

The Superb Uniqueness of Vedanta.

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## WHAT IS VEDĀNTA ?

**I**t is generally believed that by Vedānta Philosophy is meant a philosophy confined exclusively to the Vedas, the sacred Scriptures of the Hindus; but the term 'Veda' in this case is used to signify, not a particular book but 'Wisdom', being derived from the Sanskrit root 'Vid' (to know), from which the English word 'Wisdom' is also derived; while 'Anta' means end. Vedānta, therefore, implies literally 'End of Wisdom'. And the philosophy is called 'Vedānta', because it explains what that End is, and how it can be attained.

All relative knowledge ends in the realization of the unity of the individual soul with the infinite Truth of the universe. The ultimate reality is the Universal Spirit or *Brahma*. It is the infinite ocean of wisdom. As rivers running across thousands of miles ulti-

mately end in the ocean, so the rivers of relative knowledge, flowing through the various stages of the phenomenal universe, ultimately end in the infinite ocean of existence (सत्), intelligence (चित्), bliss and love (आनन्द).

## THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION OF VEDĀNTA

To realize this unity must be the final aim of all true religions, but the religious history of the world shows that no other nation has ever at any period understood it so clearly or preached it so boldly as did the Ṛṣis or Hindu sages of ancient India. For nearly five thousand years, indeed, the Hindu people have realized the sublime idea that "Truth is one, but the means of attaining it are many". In the *Rigveda*, the most ancient of all scriptures of the world, we read: "That which exists is one, men call it by various names†." The Jews

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\* See the Foreword to Mahamahopadhyaya Aranta Krishna Sastri's edition of the *Sariraka Bhashya* with nine commentaries and sub-commentaries.

† 'एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ।'

call it Jehovah; the Christians, God or Father in Heaven; the Mohammedans worship it as Allah; the Buddhists, as Buddha; the Parsees, as Ahura Mazda; while the Hindus call it *Brahma* or *Īśwara*.

Upon this fundamental Truth rests the whole structure of Vedānta teachings. It insists upon the doctrine of the unity of existence under a variety of names, and offers, as can no other philosophy or religion, an adequate foundation for all the different phases of dualistic (*Dvaita*), qualified non-dualistic (*Viśiṣṭā-dvaita*) and monistic (*Advaita*) systems of philosophy and religious thought. Vedānta, indeed, may be said to establish a universal religion which embraces all the special religions of the world.

The system of Vedānta has many phases. The dualistic phase includes the fundamental principles of all the dualistic or monotheistic systems, such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other systems that advocate the worship of a personal God, or devotion to any Divine Ideal.

The qualified non-dualistic phase embraces all the systems which teach the immanency and transcendency of God. It includes all such ideas as "God dwells in us as well as in the universe", "We live and move and have our being in God", "He is the soul of our souls", "We are parts of one stupendous Whole", "We are sons of God, the children of Immortal Bliss", etc. But the monistic phase of Vedānta is the most sublime of all. Very few of the advanced thinkers and philosophers can appreciate the grandeur of spiritual oneness. Yet, herein lies the solution of the deepest problems of science, philosophy and metaphysics, as well as the final goal of all religions. It alone explains how it is possible for one to say "I and my Father are one".

The superb uniqueness of Vedānta lies in its conception of God as personal,

impersonal and beyond both. The personal aspect of the God of Vedānta is worshipped under different names and forms of sectarian religions. The God of Vedānta (*Īśwara*) is one, but has many names. He is the Father in Heaven of the Christians, Allah of the Mohammedans, Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, Ti Tien of the Chinese, Jehovah of the Jews, and Buddha of the Buddhists. He is the same as Viṣṇu, Śiva and Divine Mother of the Hindus. He is sexless; therefore, He is both the Father and the Mother of the universe. He may be worshipped by devotees as a masculine or feminine deity or may be regarded as It.

The religion of Vedānta is uniquely universal, because it is not built around the personality of any founder. Any religion or philosophy that depends for its authority on a specific personality can never satisfy the demands of a universal religion. In order to make a system of philosophy universal, the first thing necessary is that it must be absolutely impersonal. So long as there is a founder of a religion, it is limited by the personality of the founder and cannot be universal, as we find in special religions like Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism and kindred Faiths. The followers of each of these great religions, forgetting the fundamental principles, become attached to the personality of its founder and refuse to recognize any other; and this results in the discord, conflict and persecution with which the pages of religious history of the world are filled.

The religion of Vedānta has neither dogma nor creed of any kind. Like an impartial judge, the religion of Vedānta gives a proper place to each of those sectarian religions in the grand evolution of the spiritual thoughts and systems of all nations. Having no founder, it stands upon the eternal spiritual laws that have been discovered by various sages and seers of Truth of all countries

and of all ages, and which have been described in the different Scriptures of the world. As the spiritual laws are uniform and universal like the laws of nature, they must pervade all the Scriptures of different nations.

Furthermore, the students of Vedānta find in this universal religion the ultimate conclusions of the greatest scientific thinkers and philosophers of the East and the West. It embraces all the scientific truths and all the philosophies of the world. The one Infinite Reality or *Brahma* of Vedānta is the same as the Oversoul (*Paramātmā*) of Emerson, the Good of Plato, the Substantia of Spinoza, the *Dinge an Sich* or "transcendental thing-in-itself" of Kant, the Will of Schopenhauer, the Unknown and Unknowable of Herbert Spencer, the Substance of Ernest Haeckel, the Matter of the materialists, the Universal Spirit of the spiritualists. Therefore, Prof. Max Muller said: "Vedānta is the most sublime of all philosophies and the most comforting of all religions". He also declares: "None of our philosophers, not excepting Heraclitus, Plato, Kant, or Hegel, has ventured to erect such a spire, never frightened by storms or lightnings. Stone follows on stone, in regular succession, after once the first step has been made, after once it has been clearly seen that in the beginning there can have been but One, and there will be but One in the end, whether call it *Atmā* or *Brahma*." ("The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy", P. 239). Schopenhauer said about Vedānta: "It has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death."

Vedānta accepts the teachings of great prophets and inspired saints like Moses, Zoroaster, Confucius, Laotze, Buddha, Jesus the Christ, Mahomet, Śankarāchārya, Rāmānuja, Chaitanya, Nanak and Ramakrishna Paramahansa. It also leaves room for those who are yet to come for the good of humanity.

Another unique feature of Vedānta is that it does not prescribe to all one special path by which to reach the ultimate goal. On the contrary, it recognizes the varying tendencies of different minds, and guides each along the way best suited to it. It classifies human tendencies into four grand divisions, which, together with their sub-divisions, cover almost all classes of people; and then it sets forth the methods which may be helpful to everyone. Each of these methods is called in Sanskrit 'Yoga'.

The first is *Karmayoga*. It is for the active man, for those who like to work and are always ready to do something for the help of others; in short, it is for the busy, everyday working man or woman. *Karmayoga* teaches the secret of work, and tells us how we can turn our daily actions into *acts of worship*, and thus reach perfection in this life through work and work alone. It is essentially practical and absolutely necessary for those who prefer an active career, for it will teach them how to accomplish a maximum of labour with a minimum loss of energy. The larger part of the mental energy of the majority of people in this country is needlessly wasted by the constant rush of their daily lives, which is merely the result of lack of self-control. Did they know the secret of work, they would not only avoid this waste, which is the cause of the many nervous disorders to which they are at present subject, but would actually lengthen their days. *Karmayoga* reveals this secret, and opens the way to complete self-mastery.

The next method is *Bhaktiyoga*. It is for such as are of an emotional nature. It teaches how ordinary emotions can bring forth spiritual unfoldment of the highest kind and lead to the realization of the ultimate ideal of all religions. In a word, it is the path of devotion and love. It explains the nature of divine love and shows us how to turn human love into divine, and thus fulfil the purpose of life both here and hereafter.

The third is *Rājayoga*—the path of concentration and meditation. The field of *Rājayoga* is very vast. It covers the whole psychic plane and describes the processes by which the psychic powers are developed, such as thought-reading, clairvoyance, clairaudience, the evolving of finer perceptions, the going out from the body, the curing of disease through mental power and the performing of all such acts as are ordinarily called miracles. All the psychic powers which were displayed by Jesus of Nazareth and his followers, and which are used to-day by Christian scientists, mental healers, faith healers, divine healers, and various other kinds of healers, have been displayed from ancient times by the Yogis in India.

*Rājayoga* takes these psychic powers and phenomena, classifies them and makes a science out of them. It also teaches the science of breathing. The wonderful effects of breathing exercises on mind and body are not unknown to the mental healers of the West. If, however, *Rājayoga* deals scientifically with the psychic powers, it does not cease to warn its students that the attainment of any of these powers is not a sign of spirituality. This is a great lesson which the mental healers and Christian scientists of America especially will have to learn from the Yogis of India. Little brains and weak intellects easily turn away from the path of spiritual truth when some psychic power begins to manifest itself in them; and they think that they have reached the highest state of spirituality because they have got the power to cure headache or heartache. *Rājayoga*, however, teaches that the exercise of psychic powers and making a profession of it are great obstacles in the path of spiritual advancement. Its principal aim, on the contrary, is to lead the student, through concentration and meditation, to the highest state of super-consciousness, where the individual soul communes with the Universal Spirit and realizes the unity of existence, eternal peace, and happiness.

*Jñānayoga* is the fourth method. It is the path of right knowledge and discrimination. This is for those who are intellectual, discriminative, and of a philosophical nature.

Thus we can see in some slight degree how universal is the scope of Vedānta. Vedānta also explains the fundamental principles of spiritualism, tells us how the soul exists after death and under what conditions, what kind of souls can communicate with us, and what becomes of them afterwards, how the earth-bound souls, being subject to the law of *Karma* or causation, reincarnate on this earth taking human forms, again and again. It explains the science of the soul, and it expounded the law of correspondences ages before Swedenborg was born.

The religion of Vedānta recognizes spiritual growth and evolution in the path of realization. As in our physical body there are different stages of growth like childhood, youth and maturity, so in the spiritual life there are spiritual childhood, spiritual youth and spiritual maturity. The one leads to the other, the one merges into the other and ultimately leads to the realization of God. Spiritual childhood begins with ancestor-worship and ends with the conception of one extra-cosmic personal God who dwells in a heaven outside nature. All the dualistic or monotheistic religions do not go beyond this stage of spiritual childhood and make their followers believe that this is the highest and there can be nothing higher.

But the spiritual youth begins when the seekers after Truth gradually realize that God is not outside nature, but that He dwells in nature as well as within us, that He is not extra-cosmic but intra-cosmic, that He is immanent and resident in nature, that He is the Soul of the universe. Just as the soul in our body is the internal ruler of our body, so the Soul of the universe is the internal Ruler of the universe. He governs the world, not from outside but from inside. He is the

Creator, not in the sense that sitting somewhere in a Heaven outside nature He commands and creates something out of nothing; He creates or starts the evolution of nature by pouring His spiritual influx in this nature or *Prakṛti* (Latin *Procreatrix*) or creative energy:—

मम योनिर्महद्ब्रह्म तस्मिन् गर्भे दधाम्यहम् ।

संभवः सर्वभूतानां ततो भवति भारत ॥

( *Gītā XIV. 3* )

In fact, the cosmic energy forms the body of the Spiritual Being. God then appears to be both the efficient and the material cause of the universe ( निमित्तोपादान-कारण ) and, therefore, He is not only the Father but the Mother of the universe,—Father and Mother both in one. The individual souls are parts of His own Being like sparks of a huge bonfire—

‘ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।’

( *Gītā* )

Our souls are immortal by nature.

This state gradually leads to spiritual maturity, where we do not think of the world or of its creation, but, rising above all phenomena, we realize the indivisible oneness—that we are not merely sparks, but that we are closer to

Divinity, that we are spiritually one with God. Then and then alone we can say, ‘I and my Father are one’—‘अहं ब्रह्मास्मि’. Thus, by reaching maturity in spiritual life one attains to the absolutely monistic ( अद्वैत ) realization of spiritual oneness.

The religion of Vedānta is truly catholic and tolerant. It has no quarrel with any particular form of worship. All rituals, all ceremonials and all forms of worship advocated by dualistic Faiths are, only means to the realization of the highest end of spiritual oneness with Divinity or *Brahma*. Therefore Vedānta embraces all forms of worship as well as all other sectarian religions of the world. Well has it been said by Prof. Max Muller: ‘For all practical purposes, the Vedāntist would hold that the whole phenomenal world, both in its subjective and objective character, should be accepted as real. It is as real as anything can be to the ordinary mind; it is not mere emptiness as the Buddhists maintain. And thus the Vedānta philosophy leaves to every man a wide sphere of real usefulness, and places him under a law as strict and binding as anything can be in this transitory life; it leaves him a Deity to worship as omnipotent and majestic as the deities of any other religion. It has room for almost every religion, nay, it embraces them all.’ ( *Three Lectures on Vedānta Philosophy.* )

