

# Dialogues with The Guru

Sri Chandrashekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal (1892-1954),  
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(Compiled by Sri R. Krishnaswamy Iyer)

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*These passages from the book "Dialogues with The Guru" provide answers to many nagging questions that trouble the individual as well as the society. While answering generic questions, Sri Acarya, induces one to reflect over the true meaning of Sanatana Dharma and application of its principles to modern life.*

*These passages are translation of talks with His Holiness Sri Chandrashekhara Bharati Swamigal, compiled by Sri R. Krishnaswamy Iyer.*

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## Advaita

An elderly gentleman, Mr. R., who had some acquaintance with the Vedanta literature, once approached His Holiness and said:

*I have tried to understand the Advaita philosophy but numerous doubts and difficulties keep on cropping up now and*

*then, which I don't find it possible to solve by myself or with the help of the scholars whom I have met. I shall be very grateful if your Holiness will be pleased to initiate me into the Advaita-Vedanta yourself.*

**His Holiness:** I shall certainly be very glad to do so, if I can do it. But it is quite beyond my competence.

**Devotee:** *I am sure Your Holiness is not serious. If Your Holiness professes incompetence to teach Advaita, I do not see how anybody else in the world can claim to teach it.*

**HH:** What can we do? It is the nature of the subject. The Upanishad itself proclaims 'He who claims to know, knows not'. The *Advaita* is not something to be learnt; therefore it cannot be a thing to be taught. It is essentially something to be realised by oneself. I cannot therefore undertake to teach you. If, however, in the course of your Vedantic studies you want any passage to be explained either in a text or in a commentary, I shall certainly try my best to explain it. I can thus help you only to understand the significance of words or of sentences which are composed of words, or of ideas which are conveyed by sentences. But it is impossible to convey to you a correct idea of what *Advaita* is, for it is neither a matter for words nor is it a mental concept. It is, on the other hand, pure experience which transcends all these. Suppose I do not know what sweetness is. Can you describe sweetness in words sufficiently expressive to convey an idea of sweetness to me?

**D:** *That is certainly impossible.*

**HH:** Sweetness can be known only when I put some sweet thing on my tongue. It is impossible of being explained in words or of being learnt from another person. It has to be

realised in direct experience. If a thing so familiar to us as sweetness transcends all expression, how much more transcendental will be the truth of *Advaita*, which is the supreme sweetness. I am reminded in this connection of a gentleman who came here sometime back. He was a *Brahmana* but his training had all been on the 'modern lines' so that he was a *Brahmana* only in name; and thanks to circumstances, he had attained a prominent position in public life. It was his first visit to this place. He seemed to have been very much enchanted with the crystal clear water of the river, the natural scenery all around, the peaceful atmosphere and other things. When he came to me, he expressed the delight he experienced and added 'Why, it is *brahmananda*'. He evidently meant, of course, that it was like *brahmananda*, the bliss of *Brahman*, the Absolute. It struck me that, in spite of his training and habits so divorced from our time-honoured religion, this idea that *brahmananda* was the highest of all *anandas* and that, therefore, that alone could be used as a simile to express a delight which defies adequate expression was still un-eradicated from his mind. I mention this incident to show that, even in common parlance when we find words wanting to express an intense sensuous pleasure, we resort to *brahmananda* alone as an adequate or expressive simile. That means that it is universally recognised that the *ananda* of *Brahman* which is the same as *Advaita* is beyond all words. Ask me not therefore to teach you *Advaita*, for it is an impossibility. But you may ask me to unravel for you some grammatical construction or to solve some of your doubts in the logic of the system. That is the best that I can do for you.

*D: I now quite understand the standpoint of Your Holiness. But I do not think I shall be justified in troubling Your Holiness to solve doubts in grammar, syntax or logic.*

**HH:** It does not matter in the least. If the solving of even such a doubt takes us nearer to a realisation of *Advaita*, it is worth doing.

**D:** *But I have not brought any book with me now, and I am unable to state from memory any of the passages which I found difficult to understand.*

**HH:** We shall reserve it then for some other occasion. We may now consider some topic for which no reference to books is needed.

**D:** *As Your Holiness pleases.*

**HH:** First, we shall try to understand what is meant by *Advaita*. How have you understood it?

**D:** *I have heard it explained thus: dvi means two, dvita means the state of being two, that is, two-ness. Dvaitam is the same as dvita. Advaita is therefore that thing in which there is no two-ness or duality.*

**HH:** Quite So. What do you call that something in which there is no two-ness?

**D:** *It is Brahman.*

**HH:** Perfectly right. And by *Brahman* - you mean that basic principle of reality wherefrom the universe derives its existence, whereon it rests and wherein it disappears.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** Let us ignore the word *Brahman* and its full significance for a moment. You give the name of *Advaita* to the principle which is responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe?

**D:** *Quite so.*

**HH:** You mean then **that** there is no two-ness in the principle?

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** In other words, you mean that that principle is one and one only?

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** To explain it again, you mean that there are no two such principles?

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** And you claim that our system of thought is rightly called *Advaita* as it enunciates the doctrine of the non-existence of two such principles?

**D:** *Quite so.*

**HH:** That is all right. Now we shall consider for a moment the other systems of thought, be it Christianity or Islam, *VisishtAdvaita* or *dvaita*, *Tarka* or *Yoga*, be it any system of thought which admits the existence of a principle which is responsible for the creation, the sustenance and the dissolution of the universe. Do any of these systems ever proclaim that there are two such principles or do they all agree in proclaiming that there is and can be only one such principle?

**D:** *No system postulates any plurality in God. There may be and is plurality among the devils, who are as much created beings as ourselves, but certainly none in the Supreme Godhead. He is ever One.*

**HH:** Quite so. No system therefore enunciates any duality so far as God is concerned?

**D:** *It is so.*

**HH:** Then, every system, inasmuch as it negatives the existence of **two** Gods is entitled to give the name of *Advaita* to the God enunciated by it and to appropriate the same name for itself also. If so, what is the justification for your monopolising the name *Advaita* specially to your God and to your particular system of thought?

**D:** *I pray that Your Holiness may be pleased to explain it.*

**HH:** There is another difficulty. You know that in the *Advaita* philosophy a practical *saguna Brahman* and a transcendent *nirguna Brahman* are both enunciated.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** None of the other systems accepts similar distinction and they decline to conceive of *Brahman* as twofold?

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** It would seem therefore that all other systems, except your own, enunciate a single supreme principle and that in your system only there is an enunciation of two supreme principles, the *saguna* and the *nirguna*. Strictly speaking, therefore, it would seem that all systems are equally entitled to call themselves *Advaita* and that, if any system can be disqualified from using that name by reason of enunciating plurality in God, it is certainly your system only that can be so disqualified. The *Advaita* system is thus not only not exclusively entitled to call itself *Advaita*, but is not entitled at all to call itself by that name. How do you then call *Advaita*?

**D:** *The answer for this also must come only from Your Holiness.*

**HH:** Not necessarily, for you yourself can give the answer quite easily.

**D:** *How?*

**HH:** Generally speaking, a name gets attached to a particular thing only if some attribute which is denoted by that name happens to be the exclusive attribute of that thing. If an attribute is common between a particular thing and several others, that particular thing cannot be called by the name which connotes that attribute.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** A name is therefore given to a particular thing when that thing has an exclusive characteristic of its own which is associated with that name.

**D:** *Quite so.*

**HH:** Now, what is the exclusive characteristic of our system of *Advaita* philosophy which is absent in all other systems?

**D:** *I suppose, the doctrine of Maya.*

**HH:** Quite so; and its implications.

**D:** *What are the implications?*

**HH:** Before we go to that question, tell me what do you understand by *Maya*?

**D:** *I have heard it explained as the differentiating prin-*

*inciple which is responsible for diversity in the universe.*

**HH:** In the universe of matter or in the universe of souls?

**D:** *In both. Maya is the prime cause of all diversity, in the objective as well as the subjective universe.*

**HH:** Then, but for *Maya*, there can be no diversity at all?

**D:** *I have heard it so said.*

**HH:** Matter, inert as it is, will have no independent existence of its own, but for *Maya*?

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** Similarly, I suppose, we, individuals as we are now, will have no independent existence of our own, but for *Maya*?

**D:** *It would seem so.*

**HH:** If we do not enunciate any such differentiating principle as *Maya*, matter-inert matter-will persist in having an existence of its own consistently with God the Supreme Principle, just as the mud from which a pot is made claims consistent existence with the potter who uses it for making the pot?

**D:** *It is so. In some other systems, they assign to God only the status of the potter and enunciate a primary substance, be it *pradhana* or the atoms or any other thing, as the material out of which the universe is made.*

**HH:** But there are some systems which deny the independent existence of matter and which enunciate that God is Himself the material cause as well as the efficient cause. That is, He is as much the mud as the potter.

**D:** *Quite so. I think such an idea is formulated by the Visishtadvaitins.*

**HH:** It finds a place in some other systems also. Though they conceive of God as the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe, they do not grant that God is the material cause of individual souls, for souls are not matter; nor is God the efficient cause of such souls, for souls are not 'made'.

**D:** *I understand.*

**HH:** Then, by postulating that the individual souls are not made but exist from time beginningless, they assign to them an existence, an independent existence, co-eval with God Himself.

**D:** *No doubt so, for they call all souls eternal.*

**HH:** But so do we. The difference between our system and theirs lies not in ascribing eternal existence to the individual soul, but in their ascribing to it eternal independent existence as all individual soul and in our ascribing the eternality to *Brahman* and deny to the soul any existence independent of *Brahman*.

**D:** *It is so.*

**HH:** Now then, we find that there are some systems which postulate the existence of God as the Supreme Being and at the same time grant the independent existence of matter and also the independent existence of individual souls. In some other systems, God is conceived of as the Supreme Being as well as the primary material cause of the universe of matter, thereby denying to inert matter an independent ex-

istence of its own, but conceding such an existence to individual souls.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** It is only in the *Advaita* system that matter is denied existence independent of God and the individual soul also is denied existence independent of God.

**D:** Quite so.

**HH:** It will be clear now that the distinguishing characteristic, which exclusively belongs to the *Advaita* system, is its enunciation of the non-existence of the universe of matter or of individual souls independent of God which is called by us *Brahman*.

**D:** No doubt, it is so.

**HH:** It must be then this distinguishing characteristic which is responsible for the name *Advaita*, which our system has appropriated to itself and by which it is generally known to all.

**D:** But how does the name *Advaita* convey the idea of this distinctive characteristic?

**HH:** You yourself said that *Advaita* signified a negation of duality.

**D:** But Your Holiness pointed out that no religion in the world postulated a duality in God?

**HH:** Quite so. You committed the mistake of understanding negation of two-ness in God' to mean 'negation of two Gods', thereby giving room for my further questions. If *Advaita* meant negation of two Gods, our system has no sole right at

all to appropriate that name to itself; but, if it means on the other hand negation of any second principle independent of God, we have the sole right to monopolise that name for our system. It is only in the latter sense that our system goes by the name of *Advaita*.

*D: I now understand the significance of the name; but there is Maya the differentiating principle which is responsible for the diversity in the universe of matter and of individual souls. Surely, that is a second principle.*

*HH: No. That cannot be a second principle. Viewing it as the sakti or power or potentiality of Brahman, it can have no independent existence of its own apart from the sakta, the Supreme Person or Brahman. From the still higher standpoint of absolute truth, it has no existence at all. Maya is the name given to it because it is not (ya ma), but seems to be, borrowing its seeming reality from the eternal verity called Brahman.*

*D: The doctrine of Maya is a bugbear to many of the modern scholars and they even go to the length of saying that it is really a weak point in the otherwise sound system of Advaita.*

*HH: It will be well if it proves so much of a bugbear that the modern scholars leave Advaita alone. The Advaita doctrine is enunciated from a plane which ordinary people cannot aspire to for very many more births to come. They have absolutely no right to approach it, much less to sit in judgement over it. As at present situated, most of us are far, far below that stage. Frankly speaking, it may take innumerable births for some of us (who do not think of the soul at all) to attain even the stage of the Charvaka or materialist, who*

thinks that the soul is no other than our physical body itself.

*D: I hope we are not so low down as that. The days of rank materialism are past and I am sure we can claim to be astikas or believers.*

*HH: I am not so sure about that. If you consider for a moment the significance of the word *astika*, I feel sure you will yourself hesitate before you claim to be one. An *astika* is one who says a thing *is* (*Asti*) and a *nastika* is one who says a thing *is not* (*Nasti*). Suppose there is a vessel before me. Can a person say that it *is* and another person at the same time say it *is not*?*

*D: Certainly not. If the vessel is, it is for both.*

*HH: Quite so. Suppose a man says that the Himalaya mountain is, can another man who has never seen it say that it *is not*?*

*D: He can only say that he has never seen it. He cannot deny its existence.*

*HH: That is, in your view, if a person says that a thing exists and if the existence of the thing is patent to all or is verifiable by everybody, no other person can possibly say that it does not exist.*

*D: Quite so.*

*HH: Therefore, an honest difference of opinion as regards the existence for a thing can possibly arise only if that thing is not manifestly perceived or is incapable of being verified immediately.*

*D: Quite so.*

**HH:** That there is a future birth is a fact not evident to all and not capable of being verified now. That there are regions of experience other than this earth is also a fact neither patent nor capable of immediate verification. Similarly, the existence of God is not patent to all, nor can it be verified by our limited capacity of perception.

**D:** *No doubt so.*

**HH:** When we call a person an *astika*, we do not merely mean that he says that any particular thing *is*; nor, when we call a person a *na-stika*, do we merely mean that he says that a particular thing *is not*. We use the term *astika* for one who asserts these three things: the existence of a future birth, the existence of other *lokas of* experience, and the existence of God. Similarly, we use the term *nastika*, for one who denies the existence of these three. Now, consider for a moment the attitude of the modern man, however educated he may claim to be. Does his daily conduct bear out that he believes in a future birth, a future *loka*, or even in God? Why does the craze for pleasure increase day by day as if all enjoyment must be had now or never? How is the belief in a future state of experience consistent with the growing neglect of *Dharma*? What justification is there for the increase in the number of Law Courts and Registration Offices if the people believe in God, the Eternal Witness of all their transactions? Whatever people may choose to say in public and whatever they may think of themselves, I am convinced that *astikyam*, faith, is going down rapidly. All our present endeavours must be directed towards a restoration and maintenance of *Ashtikyam*.

Questions posing as to whether the Ultimate Reality is one, two or one-and-a-half, have no practical interest for the

large majority of us. We may therefore leave such questions for the present and interest ourselves in the practice of our *Dharma*. Everybody knows that it is wrong to tell a lie. Nobody has the slightest doubt about it. All the same, falsehood is ever on the increase. Everybody knows that it is wrong to cheat. All the same, cheating is the normal practice in modern life. What is the practical use of enunciating the abstract truth of the Absolute *Brahman* to people who are not prepared to put into practice the elementary principles of even *Samanya Dharma*, Ordinary Law? After securing steadiness in *Samanya Dharma*, and after purifying and qualifying himself by the earnest practice of *Visesha Dharma*, the Special Law, prescribed for him, a person attains the requisite standard of competence to enable him to enter on the study of *Advaita*. The tendency to neglect the wholesome doctrine that Vedantic study is intended only for the competent is responsible for the confused thinking of modern days. Even for simple crafts, such as masonry or carpentry, a preliminary course of training is required before a person is allowed to handle the instruments; but in the field of *Brahma-Vidya*, the science of the Self, the highest and the most difficult of all sciences, everybody thinks himself competent and entitled to study the system of *Advaita* and even to sit in judgement over it. This attitude must go and must be replaced by earnest endeavour first to secure the necessary competence. If we make an honest attempt to secure that competence by following implicitly the directions of the *sastras* and of the Guru, the Lord will guide us along the path of progress, solve all our problems and doubts, free us from all worry and trouble and lead us on to the state of realisation of the *Advaita* Reality, the truth and the bliss of the absolute oneness of all in the undifferentiated *Brahman*.

## **The Sandhya Worship**

A touring Educational Officer once met His Holiness and said,

*"I have occasions of being in constant touch with young boys, mostly Brahmanas, studying in schools which I have to inspect. I have found that even the boys who perform their sandhya do so more as a form than as real worship. I shall be very grateful if Your Holiness would give me some valuable hints which I could convey to them."*

**His Holiness:** I am very glad to see that you are not content with mere official routine of inspection but desire to utilise the occasion for the betterment of the boys. It will be well if all educationists, inspecting officers or teachers, realise that they have been entrusted with the very grave responsibility of training up young men in the most impressionable period of their lives. In my opinion they are really to blame if they confine their attention only to the prescribed text books and neglect the spiritual side of the young generation.

**D:** *I always keep that end before me and I don't miss any opportunity of talking to the boys and giving them some useful advice. It is mainly with a view to do that work better that I request Your Holiness to give some practical suggestions.*

**HH:** Even if the boys to whom you propose to convey such suggestions may not benefit by them, you will certainly be benefited.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** You may therefore, for the present, ignore the boys and ask such questions the answers to which are likely to be useful to you.

**D:** *The first question which suggests itself to me is with reference to the sandhya worship. What is the deity or upasya devata in the sandhya worship?*

**HH:** Before we consider that, please tell me what you understand ordinarily by the sandhya worship?

**D:** *By sandhya worship we mean the worship of the rising Sun, the setting Sun or Sun in the mid heavens.*

**HH:** Quite so. Comprehensively speaking, you mean worship of the Sun?

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** You tell me that sandhya is the worship of the Sun and yet you ask me what is worshipped in the sandhya. Don't you think it is an unnecessary question?

**D:** *Put so, it may seem an unnecessary question, but my real question is, what is the Sun that is worshipped?*

**HH:** What do you understand ordinarily by the Sun?

**D:** *We mean the bright celestial orb in the sky.*

**HH:** Then it is that bright celestial orb that is worshipped.

**D:** *But that orb is, according to science, mere inert matter in a state of high combustion and is certainly not worthy of being worshipped by intelligent beings like ourselves. It can neither hear our prayers nor respond to them. I cannot believe that our ancestors were so ignorant as to address*

*their prayers to a mere burning mass of matter*

**HH:** I quite agree with you. They could never have been so foolish.

**D:** *What then did they see in the Sun to justify their prayers being addressed to it?*

**HH:** You said just now that addressing of prayers to inert matter cannot be justified by reason.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** What then must be the nature of the entity to which a prayer is addressed?

**D:** *The primary condition is that it must not be mere inert matter, but must be endowed with intelligence.*

**HH:** And the second condition?

**D:** *That it must be able to hear our prayers and be powerful enough to answer them.*

**HH:** Quite so. If our ancients were not fools and yet addressed their prayers to the Sun, their conception of the Sun must have been quite different from that of mere inert matter, in a state of high combustion.

**D:** *Yes, they must have also postulated of it intelligence, the capacity to hear us and the ability to help us.*

**HH:** The 'us' including not only all those who are now living to raise their hands in prayer to the Sun, but also the generations, past and future, infinite in number though they may be?

**D:** *Of course.*

**HH:** The entity that is worshipped as the Sun is therefore one whose intelligence or ability knows no limitation of space or time.

**D:** *It must be so.*

**HH:** You have now got your answer to the question as to who is worshipped in the *sandhya*? It is an intelligent Being, omniscient and omnipotent in the matter of hearing and responding to its votaries.

**D:** *Your Holiness then means that it is a deva who has his habitation in the solar orb?*

**HH:** Quite so. He has not only his habitation there, but the solar orb itself is his physical body.

**D:** *Your Holiness means that the deva enlivens the solar orb, just as we do our physical bodies?*

**HH:** Just so.

**D:** *If then he is embodied just like us, how does he happen to have such high intelligence or power as to merit our obeisance?*

**HH:** He attained that status by virtue of the appropriate *karma* and *upasana* done by him in a previous life.

**D:** *Does Your Holiness mean that he was at one time just like ourselves and that he attained that status by his endeavour?*

**HH:** Yes.

**D:** *Then he is no more than a jiva, which I also am. Why should a jiva make prostration before another jiva, howsoever superior?*

**HH:** *Why should your son or pupil respect you and why should you show respect to your superior officers? Are not both of you jivas?*

**D:** *No doubt we are. But we respect our superiors as it is in their power to help us or injure us, if they so desire.*

**HH:** *That is a very low kind of respect. Anyhow, taking even that kind of respect, we must respect *Surya devata* if it is in his power to help us or injure us, if he so desires.*

**D:** *Of course.*

**HH:** *Being a jiva as much as your superior officers, he will help you if you appeal to him for help or injure you if you ignore or despise him. In your own interest then, you are bound to worship him and secure his goodwill.*

**D:** *But I need not court the favour nor fear the displeasure of my superior officer, if I carry out the duties of my office faithfully.*

**HH:** *Quite so.*

**D:** *If I preserve that attitude, there is no reason why I should propitiate my superior officer.*

**HH:** *Certainly not.*

**D:** *Similarly, if I carry out strictly the duties enjoined on me by the sastras, I need not propitiate any other jiva, be he the highest devil.*

**HH:** Quite so.

**D:** Then, should I not give up the worship of *Surya devata*?

**HH:** Certainly you may, unless of course such a worship is part of the duties enjoined on you by the *sastras*.

**D:** How can that be?

**HH:** It is true that an honest and strict officer in performing the duties of his office need not mind the pleasure or the displeasure of his immediate superior. But the mere fact that he thinks it necessary or obligatory to perform those duties properly, shows that he has as the ultimate end the pleasure, or avoidance of the displeasure of a still higher officer who is superior to him as well as to his immediate superior. Even if he has no personal acquaintance with that higher officer, he always has in the background of his mind an undefined power, call it the King or the Government, when he performs the duties of his office. And that power has the ability to benefit him by a recognition of his services or to punish him by taking note of his delinquencies. Further, that power rules both him and his immediate superior officer. If therefore that power requires him to behave in a particular manner towards his superior officer, he cannot afford to disobey that injunction, for if he disobeys, not only does he incur the displeasure of that officer but also of the higher power.

**D:** That is so.

**HH:** Similarly, if a power which rules both you as well as *Surya devata* requires you to conduct yourself in a particular manner towards that *deva*, you cannot afford to neglect that injunction, but must conform to it or take the risk of incurring the displeasure of that *deva* as also of the higher power.

**D:** *It is no doubt so. But in that case, in prostrating myself before Surya devata, I shall be really worshipping the higher power even when my worship may seem addressed to the Surya.*

**HH:** What of that?

**D:** *If I am able to conceive of such a higher power who rules even the Surya, that power is really the worshipped entity although to all appearances the worship is addressed to the Surya only.*

**HH:** Quite so.

**HH:** *But Your Holiness said that it, was Surya devata who was worshipped?*

**D:** Yes. It is correct so far as persons who are not able to conceive of a higher power are concerned. To those however who can conceive of that power, He is the real *upasaya*. That power is called *Hiranyagarbha*. He enlivens and ensouls not only the *Surya*, but all devils. He enlivens and inhabits not only the solar orb but all things. He is the cosmic personality who is the soul of all things.

**D:** *I suppose just as we have the sense of "I" in our physical bodies, so does that cosmic personality has the sense of "I" in the entire cosmos.*

**HH:** He has.

**D:** *If so, the difference between Him and me lies not in the presence or the absence of the sense of "I" but only in the degree, the range or the magnitude of that sense. Mine is restricted, His is extended.*

**HH:** It is so.

**D:** *if it is the sense of "I" that is responsible for the concept of a jiva, he must be as much a jiva as myself.*

**HH:** Quite so. In fact He is called the First Born.

**D:** *Then, even if this higher power happens to belong to the category of Jivas, just like myself, the same objection which I mentioned against the worship of Surya devata holds good in his case also.*

**HH:** What then would you like to worship?

**D:** *A transcendent power which is not a jiva.*

**HH:** Have it then that it is such a transcendent power that is worshipped in the *sandhya*. We give Him the name of *lswara*, the Lord, or the *antaryami*, the inner ruler.

**D:** *But I have heard it mentioned that the terms 'Lord' and 'Ruler' are only relative terms which are used in regard to Him when we want to describe Him in relation to the universe, which is 'lorded over' or 'ruled' by Him.*

**HH:** Yes, it is so.

**D:** *It cannot be that we can have no conception of him apart from his relationship of some sort to the universe. His relationship to the universe can at best be only an extraneous circumstance. In His essence, He must have an independent existence quite unrelated to anything else.*

**HH:** You are right. We call that unrelated essential existence *Brahman*.

**D:** *If it is so, that must be the real object of worship*

*rather than the relative aspect called Ishwara.*

**HH:** It is even as you say. It is really the unqualified *Brahman* that is worshipped in the *sandhya*.

**D:** *I cannot really understand Your Holiness. You first said that it was the solar orb that was the object of worship, but when I pointed out that it was only inert matter, you said that it was Surya devata that was the object of worship; when again I pointed out that he was only a limited jiva like myself, you said it was Hiranyagarbha, the cosmic soul, that was the object of worship: when once again I pointed out that he was after all a jiva, however cosmic his sense of 'I' may be, you said that Ishwara the Lord and Ruler of the universe was really the object of worship; and lastly when I said that even he is but a relative aspect of Brahman, you said that the object of worship was Brahman itself.*

**HH:** I did say so.

**D:** *But I fail to see how all these statements can be reconciled.*

**HH:** Where is the difficulty?

**D:** *The object in a particular worship can be only one. How can it be the solar orb or the deva enlivening it or Hiranyagarbha or Ishwara or Brahman at the same time?*

**HH:** I never said that it was the solar orb or the devil and so on.

**D:** *Does Your Holiness mean to say then that the object of worship is the solar orb and the devil and Hiranyagarbha and Ishwara and Brahman all put together?*

**HH:** Nor did I say anything of that sort.

**D:** *How then am I to understand Your Holiness' statements?*

**HH:** When did I tell you that the upasya was *Surya*?

**D:** *When I mentioned that the physical mass of burning matter cannot be the object of worship.*

**HH:** Before you mentioned it, I said that it was even that mass that was the *upasya*.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** I never mentioned that it was the solar body or the *deva* as an alternative. To one who cannot conceive of an enlivening soul, *the upasya* is the physical mass; to one, however, who declines to accept inert matter as an object of worship, I said the *upasya* was *Surya devata*. *The upasya* is ever one, but its exact nature varies with the competence of the worshipping aspirant. The *upasya* gets further refined when even the concept of a *devil* does not satisfy the enquiring devotee. We say then that it is *Hiranyagarbha*. When even such a concept seems meagre or unsatisfactory, we tell the devotee that he is really worshipping the Supreme Lord himself. When he begins to feel that even the Lord-ness is a limitation of His essential nature, we tell him that it is the infinite *Brahman* itself that is really worshipped. Where is the difficulty?

**D:** *Does Your Holiness then mean that it is not possible to definitely say what the object of worship in the sandhya is except with reference to the mental equipment or intellectual advancement of the worshipper?*

**HH:** How can there be an object of worship if we ignore the worshipper? The nature of the worshipped necessarily depends upon the nature of the worshipper.

**D:** *How?*

**HH:** Take me for example. All of you show me respect. But the object of respect, though it is, roughly speaking, myself, does differ with each one of you. Ordinary people respect me and like to see me surrounded by glittering paraphernalia; their attention and respect are claimed by those articles rather than by my personality. Such people will show the same respect to others who have similar paraphernalia. Their homage is not therefore really paid to me but only to the paraphernalia. Some others respect me for the position that I hold or for the *Asrama* in which I am. Such people will equally respect others who are or may come to be in such a position or in such an *Asrama*, their homage is therefore not paid to me but to my position or to the *Asrama*. And some others may not care what position I hold or in what *Asrama* I am, but give me homage wherever I go and however I may be; their object of respect is my physical body. A few others will not mind if my body is dark or ugly or even diseased, but will nevertheless give me homage if by purity of mind and character or by the power of my intellect and learning or by any spiritual merit that I may possess I command their respect. Very few indeed will respect me for the spark of divine intelligence which inheres in me, as it does in all of you.

**D:** *Of course it is not possible to say that all the devotees that approach Your Holiness are of the same mental equipment.*

**HH:** Quite so. But, ordinarily all these people, whether

they really tender homage to the paraphernalia or to my status and *Asrama* or to my body or to my mind or to my intellect or to the divine spark in me, prostrate before me to show their respect. Can you tell me, apart from any reference to the several devotees, to whom or to what they prostrate?

*D: It is no doubt very difficult to answer.*

*HH:* Similarly, with every kind of worship. Externally viewed, there will be no appreciable difference between the one who respects me for the paraphernalia and another who respects me for the divine spark in me. Externally viewed, there will similarly be no appreciable difference between the devotee who in his blind faith is content to address his prayers to the luminous Sun and another who turns to it as a visible symbol of the infinite *Brahman*. The question as to what is the *upasya* in the *sandhya* worship can therefore be answered only in this way.

*D: I now understand how in the simple worship of the Sun all possible stages in spiritual perception have been provided for.*

*HH:* It is not only this, for you will find if you consider the matter still further, that all the three ways known as *karma*, *bhakti* and *Gyana* have been given places in the daily worship, but that is a different matter. Simple as the *sandhya* worship seems to be, it is sufficient to help us on to the highest stages. It is as useful to the highest aspirant as it is to the beginner. It is a folly, therefore, to belittle its value or to neglect it in practice.

## **True Devotion**

Another evening, the conversation which was quite general at first, gradually turned on to the subject of *bhajana*, singing of devotional songs to the accompaniment of music. A *bhakta* who belonged to the party in attendance mentioned that such devotional exercises had an exhilarating and soothing effect on our wayward minds and that it was pleasing to find that *bhajana* parties were being formed in increasing numbers in every town and village.

**His Holiness:** I am glad to hear this. But I have heard that at the same time the observance of our religious rites is steadily going down. Why is it so?

**Devotee:** *It is mainly because the ordinary people lack faith in the efficacy of religious rites that they resort to bhajana for pleasing God.*

**HH:** I suppose that many of the persons engaged in *bhajana* may not care for or may even neglect their ordinary religious duties like the *sandhya* worship.

**D:** *Yes. They say that while engaged in bhajana they can give up the sandhya worship, because bhajana being a higher kind of worship makes sandhya unnecessary and redundant.*

**HH:** As a general proposition it is quite true that the greater includes the less. But how do we know that *bhajana* is of greater efficacy than *karma* in the matter of pleasing God?

**D:** *Bhajana is a direct appeal to God while karma is but an indirect appeal through the observance of rituals.*

**HH:** I suppose you concede that we have never met God

personally.

**D:** *Certainly, I do.*

**HH:** You must also concede that we can never of our own accord find out what will please God and what will not, for we cannot ask Him directly nor can He tell us in person.

**D:** *It maybe so, but we can easily ascertain it from the Sruti, which embodies His teachings.*

**HH:** You may also add the *Smritis*, especially the *Bhagavad Gita*, which record in no unmistakable terms His mind as divulged to those who have had the rare fortune to hold direct communion with Him, both in the spirit and in the flesh.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** And what do they teach us?

**D:** *They certainly do no discount bhakti.*

**HH:** Certainly not. But the question is, what is bhakti? Is it your *bhajana* or is it *karma*?

**D:** *How can karma be bhakti?*

**HH:** In fact, you will find that *karma* alone can be *bhakti* and certainly not the *bhajana*, if it is inconsistent with or is divorced from *karma*.

**D:** *How can that be?*

**HH:** The Lord tells us quite unambiguously 'Man attains perfection by worshipping God by performing the *karma* enjoined on him.' He clearly enunciates here the proposition that the way to worship Him is to perform one's assigned

*karma.*

**D:** *But such a performance of karma is not the only way in which devotion can be shown to the Lord.*

**HH:** It is the only way for those on whom *karma* is enjoined.

**D:** *Surely a person who spends his time in prayer and contemplation of the Lord is as much a bhakta as, if not more, the one who busies himself with outward rituals.*

**HH:** Leave again comparing. He will not be a *bhakta* at all if he chooses to neglect the *karma* enjoined on him in favour of mental prayers and contemplation.

**D:** *Why so?*

**HH:** Take the ordinary case of a master and his servants. Suppose one of his servants is always standing before him and singing his praises. The master may sometimes ask him to fetch something from another room. Suppose the servant replies, 'O, Master, I cannot bear the thought of parting from you even for a moment. I cannot forego even for a moment the pleasure and the privilege of looking at your handsome face. I like to be ever with you and to praise you by recounting your inestimable qualities. Don't ask me to leave your presence.' Suppose again there is another servant who is always away from the presence of the master, but is carrying out with scrupulous care all the commands of the master, communicated to him either by the master personally or through his deputies. Wherever the master turns, he finds that he has been most loyally obeyed by this servant who nowhere seems to intrude on him. Which do you think is the more devoted of these two servants and with whom in your

opinion, will the master be pleased more?

**D:** *Certainly the latter.*

**HH:** Is a father happy with the child who always prefers to sit on his lap and declines to do anything or with the one who is going out on errands?

**D:** *With the latter, I should think.*

**HH:** Further, can you grant that the servant, or the boy, who refuses to leave the presence of his master or father and does not carry out his orders, is really devoted at all?

**D:** *Surely disobedience cannot go hand in hand with devotion.*

**HH:** Quite so. The primary test of devotion in any sphere of life is obedience, unquestioning and loving obedience, not inquisitive or grumbling obedience.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** 'The *Sruti* and the *Smriti* are the commands of Myself,' says the Lord. Can you conceive of a devotion to the Lord side by side with a disobedience of His commands?

**D:** *I now see that bhajana can never be a substitute for karma.*

**HH:** It can never be.

**D:** *What then is the function of bhajana? It cannot certainly be all waste.*

**HH:** A servant, when he finds leisure after discharging all his duties, may certainly stand in the presence of the master,

but not when he has got duties to perform. Similarly a person, who after performing all the *karma* enjoined on him still finds leisure, can spend it in prayer or in singing the praises of the Lord and thus utilise the leisure to the best advantage. *Bhajana* is thus intended only for the occasions of leisure in the midst of *karmic* duties.

*D: I fear if a Brahmana should be asked to perform properly all the duties enjoined on him by the Vedas and the Smritis he cannot have bhajana at all.*

*HH:* It is not quite so. It is only the lazy people that are ever short of time. The busy ones are always able to find leisure.

*D: it seems to me that if bhajana is to be done only at the times not occupied by religious duties, the castes other than the Brahmanas will have more leisure for it, as they have to perform only very few religious observances. It seems that the non-Brahmanas are more competent to take up bhajana.*

*HH:* Quite so. It is intended more for them than for the Brahmanas.

*D: Is it not an anomaly that the Brahmanas should be denied equal privilege in this matter?*

*HH:* No. They are not denied this 'privilege' as you call it, for they can enjoy it in their leisure moments. Further, you forget that carrying out the commands of the Lord is a greater act of devotion than singing His praises. Now you may look at the matter from another point of view also.

*D: What is that?*

**HH:** A servant who loves to look at the face of his master and avoids performance of his duties does so because he derives pleasure from being with the master and fears a cessation of that pleasure if he has to perform his duties.

**D:** *It may seem to be so.*

**HH:** The only consideration therefore which weighs with him in determining his conduct is his own pleasure and not the pleasure of his master.

**D:** *Strictly analysed, it is so.*

**HH:** Can you call such a servant devoted in any sense when he places his own selfish pleasure above his master's pleasure?

**D:** *Certainly not.*

**HH:** Similarly, if a so-called *bhakta* prefers to sing to the accompaniment of enchanting music the praises of the Lord at the same time ignoring, neglecting and disregarding His divine commands, can you call him a 'devotee' at all?

**D:** *I fear, not.*

**HH:** Again please consider for a moment that that so-called *bhakta* has a conception of the Lord only as a very attractive object intended for his enjoyment. What can be more absurd than dragging down the All-conscious, Omnipotent Lord to the level of a toy intended for one's amusements? To conceive of the Lord as an object of pleasure is sheer profanation, which should never pass off under the name of devotion. Real devotion lies in carrying out His dictates implicitly. To disobey Him in action and to profess allegiance in words is blasphemy. It is not *bhakti*. *By bhakti is*

meant single-pointed devotion uniformly expressed in mind, speech and body.

## **Name and form**

*Devotee:* May I ask one other question relation to bhakti?

*His Holiness:* Yes. What is it?

*D:* I have seen a number of bhaktas who lead earnest and pious lives, but at the same time indulge in recrimination and invective if any devata other than their own upasya deva happens to be praised within their hearing. Is such an attitude of intolerance consistent with true bhakti?

*HH:* No it is not. Such an attitude is to be found not in true bhaktas but only in those who have no proper understanding of the meaning of bhakti or of the nature of the Lord to whom they profess to be devoted. The Highest Being, the Supreme Lord, the ruler of the universe, transcends all particular names and forms. Name and form are the attributes of the mute prakriti. God has no name or form of His own until you clothe Him, howsoever slightly, in prakriti. This entire world of name and form is, as it were, only His feet, to adopt the words of the *Purusha Sukta*. We cannot have any direct relationship with the higher and larger portion of His divine personality. Only His feet are visible to us and we are asked to worship Him only through service to His feet. It is our proper conduct, as laid down in the *sastras*, with reference to the various portions of the universe (*devils, pitris, men, animals, etc.*), that goes by the name of *karma*. This is the service of the feet. When, after steady and continued service at His feet, the Lord, satisfied with our devotion, chooses to raise us up to a height where from we can look

directly upon His face, there will be time enough to learn whether His forehead bears the mark of the *gopichandana* or is adorned with *bhasma*. Situated as we are at present at the lowest rung of the ladder and even without a gleam of the glory of His feet, why should we choose to waste our time and energy in speculating and wrangling about the nature of His face? The true *bhakta* never does that. He is content to know the simple definition of the Lord that He is the Creator, the Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe. The name or form that you assign to the Lord is of no moment to Him, for He knows that that name or form is not His essence, but is accepted or assumed only temporarily for the sake of a particular *bhakta*. The true *bhakta* is also content to know that the Vedas are His divine commands and that a strict performance of the duties enjoined by them is the only way of securing the grace of the Lord and, within the competence of man, the only way of serving Him.

**D:** *But is it not a fact that a jiva bhakta claims that jiva is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Dissolver the universe, and a Vishnu bhakta claims that same thing for Vishnu?*

**HH:** No doubt at first sight it may seem to be so. In the view of the *Siva bhakta* his Lord *Siva* is the only Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe; he does not grant that any other entity, *Vishnu* or another, has the characteristics of being the Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe. He does not say that there are more than one entity which can claim those characteristics or that his Lord *Siva* is supreme over all others. What he means and what he does believe is that the Lord *Siva* is the only Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe. He does not postulate plurality of Gods, but emphatically says that there is but one god who is the Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe and that His

name is *Siva*.

**D:** *Certainly it is so. But the Vishnu bhakta says the same thing of Vishnu. The devotee of Ganesha, Subrahmanya or Devi also says the same thing of his upasya. Which of these has to be taken as right? All of them surely cannot be right.*

**HH:** You agree with me that none of these *bhaktas* postulate plurality of Gods?

**D:** *I do.*

**HH:** You agree with me that they all postulate the existence of only one God?

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** You also note that they all agree in the definition of that God as the Creator, the Sustainer and the Dissolver of the Universe?

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** But they happen to differ as regards the name or the form to be attributed to that God?

**D:** *Quite so.*

**HH:** This shows that their conception of God is not at all faulty.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** Suppose you have a grain of rice before you and you satisfy yourself that it has got all the characteristics which are peculiar to rice and that therefore it is rice; does it matter the least to you if a Tamilian gives it the name *arisi*, a Ca-

naresse calls it *akki* or a Sanskrit Pandit prefers to call it *tandula*?

**D:** *No, it does not matter.*

**HH:** Don't you then realise that all names are external to and not of the essence of things, though such names have great practical utility in the world of names and forms? Similarly, if the characteristics of being the Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver of the universe are there, what does it matter if He is called *Siva*, *Vishvu* or *Devi*? The entity denoted is the same, though the names may differ. A Tamilian who does not know Canarese or Sanskrit will be vehement in saying that rice is called only as *arisi* and never as *akki* or *tandula*. He is quite correct so far as he goes, for no such names are to be found in the Tamil language with which alone he is familiar. As long as by a process of analysis, he does not learn to dissociate the name from the thing, the name is the thing for him; and if you deny that name, he will take it that you deny the thing itself. Only the *bhakta* will be quarrelsome who cannot dissociate a particular name or a particular form from his conception of God. He is correct so far as his mentality goes. But his *bhakti* is far below that real *bhakti* which realises that God is above all names and above all forms, that particular names are but convenient denominations for trying to express the essentially inexpressible and that particular forms are only limited aspects of the essentially limitless God.

**D:** *It seems to me that Sri Vyasa is himself responsible for these unseemly squabbles. He wrote a large number of Puranas devoted to many different devata, and in every one of them he calls the devata dealt with there as the Highest Being, so that even a sincere reader is unable to understand*

*which is really the Highest Being in Sri Vyasa's view.*

**HH:** I suppose we can start with the presumption that Sri Vyasa was neither an ignorant person nor was he deliberately out to mislead people?

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** He must have known the elementary proposition that there cannot possibly be more than one Highest Being.

**D:** *Quite so. That is just my difficulty. I cannot understand how he chooses to call every one of the devatas as the Highest Being.*

**HH:** Your difficulty is very easily solved if you understand Sri Vyasa to say not that every *devata* is the Highest Being but that the Highest Being is every one of the *devatas*.

**D:** *How is that?*

**HH:** The Highest Being having no name or form of His own has to take on some name or form when He is conceived of as an object of worship. Being in His essential nature absolutely formless, in the absolute view He has no form at all: but in the relative view, all forms are equally His.

**D:** *I do understand this. But Sri Vyasa when he deals with a particular form, say Siva, chooses to endow it not only with the attributes of the Highest Being but also with the attributes peculiar to other devatas. He does not deal with Siva as the dissolver-aspect of the Highest Being, but says that He is even Vishnu or Brahma and sometimes says that Vishnu and Brahma are but His aspects, or offsprings.*

**HH:** Take a familiar incident in family life. Suppose a gen-

tleman has four children and the birthday of one of them happens to be celebrated. That child is the 'idol', the *upasya for the day*. He is seated on a raised seat in the central hall of the house; he is dressed in costly clothes and is decked with jewels. Is it not unusual for the mother and the other children to part temporarily with the jewels that they themselves usually wear, so that the 'idol' may be better adorned?

**D:** *It is so.*

**HH:** Do the mother and the other children feel the slightest regret at parting with their jewels or the slightest envy at that child wearing them for the occasion?

**D:** *Certainly they do not.*

**HH:** Can anybody accuse that child of depriving its mother and the other children of their jewels on this day? Further, will anybody accuse the father of partiality towards that child because he gives it prominence for the day and even deprives the others of their jewels to enable that child to shine better?

**D:** *Certainly not.*

**HH:** Now will you tell me in whom the right of ownership and possession of all this finery and all the jewels really vests?

**D:** *Certainly in the father.*

**HH:** Quite so. Does he ever wear the jewels himself?

**D:** *No.*

**HH:** That means, that though all the jewels really belong to him, he never shows himself off in them but finds pleasure

in decking out his children in them as and when occasions may arise?

**D:** *Quite so.*

**HH:** We may therefore say of him that he never wears any jewels though all the jewels are really his.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** The jewels are his, not only when they are kept in the safe in his custody but even when the child is actually wearing them.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** The Highest Being, the impersonal *Brahman*, is like the father. He never wears any attributes, but all the attributes which every one of the *devatas* has belong to Him. When a particular *devata* is conceived of as the *upasya* in a particular *Purana* for the upliftment of a type of *bhakta*, that *devata* is given the seat of honour, next to none (not even the father, who has to stand aside in the background looking on happily at the child), and has to be decked with all the attributes which ordinarily go with the other *devatas* also. There is absolutely no room for any charge of partiality if in any particular *Purana* certain *devata* is given prominence over others, for when their turn comes in the other *Puranas* they are treated with equal prominence. Such is the attitude of Sri Vyasa in every one of his *Puranas*. He knows that the Highest being is devoid of any attributes, any name or any form; but, as a practical teacher, he knows equally well that such an absolute conception is not within the reach of people, a few exceptions apart, and, therefore, he offers for the contemplation of devotees particular *devatas* who,

though mere aspects of the Absolute *Brahman*, are treated for the moment and for all practical purposes as being identical with the Supreme Being. He has so written the Puranas that the *bhakta* of any particular *devata* by intensity of devotional exercise can obtain the fruits of devotion to other *devata* also, without the need of worshipping them separately, and finally, by further effort, can attain even a knowledge of the Absolute *Brahman*, through devotion to his particular *devata*. For practical wisdom, which combines economy of effort with maximum benefit and adapts the doctrine of the Absolute *Brahman* to the needs of the devotee without impairing in any way the truth of the doctrine, Sri Vyasa is inimitable. If we fight among ourselves without understanding Sri Vyasa properly, the fault is ours, certainly not his. On the other hand, all our gratitude must go to him.

## **Fate and Free Will**

One evening a disciple approached His Holiness with a view to obtain some valuable instruction, but found words wanting to express his intention and His Holiness came to his relief by starting the conversation himself.

***His Holiness:*** I hope you are pursuing your studies in the Vedanta as usual.

***Disciple:*** I cannot say that I make any regular study, but I do study somewhat off and on.

***HH:*** In the course of your studies, you would have been faced with many doubts.

***D:*** I cannot say that I have studied deep enough even for that.

**HH:** I do not mean the doubts, which arise when we endeavour to grasp the technicalities of the Vedanta system, but only those broad problems, which present themselves to any one who makes an attempt at serious thinking.

**D:** *Certainly, there are very many such doubts.*

**HH:** Will you formulate one of such doubts and tell me how you have tried to solve it?

**D:** *I shall mention one of such doubts, which is repeatedly coming up to my mind and for which I have found no solution yet. I shall be very grateful if your Holiness will solve it for me.*

**HH:** Please mention it.

**D:** *It is no other than the problem of the eternal conflict between fate and free-will. What are their respective provinces and how can the conflict be avoided?*

**HH:** The problem is indeed a very great one and would baffle the intellect of the highest thinkers, if presented in the way you have done it.

**D:** *What is wrong with my presentation? In fact, I only stated my problem and did not even explain how I find it difficult to solve.*

**HH:** Your difficulty arises even in that mere statement of the problem.

**D:** *How?*

**HH:** A conflict is conceivable and possible only if there are two things. There can be no conflict if there is only a single thing.

**D:** *But here there are two things fate and free-will.*

**HH:** Exactly, It is just that assumption that is responsible for the problem arising in your mind.

**D:** *It is not my assumption at all. How can I ignore the fact that they do exist as independent factors, whether I grant their existence or not.*

**HH:** That is where you are wrong again.

**D:** *How?*

**HH:** As a follower of our *Sanatana Dharma*, you must know that fate is nothing extraneous to yourself, but is only the sum total of the results of your past actions. As God is but the dispenser of the fruits of your actions, fate, representing those fruits, is not His creation but only yours. Free-will is what you exercise when you act now.

**D:** *Still I do not see how they are not two distinct things.*

**HH:** Have it this way. Fate is past *karma*, free-will is present *karma*. Both are really one, that is, *karma*, though they may differ in the matter of time. There can be no conflict when they are really one.

**D:** *But the difference in time is a vital difference which we cannot possibly overlook.*

**HH:** I do not want you to overlook it, but only to study it more deeply. The present is before you and, by the exercise of free-will, you can attempt to shape it. The past is past and is therefore beyond your vision and is rightly called *adrishta*, the unseen. You cannot reasonably attempt to find out the relative strength of two things unless both of them are be-

fore you. But, by our very definition, free-will, the present karma alone is before you and fate, the past *karma*, is invisible. Even if you see two wrestlers physically squatting before you, you cannot decide about their relative strength. For, one may have weight, the other agility; one muscles and the other tenacity; one the benefit of practice and the other of coolness of judgement and so on. We can on these grounds go on building arguments on arguments to prove that a particular wrestler will be the winner. But experience shows that each of these qualifications may fail at any time or may prove to be a disqualification. The only reasonable, practical and sure method of determining their relative strength is to ask them to wrestle with each other. While this is so, how do you expect to find by means of arguments a solution to the problem of the relative value of fate and free-will when the former by its very nature is unseen!

*D: Is there no way then of solving this problem?*

*HH: There is this way. The wrestlers must fight with each other and prove which of them is the stronger.*

*D: In other words, the problem of conflict will get solved only at the end of the conflict. But at that time the problem will have ceased to have any practical significance.*

*HH: Not only so, it will cease to exist.*

*D: That is, before the conflict begins, the problem is incapable of solution, and, after the conflict ends, it is no longer necessary to find a solution.*

*HH: Just so. In either case, it is profitless to embark on the enquiry as to the relative strength of fate and free-will.*

**D:** *Does Your Holiness then mean to say that we must resign ourselves to fate?*

**HH:** Certainly not. On the other hand, you must devote yourself to free-will.

**D:** *How can that be?*

**HH:** Fate, as I told you, is the resultant of the past exercise of your free-will. By exercising your free-will in the past, you brought on the resultant fate. By exercising your free-will in the present, I want you to wipe out your past record if it hurts you, or to add to it if you find it enjoyable. In any case, whether for acquiring more happiness or for reducing misery, you have to exercise your free-will in the present.

**D:** *But the exercise of free-will however well directed, very often fails to secure the desired result, as fate steps in and nullifies the action of free-will.*

**HH:** You are again ignoring our definition of fate. It is not an extraneous and a new thing which steps in to nullify your freewill. On the other hand, it is already in you.

**D:** *It may be so, but its existence is felt only when it comes into conflict with free-will How can we possibly wipe out the past record when we do not know nor have the means of knowing what it is?*

**HH:** Except to a very few highly advanced souls, the past certainly remains unknown. But even our ignorance of it is very often an advantage to us. For, if we happen to know all the limitless varieties of results which we have accumulated by our actions in this life and the countless lives that have preceded it, we will be simply staggered at the magnitude

and number of such results and give up in despair any attempt to overcome or mitigate them. Even in this life, forgetfulness is a boon which the merciful God has been pleased to bestow on us, so that we may not be buried at any moment with a recollection of all that has transpired in the past. Similarly, the divine spark in us is ever bright with hope and makes it possible for us to confidently exercise our free-will. It is not for us to belittle the significance of these two boons—forgetfulness of the past and hope for the future.

*D: Our ignorance of the past may be useful in not deterring the exercise of the free-will and hope may stimulate that exercise. All the same, it cannot be denied that fate very often does present a formidable obstacle in the way of such exercise.*

*HH:* It is not quite correct to say that fate places obstacles in the way of free-will. On the other hand, by seeming to oppose our efforts, it tells us what is the extent of free-will that is necessary now to bear fruit. Ordinarily for the purpose of securing a single benefit, a particular activity is prescribed; but we do not know how intensively or how repeatedly that activity has to be pursued or persisted in. If we do not succeed at the very first attempt, we can easily deduce that in the past we have exercised our free-will just in the opposite direction. That the resultant of that past activity has first to be eliminated and that our present effort must be proportionate to that past activity. Thus, the obstacle which fate seems to offer is just the gauge by which we have to guide our present activities.

*D: The obstacle is seen only after the exercise of our free-will, how can that help us to guide our activities at the start?*

**HH:** It need not guide us at the start. At the start, you must not be obsessed at all with the idea that there will be any obstacle in your way. Start with boundless hope and with the presumption that there is nothing in the way of your exercising the free-will. If you do not succeed, tell yourself that there has been in the past a counter-influence brought on by yourself by exercising your freewill in the other direction and, therefore, you must now exercise your free-will with re-doubled vigour and persistence to achieve your object. Tell yourself that, inasmuch as the seeming obstacle is of your own making, it is certainly within your competence to overcome it. If you do not succeed even after this renewed effort, there can be absolutely no justification for despair, for fate being but a creature of your free-will can never be stronger than freewill. Your failure only means that your present exercise of freewill is not sufficient to counteract the result of the past exercise of it. In other words, there is no question of a relative proportion between fate and free-will as distinct factors in life. The relative proportion is only as between the intensity of our past action and the intensity of our present action.

**D:** *But even so, the relative intensity can be realised only at the end of our present effort in a particular direction.*

**HH:** It is always so in the case of everything which is *adrishta* or unseen. Take, for example, a nail driven into a wooden pillar. When you see it for the first time, you actually see, say, an inch of it projecting out of the pillar. The rest of it has gone into the wood and you cannot now see what exact length of the nail is imbedded in the wood. That length, therefore, is unseen or *adrishta*, so far as you are concerned. Beautifully varnished as the pillar is, you do not know what is the composition of the wood in which the nail is driven. That

also is unseen or *adrishta*. Now suppose you want to pull that nail out, can you tell me how many pulls will be necessary and how powerful each pull has to be?

**D:** *How can I fix the number of pulls now? The number and the intensity of the pulls depend upon the length which has gone into the wood.*

**HH:** Certainly so. And the length which has gone into the wood is not arbitrary, but depended upon the number of strokes which drove it in and the intensity of each of such strokes and the resistance which the wood offered to them.

**D:** *It is so.*

**HH:** The number and intensity of the pulls needed to take out the nail depend therefore upon the number and intensity of the strokes which drove it in.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** But the strokes that drove in the nail are now unseen and unseeable. They relate to the past and are *adrishta*.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** Do we desist from the attempt to pull out the nail simply because we happen to be ignorant of the length of the nail in the wood or of the number and intensity of the strokes which drove it in? Or, do we persist and persevere in pulling it out by increasing the number and the intensity of our present efforts to pull it out?

**D:** *Certainly, as practical men we adopt the latter course.*

**HH:** Adopt the same course in every effort of yours. Exert yourself as much as you can. Your will must succeed in the

end.

*D: But there certainly are many things which are impossible to attain even after the utmost exertion.*

*HH:* There you are mistaken. If there is any thing, it is by its very nature capable of being experienced. There is nothing which is really unattainable. A thing, however, may be unattainable to us at the particular stage at which we are, or with the qualifications that we possess. The attainability or otherwise of a particular thing is thus not an absolute characteristic of that thing but is relative and proportionate to our capacity to attain it.

*D: The success or failure of an effort can be known definitely only at the end. How are we then to know beforehand whether with our present capacity we may or may not exert ourselves to attain a particular object, and whether it is the right kind of exertion for the attainment of that object.*

*HH:* Your question is certainly a very pertinent one. The whole aim of our *Dharma sastras* is to give a detailed answer to your question. They analyse our capacities, or competency, and prescribe the activities which a person endowed with a particular *adhikara* can undertake. The activities are various and numberless, as the capacities also happen to be various and numberless. Regulation of activities or, in other words, the directing of free-will into channels least harmful and most beneficial to the aspirant, is the main function of religion. Such regulated activity is called *svadharma*. Religion does not fetter man's free-will. It leaves him quite free to act, but tells him at the same time what is good for him and what is not. The responsibility is entirely and solely his. He cannot escape it by blaming fate, for fate is of his own mak-

ing, nor by blaming God, for He is but the dispenser of fruits in accordance with the merits of actions. You are the master of your own destiny. It is for you to make it, to better it or to mar it. This is your privilege. This is your responsibility.

*D: I quite realise this. But often it so happens that I am not really the master of myself I know for instance, quite well that a particular act is wrong, at the same time, I feel impelled to do it. Similarly, I know that another act is right, at the same time, however, I feel powerless to do it. It seems to me that there is some power which is able to control or defy my free-will. So long as that power is potent, how can I be called the master of my own destiny? What is that power but fate?*

**HH:** You are evidently confusing together two distinct things. Fate is a thing quite different from the other which you call a power. Suppose you handle an instrument for the first time. You will do it very clumsily and with great effort. The next time, however, you use it, you will do so less clumsily and with less effort. With repeated uses, you will have learnt to use it easily and without any effort. That is, the facility and ease with which you use a particular thing increase with the number of times you use it. The repeated and familiar use will leave behind a tendency to use it. The first time a man steals, he does so with great effort and much fear; the next time both his effort and fear are much less. As opportunities increase, stealing will become a normal habit with him and will require no effort at all. This habit will generate in him a tendency to steal even when there is no necessity to steal. It is this tendency which goes by the name *vasana*. The power which makes you act as if against your will is only the *vasana* which itself is of your own making. This is not fate. The punishment or reward, in the shape of pain or

pleasure, which is the inevitable consequence of an act, bad or good, is alone the province of fate or destiny. The *vasana* which the doing of an act leaves behind in the mind in the shape of a taste, a greater facility or a greater tendency for doing the same act once again, is quite a different thing. It may be that the punishment or the reward of a past act is, in ordinary circumstances, unavoidable, if there is no counter-effort; but the *vasana* can be easily handled if only we exercise our free-will correctly.

*D: But the number of vasanas or tendencies that rule our hearts are endless. How can we possibly control them?*

*HH:* The essential nature of a *vasana* is to seek expression in outward acts. This characteristic is common to all *vasanas*, good and bad. The stream of *vasana*, the *vasana-sarit*, as it is called, has two currents, the good and the bad. If you try to dam up the entire stream, there may be danger. The *sastras*, therefore, do not ask you to attempt that. On the other hand, they ask you to submit yourself to be led by the good *vasana* current and to resist being led away by the bad *vasana* current. When you know that a particular *vasana* is rising up in your mind, you cannot possibly say that you are at its mercy. You have your wits about you and the responsibility of deciding whether you will encourage it or not is entirely yours. The *sastras* enunciate in detail what *vasanas* are good and have to be encouraged and what *vasanas* are bad and have to be overcome. When, by dint of practice, you have made all your *vasanas* good and practically eliminated the chance of any bad *vasanas* leading you astray, the *sastras* take upon themselves the function of teaching you how to free your free-will even from the need of being led by good *vasanas*. You will gradually be led on to a stage when your free-will will be entirely free from any sort of colouring due

to any *vasanas*. At that stage, your mind will be pure as crystal and all motive for particular action will cease to be. Freedom from the results of particular actions is an inevitable consequence. Both fate and *vasana* disappear. There is freedom for ever more and that freedom is called *moksha*.

Source: *Dialogues with The Guru* compiled by R. Krishnaswami Iyer

## **The Utility of God**

A young man, a typical product of the modern system of education, was somehow attracted to the presence of His Holiness and was duly introduced to him. In the course of the conversation which ensued, His Holiness asked him:

**His Holiness:** I see that you have a lot of leisure. May I know how you utilise it?

**Devotee:** *I cannot say that I utilise it; it spends itself.*

**HH:** Evidently you are not one of those leisured people who complain that time does not pass.

**D:** *No.*

**HH:** I am very glad to hear it. In fact, knowing how precious every moment of our lives is, we must really complain that time does pass very quickly.

**D:** *I do not complain about the passing of time either.*

**HH:** It is only those who waste time that complain of the passing of time. Those who feel that their time is well spent, never have that complaint. Obviously you belong to that class.

**D:** *I do not think I do. I only know that time has to be*

*spent. Whether it is well spent or ill spent does not affect the inevitable passing of time. And, there are no absolute standards from which we can say that it has been well spent or ill spent.*

**HH:** Certainly. But if time is spent in some manner which does not in any way disturb your equilibrium or anybody else's, it gives you some mental repose.

**D:** *Such a repose is found only in sleep.*

**HH:** Quite so. But we cannot sleep always. We seek such mental repose even while awake. It is not possible for us to sit vacant minded. Our mind has to be given some work. The least harmful work that we can give to it is to think, not of the exciting things which disturb our equilibrium, nor of concrete things which may have a personal relationship to ourselves and may therefore tend to excite our passions, but to think of abstract things, say about the origin of the world and such other things.

**D:** *That will be giving way to mere speculation.*

**HH:** What if it is so? You hurt nobody by it and you give your mind some innocent work. And there are some of us who think that you will be benefiting yourself thereby. Whether we are right or not, it does not matter. You cannot say that there is any harm in such speculation.

**D:** *But what is the use of it?*

**HH:** It helps you to spend time. What more use do you want? If there is some use, as we say, well and good. If there is none, you do not lose anything. Why not therefore you spend some of your time in studying philosophy and allied

subjects, if only to pass the time?

*D: I have read a few books, but I have found them to be mere words.*

*HH: What more can you expect in a book? You must supplement it by your own thinking. Since you have read some books on the subject, you must have formed some idea about such things as the evolution of the universe and the existence of God.*

*D: Books do not give us any definite ideas. Each author adopts his own line of speculation and wants to make out that it is superior to every other. Further, in the very nature of things, it is not possible to form any definite idea about such subjects. A writer may present an idea in as definite a form as possible, still there can be no finality about it for somebody cleverer than him can prove it to be baseless.*

*HH: That is inevitable in all intellectual processes. Apart from minor differences, are the modern thinkers agreed at least on this point that, if the world had a beginning, it had a single undifferentiated cause from which it took its birth?*

*D: I think they are, though they postulate the exact nature of that cause variously. Some think that there was at the beginning a nebulous mass of atoms.*

*HH: So do our tarkikas. Were those atoms at rest or were they active in the pre-creation stage?*

*D: The scientists now tell us that the atoms are never at rest but are incessantly active and ever stored with energy.*

*HH: Are these primary atoms conceived of as particles of gross matter which are kept in motion by a force outside*

them or are they conceived of otherwise?

**D:** *The latest theory is that the atom is itself a gross form of the infinite energy which is inherent in it.*

**HH:** Whatever it be, scientists realise that it is energy or force which gives substance or existence to the atom or which rules its activities.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** They will also have to grant that that energy is common to all atoms, is homogeneous and is infinite.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** As energy can be transmuted, there is no reason to suppose that the primal energy in one atom is of a different sort from that in another.

**D:** *Of course, not.*

**HH:** Our hypothesis will therefore be very much simplified if we postulate the existence of a single energy or force which is infinite in capacity and takes on the form of atoms under certain conditions.

**D:** *The Western scientists also are now approximating to that idea.*

**HH:** They will have to, if they are logical. This infinite force then may be taken to be the prime causal material of the universe?

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** But the universe is not mere matter which we can

trace to atoms. You and I exist. Apart from our physical bodies which are, of course, matter, there is the spark of intelligent consciousness in us which cannot come under the category of matter; and that also has to be explained if a complete explanation of the universe is attempted. How do the scientists see to explain it?

*D: The scientists proper concern themselves only with the material universe.*

*HH: But there must have been thinkers who have considered the other aspect also.*

*D: Yes, there are some such thinkers, but I do not think that they have postulated a prime cause for the intelligent principle in us. They have answered either that such principles do not exist independent of our bodies or that they are eternal and cannot be traced to another cause.*

*HH: Why did they not consistently assume that the world had no beginning and cannot therefore be traced to a cause?*

*D: The variedness of the world requires some explanation.*

*HH: So does the variedness of our souls.*

*D: Bereft of extraneous things, there is no reason for our assuming that one soul is different from another.*

*HH: It is equally so in matter. Bereft of extraneous things, there is no reason for our assuming that one atom of matter is different from another. In fact, you traced all atoms to a primary causal force where there was no variedness.*

*D: Yes.*

**HH:** My only point is, why don't you consistently and for the same reasons postulate the existence of a primary causal intelligence responsible for the world of infinite souls?

**D:** *We may do so.*

**HH:** Then, adopting the method of scientists, we may arrive at the conclusion that there is a primary causal force responsible for the universe of matter and also there is a primary causal intelligence responsible for the universe of souls. We must also grant that each of such primary causes has infinite power of expression.

**D:** *Yes, no doubt so.*

**HH:** Our hypothesis will be much more simplified if, instead of assuming two primary causes, we assume only one and characterise it as force endowed with intelligence or as intelligence invested with force.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** That is exactly what we do in our philosophy. When we conceive of the root cause as force endowed with intelligence, we call it *sakti*; when we conceive of it as intelligence endowed with force, we call it *Chit*.

**D:** *I see.*

**HH:** But even in this hypothesis we have the two independent conceptions of force and intelligence subsisting together, though in intimate correlation.

**D:** *It is so.*

**HH:** We can still further simplify our hypothesis if we can attribute to that root cause a single characteristic which is

common to both force and intelligence and which can take on the form of force or intelligence according as we view it from the standpoint of the universe of matter or from that of the souls. In other words, we may postulate that root cause as undifferentiated intelligence force (*Chit-sakti*). We call that *Brahman*. As intelligence and force are but aspects of the same entity, we can characterise it only by saying that it is; and we therefore sometimes give it the simpler name of *Sat*, Being.

*D: But all this is only speculation.*

*HH:* It is, if we ignore the stable authority of the Vedas, which enunciate and proclaim such a fact. Apart from this, what does it matter if it is only speculation? As I have already mentioned, it hurts nobody.

*D: But is that any reason for wasting our brains on this matter?*

*HH:* It is far better than wasting our brains on any other matter. Further, there is a great positive benefit also.

*D: What is that?*

*HH:* Suppose a man is too feeble to walk; does it not gladden his heart to know that he has someone who is strong and willing to support him? Another man may be very ill; will it not be some relief to him to know that there is a kind doctor near at hand to attend to him? Another still may be sorely tried by poverty; will not his trouble be alleviated by his knowing that there is a rich and kind relative close by who can place him above want?

*D: Certainly.*

**HH:** Every moment of our lives we are face to face with innumerable causes of sorrow; sometimes ill-health, sometimes poverty and so on. Will it not gladden our hearts to know and to feel that there is somebody else close at hand who can relieve us of the causes of our sorrow, and give us comfort, if only we ask for it?

**D:** *It is certainly a consoling thought.*

**HH:** There is no use in looking up to another sick man when you are sick or to another poor man when you are poor.

**D:** *Certainly not.*

**HH:** We must then think of one who is strong and healthy or who is rich.

**D:** *Of course.*

But our difficulties do not end with illness or poverty?

**D:** *No. The difficulties to which we are subject are infinite in number.*

**HH:** In every one of our difficulties, it will be a relief to know that there exists a friend who is free from that difficulty.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** We must therefore know as many such free persons as the number of difficulties which trouble us.

**D:** *But that is not possible, as the number of difficulties is infinite.*

**HH:** Quite so. It will therefore be a great relief to us if we

can find one person who is free from all difficulties?

*D: Certainly, but where are we to find him?*

*HH: Death is one of the troubles of this world?*

*D: Certainly.*

*HH: Birth is equally a trouble?*

*D: Undoubtedly, in fact it is the prime trouble which leads to all other troubles.*

*HH: It will therefore relieve us to know that there is a friend who is not subject to birth or death and can in addition cure us of both these ills.*

*D: Logically it is so.*

*HH: Ordinarily we are not content with mere freedom from troubles, for we want our desires to be satisfied; and our desires are equally infinite in number. We would therefore like to have some friend who can fulfill all our wants. Our desires are not only infinite in number, but are also unlimited in extent. No rich relative, howsoever wealthy he may be, can undertake to fulfill all our desires; even if he had the will, his wealth would be exhausted in course of time. It will therefore be well if our hypothetical friend had inexhaustible wealth. One of your friends may be very rich, but he may not have ready cash with him when you want it; in that case he cannot give you instant relief. Our supposed friend must therefore be not only all-rich but he must be so at all times. Further, if your rich friend has to await the arrival of his cashier or has mislaid the key of his safe, he cannot be immediately helpful to you. If you have such a friend at Madura, you cannot have him at Mysore unless you take*

him there with you. It will certainly be more convenient if your friend could be at any place where you wanted him, without the need for your taking him there. Proceeding on the same line of reasoning, we may say that it would be a great relief to you to feel that there is a friend ever ready to help you, who can be everywhere with you; who can do anything for you, who knows everything, who is himself free from trouble of any kind whatsoever and who has the desire and the ability to satisfy all your wants and to free you from all your troubles.

*D: But such a friend is a purely hypothetical one?*

*HH:* So what? To feel, rightly or wrongly, that such a friend exists does give us relief. From the nature of the numberless characteristics which we require in such a friend, we must postulate of him omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. With our limited intellect, it is difficult for us to conceive of such a friend and impossible to visualise him in actual life. If therefore somebody, who is deeply interested in us and in whom we place full reliance, informs us of the existence of such a friend, we shall feel very greatly relieved. In case we happen to doubt the veracity of the statement of our informant, we will not be able to prove it wrong because with our limited intellect we have no means of doing so. But in case we have complete faith in our informant, we become secure in the resultant feeling of the ever-true presence of that all-powerful friend. He who has or who acquires such intense faith can have no fear of despair, believing as he does that that friend being all-knowing and all-powerful will relieve him of all sorrow when the time comes. Even when he does not get any relief, he would console himself with the thought that perhaps in the all-wise dispensation of that friend, this sorrow is itself the best for him under the circum-

stances. Therefore, apart from the abstract question whether the existence of such a friend, whom we call God, can be proved or demonstrated, there can be no denying the fact that the belief in such a friend is of great practical benefit.

*D: How can we believe in a person of whose existence there is no proof?*

*HH:* Do we believe only in those things whose existence is proved? If we limit our belief to such things it will be impossible to do anything in this world. We have to have faith in the words of everyone that comes into contact with us. As a stranger standing by the road directs you, at your request, to a house you are searching for, you do not embark on an enquiry as to his honesty or as to the correctness of his knowledge; but, placing immediate and implicit reliance on him, you go as directed by him. If then you reach the wrong house, it will be time enough to find fault with him. If, however, before following his directions you want him to prove to you that he is right, the only thing he can do is to take you by the hand and lead you to the house; even then you must be prepared to go with him. It will not do if you refuse to move a single step and yet expect him to prove the correctness of his statement. Similarly, when you have absolutely no reason to doubt the good faith of our ancient seers who proclaim God, you must be prepared to place implicit faith in their words. If you follow their dictates and find at the end that they were wrong, it will be time enough then to blame them, but not till then.

*D: The seers were as much human beings as ourselves. How did they happen to know of God when we do not?*

**HH:** They did so because they had implicit faith in the words of their teachers and earnestly followed their instructions for the realisation of God.

**D:** *If that is the answer, further question will arise as to how did those teachers know? And this question will have to be repeated ad infinitum without any finality.*

**HH:** Certainly so, if we do not grant the existence of some primal person who knows the truth without the need to learn from another.

**D:** *Who is he?*

**HH:** Our old friend again, the Omniscient God Himself. The Vedas are His breath and the fountainhead of all right knowledge. Have faith in God, His words and His servants. You will feel before long an immense relief. The thought of His ever-living presence with you will be a great solace to you. Once you begin to feel such a presence, a joy unknown to you ever before will begin to be felt. And you will then realise that time is not something to be merely spent in some pursuit or other, but has to be intensively lived in the pursuit and enjoyment of the bliss of peace. There will no more be any room for pessimistic thoughts nor will life seem a blank with no purpose to serve.

Source: **Dialogues with The Guru** compiled by R. Krishnaswami Iyer

## **The Means of Happiness**

In one of the quiet villages where His Holiness was camping for a few days, a party of villagers, including Brahamans, came one evening to pay their respects to him and while doing so their spokesman said:

**D:** *Till some years back, our village was a prosperous one. During recent years, however, it has gone down very much. We pray therefore that your Holiness will be pleased to confer your blessings upon us, so that the village may once again get back to its former prosperity.*

**HH:** Certainly the Lord will listen to your earnest prayers. But I desire to point out that an appeal to the Lord is necessary only when the remedy is not in our hands.

**D:** *How is the remedy in our hands?*

**HH:** You tell me that the village has gone down in prosperity during the recent years. But, if my information is not incorrect, there are more storeyed houses now than before and the houses are mostly built in stone, brick and mortar and are well lighted, well ventilated and attractive, quite unlike the mud-walled dark and dingy thatched huts in which your forefathers spent their lives.

**D:** *It is no doubt so.*

**HH:** You wear clothes finer and costlier than what your ancestors were content with and have very many things which they never even dreamt of

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** While they traveled by rickety carts along muddy roads to villages only a few miles away, you can now travel by the best of motor cars over well-paved roads to places thirty times more distant in about the same time.

**D:** *It is true we have all this.*

**HH:** While they had to be content with the oil lamp of

local manufacture to light their houses, you get yours from across the seas; you have brilliant lights now, even if electric installations have not yet reached your village.

**D:** *No doubt, we have.*

**HH:** Then what is your complaint? You have in abundance all the requisites of comfort and happiness, far more than your ancestors had. What more do you want?

**D:** *It is true that we have all these things, but the fact remains that we are not as comfortable and happy as our forefathers.*

**HH:** How can that be? If the means of happiness have, as you admit, increased, happiness also must have increased. It cannot possibly be reduced in any case.

**D:** *It is however reduced and we desire to know how we can regain the old happy state.*

**HH:** Then we must enquire into the matter a little deeper. There must be something wrong somewhere. If, as you admit, the means of happiness have increased, the only possible logical conclusion is, either that we are wrong in the assumption of the real means of happiness, assuming that they are real means. We shall first consider whether the modern improvements that you now enjoy are really the means of happiness. Ordinarily, we deduce the relationship of cause and effect between two things if one of them invariably precedes the other. This method is positive and is known as the *anvaya* method. The negative method is known as *vyatireka*, that is, when we deduce the relationship of cause and effect between two things by noticing that the absence of the one invariably precedes the absence of the other. We

note that the existence of wet clay invariably precedes the making of a clay pot. We note also that if no wet clay is available no clay pot can be made. We infer from these two parallel and corroborating facts that wet clay is the cause and the pot is the effect. Similarly, if we want to verify the statement that the modern advantages are the cause of happiness, we must adopt these two methods. Now you find that you enjoy these modern amenities and yet have no happiness?

*D: It is so.*

*HH:* That means that the reasoning by the *anvaya* method does not lead you to the conclusion that they are related as cause and effect.

*D: It seems so.*

*HH:* You further admit that your forefathers did not have these modern amenities and yet were happy.

*D: They were.*

*HH:* This again means that the reasoning by the *vyatireka* method also does not establish such a relationship.

*D: It is so.*

*HH:* It follows therefore that the modern amenities are not the real means of happiness.

*D: Logically it does.*

*HH:* But we do want happiness?

*D: Certainly.*

**HH:** We must not therefore stop with merely throwing overboard the advantages that we have, but must seek to know what are the real means of happiness and try to obtain them.

**D:** *No doubt, but what are those means?*

**HH:** That is exactly the question to be considered now. Adopting the same line of reasoning, we must ascertain what means were present when our ancestors were happy and what is absent in us now when we are not happy.

**D:** *Certainly, but what is that?*

**HH:** Think for a while yourself they performed their daily Vedic rites and attended punctiliously to the dictates of the *Dharma sastras*. Did they not?

**D:** *Certainly they did.*

**HH:** Now, you neglect them, don't you?

**D:** *I fear, we do.*

**HH:** They had *achara* or right conduct and had great regard for virtues like truth. You cannot say that you have such a conduct or such a regard.

**D:** *I must confess, we have not.*

**HH:** Why did they perform their religious duties so well and why do you neglect them?

**D:** *I suppose the times are responsible for it.*

**HH:** That is a lame excuse and explains nothing. The truth is that you are wanting in the faith that your ancestors had.

**D:** *That is true.*

**HH:** It seems, therefore, that people were happy when they had faith and acted according to it and that people are not happy when they are wanting in faith and neglect their duties.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** *Sraddha* or faith and *Dharma* or right action are thus invariably present where happiness is found and are invariably absent where happiness is not found. They are therefore the cause of happiness. Get them back and you will get back your happiness.

**D:** *But we see even now that there are a large number of people who have sraddha and stick to their Dharma, but are no more happy than ourselves.*

**HH:** That is not correct. It may be that they are not in as affluent circumstances as others but, as I have pointed out, that is no criterion of their happiness. Happiness is a state of mind and cannot be gauged by the quality or quantity of external possessions.

A person may be the lord of all the three worlds and yet be unhappy another may be the poorest of beggars and yet be the happiest man in the world.

**D:** *I quite see it. On what then does happiness depend?*

**HH:** Ordinarily speaking, we say that we are happy when we get the thing we are longing for.

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** At the time when we are longing for a thing, our mind

is in a state of unrest; but when we get that thing, the state of unrest is replaced by a sense of rest or peace.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** We say, again, that we are happy when we get rid of a thing which we were loathing.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** At the time when we are loathing a thing, our mind is in a state of unrest; but when we get rid of that thing, the state of unrest is replaced by a sense of rest or peace.

**D:** Yes.

**HH:** In either case, therefore, it would seem that happiness is practically identical with the feeling of rest or peace. It does not matter what exactly is the immediate occasion for it, whether it be the obtaining of a desirable object or the getting rid of an undesirable object. Happiness follows when a preceding state of unrest is ended.

**D:** *It is so.*

**HH:** It cannot matter also how that preceding state of unrest is ended. Obtaining a thing or getting rid of another is the ordinary method of stopping the unrest. But, if there is some other method by which it can be stopped, even then happiness is bound to follow.

**D:** *Certainly.*

**HH:** The number of things in the world that can awaken desire is infinite. If a man gets a particular thing, the mental unrest caused by the longing for that thing may cease, but it will only be replaced by another mental unrest caused by the

longing for another thing. The process will be repeating itself *ad infinitum* as there is no limit to the number of things which can be desired. It is therefore practically impossible to obtain absolute mental rest by trying to satisfy our longings. Similarly, the number of things that are undesirable is also infinite. If you get rid of a particular undesirable object, no doubt you get mental peace for the moment; but the next moment you will become restless, because another thing will be troubling you. The process here also will be going on indefinitely and interminably as the things that may give us trouble in the world are countless. It is equally impossible therefore to obtain absolute mental rest by trying to get rid of or avoiding troublesome things.

*D: But we do want mental peace.*

*HH:* Quite so. If, therefore, we seek to allay our unrest by trying to secure the things which the mind asks for or to get rid of the things which disturb it, we must ever remain searching for peace, which never can be attained. It must also be borne in mind that it is not quite within our competence to obtain or get rid of a particular thing at our pleasure; in fact, we are slaves of circumstances, if we depend upon them for our happiness.

*D: How else then are we to get peace and happiness?*

*HH:* Is it a necessary condition of health that it must have been preceded by a state of ill-health?

*D: Certainly not.*

*HH:* A man is said to be healthy when he has no sickness. He need not have been sick before.

**D:** *No.*

**HH:** It will therefore, be foolish to define a healthy man as one who has suffered from a disease and is now free from it. Certainly such a man maybe called healthy but the expression 'healthy man cannot be applied to him. Freedom from sickness is a condition of health but certainly not an antecedent sickness and a recovery from it.

**D:** *Quite so. But I fail to see the relevancy here.*

**HH:** Similarly, happiness can only mean a freedom from unhappiness; it cannot be a necessary condition of happiness that it should have been preceded by a state of unhappiness. A man whose mental equilibrium has been disturbed by an attraction to a particular thing or by a repulsion to another may be called happy when the equilibrium is once again restored by the thing being obtained or got rid of, as the case may be. But, it will be foolish to say that all happiness necessarily assumes a previous state of unrest.

**D:** *It will be so.*

**HH:** As we can conceive of health without assuming a preceding sickness, so must we be able to conceive of happiness without assuming a preceding mental unrest. In fact, the health which is not preceded by a sickness is more natural, perfect and permanent than the one which comes into being on the cessation of a sickness. Similarly, the happiness which is not preceded by a mental disturbance will be more natural, perfect and enduring than the one which follows a mental disturbance.

**D:** *It is bound to be so. But how can we get such a happiness? Ordinarily we get it only by seeking pleasure or avoid-*

*ing pain?*

**HH:** Quite so. But, if there is a third method by which you can have happiness without undergoing the antecedent trouble of seeking pleasure or avoiding pain, you will agree with me that the happiness thus secured will be more perfect.

**D:** *Certainly, but what is that third method?*

**HH:** It is only this. Merely cease to submit yourself to that antecedent trouble.

**D:** *How can we do that?*

**HH:** Man is and remains healthy when he refuses to submit himself to anything which may cause sickness. Is it not so?

**D:** *Yes.*

**HH:** Similarly, man can be happy by refusing to submit himself to anything which may disturb his mental equilibrium and make him unhappy. It is only an application of the maxim that prevention is better than cure. For calling yourself clean, it is not necessary that you dip your hands in mire and then wash it off.

**D:** *I now understand that the happiness which results from attraction or repulsion is not real happiness. Real happiness is only that which is the concomitant of mental equipoise unrelated to any attraction or repulsion.*

**HH:** *Quite so.*

**D:** *But, how can we acquire and retain such a mental equipoise in the midst of this vast universe of things which either attract or repel?*

**HH:** Anyhow, this is certainly a more practical method than the one of trying to exhaust the inexhaustible store of things, desirable and undesirable.

**D:** *This method may be foolish but the other does not seem to be practical.*

**HH:** Why not? Suppose you have about twenty articles in your room every one of which is likely to distract you by its very sight. Which is the more practical method, to prepare cases for enveloping every one of them or to shut your eyes?

**D:** *Certainly, the latter is easier.*

**HH:** Similarly, it is impossible for you to regulate, modify, annihilate or create at your pleasure the infinite things of the universe which are likely to disturb you. But you can so regulate your own mind that it may gradually cease to be disturbed by them. This is quite within your competence. Your forefathers were happy, not because they had more objects of pleasure or less causes of trouble, but because they were able to retain their mental equilibrium, which gave them rest, peace and contentment and, therefore, happiness. They did not depend upon outside things to make them happy, nor did they concede to outside things the capacity to make them unhappy. Their feeling of rest and peace, contentment and happiness, was normal, natural and healthy and, therefore, lasting. You must also cultivate that feeling if you want to be happy. Such a feeling is born and ingrained in the *Brahmana* especially, and if he neglects it and seeks happiness in the outside world, he is seriously impairing his chances of getting it again in the next birth, for God will be quite justified in withholding a gift which the donee does not appreciate at its proper value when he has it with him. Never let go

your birthright or *svabhava* of contentment and never give the go-by to your *sva-dharma* or duty. Everything will right itself in due course. Make honest and sincere attempt to regain and retain your *brahmaniam* in the firm faith that God is ever with you to help you.

*D: We shall try our best, but these happen to be very bad days for the Brahmanas.*

*HH:* When did the bad days begin? You must bear that also in your mind. They began when the *Brahmanas* swerved from their *achara* and *Dharma* and entered the field of competition in the pursuit of worldly things. They forgot that they were most ungratefully misusing the heritage of ages. The others, who were left behind the *Brahmanas* in this race, first looked upon them with admiration and later on with envy and now with hatred. Let the *Brahmanas* withdraw from this race they will once again regain and command the respect which is their due. They commanded respect before, not because they were richer or stronger than others, but because of their contentment, which made them happier than the richest and because of their *Dharma*, which made them stronger than the strongest. The so-called bad days are therefore only of our own making. We can at any moment put an end to them, so far as every one of us is concerned, by reverting to the simple faith and the upright conduct, the religious fervour and the peaceful contentment of our fathers. I think that the bad days will turn out to be really useful and not after all bad, if they but make the *Brahmanas* realise the depth of their fall from their true ideal and induce them to make honest endeavour to recover it.

Source: Dialogues with The Guru compiled by R.Krishnaswami Iyer

## **GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT WORDS**

ACHARA – Right conduct.

ACHARYA – A spiritual guide, one who has mastered the codes of achara (right conduct), observes them himself and makes others observe them properly.

ADHARMA – Conduct opposed to *Dharma*; action prohibited by the Sastras.

ADHAVA – A woman without husband.

ADHIKARA – Competency, necessary qualification requisite for a particular course of study or practice.

ADITYA – The Sun God, son of Aditi.

ADRISHTA – Literally, unseen. Particularly applied to the unseen store of past karma which is beyond our vision till it manifests itself.

*Advaita* – Literally, non-dual. The name is applied to the system of thought known as non-dualism propounded in the Upanishads and expounded by Sri Sankaracharya.

AGNIHOTRA – The daily sacrifice in fire enjoined by the Vedas.

ANANDA – Bliss.

ANTARYAMI – The inner Ruler. The name applied to the Godhead when conceived of as controlling the entire universe from within.

ANUMANA – The process of reasoning, inference.

ANVAYA – The method of reasoning by which we deduce the relationship of cause and effect between two things by perceiving that the existence of one of them is invariably

preceded by the existence of the other.

ASTIKA – One who grants the existence of 1. God, 2. Other regions of experience, and 3. Other births than the present one.

ASTIKYAM – The state of being an Astika, a believer.

BHAJANA – Generally, worship. Particularly applied to a set of devotional exercises usually accompanied by music.

BHAKTA – A devotee.

BHAKTI – Devotion.

BHRAMA – Misconception, illusion, wrong knowledge.

BHASMA – Sacred ashes.

BRAHMA – The name given to the Absolute when viewed as the creator of the universe. He is conceived of in devotional literature as having his special abode in the region known as Satya Loka.

BRAHMACHARYA – Studentship, primarily for the study of the vedas.

BRAHMAN – The Ultimate Reality whose essential characteristics are absolute existence, absolute consciousness and absolute bliss and which transcends all limitations.

BRAHMANA – A member of the class of that name among the four main classes into which Hindu society is classified in the *sastras*, namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra.

BRAHMANYAM – The spiritual status of a Brahmana.

BRAHMANANDA – The bliss of the Absolute Self.

CHARVAKA – Literally, sweet-tongued. A materialist ac-

according to whom this body is the Self, its gratification the goal of life and its dissolution salvation.

CHIT – Consciousness, intelligent principle.

CHIT-SAKTI – Consciousness-energy, intelligence-cum-force.

DEVA – Literally, a shining one, a celestial being (masculine).

DEVATA – Same as *deva* or *Devi*.

DEVI – Literally, a shining one, a celestial being (feminine).

DHARMA – The essential or ordained function, duty as enjoined in the Scriptures. Generally, the law governing or regulating conduct.

DHARMIKA – One who conforms to *Dharma* in his conduct.

DVIBHASHI – Literally, able to speak two languages. Corrupted into Dubash. A person who can act as an interpreter between two persons who do not understand each other's language.

GANESA – The God of learning.

GNYANA – Knowledge. Particularly, the knowledge of the Absolute Reality leading to freedom from phenomenal life.

GOPICHANDANA – A special kind of light yellow mud, sacred to Visnu.

HIRANYAGARBHA – The name given to the first bom, that is, the being that comes into existence at the beginning of creation and who enlivens and ensouls the entire universe.

ISWARA – The Absolute Reality viewed in its relative as-

pect as the Lord of the universe.

JIVA – The individual soul by whose presence the body is said to live.

KALI YUGA – The present Hindu era, said to have begun about 3100 B.C.

KAMA – Desire. Particularly desire for sense gratification.

KANYA – An unmarried girl.

KARMA – Action. Specially, responsible action, good or evil. The name is also applied to the unseen effect of action already done which is awaiting manifestation.

KARMIC – Pertaining to karma.

LOBHA – Miserliness. Disinclination to part with what one has, sometimes used also to signify the longing for what one has not. Greed.

LOKA – Region of experience, a world.

LOUKIKA – A worldly person.

MAYA – The inscrutable power of *Brahman* responsible for all diversity. The differentiating principle conceived of as the power inherent in the Absolute.

MOKSHA – Literally, release. Freedom from all bondage, that is, final liberation leading to the state of unlimited existence, unlimited consciousness and unlimited bliss.

MATHA – A place where a sannyasin (recluse) resides. A monastery in general.

NASTIKA – One who denies the existence of all the following: 1. God, 2. Other regions of experience and 3. Other births than the present one.

TARKA – The science of logic.

TARKIKA – A logician.

UPANAYANA – Literally, taking near. The initiation ceremony done for the boys of the twice-born castes among the Hindus to qualify them for the study of the Vedas.

UPASANA – Literally, sitting near. One-pointed devotion.

UPASYA – The object of devotion.

UPASYA DEVATA – The particular God who is the object of devotion.

VAIDIKA – One who has studied the Vedas and regulates his conduct according to them.

VARA – A bridegroom.

VARA-SULKA – The fee paid to secure a bridegroom.

VASANA – The resultant tendency left by an action or an experience which generates the taste for or facilitates further action or experience of the same sort. Facility or taste.

VASANA SARIT – A stream of tendencies.

VEDA – The primary Holy Scriptures of the Hindus believed to be eternal.

VEDANTA – Literally, the last portions of Vedas namely the Upanishads. Derivatively, the philosophy enunciated therein.

VIDHAVA – A woman who has lost her husband.

VIDYA – Knowledge.

VIKSHA – Special, particular.

VISHNU – The name given to the Absolute when viewed as

the sustainer of the universe. He is conceived of in devotional literature as having His special abode in the region known as Vaikuntha.

VIVAHA – Sacrament of marriage.

VYATIREKA – The method of reasoning by which we deduce the relationship of cause and effect between two things by perceiving that the non-existence of the one is invariably preceded by the non-existence of the other.

YAGA – Sacrificial worship ordained in the *sastras*.



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