Steps should be taken to improve one's righteous behaviour and spiritual practice (sadhana). All levels of consciousness have to be purified and then directed to holy tasks.

During middle age, besides fostering the family and society, one has to live an exemplary life to inspire one's children and hold forth before society elevating ideals that are worth practising. No attempt should be made to belittle society and benefit only the family, for it is bound to fail. The Brahman principle can be realized only by purifying one's activity and utilizing that activity to serve oneself in all. It can never be realized as long as one relies on the caste into which one is born, the intellectual equipment one has added unto oneself, or the mastery of the Vedas.

Atma is eternal

One who is born cannot escape death, some time, somewhere. Every moment, many are born and many die.

But one has to discover how to "avoid" death. Now, the Atma, which is the core of humanity, is not born; since it does not take birth, it does not meet death. Death happens to the body with which it is associated, with which it mixes. The delusion that the body is the core, that the body is real, that verily is the death. Affliction by that falsehood is the act of dying. To be free from that delusion is to attain immortality. The body disintegrates, not the Atma, the soul, the Self. The body is undergoing change every moment, and the final change is death, when the Self, changeless, remains. When one believes that the changing body is oneself and starts referring to it as "I", that "I" dies, but the real "I" is deathless.

As intense elevating activity and fearless inquiry into one's truth are practised more and more, the consciousness that the "body is oneself" can be overcome and negated. Consider the fruit of the tamarind tree. When unripe, it is not easy to separate the rind, the pulp, and the seed. So too, those who have stuck to sensual desires and to fondling and feeding the body cannot earn the awareness of the Atma. When the tamarind fruit becomes ripe, the rind can be broken off, the pulp detached from the seed, and the seed isolated without effort. Inquiry and unselfish activity ripen the consciousness, and the Atma can be isolated from the body, clear and pure.

Five encasements of the body

The body has five encasements, which hide the Atma. These are grouped under three categories: the gross, subtle, and causal. The physical case (flesh, blood, bone, etc.) and the vital case (breath) form the gross (sthula) body. When these two sheaths - the gross body - fall or disintegrate, the body also falls and cannot rise.

The word sukshma, which is generally translated as "subtle", means "small" in Sanskrit. But it has another meaning: that which expands. Air expands more than water; space is more expansive than air. Compared with the expanse of the liberated soul, even space has to be considered "gross"! Steam is more expansive (subtle) than water. Although a block of ice and a lump of camphor appear "gross", they become subtle when heated or lit.

The rule of the world is that the seen causes the unseen, the manifested explains the unmanifested. But the rule in the realm of the spirit is different. The latent Atma causes the patent world. Being is behind becoming, and finally, becoming merges in being; the patent is absorbed into the latent. Like milk from the cow, the power of relativity (maya) flows from the supreme Person as the five-element constituted cosmos, the patent manifestation.

The cosmos is cognized as a composite, just as milk is a composite of cream, curd, and butter, which can be got out of it by the action of heat and cold, the addition of sour drops, and the process of churning thereafter. Churning separates the butter from the milk. In the same manner, through cosmic processes and upheavals of heat and cold, the five fundamental elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) were separated and Earth, this ball of butter, emerged as the product of the churning.

Three character traits, five basic elements

If a person or thing has one of the three character traits (balanced, passionate, dull) predominant in the makeup, we denote the person as having that trait. So also the element that is predominant in any created entity gives its name to it. This is why the world on which we live is called the Earth (bhumi). The realms in space where the element of water predominates are known as the atmosphere (bhuvarloka) and the celestial plane (swarloka). The materials therein flow in currents and streams.

In short, what appears as the five element-constituted cosmos is only the superimposition on God of the nonreal individual Self and the five elements. God seen in and through the non-real appears as nature. This is but a

distorted picture of Reality, this everchanging multiplicity. The fault is in the mirror that reflects, the mind that perceives, the brain that infers. What the mirror presents as true has no authenticity. The mirror is coated with dust, and its face is not plain at all. God has no illusion (maya); He has no intention or need to delude, nor does He will that it should happen. But people in their ignorance see things that do not exist and believe that they do exist just as they see them. This weakness is named "superimposition (adhyasa)".

When God is reflected as nature, the reflection becomes illusion (maya). Just as milk curdles into yogurt, God becomes the world (jagath) of incessant transformation, the image (maya) of the unchanging Divine. His will causes this unreal multiplicity on the One that He is; by His will, He can end it. He is the Master of illusion.

God is omnipresent, omnipotent. Of the three entities Overself, Self and nature, nature has the fulfilment of the wants of humanity as its purpose. God has no wants or wishes. He is the fullest and highest attainment. The bliss (ananda) of every being and for every being flows spontaneously from God; His words to Arjuna in the Gita are, "I have no duty to discharge, O Partha, in the three worlds." He has created duties only to foster the consciousness of all living beings. He has no activity and no obligation. He brings about the result of every activity.

Without Him, no activity can yield result! He decides which result should accrue from which act.

22. The Inner Inquiry

"All this will disappear and lose individuality with the emergence of the highest wisdom (jnana)," said the sage Vasishta to Rama. "Rama," he advised, "You have to understand how this non-knowledge grew and by what means it can be destroyed." Superposition of falsehood over truth There is one mystery hidden in this advice. Centuries of enquiry have failed to unravel this secret: from where did the cosmos originate? How did it emerge? If it had a personal cause, the enquiry could have succeeded.

The cosmos (jagath) is not such an object. The questions "how did it emerge?" and "from where did it originate?" are exactly on a par with the question, how did the "serpent" appear on the "rope" and cause the "terror"? Only the rope exists there; the serpent was imposed thereon, at dusk, by the defective intellect of the onlooker - that is to say, on account of illusion created by reasoning. In other words, ignorance is the basis of the misapprehension.

Brahman is the rope; the cosmos is the serpent, superimposed on it by reason afflicted by illusion. We cognize Brahman as the cosmos; we take one thing as another as long as this affliction holds sway. Therefore, it is best to conclude that the cosmos is an object that originated in our own intellect (buddhi) and emerged out of the same faulty faculty. An object born of such a delusion and confirmed by only an infirm intellect can never be true.

When the delusion goes, when the infirmity disappears, the cosmos so caused also disappears.

"I am ignorant (aham ajnah)." Everyone has to acknowledge to oneself this fact about oneself. One can't escape making this declaration about oneself. The conclusion set forth in all sacred texts and scriptures is that all this is Brahman. Setting this aside, if one still claims that one is "I", one is asserting that one is but an ignoramus.

A doubt may arise: is it at all possible to forget oneself and believe that one is something else? We have already seen that the acceptance of truth polluted with untruth (mithya) is the sign of ignorant people. In the dusk, falsehood is superimposed on truth; the serpent is visualized on the rope, lying on the road. The delusion affects the consciousness and warps the intellect (buddhi), so that they forget their genuine nature, which is ecstatic delight (ananda). They impose on themselves the limitations of individuality and consider themselves as individual souls (jivas). They welcome the belief that happiness is outside them in the objective world, and they entangle themselves in the moving, changing, restless world (samsara). They suffer the twin blows of fate and fortune.

Such people are taught by the revealed scriptures (sruthi), the Vedas and sacred texts, to transform their lives through consistent endeavour for knowing and realizing the Atma.

Nondualism dispels primal ignorance

The protagonists of nondualism (a-dwaitha) are not engaged in proving that there is something named ignorance (a-jnana). "I am not happy; I have no joy. I want this. I must earn this." Such longings constitute the individual (jivi). This attitude is the core of the ignorance. So, if you seek to destroy the ignorance that separates and stultifies, this attitude must be transformed and the conviction that "I am the embodiment of happiness, I am the one who has realized desire" has to be cultivated. The person who has the former attitude has individualized knowledge, and one who has the latter knowledge has universalized wisdom (jnana).

Bearing the burden of nonexistent problems, kicking up dust in the confusion, tied helplessly to the wheel of birth and death, people curse themselves in despair. The nondualistic texts arose in order to warn people against this ignorance and arouse in them the wisdom that can save them from misery and wrong. Truly speaking, we are ignorance as long as we feel we are in bondage. In fact, we have not been created; we are not limited or abridged or bound. The faith that has taken root, namely, "There is a universe (jagath)

that contains me along with other similar seekers of happiness; in that search, I meet joy and grief and encounter birth and death" - this is the fundamental ignorance.

Four requisites for spirituality

"We become what our thoughts are." These thoughts on the validity of the objective world and the value of the joys derivable therefrom, though they emanate from ignorance (a-jnana), do shape us from within. The reason we are caught in this mould lies in the absence of four requisites: (1) attention to spiritual progress, (2) steady faith, (3) devotion, and (4) the grace of God. Even if one of these four is absent, people cannot experience the highest bliss of the Absolute.

Our inquiry should not be directed to the obvious and the superficial. This line of inquiry will only mislead us into believing what is not the cosmos. It makes us forget that it is our mind that has generated this panorama of cosmic proportions and presented it to us as truth.

It is indeed strange that this huge cosmos depends ultimately on whether "I cognize it as such or not! If you feel it is there, it is there; if you feel it is not there, it is not there!" This means that we have to go deep into this process of the mind. Is there any occasion when our assertion leads to the existence of a thing and our negation results in its disappearance? Or, is this conclusion a figment of the imagination?

Inquiry on these lines would undoubtedly reveal the truth. When the rope is seen in darkness, by mistake, by ignorance, the serpent arises and appears in its place, displacing the truth of the rope. For some reason, when the truth is known and the onlooker feels, "This is no serpent; it is a rope", the serpent disappears, for it was mere "falsehood". So, feeling or thinking is able to create the serpent and also to destroy it. Assertion creates; negation destroys. Both are mental processes, which can be classified as "thoughts".

Though there are diverse levels and grades, all these are but thoughts. From

where do these thoughts emerge?

Are they free to emerge spontaneously? The answer is: "Our intellect follows the lead of our activities (buddhi karma anusarini)." Thoughts arise in conformity with the attachment one develops and the results one anticipates from one's actions. The very first motive for action is, "I must attain happiness and harmony." This motive arises from the ignorant assumption that the world is real.

Transform knowledge into practice

Education without wisdom, mere wisdom bereft of discrimination, action without discretion, erudition lacking sagacity, power not justified by credentials, statements not based on truth, music wanting in melody, adoration not sustained by devotion, a person devoid of common sense and character, a student not endowed with humility, and a discourse that fails to inspire - these serve no useful purpose.

In addition to knowledge derived from the sacred texts, one should gain wisdom through experience. Knowledge without personal experience is futile. Wisdom lodged within us will be of no avail if it is static. It will only assume the form of mere scholarship. If such learning is brought within the ambit of practice, it is creditable.

Acquiring and hoarding wealth will be of no avail if it is not consecrated and spent for the welfare of the world.

Similarly, mere acquisition of knowledge from books is a futile exercise. Knowledge becomes blessed only when it is translated into actions that promote the good of humanity. This translation of knowledge into experience is possible only when you pass through the three stages of knowing (jnatum), visualizing (drashtum), and entering (praveshtum).

First, you must learn about the precious truths contained in the sacred texts from veterans in the field. When you learn about them, you naturally take an

interest in them. Then you develop an urge to visualize those truths at any cost. This is the first stage of knowing.

In the second stage, you carefully peruse, examine, and collect such sacred texts wherever they are available.

You read and directly visualize them. With great perseverance you enquire, comprehend, and enjoy them. Thus, you derive some satisfaction that you have discerned certain profound truths. This is the second stage of visualizing.

It is not enough to make progress only in the first two stages. One must experience what is known and seen.

By entering the arena of experience, one should feel complete identification with the ideal. Lying down after consuming food causes indigestion. However, if one consumes daily the requisite quantity of food and undertakes some physical work, the food will be digested and, converted into blood, will offer nourishment. In the same manner, we should translate into experience and action what we have known and seen, by assimilating it and utilizing it for the progress of our country and welfare of humanity.

It is easy to memorize passages from books and deliver lectures. Knowledge acquired merely through the reading of books is bookish knowledge. This is quite an ordinary type of knowledge. What has been heard, seen, and understood should be put into practice at least to some extent. This is the stage of entering.

The ancient sacred lore contain several precious truths. Invaluable gems lie hidden in them. Many scientific theories relating to the atom are also to be found there. Students should seek to unravel these hidden truths and harness them to the effort for human welfare. There must be the urge as well as the determination to explore undiscovered truths. One should not rest content with delivering discourses and appearing on forums of discussion.

Only those possessing a genuine spirit of enquiry can disseminate real knowledge in the world. Mere superficial knowledge will be of no avail. No knowledge can surpass the knowledge derived from direct experience. It must be acquired through self-effort, initiative, determination, and perseverance. It should be utilized for technological development and the increase of production, which make for the country's progress.

Discriminatory knowledge

It is necessary to derive wisdom from experience, but it is equally essential to develop the faculty of discrimination, which enables us to employ the wisdom for the well-being of the country. Education without discrimination and wisdom without discernment are of no use. Education is one thing; discrimination, quite another.

Discrimination is the faculty that enables us to distinguish good from bad and confers upon us the ability to decide how much importance to give to various aspects in a given situation. Discrimination is a component of wisdom.

Without discrimination, one cannot pursue the right path. It is a mark of sagacity to display discrimination in all actions.

Through researches in atomic energy, one may invent destructive weapons that can reduce the entire world to ashes in a second. The same atomic energy might help us to generate millions of kilowatts of electric power, which could be utilized for industries and agriculture, transforming the country into a smiling garden. An educated person should display discrimination in such matters and take the right course of action. Discoveries and inventions should not be for evil purposes that lead to disaster and destruction. Discrimination guides us in properly employing them for augmenting production and promoting human welfare.

People endowed with wisdom and discrimination will be honoured and adored, even though they may not have wealth or position. People devoid of wisdom and discrimination can never blossom spiritually, even though they

may be an eminent educationist, a prominent scientist, or a multimillionaire. One without wisdom and discrimination cannot even distinguish between dharma and lack of dharma. Therefore, every student must acquire wisdom and discrimination without resting on their oars after gaining theoretical knowledge. The student should develop farsighted vision along with wisdom and use it for the uplift of society.

Worldly wisdom

In addition to wisdom, discrimination, and experience, one should also possess inspiring common sense.

This cannot be acquired through books. In order to gain it, one must travel extensively. It is for this purpose that our ancestors went on pilgrimages to see, speak to, and touch the feet of holy people in sacred places. They also saw many sights and objects in this diverse universe of God and derived many valuable lessons therefrom. Several objects in nature teach valuable lessons that impart wisdom. The development of common sense consists in comprehending the origin and nature of such objects.

One should grasp the significance of history, culture, and civilization and propagate it. One who intends to undertake such propagation must first of all comprehend the nature of the soul. In this world there are several branches of learning, like physics, music, literature, art, and mathematics. Of all these forms of knowledge, selfknowledge is the sovereign. Without its attainment, one cannot enjoy any peace. Though one may gain renown and recognition in the world, one will not experience happiness without self-knowledge. "Knowledge of the soul", "knowledge of God", "spiritual knowledge" - all these expressions connote the wisdom that promotes full awareness of soul and God. Self-knowledge is that knowledge by which everything else is known. A person with self-knowledge can indeed be acclaimed as all-knowing.

Secular learning cannot confer on us abiding and absolute peace. Only self-knowledge can help us cross the sea of sorrow. So, all should strive to attain this self-knowledge, which can be acquired through purity of mind.

Purity of mind can be attained through pious deeds, sacred acts, charity, compassion, and devotion. Disinterested action consecrated to God purifies the heart. The sun of wisdom dawns in a pure heart. The dawn of such wisdom exalts one to the status of God.

Human effort and divine help

Human effort constitutes the prime step in one's endeavour to attain this highest state of Godhood. God's grace is the second essential factor. Anyone can strive for and attain self-knowledge. Men and women, rich and poor, all are eligible to kindle in themselves the flame of spiritual wisdom. Distinctions of race, religion, caste, and creed do not come in the way. It does not matter if one has no secular education, has no grounding in the physical sciences, or is not well-versed in worldly lore. In the modern world it is not that easy to gain this self knowledge.

All the same, one need not give up the effort in a mood of frustration and despair.

Some people relentlessly seek spiritual knowledge at the expense of secular learning; this is not desirable.

Some miss both and wander aimlessly between the two; such a predicament is also undesirable. Secular learning should not be neglected. It is beneficial to acquire spiritual vision while seeking mastery over secular lore. So, youth should necessarily spend some time everyday in meditation upon God.

Young people have to spring into the sphere of action and strive to the best of their ability to build up a resurgent India and a happy peaceful world. They must shed the desire for power. The desire to uproot corruption and immorality and the urge to work hard should be firmly implanted in the heart of every student. Mother India's future depends on them, and she is waiting for them. Even as it is the duty of children to serve and please their mother, it is the bounden duty of every child of mother India to make her happy. To serve the motherland selflessly should be the sacred ideal of one's life. Thus,

it is the duty of all Indians to engage themselves in the dedicated service of Mother India.

Such an obligation on one's part may even be described as forming part of the nobility of character of the individual vis-a-vis their motherland. Therefore, every student must inculcate in themselves a wider perspective of national unity and integrity. A person without character can neither uplift himself nor be of any use to the country.

Sacrifice versus charity

Sacrifice is also an aspect of character. It is one of the qualities that young people should imbibe. It is often thought that charitable and philanthropic acts make for sacrifice, but there is a vast difference between charity and sacrifice. Charitable people give only a fraction of their bounty to others. Gifts of land, distribution of food, contribution of physical labour, and spreading of education and knowledge belong to this category. Through acts of charity, no person ever gives up all that they have. One is not cursed to be born penurious if one does not perform acts of charity.

Going a step higher, some retain for themselves what is just and essential and give away the rest to society.

Such people win the highest acclaim in the world. Our sacred texts prescribed that a portion of one's possessions must be offered to the poor and helpless. Neglecting this injunction, one should not accumulate millions of rupees in a selfish, callous, unfair, and unjust manner, like an avaricious curmudgeon. Sooner or later, such a miser will become a victim of disaster and degradation. It is inevitable.

Wealth piled up through unfair means is the result of exploitation of the blood of the poor. Young people should not become slaves of such unfair existence and should not adopt exploitation as a means of living. Even God will not forgive such selfish exploitative lives. He who piles up wealth without enjoying or giving to others will be damned after death, and the progeny of

such people will also be damned.

Four inheritors of wealth

There are four inheritors of hoarded wealth. The first is charity; the second, the king; the third, fire; the fourth, the robber. The first claimant is charity, and the major share goes to it. Students should recognize the profound significance of this truth and utilize the wealth they acquire for the welfare of mankind.

Sacrifice is the highest step. One who has the true spirit of sacrifice gives even their dearest and highest possession to others without any hesitation or reservation, smilingly and gladly. Surrendering the fruit of action to the Lord is real sacrifice. A renunciant (thyagi) does not shrink even to give up their body, regarding it as worthless straw. Sacrifice means something more than giving up of wealth, gold, and material objects. Evil qualities like hatred, jealousy, wrath, and malice that have become ingrained in people over many life times should be discarded.

There is no happiness greater than that obtained from sacrifice. Only those who sacrifice are the children of immortality, because they live for ever.

Spirit of sacrifice

When we study our epics and legends, we come across numerous figures who embody such spirit of sacrifice.

Emperors like Sibi and Bali and heroes like Dadhichi and Karna belong to that illustrious line. Today, we need such people animated by the spirit of sacrifice among the political leaders and students. They should forget selfishness, crush egotism, dispel desire for power, put an end to pettiness of mind, pledge themselves to justice, and promote the welfare of society.

Unfortunately, words are losing their significance. Sacrifice, justice, righteousness, and service have lost their meaning and have degenerated

into business. Selfishness looms large and dances like a destructive demon among students, politicians and educationists. Clamour for power and the desire for position are uppermost in the mind. Our country, which was once celebrated as a land of sacrifice, dedicated endeavour, and penance, has degenerated into a veritable playground for ephemeral joys. This is the reason for the country's many afflictions and ailments.

This state of things must come to an end, with a change for the better; then, our history will be repeated and our former glory revived. Thousands of sacrificing spirits should emerge from your midst. Every young Indian should be enriched once more by the spirit of sacrifice.

Sacrifice is sweeter than enjoyment. Sacrifice should become the aim of life. Only through sacrifice can one attain peace. Sorrows do not flee from us as long as the mind is not at peace with itself. Agonies dwell forever within us. Without the tranquility of the soul, no amount of wealth can be of any use. Surrendering the fruits of action with a dispassionate mind is eligible to be termed sacrifice. Only purity of mind can confer upon it tranquility.

The Upanishads have proclaimed in a full-throated voice that sacrifice alone leads to immortality. Sacrifice is the chief trait of the pure. Therefore, every student must imbibe and display the spirit of sacrifice in their life. One should not become a victim of the disease of enjoyment.

End of education: wisdom and service

Unfortunately, a widespread opinion is circulating freely that education is for jobs and not for the expansion of illumination. This is deplorable. Wisdom is illumination, and the aim of education is to radiate that light of wisdom. Such wisdom bestows real power upon a person. Wisdom enables us to recognize the mutual relationship of objects and individuals and to know the precedents and antecedents of each object.

How can this illumination enter one's being? By listening to and going through great books like the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Upanishads, the Koran, and the

Granth Saheb, the biographies of noble souls, and books dealing with physical and technological sciences and psychology, one gains this light. Along with wisdom, the discriminatory approach and logical thinking can be gained by reading them. One should not depend entirely on knowledge derived from sacred texts but also upon wisdom arising from experience.

The shape and the content of education must change. Professor Gunnar Myrdal of Stockholm University, visiting Delhi in 1972, said, "The educational system of India is not progressive. It fosters the mentality that we shall not soil our hands." All Indians, especially students, should think about these words. This remark pinpoints the tendency of our students to lead comfortable lives under electric fans, resting in airconditioned chambers and avoiding manual labour, its stress and strain, sweat and dirt, without even one fold of their ironed clothes getting crumpled.

This attitude is a far cry from the ideals of obedience and humility instilled by education. Students should impart to the people around them in society the sacred ideas they have imbibed. They must spring like tiger cubs into the arena of the villages and cleanse them of all sorts of pollution. They must teach and train the illiterate residents of the villages to live decently and with dignity. Students must strive along with the villagers and lead them forward. Students of today should pose lofty ideals of life to the world through their exemplary lives.

23. Modes Of Worship

Vedas: source of all-knowing wisdom

The Veda is the most ancient as well as the most lasting knowledge discovered by humanity. That is to say, people did not invent it; they only recollected it in the serene silence of the soul. So, the Veda can lead people into the vision of the truth, unreachable by the senses and unrelated to the material world. It is inaccessible to human reason because it is transcendent. So, it is described as the Great Protector (Paramam-vyoma) and as indestructible Truth (Thath). These words denote all four Vedas, beginning with the Rig-veda.

The term Veda was originally applied to the Supreme Lord (Parameswara), the All-Knowing (He who knows is Veda (Veththi ithi Vedah)). Then, it was applied to the principle of understanding (That which makes known is Veda (Vedayathi ithi Vedah)). The Rig-veda and the other Vedas have the all-knowing characteristic, so this meaning is also appropriate. Later, the word was applied to activities in consonance with the Vedas - activities promoting the goals laid down, namely, righteous, economic, volitional, and spiritual.

Secret of Vedic rituals and sacrifices

The Supreme Lord is all-seeing; He is the person on whom all the hymns of the Vedas converge. The Vedas enable people to get the vision of that Lord, and those who have earned that vision are the sages (rishis). They were guided by the Vedas; many psalms, hymns, and declarations emerged from them. As a result, the Supreme Lord Himself is referred to in the Brahma-sutra as the Great Sage (Maha-rishi). Among the 108 names of Siva, the supreme Lord, we find the Chief Sage and the Foremost Sage (Maha-rishi and Mukhya-rishi).

Even the Veda is personified and referred to as sage (rishi), for the same reason. Brahman (the vast Expanse) is another word that denotes the

supreme Lord as well as the Veda. Hence, all acts undertaken with no other desire than the attainment of Brahman are also known as Brahma activities (yajna). A rishi yajna is a sacrificial act designed to gain the vision of truth - but with no desire to earn the fruit ensuing therefrom.

While performing such sacrificial acts, the expression swaha is used. Sacrificial acts are pure, auspicious, sacred acts. The exclamation swaha, used while offering oblations or reciting the Veda, is full of significance. It is used in this manner:

Kesavaya swaha, pranaya swaha, Indraya swaha.

The meaning generally given is:

Let this be duly consumed. May these materials we are now placing in this holy fire be fully accepted and consumed,
so that through this fire they can reach the deity for which they are intended
- Kesava, Prana, Indra.

Doubts may arise: why pray to fire for something that is inevitable, since it is the very nature of fire to burn all that is put into it? But the scriptural meaning is different. In the poem "The Birth of the (war god) Kumara" (Kumara Sambhavam), Kalidasa describes the Himalayas as divine-souled, that is to say, the embodiment of the divine.

The scriptures distinguish the divine body and the material body, which each entity and being possess. The divine body of everyone cannot be cognized by the senses. When an oblation (ahuthi) is given to it, it becomes sanctified.

The oblation is trans-substantiated into a sacred offering (havis).

The oblation is described in the Veda thusly. The offering (attha) and offeree (adya) become one through the acceptance. Who in this case is the offeree, the acceptor? It is Agni, the divine power inherent in fire, in the sun, in the warmth of the vital air, which sustains life. When, with the recitation of the appropriate ceremonial formulae, material oblations are placed in fire (agni) with the phrase swaha, it is not a mere exclamation; it is expiation; it is realization of the prayer that the ritual represents.

Fire rituals conducive to world welfare

The Veda is also known as Chandas. This name means pleasant, joyous. It is also associated with kindred meanings like strong, vital, and shielded. Since all the attributes and characteristics can be predicated of the Vedas, Chandas is very appropriate.

The sacred ceremonies and rituals that the Vedas expound confer joy not only on the participants but on the entire world and even on worlds beyond. The supreme Lord, the source of bliss, is known in the scriptural text as having the Vedic ritual as His limbs and using the Vedic ritual as His vehicle.

When Godhead assumes form, the first manifestation is Hiranyagarbha (the golden womb). This is also embodied bliss, having as vehicle the bird with wings of beauty, or Garuda. The Supreme Lord is also known as He whose chariot is the bull (Vrisharatha), the symbol of dharma. This is why in temples we find the bird Garuda carved or kept as an idol before the shrine of Vishnu and the figure of the bull or its idol placed before shrines of Siva.

Cha or chadana has as its root meaning another important aspect of the Vedas: shielding, fostering, or promoting - promoting the welfare, the ultimate liberation of humans engaged in the unceasing round of worldly affairs. Humans are ever caught up in activities pursued with the profit available as the purpose. They have to be moulded as righteous men and women at the same time; the Tree of Life has to be guarded to offer them fruits and shade.

The Veda has to shield activist "doers" (karma lovers) from the evil temptation to court unrighteousness.

It has to shield inquiry-fond thinkers (jnana seekers) from the evil temptation to pursue the pleasure-bound senses. Since the Veda both guides and shields, these verses are called, in totality, Chandas. Through their role as armour or shield, they shower bliss on all who rely on them. "By shielding they become Chandas (Chadanath chandasi)." There is a myth about Vedic rituals (yajnas). Once, Yajna fled from the gods, taking the form of a black antelope. The gods went in pursuit, but they succeeded only in retrieving its skin. That skin became the sacrifice (yajna), the symbol of the rite. The white, dark, and tawny colours of that skin represent the Rig-, Yajur-, and Sama- Vedas, and it was adored as sacred for this very reason. It was honoured as symbolizing Triple Knowledge, that is to say, mastery of the three Vedas. The skin is used by the officiating priests and other participants in all Vedic ceremonies in order to invoke the protecting hymns, called Chandas. The three colours are also believed to represent the three worlds; therefore, the one who is seated on or wears the skin benefits the three worlds by their Vedic recitations and oblations.

The master of the ceremonies at the Vedic rite (yajna) is described in the Vedic scripture as the "Fetus in the Womb". Since the fetus is safe and secure, with its fingers clasped and body prostrate, enveloped in the mother, the priest initiate must be enveloped in the antelope skin that symbolizes Mother Veda. To human eyes, it is just a skin, but during Vedic rites it becomes a shield. This is why, before wearing it, the initiate prays, addressing it, "You are the shield (charma), shield me as charma." Since it shields people from grief, injury, and wrong, Charma has come to mean happiness and bliss. Vishnu, the second of the Trinity, is the embodiment of bliss, and Vedic sacrifices confer bliss. Vishnu is praised as sacrifice (yajna) itself (Yajno vai Vishnuh). The Lord Vishnu is the embodiment of the Triple Veda.

Fourfold Vedic paths to divinity

Upasana means the acquisition of the presence of the divine, the

achievement of the bliss of adoration. Vedic tradition sanctions four paths as legitimate and fruitful to win this achievement. They are called truth-based, manifestation-based, symbolized-divinity, and step-by-step methods (sathya-vathi, anga-vathi, anya-vathi, and nidana-vathi). We shall consider these in some detail.

Truth-based (sathya-vathi). The scripture defines the Divine thus: The Atma is immanent everywhere, just as ghee interpenetrates every drop of milk (Sarva vyapinam Atmanam, ksheere sarpiriva arpitham). When the seeker pursues the truth with this conviction urging their endeavour, the spiritual practice is called truth-based.

The Lord declares, "In My latent form, I am in the entire creation, operating the mystery. See in Me all this, see all this as Me (Maya thitham idam sarvam, jagadavyaktha murthina)". When one succeeds in this effort, the truth-based path will lead to success. The Lord assures, "I shall be visible to you as all this and in all this." The Lord promises this vision of immanence and transcendence to whomever persists with sincerity on this truthbased path.

Manifestation-based (anga-vathi). The universal being is the fire, the wind, the sun, the moon, and all else. He is the breath that sustains life in all beings. He is the fire that illumines all. He is the rain that feeds the plants that provide sustenance. So He can be adored either as fire (agni), wind (vayu), or rain (varuna), as having graciously assumed all these beneficent forms. This approach through benign manifestations (angas) is the manifestationbased path (anga-vathi). Anga means "limb", "fact", "feature".

Symbolized divinity (anya-vathi). Picturing the many-faceted divine and symbolizing, in perceivable ways, the attributes that are evidenced in each facet, the seeker endeavours to acquire the presence of the Divine.

One form of the Divine, the Omnipresent (Vishnu), is pictured as having the conch, wheel, and mace (symbols of the primeval word or sound, of time, and of might and majesty). The facet to which is ascribed the power and willingness to overcome obstacles (Vigneswara) has the symbol of the single

tusk, which symbolizes sharpness and concentration. It is associated with Siva (Iswara), the facet of disintegration and dissolution, who bears the trident (trisula), which symbolizes in its three prongs the past, the present, and the future.

Rama, the form of dharma, is always pictured with the bow, which can send the arrow (will) straight to the target. Krishna, the manifestation of universal love, has on His crown a peacock feather, which symbolizes the thousand-eyed glance of grace. He bears a flute on which He plays enthralling tunes; the flute is the symbol of the egoless desireless seeker. The facet of wisdom pictured as the Goddess Saraswathi has a veena (a stringed musical instrument) in Her hand, symbolic of heart strings responding with harmony and melody to the gentle touch of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Seekers meditate on these pleasing personifications and the significance of the symbols of their attributes.

They adore the divine in the delight that wells up in their hearts. This is named the path through symbolized divinity (anya-vathi) - anya meaning the other, the adjunctory, the appurtenance.

Step by step (nidana-vathi). This path is slow, but progress is always achieved when each step is successfully negotiated. Below are the eleven stages through which the seeker has to pass to win the final consummation in bliss. Therefore, the name for this path is "slow and sure (nidana)".

1. Listening to the glory of God (sravanam)
2. Singing His unique graciousness joyously (kirtanam)
3. Always keeping in memory and recapitulating the majesty and mercy of the Lord (Vishnuh smaranam)
4. Aspiring to fall at the feet of the Lord (pada-sevanam)
5. Offering prayers to the image or idol of the Lord (archanam)
6. Offering gratitude for blessings received (vandanam)

7. Surrendering to the will of the Lord (dasyam)
8. Confiding completely in Him (sakhyam)
9. Dedicating thought, word, and deed to Him (atma nivedanam)
10. Longing to merge in Him (thanmaya-asakthi)
11. Agony at the slightest separation from Him (Parama-viraha-asakthi)

Each of these four paths (truth-based, manifestation-based, symbolized-divinity, and step-by-step) is more commendable than the previous ones, as far as simplicity and practicability are concerned. In the end, they award oneness with the Universal Will.

Of the various other forms of worship or spiritual practices (upasanas or sadhanas) mentioned in the sacred texts and practised by seekers, idol adoration or image adoration is included under manifestation-based.

Divine omnipresence

"Everywhere His hands and feet, everywhere His head and face (Sarvathah pani padam thath, sarvathokshi siro mukham)." The Lord has His Hands everywhere, for He is in all. He sees through all eyes. He thinks, plans, and resolves in all heads. He eats through all mouths and hears through every ear. Through one form, you can adore Him as all forms. This is the highest ideal: He is latent in all beings; He operates unseen in and through all. This is worshiping Him as present in each, the image worship. Various other modes of worship are also mentioned in the texts:

Sun worship (Bhanopasana). Ascribing to the Lord the highest splendour, the deepest compassion, the most potent power, etc. and worshiping Him as such.

Adoring Him as the Master and Preceptor who teaches the Gita and reveals the Way (Gitopasana). The epic Mahabharatha is revered as a Veda, the fifth one. It sets out the code of morality to which people must adhere in order to realize their goal, both here and hereafter. It is an inexhaustible treasure chest of guidelines for righteous living and spiritual uplift. Here, the Lord can

be seen on the theatrical stage of the field of dharma (Dharmakshetra), with all the equipment and roles, plots, counter-plots, denouements, and devices for the cosmic play He is enacting in His own marvelous way. This play is the epic, the Mahabharatha. In this play, the actors, actresses, dialogues, texts, cues, and songs have been assembled by Him. He is the cast, the director, the audience - all.

It is God (Madhava) who manifests Himself and manipulates in every thing and being. On the one side is boundless material strength urged on by unrighteous greed; on the other, the apparently limited strength of the Atma, the ever-righteous. In the cosmic confrontation and conflict between these two forces, the Lord stands forth as the arbiter, the supreme embodiment of the victory of right over might. This ultimate ambrosia is available in the Mahabharatha - the Bhagavad Gita, the Song of Divine Triumph.

The core lesson that the epic is bent on teaching is contained in the Gita: the seeker surrenders with the words, "Your word shall be obeyed (karishye vachanam thava)" and the Lord admonishes the seeker that "in fulfilling the duty assigned to you lies your safety and prosperity (swadharme nidhanam sreyah)." All work should be tested on this criterion.

The path of dedication to the Will of God (devotion, bhakthi). This path should not be discarded, for it can lead to all-round delight and bliss. Instead, if you close your eyes and instil in yourself the conceit that you are Brahman, you will miss the joy and become a victim of anxiety. When you pound husk, you can't expect rice grains to result, can you? And, Krishna is no other than the very Brahman!

Three Vedanta paths

Nondualism (adwaithopasana). The body of the cow has milk in it. The milk has ghee in it. But the ghee can't be a source of strength yet. The milk has to be drawn, yeast has to be added to curdle it, butter has to be churned out and clarified to produce the ghee, which, when consumed, gives strength. So too, though God is omnipresent and omni-motivating, He has to be

discovered and cognized in order to realize bliss, awareness. Like oil in mustard, butter in yogurt, water inside the earth, and fire in timber, God is present but not patent in everything. God is in the human body and in the human mind. To become aware of Him there, spiritual effort is necessary. When that is undertaken, the unity of both can be realized. One will not thereafter experience "two" or "difference". The awareness of the one without a second is "liberation", release from bondage.

Qualified nondualism (visishta-adwaitha). Ramanuja considered the problem whether the God whom one seeks to worship and realize as real must be conceived as being apart from oneself, or whether God can be conceived as in oneself. His answer is: Life is the soul of the body; God is the soul of Life. God is the grantor, the force, the sustainer. Seek Him in that spirit. The supreme sovereign Lord (Purusha), in whom all the elements reside and who is the indweller and inner motivator of all creation, can be known and experienced only by winning grace through surrender. Understand well His transcendence and immanence and, realizing your deficiencies, surrender the ego in order to partake of His Glory. The mental attitude of the seeker should be "Thou alone art all, O my God of Gods (Thvam eva sarvam, mama deva deva). You are the urge, you are the path, you are the goal." The spiritual effort must be one-pointed, unwavering, untiring.

Dualism (dwaithopasana). The dualistic outlook on the relationship between God and the individual is that of husband and wife. Vishnu, the Lord, the ever free ever full, has to be adored as the wife adores the husband.

Krishna consciousness

Chaithanya's spiritual ecstasy (Chaithanyopasana). Among such spiritual seekers, Chaithanya is most note-worthy. He established a distinct spiritual practice. Without the anguished yearning for the feet of Lord Krishna, liberation cannot be gained. Why? Even purification of one's intelligence isn't possible without that yearning.

This is Chaithanya's assertion. He declares that sages and others capable of

being immersed in inner bliss can enjoy the ecstasy of the supreme consciousness through contemplation of the auspicious, restorative, and cleansing attributes of the Lord, Sri Hari.

No text or scripture is needed to realize this bliss. Sunk in the waves of that divine ecstasy, the person ignores all the norms of social behaviour and escapes from all conventions. The person sings aloud the names of Hari, sheds streams of joy, dances in divine delight, and experiences unadulterated genuine bliss. The person feels that the Lord's feet have made every inch of ground holy. Thus, people sing the glory of the Lord fully attuned to Him.

This spiritual practice (sadhana) was emphasized by Chaithanya as the easiest and most fruitful. His foremost goal was to attain the absence of body consciousness in the flood of ecstasy that surges from melodious group singing of the majesty and mercy of the Lord.

The Gowdha form of worship (Gowdeyopasana). A few other forms of worship merit mention. The Gowdha form is one such. Sri Krishna (formulated and incorporated in the unmanifest immanence as the highest Supreme (Purushothama)) and Radha (formulated and incorporated as unmanifest universal energy) are both visualized and known as Krishna-Radha or, more commonly, as Radha-Krishna. Madhava is another name of Krishna, signifying that He is the master of cosmos or nature (prakriti). So, the name used in this worship is Radha-Madhava.

The recitation of this name is held by the adherents of this path of worship to be capable of leading to ecstasy that can confer liberation from all forms of bondage.

The founders (acharyas) of this path declare such liberation to be the attainable goal. The Lord is the very embodiment of the nectar of delight. Living beings can get immersed in spiritual delight only when they imbibe that nectar. The Vedas (sruthis) proclaim that those born in bliss (ananda) can live only in and through bliss. The sacred name Radha-Madhava is the key, it is said, to the treasure house of that precious nectar.

Radha-Madhava is nature-spirit (Prakriti-Purusha). This dual category is assumed to represent the duality of the individual soul and the universal soul (jivatma and Paramatma), the wave and the ocean. Worship is offered to both through that name. Vallabhacharya proclaimed, "Krishna is the Lord Himself". Attaining Him was explained to be equal to merging in the Universal, which was the goal of genuine monists.

Siva consciousness

Siva worship (Saivopasana) is also a notable path. This emphasizes the worship of Siva as formulated in the infinite Lingam or divine symbol, "Lingam Sarva Kalam". The infinite lingam is the symbol of the primal energy that forms the basic cause of the origin, condition, and progress of the "elements" that compose the cosmos. The lingam is the form of Siva Himself, and realizing it as such is asserted as the ultimate goal, liberation.

Iswara worship (Virasaivopasana) advocates the worship of Siva, the Lord (Iswara), as the one and only, everywhere and always. The merging of the individual in the splendour of the lingam or Iswara is the acme of all spiritual practice, the achievement of liberation.

Pasupathi worship (Pasupathopasana). Pasupathi is another name for Siva. The individual entity (jiva) is tied by the bond (pasa) of the qualities or modalities arising from nature. Pasupathi is worshiped in order to earn freedom from bondage.

Worship of Goddess of universal energy

Worship of the feminine aspect (Sakthopasana). "The Goddess is all Gods (Sarvadeva mayee Devee)." The Primeval Universal Energy (Adi Parasakthi) is conceived as the matrix of all forms of divinity. The cosmic urge (prakriti) is the cause of the variety and multiplicity of expression, the manifold forms. The Supreme Divinity (Maheswara) has this capacity to manifest and is therefore so named.

The Supreme Divinity and the Universal Energy are two aspects of the same force. This dual-faceted force motivates the universe, from the vast expanse of the sky to the entire earth. The unmanifest supreme Person manifests as the Feminine Universal, the maya, the Parasakthi. In each individual, it is experienced as knowledge, strength, and activity.

Worship in prophetic religions

Jain mode of worship (Jainopasana). The Marvari community, in worshipping the Lord, adopt a vaishnavite slant. Idols of Vishnu, with the traditional equipment of the conch, the wheel, the mace and the lotus, are found in Jain temples. The Jains have as their mantra:

Namo arihanthanam
Namo siddhanaam
Namo ayiriyanaam
Namo uvajjhayanam
Namo Loye sabba sahuunam

Salutations to the great heroes who have conquered desire, etc.
Salutations to those equipped with supernatural powers.
Salutations to the great masters of spiritual wisdom.
Salutations to the great teachers who transmit the wisdom.
Salutations to the good persons of all lands.

This five-fold adoration helps remove the evil effects of all sinful acts. Experiencing the meaning of this mantra gives one the sum of prosperity. The Jains declare that when one merges in this universal adoration, one is liberated and attains moksha.

Sikh mode of worship (Sikh-upasana). The preceptor (guru), who reveals the

Atma and makes one conscious of its existence as one's reality, has the highest place in this system of worship. The collection of the teachings of the gurus - referred to as Granth Saheb - is extolled and revered by the Sikhs. It is derived from the spring of Indian (Bharathiya) spiritual traditions. Its ideas form the very core of Indian cultural traits.

Christian worship (Christ-upasana). Lord Jesus is the Saviour. People are by nature prone to fall into sin, knowingly or unknowingly. Jesus shed his heart blood on the cross to free people from sin and to cleanse their souls.

Follow this Lord and his teachings contained in the Bible and worship him - this is Christ worship. Sing his glory and adore him through hymns - this is the mode of worship that this method envisages.

Mohammedan worship (Mohammadan-upasana). "Acquire self-confidence and place all burdens on God; have implicit faith in the power of God every moment of living; recognize it at every step (Imamdaree khaldamey ho, Pygambar mey bharosa)" - these are the rules for meaningful life. One has to evidence one's rectitude in the court of the Lord, when one lays down one's body. So, one has to follow the straight path laid down by the Lord until the very end. For this, the holy Koran is the guide; it has to be revered and observed down to the very letter.

This is the spiritual instruction to be observed in this worship.

"Allaho Akbar; La Illah Ill Allah." This sacred formula of Islam signifies that God is the supermost sovereign; Allah is the undisputed unexcelled ruler of creation. He alone is worthy of worship. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says, "there is nothing higher than Me." The Koran formula says the same. The Mohammedan worship is a form of the same spiritual practice, based on the same truth.

India: spiritual treasurehouse

All these modes of worship reveal that, since people initiated their agelong

inquiry into their own truth, they have accumulated, especially in India (Bharath), a vast spiritual treasure that can save them from sorrow and bondage. The treasure is so vast and so deep that it has survived the passage of centuries as vast and as deep as ever it was, unaffected by the emergence of different modes or the influx of other forms of worship.

Moreover, the spiritual wisdom of India is today a triumphant beacon, shining in one resplendent flame in the thickening darkness, illumining all lands, encompassing all races, and enchanting all mankind.

No fortune is more splendid than being born on this sacred land, Bharath, repository of this magnificent and beneficent culture, which can save the world. Becoming aware of this blessing is indeed a spring of immeasurable divine bliss (ananda).

24. The Divine Body

Fourfold division of mankind

The sociological basis of Indian (Bharathiya) culture has to be clearly understood. Mankind falls into four groups, when innate nature and inclinations are considered. They are named brahmin, warrior (kshatriya), trader (vaisya), and labourer (sudra). This demarcation is not a selfish, crooked conspiracy designed to make the "superior" trample upon the "inferior". Nor is it the consequence of an envious plot to obstruct human progress.

It is best to judge it as a plan to promote the expansion of human achievement by fostering the trends and traits of each person. It is the royal road for the attainment of human progress. It works only for the promotion and regulation of human activity in such a manner that harmony and social well-being are ensured.

As readers already know, the teacher of the Gita, Lord Krishna, declared,

Chathurvarnyam maya srishtam, guna karma Vibhagasah,
tasya kartharamapi mam Viddhi akartharam avyayam.

I created the four castes (varnas), the brahmin, the warrior (kshatriya), the merchant (vaisya), and the laborer (sudra), on the bases of natural disposition and vocation of each. Know Me to be author of these, as also the non-author, the Unchangeable.

The system of caste is thus founded on attributes and activities. The world was in the very beginning predominantly pure (sathwic) in nature and, as a consequence, all were only brahmins. Later, through the adoption of various vocations and the development of various inclinations and preferences, types of people got demarcated as castes. The one and only brahmin class of sages (rishis) had later to be sectionalized, in the interest of social justice and harmony, when qualities of character varied. In the Santhi Parva (Mahabharatha), Sage Bhrigu elaborately answered a question raised about this development by Sage Bharadwaja. It runs as follows:

"Brahmins who are fond of worldly pleasures, affected by egotism, and subject to anger, lust, and other passions have passionate qualities (rajoguna) mixed with their innate pure (sathwic) nature, so they were classified as warriors (kshatriyas). In fact, all brahmins cannot be predominantly pure (sathwic) in nature, nor can all of them be devoted to pure ritual activity. Those who do not adhere to the pure (sathwic) ideal of truth and who evince the qualities of dullness (thamoguna) mixed with passionate (rajasic) traits, those who are mostly both dull (thamasic) and passionate (rajasic), were classed as merchants (vaisyas). The rest, who spend their lives in occupations involving violence, who don't practise cleanliness, and who are bogged down in passive (thamasic) means of livelihood were classed as laborours (sudras). Thus, the brahmins denoted various castes and ensured the safety and security of human society. This is the assertion of the revealed scriptures (sruthis)." Those endowed with pure (sathwic) characteristics are brahmins. Those with passionate (rajasic) qualities and, as a result, equipped with courage and heroism, are warriors (kshatriyas), who can protect mankind from harm. Those who have neither valour nor heroism but who are proficient in persuasive talent and the tactics of commerce and eager to use these skills in proper methods are traders (vaisyas). In this class, the passionate and passive qualities (rajoguna and thamoguna) are blended.

The others, who have no inclination for undergoing asceticism or acquiring scholarship, who do not practise spiritual discipline (sadhana), who have no physical stamina and mental courage necessary for battle, who do not possess the special skill needed for trade and commerce, are passive

(thamasic) in nature and so engage themselves in thamasic professions. These are labourers (sudras). They fulfil themselves by their labour, through which they contribute to world prosperity and peace.

Four castes: limbs of divine cosmic energy

The four castes are only limbs of one body; they are not separate entities. There is no basis to consider one superior and another inferior. Each performs its function so that the body can be healthy and happy, so that each can win the highest state of consciousness from its own role. So, the ancient Vedic caste (varna) organization based on such broad ideals was taken to be the divine plan. The plan witnessed the truth that the four castes were the four limbs of the one divine cosmic Person (Purusha).

This truth becomes clear when we consider the divine statement in Purusha Sukta found in the Rigveda:

Brahmano sya mukham aseeth
Bahuu rajanyah krithah
Uuruu thadhasya yadhvaisyah
Padhbyam shuudhro ajayatha.

The brahmins, those with pure (sathwic) nature and established in higher knowledge

or wisdom, are the face of the cosmic Person;

The warriors, those who are predominantly courageous, physically strong, having in

their nature pure and passionate (rajasic) qualities, are the arms of the cosmic Person;

The merchants, those who have a passionate (rajasic) nature mixed with inertia (thamas)

and are efficient in the arts of commerce, are the thighs of the cosmic Person;

The labourers, those who are active and engaged in physical labour and are endowed with dullness (thamas) are the feet of the cosmic Person.

The Lord is thus described in the Rigveda as the wondrous and splendrous embodiment of such components.

But this holy and profoundly significant caste (varna) organization fell into the hands of unintelligent selfish people with restricted outlook and narrow ideals; they expounded it in writing as their fancy dictated. Thereby, they brought about great harm to the world. As a result, the system is interpreted today as a plan designed by the majority to suppress the minority!

An integrated vision of society

Caste is the cosmic Person Himself, manifesting as human society. It is the visible form of the Lord, charming in every limb. It is a great pity that this truth is not widely recognized. It is the good fortune of this land, India (Bharath), that in this vision the Lord, as the physical integration of the "caste limbs", is promoting peace, harmony, prosperity, and well-being for all mankind. Not aware of this truth, people declare that this system is only a man-made contrivance and that, in fact, all people are equal. They base this conclusion on external characteristics and breed agitations on the basis that all mankind is one species.

Of course, it is true that all people are of one species. But distinct groups do emerge as a result of differences in character and the professions they adopt. This is an inevitable development. No one can deny this. All are not pure (sathwic) in this world of humanity; only a very few are of this nature. Judging from mere appearance, one can't declare that all people are one. We have to distinguish and discriminate and group those with pure, passionate, and dull (sathwic, rajasic, thamasic) natures, or combinations of one or more of those

natures, separately. No one can say this is wrong.

In a general way, predominantly dull (thamasic) natures are grouped as labourers (sudras); but, among them, don't we have many who are of pure (sathwic) quality? Among those who are grouped as brahmins, the pure sathwic type, don't we have many who are predominantly dull (thamasic)? Therefore, the Vedic religion of India (Bharath) has clearly laid down that appearance alone or birth to a family alone cannot decide caste; it has to be determined on the bases of character and occupation.

The four castes (varnas) are the limbs of the divine body, of the one and only Lord. Each is important and indispensable for its own role. The goal of each is to serve the Lord by serving humanity, rendering service in accordance with its dharma, the accredited mores of conduct and modes of behaviour.

Some people assert that brahmins and not labourers (sudras) have the right and responsibility to practise spiritual disciplines or austerities (tapas). What we have to remember here is that the restriction is for the labourer nature, not for individuals born as labourers; the permission is for the brahmin nature, not for all individuals born as brahmins.

Cows are useless as animals for riding; horses are useless as yielders of milk. These statements are based not on hatred of the species or malice against any of them but on the nature and characteristics of the animals concerned. Both are quadrupeds. However, their distinct natures decide that one is useful for the milk it yields and the other for riding purposes. The castes are based not on race or birth but on innate nature and tendencies and the profession adopted and pursued.

Unity of individual and cosmic spirit

All sparks are fire. They cannot be declared separate, nor is there a need to assert that they are not separate.

So too, people or individualized beings are not separate from the Universal

Absolute (Brahman), nor is there a need to assert that they are not separate. There is only one caste, humanity.

The relation between Brahman and the individual soul (jiva) is not one of identity or oneness but of causeeffect.

Until liberation is attained, the particular is distinct, separate. When liberated, since the cause of individualization is absent, the individual soul (jiva) is one with Brahman. Separation and oneness of the individual soul and Brahman are the consequences of the delusion of bondage and the awareness of freedom.

Brahman is self-effulgent, self-illuminating. It is not the "object" of consciousness; It cognizes all objects.

All things and beings belong to the category of "seen" or "observed" or "known". It is the seer, not the seen. When the form is the "seen", the mind is the "seer"; when the mind and the activities of the intellect are the "seen" or "observed", then the witnessing consciousness is the "seer".

This witness can be seen by no one. All things cognizable are the body of the Atma, not the Atma. They are name-form combinations like pots and pans of clay, which impinge on the consciousness as "seen" or delude it like the "silver" on "mother of pearl". The Atma is; It exists by and for Itself. The universe is the "other", for others; it is "real" and available for others. The universe has no innate reality. It emanates from Brahman, and its reality is based on the reality of Brahman. So, its reality is lower than that of Brahman.

The illusion created by a magician for deluding others cannot affect the magician himself. In the same manner, since the universe is contrived by Brahman, it is clear that it cannot affect Brahman Itself.

Maya: ideational superimposition of Reality

The universe appears to have emanated, as being experienced as such, and

as disintegrating. These three are but superimposed ideations upon the One modification-less reality, just like the snake superimposed upon the rope, at dusk. This ideation is illusion (maya), for it hides and reveals at the same time. Illusion cannot be said to be unreal. The rope appearing as snake is known again as rope when the snake disappears. But the universe does not disappear in the same manner. Its existence cannot be explained away. It is a unique phenomenon; we cannot compare it with any other. We cannot dismiss it as unreal or accept it as real. It is truth-untruth (sat-asat), not untruth. That is to say, real-unreal, not unreal.

It persists for some time and is therefore real. It does not persist for all time and is therefore unreal. A thing can be true only as long as it is not something different; while dealing with it on the temporary practical relative level, the universe remains as universe. It is relatively real. Truth is one, it has one feature only. The universe has manifold features through time, space, and causation, so it is unreal. Sankara proclaimed the universe (jagath) to be unreal. When the highest truth is known, the universe is revealed as but an appearance on the Real and as distinct from the basic Brahman. Since the universe is imposed by the mind on the Brahmic truth, it too is to be treated as a Brahmic phenomenon. "All this is indeed Brahman (Sarvam Khalvidham Brahman)." Brahman, the Cause of all causes In fact, Brahman and illusion (maya) have an intimate relationship. Truth, once established and fixed, is ever unaffected. And illusion is not fundamentally true. What is learned by the impact of appearance is pseudoknowledge (mithya jnana); it is non-knowledge (a-vidya). The illusion (mithya or a-vidya, ignorance) will vanish as soon as the appearance is negated and the truth is grasped. Illusion is neither invalid nor valid.

The universe appears to each in accordance with the point of view or the angle of vision. It has no independent existence, apart from the ideations that are projected by and from the observer. Its support and sustenance is Brahman. Brahman is the unaffected cause. The effect will not have any effect on It. Illusion is the effect that is prone to inevitable change.

Brahman is the one supreme truth, which has assumed the manifoldness of

the universe (jagath), consequent on the influence of illusion. When Brahman is cognized as with illusion, It becomes the material cause of the universe. It is in the universe as the universe. Brahman is said to be the instrumental cause of the universe, but illusion is the prompting influence. Brahman is beyond both cause and effect. It cannot be a cause, either instrumental or material.

The universe can be conceived as a picture; the plain canvas is Brahman, and the colours spread on it form the universe. The appearances immanent on the canvas, the human figures, are dark. The individual soul (jiva) is the experiencer of pain and grief through involvement with the universe. He is the "seen", "the observed". Brahman is truth; the universe is the play, the pantomime, the sport. It is the manifestation of the will that is latent in Brahman. To recognize the will behind the play is to attain liberation.

Four prerequisites for the Vedantic path

Meditation (dhyana), worship (puja), rites and rituals, and other activities are laid down for those too dull to recognize this will. Only those who can renounce triple fruits of worldly endeavour can claim the right to follow the path of wisdom (jnana). Spiritual seekers on the Vedantic path must be equipped with:

1. discrimination to distinguish the transient from the eternal,
2. determination to desist from worldly and other-worldly pleasures,
3. sense control, self control, detachment, fortitude, faith, and equanimity, and
4. keen yearning for liberation.

All things have to be viewed as products of the Divine Will and used with the reverence that this knowledge will kindle in the consciousness.

The paths of holy activity (karma) and intellectual discrimination (jnana) are

intended for different spiritual seekers. It is not possible to mix the two and follow them together. Righteous living can confer new life; prosperity is the gift of the knowledge of dharma; liberation is the gift of the knowledge of Brahman. The awareness of Brahman does not demand for its continuance and constancy the practice of any spiritual practice (sadhana). It does not depend on the performance of any specific duties and chores.

Liberation is of two kinds: immediate and gradual. The first is the result of the attainment of wisdom (jnana).

The second is the result of worship (upasana), spiritual study, and spiritual discipline. Wisdom (jnana) is pure, unmixed, monistic experience. Devotion (bhakthi) is of the nature of supreme love, characterized by love for God, for the sake only of the Lord.