

God Embodied in Form.

(Questions and Answers.)

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Questioner—I have to ask certain questions on the subject of God embodied in Form. If you kindly give me the permission, I may do so.

Answer—Certainly, you may ask whatever you like without any hesitation. Whatever knowledge I possess on the subject, I shall impart to you without any reservation.

Q.—While considering the question of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Form, the question naturally arises in mind: Has God really any Form? If He has, what is the type or character of that Form? That is the main question. If Śrī Kṛṣṇa was either an Incarnation of God, or even God Himself, what was the character of the Body which He possessed and through which He appeared before the people who had the privilege of seeing Him actually in Form? Did He possess any other Body beyond that outer Form perceived by the senses? If He possessed any such Body, what was its type or character? These and other questions of a similar nature press the mind for a solution.

A.—It is true, God possesses a Form and an Abode, the descriptions of which are found in the Śāstras. Together with this, it is also mentioned in the Śāstras that God is Formless, He is Consciousness in its pure and Absolute sense, no Form can therefore be attributed to Him; that His Name, Abode and conceptions of the kind are all fanciful and imaginary, and so on. It is unnecessary to make it a point of controversy whether God does possess a Form or is Formless. Those who have their inner vision

opened know that He can be described both as possessing a Form and as Formless; as a matter of fact, He is beyond both the conceptions of Form and Formlessness.

Q.—In the Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, 'जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यम्', which means that His birth and action were both divine. This is no doubt a subject which has relation to the sport (लीला) of the Lord. It shows that His birth as an incarnation as well as His actions were out of the common, or supernatural. The word 'Birth' here clearly indicates His embodiment in a Form.

A.—God is subject neither to birth nor to *Karma* (action). He is not guided by Destiny in the form of *Prārabdha* (action which has begun to bear fruit). It is the *Jīva* (individual soul) who, according to the nature of his past actions, assumes a particular form or body through which he enjoys the fruits of his past actions and at the same time performs new actions the experiences of which are accumulated and stored in the form of seeds or *Samskāras*. These seeds or *Samskāras* being absent in God, He does not assume any body for the enjoyments of fruit of actions. He is devoid of the sense of 'I' and 'Mine', therefore He does not perform any action which may entangle or bind. His actions are not such that they may leave some seed for future fruition. To say nothing of God, even liberated souls become free from the tangle of birth and action (*Karma*). Although this is so, descriptions are found in the Śāstras of God taking a particular body or form, as well as of His actions.

But this does not mean that either that birth or that action is similar to the birth or action of ordinary souls. This has been made clear in the *Gītā* by the application of the word 'divine' in relation to God's birth and action. For the welfare and redemption of suffering humanity sometimes God Himself and sometimes His associates come down on earth and take the human form. The actions they perform in that life in human form are essentially different from the actions performed by ordinary souls; in fact, it will be no mistake if their action is styled as non-action. How can there be any doubt that an action which has no inspiration of Destiny at its source and does not lead to any enjoyment of fruit, is different from the action (कर्म) as it is known in the current sense of the term ? It is in order to bring out the difference between ordinary action and divine action that many people use the term sport (लीला) with reference to the latter.

Q.—There are people who believe and say that in respect of God the conceptions of birth on this earth and action (कर्म) are incongruous. How can these conceptions, they say, be attributed to one who is in essence all-pervading, indivisible Existence, who cannot be limited by space or time, who is actionless, absolute Consciousness and exists for all time in one state of Being ? Therefore, they urge there can be no Incarnation of God Himself. On examination and scrutiny this view does not appear to be unsound or illogical. Kindly enlighten me as to the conclusion of the Śāstras on this question.

A.—Child, you should realize that in the state of existence where all distinctions, differences or attributes are non-existent, there can arise neither any doubt, nor can there be any need or demand for a solution. Where, again, the effulgence of Truth swallows up and eliminates the experiences of

distinction and similarity both, there also there is no occasion or room for doubt. It is in the region where Time is operative and Nature or creation rules in her glory, where therefore there are manifestations of distinction, differences and inequality, it is there that doubts find their origin or source; it is in that state of existence where there is play of the pairs of opposites that questions of doubt and their solution arise. The form of God which is transcendent, unmanifest, stainless is not the subject of discussion here. His all-pervading, self-effulgent form also is beyond either thought or discussion. But the form in which He is the ruler and *Jīva* (individual soul) is the ruled, He is the embodiment of Bliss, and *Jīva* the embodiment of suffering; He is the dispenser of fruit of actions (कर्म) and *Jīva*, the enjoyer of that fruit, both evil and good; it is that Form of God which we shall consider and discuss. It is this Blissful and merciful Form that takes incarnation on earth. Souls who having reached this state of Bliss have attained qualifications similar to those of God may also and do come down on earth and incarnate themselves.

Q.—Is this Blissful Form of God eternal ? When He comes down and incarnates Himself, does He leave the eternal Form behind and take a Form subject to *Māyā* or creation ? If such is the case, then what is the speciality or particular excellence attaching to that assumed Form ?

A.—Yes, that Blissful Form of God is eternal—there is no leaving behind or assumption of that Form, there is no rising or setting in relation to it, that Form is beyond the influence of Time, unchanged and unchangeable. The Śāstras and saints term that Form as solidified Knowledge. It is not within the capacity of all to have a vision of that Form. Whoever sees It

becomes, indeed, blessed. Devarṣi Nārada went to Śvetadvīpa and had the privilege of a sight of Nārāyaṇa; but even he, according to the Śāstras, could not see Nārāyaṇa in His own real Form. Nārāyaṇa Himself said that Nārada could not see His real Form, what he saw was only a Form created by Māyā. It goes without saying that the Form which cannot ordinarily be seen even by a devotee of the status of Nārada must be difficult of perception for an ordinary aspirant.

Q.—I agree, this is true; but is the Form of God not accessible to view on account of its being beyond the reach of the senses ?

A.—No, that is not the case. There are many more things within Nature which are beyond the reach of the senses. Even if one acquires the capacity to see those things, one does not necessarily qualify himself to have a vision of God. When aspirants who have entered the realm of Sādhana keep on patiently and steadily advancing, many of them get these super-sensuous visions in a more or less degree. But this does not *ipso facto* qualify them for a vision of the Lord. The senses attached to the body have a limited capacity. When through spiritual practices and austerities they begin to be purified, they are gradually released from extreme dependence on or attachment to the body. That is to say, when through a comparative purity of the subtle body, this last begins to appear partly different from the gross or physical body, then the senses which are attached to it similarly become partly independent of the control of the gross or physical body. Nevertheless, the link between the two is never completely broken so long as the physical body is in existence.

Now, try to understand this point carefully. We see all varieties of forms

through our sense of sight. It is unnecessary to add that all these forms are material forms. Now, the sense of sight operates within certain rules and limits. For instance, the object of sight must exist within an area of clear light, the eyeballs must be free from defect, the object of sight must not be either too minute or too extensive, and there must be no obstruction between the eyes and the object of sight, etc. All these are hindrances to acquirement of knowledge through the sense of sight. When the sense of sight is subordinate to and under the influence of the gross, physical body and these hindrances are present, it cannot in that case come in touch with any external form. But when the relation between the senses and the body gets attenuated or loosened, then the senses acquire some amount of independence so that these hindrances cannot restrain their movement or activity. In that case, therefore, objects lying at a great distance may become perfectly visible, and even the minutest objects of creation may appear within the range of one's observation. Objects which are generally beyond the perception of senses of ordinary beings can be fully perceived by people who have acquired this qualification. This sight or vision is a sort of super-sensuous sight or vision.

Q.—How is the connection between the senses and the physical body attenuated or loosened ?

A.—We shall not enter into a discussion on this subject inasmuch as this is a question which has a bearing on the subject of Yoga. But this much you may know that as a result of purification of the heart, the gross physical body and the subtle body get more or less disjoined. In that case the senses also can function as if they were independent of the physical body.

Q.—Do you mean to say that this type of what may be termed super-sensu-

ous vision which may come in the life of a person as a result of purification of the heart is not a thing parallel or similar in nature to a vision of the actual form of the Divine.

A.—Yes, certainly, that is my point. Do you imagine that Devarṣi Nārada lacked in super-sensuous vision? Nevertheless, that power of vision of him did not help him to get a sight of the true Form of the Divine. It is true that the Divine Form is super-sensuous, but there are stages or grades even among super-sensuous things. A person entering the region beyond the senses does not necessarily enter the Abode of God. And this is also not a fact that the Form of God can never become an object perceivable by the senses.

Q.—These ideas seem to be difficult to understand or retain in the brain. The discussion of this subject makes it clear that I should properly know and understand the constituents of the body of an individual soul. It may be that an understanding of the secrets of the body of an individual will make it easy for me to understand the mystery attaching to the Form of God. How many are the bodies of an individual soul?

A.—In a general way you may take it that every individual possesses three bodies. There are many subtle factors even in the constitution of these bodies. The gross or physical body, the subtle body and the causal body—these are the three material bodies of a *Jiva*. Beyond this there is the soul of a *Jiva*, which in constitution is pure or absolute Consciousness.

Q.—Does God also possess different sheaths of bodies similar to what are possessed by a *Jiva*?

A.—No, in the case of God, it is His very spiritual essence (सत्त्व) which takes the form of a Body, that Body is a consolidated form of Consciousness

and Bliss; this difference has been brought out and hinted before. God does not possess the three different kinds of material and Mayic bodies as the physical or external, subtle and causal. For the possession of a material body there must be the sense of 'I' or 'Mine' (ego), which is lacking in God; therefore material objects cannot enter into the constitution of the Body of God. But although He does not possess the sense of 'I' or 'Mine' (ego), He can create it at will and assume it according to necessity; in that case He may even adopt a material body centred on that ego created by Himself. It must be remembered, however, that this ego is something extraneous and assumed, and so is the material body centred on it. In its ultimate analysis the *Jiva* is also devoid of a material body, for a *Jiva*, too, is in essence Consciousness itself. But from the point of view of differentiation *Jiva* in essence being a particle of the total Consciousness, which is God, he may while in the state of self-forgetfulness identify himself with the material body. So long as the ego and identification with the body persist, the *Jiva* must possess a material body. This rule, however, is not applicable in the case of *Jivas* who through devotion have raised themselves to the position of associates of God. Like God Himself, these also through assumption of a temporary ego may either create a new material body, or may enter an old body and give it a new lease of life. Ordinary *Jivas* who have no direct touch with the divine forget their true selves through the influence of *Māyā*, and being subordinate to the laws of creation identify themselves with their respective bodies which are also creations of *Māyā*. This ego persists up to the moment of the awakening of Consciousness or Knowledge; it totally disappears only with the rise of the sun of self-knowledge, when identification with the body also comes to an abrupt end.

In the Vedānta we find discussion on the gross, subtle and causal bodies considered in relation to the individual (part) as well as to the universe or whole. Are the three bodies or sheaths of the collective entirety of the same category as the different bodies or sheaths of an individual *Jiva*?

A.—Yes, certainly, they are so. The *Jiva*-ego possessing the individual gross, subtle and causal bodies is known by the names of *Vaiśvānara*, *Taijasa* and *Prāñña* respectively. And the ego possessing the cosmic gross, subtle and causal bodies is given the names of *Viśva*, *Hiraṇyagarbha*, and *Īśvara* respectively. Looked at from the higher spiritual standpoint both are *Jivas*. What is termed '*Īśvara*' here is not God eternal, but a created god. From the point of view of metaphysical reality, He is also a *Jiva*. The three aspects of *Brahmā* (Creator), *Viṣṇu* (Protector) and *Śiva* (Destroyer) are of this God—all being within the three *Guṇas*. God eternal is beyond the *Guṇas*. He manifests Himself through the operation of pure or transcendent *Sattva*, which is beyond the three *Guṇas*. This pure *Sattva* (विशुद्ध सत्त्व) being an eternal, indestructible principle, the Form of God manifested through it is also eternal and supernatural. We shall go more into detail on this subject as we proceed in our discussion.

Q.—Are we, then, to understand that in respect of God there is no distinction between part and whole, and that He does not actually possess any Body or Form?

A.—How can there be any doubt on this matter? Well, I shall not give a direct answer to your question; please hear it with some attention. The *Jiva* in its pure state of soul is a part of God, eternal, unmanifest, blissful, self-luminous, consciousness in essence, formless and unchangeable. In point of size *Jiva* (soul) is a particle or atom,

but this atom is possessed of this peculiarity that through its inherent quality of Knowledge or Consciousness, it is at the same time all-pervading. Knowledge is part of its being. Like the character of the soul, this Knowledge (ज्ञान) is a substance which is eternal, transcendent and blissful. The soul of every *Jiva* is different from the ego which gives him the character of a *Jiva*, but this difference cannot be expressed through words. Even when the distinction of attributes vanishes, this difference does not cease to exist. But the revelation or realization of real nature of the soul is not possible except through the special grace of God.

The *Jiva*-form which rests as a seed in the causal state of existence is the causal body; that is not the soul (स्वरूप) of a *Jiva*. This soul of a *Jiva* exists in a state which is beyond the operation of the wheel of cause and effect. The causal body also is in a sense eternal—it is eternal in a state of flux. The seed is never destroyed, neither has it a beginning. So long as the state of flux which governs creation lasts, till then the creation will also exist. The cause (कारण) has no outer form or expression (लिंग), but an outer form or subtle body grows out of it and assumes a gross form through the growth of a material encrustation. Through some inner urge of necessity or desire the cause is transformed into an effect or outer expression. To the extent this urge is satisfied and the desire is fulfilled, to that extent the *Jiva* is liberated. When the necessity or desire is totally satisfied one has not to remain subject to the wheel of creation. When the *Jiva* feels the presence of his ego in the causal state of existence, he observes the manifestation of a luminous symbol like a particle of lightning from his causal body. This symbol which is separated from and is a part of the causal body cannot know the source of its existence, which is the causal body. The form

which the symbol takes in the course of this natural evolution of creation is a form which is constant and eternal only in a relative sense. This form is an important and helpful factor in the evolution and continuance of creation. When the *Jiva* enters this symbolic body, he begins to imagine himself to be identical with this body. An effulgence or effulgences proceeding out of this symbol in its pure state enter the gross material world and, covered by material encrustation, develop as the gross, material body. The pure symbolic body observes, as it were, from a distance this sport of creation of which it is the centre; but its emanation or reflection which gets entangled in the gross body cannot know its origin or source. This happens due to the influence of ignorance or delusion.

When the *Jiva* identifies himself with the gross body, he imagines himself to be the gross body itself. But when through spiritual practices the reflection or emanation of the causal symbol entangled in the body gets somewhat liberated, then can he realize that the gross body is not the *Jiva* itself and that the symbol also is not a pure symbol because it possesses gross desires. It is this symbol which according to *Karma* takes and leaves behind gross physical bodies. There have been an innumerable number of such births and deaths, innumerable gross bodies have been adopted and left behind, and yet the symbol (लिङ्ग) has in essence remained the same. The form of this symbol is identical with the gross sentiments possessing a heart, and as transient as those sentiments, inasmuch as its relation with the gross, external world is not permanent. When purity of this symbol is attained through continued spiritual practices, it may be possible to realize the pure symbol (विशुद्ध लिङ्ग). And when the ego is surrendered to that pure symbol, the *Jiva* gets liberated from the cycle of births and deaths in

the gross world. For, when the symbol is freed from gross desires, it cannot possess any gross encrustation or body. The form of the pure symbol is extraordinarily luminous, enchanting to the mind and eyes, lovely and divine. All the regions of the Devas are identical in state to this pure symbol. But a *Jiva* attaining this state has to return and take birth on earth. But when the symbol is purified, he does not desire to remain attached to the gross world inasmuch as he loses all attraction for gross things. He then naturally returns to the causal state from where he descended. With greater purification and perfection of the symbol it is transformed and manifested in the form of the causal body itself. The splendour, beauty and elegance of the causal body is indescribable. The descriptions of the incomparable beauty of the god of love (Cupid) that are found in the Śāstras have reference to the original source of this causal body. On this subject there is much to be said, but this is not the occasion to enter into this discussion. This much, however, should be made clear that even the causal body is a material body. The soul (स्वरूप) of the *Jiva* is beyond this body. When it is impossible to describe even the beauty of the causal body, how can it be possible to describe the glory of the soul? Except through the grace of God, there is no way to realize the soul.

Q.—Then, is it to be understood that without crossing the causal region and liberation from the control of *Māyā*, it is not possible to obtain a vision of the true Form and Body of God?

A.—Yes, that is the point. The Supreme Form of God, which the authors of the Śāstras have described as the eternally-risen (नित्योदित) Form, can only be seen by those who are eternally liberated.

Q.—Some religious sects which are followers of the *Pañcharātra* school point

out that there are fivefold Forms of God,—what are the points of difference among these respective Forms ?

A.—There is distinction among them without any difference. The Supreme Form of God can be realized only by His constant associates and liberated souls. Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣwakṣena and others, whose knowledge is unobstructed for all time belong to the class of constant associates of God. And those who having withdrawn themselves from the world have succeeded in removing the limitations of knowledge belong to the class of liberated souls. These latter also stay in the stage of final beatitude. The Supreme Form of God is an object of perception to the eyes and knowledge of these classes of souls alone. The region where they stay is never influenced by Time or change, the bliss they enjoy is infinite,—that region is, in truth, a form of the eternal attributes of God.

But the other Forms of God, which are known by the name of Vyūha, are different from this. Outside the eternal, transcendent region (नित्यविभूति) and within the region of the sport of creation (लीलाविभूति), God exists in this Vyūha-Form. This Form is assumed for the creation, sustenance and destruction of the world, for protection of Jivas passing through the grinding machinery of Māyā, and for offering of benediction and grace on worshippers and devotees. Vāsudeva, Sankarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha—these are the four Vyūhas or distinctive forms. In reality, however, the Vyūhas are three; for the first-named, Vāsudeva, comes within the circle of these Vyūhas and is counted among them without any direct or particular function.

Q.—Then it appears there is a world of difference between the Supreme Form and these Vyūhas. The Supreme Form is beyond the universe. It has

no such function as creation and destruction, the world as we know it does not exist there, and consequently there is no problem of redemption of Jivas attached to the world. The souls in that region having all reached the state of bliss, there are no worshippers there, and therefore no grace to be bestowed on them. The Vyūha-Forms however, seem to exist within the region which is governed by Time.

A.—Yes, what you have said is true. Knowledge (ज्ञान), Strength (बल), Glory (ऐश्वर्य), Energy (वीर्य), Prowess (शक्ति) and Lustre (तेज)—these six supernatural qualities appear simultaneously only in the divine Form of God. It is therefore that God is described in the Śāstras as having a Form possessing these six attributes. The Form of God in which these six attributes are present in the fullest state of development is known as Vāsudeva. The Form in which there is preponderance of Knowledge and Strength is 'Sankarṣaṇa'; where glory and energy predominate, He is called 'Pradyumna'; where prowess and lustre predominate, the Form is known as 'Aniruddha'. It should, however, be borne in mind that it is the central form, Vāsudeva, who through permutation of the attributes has transformed Himself into the other three Vyūhas. Therefore, the Forms of Sankarṣaṇa, etc. are in reality possessed of all the six attributes, though in connection with the function they perform each of them requires primarily to exhibit only two attributes mentioned above. One should, therefore, have no doubt in one's mind that the Forms of Sankarṣaṇa, etc. are in reality different forms of God Himself. The Supreme Form of God is eternally-risen, 'नित्योदित' (eternal Vāsudeva), He is served by His eternal companions (नित्यगण), while the Vyūha-Form is characterized by rising and setting both, 'शान्तोदित' (Vyūha-Vāsudeva); oftentimes these two are

regarded as one, and hence the Vyūhas are counted three instead of four.

Sankarṣaṇa is the ruler and controller of the *Jiva-Tattva*; without the presence and urge of God, the *Jiva* cannot function in creation. When the desire for creation arises in God, He takes up the control of the *Jiva-Tattva* absorbed in *Prakṛti* and separates and brings out the *Jiva* merged in *Prakṛti*. When this process starts, there is awakening of Name and Form (नाम-रूप) in *Prakṛti*, which so long remained in a state of unqualified or absolute existence.

Pradyumna is the ruler and controller of the mind. Through His Energy, He initiates the laws of *Dharma*, and through His glory manifests creation in its subtle or pure state (शुद्ध सृष्टि). The work of destruction of the universe is carried on by Pradyumna. In creation in its pure, unalloyed state, the main creation consists in the creation (from the mouth) of one Manu, and, (from the arms, thigh and feet) of the other three Manus. These four Manus are to be understood as representing the pair forms of Brāhmaṇas and the other three Varnas respectively. From these four Manus in gradual stage of evolution proceeds first *Mānava* (descendant of Manu), then *Mānava-Mānava* (descendant of *Mānava*) and lastly man (मनुष्य). All these are by nature possessed of unalloyed *Sattva* (शुद्ध सत्त्व), desireless, devoted to God, and devoted to spiritual thoughts.

Aniruddha (through His prowess) is the protector of the infinity of universes, is the knower of Reality, and through His lustre He is the master and initiator of Time and creation in its mixed form. He is the creator of Brahmā. From Brahmā proceed four types of beings (Brāhmaṇas, etc.) who have the predominance of *Rajas* in them; they are all subject to

desire and attached to *Karma*. Aniruddha creates both the cause of the primordial egg and the egg itself from which proceeds creation. And, entering into the heart of all animate creation, He creates the contents or substances within the egg. Thus through His will-power or resolve He creates the cosmos directly (समष्टिसृष्टि) and the world of individuals through some medium or channel. Brahmā, who takes birth within this egg as a representative of the total creation of bound Jivas, is the direct symbol of this creation. The creation which is initiated by Brahmā is a different type of creation.*

Q.—Now, kindly tell me something about the third form of God.

A.—The third Form of God is known by the name of *Vibhava*. This Form, though having infinite varieties, is mainly divided into two classes according as the manifestations are primary or secondary. The manifestation of God (in His own Form) like other manifestations of creation is *Vibhava*. Primary *Vibhava* is an Incarnation of God Himself, and secondary *Vibhava* is Incarnation in *Āveśa* Form (possession of a medium by God). This *Āveśa* (possession) may be either of the active power of God (शक्ति) or of God Himself (स्वरूप). In primary *Āveśa*, God enters the body of an animate being in His own supernatural Form, as He did in the case of Paraśurāma, for instance. And if, during the period of functioning, an individual manifests in Himself the Divine Energy only, he should be recognized as an *Āveśa* (possessed) of the Divine Energy (शक्त्यावेश), as was the case with Brahmā. A primary or direct Incarnation possesses a Form which is divine and supernatural and His character is firm and fixed like that of God Himself. This Incarnation is an

* There are some who hold that creation in its pure state takes place directly (through the resolve) of Pradyumna, while mixed creation takes place through some medium. But this view is not accepted by all.

object of devotion and adoration to spiritual aspirants. Just as a flame may by its contact produce many more flames of the same type or character, in the same manner primary Incarnations appear for the protection of the world. Some of these Incarnations appear in human shape, others take the forms of animals, while still others manifest themselves in the form of inanimate beings. The will of God is at the root of these manifestations, there is no other cause behind them; the law of *Karma* is not operative in such cases.

Incarnations of the secondary type are not the objects of worship of spiritual aspirants. For they are the presiding deities of Jivas possessed of the ego-sense or the sense of separateness. They alone who are attached to the enjoyments of the world and follow the ways of the world, worship these Incarnations. They are an *Āveśa* (possessed) of the *Śakti* (Power) of God. Even among these secondary Avatāras, there are many varieties and differences.

Q.—Is not the origin of an Incarnation the will of God?

A.—Yes, God assumes different Forms through His own will: these are His Incarnations. Through adoption of these forms He protects the good, destroys the wicked and establishes the reign of *Dharma*. The law of *Karma* is not the cause of an Incarnation. Causes like the curse of Bhṛgu and so on, which are mentioned in the Śāstras, are only a pretence. In reality, God incarnates Himself through His own will as a matter of sport (लीला). No external cause can compel Him to incarnate against His will.

Q.—What is the fourth Form of God?

A.—The fourth Form of God is the indwelling regulator of Jivas (अन्तर्यामी). In this Form He enters the heart of every *Jiva* and regulates his impulses. This regulation of the Jivas is done in two ways. Firstly, as the friend of *Jiva*, God stays in the heart of Jivas in

His own benign Form. The object is to protect the *Jiva* and keep his company as the object of his adoration. The second Form is the Form of Inner Spirit (अन्तरात्मा). This Form stays with the *Jiva* under all circumstances, whether in heaven or in hell, and even in the state of the embryo, and preserves his existence and helps him. He can never leave the *Jiva* alone, therefore He stays as the innermost soul.

Besides these, there is the fifth Form of God—Incarnation for Worship (अर्चवतार), Image for Worship. This is possessed of a Form like that of a human being. Through His grace, according to the desire of His devotee, He installs Himself in any object whatsoever, accepting it as His Image. There is no restriction of place here—it does not matter if the place where His Image is installed is not a sacred place like Ayodhya or Mathura. Neither is there any condition of time: He can stay as long as He desires to stay. Nor is there any condition of qualification: it is not necessary that the person invoking Him should possess the same qualifications as were possessed by Daśaratha and others like him. This Form is different from the Form of an Incarnation. Wherever or whenever the worshipper or devotee desires to meet Him, he may do so. God ignores the transgressions or omissions of the devotee. Whatever arrangements the devotee makes for His bath, food and rest, He accepts them all subordinating Himself to the sentiment of the devotee.

By nature God is the Master and Lord, and *Jiva* is His dependent servant. But in this *Archāvātāra* (Form for Worship) the relation is reversed. In this Form, God Himself becomes quite ignorant, helpless and dependent, and satisfies the desire of the devotee through exercise of His unlimited mercy. He even grants salvation to the devotee. Such is His friendly affection and love for the devotee.

Q.—It appears that, from the point of view of the *Jiva* fallen in the present state of degradation, there are degrees of excellence in these five forms compared to one another.

A.—Yes, it is true. But in essence there is not the least difference anywhere. By dint of sheer devotion a *Jiva* engrossed in the body may be blessed with a sight of the *Archavatāra* (Form of God for worship). If he has made some advance in the subtle plane, he may through the strength of his devotion even see the Form of God residing as the inner spirit (अन्तर्दामी). In the causal plane even *Vyūha-Vāsudeva* may appear before a devotee. Beyond that is the Supreme Form of God. The *Vibhava*-Form generally manifests Itself in the physical plane, occasionally It appears also in the subtle state; but, without crossing the boundary line of *Māyā*, it is not possible to see the Supreme Form of God.

Q.—Is the supreme form of a *Jiva* also of this type ?

A.—How can there be any doubt about this ? But without the special grace of God, the *Jiva* cannot attain his Supreme Form. Because, without His grace, it is not possible to cross the jurisdiction of *Māyā*. The *Jiva* who having dissociated himself from *Prakṛti* through the practice of *Jñānayoga* attains emancipation or realization of Self does not get the Supreme Form. He does not reach the Supreme Abode of God following the path of the Sun (अर्चिमार्ग) and cannot realize Him. He only realizes his Self. In the eye of the devotee, the condition of such a soul is as pitiable as that of a wife forsaken by her husband. A *Jiva* of this category no doubt leaves behind both the creation and the bodies which are the products of creation, but he does not attain a supernatural body. Some people imagine that he enjoys Self-realization in some region within

the jurisdiction of *Prakṛti* itself, but that is impossible.

The *Jiva* who advances in spiritual life through adoption of the spirit of devotion and surrender attains final beatitude. Devotion is of two kinds, viz. (i) that which is practised as a means to a higher end (साधन) and (ii) that which is an end in itself (सत्य). To a devotee, the means of God-Realization is Devotion; while to a God-dedicated soul, the means as well as the end is God Himself. Aspirants of both these types go beyond *Prakṛti*, that is, cross the *Virajā*, and leaving the subtle body behind, are enabled to attain the supernatural divine form through the touch of the divine hand. That confers on them the privilege of entering the Abode or region of Supreme God. A liberated soul has a free passport to travel through all the regions of creation and beyond. This, however, should always be borne in mind that his will is always subordinate to the Will of God. The knowledge of that class of *Jivas* who enjoy the eternal state can never be limited or circumscribed. They can never do anything which is disliked by, or is in direct opposition to the Will of God. They have been in the enjoyment of many a special privilege through eternity; but at the root of this freedom, again, lies the eternal Will of God.

Q.—I am told the *Śāstras* declare that the various deities have no form other than the Mantras. Some people say that like the *Devas*, God also does not possess any Form. As against this, the *Śāstras* themselves declare in certain places that the *Devas* do possess forms of their own. You have also supported this standpoint. How can you reconcile these mutually contradictory statements ?

A.—Well, you must know it for certain that there are no contradictory statements

in the Śāstras—there can never be. From the standpoint of the Mimāṃsakas, the Devas have no other form than the Mantras; but, according to the Vedānta, the Devas are possessed of Forms. There is no real contradiction between these two separate statements. When the spiritual vision is opened, then alone the truth of these statements can be properly grasped and realized. As a matter of fact, the Mantras alone are the true forms of the Devas. It is not our intention to enter into a detailed discussion on the subjects of *Vindu* (central point), *Nāda* (sound) and *Kalā* (rhythm); but I may tell you this much that *Nāda* comes into being through agitation of the *Vindu*, and along with that there is a manifestation of *Kalā*. It is in the stage subsequent to this that the organic Body or Form is originated. Pure Consciousness, which is beyond the *Vindu*, or which, though related to the *Vindu*, is in reality unaffected or untouched by it, then appears embodied in a Form. Owing to the reflection of *Chit* (consciousness), that Form appears as a luminous Body. It is such forms that are known as Devas in common parlance. It is needless to point out that this is a phase of *Nāda* itself, only the *Nāda* here assumes a luminous form. That is the only speciality about it. In the language of Sanskrit Grammarians this is called 'Paśyanti Vāṇi' (visualized speech). When a *Mantra* is realized, or the embodied form of a *Deva* is perceived, it is this pure, Sattvic luminous 'Paśyanti Vāṇi' that is manifested. The sound and its meanings are as organically connected as a word denoting a particular object and the object denoted thereby; hence in the case of Devas both exist in a state of unity. When you come to understand the mystery of the Mantras, then it may be possible for you to realize that there is no actual contradiction between the points of view of the Mimāṃsā and the Vedānta schools of thought. The apparent contradiction between the questions of Form and

Formlessness in relation to God can be reconciled in a similar way.

In the *Bhāgavata* (I. v. 36) God has been described as 'मन्त्रमूर्तिमूर्तिकम्'; this also shows that though having a form in the shape of Mantras, He is Formless. Clear references to this *Mantra* or Sound Form of God are found in other passages of the *Bhāgavata* also. Pleased with the long austerities of Ṛṣi Kardama, father of Kapiladeva, the Incarnation of God as a *Siddha* (liberated soul), God appeared before the former assuming the form of *Śabda-Brahma* (*Brahma* in the Form of Sound);—

तावत्प्रसन्नो भगवान् पुष्कराक्षः कृते युगे ।
दर्शयामास तं क्षत्तः शब्दं ब्रह्म दधद्रुपुः ॥

(*Bhagavata* III. xxi. 8)

This Form is called in the terminology of the Rāmānuja sect as 'पञ्चोपनिषत्तनु'; that also means that the Form of God consists of *Nāda* or the Sound-Form of *Brahma*. The doctrine held by the Āchāryas of the Vaiṣṇava school that the Form of God consists of Pure *Sattva* (विशुद्ध सत्त्व) also refers to the same thing. For what has been termed in the Śāstras of the Śaiva and the Śākta schools as *Vindu* is nothing else than the Pure *Sattva* of the Vaiṣṇava devotees. *Akṣara Vindu* and *Kṣara Vindu*—these are only two different aspects of the same *Vindu*. The melting away (क्षरण) of this *Vindu* gives rise to the *Varna* or letter-sound. The objective world of Form is only an evolution or development of the letter-sound. This *Vindu* has intimate relation with the *Kuṇḍalini* (the seat of spiritual power of a *Jiva*). You are perhaps aware that it is when the *Kuṇḍalini* is awakened that the *Deva* or object of worship becomes manifest. The awakening of the *Kuṇḍalini* means the transition of *Brahma* as sound (शब्दब्रह्म) from the unqualified to the objective state.

One may ask here whether a Form manifested through stimulation of *Vindu*

can be an eternal Form. Why should the *Vindu* be stimulated at all and before this stimulation was there no Form at all? It is necessary to know the solution of these questions. The Form originated from stimulation of *Vindu* is certainly not eternal, but it is comparatively eternal all the same. A form enduring through a *Kalpa* (cycle) is also eternal in a sense, although in reality it is not eternal. For it perishes at the time of dissolution of the universe. It has an origin and an end. If the question is probed further, it will appear that there was Form even before the stimulation. If it were not so, stimulation would be inconceivable, and the manifestation of Form in the Pure State would have been impossible. An organic Form manifested through stimulation of *Vindu* has been termed as *Vaindava* Form (वैन्दव रूप) in the Tantra-Śāstra. It is the origin of all the Forms of creation. But, although it is the origin of all Forms, it is itself not eternal. The Form which transcends the *Vindu*, nay, which is beyond *Para Vyoma* (पर व्योम), and which through some incomprehensible reason attaching itself to *Vindu*, is transformed into *Vindu*, *Kalā* and *Nāda* and causes the manifestation of the *Vaindava* Form, is the eternal Form: that is *Śākta*, that is Consciousness. Inasmuch as the transcendent Energy of God is Consciousness itself, this Form, too, may be described as embodied Consciousness. But it should be borne in mind that from the standpoint of the manifested world this is unmanifest, so there can neither be meditation nor any description of this Form. When the *Śākta* Form remains close to the unstimulated *Vindu*, there is revelation of the self-effulgent, eternal Form. The *Śākta*-Form is eternal, the *Vindu* also is eternal; therefore the Form that is revealed through this proximity cannot be anything but eternal. Those who have studied the characteristics of *Para Vyoma*, which is a manifestation of Consciousness itself (चिह्नितसमय), will easily understand the point. As between *Śakti* and *Vindu*, *Śakti* is another name for Consciousness, while *Vindu* is of the nature of Pure *Sattva* and therefore material. Considered from this point of view, the Form consisting of the

Praṇava, the *Mantra* or the *Vindu* should be described as purely material, though eternally illumined by consciousness. If emphasis is laid on the consciousness element, it may also be described as Consciousness in essence. But you must remember that there is not the least trace of materiality in the *Śākta* Form—it is eternal and unmanifest. But the Form of the *Devas* as well as of the lower world, being evolved out of imagination through the operation of *Kalā*, which has its origin in the stimulation of *Vindu*, is nothing but material and transient. Wherever in the Śāstras *Brahma* has been described as the manifested Form of Sound, there, according to the secondary meaning of the expression, the assumption by the Lord of the *Vaindava* or similar such Form is to be understood, and not of His own Supreme Form. But if one acquires the capacity to realize and accept the transcendent Power (पर शक्ति) or Consciousness (चैतन्य) as *Brahma* in the Form of sound (शब्दब्रह्म), then the *Śākta* Form also may be understood as Sound (शब्द) in essence.

Owing to the differences of experience and description of the Ṛṣis various conflicting views have obtained currency about the Form of God. But in reality there being no distinction between the Body and possessor of the Body in the case of God, there is no occasion for any conflict of views. God being *Sachchidānanda* (i. e., Truth, Knowledge and Bliss combined), His Form also is an expression of these divine attributes; therefore Its eternity is inherent in It. In the *Mahāvarāha-Purāṇa*, it is stated:—

सर्वे नित्याः शाश्वताश्च देहास्तस्य परात्मनः ।
हानोपादानरहिता नैव प्रकृतिजाः क्वचिद् ॥
परमानन्दसन्दोहाः.....

The embodied forms of that Supreme Being are all eternal and everlasting; they are not assumed and rejected as something apart from the Divine Himself and are never born of *Prakṛiti*. They are ever-blissful in character.

In other passages also the Form of God has been clearly stated to be eternal and spiritual in essence.

Q.—Well, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was God Himself, as you say, and the *Bhāgavata* also

says—'कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम्'. If this is a fact, His embodied Form also must be supernatural and eternally blissful. If so, how did He leave this Body ? There are clear references to His leaving the Body in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purānas*.

A.—How can there be any doubt but that Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Body was supernatural ? The supernatural Body is not and cannot be left behind, only it appears that It is being left behind; and that, too, in the eye of the people in general, as it happens in the case of a magical feat. The *Shānda-Purāna* says—

पृथिवीलोकसंस्यागो देहत्यागो हरेः स्मृतः ।
 नित्यानन्दस्वरूपत्वादन्यन्नैवोपलभ्यते ॥
 दर्शयञ्जनमोहाय मादृशीं मृतकाकृतिम् ।
 नटवद्भगवान् विष्णुः परज्ञानाकृतिः स्वयम् ॥

That is to say, by leaving the Body is here meant leaving the earth; in reality, the Form of God, being eternally blissful, cannot be left behind. Where the body and its possessor are different, there alone the question of leaving the body can arise; but where both are identical, how can there be leaving of one by the other ? Therefore Śrī Kṛṣṇa did neither leave His Body nor adopt It. He may, of course, choose to adopt a Body created out of the elements of *Prakṛti*, and sometimes does so; and this Body is left behind, inasmuch as it is something acquired and not inherent.

Q.—Those who saw Śrī Kṛṣṇa face to face, did they all enjoy the privilege of seeing His actual supernatural Form ? It does not appear that they did so. For, if they did, no one could entertain doubt about His being God Himself. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself says:—

‘अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।’

“The ignorant imagine Me to be possessed of a human body and show me disrespect.”

A.—There is no doubt but that all people could not recognize Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Those who were Jñānis (possessed of divine knowledge) and Bhaktas (devotees), whose inner spiritual eye had completely opened, they alone could recognize His divinity; it is before them that His supernatural Form used to be revealed. The ignorant people showed Him disrespect taking Him to be an ordinary human being. The reason for this is that until the scale of ignorance disappears from before the eyes, that is to say, until the spiritual eye has been opened, the supernatural divine Form cannot be perceived. This is not true of Śrī Kṛṣṇa alone. The same thing happens in the case of even those Mahāpuruṣas (great souls) who have attained affinity of character with God.

Q.—Well, then, what was the actual Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa ? Did He manifest Himself before all people in the same Form ?

A.—It is not possible at this stage to deal at length with this subject. But I may tell you that in my opinion there is none within the fourteen worlds comprised in this universe who possesses the capacity to describe adequately the supernatural, eternal Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. No one can enjoy the privilege and rare good fortune of seeing that Form without the grace of His *Yogamāyā*. The descriptions contained in the Śāstras give only some broad indications of that Form with a view to helping the devotee in his meditation. The Form which Ṛṣi Kardama saw was a Form with four hands; Dhruva, Arjuna and many other devotees saw this very Form. Although all the Forms were not completely identical in every detail, it may, however, be said without fear of contradiction that they were identical in nature. But the Form referred to above belongs to the plane where there is a manifestation of divine glory (ऐश्वर्यं). In the region where sweetness (माधुर्यं) prevails, He is possessed of two hands only. In the *Nirvāṇa-Khaṇḍa* of the *Padma-Purāna*, it is stated that God revealed

to Brahmā that Form of His which was not revealed even to the Vedas. It is the Form of a young beautiful dancer just opening into youth, dressed as a cowherd, standing under the Kadamba tree, flute in hand, the colour of His Form as blue as a cloud, wearing a yellow robe, a garland of sylvan flowers hanging from His neck, His sweet face slightly open through a smile, and on all sides surrounded by

cowherd-boys and cowherd-maids. This Form is eternally present in the supernatural Vṛndāvana. Who is there on earth who can delineate through words this All-Conscious Form of infinite beauty ? It is absolutely idle to make any such attempt. But besides this, there are other infinite Forms of Śrī Kṛṣṇa which you may be in a position to see if you acquire the necessary spiritual qualification. Through His grace everything is possible.

(Kalyan)

