

# *The Eternal Message of the Gita*

SWAMI SIDDHESHWARANANDA<sup>1</sup>

Source: *Vedanta Kesari*

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## 2. Equal Vision

*Those who know the Self look upon a brahmin, humble and wise, a cow, an elephant, and even a dog or a pariah, with equality. (Gita V.18)*

THE EQUALITY of vision described in the above verse corresponds to what Meister Eckhart calls, "the presence of God":

'When one speaks of equality,' he writes, 'it does not mean that one should attribute the same value to all works, to all places, or to all men. That would be a grave mistake. indeed, it is more meritorious to pray than to spin, and the church is a nobler place than the street. Nevertheless in all your works you need to have the same spirit and the same trust, and preserve the same earnestness towards your God. Surely, if you would persevere in such equality, nobody would keep you from enjoying the presence of your God.

'On the other hand, he who does not thus truly

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- 1 A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, India, Swami Siddheswarananda (1897-1957) taught Vedanta in Europe from 1937-57—he was the Minister-in-Charge of Centre Védantique Ramakrichna, Gretz, France.
  - 2 This the 2<sup>nd</sup> of a series of independent commentaries by the Swami on various themes of the Gita-teachings published in French from Gretz in their *Bulletin des Activités Culturelles* No.2, September 1955. English tr. and edit by André van den Brink and René Tien of Centre Védantique Ramakrichna..

possess God in his innermost self, but is forced to seek Him constantly outside, in this or in that, and who seeks Him according to various modalities, with men, or in such and such a place, or through the intermediary of a work—he does not possess God.

'And then it easily happens that this man will run up against some obstacle, for he does not possess God, and it is not God alone whom he is seeking, whom he loves and has in view. So what hampers him is not only bad company, but also good company, not only the street, but also the church, not only bad talk and bad works, but also good works. For the obstacle lies in himself: God has not yet become everything to him. If God were everything to him, he would feel well and at ease in all places and with everybody. For he would possess God, whom none would be able to rob him of or remove from his work.' (Meister Eckhart, *Traitées et sermons*, Edition Aubier, p. 32).

But how to reconcile this equal vision (*sama-darshana*) with our different scales of values? How can they even coexist? In the same talk Meister Eckhart assures that it is possible: 'Observe well the manner in which you aspire towards your God. The disposition in which you find yourself in church or in your closet should be maintained and transported amidst the crowd, in the turbulence and hostility of the world.' Between this equal vision of things and the different values that we attribute to them, there should be neither opposition nor confusion. In fact, as we shall see later on, the confusion of values arises only in the absence of that vision.

From the Hindu point of view the hierarchy of values corresponds to the one which exists between the notions of *sattva*,

*rajas* and *tamas*. In his commentary on this verse Shankara observes that the brahmin represents *sattva*, the cow *rajas*, and the elephant *tamas*. 'But,' Shankara adds, 'In all of them the sage sees only the One, immutable, the One that cannot be affected by the qualities, not even by *sattva*, nor by the tendencies born from these qualities, whether they be *sâttvic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*.'

This contradiction is disturbing to us: Can one see the One and the many at the same time? Values imply the existence of distinctions, whereas an equal vision supposes that no distinctions are made. Values apply to different degrees of manifestation, whereas the equal vision is an intuition of the non-manifested Supreme (*akshara*) who constitutes (as we shall see in chapter 4 with its commentary on verse 8.20) the *Intemporal* Reality, Imperishable and unborn. This equal vision must necessarily efface all differentiation. How to reconcile two notions which seem to exclude each other mutually? How can distinction and non-distinction even coexist?

The problem disappears, if one understands that this vision is Existence (*sat*) Itself, Existence which can never be perceived, and to which, therefore, no scale of values can be applied. At the same time this vision is present in every perception, just as clay is present in every object made of clay. It is only through a verbal artifice that we draw a distinction between the equality of vision and the different values, for in reality *each value is the manifestation of the supreme Principle*. And when a being who is possessed of this equal vision finds himself in contact with a *sattvic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic* force, his behaviour will express the *transcendence* of that vision lying beyond all values. At every moment of his life the sage is integrated in this intemporal comprehension, seeing the same Principle in all manifestation. But he who does not have this

vision, this 'presence of God' within himself, will run up against obstacles. It is interesting to note that such a man will then be hampered, not only by bad company, but also by good company, not only by the street, but also by the church, not only by bad works, but also by good works.

It is only because our system of thinking is *not* based on this supreme understanding, that we are all the time running up against problems. He who is a seeker of God gives preference to the *sattvic* aspect of the manifestation, setting it against the *rajasic* and *tamasic* aspects: 'To him God has not yet become all': says Meister Eckhart. 'If God had become all to him, he would feel well and at ease in all places and with everybody.' Let us note that it is proper to give here to the word 'God' the same significance as to the term *Atman-Brahman*, the supreme Principle that is the source of all, both of evil and of good. In one of his sermons Meister Eckhart also calls it 'the Citadel of the soul' (*op. cit.*, p. 127). This, according to Chinese thought, is the *Tao* who reconciles the opposite principles, *Yin* and *Yang*.

If we maintain a partiality towards the *sattvic* aspect of the manifestation, setting it against the *rajasic* and *tamasic* aspects, the equality of vision will be denied to us. Zen also teaches us: 'To oppose what you like to what you don't like, this is the disease of the mind.' The equality of vision only comes with the *intemporal* knowledge. One cannot expect to attain it, unless one refuses all notion of duality. Here, then, one needs to be particularly attentive, for at every moment one should forbid oneself to fix the manifestation into modes or to interpret it according to value judgments. No doubt manifestation does involve modes and values for the one who sees it as manifestation, but such categories do not concern the sage any more. His understanding (*jñana*) which is not of the order

of the intellect, which is intemporal and immutable in its essence, embraces with the same regard what, to us, is multiple, what we call 'modes'. The sage knows that it is futile and vain to squeeze Nature, to want to reduce it to one single mode. What does it matter to him, if differences such as between the church and the street subsist?

When looking at it from the standpoint of manifestation, however, the sage's behaviour expresses a plenitude of love. In the eyes of all he remains on the plane of *sattva*, incapable of committing any immoral or antisocial act. If he enters into contact with the forces of *rajas* or *tamas*, he unconsciously exerts a *sattvic* influence on them, and in his radiance he transforms them for the welfare of all. A dynamic force which is all purity emanates from the sage whose presence, on the level of the manifestation, constitutes a blessing for the entire world. As to the vision itself, it is only accessible to those who have similarly attained the 'level' of non-duality (*advaita*).



*Even here (in this world), existence (earthly life) is conquered by them whose mind rests in **equality**, for Brahman is equal and faultless, therefore they abide in Brahman. — Gita (5.19)*



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