

By L. R. Pangarkar, B. A.

(1) I am directed by the obliging Editors of "Kalyan" to write a few lines on belief and no-belief. To think, write or speak of God is ever to me a thing of joy. It is a labour of love. The difficulty is my poor acquaintance with English. This is perhaps my first public utterance in English since my graduation in 1898, though I have been fondled and indulgently treated by my Marathi readers during the last 30 years or so! "Belief or non-belief" is to me like a set of light or no-light *i. e.* darkness. One is a positive entity, the other is a mere negation of it. I have struggled almost all my life to move in light and it goes rather hard upon me to think of no-light! Belief in God is a step to God-Realization. It is a subject, not of words, but of secret enjoyment, and I am conscious of my unworthiness. However, as a Marathi poet says, "Birds fly according to their might in the wide sky, even so do men think or sing of God." A supremely humble soul like myself may dare where a Tulasidas or a Tukaram trembles! A song or a prayer is a music of the soul, it purifies and enraptures the singer.

(2) The four questions put before me are:—

- (1) Why should we believe in God?
- (2) Where is the harm in not believing in His Existence?
- (3) What strong reasons do you put in support of God's Existence?
- (4) Will you kindly relate some incidents from your life which have strengthened your faith in God's Existence and His mercy?

(3) The first three questions are allied and deal with belief or no-belief, the fourth is personal and rather delicate. To my mind—no reasons, no arguments, no amount of logic would turn a non-believer into a believer, nor does a believer proceed to believe from arguments. We do not love from arguments. We believe or love because we cannot help doing so! We do not love our parents from arguments. Love is perhaps an inner organ, with which some are born, some are not! It is said of Bhakta Prahlāda that he had a natural love for God—"तस्य वैसर्गिकी रतिः." Sage Ekanātha says

that he was born a Bhakta: since his very birth he was a lover and servant of God—it may be the result of good works in past lives. Pure, natural, unalloyed love is a divine gift. Poets, heroes, philosophers are, they say, born and not made; much more, therefore, is a lover of God born with love. This does not, however, preclude the possibility of a non-believer being transformed into a believer. I know of a man, who defied God and lived a life of sins for 50 years and then a sudden transformation came on him and the last ten years of his life he verily lived the life of a saint! Even confirmed unbelievers do learn to believe and even to love. There is not a sinner that cannot be reclaimed, not an atheist that cannot be brought round to believe. The man referred to above was suddenly thrown into the company of a pious *Yogi* who lived with him for six months, and one bright morning the sinner was turned into a sage! My point is a non-believer learns to believe not from arguments and reasons but by company with God-loving and pious men. *Satsanga* or pious and God-loving company is a great dynamic force, that rends rocks and makes them flow with springs of pure waters! Ajāmila, Aghasura, Bakī and Pingalā are so many instances to quote. The author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a brilliant example. Even Tulasidas was set right by the admonitions of his wife. Tulasidas has rightly observed “विदुः सतसंग विवेक न होई”—man is brought to the right path of thinking only by the company of godly men.

(4) Belief in God is the first step to God-realization. *Śraddhā*, *Bhāva*, *Vīśvāsa*, faith, all these mean one thing—unwavering belief in the Existence of God. Want of belief blocks all way to Realization. Belief develops into *वक्ति* or

वक्ति—love of God. Love of God and God's creatures is *Bhakti*. aith is the door to the knowledge of God—अज्ञानाच्छ्रद्धा ज्ञानम्, faith—not logic—वक्तव्यज्ञानम् ज्ञानम्. No! All logic and reason quail before Him, are lost in Him. He is beyond them—“बो बुद्धेः परमस्तु सः”. He is beyond intellect, mind and all sense-organs. When once you realise Him, intellect, mind, sense-organs and body, nay, the whole universe are realised to be worked by Him, to be in Him! In fact, then, there is nothing but Him. He and He alone is, He is everything. You lose yourself in Him. That is Realization. The ‘नामदीयं सूक्तं’ of the *R̥gveda* and the ‘श्लोक’ of the *Bhāgavadgītā* (Chap. xv. verses 12 to 18) give us, if words can give, the most correct idea of God, though God is not a idea but a reality. To attain that Highest, सत्त्वना is essential—man must move by the ‘Path.’ Knowing and thinking alone are not enough, being and becoming are necessary. By *Bhakti* or love unto Him who is both manifest and unmanifest, *i. e.*, सकृण and निरुण, you can rise to the Eternal One. The One is many and many is one! Now, what is the Path? Where will you find it? Who will show it? Who but those that have gone by the Path and reached the Goal. Saints and sages alone can show it! By the force of Self-experience they tell us that it is for you to find it, it is inside you. Path and goal are one! Reading the Upaniṣads, the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgawata*, all the Bibles of the world, the works of saints and sages in pious God-loving company; daily worship and prayer, visit to sacred temples and shrines; avoidance of profane books, men and talks—these are some of the *Sādhanās* essential for all seekers—especially for beginners. They purify the soul—rather convince that the soul is already ever pure! Open the door of your heart to receive God and you find that He is

already there! Who but He doth work the machine of your body? As Bhakta Dhruva says, "One who, in me, stirs up words on my tongue, puts motion in my hands and feet, enables me to hear sounds and pervades my whole body—Him I behold, my salutations to Him." God is in me and outside me. All religion is realization. It is losing individual consciousness (अज्ञान) and realising that He alone is and He is everything. He pervades and is the pervaded. He is personal and impersonal. He is form and no form. He is worshipper and the worshipped. He is all-in-all. He is a beautiful whole—an undivided Gem. Belief, Faith, Love, Realization—what a mountain of strength and delight it is to the soul. A Believer easily combats enemies within and is strong. What has non-believer to fall back upon? Health, wealth, relations and friends do not stand him in need; he is a poor forlorn thing! To a believer, God is his pillar of strength and joy. "संशयस्या विनश्यति" and "न मे मङ्गः प्रणश्यति" are two extremes. Choose whichever you like!

The lord has given so many charters to His Bhaktas in *Bhagavadgītā*, the greatest Bible of the world:—

- (1) "योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ।
(I.X. 22)
- (2) ददामि बुद्धियोगं तं येन मामुपयान्ति ते ।
(X. 10)
- (3) तेषामज्ञानजं तमः । नाशयाम्यात्मभावस्यो...
(X. 11)
- (4) तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
(XII. 7)
- (5) अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ।
(XVIII. 66)

A believer has so many assurances from God Himself; a non-believer has none! What support does he expect and from what quarter? To a believer God's assurances are so many fortifications. He rests safe in these castles protected by the Master of this world.

(5) Born of God-loving and God-worshipping parents, brought up in an environment of piety, thrown in the company of pious men and women in my wide and intensive travels, and imbued with a passion for spiritual literature, I never felt the need of arguments to convince me of the Existence of God. I have ever felt His existence in every nerve and tissue of my body. His Mercy is my capital, His Kindness my armour, His thought my supreme delight, and conversations with His Bhaktas my very Heavens! What necessity is there for a fish to be taught to love waters? I have said of Bhakta Prahlāda that he had a natural love of God. It may seem preposterous for me to say the same, but the truth is none the less. As a flower flows along with the current of waters, so does my mind flow with the Ganges of Devotion. I believe and love God. The intense fervour of Tukaram it may be long for me to reach, but I am content to be an humble soldier in an army of God's Servants led by our saints and seers. The carriage that was derailed has been put right, and I feel happy and safe in the hands of Him who is both my Driver and Guard! All logic, all arguments and reasons have ere long melted in the pot of Faith! My mind, my intellect, my very soul has been captured by Him. He and He alone is, there is nothing but Him. To think of God and to love Him—Oh, what an ocean of delight! What a fountain of ecstasies!

(6) Shall I say plainly how I was saved from the rock of non-belief? In 1894 I was a college student in Poona. It was a period of transition. Old was giving place to new. Most of our educated men were influenced by Western life and thought. Mill, Spencer and Huxley ruled the minds of Educated Mahārāṣṭra for a quarter of a century. Our Professor of English and Logic and the Principal of our (Fergusson) College was Mr. Agarkar. He was a great and good soul and had been recognized as the pioneer of Social Reform. He preached new ideas to his students in college and to the people generally through his then popular paper "The Sudharak." He had his back turned upon Ancient Literature and Life. He was patriotic but was influenced entirely by West. I was connected with him for 6 years in school and college as a pupil. He directly preached Atheism. His tirades against Hindu Religion, Śāstras and everything that was old had and still have a great sway over the minds of young people. "Logic and Reasoning" were his chief weapons and he mercilessly attacked all ancient life and thought. At his instance a spell of non-belief fell upon me! I began to feel that the Universe was without God—"निराकृत्य". My mind was being tossed between faith and non-faith; there was a tussle between home influence and college influence. Torn from belief—wedded to ignorance though it then was—I felt uneasy and unhappy for a period of one year. I felt dejected, doubtful and bewildered. But I was destined for a mission of Faith and for work to regenerate and popularise the literature and the life of our saints. So God wished to save me from the pitch of non-belief. On a certain fine evening, while I sat musing on the top of a hill,

thirty miles from Poona, my musing led me from the transitoriness of this phenomenal world into the reality of God—from this mortal, finite and changing world into the Infinite and the Non-changing. For half an hour I lost myself entirely and then emerged—bathed in an ecstatic joy—from, shall I say, a condition akin to *Samādhi*! There was a change inside, a new birth. The *Samādhi* came unsought, purely through His Mercy. It has since been found to be unamenable to effort. It was not of the kind sought by Yogic practices. I was being waylaid, the Merciful God wished to save me. I felt He unfolded Himself to me once for all. I recovered an anchor for my belief, faith was restored. Next day I bought the volumes of Ramdas and Tukaram and entered into their spirit with a new vision. *Gītā* and *Bhāgavata*, Jnaneshwar and Ekknath, Ramdas and Tukaram have since been my inspiring companions. What with my reading and musing and what with the company of spiritually, advanced souls, I feel strong—I am fairly on a path leading to Godhood. I still revere and love my old professor. I have described the above incident in one of my poems, published in a small volume. Let me not be misunderstood. I have not yet realized. I have not yet been able to pursue my *Upāsana* with any diligence commensurate with Divine Mercy. In that I am a waverer, a sinner. I can say this much that from belief to faith and from faith to realization the path is smooth, cheering and blissful. God is really great and merciful and He is more anxious to save us than we are to seek Him. He loves all faltering and struggling souls. His compassion for them is unbounded. Complete self-surrender is what He expects from us

for our own good. He loves naked Gopis—selfless souls, stripped of all clothes of desires! He is full of Grace and looks with more than motherly affection on us all and is ever ready to help us on to Him. Let us move onward, *i. e.*, inward! To Him there is no onward and inward. He is near us, inside and outside us, manifest in every form, present in every creation. He watches our progress and leads us on unto Him. Let us learn to love Him through all creatures. Let every action of ours be service unto Him. Let us rejoice, we are of Him and in Him! He is all Joy—“सर्वो वै सुखः”, say the Upaniṣads. He is an ocean of Bliss, says Tukaram.

(7) I can call to memory another incident in my early life, proving the efficacy of prayers. I was then only eight. My father Rambhau was an exceedingly pious man. He used to get up early at four, every morning, bathe and engage himself in worship and prayers till it was past noon. He used to recite the whole of *Gītā* and give ten recitations of ‘Viṣṇu-sahastranāma’ every day. Modern people will not call him ‘educated,’ for he was a villager and knew only a smattering of Sanskrit, English nil! But, for purity of life and devoutness of soul he is unsurpassed. We used to live then in a village 16 miles west of Poona and some 12 miles north of Alandi, a sacred place known as the ‘Samadhi’ of Jnaneshwar, the well-known commentator on *Gītā*, the oldest poet, philosopher, and saint of Mahārāṣṭra, regarded universally as an Avatār of Viṣṇu. Now, it happened that at the age of eight I was attacked by

terrible fits; the number of fits went up to 8 or 10 a day. My mother and other relatives of mine had almost given me up for lost. My father was upbraided for negligence. Once he was forced to take me out, presumably to Poona, to consult medical experts. My father took me in a cart, and ordered the cart-man to take us to Alandi, instead of to Poona! We, thus, went to Alandi, bathed in the sacred Indrayani, and went to the temple of Jnaneshwar. My father devoutly worshipped and then put my head at the feet of Sri Jnaneshwar and with tears in eyes and with a full heart prayed loudly: “Oh! Jnaneshwar our Mother! I have placed this boy at your feet. I know no better *Vaidya* than you nor any medicine more efficacious than your *Charaṇa-tīrtha*, I here dedicate him to your service. You are his father, mother and saviour. Save him if you choose. He is made over to your Mercy.” The sincere and earnest prayer of a devout soul *is* heard, *is* ever responded to. I solemnly declare that since that moment the ugly fit never—not once—visited this mortal body and I was saved from the worst malady in my life and made over to the protection of the premier saint and Avatār of Mahārāṣṭra at an early age by my holy father. ‘Jnaneshwar * Mata ki Jaya.’

* May I mention here that as an humble service to Sri Jnaneshwar, I have given out three books in Marathi. They are:—

- 1 The Life and Works of Jnaneshwar.
- 2 The Prabhawal of Jnaneshwar, *i. e.*, Selected poems of Jnaneshwar and other saint-poets under His influence.
- 3 The History of Marathi Literature—Vol. I—P. 800.
—The Times of Jnaneshwar and Namdeo—*i. e.*, 12th and 13th Century Literature (just out).

