

Acharya Sankara on Bhagavan Sri Krishna.

Note:—Many people who have only heard of Āchārya Śankara as the founder of the Adwaita school of Vedānta may not have the privilege of knowing what opinion the great Āchārya held about the Descent of the Supreme Being in the Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Some may have their doubts about the place of the conception of Avatāra in the scheme of the Adwaita philosophy. Others, again, who have not studied the original works of the great Āchārya and yet try to think in terms of Adwaita, may even arrive at wrong conclusions about Personal God, His Incarnations and His sports on this terraqueous globe, through deductions of corollaries from the broad postulates of the Adwaita philosophy. But the great Āchārya himself did not leave anyone in doubt about his conclusions and beliefs. In his famous commentary on the *Gītā*, and more particularly in his comparatively unknown original work entitled *Prabodha-Sūdhākara*, he has clearly and elaborately dealt with these subjects. For the benefit of those of our readers who cannot read these works of the Āchārya in original, we give below a free translation of his actual words on the subject.

—Editor.

ŚRĪ KṚṢṆA'S MANIFESTATION

After ages, when the light of Knowledge in people who are expected to observe the practices of religion get darkened through growth of worldly desires (which state is the cause of His manifestation), when righteousness began to be overcome by unrighteousness and evil began to predominate, then Bhagavān Śrī Viṣṇu, who is known also as Nārāyaṇa, who is the Supreme Lord, who is interested in the preservation of creation, manifested Himself in the Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa through Devakī and Vasudeva for the protection of the representatives of *Brahma* on earth, that is, the Brahmans and their Brahmanhood. This fact is well-known.

That Lord, possessed of the complete attributes of God, viz., knowledge, splendour, power, might, energy and glory, although unborn and imperishable, master and lord of

all creation, eternally pure, awakened and free in character, yet controlling His Vaiṣṇavī Māyā, which is the primordial Prakṛti consisting of the three Guṇas, appear through sport as having been born like ordinary mortals and showing His grace on them.

Although He is free from any personal motive, yet only as an act of mercy on Jīvas merged in the ocean of *Māyā*, and considering that an ideal accepted and put into practice by a person who has acquired a position in society through his own personal qualities gets easily accepted by society at large, the Lord delivered His divine discourse to Arjuna on both the aspects of Vaidika Dharma (*Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti*).

It is the ignorant and the foolish who entertain doubt about Bhagavān Vasudeva being Īśwara, being omniscient, to remove which Arjuna asked the question in verse 4 of the fourth

chapter of the *Gītā*. For removal of this doubt, the Lord said, "O Arjuna, both you and I have passed through many births; I know them all, whilst you know not." This is because your knowledge is covered by the *Samskāras* of good and evil, whereas I am eternally pure, eternally awakened and eternally free; therefore My knowledge is unscreened, and hence it is that I know (everything).

But if you are God eternal, untouched by either good or evil, it may be asked, how can you take birth? In answer to this, the Lord says, "Though I am unborn—birthless, changeless—having the character of undiminished knowledge,—the Lord of all beings from *Brahmā* down to the meanest creature, yet subjugating My *Prakṛti* or *Vaiṣṇavī Māyā* consisting of the three *Gūṇas* under whose control the whole creation moves and through whose influence men do not know that they are *Vāsudeva*, I appear, through sport, as possessing a Body or as having taken a birth; but in reality I do not take birth like other mortals".

(*Bhāṣya on the Gīta*)

INVOCATION

Salutation to *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, Lord of the *Yadus*, who exists eternally in one state of Being, who is embodiment of *Ānanda* (Bliss), Consciousness itself, self-revealed, *Puruṣottama* (Highest *Puruṣa*), unborn and God Himself.

In describing whom the *Śrutis* (*Vedas*) behave like dumb creatures, can that Lord be ever revealed through the vocabulary of men?

Although such is the character of the Lord, yet through study of the scriptures and through meditation and *Kīrtana* (singing) of his glory, people go on discussing about Him.

(*Prabodha-Sudhakarā*)

MEDITATION

Meditate on *Śrī Hari* enjoying His repast in the company of cowherd-boys in a forest-bower on the banks of the *Jamuna*. He is seated cross-legged under the fabled tree which fulfils all desires (*कल्पवृक्ष*). He possesses a colour as blue as the cloud, His effulgence illumines the entire universe, He wears a beautiful cloth of yellow colour, His Body is painted with sandal-paste and other sweet-smelling ingredients, His eyes are extended up to the ears, the ears are adorned with a pair of ear-rings, His lotus-like face is blooming through a sweet smile, a necklace consisting of the *Kaustubha* gem is hanging from His neck, the beauty of His ornaments is enhanced by the lustre of His Body, a garland of forest flowers is suspended on His chest, He has conquered the dark age of *Kali* through His glory, a cluster of humming bees surround His head adorned with the beautiful seeds of *Guñjā* (*Abrus precatorius*).

Salutation to the *Mahāpuruṣa*, the bestower of Bliss, who is being served by a slow breeze sweetened by the smell of flowers of the wish-yielding tree (*कल्पतरु*), who is embodiment of Infinite Joy, and at whose feet lies the *Ganges*.

Salutation to the son of *Yadu* whose sweet smell has sweetened all the quarters of the earth, who is

surrounded by innumerable cows of plenty, who removes the fear of Devas and is a terror to powerful Demons.

Whose supernatural beauty puts to shame the total beauty of crores of Cupids, who is the bestower of desired objects, an ocean of mercy,— O ye eyes, leaving that Śrī Kṛṣṇa how can other objects of the world tempt ye ?

(O, what a shame!) that these ears are attracted towards idle gossip, leaving the sweet, captivating stories of Hari, which sanctify the heart.

The senses are extremely unfortunate in so far as they are being drawn by the transient, sinful objects of the world notwithstanding the constant presence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as an object that can wholly absorb them.

(Prabodha-Sudhakara)

IDENTITY OF QUALIFIED AND UNQUALIFIED BRAHMA

The identity of qualified and unqualified *Brahma* which the Śrutis and Purāṇas have hinted at in a covert manner, I shall attempt to make clear through the following statements.

This jewel of the Yadu race, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is none else than the Supreme Soul that resides within the hearts of all as the Knower of heart, who is all-truth, all-knowledge, and all-bliss, and who is beyond *Prakṛti*. (If you argue) this Kṛṣṇa is a qualified Being, possessed of a visual body, finite, and subject to attraction and repulsion like ordinary beings; how can he be *Paramātmā*? (On this point it should be understood that) these

material eyes can see only material objects. God cannot be seen through them. God can be perceived only by the eye of Knowledge (Divine eye). While showing Arjuna the Universal Form, the Lord granted him the divine vision; this proves the invisibility of Hari even in the Form of man (the divine vision had to be given owing to the impossibility of perception of the Divine Form through material eyes). Just as the orb of the sun, although appearing at a particular point of the horizon, illumines the entire world and appears before all simultaneously in all parts of the globe, in the same manner the Lord of Yadus, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, although possessing a Form and appearing finite, is nonetheless all-pervading, the soul of all, and nothing but an embodiment of *Sacchidānanda* (Truth, Knowledge and Bliss).

The Lord took many Forms during the Rāsa-dance with the Gopīs and at Mithila assumed duplicate Forms and accepted the hospitality simultaneously at the palace of Videha Janaka and at the house of the Brahman devotee Śrutadeva. Moreover, Duryodhana also saw his entire army in the Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This clearly proves that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was none other than the all-pervading Śrī Hari Himself.

When the sage Bhṛgu kicked the Lord at His chest, did he thereby become an object of hatred to the Lord of the Goddess of Wealth? (No, to Him all are equal) devotee or demon or anyone else, He deals equally with all. Therefore, God has

neither friend nor foe, nor is He indifferent to anybody. The Divine in human shape is like a tree laden with delicious fruits and standing on a beautiful road. The philosopher's stone, even when bored by a nail of iron, transforms the iron into gold; similarly, a person cultivating enmity with the Lord reaches the Lord.

Question—All created beings have taken their origin from the *Ātmā*, and *Ātmā* is the dearest object of all. This does not hold good in the case of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Answer—When the calves were stolen, the Lord bewildered Brahmā by creating out of Himself the forms of all the calves and cowherd boys, reproducing their exact age, form, idiosyncrasies and even the shapes of their respective ornaments. He created these Jivas out of Himself just in order to substantiate the statement of the *Śruti*: “Just as tiny sparks emanate from the flame, similarly all Jivas originate from the *Ātmā*.”

One day, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was grazing the calves in a part of the woodland on the bank of the Jamuna; in the vicinity of that place but in a different grazing-ground the older cowherds were grazing the cows. These cows observing the calves from a distance became overpowered by affection and rushed to meet them; the cowherds tried their best to stop them, but they could not be stopped. Milk began to flow from their udders, and even the cows that had given birth to new calves began to lick their older calves and through exuberance of love gave them a hearty suck. The cowherds

on their part took hold of what they imagined to be their respective children and began to smell their heads and caress them. Thus for sometime an electric excitement possessed all men and beasts of the place. These cowherd boys and calves were none else than Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself. Through the above sport Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa proved it to all that He was the dearest of all objects. The incident gave an ocular demonstration of the truth inculcated in the Upaniṣads that the *Ātmā* is dearer and nearer than son, wealth and all other objects of creation.

Question—The *Ātmā* (soul) exists in the same state in all living beings, then why did Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa show difference in treatment as between Arjuna and Duryodhana?

Answer—Brahmā saw all the calves and cowherd boys in the Form of the Lord possessing four hands irrespective of whether they were deaf, blind, lame, dumb, big or small. The Upaniṣads also declare God to be equally present in all beings from the mosquito to the elephant.

Question—*Ātmā* is a non-enjoyer. If Śrī Kṛṣṇa is *Ātmā* Itself, how did He indulge in amorous sports with the cowherd maids of Brindaban?

Answer—The Gopīs were enchanted and enraptured by the supernatural beauty of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Their whole being was so completely merged in Śrī Kṛṣṇa that even while they were engaged in the ordinary duties of their household as so many automatons, their eyes perceived all objects only as Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In their state of ecstatic delirium they would embrace even trees and beasts

saying "Here is Hari". Śrī Vedavyāsa himself, who was an incarnation of Lord Nārāyaṇa, stated that some Gopīs would imitate the sports of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and suck the breasts of other Gopīs who impersonated Pūtanā, the demoness. This shows that they saw even their husbands in the Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and definitely knew that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was the ruler of the hearts of all husbands and wives whether their own or those of others. If the reality is understood it will be found that just as there is identity between sugar and its sweetness even so this transient human body, too, is identical with the *Paramātmā*. There can be no doubt, then, about the divine character of the Body of Śrī Hari in human Form, who is God Himself, the Possessor of Infinite Power, the transcendent sporter who performs Superhuman Līlās through His own *Māyā* (enrapturing power). When He swallowed a clod of earth and Mother Yaśodā in anger forced open His mouth, she saw the entire universe within the cavity of the mouth. What is the surprise, then, if the same Lord showed Himself in Universal Form?

(Prabodha-Sudhakarā)

GRACE

The demoness Pūtanā came to give Him suck painting her breasts with the strongest poison; even then the body of that fortunate woman was sacrificed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śakatāsura was a great sinner, but Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa despatched him to the Supreme Abode. Even when He appeared like an infant, the Lord strangled to death the demon Tṛṇāvarta. The sons of Kubera

who had been transformed into Arjuna trees through the curse of Nārada, and had been greatly suffering thereby were free from their plant life and sent to His own Abode by Śrī Kṛṣṇa who uprooted the trees by a strong pull even while tied to the husking-stand. Keśī an enemy of Devas, and even nasty demons like Kakāsura (the crow-demon) and Bakāsura (the heron-shaped demon) also reached, through the grace of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the region which is devoid of all pain and suffering. The huge python-shaped demon named Aghāsura who caused suffering to the cows, the Gopas and the Gopīs by drawing them into its stomach was made sinless by the Lord through death at His divine hands. The ocean of mercy, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, protected the panic-stricken Gopas from being burnt by a forest conflagration by swallowing that fire. To save the inhabitants of Gokula from thunder, lightning and rain, the Lord uprooted the Govardhana hill single-handed, and held it in one of His hands. Delighted only with the offering of garlands and sandal-paste, the Lord transformed the ugly woman Kujā, who possessed a pair of protruding teeth and a body twisted at three points, into a beautiful woman. The huge, intoxicated elephant Kuvalayāpīda which was kicked to death by the Lord fell as a moth falls into a blazing fire. Through touch of the Body of the Lord of Lakṣmī (Wealth), the wrestlers Muṣṭika and Chaṇūra, who came for a wrestling duel, attained salvation. The jewel of the Yadu

race, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, made short work of Kaṁsa who eagerly looked forward to attaining Vaikunṭha through many sins committed by him in that birth. Having obtained the privilege of a sight of Hari while dying, Śiśupāla, the ruler of Chedi, was graced by the Lord with the Sāyujya* type of salvation. In His Incarnation as fish or in other Forms, the Lord bestowed His own Form on the enemies of Devas who were killed by Him, to say nothing of salvation. Those who were killed by the son of Yadu were freed from the cycle of metempsychosis; therefore, the ruler of hearts, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, was the source from whom all incarnations proceed.

One who showed Brahmā the existence of many universes each of which was presided over by a Brahmā of its own, and had its own Viṣṇu, its own cowherd boys and calves; the water consecrated by washing whose feet is borne in reverence by Śiva on His head;—that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is different from the Divine Triad (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva), an unfading, imperishable glow, deep blue in colour, the constituent elements of which are *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*.

Glory to the Lord of Yadus, who is our origin, our titular Deity and who is all-pervading; even Śiva, the destroyer of the demon Tripura, and Brahmā, who has his seat on a lotus, are recipients of His grace; the Ganges, which destroys all sins, proceeds washing the nails of His toes; and sovereignty over heaven, earth and hell are held only as His gift.

O supreme mother Kṛṣṇa, born under the influence of the star known as *Moha* (ignorance), this

* In the Sayujya-type of salvation, the Jiva gets merged in God and his identity is lost.

child of yours was delivered for rearing in the hands of *Māyā*, and you have long since adopted towards it an attitude of indifference. O tender mother, not for once do you turn to see my face? O omniscient mother, do you lack in power to neutralize the evil star *Moha* (and redeem Your child)?

Ye mind and heart, get rid of your fickleness and hold both the balances of the scale before you; in one balance place all the objects of gratification of the senses, and in the other balance Bhagavān, the Lord of fortune. Consider which of the balances contain more peace and true welfare. Accept that which appears to you through reasoning and experience as the repository of supreme bliss.

The Lord of Śrī (Wealth) attracts a soul who takes refuge in Him like the magnet which attracts a piece of iron. When He showers His grace, He does not make any distinction based on social status, physical charm, wealth or age, nor does He differentiate between a virtuous and a sinful soul. This observer of the heart, this huge, black cloud in the Form of *Paramātmā* accepts only the sincere offerings of the heart. When a cloud showers, does it make any distinction between a catechu plant and a plant of Champā? Although God is equally present everywhere, it is His devotees who are always merged in supreme delight from a knowledge of His grace. Just as a young of a tortoise is nourished only by the careful and affectionate gaze of its mother without milk or any other kind of food, similarly a devotee who has no other shelter, whose sole refuge is God, lives exclusively on the grace of the Lord.

(*Prabodha-Sudhakarā*)

