

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY



THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Here are a number of editorials which appeared entitled 'Observations' in the *Bulletin* of The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. The articles, all written by Swami Lokeshwarananda, are brief but self-contained and, if not learned, are thought-provoking, and clear and precise in expression. The style is direct and incisive. Readers liked them when they first appeared. Many among them have since asked that these articles be put together and brought out in book-form. Hence this book, *Practical Spirituality*.

The articles cover a wide range of topics, but, as the readers will observe, there is a unity of thought underlying them. Secular or spiritual, each subject is dealt with from a commonsense point of view, logically, and free from dogmatism. The plea that is constantly made is that man has a higher destiny which he must try to fulfil.

Practical Spirituality, in its second and larger edition, retains all the qualities that characterized its first edition, published in May 1960. Professor A. L. Basham's Introduction is an added attraction in the present edition.

We would feel ourselves amply rewarded should this little volume provide food for thought in aid of those struggling to resolve the tangles which plague them in the course of their daily life.

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INTRODUCTION

All Indians will know of the Ramakrishna Mission and many Indians, especially if they are Bengalis, will know, or know of, Swami Lokeswarananda, the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta, one of the most important educational institutions of that great city. The Swami has had a long career of devoted service, both to the great organization of which he is a member and to humanity at large. What follows may be common knowledge to many Indian readers of this book, but it is mainly intended for non-Indians, and it is hoped that many non-Indians will read this book, which reflects the ethics of modern, reformed Hinduism better than any other book known to me.

The Ramakrishna Mission was founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest of modern Indians, on the basis of the teaching of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, of whom he was the devoted disciple. These names recur frequently in Swami Lokeswarananda's articles, and their importance in the history of 'the Indian Renaissance' cannot be exaggerated. The Ramakrishna Mission is today the foremost organization for the propagation of a reformed Hinduism, emancipated from the caste prejudices and ritualism accumulated over many centuries, and its religious activities are accompanied by much social work among the poor and by educational projects designed to help Indians to understand their own cultural background.

The book which I have been given the honour of introducing consists of a number of short essays originally contributed to *the Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*. They are not in any rigid sequence

and the reader who has only a little time may sample them in any order; but if he goes through the book from beginning to end he will obtain a very clear picture of the moral and ethical thinking of a modern Hindu, a highly educated man who, for all his long career in a monastic order, has kept in touch with everyday contemporary life, and with the drives and needs of ordinary people. Some of his advice may seem rather like a counsel of perfection but behind it all there seems to be an implicit recognition that the ordinary reader will not be persuaded to alter his way of life drastically, but will nevertheless be inspired by these writings to think harder about his own moral position and perhaps to change it for the better.

The western reader may be impressed by the numerous references to Jesus Christ, who is more than once linked with the Buddha and with Ramakrishna Paramahansa as one of the rare examples of perfected humanity who arise in the world from time to time. This does not mean, however, that the author is on the way to becoming a Christian in any real sense of the term. Most modern Hindu reformers have been in varying measure influenced by Christianity. Ramakrishna became for some time to all intents and purposes a Christian, and had a very vivid vision of Jesus; but he also became a Muslim in the same manner, and as a result of his spiritual experiments he uttered his famous dictum 'All religions are true' Mahatma Gandhi loved the Christian gospels, and made use of them to reinforce his doctrine of non-violent resistance to oppression. Swami Lokeswarananda borrows themes and concepts from Christianity for his own purposes. It cannot be over-emphasized that Hinduism is an inclusive religion. 'Whatever God you worship, I answer the prayer,' says the incarnate God Krishna in as

many words in the *Bhagavad Gita*, an attitude diametrically opposite to the Hebrew 'Thou shalt have no other gods beside me', inherited by the older forms of Christianity.

From many passages in this book the reader will realize that modern Hinduism is comprehensive and all-inclusive. To attain the highest bliss one does not even need to be a Hindu. The message of Swami Lokeswarananda is that the goal is hard to attain and may demand tremendous effort and self-sacrifice, but it is open to everyone, even to the man who declares himself an unbeliever in any organized religion.

The doctrines of the Ramakrishna Mission are based on the ancient scriptures known as *Upanishads*, as interpreted by the non-dualist (*Advaita*) Vedanta of the great philosopher Sankara (c. A.D. 800). Sankara formulated a brilliant metaphysical system, which maintains that the only entity in the universe which is absolutely real is *Brahman*, an impersonal spirit underlying all appearances, which have only a qualified reality. On ultimate analysis this Brahman is identical with the inmost self of every being, known as *atma*. In order to achieve the highest state of permanent bliss the individual personality must fully merge itself in the absolute Brahman so that no trace of selfhood remains. It must be emphasized that this is only one among several schools of Hindu philosophy; there are others which maintain the ultimacy of a personal God and the eternity of the individual soul, which never completely loses its individuality. But this non-dualist doctrine has had the greatest influence on the intellectual Hinduism of the present day, and this is the system which Swami Lokeswarananda interprets for his readers. Nowhere does he reject outright the existence of a personal God, but for him the ultimate

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divinity is the pure impersonal being which is one with the human soul; and all earnest seekers after truth should strive for full realization of that identity, when they will achieve a state of bliss which is indescribable in words, but which many saints and sages at all times have experienced.

The Swami's approach, however, is not one of withdrawal or life-denial, and for him the seeker of the highest bliss is not cut off from the world. Following the example of Vivekananda, he plays a full part in the drama of human affairs; but behind his efforts is a calm detachment. His greatest service to mankind is not in helping to establish and develop hospitals for the sick, kitchens for the hungry, or educational institutions for those seeking knowledge. Rather it is in the example he sets by showing his fellow-men the heights which the human spirit may achieve by its own efforts.

I am very pleased and proud to have been invited to introduce this book, which, rather than the writings of some of the miracle workers and 'streamlined swamis' who pullulate nowadays both in India and the West, will introduce to the world some of the finest ethical thoughts of the twentieth century.

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

It may be difficult to define spirituality, but when it expresses itself in qualities like humility, selflessness, moral courage, or in small but scintillating acts of high-mindedness, one cannot help being impressed by it. Spirituality is what a man is, how he behaves with others, what sort of life he lives, what is his attitude towards life, and so on. It is intangible, yet it is distinct and clear. A very significant fact about a spiritual man is that he cannot help being what he is. If he is good, honest, and simple, it is not for the sake of any recognition he is expecting from anybody but because it is his nature. Similarly, he cannot change his nature because of threat or temptation. Under no circumstances will he be different from what he is.

Throughout history and in all countries there have been such men and women, not many perhaps, but some at least, and, surprisingly enough, such men and women are found only among the religious. There seems to be something in religion which brings out the best in man. This is why religion is often described as a science of 'being and becoming', a science of growth. A country may be poor materially but if the average men and women in it are hardworking, sincere, honest, intelligent, and devoted to noble thoughts and ideals, the country is bound to prosper. A country's wealth is in its men and women. It certainly needs economic growth, but this should be matched by growth in other directions also. Most of all, growth in the character of its average men and women. One great man or woman is not enough; it only raises hopes for others, it only shows that others also can grow to the heights he or she has attained.

More than material prosperity, what, therefore, is desirable is that the people should try to realize the best in human nature.

But what is this 'best'? Surely it cannot be merely physical and intellectual growth, it must also be moral growth, that is, growth in character. Everywhere it is men and women of character whose influence is felt most and which is also most lasting. A physical or intellectual giant does impress us, but it is the man of character whom we respect most. We look at him and tell ourselves that he is the man we would like to follow. The kind of character he developed is a model like which men and women of every age and every country try to shape themselves. It is as if he is the answer we were looking for to the question of how best we may grow to our own satisfaction and to the satisfaction of others as well. If we look closely, we will find he owes his success to that science of growth—religion. Religion inspired him, guided him, and took him to the height he has reached. This is what gives religion its credibility.

Spirituality is what flows from such a man. He is a demonstration of what man can be, given the will and the opportunities. It is his being that is interesting, and because what he is reflects itself in what he says and does, his whole life becomes a model for others to follow, a model of *practical spirituality*. He is the example of what spirituality is, he is also its meaning and justification. Religion is the science, spirituality is its achievement. Spirituality is the richness, acquired through years of struggle, which gives man a power, a dignity, which nothing else—no wealth, no scholarship, no office—can give.

BEING AND DOING

A good man is good because he has to be good, because he feels he cannot be otherwise. If a man is good because of fear of some superior power, visible or invisible, then goodness is not something natural to him but something which circumstances over which he has no control have imposed on him. Or it may be he is good because he expects by being good he will get some reward which he cannot otherwise get. This too is an artificial goodness, a goodness assumed with a view to gaining some end which is otherwise beyond his reach. A truly good man is good not because of any fear of punishment or any hope of reward, but it is his nature to be good and he just cannot help being good. If this is the test of a good man, how many among those who pass as good men and women in society answer to that description?

A man is often judged by the deeds he does. It is doubtful if this is a correct criterion always. He may do good deeds from an ulterior motive which others cannot detect and which perhaps he himself is not yet conscious of. Or it is even possible that in the beginning he is moved entirely by an altruistic motive, but as he goes on, his self-interest asserts itself and ultimately it may turn out that in whatever he does the motive is selfish. The thin coating of goodness with which he began soon gives way to the pressure of self-interest which, so long dormant, has now become irresistible. This is true of most people engaged in social work. Some are blatantly selfish; whatever good work they do is only a cloak to hide their real motive of gaining power, political or otherwise. It is only a means to an end which, notwith-

standing appearances, is by no means good. Take for instance the case of an individual or an organization spending money in charity with the object of popularizing a particular religious creed or dogma. Worse still is the case in which there is an attempt to impose a particular political philosophy on a people under the pretext of giving them aid when they are in difficulty. Can this be justified? But this is very likely to happen and this in fact is happening in many places.

The criterion is the motive, but the motive cannot be good if the donor, whether an individual or an organization, is bad. A wicked man trying to do good to others is likely to do more harm than good by the very manner in which he will function. Such a man may give some material help, but, in doing so, he may cause much moral damage. Perhaps he will hurt the self-respect of the people he is helping; he may be discriminatory in his dealings with them; he may even exploit them for selfish ends. A bad man may have flickerings of goodness now and then, but there is every possibility that his evil propensities will prevail in the end.

It is, therefore, risky to judge a man by what he does. The criterion should be what sort of man he is. Being is always more important than doing. A good man may not do much social work, yet his very presence has an elevating influence upon others. The good he does is silent and unobtrusive; it is also lasting. The person who bustles about giving the impression that he is doing much may really not be doing much that is good. A good man need not do much, but whatever he does becomes the source of much good because he is goodness itself.

AT PEACE WITH ONESELF

Life is a torment with most people. A continuing, unremitting torment. They find life such a cruel joke that they wish they could get rid of it. The sooner, the better. The reason varies from individual to individual. It may be poverty, disease, bereavement, or disappointment, but, ironically, the reason, in some cases, is one's own self. The torment, in other words, is self-inflicted. It is self-inflicted in the sense that it is not real, it is imaginary. If you ask such people what is hurting them, they will say they do not know. That does not make the suffering less painful. There is also no easy relief for the suffering because the cause is not known. The fact of the matter is that the cause, if there is any at all, is not objective. It is in the mind, embedded somewhere in its depths. To outsiders, it does not exist, it is imaginary, but to the sufferer it is real, very much so, the only reality.

Why is it so, why do people suffer when there is no reason, no apparent reason at least, that they should suffer? It is understandable if a man suffers because of some misfortune which throws him completely out of gear, but when there is no such calamity, why should he suffer?

Hindu philosophy has an explanation for this, which, however fantastic it may sound, deserves a close look. It says that man suffers because he has too many desires, some prominent and some not very prominent but no less pressing. There are desires which get fulfilled and there are desires which never get fulfilled. It is good that all his desires are not fulfilled, but he does not think so and he begins to fret. The unfulfilled desires keep nagging

at him constantly, and he never has a moment's peace of mind. If he is a person with means to satisfy his desires and he satisfies them, the same desires will attack him with redoubled fury as soon as they are fulfilled. Hindu philosophy compares desire to fire. Just as fire is never extinguished by the addition of fuel to it, so also are desires never got rid of by satisfying them. The more they are satisfied, the more they grow in intensity. Also, if one desire goes, another immediately takes its place. Thus man is constantly plagued by desires. An odd aspect of the situation is that some of the desires remain unidentified; they hide themselves somewhere under the surface of the mind and never show up till an opportune moment arrives. It is such desires that give the most trouble to man. A man with such desires is always unhappy but he does not know why he is unhappy.

Hindu philosophy advises equanimity under all circumstances. It says, man should try to remain calm in face of both pleasure and pain, success and failure. Whatever may happen he should remain unperturbed. But is it possible? According to Hinduism, it is possible if man can rid his mind of desires. Desirelessness is considered an ideal state of mind. To attain this state he has to practise discrimination. Most of the time he craves for ephemeral things; instead, he should struggle to get things that last long. What are those things? In one word, *perfection*.

There is no short cut to perfection. One has to struggle hard for it. Hinduism does not believe in any miracle except the miracle of hard work. To be at peace with himself, man has to have this perfection.

THE WILL TO LIVE

According to Hindu scriptures, life is a welcome opportunity which must not be wasted. Birth is not an accident to be followed by another sure accident—death. But if life is an opportunity, how does one use it to one's advantage? This is something one has to decide for oneself, but whatever may be the goal one chooses for oneself, the watchword should be — progress.

It is human nature not to be satisfied with what one is and what one has. This discontent spurs one to increase efforts to progress towards the desired goal. But it is not enough to have discontent, it must sharpen one's will to live fully, fruitfully, for a purpose, if possible, for the highest and noblest purpose. This means one must plot one's course of life with care, know what one's priorities are, take every step deliberately, never losing sight of the goal one has. It is not enough to have a worthwhile goal of life, one must also make commensurate efforts to achieve it. If one succeeds in an undertaking, it is not by fluke but by one's own efforts. One is truly the architect of one's fate. There is no success that is worth having which one can have without paying a heavy price. There are bound to be unforeseen difficulties in the way but one is never deterred by them but keeps fighting till all difficulties are overcome and the success is within one's grasp. This is possible if one has an iron will, a will that defies difficulties. It is conceivable that there will be failures at various stages, but one still keeps trying, trying doggedly, refusing to give up the struggle.

The long and the short of this is that one has to rely on one's own strength. One hears of God's grace, but it

is only too true that God helps those who help themselves. The difference between success and failure is the difference between strength and weakness. The fact of the matter is that man is invincible. He succeeds if he only wills to succeed. There is yet nothing he has tried his hand at which he has not achieved. There is no secret of Nature he has tried to probe which she has not ultimately surrendered to him. The origin of life is a mystery he has still to unravel, but a breakthrough may be expected any moment. Man has triumphed against Nature, but he has to triumph against himself. He has made Nature his friend, but he remains an enemy to himself. He has yet to conquer his own nature. The challenge before him today is to demonstrate that he is stronger than his own nature, than his passions and prejudices, that he is master of his thoughts and actions, that he can direct himself to his own good as well as to the good of others. He has far too long lived for himself, he has now to demonstrate that he can also live for others. The will to live also includes the will to live for others.

Man has to remind himself that he has infinite power within himself. He can not only do whatever he wants to do, he can also be whatever he wants to be. It is a question of how *madly* he wants to be whatever he wants to be. A saint is a saint because he willed to be one. Whether one is trying to do something, or be something, one must take full control of oneself, and not merely be a piece of drift-wood in the sea of life. In brief, one must will to live in the manner one likes best, live for oneself and for others, for a better world where one is at one's best.

A SAINT IS NO KILLJOY

The popular picture of a saint is that he is a grim-faced person, always busy correcting others and, if they are humble enough, guiding them towards their redemption. He has little time and less inclination to laugh. He not only does not laugh, but does not like it that others should laugh either. How can he afford to laugh or allow others to laugh when there is so much sin in the world and when the inevitable result of that sin is hellfire? His very presence has a chilling effect on those who love laughter : there is no question of anyone enjoying a joke before him. As if to joke, or to enjoy a joke is also a sin. Life is such a serious matter with him that there can be no place for any kind of levity in it.

But a saint need not be like this. He is human like anybody else. He, in fact, laughs and also makes others laugh, possibly at his own expense. He knows there is much evil in the world but he knows that there is also much goodness; he knows this is the way the world is made and it will always be like this. Ramakrishna used to say, 'The world is like a dog's tail; it will always be curled; you may straighten it out but as soon as you let it go, it will be curled again.' The world is always a mixture of good and evil, it is never absolutely good or absolutely bad. Knowing this a saint is in no haste to correct others. When he sees someone doing wrong, he feels sorry but does not condemn him. He knows given opportunity, encouragement, and help, he may improve, and so if there is anything he can do to help him improve, he does it. He has goodwill for everybody, but more goodwill for those who are weak and who, from weakness, do wrong. The way to help the weak is not to

condemn them, but to encourage them, to give them self-confidence; so he tries to make them feel that they have not yet lost the battle, they have lost a few rounds only but there are more rounds to follow and they must keep fighting to the end. What is important is to keep fighting till the last. This is the message the saint has for every struggling soul. He has sympathy for everybody, but for those who fight, also respect.

How can a saint be cheerful when there is so much suffering in the world? True, there is much suffering in the world, but the saint knows if there is suffering there is also joy; they come and go, never lingering for long. He treats both with indifference. He thinks they are part of life and have to be accepted. Rather take them, as sport and put a bold face on them. Life goes on whether you cry or smile. It will not stop because you are crying. Why not smile then?

A saint has infinite faith in man. He is not unduly perturbed by the weaknesses he sees in anybody. He knows these can be overcome, given time and opportunity. A saint rather makes much of his own weaknesses, as if he is as bad as anybody else and perhaps even worse. This is just to encourage others lest they think they cannot beat the evil forces working within them. He refuses to see evil anywhere, for what is good and what is evil when life is taken as a whole, when it is seen that what is good at one point is bad at another, good and evil are only points of view? A saint takes evil with good, pain with pleasure, for they always go together, there cannot be one without the other. He is altogether human, human in his weaknesses, human in his understanding. To him the whole human phenomenon is wonderful, deserving only respect and admiration.

‘WHAT’S IN A NAME’

Whatever the English poet might say, the name is certainly an important factor in determining the character of the person bearing it. Its importance is in the meaning the name carries. If it is a word without any meaning, then it is no name at all, it is only a useless sound. It is an insult to give such a name to an individual, as if he is so worthless that he need not be taken any notice of. A nameless person, or a person bearing a name which signifies nothing in particular, is not likely to command any respect from his acquaintances, it is doubtful if he can have any respect for himself either. Worse of course is the position if he has a name which has a meaning, but a meaning which is derogatory. Suppose he has a name which connotes something like ‘Satan’, will he not feel humiliated by it? Is it not like putting a stigma on him for no fault of his? If he ever happens to offend others not by any misconduct on his part but by the mere fact that he refuses to be used by them for any purpose of their own, the first comment that this will provoke will be that he is only being true to his name, that is, he is wicked and mischievous, which of course he is not.

One might argue : But suppose he has a name which means ‘saint’, will that make his critics say something less offensive than the above? Yes, the most likely comment that they may feel provoked to make in such a situation will be that he is a ‘saint’ in name only.

This is not to say that the name is a true index of a man’s character. What is suggested here is that if it is a name with a good meaning, let us say a name which fits only a high-minded person, it is very likely that the man

will constantly be reminded of what others expect of him. This should be an incentive to him to try to live up to the expectations of his friends. If, on the other hand, he has a name given him which has no meaning at all, or has a bad meaning, it can only make him feel small before others unless he is an extraordinarily strong man capable of ignoring what others think of him.

There is no doubt that what counts is the man that he is and not what the name says he is. He may be entirely different from what the name suggests, yet it is no reason that he should have a bad name given him. If he has a bad name, it is as if he is doomed to be bad always, with little or no hope of redemption. Often the name parents choose for their child is an indication of what they want their child to be like. They should be modest in their expectations, they should not expect something obviously impossible. If they give the child a name which can fit only a god and not an ordinary mortal, it will remain a cause for embarrassment to the child to the last day of his life.

The name is the man, according to an Indian saying. How one wishes it were so! Perhaps nobody is quite worthy of the name he bears; still a good name is always a source of inspiration. It is a reminder of what he has to be like. The name is a commitment to an ideal. It sets the course of the child's future growth, it sets also a standard by which he will always be judged. The name gives him an identity, he feels he is separate from others, he is himself, he is important. The name is the most important part of a man. It can never be underestimated.

‘GET UP AND BEGIN AGAIN’

No one can say that he has never tasted failure in life. Life means ups and downs; sometimes you are up and sometimes you are down, it is never the same. The important lesson to remember is that you should keep struggling all the time, no matter what the results are. You should continue with your struggle even when there is a success, for it is possible to improve upon the success you have so far achieved. Try to do better always and you can never say that you have had enough. ‘Nothing succeeds like success.’ What you achieve externally through your struggle may be important, but what you achieve internally, i.e. in terms of your character and personality, is more important. This is why it is important that you should keep struggling even when you have achieved what you wanted to achieve. If you fail, it is no reason that you should give up trying. You may fail again and again, yet you should go on trying till your last breath. The *Gita* teaches that you should work regardless of whether you get your reward or not. The idea is that work itself is its reward, there is no other reward to look forward to. If there is any other reward, it is incidental. The reward is an incentive, but it may prove illusory, it may even be a deterrent to further efforts. This is why the work is more important than the reward. ‘Take care of the means and the end will take care of itself.’ That is to say, try your best, that is the only thing you can do and that is also the only secret to success. You may try your best, but that does not mean that there is any guarantee that you will succeed. The *Gita* does not want you to labour under any delusion about the results of your efforts; it may be that in spite

of everything you have done success will elude you, but you should still keep trying. When you do so, the hidden powers within you unfold themselves and this is much more important than what you wanted to gain externally. It is the experience you have through constant trying that matters. You may fail again and again, yet it is a small price you pay compared to what you gain in terms of your personality. You become maturer in your judgement, your vision becomes clearer, you grow stronger and bolder, you become a vastly better person in all respects. Seen in this light, the saying 'failures are the pillars of success' makes sense. Never to give up trying in the face of repeated failures is the lesson of the *Gita*.

Browning echoes the same thought in his 'Life in a Love' when he says, 'To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,/And, baffled, get up and begin again.' The real test of a man is when he is confronted with adversity. When everything is easy and smooth, it is easy to go on, but to go on when there are difficulties, when you are persistently dogged by ill luck, requires much courage. Hindus believe that it is possible to build up such an inner strength as to be able to defy all hostile forces within or without, and pursue one's objective with unflinching devotion. One way of building up this strength is to know that life is a sport. The rule of the game is that whatever happens you should always go on, taking both success and failure in your stride. Leave nothing to chance, depend upon your own efforts. A coward balks at difficulties, a bold man welcomes them because he wants to measure his strength against them. To dare, and never to fear difficulties is the most important lesson to remember.

KILLING THE SELF

The whole purpose of religion is to kill the self, the individual self. What exactly does it mean? Does it mean that you have to commit suicide? If it means something else, if it means, for instance, killing your own ego, why should you do it? What do you gain by it? And how do you kill your ego if that is what it means?

Indeed, killing the self means killing the ego, killing that consciousness of 'me' and 'mine' which is the very centre of our existence. We live for this ego, to satisfy its whims, its passions; we are slaves to it. But what is this ego? It is our self, but distorted self. It is the self which thinks it is the master to whom all powers and all things in the world should belong. A man thinks he loves his wife and children, his friends and relations, but, really speaking, he loves himself, his 'self', and it is for the sake of this self that he loves whomsoever and whatsoever he says he loves. The 'me' and 'mine' which constantly thrust themselves out in a person's dealings with others are only projections of this ego. In short, it is because of this ego that life with all its ramifications for an individual can go on. It is this ego that makes a man selfish.

But selfishness is the root of all trouble in the world. Individuals, communities, and countries fall out because they are selfish. If there are wars, it is because some nations are too selfish. Some amount of selfishness is natural but it can be excessive and when excessive, it becomes dangerous. It is at this point that some sort of check is called for. Even within a family or community, if there is too much selfishness, it has to be curbed. The necessity for a State to frame laws and devise a machinery

to enforce those laws arises because of this selfishness. The laws evolve through centuries of experience and most of them remain unwritten. Within certain limits, selfishness is legitimate, even welcome, but where it exceeds those limits, the offending member or members may have to face expulsion. This happens even in the animal world. In man's case, the check is more rigid; the criterion of his progress is how selfless he is.

Civilization, in fact, is a process of reducing selfishness to a minimum. The most selfless man is the most civilized. The ideal is selflessness, giving precedence to the interests of others over one's own. The best, the only way of achieving this is through religion. Religion demands pushing aside one's own self in favour of another being, a higher being, in common parlance, known as God. 'Not me but thou' — this, in a nutshell, is the attitude of a religious man. To the higher being, i.e. God, he surrenders his will, his interests, his own self. Slowly, through years of practice, he is able to replace himself by God who is the symbol of all that is best and highest, the Soul of all souls, the Being of all beings. Slowly his own self disintegrates, in its place there is God, the Self of all. When this happens, a man is then the Self of all, that is to say, his concern is no longer for himself but for all beings. His happiness henceforth is in the happiness of others, his sorrow in the sorrow of others.

This is what is regarded as liberation, liberation from the bondage which narrow selfishness imposes on a man, the kind of selfishness which flows from the feeling that you, as an individual, have a separate identity from others. When this selfishness is gone, you have the feeling that you are one with others, as if your own self is extinct, 'killed'. This is the goal of religion.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL ACTION

To what extent can religion and social action go together? In other words, can you practise religion seriously if you are too much involved in social action? The question arises because in this dynamic age religious people find themselves, willy-nilly, more and more drawn into the maelstrom of social life, so that they hardly have time to pray. At best, they can mumble a prayer now and then, but they cannot hold a real communion with God, which is what real prayer is. Religion means killing the ego. To do that, one has to do much thinking, arguing, and weeping. It is a battle one must fight against oneself. Only the bravest and most determined can win this battle. But where is the strength to come from to wage this battle? The strength is within, only one has to explore one's depths to discover it. It is a long and arduous task, but it can be done. It requires practice, long and ceaseless practice. But if one's mind and energy are occupied with social action, how can one do this practice, in other words, how can one make any progress with one's religious life?

Hinduism has an answer to this question. It says : 'Yes, you can still make good progress with your religious life provided you work with detachment, work as if you are an instrument of God. Such work is as good as prayer. It is worship.' Nothing, according to Hinduism, is secular. Whatever a man does is spiritual in that it takes him either towards God or away from Him. If one works with humility and reverence and with the feeling that one is serving God, work, then, becomes a spiritual exercise.

This is the secret of Karma-yoga, work which unites a devotee with God. If, on the other hand, you work out of pity for your fellow men, it means you are working out of arrogance. An arrogant man can never do good to others. He does more harm than good — to himself as well as to others.

If a man spends all his time praying, is he to be condemned because while he is trying for his own liberation he is doing nothing for others? According to Hinduism, such a man is doing more good to society than a so-called social worker can do. How? By the example of his life. He demonstrates how one should live one's life. His life is the epitome of religion, ethics, and social action. In silence, he shapes the destinies of other people. This is the best service that one can render to others. Giving food to the hungry is certainly good work, but a better form of service is to give people intellectual help. A still better way to help others is to help them spiritually. This is what a man of God does. He does so not by preaching, he only lives his life, which is more effective than any number of speeches that he might have made. A silent man, steeped in God-contemplation, can do more good to humanity than the busiest social worker. What such a man does lasts for centuries. The work of Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed is an example. St. John said : 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' A man wrapped in God enjoys intense rest in the midst of intense action. Today there is much action in and around us but no rest. As a result, there is much divisiveness at all levels of life. What man needs in this technological age is a sense of unity and peace. This can be acquired only by living in constant communion with God. Social action is good, but not if it hurts that communion.

KRISHNA

Krishna was statesman, philosopher, warrior, and humanist — all rolled into one. He was, above all, a defender of virtue. He fought evil wherever he saw it. He destroyed his own kinsmen because they were wicked. Left to himself, he would have preferred to live a quiet life, but the events in contemporary India forced him to take a hand in shaping the country's destiny. The mantle of leadership was literally thrust on him. If ever intervention by a single individual changed a country's history, this was it. He was kind, but, where necessary, also ruthless. But his motive was always the same : upholding virtue. He was not an idealist who merely talked; he was a man of action and it was always to defend truth and justice that he acted. Weakness often passes as goodness. He had nothing to do with this kind of goodness. He would rather have a strong man making honest mistakes than an ineffective man doing nothing lest he commit mistakes. He had many admirers and, naturally, many enemies also, but, so far as he was concerned, he treated everybody according to his merits as a man. A man might be poor, but if he was a good and honest man, Krishna would rather be his guest eating whatever he could afford than eat at the house of a prince who was wicked.

Krishna appeared at a period of history when there was much confusion as to the real meaning and purpose of religion. He removed that confusion. There were many contending systems of thought in the field of religion then, each claiming to be the best and highest. He reconciled them, giving each its place. There were also many social practices which created unnecessary divisions among men and women. He reorganized them

into what is called caste based on aptitudes and skills. People needed a philosophy which gave life a purpose and a sense of direction. He taught that philosophy. It was nothing new perhaps, it was ancient wisdom, but he distilled it into a new form which was at once logical and relevant. In this, Krishna sums up man's goal of life and the way to reach it. He teaches no dogma, he teaches what is obvious, practical, and reasonable. He makes no false promise, he draws attention to the realities of life and teaches how they may be handled. Life is as much a challenge as an opportunity. One can never turn one's back on it, one has to face it, never balking at the struggle that it may demand. 'Intense rest in the midst of intense activity' — this is the ideal Sri Krishna preaches. Most people are victims of their circumstances. The ideal is to rise above circumstances, to remain calm in spite of everything. This is possible when one fully masters the art of non-attachment. Sri Krishna stressed much the importance of this art of non-attachment. He taught a new concept of duty. What is duty for a scholar cannot be duty for a soldier. A scholar may abhor killing but a soldier has to kill, it is his duty. One cannot copy another. Each has to grow in his own way, according to his genius. Each has to do his duty well, there is no high or low in this. A sweeper who does his duty well is just as good as a priest who does his duty well.

Sri Krishna is the ideal man, judged by any standard. He is the sum total of all that man can wish to have — strength, courage, wisdom, physical beauty, above all, moral grandeur. He is the way as well as the goal before man.

'THE LIGHT OF ASIA'

Buddha taught no new religion. He taught the old Brahmanical religion, but only that part of it which is its kernel, which, in fact, is the kernel of every other religion, of religion itself. He wanted people to fix their attention on this kernel rather than waste time debating about matters they understood very little or occupying themselves with practices which touch only the fringe of religion, if at all. He was a pragmatist who knew that the best way to learn is by doing. This is why to the last day he maintained silence when people asked him questions about God or soul. His silence was naturally misunderstood and some even accused him of trying to hide his ignorance by refusing to answer such questions. This did not budge Buddha from his position, for he was sensible enough to know that, by launching into a discussion of ontology, he would not help clear the confusion which already prevailed but would only add to it. He knew that the ultimate truth could never be presented to the curious crowds like an object for them to look at, turn over, and judge; it was something that had to be known only through *transcendental experience*. As Ramakrishna used to say, what sugar tastes like can be known only when it has been tasted. It is a question of direct and personal experience, and not one of guess-work or intellectual apprehension. This is why Buddha scrupulously avoided speculative discussions, debates, and arguments, for they led nowhere and were a sheer waste of time.

To underscore the folly of such exercises, he would describe them like the speculations of a man, hit by a poisoned arrow, as to the caste of the enemy while he should hasten to get medical aid. He would not counten-

ance waste of time over such idle and futile discussions while the burning problem is how to end the sorrow which is universal.

But is it true that sorrow is universal? In what sense is sorrow universal? Buddha contends that life is full of misery and everybody is suffering, even the most fortunate among us. It is true that there are moments of happiness but those moments are so rare and are of such fleeting nature that they only heighten the misery that is temporarily absent. This may sound pessimism, but Buddha claims he is only making a statement of fact. It is self-deception not to see this. But 'why is there this phenomenon of universal sorrow?' one may ask. Buddha's answer is that this sorrow is self-created. Man suffers because he lacks self-control, because he lets desire get the better of his judgement, because, driven by desire, he runs after objects he cannot keep for long or objects he had better not have at all. Self-control, in Buddha's view, is the secret of happiness. To conquer oneself is more creditable than to conquer a territory, he used to say. But how can one acquire self-control? Only by practice. His eightfold path is nothing but a detailed account of this practice. By treading this path one gets to the goal of life which Buddha describes as *nirvana*, which, though designated differently by different religions, is the same thing — supreme happiness.

Buddha's prescription is clear, there is nothing mystifying in it. 'Test it as gold is tested by fire', Buddha says. The onus is entirely on oneself, there is no external element to help. And one has to carry one's own cross, one has to be one's own lamp also.

JESUS CHRIST

Christ's message is best summed up in his Sermon on the Mount. Here he unfolds an ideal which has inspired mankind for twenty centuries and will continue to do so in the centuries to come. It has given man a sense of direction, told him what he should aim at, given him a yardstick by which he can judge himself. Without it he would have been helpless like a rudderless ship in a raging sea. Now that he knows his goal, all he needs to do is to struggle, keep struggling, till he reaches it. If the human level is to rise, the Sermon on the Mount points to the way, the only way, it can do so.

But why has not man improved in spite of Christ or Buddha or other religious leaders? one may ask. He has improved his environment, but why has he himself remained unchanged? This is indeed a paradox. Some will say : Given the present alignment of economic and political forces, there is no hope that man himself will improve. First of all, much of what is moral or immoral by present-day standards is arbitrary, having been devised by selfish people who want to perpetuate their hold on the poor and the ignorant. Secondly, they argue that so long as large sections of people are denied social justice, there is bound to be preponderance of crime, immorality, and evil. In other words, it is the social conditions that determine whether a man will be moral or immoral. Pushed further, the argument implies that if a man is poor or otherwise handicapped, he is automatically wicked. But it is common experience that there are people who despite their economic and social limitations are moral, while there are people who in spite of all the advantages they enjoy in terms of economic resources

and social status are prone to be corrupt. So it is not entirely a question of environment. It is in fact a question of whether or not a person has set himself a moral goal and how strong his will is to pursue that goal. The environment may be a hindrance, even then by sheer will he overcomes it. The environment may help, but a truly honest man is honest for reasons of his own. Even if there is no fear of detection, he will not do what he knows to be wrong. He will similarly do no wrong even if there is the prospect of getting a reward for doing a wrong. A man cannot be taught to be kind, good, or generous by legislation. He has to acquire these qualities through years of struggle, perhaps marked by frequent failures.

There have always been individuals who have practised Christ's message, some more, some less. There will always be people who will do so. But the time has come when leaders all over the world should ponder if Christ's message cannot be practised at the collective level. If the world has to improve, humanity must commit itself to the kind of ideal Christ or, for that matter, other saints and sages preached. That is to say, all human affairs, individual or collective, must be governed by the principles of piety, brotherhood, compassion, love, and goodwill. It sounds utopian, but there seems no alternative to it.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Ramakrishna's message to man is to aspire for the highest. He specifies what he thinks is the highest — God-realization. What does he mean by God-realization? God-realization, according to him, is a kind of experience which completely changes an individual. He is no longer an individual, he is the cosmos, the whole, the infinite, all and everything. It is like the river entering the sea, the river loses its identity, becomes the sea. Can this happen? Ramakrishna testifies that it can. When a young boatman hit his brother, Ramakrishna cried out in pain; his body bore marks of the assault. If somebody plucked a leaf, he felt as if he was plucking at his heart. If others were happy he was happy, if others were in pain he was in pain. This sense of being one with others, with everyone and everything, 'from the Supreme Being to the tiny blade of grass', is the immediate result of the experience called God-realization. When this happens, 'I' and 'mine' become irrelevant, the small self dies, the big Self which is the self of all takes its place. Love and compassion then become natural, as natural as the coolness of the breeze, the fragrance of the flower, the sweetness of the nightingale's music.

Ramakrishna *lived* his message. He was LOVE personified. However mistaken a man might be, however wrong his philosophy, Ramakrishna would not condemn him, nor make too much haste to correct him. Each individual is unique and each must grow in his own way — this was Ramakrishna's understanding of man. His concern was to see that each was struggling, struggling to grow. This struggling was most important, for one could grow only when one struggled. Not to be content easily, not

to be content with paltry things, but to aim high and to keep struggling till the best and highest are within one's grasp, was his call to everybody. If some men and women had become great, others could become great too. It was a question of struggle, faith, and courage. Given these, the impossible becomes possible. The future of civilization depends on this struggle. Should man feel that he has achieved enough, he sees no reason to struggle further and his future progress is doomed. This means stagnation, death. Man's achievements through science and technology are certainly stupendous, but man, being man, cannot stop there, he has to go forward, go on and on, for ever. This is man's destiny, his obligation.

Man is an alien to himself in the present age. He finds chaos within and chaos without, he has lost his sense of direction, he does not know where he is heading. He has achieved much, but he finds what he has achieved can very well be his doom. He wants to love and to be loved, but something has gone wrong somewhere so that, instead of loving and being loved, he hates and is hated. The greatest problem in the present age is the problem of human relationship. The relations between individual and individual, between nation and nation are warped by suspicion and distrust. There is no peace anywhere — at home, in society, or at the international level. Man is haunted by his own restlessness, his greed, anger, hatred, and jealousy.

Only the trail that Ramakrishna, in this age, blazes can save mankind. His is the way of achieving the highest, the highest which is within and not without, the way of love.

SARADA DEVI

In a sense, Sarada Devi's life was more colourful than Ramakrishna's. And certainly more testing and more complicated. Ramakrishna never knew the rigours of a householder's life, its challenges, its bitternesses. He, the ideal monk, always kept away from the cross-currents of a family life. He was a child of nature, free, happy, and gay; he loved to watch the fun called life but was careful enough never to be drawn into its maelstroms. Sarada Devi, on the contrary, was at the very heart of it. She was the head of a large family comprising men and women, most of them not even distantly related to her. And what an assortment of characters they were! Some of them were great souls by any standard, but there were also some who were mean, jealous, and positively mischievous. How she managed to keep them all together without losing her balance of mind in the process is a mystery. And each of them was convinced that she loved him or her the best. They were all of them dependent on her, not only spiritually but also materially. She was not only their 'mother' but also their guru. She gave them full satisfaction on both scores.

Sarada Devi had a hard life from beginning to end. As daughter, wife, and, finally, as the beloved mother of a large community of people cutting across race and language, there were demands on her much more than a woman in her circumstances normally has to meet. She fulfilled them in a manner possible only for her. But what is remarkable is that, in the midst of all her cares, she maintained a degree of aloofness which Hinduism attributes to the highest and best among men and women. Through the skein of all the varying situations which she

faced, she remained absolutely calm as if these were no concern of hers. Her fortitude, courage, and wisdom, tested again and again, amazed everybody.

But the most amazing thing about her was her renunciation, a quality she shared with her husband in a measure equal to, if not more than, his. She often found herself in a situation in which starvation seemed certain, but under no circumstances would she seek aid from any quarter. Even when her disciples had grown to a considerable number and there were people among them with means to keep her in comfort and also anxious to be of service to her, she would never so far as even drop a hint that she had any difficulty.

She taught not by precepts but by examples. There were irritants galore in the way people around her behaved, but she was an indulgent mother who knew the best way to educate an erring child was to set an example before him, which she did. She had seen the worst side of man, but she never lost faith in him, knowing that, given affection, sympathy, and guidance, he could overcome all his limitations.

She was human, yet divine. Her divinity shone through everything she did, even if it was something entirely mundane. She was a simple woman, but in thought, speech, and action she was attuned to God. She demonstrated how one could be in the world and yet not of it. Because her mind rested constantly on God, her whole life was a continuous prayer. She was a true saint, but she never claimed she was. She passed as an ordinary woman, but everything about her was extraordinary.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

In all he said and did Swami Vivekananda's chief concern was man. He described man as 'the only God I believe in'. 'Man-making is my mission', he used to say. Man, according to him, has immense possibilities, there being almost no limit to his growth. The task before man is to grow, to keep growing, despite constraints. Only man can make a conscious effort to grow, can plan and direct his growth, can even choose its pace. He — only he — can be his own master. He may have difficulties in the way — he is sure to have them, but he can overcome them. Without difficulties life would be dull, there would perhaps be no growth, either. Man has to overcome more difficulties than an animal. This is why man is man. The more a man advances, the greater are the difficulties he has to face. The greatest man has to face the greatest difficulties. Not to be daunted by difficulties is the test of a man. Swami Vivekananda thought that religion imparted that quality to man which sustained him through all his trials and tribulations. He called that quality self-confidence. Strength, courage, and self-confidence — these, according to him, are the essence of religion, all other things are peripheral.

Growth, in his view, is not merely physical or material; it is also moral and spiritual. 'Each soul is potentially divine', he used to say. That is to say, man is not just man, but also God, God only potentially now but with every chance that this potentiality shall some day be transformed into reality. The goal is to grow, to go on growing, till the divinity that is in man becomes manifest. It is not just a fancy, but a distinct possibility. He would point to Buddha and Christ as examples of the extent to

which man can grow. If there has been one Buddha or Christ, there can be many more Buddhas and Christs, he would argue. They were no doubt unique, but they were unique in their power of will, in their capacity to make sustained efforts to grow, to improve, till they became godlike. If they became what they became, there is no reason why others cannot achieve the same degree of moral and spiritual growth. It is relatively easy to make material progress, but it is infinitely more difficult to raise one's moral and spiritual stature. With a little effort one may be able to overcome one's poverty or disease or such similar external handicaps, but to be able to overcome one's moral weakness, to control the mind and direct it to that which is good and right, to mould one's life and character strictly according to moral principles, to achieve moral perfection, requires much greater effort. Buddha would give the credit of a hero to the man who conquers himself and not to the man who conquers a territory or an enemy.

Swami Vivekananda had, however, the practical sense to realize that it would be a vain task to preach religion and morality to people who starved, people who were neglected, oppressed, and were victims of social injustice. He was a champion of freedom, justice, and equality everywhere; he welcomed the truths of science and technology, for they have armed man with the power to combat all kinds of physical evils, but his message was that this should be matched by religion, for religion alone can give man the moral and spiritual tilt which he now lacks and which alone makes him a complete man.

PEACE

The Dalai Lama, while speaking on the occasion of the Theosophical Society of India's centenary celebration, put his finger on the real problem when he said that at the root of the troubles which afflicted man today lay his own pride and selfishness. He said that there could be no peace on earth so long as man continued to neglect moral values. Progress in science and technology was good, but this, he pointed out, needed to be matched by advancement in moral qualities if chances of conflicts were to be minimized.

Unfortunately, those who control human affairs today would receive the great pontiff's remark with derision only. But have they anything better to suggest? They will probably point to suitable changes in political relationships as a possible solution to the problems that threaten international peace today. They have proceeded on this assumption a long time now, but peace seems as elusive as ever. Even if there are no open hostilities, the cloak-and-dagger game goes on all the same. A *détente* is only a euphemism for the time given to each other for the next move in this game. Meanwhile, tension mounts, the arms race goes on unabated, and relations between the nations get more and more tangled. Can there be any peace this way?

If the seeds of war are in the heart, the heart must be cleansed of them. Hatred must be replaced by love. Naive, perhaps, but there is no other solution. Buddha showed *maitri* (goodwill) even towards those who consistently harmed him. Christ begged forgiveness for those responsible for his death. Gandhi always treated the British as friends even though they responded by

throwing him into prison. He was often criticized because he mixed religion with politics, but he saw no conflict between the two. Politics or, for that matter, whatever he did, was an extension of religion. A religious man is a religious man, under all circumstances and in all he does. The idea that politics and religion must be kept apart has done much mischief. A politician needs religion more than any other functionary, because in discharging his duties rightly a politician has to exercise a great deal of self-restraint and show in his dealings with others that he is thoroughly honest and fair. One reason why peace has become a difficult proposition is that politicians are not fair to each other. Where the country's interests are concerned they think it is all right to be ruthless. To them, any means is good if the end is good. But very often, both the end and the means are bad.

The miracle of peace can happen only if love replaces hatred. Love, goodwill, friendship — these come from religion only. Within the national context, there can be no peace unless there is social justice guaranteed to every section of people. At the international level also, there can be no peace unless freedom is assured for every nation to pursue its own course of life. In both cases, men in power have to be inspired by the religious ideals of equality and fair play. A truly religious man treats the entire human race as his family, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*.

The Dalai Lama has done well in sounding the timely warning that material prosperity will lose its meaning if it is not accompanied by moral uplift.

WORLD LEADERSHIP

World leadership today is in the hands of people whose only credibility is that they represent rich and powerful countries. They are able to impose their will on others not by virtue of any outstanding qualities which they possess in terms of intellect and character but because they have behind them the great economic and military power which their countries possess. They may be people with no interest in what goes on outside their countries and no sympathy with the just and valid aspirations of other peoples. Yet they are people who can sway the course of world events in any direction they like. That is to say, they have power without responsibility. No wonder they are a terror to weaker nations.

What, then, is expected of a world leader? What is his profile like? First and foremost, he will be a person who deems the entire human race as his family. He loves his country all right but this love does not make him blind to his obligations to other countries. If his country does any injustice to another country he will be the first to protest. He believes in certain principles which he follows irrespective of what other people say or think about him. He has no other ambition than that he may serve others to the best of his ability. All men and women are equally dear to him, even those who oppose his country. He is completely free from ego so that if any plan of his goes wrong, he does not feel upset. Also he is not overjoyous if his plan succeeds. What he is concerned about is principles. If he has followed his principles he is content. Similarly, if anybody criticizes him or does him harm, he does not bear any grudge against him. He

does not seek any recognition for what he does. He is content to do what he thinks right. To him the means is just as important as the end. The world may or may not acclaim him as its leader, but it is of no concern to him. The interesting thing is that people follow him all the same. They follow him because of himself, because of what he is, and not because of his country. They follow him because they see in him the ideal man.

It is clear that it is not enough for a world leader to be politically astute. It may be an additional qualification, but the essential requisite is for him to have a character that will command respect from all including those who disagree with him. People aspiring for world leadership have to have something of the moral stature that characterized Buddha and Christ. They must have the same compassion and wisdom so that the weaker nations may feel that their interests are safe in their hands. As world leaders, they must accept the responsibility of helping the weaker nations grow stronger. If there is any injustice done to them, they must see it redressed quickly. Now that technology has unified the world, they must help this unity grow stronger and more meaningful by promoting the spirit of co-operation and friendship among the nations. The world's problems are not merely political and economic. They are also moral. Life's purpose is not accumulation of wealth and pursuit of sense-pleasure, but higher development — morally and spiritually. World leaders should never tire of repeating this. But they themselves should set an example in this respect.

‘NOT ME, THOU’

Can there be a higher destiny for man than what wealth, political power, intellectual brilliance, and social standing represent? This question is relevant, because some individuals have these advantages to a good measure and yet do not seem satisfied. What else can they crave for? Perhaps they themselves do not know. The fact is that this sense of dissatisfaction is general — all are plagued by it, including the luckiest among us.

This raises the question : What is it that makes a man happy? The ancient seers of India did not think that man's happiness depended upon external circumstances. But the impression that they worshipped poverty is wrong. They always thought it an impediment. But they did not mind it — they even preferred it if the alternative was moral and spiritual bankruptcy. To them, physical well-being was necessary, but still more necessary was moral well-being. The goal of life, according to them, was perfection, which alone could make a man happy. A perfect man is happy because he feels he has all he needs — within himself. He is happy with the barest necessities of life provided he has been able to conquer his ego. The ancient seers of India contended that perfection came when one saw that there was a common thread running through existence, however diverse it might appear. When one saw this unity of existence, one could not hate or fight others. One could only serve. One also ceased to be selfish, for if all were one in essence, the question of being selfish did not arise. To see this oneness makes for peace and harmony. Knowing this oneness, a perfect man can only love, help, and serve.

It sounds too high an ideal, but that makes the challenge all the more exciting. 'Not me, thou' — this, according to Swami Vivekananda, is the key to all human progress. The beginning of ethics is in this motto. There would hardly be any civilization without this selflessness. There would be no religion, either. Finally, selflessness is perfection.

Have there been any individuals who can be said to be perfect, judged by this criterion? Some names immediately come to mind. One was Buddha. He spurned all that high birth, political power, or wealth could offer. Service to humanity was to him the highest good. He would gladly die to save a small lamb or a head-hunter. Christ died so that others might live in immortality. Cast in the same mould were Mohammed and Nanak. Ramakrishna, in our time, followed the same life-style. Money, social success, scholarship — all these galled him. His fellow-men were his sole concern.

Ramakrishna's example clearly shows that happiness depends upon 'being' and not 'having'. He had little by way of material possessions and yet was happy. He had some inner richness which made up for what he lacked outside. Can this richness be defined? Selflessness is perhaps another name for this richness. 'Seeing the Self in others and others in the Self' — makes for this selflessness. If I hit you, I hit myself. If I help you, I help myself. Ramakrishna felt happy when others were happy; he was sorry when others were sorry. His ego embraced the whole of existence.

Ramakrishna is the latest miracle in the life-style which says : 'Not me, thou.'

THE DEATH OF AN IDEAL

If caste was designed to promote skills and avoid competitions it has served Hindu society well. Originally, it might have been its purpose also to help each individual attain to the highest goal of life, brahminhood, but how far it fulfilled that purpose is a matter of speculation. There is no doubt that caste, based on merit and aiming at the highest development of an individual in the direction best suited for him, was an ideal social organization. But the day it banned social mobility by ruling that birth was to be its determining factor and not talent, it invited its own doom. No longer was it open to an individual to practise the trade that suited him best. His trade was predetermined by his birth. A carpenter's son must be a carpenter whether he liked it or not. His talent and temperament might point to a scholar's life but he had to be content with being a carpenter. The reverse was equally frustrating. A brahmin's son might find scholastic life soul-killing. He would much rather sweat over tools than waste time reading books he was least interested in. But birth had already ordained that he should be a scholar, no matter what sort of a scholar. This was no way of promoting scholarship or talents. This was the way to stagnation. This was the beginning of the end, so far as caste was concerned.

But worse things followed when caste branded some trades as high and some as low and allowed special privileges to those it held high. A brahmin was assigned the highest place in the hierarchy. No one could object to this if he was what his caste implied — a perfect man. But not all brahmins were perfect or intellectually advanced. Yet birth had entitled them to brahminhood

and that was that. A Shudra or a Vaishya might be a superior man in terms of character and intellect but he must be content with the status his caste assigns him. Unfair, no doubt, but worse, talents could no longer grow under the system. Caste thus ended up defeating itself.

But this was not all. Close on the heels of caste came untouchability, the worst blot on Hindu society. It had to come, seeing the way caste operated. Some trades were just not clean, no matter how important socially. Any physical contact with people who followed those trades was contamination. They were therefore untouchables!

At first, personal hygiene may have been the reason behind this, but later birth became its basis. A sweeper, physically clean, was still an untouchable; a brahmin with no sense of hygiene, was still a brahmin. The viciousness of it did not stop here. Untouchability spread to the higher castes also. One caste would not mix with another if it was lower. A society, so divided, is bound to lose its cohesion. Hindu society did lose its cohesion but, surprisingly, not to the extent one might expect in the circumstances. The explanation perhaps is that certain religious ideals held the people together.

But it is wrong to think that the scourge of caste has continued without any resistance. The enlightened sections of society have always fought it where it impinged on the basic rights of man. There is no doubt it cannot continue long in its present form. The ideal is to transcend all castes and see mankind as one. One hopes the emerging Indian society will bear this in mind.

'BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS'

For anything you want to learn you need a teacher, someone experienced and able to help. For religion, a guru (teacher) is essential. But it is not easy to be a guru. Only a person who is himself highly developed spiritually can and should be a guru. It is said no one should assume a guru's role unless one has been specially commissioned for the purpose. But commissioned by whom? They say, by God Himself. If you are commissioned by God, then whatever you say carries weight. You do much good too to those who follow you, otherwise you do them harm. Can a blind man lead another blind man? It is like that. But how does one know who is commissioned by God and who is not? Is there any way of knowing who is a genuine teacher? They say, yes. You know him by his character. Does he want money for his services? Is he after name and fame, after power and position? Then, beware of him, he is fake. A genuine teacher teaches out of his compassion and wants no return. He is happy to be able to help and does not even admit that he is helping. He will probably say that you are helping yourself. What he probably does is to give you your self-confidence. He makes you conscious of your abilities and points you to the goal towards which you should bend all your efforts. There is, in brief, an esoteric relationship between you and your teacher which places on your teacher the responsibility to ensure that you progress in all directions. If you do not progress, it is the teacher who is to blame. This is why many people balk at the prospect of being gurus to others, even though they are people having requisite qualifications to teach others. They are simply frightened by the responsibilities that the role of a guru carries.

There are also teachers who refuse to extend their circle of disciples beyond a select few. They claim they know who exactly their disciples are, as if their relationship spans many lives. They say they can look after those to whom they have been gurus from an earlier birth. If a new candidate approaches them they can consider his request but they are under no obligation to accept him as a disciple. There are stories of gurus seeking out their disciples from among many, just as there are stories of disciples searching for their gurus and finally being able to locate them. Ramakrishna is on record as being able to recognize at sight those who were 'his own'. He would treat them as if he had always known them. Similarly, he recognized those who did not belong to his flock. He might be nice to them, yet he would tell his disciples not to mix with them too much, for he said they did not belong 'here' (meaning his own school of thought). He would keep an eye not only on people they mixed with but even what they ate and how much. He tended them as mother bird does her chicks! That is what a guru is like.

Viewed against this, the way some gurus are operating in India and abroad is bound to cause concern. They perform weird tricks to convince the world of their powers, but is religion magic? True religion raises a man's moral stature. It makes him a better man, better in every respect. A guru's credentials are to be judged in terms of these qualities. If a guru does not possess these qualities himself, how can he confer them on others? Can an unlighted lamp light other lamps?

‘TO BE OR NOT TO BE’

Has knowledge any purpose? If so, what is it? The Indian view is that it must change your character. What you know must be reflected in what you are. Suppose you have a university degree in science, but you are irrational in your thinking. Your attitude towards life is still coloured by old myths and prejudices. Obviously science education has failed in your case. You have your mind stuffed with material gathered from every possible source, but you are carrying it as if you are carrying a burden. You are just like the ‘beast of burden’ who carries sugar but is not able to eat it!

This is why Indian seers laid great stress on ‘being’. ‘To know is to be’ was their dictum. It is not the amount of knowledge that is important; it is the way you use your knowledge that is important. And the way you will use your knowledge will depend upon what sort of a person you are. If you are a good man, you will use your knowledge well — for your own good and the good of others. But if you are a bad man, you will use your knowledge to harm others and in the end you will harm yourself also. Since knowledge is power, an unscrupulous man, armed with the power which knowledge confers on him, can do much more mischief to society than one who is not educated. Wartime Germany saw this happen. How the scientists there allied themselves with their Government in perpetrating crimes against humanity is well known. The same thing happened in other countries as well though in a lesser degree perhaps. The story of man abusing knowledge is as old as man himself. There is more knowledge now than before, but man is not the better because of that.

This is why one has to ask : What is the purpose of knowledge? Knowledge is often called light, for it dispels the darkness of the mind, i.e. ignorance. 'Lead us from darkness to Light' is a common prayer in India. It is, in fact, a universal prayer. The purpose of knowledge is, therefore, to enlighten. But what is enlightenment? The power to discriminate good from evil, right from wrong, pleasure from pain. It is not enough to be able to discriminate, it is also necessary to stick to what I want. If I know what is right, I should then do what is right. Similarly if I know wherein my pleasure lies, I should then do just that which will ensure that I may always continue to enjoy pleasure. But it takes much courage, strength of mind, and long practice to regulate one's behaviour and action according to one's judgement. This is why 'being' is considered more important than 'knowing'. Where 'being' and 'knowing' go together you have a perfect man. The world has seen great intellectuals, but few men and women of character, i.e. people who quietly *live* ideal lives. It is to such people that the world owes all that is ennobling. It may be good to unravel the mysteries of life but it is much more desirable to be able to live a good life. Buddha's remark that a real hero is he who conquers himself is only too true. Man is out to conquer external nature which is good, but it will be better if he is able to conquer himself. Knowledge is best used when used to raise better men and women.

YOGA

The world-wide interest which yoga has aroused is encouraging, but is not without its dangers. Already yoga centres have cropped up in many places in India and abroad, where yoga is being taught by people least qualified to do so. If yoga were only a physical exercise, no serious objection could be raised against this; but yoga is an integrated science whose sole purpose is to help man improve his spiritual life. At the moment, yoga's popularity rests on the proven physical benefit it brings. It keeps the body slim, strengthens the digestive organs, keeps off common diseases like colds, helps one preserve one's youth and beauty, and so on. The claim is also made that it can cure more serious diseases, but the claim has yet to be tested. As man's chief worry is about his body, no wonder yoga is becoming increasingly popular. More and more people are crowding round these yoga centres, hoping to push back their advancing age or retain their fast-fading beauty. That yoga has a higher purpose is hardly realized. So much fuss is made over its physical advantages that many have now come to think it is nothing but another form of physical exercise. This suits the self-styled teachers because they know little or nothing about its other advantages.

Yoga literally means 'union'. But union with what? With God, and with the psychic powers that lie locked up within the mind, according to the Hindu scriptures. It is a sort of communion with the source from which all powers emanate. Hindus believe that there are infinite powers lying hidden within the mind. Those powers remain unused and shall remain unused so long as man is not able to establish contact with those powers. It is

the science of yoga which enables man to use those powers for whatever purpose he likes. Yoga is, therefore, essentially a science of the mind. The body also plays its part but it is only to the extent that it is an adjunct of the mind. A yogi takes due care of the body but does not allow it to take precedence over the mind. A yogi has to have a fit body but, more important, an alert mind.

A yogi can think and feel in a way much better than an ordinary person. He has deep feelings, feelings that remain unknown to any individual. Again, if such feelings ever come to an ordinary individual, he gets completely swept off his feet, but a yogi has those feelings fully under his control. A yogi has also thoughts too high and subtle for a person who has never practised yoga. A yogi, on the whole, lives a life marked by deep and colourful experiences. His sensibilities being more sharp and mature, he enjoys life more intensely than others. The truths which an ordinary man can never comprehend are a commonplace to him. He may have a frail body but his mind is so powerful that anyone who comes within his orbit is influenced by him.

It is said that if you are not strong physically and mentally, you cannot realize God or make any spiritual progress. This is where yoga comes in. It helps you develop a good physique and a sharp and sensitive mind. But if you say you are interested only in what it does for your body and you do not care what it does for your mind or not, you are then not taking full advantage of what yoga offers you. You are missing the more important part of the benefit yoga can give you. You are also misusing it.

MEDITATION

The *Gita* says that it is hard to control the mind, just as hard as controlling the wind. But if you cannot control the mind, you run great risks in that you may do silly and rash things, things for which you will be sorry later. If, for instance, somebody provokes you, you may react in a manner leading to unpleasant consequences for you and others. A man without any self-discipline is always erratic. He can seldom think or act coolly and judiciously. He acts on the spur of the moment, doing things he would not have done if he knew what he was doing. But a man having control over his mind is slow but sure and seldom makes a mistake. He is a conscientious man, always honest, straightforward, and dutiful. He is also confident, bold, and strong. The *Gita* says that such a person takes everything in his stride—praise or blame, fortune or misfortune, and so on. Whatever may happen, he maintains his calm, his vision is clear, his judgement sound. He takes a decision after weighing all its pros and cons and once he takes a decision he never swerves from it.

But how does one get such control of oneself? Hindu scriptures say, by practising meditation. If you practise meditation regularly and in a correct manner, you become your own master and cease to be the slave of circumstances that you are now. But what is meditation? And how does one meditate? Meditation is thinking, thinking deeply, with deep concentration. When you fix your mind on something, that is meditation. Normally you find your mind always flitting about, but if you can keep it fixed on some object, idea, or experience, you are meditating. It is as if you are pouring a liquid from one

pot to another in a continuous flow. Or as if a lamp is burning in a room and there is not a whiff of wind to disturb its flame. There is yet another simile — that in which the mind is compared to a lake with a smooth surface, there being not a single ripple on it. There is a tremendous force when the whole lake is turned into a wave or a stream. Similarly, when the whole mind is applied to a task, it is more easily accomplished. The fact of the matter is that the mind is always in a state of turmoil. If by practising meditation, one can bring it under control, one can then make use of the great powers that lie hidden in the mind in whatever way one likes.

But how does one meditate? First of all, you sit in the position of a lotus with your back straight. Then, fix your mind on either a figure, word, or symbol. Whatever you choose to fix your mind on, imagine it as luminous. Focus your mind on it with intensity so that you may feel as if you are one with it. Hindus believe that if you keep meditating on Buddha you eventually become a Buddha. This is where meditation excels as a character-formation technique.

There are people who say that it is immaterial what you meditate on so long as you meditate. They say that you may meditate on a nonsense word and yet get the same results from meditation. This goes contrary to the Hindu saying that you are what you think you are. Even if you are not a religious person, meditation may help you but meditation is essentially for people who are trying to achieve some religious purpose. If meditation is used for relaxation only — this is exactly how it is being used by a great many people today — you are not taking full advantage of what it can do for you.

THE PRINTED WORD

It is difficult to tell how many books are published every year. The number must be staggering. But are all these books really worth publishing? How many of them are going to be read or are readable?

This leads to the question : What sort of books should be published? The answer at once is books having something new, important, or uplifting to offer. Even if some books are a mere rehash of what others have said, they may be published provided they present old thoughts or interpret old material to meet the needs of the present age. Take for instance the old idea that you should love your neighbour as yourself. It is an eternal truth, just as valid now as when it was first stated, yet it will not pass muster unless it is put across with sound political and economic arguments. It is not enough to say that the man who first said this was a holy man. Holiness is no longer the test of credibility. The truth must be established in terms men and women of this generation understand. It may be a truism that the whole fabric of human knowledge centres round a few basic truths which are eternal. Yet each generation looks at those truths from a new angle and questions them. This happens because life keeps moving on and conditions are never the same. Each generation finds itself confronted with new situations and new challenges. Why should it accept the old truths unless it finds them valid against the challenges it is facing? If someone demonstrates with appropriate arguments and in terms the generation understands that the old truths still hold good, then whatever he writes will be worth reading.

On this token, not many books are worth publishing. Yet they are being published and will continue to be published at the present rate or even at an increased rate. The reason is that most people write books not because they have something original or profound to say but because they want to satisfy their ego. This is so very different from the practice of the old seers of India. Their wisdom is known but they themselves have preferred to remain unknown!

The role of books is indeed crucial because many people have a feeling of awe towards the printed word. The tendency to treat the printed word as sacrosanct is wide-spread. Few, indeed very few, think, argue, or discriminate for themselves. They want others to do so for them. They accept whatever appears in print as final. Even people, otherwise very clever, are not free from this weakness. If the purpose of a book is to disseminate knowledge, it must then disseminate knowledge which is useful. When a man says he has known Truth and his character gives convincing proof that he has, his words carry tremendous power. For generations, people love and cherish his words and derive inspiration from them. The knowledge he gives is true knowledge, knowledge that sustains and nourishes.

A book should also try to stimulate independent and rational thinking. It may not give any new information, but if it strikes a new line of thinking, even challenging long-cherished beliefs and traditions with good reasoning and on the basis of new data, the book is most welcome. Civilization cannot progress if man does not think. *Das Kapital* has made man think and in so far as it has done so, it is one of the greatest books ever written. One may not agree with a book, but if it gives man food for thought, it is welcome.

DETACHMENT

Swami Vivekananda once remarked that if a man had never cried with pain, he could not be taken to have grown into adulthood. By implication, pain and suffering are to be regarded as an inevitable concomitant of life; no one can honestly say that he had never had any trouble with himself or his surroundings. Joy and sorrow follow each other like day and night. It is useless to say that one will have only joy and no sorrow. If you ask for joy, you are also asking for sorrow. This is why Hindu thinkers say the ideal is to go beyond both joy and sorrow. They believe that there is a state in which both have no meaning or an identical meaning. It is not that you are not conscious of joy and sorrow. You may be a highly sensitive person so that even a little joy or sorrow duly registers with you, but you have so trained yourself that you are not affected by them. You know that life has its ups and downs, but you never let them disturb your peace of mind. To you it is all the same whether people praise or criticize you. You take both as fun. But is such a state desirable? one may ask. Why should I not thank people if they praise me? After all, I am not a piece of stone that I do not feel anything. If I am dead, I do not care what people say or think about me. But so long as I am alive, it is only natural that I will feel and react. A less sensitive person will feel less, and an idiot perhaps will feel nothing. Is idiocy being advocated then?

Certainly not, idiocy is not desirable, but similarly, being at the mercy of people who praise or blame according to their whims is not desirable either. One has to be oneself all the time. That is to say, one should

be one's own master and not a slave to extraneous factors. It is recognized that it is not possible to avoid misfortunes in life. However careful one may be, there will inevitably be disease, old age, bereavement, separation from friends and relations, financial loss, and finally of course death. What is one to do in face of a situation like this? Hindu teachers advise : 'Take them in your stride; do not let them affect you. Behave as if you are only a witness, as if you are watching a football match in which two sides are fighting hard, but you are not in the least concerned about the results, you are there only to enjoy the game.' But what about the good things that life offers? The affection of good friends and relations, wealth, public recognition, health, a high social standing, and so on? Should not one be grateful that one has these good things? Should not one feel happy? Hindu teachers say : 'If you allow these good things to affect you, then, the bad things will affect you too. Either you master them or they master you. There is no other option left to you.'

Does it mean then that one is never to seek pleasure, happiness, or comfort? The answer is, one may seek them, but seek them knowing all the time that one may never get them. Try for what you think is desirable, but be in readiness at the same time to accept calmly the results. This is the philosophy of detachment which the Gita preaches. It is a practical philosophy which asks people to face life as a conquering hero, treating good and bad with equal contempt.

This is not defeatism or fatalism, this is being one's own master.

SPIRITUAL ASPIRATIONS

What does a spiritual aspirant want? What, again, is spirituality? One hears much glib talk about spirituality, but what exactly is it? Obviously, it is a word derived from 'spirit' which is something opposed to 'flesh' and means, among other things, 'attitude, feeling, vigour, qualities associated with intellect, courage, etc.' It is a difficult word to define, but, clearly, it represents the essence of the human personality, the core of one's being. It is not tangible like the human body and it has also a separate entity from the body, though the spirit and the body closely work together. According to the *Gita*, the body is like a piece of cloth which a man may wear and discard at will, that is to say, it is the spirit that is important and the body is only an instrument or vehicle which the spirit uses for its own purpose and as it likes.

What does this boil down to? The body is necessary in so far as it is the instrument the spirit must have in order that it may function in the way it wants to, but the spirit is supreme, it is the master whose dominance must always prevail. Some people live for sense-enjoyment only—good food, drinks, clothing, and so on. They cannot think of any other form of enjoyment, enjoyment which is not gross, which the senses cannot grasp. For instance, a good thought, an ideal, living life according to a high ethical standard—these things do not appeal to them; these things are too vague, too abstract for them. But there are others who are ready to barter away everything they possess for the sake of their religion, their scholarship, their moral convictions. They will welcome hardship, even death, rather than sacrifice

their principles. It is such people who come under the category of spiritual aspirants.

But what spiritual aspirations are the best? Hinduism—perhaps all religions though not so expressly—regard liberation as the best and highest spiritual aspiration, the supreme goal of life.

But liberation from what? Liberation from the state of bondage in which man finds himself today, the state of bondage which stems from attachment to flesh, running after sense-enjoyment. The discriminating soon discover that sense-enjoyment is a pleasure only in a limited sense, for it never lasts long and it also has a hang-over which is often painful. They, therefore, set about conquering the urge they have within their hearts, the urge to which they are held slaves now, to enjoy pleasures of the flesh, pleasures which come from the gross sense-objects. This is where religion comes in, religion which holds the key to self-mastery by virtue of the fact that it is a science of being and becoming, a discipline which helps one grow better and stronger till one finds oneself completely free from the fetters that so long limited one's being. When this happens, you find that it is possible to enjoy pleasure, peace, and happiness independent of your sense-organs or any sense-objects, independent of even the surroundings in which you are. In fact, you discover that the source of joy is within yourself, that you are by nature free, full, self-sufficient. This Self-knowledge is the cause as well as the result of the liberation a spiritual aspirant seeks. To know the Self is to know that this Self is supreme, beyond all space and time, beyond the senses and thoughts, beyond all effects and cause.

IDOLATRY

'It is good to be born in a church, but it is bad to die there', once remarked Swami Vivekananda. The church is no doubt a good institution, but because it is only an institution, it has the obvious limitation of having to subserve some particular religious viewpoint. It lives and grows so long as it represents that viewpoint. But the moment it wavers in its loyalty to that particular viewpoint, it loses its grip on the people on whom it depends, people who are its body and soul, and it begins to disintegrate. The death of the church cannot be far away when this happens. No wonder the church makes it its primary concern to give the impression that its position is unassailable. It may be that those who constitute its leadership have misgivings in their own minds about the soundness of its stand and privately hold views entirely different from what they preach from the church pulpit, but, for their own sake and for the sake of the church itself, they defend their point of view with all the sophistry they may be capable of. The church, in such circumstances, becomes a symbol of short-sightedness, stupidity, and hypocrisy. It is no longer the agency to deliver man to God that it was intended to be. It then becomes an instrument of exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous church leaders.

But the real mischief it perpetrates can be appreciated when the situation is seen from the angle of an individual member of the church. He cannot question or argue, he must only conform. He may have doubts in his mind, but all he can and must do is to acquiesce in what the church says, meekly and without any reservations whatsoever. He may feel suffocated but he must carry out the

wishes of the church in the manner it wants. The church may have stopped growing, it may have a frozen attitude towards religion, perhaps it has nothing to offer him that really suits his tastes, yet he must toe the line it dictates, no matter at what cost to himself.

When an individual accepts this position, he becomes idolatrous. He becomes idolatrous because he has surrendered his power of thought and reason to the idol of the church. So long as the church maintains conditions in which it is possible for an individual to grow freely and according to his peculiar genius, the church is a welcome mediator. But if these conditions act as a deterrent to the individual's growth, the church can no longer claim the allegiance of the individual.

Unfortunately, however, more and more people today swear by either science or religion, this apostle or that, this 'ism' or that. They do not wish to think for themselves, they want others to think for them, they are happy if ready-made solutions are offered to them for whatever problems they have to battle against. It is this tendency which is a much worse form of idolatry than worshipping a particular image, carved in wood or stone, as the Supreme God. Religion is a quest, a very long quest. To get stuck somewhere is to stagnate, it is courting death. The church is a step towards the goal, but not the goal itself. The church is good only to the extent that it is meant to be transcended. If it is not transcended, it defeats itself. This is why it is good to be born in a church, but bad to 'die' there—in a Christian church as well as in every other church.

'BE A LAMP UNTO YOURSELF'

Buddha was no mystic. He was a practical man whose views about life were dictated entirely by sound common sense. Why does man suffer? One need not turn to this philosophy or that for an answer to this question. Man suffers because he cannot or does not control himself. He lets his desires run away with his judgment. The *Gita* says : 'Man is his own friend as well as his foe.' This is very true. He must know what is good for him. He should seek only that which is really good for him, that which is morally and otherwise uplifting. If he does that, he is being a friend to himself. But when he seeks animal pleasures regardless of consequences, he is being his own enemy. Good strivings make a man good, bad strivings bad. The old cliché that man is the architect of his own fate is very true. Life is a challenge as well as an opportunity. Only the strong and the daring can make a success of it.

Buddha had found peace and joy himself and was anxious that his fellow men share them with him. He noticed much of man's misery was of his own making. The seat of the trouble is within man himself. It is a mistake to look outside for its cause and remedy. The solution Buddha offers is simple, practical, and without any philosophical claptrap. He places the onus on man himself and not on any god or goddess, or that unknown factor called Fate. What man needs is self-restraint. The word '*samyak*' which he uses while spelling out how man should conduct himself is very significant. It means restrained, restrained according to the prevailing norms. The *right* thought, the *right* speech, the *right* action—the emphasis always is on the word '*right*' in whatever man

does. The entire eightfold path which Buddha chalks out for man to attain *nirvana* is nothing but a cautious tight-rope walk between that which is pleasant (*preyas*) and that which is really good (*shreyas*). There are people who first act and then think. Buddha wants that they should first think and then act. His advice is : Ask yourself if what you are going to do is right by the accepted moral standards. If not, avoid it.

It is clear what Buddha asks is difficult for ordinary mortals. But what is the way out? Can anybody get away with doing things he should not do? Is there any power that can protect him? Buddha does not recognize any such power. If you do wrong, you must pay for it. 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.' Because Buddha does not want to hold out false hopes, people think he is a pessimist. If anything, he is a pragmatist. He wants people to accept the full responsibility of what they do.

Buddha was so much a pragmatist that he would not like anyone to indulge in idle philosophical discussions. Such discussions are self-defeating. Also, a waste of time. There is more urgent business in hand—how to conquer oneself. Let everybody concentrate on this task.

Buddha would not countenance surrendering one's judgment under any circumstances. As he lay dying, the grief-stricken Ananda said, 'Alas, we are lost. we would not henceforth know the way, for the light is going out of our lives.' Buddha's reply was : 'Why should you think the light is going? Be a lamp unto yourself (also, be like an island).' This certainly was his best message to humanity.

NON-VIOLENCE

Non-violence is often extolled as a great virtue, but is it a great virtue in all circumstances? What about the man who is non-violent only because he is weak? Christ said if somebody hit you on the right cheek, you were to turn your left cheek to him. Now, suppose you turn your left cheek to your assailant only because you are afraid to do otherwise, would that be non-violence? Is cowardice the same thing as non-violence? Gandhi used to say often that non-violence was meant for the strong and not for the weak. Non-violence of the strong is understandable; but non-violence of the weak? You can hit back if you so wish, but you don't because you know the man who offends you is essentially a weak man, one who is not able to control himself. If he is not weak physically he is weak morally. He knows what he is doing is wrong, but he is too weak a person to do otherwise. What will you do with such a person? Return blow for blow? You hate to do so, being conscious of your superiority. This is the point that Buddha made in the conversation he had with that much-feared head-hunter, Angulimala. Angulimala wondered that Buddha was not afraid of him. Buddha pointed out that he had no reason to be afraid of him. He was a strong man, strong in the faith that truth and justice in which he believed, would ultimately prevail. He knew so long as he was honest and just, nothing could harm him. The courage he had was the courage that came from this conviction. This was why he could face any challenge, any calamity, in life. Angulimala, notwithstanding the reputation he had as a cruel man, posed no problem to him. If Angulimala went about hurting other people, it was because he was

a coward, a weak man who was afraid of other people's strength and courage, their superior moral virtues. If he knew he was superior he would be in no haste to kill others. Here is the answer to the riddle why some people tend to be aggressive : it is fear, fear of other people's superior physical and moral strength.

But if turning the other cheek to the enemy is the ideal, how is one to explain Krishna's advice to Arjuna? Arjuna, as we know, was unwilling to fight his enemy. He said he did not care to enjoy the fruits of a victory 'stained with the blood of his dear friends and relations' One would have expected that Krishna would be pleased to hear this, but, instead, he scolded Arjuna as being a coward, a hypocrite. He urged Arjuna to kill his enemy. What a strange contrast this reads with Christ's advice! How can one justify this?

The whole thrust of Hindu teaching is towards helping a man grow in the manner best suited to his nature. Krishna knew that Arjuna, a Kshatriya, wanted to fight, but he was feeling nervous and was therefore trying to pose as a very generous person who did not want to hurt anybody, even if he was an enemy who had consistently done him and his family harm. That is to say, he had lost his nerve and was putting up a false pretence, a posture repugnant to the Hindu spirit. Krishna saw this and called upon him to be himself.

Non-violence is not merely avoiding violence. It is only another name of love, love which makes no distinction between friend and foe. This is the highest ideal that any religion has preached. Certainly it cannot be meant for all and sundry.

SECULAR Vs. SPIRITUAL

Is it possible to draw a sharp line of distinction between things secular and things spiritual? Are they not inter-linked? Hindus would say that they are not only interlinked but that there is no such thing as secular. Even what passes as secular is not secular, because it impinges on one's spiritual life. Hindus regard the entire life-process as only an attempt to reach God. From birth to death, whatever a Hindu does is an act of worship. If done in the prescribed manner, it is a step towards God; if done otherwise, it is a step away from God. He can do nothing that does not affect him spiritually. Swami Vivekananda used to say that when a Hindu robbed, he robbed *religiously*. A startling statement perhaps, but very reasonable and true.

It is very true that religion is a way of life. It is a way of life in the sense that it is something that sets the tone to what one is or is going to be. Religion makes or un-makes a man. It tells man his norms and urges that he observe them. If he is a good man, he is a good man at all times and under all circumstances. He cannot, for instance, be honest personally, but unscrupulous professionally. He cannot be Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde at the same time.

Indeed, no religion can tolerate this kind of dichotomy. How about a man who is honest as a private individual, but totally unscrupulous where his country or community is concerned? Can religion acquiesce in this kind of contradiction? If religion demands honesty, then a truly religious man must be honest in his personal affairs as well as in the affairs of his country and community. In international parleys today, a lie is not a lie if it is in the

country's interests. The point to be emphasized is that a wrong is a wrong, always and under all circumstances. The question arises : If you reject the spiritual view of life, where is your obligation to be moral? Why should you not be dishonest if you find you can get away with it? Who or what compels you to forgive an enemy or to help a needy neighbour? Where is the *raison d'être* for you to fight your own weakness?

If, on the contrary, you have a spiritual view of life, each step you take is important lest it be in the wrong direction. You know what you want and you are careful not to make a move that may retard your progress. You are, in fact, a different individual altogether in the sense that your whole course of life is organized and follows a definite pattern. Every little thing you do is in accordance with that pattern. It is not that you never err. You err, but each time you err you make a firmer resolve that you may not err again till you are perfect, i.e. till you reach God.

Hindus long ago realized that no civilization could survive unless it was based on spiritual values. That is why they rejected secularism and turned life into a long prayer. They may enjoy sense-pleasure, but only to overcome it. They want to be their own masters and not slaves. The legitimacy of sense-pleasures is recognized, but it must be kept within well-defined limits and, finally, completely rejected. Never pleasure for its own sake, but only as a way of transcending it. Transcendental joy, the joy that comes from union with God, is the goal.

GOODWILL TOWARDS ALL

One sign of a truly religious man is that he bears goodwill towards all. No one is his enemy. It is not that he loves only those who belong to his community or country. He loves everybody. He loves even those who oppose him or try to harm him. He loves people irrespective of whether they are good or bad. Even the worst criminal has his sympathy, affection, and goodwill. He is sorry for him, but he never hates him. He knows that he has been misled and the only way to save him is through love and affection which he extends fully, unreservedly. Who does not know deprivation of love and care is one sure way of forcing a child into crime? A religious man gives his love because he cannot help it. It is as natural to him as breathing. He loves you not because he is anxious to correct you—it is none of his business to correct anybody except himself—but because he thinks you are a friend, a dear one, to whom he owes his love as a matter of course. He feels as if you have done him a great favour if you accept him as his friend, but he will love you just as well even if you do not. It is not that he feels superior because he is helping you or because you need his help. He does for you exactly what he would have done for himself if he were in your place. He helps you not because he feels it is his religious or social duty or because he expects a return. You may have done him harm in the past and may do the same again in the future, but he helps you all the same. There is the story of a man who tried to save a scorpion from drowning; but each time he picked it up from the water when the insect fell into it, it stung him. When somebody remonstrated with him for being such a fool, his reply was : 'I

am behaving like this because I can't do otherwise, just as the scorpion is doing what it must do.' Sarada Devi is known to have treated everybody as her child. There was a criminal, whom everybody treated as an outcaste, but he too was like a child to her. The man belonged to another village and another religion. Yet whenever he called on her—sometimes he called after completing a sentence in prison—she welcomed him and fed him with great care. Why did she do so? How was it possible for her to love all, and to love all alike, so that each felt that she loved him or her the best?

The answer is that a truly religious man sees God everywhere. He sees Him most in man, whom religion often refers to as the highest reflection of God. Even the worst man has God in him. God may be hiding in him now, but some day He may break out through the layers of evil which now conceal the goodness that is in him. It is a question of time and also of course a question of effort on the part of the man. He must realize that he has surrendered to evil, which is a mistake, and he can certainly assert himself and be what he really is—a child of God. He is divine by birthright and he must prove that in his life, in his character, in everything he does. It is all right that he will struggle but society also has its duty in this. It is not that society will merely look on while the man is struggling and struggling only to fail. It cannot look on even if he is not struggling at all as it may very well happen. It is the duty of society, first to protect him from evil and if, by misfortune, he succumbs to evil, to educate him, help him, and guide him so that he may keep struggling till he is completely transformed and becomes a true child of God.

SELF-CRITICISM

Self-criticism, if carried too far, may be quite a dangerous practice. If you go on probing your weaknesses, you will soon find there is nothing within you on which you can prop even a semblance of your self-respect. This is cutting the ground from under your own feet which can only prejudice your growth and development. It is one thing to be conscious of your shortcomings, but quite another to bait yourself constantly with this. If you do it, you soon lose faith in yourself, which is a prelude to your disintegration. All hopes of your being able to redeem yourself some day are dashed to the ground.

Self-criticism is good to the extent that it may save us from falling into the error of being self-complacent, an error common among most of us. Due caution should certainly be exercised against this, but the other extreme, constantly finding fault with ourselves, is equally damaging and perhaps worse. It may cost us the capacity, or even the will, to try to overcome our shortcomings. A recurrent idea in the Hindu scriptures is that you are what you think you are. If you think you are bad, you become bad in the long run even if you are not now, and if you are bad already, you become worse.

Some people parade their weaknesses in public, partly to draw sympathy and partly to derive satisfaction from the feeling that they have made ample recompense for their pitfalls. This is self-humiliation at its worst and is deprecated in the Hindu scriptures as 'suicidal' (*atmahanan*). If one has done something wrong, one should certainly be sorry and do all that is possible to avoid repeating it, but that is not to say that one has to condemn oneself publicly for this. A sinner of today is a

saint of tomorrow. A prince is a prince even if he is temporarily in a beggar's clothes. There is divinity in man, which fact no temporary lapse on his part can alter. Man has infinite possibilities. Given the right kind of education, help, and environment, given, above all, faith, he can go far, he can improve to the extent of being a Buddha. It is only man who can improve thus.

Faith, according to Swami Vivekananda, is the key to success in life. A man, in his opinion, is an atheist if he does not have faith in himself. Faith generates strength, courage, and hope—qualities which enable a man to resuscitate himself, to pull himself together even if ravaged, again and again, by his own lapses. A man can save himself only when he wills to save himself and faith alone can give that will. When he loses that faith, he is destroyed.

Yet self-criticism is the best criticism. It is like an artist judging his own work. He knows best where he has erred, where a light touch of the brush is still needed to give his picture the life and colour that he wants. It is not that you have to be impervious to the criticism of others, but it is always wrong to judge yourself by what others think or say about you. They see your exterior but not those forces within that may be working to give a new tilt to your life. It is good to be modest and hear what others have to say, but you cannot afford to surrender command of your life to them. Others may say good things or bad about you but you have to bear your own cross. If you have faith, you will be able to bear it and in the end save yourself too.

WORK IS WORSHIP

In one of his songs, the noted eighteenth-century saint of Bengal, Ramaprasada, says, 'When you eat, try to feel as if you are offering the food to God Himself.' The idea throughout this song is that even the most trivial thing that you do should be treated as an act of worship, as a service rendered to God with humility and reverence. The philosophy he propounds is that the focal point in the entire life-process should be God. If you care for the body, you are in fact caring for God who is in the body. Whatever you do, for yourself or for others, you do only to please God who is your Master. You love Him, and you are happy if you are able to serve Him; you think it is a privilege to be able to serve Him, it is a privilege even if you suffer in serving Him. You serve Him not because you expect some return. You serve Him because you love Him and you love Him because you cannot but love Him. He may or may not love you in return, but you love Him all the same. Also, you love Him not because you are afraid of Him—can there be any real love where there is fear? You love Him because you love Him. This is the sum and substance of this philosophy.

This is not altogether a novel idea, for you get the same idea in the *Gita* also. You find Krishna asking Arjuna to surrender to him the fruits of everything he does. He tells Arjuna that his right extends up to work only and not up to the fruits of the work. But how can anybody work, if he is told that he has to work without having an eye on the results? Can any intelligent and sensitive person reduce himself to the position of an automaton? Assuming that he does become an automaton,

can he, as an automaton, work to the point of being able to make any worthwhile contribution? Krishna, perhaps anticipating this question, says that it is just not possible for anybody to stay completely idle, he has to work, work physically or mentally, work ceaselessly. What, at present, motivates him to work is selfish gain in some form or other, but when he is asked to surrender the fruits of his work to God, what is meant is that he should work and work hard, only he should work not for himself but for God. Because he is working for God, whom he loves more than anything, more than himself even, he should work with great care, work to the best of his ability, watching every step he takes, watching specially the means he employs, for his means must be as good as his end is. No effort he makes is unimportant, since every effort is an effort directed to the supreme end of pleasing God. So long as he has this end in view, everything he does becomes worship, even that which is most trivial, most mundane.

Does it mean then that if he is running a shop or working as a day labourer to maintain himself and his family, he is worshipping God? Yes, even then he is worshipping God because what he is doing he is doing for God and not for himself. If religion is to be taken seriously, it must be practised. It can be best practised if God becomes the centre of everything, if, in conformity with Ramaprasada's advice, everything is done in a spirit of service to God. Life becomes then a long prayer, a long communion with God. Work then becomes a pleasure, a privilege, it becomes worship.

TOLERATION OR ACCEPTANCE

How far can we go together when we have different views about God and religion? It is easy to understand that there need be no clash if we differ over details, but if it is something we all consider vital, can we then practise toleration? If so, to what extent can we practise it? If some aspects of your belief are altogether repugnant to me, what do you expect me to do? I may be polite enough not to say in so many words what I think about them, but can I help the feeling that I have in my mind, the feeling of resentment, the feeling that you ought to be re-educated? For the sake of good manners, I shall not perhaps publicly condemn you, or shall not try to interfere with you, but how can I help the sense of repulsion which may grip my mind at the sight of what you are doing or at the thought that, so far as your belief goes, you are nothing but savage? Can there, in such circumstances, be any fellowship between you and me? I may just tolerate you, tolerate you because I have to, but can I accept you as a friend?

Unfortunately, our breeding is such that we tend to live within small shells, we are happy within our own surroundings, but the moment we step outside the little 'islands' within which we have been used to living we feel uncomfortable; in other words, we find it difficult to tolerate, leave alone accept, anything other than that with which we have grown up, we have learnt to accept as decent, good, and civilized. No wonder we suffer a 'cultural shock' when we visit a new country with habits, institutions, ways of thinking different from ours.

What is the way out? One may argue like this, 'I admit I cannot expect others to accept me as the perfect

model of what a religious man should be like, but I certainly do not want to surrender my own preferences in order to put somebody else in good humour. I want to be myself, with all my angularities intact, this is my birth-right, and I do not fancy giving this up for any ideology which makes no sense to me'.

Is this attitude wrong? No one says it is wrong, but the question is if the other man also can have the same freedom. The ideal condition is that in which everybody has the same freedom and yet there is no clash, no hatred, no disharmony. This is perhaps asking for too much, for if everybody feels self-sufficient, it is likely that he will not care for others, have no sympathy for them, may even have contempt for them. If this is what toleration amounts to—it really does—it is obvious that it cannot keep society together or make for individual growth in an atmosphere of freedom and self-respect. What is needed is a more constructive attitude, an attitude of respect, sympathy, and understanding, an attitude which humbly accepts the other man's viewpoint as legitimate and valid, like one's own. True, it is different, but it has as much right to exist as the one to which you subscribe. Real democracy must include intellectual and religious freedom. It is not like tolerating an ugly tumour on one's face, but accepting every system, every institution, as a phenomenon of life which, despite its bizarreness, expresses the great mystery which man represents. The way out is not to tolerate, but to accept.

HUMILITY

All religions stress the need to practise humility. Why? Why is humility so important?

The answer to this lies in the roots of pride, egotism, vanity, and conceit, all symptoms of the same malady, self-love. One may argue that self-love is natural. True, but trouble starts when that love manifests itself in a manner so as to hurt others. Self-love, unfortunately, is so sweeping, so arrogant, that everything else becomes secondary before it, as if the whole world exists only to subserve the interests of one's self. But if everybody is for himself only, can there be any peace within the family or the particular group of which he is a member? Can any nation or community progress, or can there be any civilization worth the name where every individual is for himself only? Even those whom we dub as savages, follow certain norms involving much sacrifice where group interests are concerned. If a member of a particular tribe is attacked by a member of another tribe, it is a sufficient reason for the two tribes to get interlocked in a bloody feud till the wrong has been fully avenged. Similarly, if there is some work to be done that is in the interest of the tribe as a whole—the construction of a road, for instance—all adult members of the tribe put their hands to it readily and gladly. In fact, it may be said that the progress of a particular civilization reflects itself best in the manner and extent of the support it receives from its people. No civilization can sustain itself without the willing support and co-operation of the people whose combined efforts constitute that civilization. A civilized individual gladly surrenders his rights and privileges for others, i.e. for the community.

The community, in its turn, looks after his rights and privileges to the extent possible within the limits of the well-being of the community as a whole. A civilized man recognizes that he cannot live in isolation, he has to look after the interests of others. It is as much for his own sake as for theirs that he should do so. There is no wrong he can do to the community which shall not boomerang on him at some time or other. Similarly, there is no good he can do to the community which shall not contribute to his own well-being, indirectly and sometimes even directly. The fates of men and women within a given society are so interlinked that it is for their own sake that they must help one another, share whatever they have so that no one need feel that he has not got what others have got, that he is being neglected because he is not as smart as others are. As civilization develops more and more, this sense of unity grows, and more and more individuals feel concerned about each other and about the community to which they belong. Finally, this sense of unity envelops the entire human family, even other living beings. This sense of unity is, according to Vedanta, the highest achievement in life. Self-love diminishes in proportion as this sense of unity grows.

Good manners, politeness, and humility are manifestations of this sense of unity. When you feel one with others, you are careful never to hurt others, for if you hurt others, you in fact hurt yourself. You cannot boast either, for by boasting you claim that you are superior, but how can you be superior when all men and women are in essence one?

A SAINT IN DISGUISE

If anybody said in the presence of Ramakrishna that he was a saint, the first to protest would have been he himself. He would have said : 'Can a saint have cancer? Or can he fracture his arm?' Yet, even in his own time, Ramakrishna was considered the greatest living saint and there were also many who regarded him as an incarnation of God. Among those who loved and admired him were Hindus as well as non-Hindus. He himself was not educated, but those who felt drawn towards him most were people who had received the highest education that the East and the West could offer. They were people who had lost faith in God and religion or were confused about their meaning, but when they saw Ramakrishna, they understood what those words, 'God' and 'Religion', meant. They realized that God was not merely to be talked about, but talked to, communed with; similarly, religion was to be lived.

Ramakrishna did not teach a new religion, he taught religion itself, that which is the common denominator of all religions. What is that common denominator? Truth, according to Ramakrishna. Follow Truth by all means—that was his message. That, he said, was the message of religion also. Other things were secondary. To Ramakrishna and people like Ramakrishna, Truth is God and God is Truth. By Truth they do not mean the ethical truth only, they mean that supreme Being or Law that sustains the world. Science and religion are merely different ways of looking at this Truth. When you look at it through your senses, it is science and when you look at it through your own being, it is religion.

How did Ramakrishna come to the conclusion that

religions had a common denominator? He tried each religion separately and the experience he got thereby convinced him that the core of all religions was the same. He did not bother much about creeds and dogmas which, apart from the fact that they were man-made, often barred from view the very issues which constituted the essence of religion. He stressed the need to sift the essentials from the non-essentials in religion. The non-essentials vary as they must in view of the different historical backgrounds that the religions have, but where it is a question of essentials, the religions are remarkably one. They have a common aim which is to help man grow till he becomes fully divine, godlike, even one with God. He is already that, he only does not know it.

One recurring theme which ran through Ramakrishna's teachings was renunciation. Renunciation, to him, was not life-negating, but searching for a higher and more satisfying way of life. It was a quest which eventually led to the discovery that the real source of joy and happiness was within oneself and not outside. Ramakrishna taught that man was to live his life as if he was worshipping God. Nothing man did was secular; even the smallest thing he did might help him progress towards God provided he did it in a spirit of selflessness. To be selfless is to be one with God. To be selfless is to be the self of all, as Ramakrishna once experienced.

Ramakrishna dispels all doubts about religion. He is its proof, a miracle one can only view with awe. He is the Way, also the Goal. He is the Spirit of God caught in a human frame.

THE STORY OF A HUMBLE WOMAN

Sarada Devi was a village woman, who, notwithstanding the handicaps imposed by poverty, a lack of formal schooling, and the traumatic experience common to a product of a superstition-ridden society, displayed spiritual qualities befitting the greatest among the world's saints. If adversity came, as it did come to her in good measure, she met it unruffled. Often enough, her only response in such circumstances was a disdainful laugh as if what had happened was a matter to be dismissed with contempt. Equally unmoved was she when, in her later years, adulating thousands worshipped her. Nivedita* was so confused by the quiet charm which her personality radiated that the best description she thought she could give of her was that 'her life was one long stillness of prayer'. Not surprisingly, while writing to the unlettered Sarada Devi, she, the fierce intellectualist, preferred to subscribe herself as only a 'Khuki' (child). Sarada Devi had seen God face to face, so whatever she said or did was right. She did not need the intellectual equipment that others might need to know where truth lay.

Sarada Devi was great in her own right and not because she was Ramakrishna's wife. Ramakrishna's renunciation is well known, but she was his match in this. The most trying time in her life was when, following her husband's death, she retired to his village—a lonesome, childless widow with no resources to fall back upon. She could hardly get one meal a day, but there were also the demands of a conservative society to be met, which, for a less valiant spirit, would have made life an intolerable

*Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret E. Noble), the Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda.

burden. She, however, never complained and, what is more remarkable, never made an attempt to draw the attention of her late husband's numerous admirers to her present lot. She passed her days in silent prayers, her only worry being lest the mission which she knew in her heart her husband had come to fulfil, should fail. She must have seen in Swami Vivekananda's journey to the West an opportunity for the fulfilment of that mission, for, in reply to Swami Vivekananda's letter asking if he should go, she readily gave her consent saying that the visit would promote his (Sri Ramakrishna's) work. What a foresight this was, for it indeed marked the beginning of the great Ramakrishna Movement which we now see so widespread in India and abroad! Later Swami Vivekananda used to attribute all his successes to her encouragement, describing her as 'Goddess Durga in flesh'. Despite the respect she commanded, she never meddled in the affairs of the Mission. All the same, by her life and character, she set the high spiritual tone which has always characterized the Mission. She often said she was mother to all, good or bad, and she meant it. Her affection cut across all barriers of caste, race, and religion, raising many an eyebrow among the orthodox people around her. As the years advanced, more and more people came seeking her spiritual guidance and the rush was often unmanageable. They said things meant for a god or goddess only. Yet she remained calm and detached as she had been in the days of loneliness and neglect. She did not preach religion but *lived* it.

A WORLD CITIZEN

The time perhaps has not yet come when what Swami Vivekananda did for humanity as a whole can be fully assessed. Too often his success as a rouser of Indian national consciousness is stressed to the point that his work against the world canvas tends to get blurred. It is true that he showed great concern for India, but that was because India had a special claim on his affection on account of her fine spiritual traditions. Asked what his mission of life was, he once declared: 'to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.' What did he mean by this? It was his conviction that man was born with immense possibilities; Buddha, Christ, and a host of others are examples of the limit to which man can grow. Swami Vivekananda, therefore, preached a philosophy which envisaged that men and women all over the world would keep growing till they reached a state in which they had become completely transformed into gods and goddesses. This might sound utopian, but he would argue that if humanity could produce one Buddha, it could produce other Buddhas as well. What was needed was the right kind of environment, education, and encouragement so that the growth of the individual might go on unhindered. While an ideal State would deem it as its obligation to ensure such conditions, religion would accept the responsibility to motivate the individual to go on striving till he reached the limit of his growth. By religion Swami Vivekananda never meant any creed or dogma; he meant faith in one's infinite capacity to grow. Anything that weakened an individual's faith in himself or hampered his growth was, according to him, the antithesis of religion. By growth he meant multi-dimensional growth,

growth not only materially but also morally and spiritually. He welcomed science and technology, because he recognized their potentiality to promote material growth. But he rejected the view that material prosperity was an end in itself.

Man's progress, in his view, must include moral and spiritual growth—more and more 'selflessness'. According to him, to be selfish is a sin. The ideal man is 'an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere'. He is a free man, uncluttered by race, religion, language, country, society, and family. He belongs everywhere, every home is his home, every man and woman are his brother and sister. This is the ideal before man. Peace will come to earth when men and women vigorously pursue this ideal.

But philosophy did not blind Swami Vivekananda to human misery. He found working people everywhere exploited. To end this, he felt the basis of human relationship must be changed to one which recognized that man was essentially divine. The ideal society, according to him, was one with 'Vedanta brain and Islam body', i.e. a classless and casteless society with the philosophy of the highest possible collective and individual growth. A far cry from today's society perhaps, but one worth striving for. Lest the goal be lost sight of, he preached it from every possible forum till it became his world mission. The only God he cared for was man, no matter under what cloak found. He was a true humanist, a true world citizen.

CONTROL OF THE MIND

The *Gita* says that the mind is as restless as the wind, but even then you can control it if you keep trying and if you are prepared to renounce. Renounce what? Renounce things that disturb the mind, i.e. ephemeral things. The mind has a tendency to run after sense-pleasure, even if that pleasure is not good and involves risks. The curious thing is that you know that you had better leave that pleasure alone, yet you cannot help craving for it. You find Samadhi, the merchant, in the same predicament in the *Chandi* : he had been driven out of his house by members of his own family, yet he kept worrying about them. This anomaly in human behaviour is attributed to ignorance (*avidya*), ignorance of the true nature of the Self. That the Self, in its true nature, is supreme, not wanting in anything, you do not know. How ridiculous that you, the king, should beg for things yours already! You are under a kind of mesmerism that makes you forget yourself. It is like the lion in the story who had forgotten that he was a lion and was behaving like a lamb.

But why this mesmerism? Who cast this spell? These are questions the wise teachers refuse to answer. Buddha, for instance, said : 'If somebody hits you with a poisoned arrow and you are dying, will you then start asking what is the caste of the man who hit you?' Buddha means to say that when you are dying, such questions are irrelevant. First and foremost, save yourself. According to the *Gita*, you can save yourself if you so wish; whether you will save yourself or not is entirely up to you. You are your friend and you are your own enemy. The point that the teachers stress is that you can get out of your predicament

and you can do that and you have to do that entirely by your own efforts. The idea that somebody else will save you is altogether foreign to this kind of philosophy. But can't a teacher help? He can, but to a very limited extent. Being an experienced person, he can guide and advise, that's all. The real battle you have to fight yourself, single-handed. There is infinite strength within you. Use that strength instead of looking outside for help. This is the message this philosophy gives. Since you can save yourself and since there is nothing another person can do to ease your trouble, the teachers, in their practical wisdom, strongly discourage wasting time over metaphysical questions as to how your trouble started. They want, instead, that you address yourself to the immediate task of ending your trouble. Their advice is : It may be interesting to know how or why you forgot who you are, but the question may wait till you have known yourself. When you know yourself, you will laugh to think that you let yourself be duped into thinking that you were a person completely at the mercy of your mind. It is the kind of feeling you have after a bad dream. While the dream lasts, you think it is real and you react accordingly, but as soon as the dream ends, you know the whole thing is false and you laugh to think that you have been a victim of a joke, a cruel one though.

But the question is if the *Gita's* recipe will work. Saints testify it will. If the strength does not come from within, no outside strength can help. Teachers, books, temples are aids by which the strength within is awakened. So it comes to this : self-help is the best help, it is in fact the only help.

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

Many thoughtful people today say that if there has to be peace on earth it has to be on the basis of the Christian spirit. They say that unless there is a spirit like the Christian spirit behind all our dealings with each other, the kind of tension and conflict which now characterizes inter-personal or inter-group relations has no chance of abating. But what exactly is meant by the Christian spirit? Obviously, the Christian spirit means the spirit of which Christ is the embodiment, the spirit of humility, friendship, love, and goodwill towards all. That is to say, you recognize nobody as your enemy, everybody is your friend even if he is a person who has done you harm and is perhaps still trying to do it. Christ said that if somebody were to hit you on the right cheek, you were to turn your left cheek towards him. He went so far as to pray that those who crucified him be forgiven, for they were ignorant people and did not know what they were doing. When you forgive your enemy, it is not that you forgive him because you are weak. You are as strong as the other man, maybe even stronger, and if you so wish, you can hit him hard, but you refrain from doing so, because you realize that it never pays to harm others and the only way to conquer others is to conquer them through love and not through physical strength. Even the idea of conquering others is distasteful to you, for it smacks of your wanting to be superior to others which is what is farthest from your mind. You are happy to be equal to others or be even in a position lower than that occupied by others. The sense of being the lord, the master, or even the leader comes from an exaggerated idea of self-importance and a person who is trying to practise the Christian spirit finds this kind of

attitude altogether repulsive to him. He is a person who will never interfere with others, he will not interfere even where by interfering he is likely to do them good. The reason he will not interfere is that he knows that once he begins to meddle with the affairs of others he will not know where to stop. The temptation to do good to others is so great that it may carry him beyond the point when he is interfering not because he feels concerned about the welfare of others but because he is anxious to satisfy his own ego.

This, briefly, is the Christian spirit. This is not only the Christian spirit, this is also the Hindu spirit or the Islamic spirit. All religions, in fact, preach the spirit of goodwill, friendship, brotherhood, even oneness.

Can this be the basis of any human relationship in this workaday world? It will be a wonderful world if this were possible, but, as a pragmatist would aver, it is not possible. He will also argue that even if it is possible for individuals to practise these ideals, nations can never enter into a relationship with each other based on such ideals. The question is : What is the alternative then? The strategies of deception or strength to corner an opponent have long been tried, but while they may have succeeded in postponing a violent clash temporarily, they have never been able to eliminate chances of future conflicts altogether. This is why thoughtful people now point to what has above been described as the Christian spirit as the only possible basis on which peace can come between individuals or nations. It is a difficult ideal, no doubt, but since nothing else has availed, why not try the simple and straightforward spirit which religion stands for?

GREATNESS

A person is great not because of any great act or acts that he may have performed. He is great because of what he is. He may be a humble person, without much education, wealth, or social standing, yet he is great because of certain qualities he possesses which shine through everything he does, even through his daily chores. His constant thought is of how he can make others happy. This may involve much sacrifice on his part, but he makes the sacrifice gladly. He does not demand that he be given his due, he is content to get what is given him. People may ignore him, even people who know him and perhaps owe him much, but he accepts the position as if it is just as it should be. He gives others whatever he can give, it may be a small thing, but he gives it gladly, with love and respect. The way he gives makes the recipient feel as if he is doing the giver a favour by accepting the gift. He is humble before those who are superior to him, but more so before those who are inferior, as if he is ashamed of what he is. He is concerned about everybody around him. Nobody coming to him for help and sympathy has any reason to feel that he has come to a stranger; on the contrary, he has the feeling that he has come to a person who loves and cares for him.

He is a poor man but he is not ashamed that he is poor. He is happy with whatever he possesses, and his only concern is that he may use it well. He values his principles more than anything else and he will do nothing to compromise his principles. He is far above the ordinary men and women in moral terms, but he never gives the impression that he is other than ordinary. His dress is

simple, his food is a poor man's food which he takes only because he must, he listens more than he talks, and if he has to talk at all, he is never dogmatic. He does not pretend either, that he is learned and, of course, he is not learned if by that is meant that he is a person who has read many books. In fact he is not interested so much in books as he is in men and things. He never condemns anybody for he knows man is weak. He recognizes life has many ups and downs and one must therefore take the rough with the smooth which he does. That is to say, if there is a bit of good luck he is not particularly elated as he is not completely upset if luck deals him raw. He shows his goodwill towards all and even those who do him harm are not excepted. He has no ambitions, at least none on his own account. He is happy if others are happy; if there is anybody in trouble, he feels as if he himself is in trouble, and if he can do anything to give him relief, he does so. He gives praise where praise is due even it be that the person he is praising is not particularly friendly to him. He avoids making unflattering references to others, but if he ever has to do so for the sake of truth, he uses the mildest possible language. If he is given respect which perhaps he richly deserves, he feels extremely uncomfortable and will protest till he is able to convince everybody that he does not deserve it. He is ordinarily shy and humble but if ever there is an occasion when he finds truth and justice are being violated, he will be the first to protest.

Such a man is not born often, but when born, he spreads his influence across the world and through the generations. Thank God, such a man is born at all.

'KNOWLEDGE IS POWER'

Knowledge is undoubtedly power, but the question about which man has yet to make up his mind is how he is going to use this power. The question is pertinent because history is replete with instances in which knowledge as power has been abused. What is imperialism if it is not a glaring example of knowledge used as a lever for exploiting the weak and defenceless? Whenever there is aggression, whether it is by an individual against another or by a nation against another, the power derived from knowledge comes handy to the aggressor. A nation may be materially rich and powerful, but it is helpless against a nation superior in knowledge. This happened in the past and is still happening, though forms of aggression have changed. There is an explosion of knowledge going on in the world today. This has led to concentration of too much power in the hands of a few. Knowledge is a double-edged sword, which has to be handled very carefully. If used with foresight and care it may hasten the process of growth and development; if used otherwise it may spell disaster.

Any knowledge that is divisive, that does not give one the sense of unity with all men and women, is susceptible to being misused; only that knowledge is safe that makes one conscious of the fact that we are all one, that our fates are linked with one another, and that we cannot be happy till every single individual among us is happy. Much too long have we tried to understand the world we live in; not that we understand it much, yet the knowledge we have acquired has given us tremendous power. That power, without the unitive view of life, has not stopped aggression but has only given added advan-

tage to would-be aggressors. We still live in fear of each other. The pride of the strong and the helplessness of the weak keep haunting mankind as they always have. The problem is that while man is trying to understand his environment, he is doing nothing to understand himself. He is still a stranger to himself. If he understood himself, he would have seen that he and his environment or he and his neighbour are not separate entities but parts of a single whole, that he must live in harmony with them, and that if he hurts them he would in fact hurt himself.

But how can one understand oneself? The science by which one understands oneself is what is popularly known as religion. Religion shows man his weaknesses but it also shows his strength, his great possibilities. It shows that he can grow from more to more till he embraces all, everybody and everything. He eventually reaches a point when it is no longer possible for him to hurt anybody, he can only love him. He sees himself everywhere, he is of a piece with the whole universe around him. It is this unitive vision, this knowledge of the unity of existence, that is true power. What is the power behind Buddha and Christ? It is this unitive vision of life. It is because of this vision that they have the universality we see in them. They unite all mankind, across the barriers of race and even time. What they teach is valid everywhere, in every age, for everybody. Religion, i.e. the essence of religion, is a call to man to discover the roots of his being. Through this search he transforms himself, he increases his power, the power to be humble, the power to love, the power to conquer by being conquered.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

To what extent has an individual to subordinate his interests to the interests of his society? It is admitted that 'each for himself' cannot be a valid principle any longer. If society has to progress, even if it has to survive, the individual must give precedence to the collective well-being as against his own. But to what extent shall the individual make this sacrifice? If there is a clear line of distinction between individual interests and collective interests, then the choice is easy to make, but often enough the dividing line is not so clear; at any rate, the individual has every right to ask why he must make the sacrifice he is being asked to make. Take for instance, the income-tax law. Many may—in fact, do—feel that the law is arbitrary, stupid, and oppressive. There are similar laws in the country which to a man in the street make no sense at all. Even if it is conceded that these laws are sound and necessary in principle, the way they are enforced betrays a measure of callousness which cannot be excused. Even in such personal matters as marriage, one may find laws in force which reduce individual freedom to a mockery. There are also other areas where the individual finds himself so much hamstrung that he begins to wonder if he is not a slave. Indeed, individual freedom is becoming increasingly a dispensable commodity in many countries today. Freedom of movement, freedom of opinion, freedom of religious belief, freedom of speech—freedoms, all so highly prized by everybody and also so very vital for individual growth and development, are, if not completely denied, very much restricted. This is justified on the specious plea of the country's security. It is true that there may be elements in the country who would not mind sacrificing the

country's interests for the sake of their own sectional, even personal, interests. That such people need to be curbed nobody will deny but the question is : Where is the line to be drawn? If too much power in the hands of an individual is bad, too much power in the hands of society is worse. Society, represented by a thoughtless Government, can reduce the individual to a mere automaton. The question of all questions is : Is society for the individual or the individual for society? Can the interests of the two meet at a given point? What is an ideal society like? How does it operate? What are the duties and obligations of an individual, so far as society is concerned?

No one knows what exactly an ideal society is like, for it does not exist. All one knows is that it is a society which allows the maximum freedom to the individual, while giving him every possible opportunity to grow. It protects the weak and defenceless, also ensures justice and equality. It expects every individual to grow, not only materially but also morally, in his human qualities. An ideal society creates an environment where an ideal individual can grow. An ideal individual need not be told what his duties and obligations are. He knows and fulfils them, without being asked. He is his own guide, own mentor, he is Law unto himself. His social conscience abhors the idea of selfishness. He lives for others. The highest good for him is the good of all. His concern is for all, specially the weak, the helpless. He stakes everything for them. Buddha was one such individual. So also Christ. So also Ramakrishna. And there have been others. Society can justify itself only if it produces such individuals.

THE DIVINE MOTHER

No one knows what God is like, but it gives us satisfaction to think that He is a person who cares for us. If He is an unfeeling old man ready to pounce on us under the slightest pretext, who will then care for Him? This by no means can be a basis on which a good and intimate relationship can grow between man and God, an essential condition if the purpose of religion, which is to be close to God, to be like Him, if not also to be one with Him, is to be fulfilled. To make this possible, love, and not fear, should be the basis of the relationship between man and God.

But what sort of love is the best that a man can have towards God? Any kind of love, so long as it is sincere and deep, but the purest and most natural love is the love that a child has towards his mother. No love is like this love—selfless, so far as the mother is concerned, and sustaining, so far as the child is concerned. This is why God has been worshipped as Mother from the earliest times and is still so worshipped. Those who worship God as Mother feel Her presence all the time, feel She is looking after them, attending to their needs. They depend upon Her completely, just as a small child does upon its mother. They have no wish of their own, they do not ask for anything lest they ask for something they should not have, they want Mother to decide what they should have and what they should not have. They ask Mother to help them so that they may do nothing wrong, nothing that She may not want them to do. It is the most satisfying relationship that one can imagine. Satisfying, but also demanding, for nothing should be done that may hurt Mother.

But where is religion in it, in particular, how can this help an individual in his religious life? At best, it may give him some false hope and courage, false because the existence of such a mother is doubtful, apart from what she can do or can't do. He may imagine anything he likes, he may imagine that he is being protected by an unseen mother, but he may soon realize that he has been a fool, nobody is protecting him, he has to protect himself.

Those who believe in this kind of worship claim that it has two distinct advantages : first, it helps one condition oneself to a higher way of life; secondly, by practice, one assimilates all the good qualities of which God is supposed to be the embodiment. Religion, if anything, means a commitment, commitment to the highest principles of human conduct. It is a justification for self-discipline, for the practice of compassion, goodness, and high morality. A religious man tries to acquire these, and many other qualities. It of course takes much sustained effort and strength of mind to do so, but one makes the struggle all the same because Mother expects it. This is religion, at its best, under cover of a sweet and natural relationship. This way religion loses much of the irksomeness it otherwise carries.

But how does a man make a religious gain from this? Thought, it is said, changes a man's life and character. You are what you *think* you are. By constantly thinking that you are a child of God, you become a child of God. In other words, you acquire the qualities of a child of God, you become divine. The change may be long coming, but it does take place. The Divine Mother, the devotees say, can never let down Her child.

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The debate about religion will perhaps never end. There will always be people who will oppose it as there will be those who will support it. The world is thus divided into two opposite camps—one for religion, another against it. Perhaps there is no other issue over which opinion is so sharply divided.

Religion represents a human trait which is as old as the species itself. Some have branded this trait as infantile or abnormal; others, however, have glorified it as the best element in man. Without it, they say, man would be content with what is easily available, he would never dare the hazardous. But he is never satisfied with what he has or what he is. He wants more till he has the most, he wants to be better till he is the best. It is an undefined state perhaps, but he will never be content till he has reached it. It is the religious trait that always keeps pushing him forward.

The debate about religion continues because it talks about things not susceptible to objective tests. For instance, God, Soul, and Heaven. They are the pivot on which the whole fabric of religion rests, yet no one can say anything about them with certainty. Even religious experts are not sure what they mean. Also, these words have different connotations to different people. No one knows if they are mere words, or they represent some substance. In any case, they cannot be handled or felt like material objects.

No wonder critics think they are mere figments of imagination or are an 'opiate' intended to exploit the poor and the ignorant. They condemn religion as wicked,

superstitious, and unscientific. They also say that it hinders progress. They point to countries that have discarded religion and are prospering. As against these, they point to countries that still cling to religion and continue to be poor. The difference, they say, is due to religion.

Curiously enough, all these arguments make no impression on those who believe in religion. They say religion is also a kind of science. It is a science in the sense that it is based entirely on experience. Religion represents truths which people have experienced all over the world and through the centuries. Given the requisite conditions, they can be experienced even now. The experience may be subjective but that does not make it less important. God, Heaven, or Soul, or whatever else religion talks about is not real, if by reality is meant something that can be demonstrated; but it is real if by reality is understood something whose influence can be seen and felt. Those who experience it know what that influence is like and what it can do. The test of the pudding is in the eating. Religion gives man an added stature in terms of selflessness, compassion, humility, and moral strength. Religion justifies itself by the result it produces. It may not be able to explain God, Soul, or Heaven but it certainly can change a sinner into a saint.

But how does it do so? Through the urge for progress that is innate in man. Through the same old trait that characterizes man and that has carried him forward to the present level of his evolution. Religion will carry him further till he reaches a state where he feels he has no further to go. It is an impatience, a restlessness, that is never to be satisfied short of the highest and the best.

RIGHT AND WRONG

In a relative world like the one we live in, it is difficult to decide what is right and what is wrong. What is right in a given situation may not be right in another situation. A surgeon may cause bloodshed and it is perfectly right, but if another man causes it, it is wrong. The motive is an important factor in deciding what is right and what is wrong, but not the only one. There are other factors also to be taken into account. 'The path to hell is paved with good intentions' is a good warning. Is it right, for instance, to steal if the intention is to help others? In other words, can a good end justify a bad means? This is a question that is bound to raise much heated controversy. Some will insist the means is just as important as the end. Nothing good can really be achieved unless the means also is good beyond all doubt. No universal rule or formula can be found which can help determine what is right and what is wrong. The test must vary from person to person, circumstance to circumstance. Does it mean then that there is no absolute, so far as right or wrong is concerned, that is, something that is right for all and in all circumstances, or wrong for all and in all circumstances? Perhaps there is no such thing, or even if there is such a thing, no one can define it. If one tries to define it, it is very likely that it will be a subjective definition, a definition coloured by one's own prejudices, education, and background. A saint has a yardstick which is all right for him, but is hardly applicable to a common man. A common man is adjudged honest if he is honest in deeds but a saint will go further, he will try to be honest even in speech and thought. Also, he is honest not because he expects a reward or because he is afraid of punishment, he is honest because he believes in being honest, because

he cannot but be honest. Similarly, he has love and goodwill for all, irrespective of friend and foe. It is not that he cannot hit back if he wants to, but he won't, whatever the provocation. Will he not even defend himself? Is it wrong to hit in self-defence? A saint may defend himself or may not, but whatever he does is for the sake of others. If he does not defend himself, it is to be understood that he does not want to defend himself for his own sake; he may defend himself, if at all, if by so doing he finds he is defending a good cause. He may even use violence against a person who hurts others unnecessarily and out of sheer wickedness. He may have sympathy for that person and, if possible, he will do everything he can to help him mend his ways, but if the interests of those who are weak and defenceless so demand, he will take up arms and fight him. But, by instinct, he abhors violence and he will avoid it as long as that is possible; if he has to have recourse to it, it is because there is nothing else he can do to save those who are threatened with unjustified aggression.

So it seems that each individual has to decide for himself what his norms are going to be about what is right and what is wrong. So also perhaps each community and each nation. There may be some common principles to go by, but, in the end, each individual has to be his own judge. The more advanced an individual is ethically and culturally, the more demanding are his norms. What is civilization? It is this search for perfection.

THE INNER EYE

Call it whatever you like, there is something in man which makes it possible for him to decide what is right and what is good and to opt for that which is right and good. This power to discriminate and to love and stick to what he finally decides to be right and good is the measure of his progress. He may sometimes err, but if he is careful enough, he can steer his way clear of mistakes. He can also improve, go on improving, till he reaches a point where he feels he has attained what he wanted to attain, not the whole of it perhaps, but a fair amount of it. It is difficult to give it a name, one may call it 'perfection', for man is always making experiments and trying to improve and perfect himself and perfect what he does. It is of course perfection by his own standards. It is this search for perfection which he is continuing ever since he came into being, as if driven by an unknown force. He has a vague idea about this perfection and he may give it various names—God, Art, Beauty, or Truth or Power or even Money. Art, literature, music, agriculture, industry—in fact, every human endeavour is an expression of this search for perfection. He has achieved much but he wants to achieve more. He does not know what exactly he wants to achieve, but he does know that he has not yet achieved that which is the ultimate.

What is this ultimate? Perhaps no one knows, but the search must continue. It will be a disaster if man ever thought he had achieved enough. Materially, his achievement has been impressive indeed, but that is only a pointer to the greater things he can yet achieve. At this point, what he needs is to realize that he must match his material progress with spiritual and moral progress. It is

not possible to define this progress. Each individual has to decide for himself what sort of moral and spiritual progress he wants, but the urge for this progress must continue. If he ever thought the striving for higher and better moral norms was irrelevant, it would be a signal for his death. He is already suffering from unrest because he does not know what he wants or what he should want; there is a sense of aimlessness, a sense of not knowing what would be good for him to have. He has unrest because he lives from moment to moment, desire to desire, there is no central purpose which is the driving force behind everything he does. This unrest will ultimately spell his doom if he does not direct his energy towards his moral uplift. He needs stability, but there can be no stability unless it is a stability based on moral strength. Somehow or other, man has to become morally better and stronger. What is it that makes some of us so much superior to others, so much more loved and respected? Why is it that Buddha is still remembered? It is because he represents a high watermark of moral perfection scarcely attained by man before or after. Why shouldn't there be many more Buddhas? Why shouldn't man at least struggle towards that end?

The point is that man must always go on using his inner eye. If he detects within himself anything false and ugly, he must reject it right away. He seems much too concerned about his environment, which is right for his physical well-being, but he must also insist on the best and highest within himself to maintain his moral health. It is a challenging task, but something worthy of man only.

PEACE OF MIND

Is there such a thing as peace of mind? Ask any lucky person you know, very likely he will say, 'I hear people talk about it, I myself am seeking it but so far I have not found it.' Indeed, peace of mind is so elusive a thing that one wonders if it exists at all or if one can ever achieve it. People who have health, beauty, a good social standing, money, political power—things people desire so much—may still be found to complain that they have no peace of mind. Paradoxically, such people seem to be the unhappiest. They, in fact, suffer so much that they would be glad to throw away everything they have only if they could have a little bit of peace of mind.

What is it then that gives peace of mind to a man? The answer is : selflessness. A man is happy to the extent he is selfless. A selfless man is happy because he thinks less of himself and more of others. He wishes to see everybody happy—it is against his nature to wish that he will have something which others do not have. A selfish man, on the other hand, thinks of himself alone and he is too egotistic to care for others. He has an exaggerated notion about himself, as if the whole world depends upon him. He wants everything to happen the way he wants and if it does not, he is distressed. A selfless man, however, is modest in his expectations : he knows he has no right to impose his will upon others. And it is never his wish to deprive others in order that he may have more. He is happy with whatever he has in the normal course of things and he is happier if others have what he himself has. It hurts him to see others in pain. He is happy if others are happy, unhappy if others are unhappy. His goodwill includes everybody irrespective of race or

religion. 'The whole world is his friend,'* says a Sanskrit proverb. He may be a humble man without any influence at any level, yet if there is any wrong done to anybody anywhere, he feels as if the wrong has been done to him.

A selfish man is ambitious. He may have much already but he wants more. The more he has the more he wants. He never knows where to stop and because he does not get all he wants, he is impatient and restless. Such a man can never be too scrupulous about the means, he wants to succeed anyway. He is vain, and has his own idea about how the world is to be run. It may be all his ideas are stupid, if not also wicked, but if he is baulked in his attempt to get those ideas carried out, he may harm many innocent people in a frenzy of anger and despair. He is always disturbed, his uncontrolled mind always driving him from one unconscionable plan to another.

A selfless man, on the other hand, will be glad to be of service to others, but he never goes out of his way to do so. If he wants to help others, it is because of his genuine concern for them and not because of any ulterior motive. He is always self-controlled and accepts defeat and success, whichever comes, with equal equanimity. He may receive the hardest knock possible, but his peace of mind is never disturbed. His closest friends may betray him but he will go on treating them as if nothing has happened. A selfless man is happy, because he has no self-interest to look after, as apart from collective interests.

INDIVIDUAL Vs. COLLECTIVE

Man has always been trying to create a better world, but has he succeeded? Has the world improved? Some will say it has, some will say it has not, depending upon what is one's idea of a better world. No two individuals seem to agree as to what a better world should be like. There are two distinct angles from which the problem can be seen : one from the angle of the individual, another from the angle of society. The former will say, 'Yes, there is some progress perhaps in collective terms—there is more food, more clothing, better housing, better health facilities, and so on—but all this progress has been achieved at the cost of the individual.' It is almost a truism that what is called a country's progress is in proportion to the sacrifice that its people individually make. If the people make this sacrifice voluntarily, there is nothing to complain about, but it often happens that the sacrifice is forced upon them. Even this would have been justified if the country's benefit had been proportionate to the sacrifice the people are required to make, but it is not. Those who run a country are not, alas, always good, honest, and efficient. Their plans may be absolutely silly, but because they have power in their hands, they can get away with anything they want to do. Indeed, the tyranny of the State can be limitless. But is the millennium which the State is trying to bring about, and for which it robs the individual of all his rights and privileges, round the corner? Far from it. Progress from the national point of view is marginal, while from the individual point of view it is nil.

The argument against individual freedom is that it is always abused. Few individuals know where to draw the

line between their own interests and the interests of the country. If left unchecked, they can be despotic and treat others as serfs and the country as a personal property. Man, by nature, is selfish. It cannot be expected that an individual, on his own, will sacrifice self-interests just to suit the convenience of his fellow-citizens, or his society. If he does, it is more an exception than a rule. The State, anyway, has to keep watch over what he is doing, so that he may not exploit others. The danger always is that if a man is better placed and more capable, he will take advantage of others. The State has to ensure that this does not happen. The State has to see also that the country as a whole may progress and not just one part of it or just one section of its people only. This is why State control is necessary. The State is the agency through which people think and act. This is why the State is and should be supreme.

The question is : Is society for the individual, or the individual for society? No doubt, society is for the individual. The criterion of a good society is that it helps an individual grow. It never interferes with his freedom. If it does, it is only when the interests of the community are at stake, or when he is hurting others. Similarly, a good individual never thinks of himself alone, he thinks of his neighbours and of his community also. He voluntarily forgoes the advantages his superior qualities earn him. He never wishes anything for himself which others are denied. An ideal society helps him grow into an ideal individual.

PRAYER

It may be good to pray, but whom do we pray to? To God? But what proof is there that there is a God? And even if there is a God, how do we know that He will listen to us? Equally relevant, what guarantee is there that He has the power to grant our prayers? A host of such questions inevitably assail the mind when one tries to pray. There are people who say that **there is no doubt** that there is a God and if one prays ardently, the prayers shall be answered. An equal number of people, perhaps more, will assert that, first of all, there is no proof that there is a God but assuming that there is one, there is no evidence that the prayers that one sends are answered.

It is conceivable that a debate like this can never be resolved. One reason for this is that **what prayer does**, or is supposed to do, is a matter that can be experienced only subjectively. It is not a thing that can be demonstrated. If it works a miracle, that miracle is more inside the person concerned than anywhere outside. Prayer is said to be able to move mountains, but whether it does so or not is a matter of belief and there are people who will argue that the statement is not meant to be taken literally. What, according to them, it means is that prayer can give a man so much strength and self-confidence that he can overcome difficulties which he previously thought insurmountable. There is a Sanskrit hymn which attributes to God the power 'to make a dumb man speak and a lame man climb hills'. How does it do so? Even the most credulous will find it difficult to believe that such a thing can happen. If it is said that it is a miracle, then of course there is nothing one can say about it except that no rational person can accept miracles

as evidence of what prayer can do. The only plausible explanation is that, given the requisite will, man can achieve anything he wants. There is an immense reserve of strength within him. He is not normally conscious of it, but prayer makes him conscious of it. He appears to be praying to an outside deity, but really he prays to himself—that Self of his which is still unrevealed. The deity, in his eye, is the source of all that he is asking for. That deity is nothing but a symbol of that Being, termed God by dualists and Self by non-dualists. It is not that the deity can or does give him anything; whatever he gets by praying, he gives himself. It is something which comes from within, though he imagines it is a gift he has received from the deity. A Bengali song says, 'Search within, you will get whatever you want.' This is very true. One way to make this search is to pray. Prayer involves concentrated use of all the faculties that man possesses. It develops them, gives them a sharp focus, besides causing an upsurge of strength never experienced before. It carries him forward to the goal he has in view. There may be impediments in the way, but he overcomes them. He becomes conscious of a power he never before suspected he possessed. Religion, if anything, gives man an ideal and a will to live up to that ideal. Prayer is an expression of the struggle he makes to live up to that ideal. This is a process that refashions him, giving a new dimension to his life and character. The change is so palpable that not only he but others around him have no doubt about the power of prayer. If there is a miracle this is it.

PROGRESS AND EDUCATION

It is difficult to define progress, but whatever be the nature and pace of progress that a country desires for itself, it has to achieve it through education. It must so design its educational system that it can turn out the right kind of human materials to keep the country going in the direction it has in view. With most countries today, progress means material progress—more money and comforts for individuals, and more political and military power for the nation. Individual and State both are happy if they can pursue their separate goals and often they bribe each other by making small sacrifices for this purpose. The criterion of progress today is how soon an individual can get rich and a nation militarily and otherwise powerful. Naturally, education also is geared to this end.

The question is if this is real progress and if this progress is enough. No doubt, material prosperity is necessary and desirable, and, to some extent and in certain circumstances, military and political power also is necessary and desirable—but is it enough? Is there nothing else that man can desire?

The biblical saying that man cannot live by bread alone is still true. He needs other things—many other things, he needs most of all moral and spiritual development. The true test of progress is if he is a better man. A better society is a society of better men and women. A progressive society is a society where men and women constantly feel an urge to strive for higher moral and spiritual ideals and have also every encouragement from the State to satisfy that urge. It is not that material prosperity is to be discarded as a desirable goal, but in

no circumstances should this be the only goal, nor is it likely that it is going to satisfy man when he achieves this goal. It is given to man not to be satisfied with what he has or what he is. He always asks for more and more, always wants to be better and better, till he reaches a point when he is more occupied with his own internal development and he begins to think acquisition of material prosperity less and less important. At this point, he may even think scholarship, social distinction, or political power less important than his moral and spiritual well-being. His whole energy then is directed towards the unfoldment of his inner qualities—spiritual and moral. Towards this ultimate end a really progressive society trains its members to direct their steps, and to do this, obviously education is the medium.

Today there is too much emphasis placed on intellectual growth. There is no doubt great need for intellectual growth, for a society can progress only to the extent that it allows free thinking and reasoning. But equally important is the development of the heart. No man can be said to be truly educated if he is not kind and generous towards others. But even this is not enough, he must grow further, grow morally and spiritually till he discovers the truth that he is no isolated being, but part of a whole, that mankind is one, and that whatever he has he has to share with others. This is the finest development that can take place in any single individual. This is the highest stand that a nation can take.

If there is a progress that education should aim at, this is it.

SUCCESS

No one can say that he has never failed. No one can say, either, that he has never tried and yet succeeded. Success may be fortuitous in some cases, but the rule is that one must pay its price of hard work. If there is success without hard work or without trying, it is hardly worth anything. Only that success carries respectability which is achieved through hard work and after many failures. The most desirable success is always the most difficult one.

But does hard work alone guarantee success? Can it be said that if one tries hard enough one is sure to succeed? What about a poor man struggling all his life and yet remaining poor, if not becoming even poorer? Similarly with other things. Hard work is necessary, in fact, essential, but it is no guarantee about success. Often the circumstances are such that despite anything one may do, one does not succeed. This is no discredit to the person who tries. Success may elude him, but if he has courage and fortitude and keeps trying in the face of repeated failures, that is all he can do and he has no reason to feel sorry for his failures. The test of greatness is not success, but character. A great man may or may not be successful, but he is great because of the intrinsic qualities he possesses and the way he uses them. Those who succeed may even be smaller men and their success may be more the outcome of the efforts of their predecessors than their own. Their predecessors failed not because they were less intelligent or less hardworking and enterprising, but because conditions were less opportune. When conditions improved, success became comparatively easy. Others then took up the trail where they had left off and succeeded. Perhaps

they succeeded even with less effort than the effort their predecessors had made. Mallory was by no means a lesser mountaineer than Hillary. Yet Mallory had failed where Hillary succeeded. But did not Mallory's failure contribute to Hillary's success? Failures are indeed the pillars of success.

But what is success? How is success to be measured? The meaning of success varies from person to person. What is success to one is failure to another. A man writes a hundred worthless books. He thinks—and others may think too—that he is a capable writer. He is, however, forgotten after a generation or two. Another man writes a single book, but an outstanding one. He influences generations of men and women and is always remembered. The author, however, thinks he has written nothing worthwhile and is far from satisfied. It is difficult to define success, and still more so, to measure it. If success is what the person concerned thinks is success, then there is no problem. But if there has to be an objective test, success is then to be adjudged not by the final result, but by what goes before it. If success is only one step away, will that be adjudged a failure? In the final analysis, it is the attempt that is important and not so much the result. Has one done one's best? Is one undaunted by failures? Does one possess a will and a courage that will never bend before difficulties? Given these conditions, success is very likely to come but even if it does not, failure is no less honourable.

BEWARE OF THE 'GREAT'

A great man is not necessarily a good man, just as a good man is not necessarily a great man. How fine it would have been if a great man were also a good man or a good man also a great man! Such a combination rarely happens, if ever at all. It is understandable if a good man is not a great man, for to be a good man one need not be a genius; it is enough if one has average intelligence and average capabilities with a strong love for fellow men. But God save that country where a great man is born who lives for himself only. Thanks to his extraordinary abilities, he is able to inflict wounds not only on his own countrymen but on mankind itself, which take ages to heal. Unfortunately, most great men are made that way—they live for themselves only. They are mad after power which they seize by hook or by crook and having seized it so entrench themselves that it becomes difficult to dislodge them. They may be useful to their country at a given moment, but the good they do is often far outweighed by the harm they do.

Yet such men have much charisma while they are in power. The reason is that it is a human weakness to feel awe about greatness wherever it is seen. There is nothing wrong in it but some discrimination has to be made between one kind of greatness and another. A big rascal may excite admiration by his cunning, but after all he is a rascal. Greatness is desirable, but it must be the kind of greatness which reflects itself in humility and in its thrust towards helping others. The world owes much to great inventors, scholars, scientists, and writers, but it owes more to those anonymous humble men and women who, by their goodness and by the sacrifices they daily

make, sustain society. They pass unnoticed, because they possess no outstanding quality to attract public notice. But they are 'the salt of the earth'. It is wrong to say that a country is known by its great men. A country is known by its average men and women. If they are good, the country is good. If they are quiet and humble, also good, intelligent, hard-working, and selfless, that country is indeed great.

One such person may sometimes turn into a world leader. He comes up with ideas which create quite a stir because of their revolutionary character. Not an outstanding person by any standard, yet he casts a spell on those around him who follow him doggedly. Not that he tries to form a group or party, but people, on their own, rally round him. As the years go by, his influence spreads and keeps spreading even if there is opposition. His character is such that even those who do not agree with him love him. In some cases, his influence continues long after his passing away and it spreads across the borders of his country. People forget what country he came from; they love to think he is their own and they see in his message a way out of the mess in which they currently find themselves.

Buddha was one such man. Also Christ, Mohammed, and Nanak. The latest in the series is Ramakrishna. All were humble men, hardly known outside the small circle of their close associates, but they now stand out as real leaders of mankind. The so-called great men who strutted about in their lifetime, mad with power and self-glorification, are either forgotten or remembered with scorn.

KARMA

The Hindu law of Karma holds everyone responsible for what he is or is going to be. It is his *karma* that determines what sort of individual he is going to be, whether he is going to be a happy man or an unhappy man. In brief, he is the architect of his own fate. There is no such thing as chance in this. If a man is poor, if he dies early, if he inherits a fortune or loses one, whatever happens to him happens because of his past deeds. By past deeds are meant not only deeds of the current life but also of past lives, for Hindus believe in rebirth. If something happens which cannot be explained by the deeds of the present life, it has to be traced to the deeds of earlier lives. It is the cumulative effect of what has gone before. This law of Karma is a rigid law admitting of no variation.

Some say Karma has made the Hindus fatalistic. They have no initiative and no interest in improving their fortunes, and if there is any injustice done to them they do not protest because they think it is so ordained by their *karma*. Since they cannot undo the past, what good will it be trying to improve their present lot? There are people who say India is backward because her people are obsessed with this law of Karma. They behave as if there is nothing they can do about the problems that plague their life. They are callous about everything—good as well as evil. They seem to think that since past *karma* has determined their present, they cannot do anything but accept the situation as it is. India is rich in resources, her people are intelligent, her technology also is quite advanced, yet she is one of the poorest countries in the world. As an example of how Karma has crippled the

people, critics point to the incredible phenomenon of hungry masses going without food and never raiding food stores or attacking their well-to-do neighbours. The people blame themselves for their poverty, saying that they must have done something heinous to deserve their present suffering. They may see around them people rolling in wealth who have done nothing to deserve their good luck, but they do not see anything wrong in it, for, according to them, here again the law of Karma is operative.

Is this theory of Karma not just another device adopted by the wily to exploit the poor, ignorant, and superstitious masses? Really speaking, the theory of Karma is much misunderstood. It is never its intention to promote indolence or sanction social and economic disparities. It is, in fact, an invitation for an individual to revolt against whatever he thinks is wrong. By saying that he is the builder of his own fate, it summons him to use all the powers at his command to accomplish the task he has set himself. It points to the success of other people and says that the same success may very well be his if he works hard. It asks him to have faith in himself and depend upon his own efforts. There is no extraneous force on which he can rely. Self-help is the best help. If there is a barrier, it can be overcome. Given the requisite will-power, he can do the impossible. What another man has done he can do, whatever the circumstances. It is wrong to think that a man is a creature of his circumstances. There are examples of a man having started with many handicaps but eventually overcoming them to attain success in his chosen field through sheer hard work. Man is indeed the architect of his own fate.

GOD IN MAN

If God is everywhere as all religions say He is, He must be in man also, specially when he is said to have been made in God's own image. But is He in bad men also? It is understandable if it is said that He is in good and honest men, but how can He be in bad, wicked, and sinful men? Can good and evil exist together? Can light and darkness be at the same place and at the same time? Some religions try to explain this paradox by saying that there are two opposite forces in the world—God and Satan. God represents all that is good and Satan all that is evil. But for Satan the world would have been a fine place and man a happy creature. It is Satan who has injected evil into everything. If man sometimes does wicked things it is because Satan makes him do them. God warns him against being tempted by Satan, but it seems that Satan's hold on him is so complete that man prefers to ignore God's warnings. If man suffers in spite of all the knowledge that he has acquired and all the progress he has made, it is because in his ignorance and pride he obeys Satan rather than God.

But why does man obey Satan and not God? Is it then that Satan is more powerful than God? And does Satan also live everywhere like God? Do God and Satan then live together? How can they live together if they are opposite forces like good and evil, or like light and darkness? Or is it that they alternately occupy the human heart—sometimes God and sometimes Satan? But if that is the way they share the human heart, where does one go when the other occupies it? If both cannot be together and if they are not also omnipresent, then either both are non-existent or there is only one—God

or Satan. But good and evil are both realities. If there is no Satan, where does evil come from? Has God created evil then?

Hinduism believes there is only one entity, which is neither good nor bad. Good and bad are epithets which we apply to the same thing according to the angle from which we look at it. What is good now may not be good next moment or at another place. When circumstances change, our concepts of good and evil also change. What is good when we are children is not good when we are adults. Also, our standards improve as we ourselves improve in moral terms. We become more exacting, more refined while adjudging what is right and what is good. There are people whose moral standards are so high that as men and women they are godlike, divine; similarly there are people whose moral standards are so low that people point to them and say they are like Satan, Satanic. God and Satan are only two ends of the same scale; good and evil are two sides of the same coin.

Like other religions, Hinduism also believes that God is everywhere. It does not believe that there is such a thing as Satan. There is only God, sometimes clearly seen, sometimes not clearly seen. He is not clearly seen when man lets his ego, a false ego, stand in the way. When he overcomes his ego he becomes one with God, he becomes God Himself. A man is good or bad, depending upon how far he has been able to overcome his ego and manifest the God in him. To manifest Him through every particle of our being is the goal each one of us has to set for himself.

PURITY

All religions stress the importance of purity, but what is purity? Is it physical neatness and cleanliness? People hold that 'cleanliness is next to godliness'. But what sort of cleanliness is next to godliness?

Physical cleanliness may be an aid towards purity, but purity is much more than physical cleanliness. A physically clean man may be vile in character. On the other hand, there may be a man who is physically unclean; yet he is so good and noble that people say of him that if there is a God, here is He. There is nothing on record to suggest that St Francis of Assisi was a physically clean man. More likely, he was not. The same may be said of other saints and sages. Take the case of Trailanga Swami of Benares. He was naked and often lay in dirt and filth. One wonders if he did so to keep people away. Whatever his motive, people did follow him wherever he went. He performed many miracles, but it was his character that attracted them. He was totally indifferent to the world. If anybody gave him gold, he did not even give it a look. If, the next moment, somebody else walked away with it, he was equally unmoved. Ramakrishna himself lived a similar life at one time. He shared food with dogs, abstained from baths for months, and had layers of filth on his body. He was still treated as a saint. Gandhi in our day wore a loin-cloth and whenever possible lived among people who handled human excretion. People may question his political wisdom, but his saintliness is never in question. But how could he have lived in unclean surroundings if physical cleanliness were the same thing as purity?

What is purity then? Purity is a state of being in which

you are close to God. You are pure because you are in touch with 'the Pure Being'. Is there any way of knowing a pure man, i.e. one who is in close touch with God? What signs would one expect to see in him? First and foremost, he would be a man without ego, his ego having been completely merged into God. He thinks of God, talks of God, and lives in God. He cannot talk of himself unless he talks of himself as a servant or child of God. He may know much, yet gives the impression that he knows nothing. He is humble, quiet, and thorough. When he does anything he puts his whole heart into it, for he knows he is doing God's work. With him, no work is unimportant, since all work is worship. He is always cheerful, be the circumstances what they may. If there is a problem, he accepts it as one of the ways by which God wants to test his faith in Him. He prays to God for the requisite strength and wisdom to solve the problem. If he succeeds in solving it, he attributes his success to God. If he fails, he thinks it is God's will and is intended to make him more humble and more self-introspective. To him the means is as important as the end. If success comes, he is not elated; if failure comes, he is not depressed. He is calm and collected under all circumstances. He is concerned for all, even those inimical to him. He helps all with reverence and humility as if it is a privilege that he is able to help them.

Only such a man is pure. Purity is purity of character, not of body. Purity is truth, goodness, and beauty. Only God or a godlike man is pure.

'I CHANGE BUT I CANNOT DIE'

This declaration by the cloud, in Shelley's poem of that title, echoes the Hindu concept of the self. One wonders if Shelley ever read any Hindu scripture. There is nothing on record to show that he did, or had any acquaintance with this concept from any indirect source.* This perhaps is another instance of how an idea originating among a particular people can spread far beyond the boundaries of the land where that people lives. Indeed, the question might very well be asked if there is such a thing as an idea being a monopoly of any race or community. Perhaps the whole mankind has a common mind and what an individual or a community thinks is soon echoed and re-echoed by other individuals and communities across the barriers of language, region, or time. Nothing is exclusive to a particular race or region. It is only too true that mankind has a common heritage.

But what is the Hindu concept of the self? According to the Hindus, the self is never born, and it never dies. That which has a beginning has, they argue, an end. Because the self has no birth, it has no death. But can the same thing be said about the cloud? Has it no beginning? Has it no end, either? One may argue that the formation of a cloud is a common sight; so is also its dissolution. How can it be said then that the cloud has no beginning and no end? The answer is that when the cloud says that it never dies, it means that the substance of which it is made always remains intact. The cloud admits that it changes, changes so far as its form is concerned. What is called dissolution is nothing but a change of form, from vapour to water; when it is born,

*Most likely, he read Wilkins's translation of the *Gita*.

again it changes its form, from water to vapour. Birth and death are both change of form only, according to the Hindus. When a man dies he is only changing his body. It is like changing a shirt, a shirt that is worn out. The self continues just as before.

Is there any proof that the self continues even after death? There is still no proof that is beyond doubt, but there have always been individuals, who have claimed to remember facts about their past lives. They remember the place where they lived before, who their parents were, their experiences in that life, and so on. Sometimes their statements have been checked and found startlingly correct. But why don't all people remember who they were in their past lives or incidents of their past lives? One explanation may be that it is a mere vagary of the mind. It is seen that man cannot remember everything that he sees or hears. Sometimes he remembers incidents of little consequence, while forgetting events which meant much to him when they occurred. Also, after a serious illness, one tends to forget one's past completely. Death is such an experience that one finds one's memory completely wiped out after it occurs.

But what is the self made of? No one knows except that it is the core of one's being. If it exists everything else exists—the body, the mind, the intellect, everything that goes to the making of an individual. But how many selves are there? Hindus believe that the self is really one but it appears many because of the many names and forms which are superimposed on it. The names and forms change but the self remains the same. Like the cloud it changes, changes so far as names and forms are concerned, but its essence does not die.

THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION

It is understandable that education is not merely information, but what other ingredients are necessary to make the process a really well-rounded and balanced one? What, in brief, are the steps which lead to the final consummation which education implies?

Information—more precisely, knowledge—is the first step in education but it must be that kind of knowledge which is invariably followed by a change in the person who receives the knowledge. It must be knowledge which is meaningful, that is, knowledge which generates a will in the person concerned to refashion himself. If knowledge is only an embellishment of the mind without corresponding improvement in the human personality, then education is hardly worth its name. An ass may carry a load of sandalwood, it still continues to be an ass. The sandalwood does not change the character of the animal. It is said that 'to know is to be'. If this is true, education is basically a character-building process. It should make a man a 'true' man.

What is meant by a 'true' man? What sort of character entitles a man to that very desirable description? While it is difficult to answer the question, it is obvious that he is a man in whom the qualities of head, heart, and hand have combined to a perfection. But what if such a man happens to be unscrupulous? Will he not then use his superior qualities to exploit others? This is where the question of purpose comes in. The purpose of education is improvement, but it must be all-round improvement, not merely physical and intellectual improvement, but also moral and spiritual improvement. An educated man is qualitatively a better man, better in every respect,

specially in terms of human qualities. The idea of taking advantage of others is hateful to a truly educated man. He would much sooner forgo his own rights and privileges than deprive another of what is his due. Education is a kind of refinement which shows itself best in the manner in which one makes concessions for others, voluntarily and without any hope of gain. In the final analysis, the purpose of education is to help a man grow, grow not for his sake only, but for the sake of others as well. No society can survive on knowledge and skills only; it needs also compassion, fellow-feeling, tolerance, harmony, understanding, and sympathy. It is these qualities that hold society together.

This leads to the question if education can be divorced from religion. Perhaps, at a certain level, education and religion overlap. But education should not be wedded to a creed, only the essence of religion should inform it.

Stress should be laid on practice rather than on faith. Compassion should be a way of life, so also honesty and tolerance and fellow-feeling. There is already too much greed, anger, hatred, and lust for power in society. People today are scared of each other. Education by imparting knowledge and skill has made us more powerful and potentially more dangerous than ever before. Unless we learn to be humble, to restrain ourselves in the face of provocation, to forgive an enemy, we are doomed.

Education should certainly aim at making a pupil thoughtful, intelligent, rational, capable, and responsive to new ideas, but, more important, it should also make him moral, kind, generous, and selfless.

IMITATION

Too many people tend to imitate others without knowing the harm they do themselves by this. Imitation is always bad, more so when it is resorted to in the hope of hastening one's improvement—in character, in social status, or in intellectual attainments. It is true that we learn from each other, we have, in fact, always been doing so, and the more we do so, the better, but to imitate others is like trying to wear a shirt not cut to one's size and not suitable for the climate in which one lives or one's status and occupation. Suppose an orthodox brahmin wears a European shirt and a European tie but wears no shoes because he has never worn any—how will he look? Will he present an elegant sight? It will be like that jackdaw who tried to pass as a peacock under the latter's borrowed plumage.

The point is that one has to grow into what one wants to be. The growth must be real and from within, not merely an appearance. If it is only an appearance, it will not last long and, of course, will soon be found out. A fool may have all the airs of a wise man, but that does not make him a wise man, that only makes him all the more ridiculous. A wicked man may hide his wickedness by false appearances, but that only makes him all the more dangerous and he continues to be a wicked man. If, however, he wants to change into an honest man, he has to struggle to grow into it. It is only after a hard and continuous struggle that such a growth will be possible.

Suppose a dishonest man is genuinely trying to be honest. How will he go about it? Will it do if he pretends to be honest while he continues to cheat others just as before? Should he not be firm with himself, trying never

to succumb to temptations of easy gain? He has to go on fighting with himself every moment of his life and he has to continue the fight till honesty becomes his second nature. It is an uphill task, but there is no other way. One has to crush one's weaknesses; to ignore them is to indulge them.

Hindu scriptures declare that no two persons are alike and that each individual is unique. The difference between one individual and another is too fundamental to admit of a uniform approach. No single standard can fit all. What is right for one may not be right for another. If non-injury is a virtue for saints, it cannot be a virtue for soldiers. Soldiers and saints can interchange their roles only at grave risks to society. Each has to function in his own way, he cannot fit into someone else's mould. He has some inherent traits which give him the distinctiveness he carries. He can change them only at peril to his future growth. This is why Hinduism is against any change which does violence to one's own basic nature. If there has to be a change, it should be from within, slow, and carried out with great patience; it should not be sudden. Each is great in his own place. Whatever a man's status or occupation, he is great or small according to his qualities of character. Greatness is greatness of character. One has to be oneself always and under all circumstances, and to be great one has to have every inherent quality in oneself perfected and every shortcoming smothered. There is no other way to greatness. One cannot be distorted into a pre-fixed model, however good and grand it may be, unless that model is already in the person in a nebulous form.

TO BE IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

Hinduism says that the only way to be happy in the world is to be in the world but not of it. Is this not an absurd proposition? How can you be in the world without being of it? There is also the question why it is wrong to be of the world. And what exactly is meant by being 'of the world'?

A man of the world is one who is too much attached to the world. He lets himself be so much influenced by it that he hardly has any freedom of mind. If the conditions around him are good, he is happy; if they are not to his liking, he is disturbed in mind. But nothing in this world is permanent; conditions change, change much too often. They may improve, they may get worse as well. A man of the world has all his joys and sorrows determined by the conditions in which he lives. In fact, he is a creature of his circumstances. How can such a man be happy?

But is there any escape from this situation? Can anybody be completely free from the influence of his circumstances? Hinduism says it is possible to escape the influence of your circumstances if you take life as fun. If you are playing a football match, you can never be sure that you will win. Take life like that. There are so many imponderables in it that you may find that all your calculations have gone wrong, that, in spite of everything, in spite of your best efforts, success has eluded you. This is not to say that you will not try. You will certainly try, try your hardest, yet if you think you will succeed because you have tried your best, you are mistaken. The question may arise : Why should one try at all when one is not sure that one will succeed? Without any incentive,

can one put one's heart into the work one is doing? This is why you are asked to take life as fun. Act your part as well as you can, for otherwise the fun cannot go on; everybody must contribute his share and when everybody does what he or she is expected to do, there is good fun, and everybody enjoys it. It is, therefore, important that you should try your best, doing your allotted duties as well as you can, regardless of whether you succeed or not.

But is it not possible to control circumstances to the extent that you can say with certainty that you will succeed? Now that much advanced technology is at the disposal of man, can he not influence circumstances rather than be influenced by them? To this Hinduism will say that your aim should be not only to change the circumstances but also yourself—your hopes and aspirations, attitudes, levels of thinking, and so on. However good the circumstances may be, you never can have or should have all that you want. If you let your mind decide for you what you want and if you are not able to tell your mind to stop at a given point, you will then find that you are asking for things not only impossible, but also things to which you have no right. In other words, you will become an extremely selfish person, bent on having more than what you need and deserve and by means not very honest either. Given such selfishness, you can never be happy.

To be happy one has to be unselfish, be in the world but not of it. In other words, one has to detach oneself from one's environment and have complete command over oneself irrespective of the environment in which one is.

DISCIPLINE : INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Discipline is much talked about these days but very little practised. At home, in educational institutions, in offices, on playing-field, in society—there is hardly any discipline anywhere, though, in these places as elsewhere, those who wield authority never tire of stressing the importance of discipline. Those for whom discipline is recommended, however, have the feeling that people who talk so much about discipline are the very people who need it most. Often enough, the critics say, people wax eloquent about discipline only because they want to silence their guilty conscience which constantly rebukes them for not following the rules they are laying down for others. Whatever that may be, the picture seems to be grim. At home today parents' control over children is nil. If 'control' is suggestive of a kind of relationship which modern psychology totally opposes, there is not even that much-needed and innocent-looking association which can help guide children through the different years of their adolescence. Similarly, in educational institutions. Gone are the days when teachers were dictators in the classroom. Now they try to be 'equals', yet not with much success. On the playing-field the situation is worse. The players want to win by any means, fair or foul, more often foul. As regards spectators, the less said the better. It has now become a common feature that whenever there is a competitive match going on, police have to be on hand to prevent rioting among the spectators.

Why is there so much indiscipline today? One reason is that man has suddenly become conscious of his power.

There was a time when people depended upon each other for their very survival. The weak depended upon the strong, the young upon the aged. Now, the State takes care of them. The need for an individual to depend upon another is now much less than ever before. Also, there is no feeling for others. Men and women have become ego-centric, they live for themselves only. They want to be free and by freedom they mean a condition in which they can do whatever they please.

But how can family or society survive or an individual develop if there is no discipline? Freedom certainly is necessary, but discipline is more necessary. Only a highly disciplined person is free. Such a person needs no outside agency to control him, he controls himself. Till an individual reaches that stage, he certainly needs discipline. He should welcome guidance, even control, till he is really free, that is, fully disciplined. The purpose of discipline is to grow till discipline is no more needed.

The need for collective discipline is just as great. No nation can be great unless it is a disciplined nation. Collective discipline reflects collective will. Unity in thought and action is the essence of collective discipline. How can this unity be obtained? One way is by coercion. It may be political or moral coercion, but discipline so obtained can never last long. The ideal is discipline voluntarily accepted for a common purpose which is dear to all.

Discipline, individual or collective, is the outcome of a long process of self-negation, sacrificing one's own interests for the sake of others. When the self dominates, there is no discipline, individual or collective.

RELIGION AND COMMUNALISM

Is it possible to separate religion from communalism? The question arises because quarrels between religious communities are still rampant. Religion is supposed to unite people, but, in reality, it divides them into groups implacably opposed to each other. This is a paradox, seeing that the essence of all religions is the same : peace, goodwill, humility, tolerance, and so on. There is, in short, no place for hatred and animosity in it. Yet religious groups fight each other, often with violence. Is there something inherent in religion which is wrong?

It will be a mistake to blame religion for all the stupid things that people perpetrate in its name. Religion certainly does not countenance them, but what can it do if people distort or defy its injunctions? It is repugnant to the spirit of religion that in following one's religion one should do anything which has the effect of showing disrespect to another religion, or putting curbs on its practices. 'Live and let live' should be the principle governing relations between different religious communities. Even that is not enough; if possible, one should respect another religion just as much as one respects one's own. In reality, however, it is the reverse that happens. Why is it so? There may be clashes between any two groups of people but why should there be clashes of all things in the name of religion while religion is nothing but goodwill, friendship, tolerance, and respect for each other?

The answer is that there is a difference between a personal religion and an organized religion. A personal religion is principles with infinite variations in application. It is a commitment to the highest ideals of human

conduct, though, naturally, its expressions vary from individual to individual. An organized religion is stereotyped, it is a system, rigid, impersonal and admits of no variations. It thrives on temporal power. This is why it always tries to increase the number of its followers. Its strength lies not in the ideals it preaches, but in the enthusiasm of those who swear by those ideals though they know nothing about them and practise them still less. Religion, so organized, is the first step towards communalism. But people who are in charge of an organized religion make matters worse : to suit selfish interests, they whip up popular enthusiasm over issues with little or no connection whatsoever with religion till they are ready to commit any violent act in the honest belief that they are serving the best interests of their dear religion. Leaders of an organized religion are the least religious. To such people the ends are more important than the means. And the ends are as far removed from God as possible.

So far as communalism represents an urge to preserve the religious identity of a particular group of people, there can be no objection to it. Trouble starts when it becomes aggressive. Communalism is symbolical of this urge carried beyond all reason. Bigotry is always bad and if there is religious bigotry, there is also political bigotry. The spirit of intolerance is in evidence at all levels of life today. Love and goodwill are our first priorities. The passion that rules the heart can be thwarted only by compassion, the end-result of religion.

THE INDIAN UNITY

No country today has a homogeneous population. Its population invariably is a mixed one—with many races, many languages, and many religions. The old concept of nationhood based on a single race, a single language, and a single religion is no longer valid. Even small countries like Switzerland have to cope with this problem of diverse races, languages, and religions. But the case of India is the most glaring. Nowhere else is the population so widely divided as in India. Can India be called a nation under the circumstances? one may ask. In posing this question one may point to the periodic linguistic and religious riots that take place in the country as an example of how fragile the unity that now exists among the racial groups in India is. In short, one may go so far as to say that India is not one nation but so many nations precariously held together under a common Central Government. Even this fact of a common Central Government is of recent origin, the British having created it for their own convenience, and the subsequent Governments being merely heirs to it.

While this is largely true, the fact has to be taken note of that, in spite of the great diversity that exists among them, the Indian people have lived together in peace and amity through the centuries. The kind of peace which has prevailed among them is not the kind which a modern Government is able to impose with the help of its highly efficient police and army but the kind born of goodwill and mutual trust. There have been communities numerically so large that if they so wished, they could have crushed other communities, but far from indulging in any form of aggression against smaller communities,

they have fraternized with them and helped them grow with every freedom to retain their separate identities. They extended the policy of 'live and let live' to all including the smallest, the weakest, and the most backward. This is why there are people in India who are highly advanced living side by side with those who are abysmally backward. The peculiarity about India is that she has always welcomed races and tribes coming from outside and assigned to each one of them a place of honour within her social hierarchy. This is not to say that there have been no clashes at all, but they have been more as an exception than as a rule.

How does one account for this tolerance on the part of India? This tolerance stems from the philosophy of life to which India has always been wedded—the philosophy which says that man is the same everywhere. He may be tall or short, fair or dark, speak different languages, eat different kinds of food, still he is the same man. The differences one sees between one man and another are only on the surface; underlying those differences there is a basic unity which is always there and which, running through them like a thread, keeps them together. 'Unity in Diversity'—this has been the principle India has always followed. She welcomes variations, for without them life will be dull. Variations signify the strength and versatility of the spirit of man. India has always believed in freedom of thought and speech. This is why one can see in her philosophy extremes of monism and pluralism thriving side by side.

But where is the unity? The unity is in the recognition that it is the one that has become many and the sense of fraternity that such recognition implies.

THE FIRST CONVENTION OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

The First Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention was held at Belur Math from 1 April to 8 April 1926. It was open only to representatives of the Math and Mission centres and centres run by devotees. Four hundred such representatives attended. There were some open sessions when 1,000 or more people were present, both monastic and lay. The presence of some direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lent special weight to the Convention. There were many distinguished scholars and some delegates from the West.

Swami Shivananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, inaugurated the session. In doing so he addressed those present as 'Children of Sri Ramakrishna'. He said how happy Swami Vivekananda would have been if he had been alive to see those present on the occasion. Swami Shivananda reminded the audience of what the world expected of them as children of Sri Ramakrishna. They should aspire for the highest spiritual experience, but that experience should not make them blind to the suffering of fellow men. Spirituality is broadening one's self till it embraces every living being. It is not running away from life, it is accepting life with all its burdens to worship God in all beings and all things. Work is truly worship. Swami Shivananda's words stirred people to their highest moods, as if he had communicated his own spiritual energy to them. These moods prevailed through all the sessions that followed. Swami Shivananda went on to add that the ideals preached by Sri Ramakrishna should never be compromised. The

strength of the Ramakrishna Order lay in its adherence to those ideals. He also quoted Swami Vivekananda as saying that the Ramakrishna Order was Sri Ramakrishna's body. It should be preserved and well taken care of. This was necessary if only to demonstrate the uplifting power of those ideals. The Order, according to him, was governed by the principles of love, catholicity, and selflessness. He hoped it would never deviate from those principles. Swami Shivananda concluded by saying : 'I only pray that your surrender may be complete. Be like the arrow that darts from the bow. Be like the hammer that falls on the anvil. Be like the sword that pierces its object. The arrow does not murmur if it misses the target.' The hammer does not fret if it falls on a wrong place. And the sword does not lament if it is broken in the hands of its wielder. Yet there is a joy in being made, used and broken; and an equal joy in being finally set aside.'

Swami Saradananda, as General Secretary of the Math and Mission, was Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Convention. In welcoming the guests he made a very thoughtful speech. He said the Ramakrishna Movement, like any other movement, had at first met with much opposition. When it got over this opposition, people became indifferent to it. Now was the stage when people were wildly enthusiastic about it. This was why it was growing by leaps and bounds. It was at this stage that much caution had to be exercised. Expansion was welcome but not at the expense of principles. The Mission's work had always been characterized by selflessness and sincerity. In the flush of success which the Mission was having, its ideals must not be lost sight of.

. The Convention stands out as an important landmark in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement.

THE SECOND CONVENTION OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

The Second Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was held at Belur Math from 23 December to 29 December 1980 with a break on 28 December when Sri Sri Sarada Devi's birthday was observed. The First Convention having been held in the year 1926, this was the Math and Mission's Second Convention. Excepting for two sessions held at the Netaji Indoor Stadium in Calcutta, all the sessions were held at Belur Math and were open to delegates only. There were altogether 10,000 delegates representing different countries and communities, all devoted to the ideals preached by Sri Ramakrishna. On 25 and 26 December some guests were invited to the sessions held at the Netaji Indoor Stadium. The audience on these two days swelled to fifteen thousand.

Why was this Convention held? Why was it held fifty-four years after the first one? The first one was held to exchange notes and to take stock. The Ramakrishna Movement had just begun to gather momentum, having passed through the early two stages of public opposition and indifference. The growth following this was phenomenal. But was the growth in the right direction? Was the spirit of renunciation and service as vigorous as it was in the beginning? These were the issues the First Convention discussed. The First Convention had the distinct advantage of having as its leaders some of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples—Swami Shivananda, Swami Saradananda, Swami Akhandananda, and Swami Subodhananda. Their very presence was a great source of inspiration. The speeches made by Swami Shivananda, Swami Saradananda, and Swami Akhandananda stand out as

guides not only to those who follow Sri Ramakrishna but to entire humanity in all ages. Nevertheless, the Convention was a small affair : it had only four hundred representatives and visitors, and its open sessions never attracted audiences larger than 1,000.

Very much modelled on the First Convention, the second one was, however, a very impressive affair. Apart from the number of people who attended it, its most striking feature was its representative character. Every State of India and almost every country of the world were represented. The delegates came and stayed at their own expense. Their number could have been more but had to be limited because of accommodation problems. There was much hardship for everybody, but nobody cared. The enthusiasm was overwhelming.

But why was the Second Convention held? And what were the issues it discussed? The Second Convention was held because the Ramakrishna family had grown big and it was felt necessary that the ideals Sri Ramakrishna preached should once again be restated. Were those ideals any longer relevant in the modern context of scientific and technological advancement? If so, how could those ideals be translated into action in view of the manifold strains modern industrial civilization imposed on man's allegiance to higher values of life? These, among other, issues were discussed. The discussions were lively, both monks and laymen taking part in them.

The week-long Convention demonstrated that the Ramakrishna Movement was now a global movement. It also demonstrated that its strength lay not in the number of its ideological adherents, but in the quality of their character. Never before had an assemblage of this size been seen exuding so much quiet dignity and seriousness of purpose.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

It is said that the basic human qualities which held society together in earlier days are slowly dying out. Not to speak of society, even the family is falling apart. 'Each for himself'—this seems to be the dominant mood amongst today's youngsters. They think 'love', 'affection', 'family loyalty', and similar concepts are all romanticized claptrap meant only to hoodwink each other. Human relationship today is essentially utilitarian. If I need you, I will care for you—only to the extent and as long as I need you. If I have any blood relations with you, that is only a matter of accident and that does not mean that you have any special claims on me. There is no relationship which is sacrosanct; every relationship is a relationship of convenience and can be entered into as and when necessary and can be broken also as and when necessary. If some relationship is permanent by the fact of birth, it cannot impose any obligation that is permanent unless the permanence is to mutual advantage.

Is this kind of selfishness new? Has it not always been a common human failing? Is it not also natural? Selfishness is nothing new and it is also natural, but this is the first time when it is being shamelessly and unscrupulously practised since civilization began. There is no such thing as consideration for others. Even what is called ordinary courtesy is now missing. The elegance of language and manner which once marked dealings among civilized men and women is now suspect, for it smacks of an age which is gone by and a class which is no longer popular.

A society thrives best when it is composed of men and women who are intelligent, hard-working, honest, and dutiful. A good society means a society where the

average men and women are good. One or two great men do not determine its character. A great man or woman may be born in any society and under any conditions, but that is no indication that that is an ideal society. An ideal society is one which gives opportunity to every individual to grow—grow physically, intellectually, and morally. It places an ideal before the individual and urges him to grow according to that ideal. Not only that, it also creates conditions conducive to such growth.

The trouble in the present age is that there is too much importance attached to the flesh and very little to the spirit. No doubt growth in terms of physical necessities is important, but does such growth amount to much without love and affection, without goodwill, without the capacity and willingness to make a sacrifice for others? What sort of a world would this be if each individual were to live for himself alone, to the complete neglect of the interests of others? A selfish man is always an unhappy man. His little ego is never satisfied with what he has, it keeps prodding him to have more and more, by fair means or foul, and if this means that he has to deprive others, it is all right with him. What is important is his own happiness, but he little realizes that happiness is not compatible with selfishness. Happiness is not the same thing as physical comforts; he needs love, affection, and goodwill also. But he has to give them first before he can have them for himself, or even ask for them.

EDUCATION FOR EDUCATION'S SAKE

Is the dictum 'Education for education's sake' a valid one? Is such a thing possible, or if possible, is it desirable?

Many may contend that, like the other dictum 'Art for art's sake', the idea of education being for its own sake is neither practicable nor desirable. Education must be for a purpose. But what purpose? And who will determine that purpose? The pupil, his parents, or the State? Or all of them together?

Up to a point, all three—the pupil, the parents, and the State—agree what that purpose should be. They agree that the purpose of education is, or should be, general improvement of the pupil, improvement in terms of his body, mind, and spirit. Whatever makes this improvement possible may be described as education. But improvement is a vague word. What is improvement to one may be no improvement to another. A child may think all the education he needs is that which enables him to stand on his own feet, but the parents may think that is not enough, he should try to be a scholar also. The State, on the other hand, may think, rather than be a scholar, he should acquire some skill so that he can contribute more directly to the growth of its economy. Previously, children often clashed with their parents over the course of study they should choose for themselves, but nowadays the clashes are between the children and parents on the one hand and the State on the other. The present trend is for the State to control, overtly or covertly, every aspect of an individual's life. This is understandable, seeing that it cannot govern in the way it wants to unless it gets willing support and co-operation from the people. The real strength of a country lies in the character of its

people. If the people are good, honest, and hard-working, the country's progress is assured; if, on the other hand, they are lazy, selfish, and unintelligent, the country's future is doomed. No one, therefore, can object if the State tries to improve the quality of its human material. Since one of the ways it can do so is through education, it has the right to design the educational process suitably.

But should not social awareness also be a purpose of education? What if an educated man becomes selfish, selfish to the extent that he thinks nothing of betraying his country for the sake of some material gain? Does this not make an educated man potentially a bigger knave only? The ancient Indian ideal is that one should sacrifice oneself for the sake of the family, and the family for the sake of the country, and the country for the sake of the world. Social awareness may be a very desirable by-product of education but this is not to say that education should be used to create a bias for a particular political creed, religious dogma, or social philosophy; if anything, it should be used to create a bias for truth. A truly educated man loves truth more than anything else. And he himself is the best judge of what the truth is. No one else, not even the State, has any right to tell him what that truth is. The State having educated him to think independently cannot deny him the right to exercise independence. If education is for a purpose, that purpose is truth, truth determined independently and not in accordance with any personal and sectarian interests.

The worst thing that can happen to an educated man is to have to surrender his freedom of thought and conscience.

REASON

It is good to be reasonable, but can it be said that a reasonable man is necessarily a wise man, or a man who always takes a correct decision? Is reason infallible? Is reason an instrument which you can use to arrive at a correct judgement, irrespective of the circumstances in which you are, free from bias, free from passions, free from the influence of your education and upbringing, your personal and group interests? In other words, is it possible for you to be objective to the extent that you are able to wipe out your own self altogether in judging a person or a situation or a problem? Also, can a child's reason be the same as that of an adult, or an ordinary criminal's reason be the same as that of a saint? Is there a universal frame of reference by which reason can be used or even defined? Is not reason a way of looking at things which varies from individual to individual, from situation to situation?

Indeed, it is possible to say that reason can be so confusing that with a little twist here and there it can make black look white and white look black. Good and bad, right and wrong are only points of view, never the same for all and in all situations; they vary and should vary, but that does not detract from the value of an honest attempt to be reasonable, to think, speak, and act strictly according to the dictates of reason. A reasonable man may be wrong, he himself knows that he may be wrong, and it is not unlikely that he will change his stand at a later date when he is able to see more aspects of the matter than he had seen earlier and when he has also grown maturer. With experience his perspective changes to the extent that while he had earlier no

hesitation in expressing his views about right and wrong, now he is slow and cautious and may even hold back his judgement on the subject.

Reason, in theory, is a good device to use to decide what is right and what is wrong, but, in practice, one may find it is not as sure a guide as one thought and it may even turn out to be very much deceptive. It must be borne in mind that reason after all is nothing but a projection of one's own self. Rooted in one's own being, it is an attempt to be impersonal, to weigh everything impartially, strictly according to the universally accepted norms, seeing things as they are and not as they ought to be, and never allowing one's emotions and prejudices to get the better of one's judgement. This obviously is a tall order, but a truly reasonable man is a rare species to be met with, one in a million, if at all. The important point to bear in mind is that the search for the truth, for the good, for the right must not be given up. Reason acquires its credibility when the search is genuine. An honest man may make mistakes, but that does not make honesty less desirable a virtue. The limitations of reason notwithstanding, reason is a faculty which should be cultivated and acted upon under all circumstances. To do so requires courage, much strength of mind, and sustained effort but it is reason that elevates man to a position in which he no longer needs it, he in fact transcends it; through long practice of reasoning and discrimination he becomes so used to doing what is good and right that it becomes impossible for him to do anything contrary. He need no longer use his reason, he knows what is right and good instinctively.

POVERTY AND RELIGION

Is poverty a pre-condition of religion? The biblical saying that a rich man can never enter the kingdom of God seems to point to that. There are people who say that it is only the poor who are interested in religion. The argument seems to be that rich people don't need religion, for they have a fair amount of things they want and as such are able to ignore religion altogether. Poor people, on the other hand, have to have the solace that religion can give them in the absence of the material goods they need but do not at the moment possess. The argument seems to imply that really speaking, religion is only a hoax, but poor people imagine that religion will give them nobler things than material goods, though what those nobler things are remain rather vague.

If somebody is poor by choice, no one can object to it. For instance, a scholar may say that to him the first priority is knowledge and not money. He is happy if he has the bare necessities of life in order that he may concentrate on his intellectual pursuits. Similarly, a religious man also may spurn wealth if he finds it is a hindrance to what he has set his heart on—moral and spiritual perfection. But can money stand in one's way to God? It may, for money is such a thing that it can become an obsession with a person. Just as having no money is a problem, having too much of it is also a problem. In this sense, the saying that a rich man can never enter heaven presents only one side of the picture. A poor man also cannot enter the kingdom of God if he is a person whose interest in religion is only to the extent that it may help overcome his financial problems. Such a man will invariably turn his back on religion as

soon as he has enough money not to have to depend upon the mercy of that mysterious power called God.

Does it then mean that no rich man can be religious? Is wealth incompatible with religion? It is wrong to think that one has to be poor to be religious. Anybody in distress, rich or poor, can clutch at religion for support, but if a person turns to religion only from a sense of helplessness, it is only likely that he will reject religion as soon as his condition improves. Religion is for everybody, not necessarily for the poor only or for those who are in distress. A truly religious man loves God not for money or relief from trouble, but just because he cannot help loving Him, like one cannot help loving one's parents. It is not that God has to prove that He is capable of helping man in order that people may pray to Him. The purpose of prayer, in fact of religion itself, is not to get something but to *be* something.

What is that something? It is being perfect, in other words, being in the kingdom of God. Rich or poor, everybody can enter the kingdom of God, given that he fulfils the conditions. Love of God is the essence of those conditions. Where there is love of God, there is less love for money, less love for one's self, less love for sense-pleasure. When Christ praises poverty, he praises not the state in which you have no money, but the state in which you care less for money and care more for God. A beggar is not necessarily a religious man. Destitution is no hallmark of a saint. A saint may or may not have money, but he loves God above everything else. Poverty, born out of love of God, is a virtue; otherwise, a dubious distinction.

'NOT BY BREAD ALONE'

Bread may be one of man's first priorities, but it is a peculiarity of the human mind that he is not satisfied with merely getting enough to eat. He wants many more things, material and non-material. He wants, for instance, love and affection. In fact, it is this urge to acquire more and more things for his physical and mental comfort which has provided the incentive for the stupendous progress he has made in terms of civilization and culture. All his discoveries and inventions stem from this urge. He already knows much about the world in which he lives, but he is not satisfied with what he knows and he is constantly trying to probe more and more into the mystery that surrounds it. He not only wants to know more but wants also to use that knowledge to make this world a better place to live in. In his early days, he was helpless against Nature; now She is largely under his control.

It is a paradoxical situation that, despite all the knowledge that man now possesses and all the good things he has created for himself through that knowledge, he himself is no better than he was before. His problem now is he himself. He has no control over himself. He knows what is good for him, but when he acts, he hardly shows any sign that he knows it. He acts blindly, foolishly, as if driven by some invisible force. He does not trust anybody, he does not trust even those who are very close to him, but he does not trust himself, either. He hates himself and is hated by others. He is as unhappy as ever. All his achievements seem to mock at him.

Indeed, the basic fact is that while man is much too busy improving his environment, he is doing nothing or

very little to improve himself. It is said that he is still the savage that he was in the beginning of history. He is as wicked, as selfish, as unscrupulous as before. He has of course come a long way since he first appeared on earth, but the change that has come over him is more apparent than real. That is to say, the evil in him remains the same, though he does not express it in the way he did before. He is more subtle and more secretive now and is on that account more dangerous, more destructive.

A distinction has to be made between individuals and groups. An individual may be good or bad, but that cannot make much of a difference so long as he does not occupy an important position. But a nation may be dangerous when it follows the policy of self-interest to the exclusion of all norms of equity and justice. If civilization is to be saved, like individuals, nations have to commit themselves to ethical principles. The test of a nation's strength is to be judged not so much in terms of arms and weapons, but more in terms of whether it can use them judiciously or avoid using them altogether. Man's progress today has reached a point when the question that has become most pressing is whether it would not have been better if there had been no progress at all, since this progress has made man morally more and more vulnerable. This has happened because the trend is to attach too much importance to material achievements to the utter neglect of moral standards. This has to be corrected by placing adequate emphasis on man's moral uplift. He has to assert his supremacy by taking control of the forces within himself, that is, he has to conquer himself, else his conquest of nature will only bring his doom.

DEATH

Death is no end, it is only an interlude, a pause before a new beginning. It is the beginning of a new life, a new phase in the struggle a soul makes to reach its goal. The goal, as ever, is freedom, freedom from the cycle of birth and death. It is common experience that if there is a birth, there is a death, like night following day. This is the destiny of every being. He is born again and again and he dies again and again; there is no escape from this. He is caught in a tangle created by his own doings. He can get out of this only by not doing anything *himself*. So long as he acts only for himself, he is not free. Everything a man does has its results; the results may be good or bad depending upon the nature of what he does. Either way, he has to bear the consequences of his actions. This means perpetual bondage, being always a victim of his own actions. It may be a good idea being able to enjoy the fruits of one's good actions, but 'a chain of gold' is also a chain. If a person acts for others, why should not the results of his actions bind him? They will not bind him because he is altruistic. But can anyone act when he has nothing to gain? He can, since he is going to gain freedom which is what everyone desires and which is much more precious than anything else one can wish to have, no further incentive is necessary to make him act.

But if death is no end, what is it? What happens to the soul when death occurs? Also, there is the basic question if there is at all such a thing as the soul. These are all pertinent questions. Interestingly, the idea that there is such a thing as the soul independent of the body is shared by almost all religions. The word 'soul' is widely

used and it has different meanings in different contexts. It is, however, generally agreed that the soul is nothing material, and that it's the core of a man's being. It is consciousness, it is life, the force that sustains the body, the source of the energy behind everything that a man does. The question may be asked what proof there is that the soul exists. The proof is that when it deserts the body, the body cannot act though it is otherwise intact. What is missing is the soul, the real man. There are also other proofs but, for the purpose of the present discussion, it is not necessary to go into the matter further. It is enough to know that there is a power that activates and co-ordinates the human organs. This is what is called the soul of the man. This is his real self.

But what is the relation between the body and the soul? The body is like a house which the soul occupies as long as it suits it. When the body becomes unfit for use, the soul takes on a new body as a man chooses a new piece of cloth when the old one is worn out. Death marks the end of the body and not of the soul. Whatever may happen to the body, the soul remains unaffected. Since the soul operates through the body, it needs a good healthy body to do so. If the body is old and diseased, death is welcome since it is the gateway to a new body. It may be painful, but it is necessary and desirable for the new beginning and the new opportunities which may come in its wake. Death is no horror, it is only a change, a change to be viewed with optimism for a better future, a more fruitful struggle for the freedom which Buddha described as 'the great release'.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

Does God intervene in human affairs? Does He help when a nation or an individual is in trouble? How and to what extent does He help if He helps at all? If civilization is in danger because of the folly of man, if the whole human race is threatened with extinction because of the pride and rapacity of one or more power-drunk nations armed with nuclear weapons, will He intervene? Many small and weak tribes and communities have been wiped out by the aggression of their stronger and more determined neighbours. Why did God allow this to happen? There is also the question why God allows the existence of social injustice in all its weird forms, making life burdensome for many. Why do famines occur, or floods and other natural calamities or wars causing senseless destruction of life and property? Cannot God prevent such misfortunes for mankind?

If the *Gita* is to be believed, then, God does intervene in human affairs when it is ripe for Him to do so, that is, when there is too much evil in the world and goodness is pushed under. He intervenes by manifesting His power in an individual who, serving as a model for others to follow, shows the way the basic problems of the age can be solved at the personal level. He is an ideal man, ideal in character, in the kind of life he lives, in the relations he maintains with his fellow men, in all his activities. He may have a humble origin, may have no outstanding intellectual qualities, may appear simple and commonplace in other respects, yet, by virtue of his character, by virtue of what he *is*, he is able to command respect from others. Good people rally round him, while bad people are afraid of him. People turn to him, not for any

material gain but because in their eyes he is the acme of all that man can aspire to be. People emulate him though he never asks them to do so. His presence is felt wherever he is, though he never makes any conscious attempt to draw public attention to himself. His ways are quiet and humble and he himself may easily pass unnoticed, yet his influence grows, often in spite of himself. As fire gives warmth to those around, he, in his unobtrusive manner, becomes instrumental in encouraging the forces of goodness to fight evil in whatever form it may exist. He may not himself organize people to labour for a better society, but his influence is such that large numbers of people, individually and collectively, commit themselves to the ideal of upgrading their own personal life and character and building up a happier and better society.

But does this mean then that there is no more evil or suffering? Not that exactly, but what happens is that, instead of being daunted by problems, man, under the influence of this instrument of God, is better equipped in terms of character to cope with difficult situations. Men and women who are so transformed become 'the salt of the earth', 'the chosen people' to spearhead a revolutionary change in every sphere of life.

Good and evil, pleasure and pain, both are implicit in life. You cannot have one without the other. Good fortunes are welcome but misfortunes have to be put up with. God intervenes not so much by changing objective conditions as by helping man to change subjectively; He teaches man to appreciate good fortunes without being carried away by them and to defy misfortunes when it is not possible to avert them. Man is supreme. God wants that man should behave like one who is supreme.

YOU AND ME

It is our common experience that life is a constant struggle, struggle against environment, against systems and institutions, against fellow human beings, even against our own selves. The struggle is over the question of domination—shall we dominate over them, or they over us? When we fight our own selves, we fight against those elements in us which we know are likely to harm us—our impulses, feelings, and passions which take control of our actions in place of our better judgement and mature consideration. In fact, it is this last fight that consumes most of our time and energy. Taming the mind is like taming a wild horse. If you can tame the horse, he is useful to you and you can make him carry you wherever you want to go. Similarly, if the mind is under control, it can be a useful instrument to help you progress in any direction you want. A man's capability is determined by the amount of control he has over his mind. There is infinite power lying locked up within the mind. Some are able to use this power to their advantage, but most people find this power elusive, often also hostile. No wonder the struggle one has against oneself is prolonged and exhausting.

How can all struggles end? Is there any way of resolving the conflicts in which we get involved, willy-nilly? The answer that Vedanta provides is rather intriguing. It says there are conflicts because you think you and the world around you are separate. Even, within yourself, you feel you have separate constituents and these constituents pull you in different directions, as if you are a plaything at their hands. This idea of separateness, according to Vedanta, is due to ignorance. Reality is one, it is the

common denominator of all that exists, but this one Reality appears as many because of different names and forms which are superimposed on it. The names and forms are not real, for they change and that which changes cannot be real. On this token everything we see around us, in fact, the whole phenomenal world, is unreal. But is there anything real if the test of reality is that it does not change? Vedanta says there is something that never changes, that is there in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end. It is not only constant, it is everywhere, in the small as well as in the big, in the good as well as in the bad. The ultimate reality cannot be defined. All that can be said about it is that it is the ground on which everything rests. Things originate from it, subsist on it, and ultimately merge in it. There is in fact one single entity, however diverse it may appear. The diversity is only in terms of names and forms, but, at the transcendental level, there is nothing but unity.

There are conflicts because we are not conscious of this unity. If we know that we are all one, then the question of hatred does not arise. Where there is an all-pervasive sense of oneness, there are no conflicts, there is only peace, joy, and happiness. The sense of duality, the sense of 'Me' and 'You', which now marks all our relationships, is a potent cause of disunity. Vedanta advocates reversal of this relationship by stressing the unity which holds us together. If there has to be peace—at the individual or collective level—it must be on the bedrock of this unity.

ARNOLD TOYNBEE

It is possible to disagree with Toynbee's theories, but no one will question his perceptivity. His *A Study of History* is an attempt to unravel the compulsive urges in man from which spring all armed conflicts. This, inevitably, leads him on to the recognition of the role religion can and shall play in the affairs of man. He draws much ridicule for hinting at such a possibility, but he sees no reason to change his views. Incidentally, Bertrand Russell also has some such thing to say about the role of religion. After preaching and practising free thinking all his life, Russell ends up admitting that 'Christian love or compassion' is necessary to save mankind from annihilation. Russell is shy to use the word religion, but there is no doubt that by Christian love he means the love that all religions preach.

Toynbee, however, is more specific. Western technology, he says, has annihilated distance, but it has also 'armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way.' What is this Indian way? As he himself spells out, this is the non-violence of Ashoka and Mahatma Gandhi and the religious harmony of Ramakrishna—in other words, religion. In an interview he once remarked that religion would have the 'last word' as against communism because religion directly addresses itself to individuals and offers them something to hold on to in times of difficulty.

But Toynbee is aware that all that passes in the name of religion is not religion. There are accretions which religion gathers as it is exposed to a particular *milieu*. A distinction must, therefore, be made between the essentials and the non-essentials in religion. The essentials—truth, goodness, and beauty—represent ‘the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’.¹ Toynbee must have studied Vedanta, for he talks of there being an ‘Absolute Reality’ behind the appearances of things. He says that it is not enough to know that there is this Absolute Reality, but that one must ‘be in touch with It and be in harmony with It.’ Referring to the declaration by Indian philosophers, ‘Thou art That’, he says that ‘one must discover the truth of this statement for oneself.’ He sees the statement as a call for action, for striving to realize, in the language of Vedanta, the innate Divinity which is within, the identity of the individual self with the cosmic Self. ‘An imperative is implicit in the indicative’, he says. ‘Thou art That’ is a call as well as a challenge.

Toynbee has succinctly described what he calls ‘the Indian way’. It is the way of peace, understanding, and harmony—the way that comes from the recognition that every human achievement is a divine phenomenon. Many will say it is all moonshine, but is there an alternative?

CONVERSIONS

If freedom of conscience is accepted as a guiding motto, there is then no reason why there should be any fuss over a man wanting to change his religion. If the religion of his forefathers does not satisfy him, how can there be any objection to his opting for some other religion which he thinks is going to satisfy him? After all, religion is entirely a personal matter, something so intimate and yet so vital that it is only right that he should choose it after judging it from all possible angles. If he wants to forsake the religion of his forefathers, one with which he has lived ever since his birth, it is to be presumed that it is a decision he has taken after much thinking and not on an impulse. Also, the reason must be that he has tried the religion for years but as it did not satisfy his requirements, there was no alternative for him but to give it up, which he is now wanting to do, perhaps with much regret. Can it be then said that the decision he has taken under such circumstances is wrong? On the other hand, is it not fair to say that he should be praised for the courage of conviction he has shown in taking the decision he has? Indeed, it would have been cowardice on his part if he had not taken this decision in view of the shortcomings he has now detected in the religion he has so long practised.

This is all right as far as it goes, but is it not true that the basic elements in all religions are so common that the question of one religion being more satisfying than another does not arise? All religions ask their followers to love God, to try to live according to the teachings of His prophets, to serve mankind, to be honest and humble, and so on. Indeed, there is so much that is common

between one religion and another that it is just as well if a man continues in the religion of his birth, if of course it is the solace that religion gives is what he is seeking. If he is seeking not the solace of religion but something else, then it is a different matter.

But what else can a man seek in religion besides spiritual comforts, or if you like, spiritual unfoldment? Unfortunately, religion is often used as a lever for material gain and social advancement. If those who are interested in promoting a particular religious faith have also means to distribute patronage, it is not unlikely that they will try to win adherents to their particular religious faith by dangling inducements before people who they know value material gain more than spiritual benefit. A conversion so brought about deserves the strongest possible condemnation. And those who thus fall prey to the temptation of material and social advantages are also to be condemned.

But what if a religion is callous about the conditions of its adherents? Take the case of Hinduism : here some people are permanently condemned to a status that denies them their basic human rights. If such people opt for another religion where their human dignity is safe, can they be blamed? Some kind of caste is perhaps practised everywhere, but the form in which it prevails in Hindu society is outrageous. Caste is essentially a social institution, having nothing to do with religion as such. Hinduism has as much to offer as any other religion, perhaps more, but it must demonstrate its concern for the social uplift of man more than it has done so far. It must put its house in order before it can complain about conversions.

MOTHER

What marked out Sarada Devi as an extraordinary person was the fact that she reduced the higher truths of religion to matters of daily practice. Indeed, Sarada Devi *lived* religion, but the interesting point is that she never gave any hint that she was conscious of the fact. Her modesty gave no hint of the strength of her will which she used only to uphold principles, spurning every inducement to compromise. If she ever did a favour to anybody, she made it look as if she was the one who was being favoured. She was mother to all in a real sense, but this is not to say that she was blind with affection to the extent that if she saw any weakness in anybody around her she let it pass uncensured. She censured, only to create in the person concerned the will to struggle, to keep struggling, till he became a person completely transformed. She taught more by examples than by precepts. If she felt there was somebody who needed to be pulled up, she was in no haste to do so unless she thought the offence was too serious to brook deferment of the warning she wanted to sound. And the warning she gave was always suited to the occasion and the temperament of the person for whom it was meant, though, often enough, it was given as if she was stating a well-known moral *cliché* without having anyone in mind.

She was no mystic like her husband was, but a simple woman whose life was an open book for the whole world to see. She was very much in the world, unlike her husband who never took any interest in the duties and obligations which life in the world invariably involves, for as daughter, wife, and finally as mother and spiritual

teacher, she did her full quota of work, never sparing herself and in circumstances, materially and otherwise, more taxing than one can imagine. Her mind always unperturbed, she met every situation as it merited, with courage, with faith in God and also in man, always true to the high ideals she and her husband enunciated and practised in life. Idealistic yet practical with a degree of common sense and adaptability not commonly met with, she was a saint who demonstrated how the basic tenets of religion could be practised in a family environment. She had had no formal education, but, like her husband, she possessed that rare insight which enabled her to judge human nature and events unerringly. More surprising, and again like her husband, she had a ready and invariably correct solution to any spiritual problem that might be put to her. After her husband's death, the mantle of leadership of the small community of spiritual aspirants her husband had left behind him fell on her. Just as Sri Ramakrishna had predicted, Sarada Devi helped many with spiritual guidance, in fact many more than he himself did, and, in a very literal sense, the number of people seeking her ministration was sometimes so large that she felt overwhelmed. But to the last day she received all people who came from far and near, from different communities and different backgrounds, with a graciousness few humans are capable of. The few among such persons as are still surviving testify to the loftiness of her character, despite all the simplicity and drabness which surrounded her.

No wonder she is regarded as a symbol of Indian womanhood at its best, 'a chalice' left by Sri Ramakrishna, as Nivedita said.

M, THE HONEST CHRONICLER

'M', that is, Mahendranath Gupta, alias Master Mahasaya, has laid mankind under great obligation by, first, recording Sri Ramakrishna's conversations faithfully and, then, presenting them to the public in the garb of that book, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, in Bengali) now known and read throughout the world. Suppose he had not recorded them at all, or having recorded them, had refrained from publishing them! What a loss it would have been to the world! But could he have done otherwise? Was it not that Providence had chosen him for this role?

Before meeting Sri Ramakrishna, M was a confused man without knowing what he wanted or should want. After meeting Sri Ramakrishna, he was a man whom God had entrapped for His purpose. From the very first, Sri Ramakrishna impressed him by the freshness of his thoughts. Here was a man who lived in and with Truth only. It was exciting to be a witness to the experiences of one whom Truth so possessed. He felt he must record everything the man said and did for his own use. He had no thought then of sharing the record with the public. M in fact was very secretive about his diary, as about the fact that he was recording in it everything Sri Ramakrishna said or did in his presence. His notes were cryptic but surprisingly complete, complete in the sense that there was hardly any detail that he missed. That M was taking down notes of Sri Ramakrishna's talks no one knew, but Sri Ramakrishna knew, though how is a mystery.

A remarkable thing about *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is its exactitude. M was meticulous in recording everything

Sri Ramakrishna said, which is why one often comes across words which verge on the vulgar, for Sri Ramakrishna has scant respect for the sensibilities of the so-called cultured, city-bred people. The highest testimony about the authenticity of M's notes comes, however, from Sarada Devi, who, in a letter to M, says that when the notes were read out to her, she felt as if she was hearing Sri Ramakrishna himself speak. Swami Vivekananda, regarded as the best interpreter of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, also gives much praise to M for honestly and correctly recording Sri Ramakrishna's conversations. He also compliments him for having completely effaced himself from the notes. Sri Ramakrishna is at the centre of the stage and he, if anywhere at all, in the wings.

It is difficult to find another book where a world teacher is so vividly portrayed. Sri Ramakrishna is seen here as the complete history of man's search for God. There is nothing known to religion which he does not try his hand at and finally master. He is the sum total of religion and its experience. Yet he is so simple, so human! And how he endears himself by his home-spun humour, parables, and anecdotes! He does not belong to any particular country or community, or even age. He is Truth itself.

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, M spent much of his time reading—and meditating on—the notes he possessed of Sri Ramakrishna's talks. Some who had the privilege of having portions of these being read out to them were so impressed that they insisted that they be published. M, perhaps with much diffidence, agreed. He presented the notes as they were, without any attempt to gloss them over. The result is the fine piece of literature that it is.

POVERTY AND CRIME

If it is thought that poverty and crime always go together, it is a mistake. It is true that if a man is poor, he may feel tempted to earn money by dubious means; he may steal, even rob, but this is only a possible consequence, not an axiom. In any society there may be found poor people who are strictly honest, honest to the extent that in no circumstances will they do a thing they know is not right. Not that they are sophisticated people familiar with all the logic which defines what is right and what is wrong and why one should do what is right and not what is wrong; often they are simple folks whose only tools of judgement are those that their innate goodness provides. Honesty is a way of life with them, as if they cannot help being honest. It is not that they are honest because they expect some reward or they are afraid that if they are not honest they may be punished; they are honest because it is in their nature to be honest, because they are so conditioned by their upbringing and habits that they cannot but be honest.

Circumstances no doubt influence a man's character, but it is also a truism that a man can be what he wants to be irrespective of his circumstances. If a man is poor, it is no doubt a drawback but that is not to say that he has to be a criminal. He is admittedly more vulnerable to temptations, but he can still be honest by sheer force of will. There are people who say that a poor man has every right to be dishonest. This is a false and dangerous philosophy. No society can survive where this kind of philosophy rules. Society of course has its obligations to the poor, but no society can claim it has been able to satisfy everybody. Indeed, there are bound to be people

who will have the feeling that they have not had a fair deal from society. This does not legitimize their taking any liberty with legal and moral norms. Social and economic injustice is bad but chaos is worse. In the larger interests of society, individuals, even groups, have to make some sacrifice.

It is sometimes argued that a poor man has to be given incentives to be honest. What incentives—material or moral? It is doubtful if material incentives can induce a man to be honest, for then a rich man would never have been dishonest. Can then moral incentives help, incentives like some kind of rewards in heaven? It is doubtful if such moral incentives can help either, for they are remote and no one knows for certain if there is such a place as heaven. But, more important, if honesty has to be supported by incentives, it is hardly a worthwhile virtue. Real honesty needs no support from outside. An honest man is honest not for any extraneous consideration, but because he feels if he is not honest he is degrading himself, because he has a horror of anything that is not right and fair.

How can a man acquire this kind of honesty? By training, by education, by self-discipline. It is not easy but it is an achievement for which no stakes are deemed too high. If there is such a thing as 'the salt of the earth', honest men and women are that salt. A society is progressive or backward depending upon the number of honest men and women it has. The whole thrust of a society's efforts should be not only to ensure that there is justice for everybody, that those who are weak are well taken care of, but also that everybody places honesty at the top of his priorities.

YOUTH POWER

Young people everywhere today are like an explosive material to be handled very carefully. It is the discoveries they make as they grow into adulthood which make them what they are—impatient, arrogant, and rebellious. Their greatest shock of disappointment occurs when they find that their parents are not what they had taken them for—models of perfection, but they are people who preach what they themselves do not believe in and of course never practise. Soon they discover, like their parents, the entire older generation are insincere. Not only their dishonesty disgusts them but also their inefficiency which they think is responsible for all the mess that there is in the world. Their first reaction against the failure of their elders is to question the values by which their elders swear—tradition, society, family, government, etc. They reject the very basis on which society exists, for it is to them wrong, being a device invented by their elders to perpetuate their vested interests. This is why they are against every vestige of institutionalism, in fact of anything coming down to them from the past. They want to destroy the world as it is now and if possible, create a new one where at least black is black and not dressed up as something else to hoodwink others.

The revolt of the youth is understandable, but the question is if they can create a better world in place of the present one. Also, what good will it do if they destroy institutions that have evolved as the outcome of centuries of experience? If the intention is to demonstrate that behind the facade which the cherished institutions provide, man continues to be the savage that he is, they need not take that trouble, for that is a fact no one is

going to contest. But, paradoxically, the human scene is not as bad as young people make out. If there are bad people, there are also good people. Even among those whose wickedness is palpable, one may notice much goodness. Indeed, it is difficult to brand anyone as wholly bad or wholly good. Man is a peculiar mixture of good and evil. The difference between one individual and another is in degree; so also between one generation and another.

Young people think they can perform better than their elders. There is always a difference between a dream and a reality. It is the privilege of the young to dream. No one will blame them if they dream that they can create a better world than their elders. One wishes God-speed to them, but very soon they will discover that the world they hoped they would create is still a dream. Maybe they have done some tinkering with it but, by and large, it has remained the same. An Indian saint describes the world as a dog's tail which must have its curls. Try however much you can, the world will have its dark spots. Young people, in every age, have dreamt of a better world, but, despite their best efforts, have ended up leaving the world where they found it, at least in moral terms.

This is not to say that young people should not try to improve conditions in the world; let them try, but in doing so let them not destroy or belittle what their elders have achieved. The world has seen many revolutions but man has remained much the same in spite of them. Let the young people prove their superiority by raising their own level of not only action but character.

ESSENCE OF INHUMANITY'

Shaw thinks cruelty to fellow creatures may be bad but much worse is indifference to them. He describes it as 'the essence of inhumanity'. Why?

Cruelty is a temporary reaction, often the result of a chain of incidents provoking an individual to act in an irrational manner; it may be that it is not in his nature to be cruel, but, in the face of a grave provocation he loses control of himself and does what he would normally hate to do. The extenuating factor in this situation is that left to himself he would not hurt others; he may even be a kind and generous person capable of going out of his way to help a fellow creature in distress. What is wrong with him is his inability to control his reactions. When he reacts he reacts beyond the limits of discretion—or even necessity. But, by nature, he is a warm-hearted man, full of love and affection for people he likes, and equally malevolent against those he does not like and thinks are inimical to him.

An indifferent man is, however, entirely a different proposition. He just does not care for anybody, he is so occupied with himself that he has no time to think of others. He loves himself only. If he loves another person, it is because he finds it is to his own interest to do so. But the same love will in no time turn to hatred should his interests so demand. He does not care what happens to others, he has no compunction about sacrificing his closest friend if it is necessary for his own sake. He behaves as if the world itself exists for him only; he is surprised and disappointed if the world runs not as he wants it to but differently. There may be suffering all around him, but he is not touched a bit. He is truly like a Nero who fiddles while Rome burns.

A man who has no feeling for others must be adjudged immature, not too far above the animal level. He is hardly human, for the hallmark of humanity is to feel close to all fellow men and women, even animals and plants. Though other animals appeared on earth first, it is only man who successfully fought Nature to preserve not only himself but other animals and plants. While he did this he realized that to win the battle against Nature he had to fight collectively, one single member of the species not being enough for this purpose. It was this need for self-preservation which led to the origin of the family, or society, or even nation. This is where man left behind other animals to become the master of the world that he is today.

Self-preservation is a common instinct with animals, but man alone among the animals adds to it concern for others irrespective of whether they are related to him or not. Early in his evolution, he realized he could not live in isolation; he needed the support of others. But to get the support of others he had to follow the policy of 'give and take' which he did; in other words, he felt concerned for others just as he expected others would feel concerned for him. His growth has since been marked by growth in degrees of friendship and goodwill towards others. The more he grows, the more he identifies himself with others. Soon he reaches a point when if a fellow creature is in pain, he feels as if he himself is in pain. Finally emerges the man who lives for others. Here is what may be called the acme of human growth. When this takes place, man, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, becomes 'a circle with its circumference nowhere and centre everywhere'.

If the essence of inhumanity is indifference, the essence of humanity is love that embraces the whole of existence.

THE STORY OF TWO BIRDS

In the Upanishads, the story is related of two birds looking alike, always on the same tree, always together. One of them is quiet, withdrawn, doing nothing, only looking on, a spectator; the other bird is restless, pecking at different fruits, her moods always changing, depending upon what sort of fruit she is tasting. If she tastes a good fruit, she is very happy, but if she tastes a bad one, her mood at once changes to one of sorrow. Thus she is always caught between joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain; the other bird is ever the same, never swayed by changing emotions. She has complete mastery over herself and is not subject to the influence of external factors.

Withdrawal from the world is one way to peace and happiness which is very much preferred by Indian seers. But by preaching withdrawal from the world do they not lay themselves open to the charge of encouraging escapism? Can escapism be termed a virtue? Assuming that it can give you peace and happiness, can it be supported? Is it not the same thing as cowardice? Is it not much more praiseworthy to plunge into the thick of the battle and get killed than to save oneself by running away from the battlefield?

But withdrawal from the world is not escapism. It is only another name of self-control, of not being a slave to the temptations to which one is exposed in the world. Withdrawal means being in the thick of the battle, fighting one's way through it, yet not identifying oneself with it. That is to say, one has to maintain an attitude of detachment from one's environment and even from the fruits of one's own actions. One will do whatever one is doing vigorously, to the best of one's ability, yet one

will try to cultivate the feeling that what one is doing is not for oneself but for others. The trouble lies in allowing the self to dominate. If one is working for oneself only, one is only strengthening the fetters that are already on one's feet. To work for oneself leads, according to Indian philosophy, to bondage, to work for others, to liberation. But can one work for others and yet work vigorously? Does not one lose interest in work when that work is for others?

This is where Indian philosophy is very clear and emphatic : The idea of 'you' and 'I' is wrong, we are all one. Unity of existence is crucial to Indian philosophy. If one hurts another, one in fact hurts oneself.

When the suggestion is made that one should withdraw from the world, the idea is that one should withdraw from this world of duality, one should refuse to see duality, one should see only the unity which lies under the surface of the duality of 'you' and 'me', of the selves. The unity is the unity of the selves. There is only one self which is the common self of all. This is the common denominator of all that exists, this is what is called the 'unity in diversity'.

When one is firmly entrenched in this sense of unity, one can take, with equanimity, both pleasure and pain, success and failure. As day follows night, so joy is soon followed by sorrow, but one should not be swayed by either. One should try to detach oneself from everything around oneself.

The bird who has withdrawn herself from the world is not an inert object. She is very much alive, but she keeps herself untouched by pleasure or pain that she experiences. She has complete control over herself so that the tumult of her conflicting sense-experiences does not affect her.

THE CROSS MAN BEARS

Man seems to be under a curse, for he is born with some limitations which he cannot get over, however much he may try. He is very powerful, no doubt, for what magnificent changes he has brought about in his physical environment to suit his convenience! He can make Nature do just as he wishes, yet, paradoxically, he is not happy and the world too, despite all the amenities and comforts it now provides, is not the kind of paradise man thought it was going to be. If judged merely by physical standards, life is no doubt more comfortable and pleasant, but that is not to say that man is happy.

What is it that is missing? The fact of the matter is that not much attention has been paid to the task of improving man himself. The physical environment has changed much, but man himself has not. He is the same savage that he was at the dawn of civilization. Anger, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness rule his heart as they have always. He has meanwhile propounded high principles—equality, freedom, justice, peace, etc. to govern human relations. The world would have been a much better place if it could be run on these principles. In practice, however, these principles are mere words without substance. Those who profess them lack the will and the strength needed to act up to them. A man may say he believes in equality, but will he be able to treat an enemy in the same way as he will treat a friend? He must be an extraordinary man if he can do so. The world is full of unequals—there are rich people as well as poor, educated as well as ignorant, intelligent as well as foolish, people who are advanced and people who are backward. Can you treat them all as equals? Will it be fair if you

treat a weak man in the same way as you treat a strong man? Will not the weak man need your special attention? If equality means equality of rights and privileges, can a weak man have any rights and privileges against a strong man? The strong invariably intimidate the weak. Even if there is a legal safeguard to protect the weak, it becomes infructuous, for the strong invariably manipulate it to their advantage. So long as disparities exist, there will always remain the risk of exploitation of one group by another. But it is difficult to conceive that there will ever be a time when no disparities will exist between individual and individual, between race and race. Even in the most affluent societies there are sections of people who are poor; similarly in societies known to be poor, there are people who are enormously rich. Disparities are normal, even inevitable. Can there be any peace, freedom, or equality so long as disparities continue?

Perhaps not, but disparities can be no serious problem if people have a sense of unity among themselves. Given a feeling of unity, people will hesitate to hurt one another. Anger, jealousy, hatred lose their focus when people realize that they are really one. The power to hurt then gives way to the power to serve. He has succeeded in raising his living standards, he has to raise now his moral standards. He has to be a better and more controlled being than he is now. Real happiness is not in the goods he possesses, but in what he is. He has to be his own master and not merely a master of external forces. Peace, equality, freedom, and justice are meaningful only to persons who can control themselves and feel one with others. If he has established his supremacy over Nature, he has to establish his supremacy over himself now.

GOOD AND EVIL

There is a theory that there is nothing that is absolutely good, as there is nothing that is absolutely bad. Good and bad are labels which one applies to situations, experiences, or objects according to what one likes or does not like. What is good to one may not be good to another. One may find the *Ramayana* a wonderful book, from the religious and literary point of view; to another, it is a book for children only, or even trash. One may be very fond of classical music, another may find it very dull. To kidnap a girl for marriage is an offence, but, in some communities, not long ago it used to be deemed, and is even now deemed, to be an act of valour.

It is indeed difficult, even wrong, to generalize about good and evil. What is good in one situation may be palpably bad in another. Let us consider a situation like this : A man, ill with cancer, is about to die but he does not know that he has cancer and his condition is very bad; he is confident that he will soon get well and he is busy planning what he is going to do when he gets well; he keeps asking his doctor all the time when he will get back on his feet. What should the doctor say in reply? Should he say, 'No, my dear, you're not going to live long. your fate is sealed. it's now a question of days when you'll be wrapped up by death'? If he says this, he will tell the truth, but it will only hasten his death. Should he say this? The alternative is to conceal the truth, to give him the impression that there is nothing seriously wrong with him, or whatever the trouble, he is going to survive. If the doctor chooses the latter course, will you condemn him for lying?

There is an old proverb in India which asks you to tell

the truth, but not the truth which is unpleasant. This means honesty may be a good virtue but it should never be practised at the cost of others. But what sort of honesty is it when it subsists on a compromise? Is honesty then a matter of convenience—be honest when it suits you, but if it does not, never mind if you tell a lie or cheat others?

Indeed it is difficult to decide one way or another, without taking into account the circumstances of the case. It is of course your motive that counts for much. If you have a good motive, an honest mistake on your part will save you from too much opprobrium, but the mischief you have done remains the same. So you have not acted up to the spirit of the proverb—you have told the truth but an unpleasant truth, with bad consequences for others. In the final analysis, there is no right or wrong that fits all circumstances. One's idea about both is also one's own, not applicable to all.

If you act from your own idea of right and wrong, you are naturally acting under the pre-conceived notions you have about them in your mind, notions which are the by-products of your training and education in the particular environment in which you have been brought up. It is very likely in spite of yourself that you will make mistakes in the circumstances. It is true that the decision you have taken is what you think is the best in the circumstances, but it is a decision coloured by your own thinking, which is not free from bias. This is why the Indian ideal is to go beyond right and wrong, good and evil, pure and impure, to reach a state in which no subjective factor can influence you. To be free, according to this ideal, is to be free from all limitations, subjective or objective.

RELIGION AND MYSTICISM

It is said that if religion is a science, mysticism is an art. What does this distinction mean? Religion is a science because it is based on some principles and is supposed to lead to some attainable results. The results may be illusory, but those who practise religion aspire for them with great ardour and some of them at least claim that they have attained them. Religion is well organized, inspired and guided by some authority, has a large variety of practices and rituals and is marked by signs and symbols; it is a body of beliefs which bind together a mass of people, small or large. Mysticism, on the other hand, cannot be categorized, it is singular. Each mystic is his own master, he may or may not have anything in common with others; he is what he is, unique, in a class by himself. He may, in fact, give the impression of being a lunatic, or a child who follows his own caprices without caring for others. He is totally indifferent to how you treat him, he follows none, he is no respecter of any person or authority, he is his own law. Surprisingly, however, he hurts none, no one is his enemy, he can never do any wrong. He belongs to no country or class, he belongs everywhere, he is a real citizen of the world.

In what sense is mysticism an art? It is an art because it is universal, it is timeless. Art is free, it originates from a person, it may belong to a particular period, or a particular *locale*, but it conveys a message which is eternal transcending all limitations of time and space. Mysticism is an art because it points to a development in man which is all-embracing, transcending all barriers that tend to limit man, race, religion or caste. It cannot

be defined, because to try to define it is to limit it, which is the very antithesis of what it is intended to be. When you see a mystic you know what he is like, but you cannot explain the phenomenon he represents because he is beyond reason, beyond the norms with which you are familiar, because he is like nobody else. A mystic is a riddle not only to others, he is a riddle to himself also, for he does not know what change has come over him and how, he also does not see himself as different from others. He is ego-less. He does not care about the circumstances in which he is, it is all the same to him whether you honour him or hate him. To him all is equal—good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, even holy and unholy. To him, all is divine, the distinctions that one sees among men and things and about which one makes so much fuss are artificial, without any substance. He bears goodwill towards all, all are his friends and relations, he is the humblest man on earth, he is happy if he is able to serve others. He has no creed or dogma to preach, he in fact is nobody's teacher.

Is mysticism then incompatible with religion? Strangely enough, all religions end up being mystical. Religion without mysticism is mummary, meaningless, a mere make-believe. It is mysticism that gives religion its authority, its character, its vitality. A religion which does not produce mystics is self-defeating, it is like an empty shell without any substance in it. Mysticism marks the growth that an individual can attain through religion. Religion is the means and mysticism is the end. Mysticism is the fulfilment of man, it is the Freedom to which man aspires. A mystic is a man turned God.

THE MESS CALLED EDUCATION

If the purpose of education is to improve, the question is, How much do the present systems of education prevailing in different countries serve that purpose? Take any country you like, do you find the system it follows meeting its requirements fully and to the satisfaction of all classes of its citizens? Does it improve each and all? If it does, in what manner does it?

The point has to be stressed that no system of education is perfect even for the country for which it is intended, leave alone other countries; worse still, it is open to question if much thought is given by the rulers of a country to the problem of shaping educational policies according to the needs of that country. How careless and irresponsible educational policy-makers can be is best illustrated when a country tries to imitate another country's educational system in spite of their different social and economic conditions: It looks as if the educational systems are no systems at all, but are just *ad hoc* arrangements devoid of any thinking and planning, with the result that, at best, they merely help tide over current difficulties. In short, education everywhere is ill-conceived and ill-managed, though it is readily conceded by both the Government and the public that a sound educational system is the sheet-anchor of a healthy and progressive society.

If the purpose of education is to improve, the question may very well be asked, To improve what in man? Improvement of the total man, will probably be the obvious answer, for that is how the role of education is viewed nowadays. It is a fine idea, no doubt, but does the present system of education really cover the 'total'

man? Does it, for instance, help an individual develop his body, mind, and spirit, if these three constitute the total man?

Education, as it prevails today, does nothing more than impart some knowledge and skill. How much knowledge and skill does it in reality impart? Except for a few who are very brilliant, most students learn little or nothing at school. It is the experience of all who have gone through the process called 'education' that they have learnt nothing worth while even if judged from the standpoint of being able to earn money, leave alone improving 'the total man'. It may also be asked if imparting knowledge and skill is the same thing as improving an individual: A man who has learnt much and has also acquired much skill at some trade is not necessarily a better man. A learned man may be an unscrupulous man, just as a skilled worker may be a criminal. If they are educated in the accepted sense of the word, what sort of education is this?

What passes as education does not touch the real personality of the pupil. His character remains unchanged—his perspective, his sense of right and wrong, his attitude towards fellow men, all these remain unchanged. If he turns out to be a good man, it is not because of the education he has received, but in spite of it. He may have learnt a few things to be able to earn his living, (though it is possible he would have been able to earn his living even without learning them), but he has not learnt—because he has not been taught—how he could be a better man. Education has served no purpose in his case. To call him an educated man is a misnomer.

Indeed, education everywhere is in a mess today. This bodes no good for future humanity. The unfoldment of the perfection already in man, which education is supposed to bring about, can no longer wait.

SEEKING GOD

All religions talk of a God who is described as the lord of the universe, who is its creator, sustainer, and destroyer, and in whom reposes the authority behind every phenomenon, human or otherwise, that takes place in the world. The religions also preach certain goals and principles, asking man to pursue them as best he can, for they say that is the only way to peace and happiness, any deviation from them being sure to be visited with sorrow and pain. God, in fact, is painted as an anthropomorphic being who, if properly propitiated, can grant man whatever he wishes, but, if offended, may inflict severe punishment on the offender.

This concept of God as being a rather heartless person who is ever watchful for any offence that man may commit for which He can punish him, while being niggardly about giving rewards to him for his good acts, is dying out, but the idea of God as a person whose ways are inscrutable still persists. It is to this God that most people find it difficult to swear allegiance. The feeling that is most common among educated people today is that either this kind of God does not exist at all, or if He does exist, then He is to be ignored, for He cannot really interfere with one's destiny.

What then is God like? How does He influence man's life, if at all? Is He personal or impersonal? Where does He exist? How does one know what His wishes are about how we should live our lives? Through the church, the priests, or the holy men? It is true that all religions have some holy books which they say are books in which what God wants of us is clearly set out. But how do we know for certain that these books are authentic? It is

claimed on behalf of these books that they are words of God, but what guarantee is there that they are not concoctions by interested people? In particular, there are often found pronouncements in these so-called holy books which sound utterly puerile, if not also baseless. On the evidence that these holy books furnish it is difficult to credit God with omniscience which religious people attribute to Him.

What is God like then? Is He then a figment of the minds of the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious? If so, how is it that each religion has produced great souls, much greater indeed than any other discipline, as the testimony of contemporary critics shows? If religion is only a make-believe, how is it that intelligent people, throughout history, have felt drawn towards it and have practised it with great devotion? Even now, in the present age when science dominates, people are swayed by religious sentiments. Not only that, even eminent scientists have been known to be deeply religious.

Those who believe in religion claim that it is also a science in that it has some time-tested methods leading to the ultimate result known as 'God'. Religion takes you closer to God, who is both personal and impersonal, depending upon one's point of view, and who represents a level of development attainable only through great efforts. Religion is, therefore, a science of development, a science involving the use more of one's internal organs than of external organs. The results that one attains are essentially internal, but they also show themselves in one's life. The man who undergoes this change is reborn, as it were, for he has reached the state represented by God, the embodiment of peace and joy, the embodiment of every desirable quality from the human point of view.

EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Strictly speaking, these three have much in common, it may even be said that, at a certain point, they converge and become one. That is to say, an educated man is or should be a cultured man and, whether he cares to admit it or not, also a religious man. Education, culture, and religion are only different names for the same process of development which culminates in perfection, a goal that everybody tries to achieve.

Let us first examine the relationship between education and culture. Is it possible to imagine education without culture being its immediate consequence? What is education if it is not improvement of the individual as a whole? First and foremost, it should improve the mind of the individual, which means improvement of his thoughts, his attitude towards others, his manners, his speech and action. To be worth its name, education should try to bring about an all-round improvement in the personality of a student—physical, intellectual, and moral. The stress at the moment, is laid on intellectual improvement, which is perfectly in order, but to be well balanced, it should also be accompanied by physical and moral development. If an educated person is physically weak, it may nullify all the progress he may have made intellectually. Worse, however, is the case in which an educated man turns out to be morally weak. What a paradox it is that an educated man should be morally unsound! If he is intellectually mature, he should show that maturity in the power to discriminate between right and wrong and to do only that which is right. The first test is that he should be strictly moral. Similarly, he should not hurt others, he should be modest, he should

feel concerned about others, helping them to the extent he can. In other words, the criterion of an educated man is in the character he has and not merely in the amount of knowledge he has. He must show that he is vastly a better man by virtue of the education he has received, better in life and character.

But what is the criterion of a cultured man? The test of a cultured man is in his tastes and temperament, in his ways and habits, in the degree of refinement he is able to show in his dealings with others; in other words, in the kind of man he is, in his character, in the way he conducts himself in his day-to-day life. Obviously, these are qualities which flow from true education. Culture, in short, is the culmination of education.

But what is religion? Religion is a kind of growth which shows itself again in the character that one has. The growth that it stimulates is internal. First and foremost, it enlarges one's self, as if one bursts out of a shell and comes out into the open to feel that one is identical with others. It destroys one's narrow self, replacing it by a self which encompasses the whole universe. If a religious man is compassionate, it is because of this development. He is honest, again because the growth religion envisages is possible only when strict ethical principles are followed.

Thus education, culture, and religion overlap, if the aim of human growth is perfection. They should always go together, one leading to another. A properly educated man is also a cultured man—that is the least that can be expected of him; a cultured man is also a religious man, for culture embraces the qualities which religion inspires and sustains. The three are inseparable parts of a common process of growth leading to perfection, the final goal of life.

IS RELIGION AN ESCAPE FROM LIFE?

It is wrong to think that religion requires that one should turn one's back on life. It is in fact just the contrary. What religion requires is that you view life with respect, look upon it as an opportunity given to you to shape your destiny in the manner you think it best, to fulfil your hopes and aspirations without hurting others and also of course without hurting yourself in the end; in brief, it is an opportunity which you should use to the best possible advantage. Religion insists on it, for this is the only way to progress.

But it is difficult to view life as an opportunity, for it is so full of drawbacks and disadvantages. Indeed, one may ask : Where is the scope for progress when the struggle against odds is so crushing? It is not that religion minimizes difficulties; instead, it asks you to believe that you can overcome them. It says that if some people have succeeded in life, you can also succeed. They have succeeded because they tried hard. Religion does not promise an easy success, it only asks that you should try your best. But suppose you do not succeed in spite of your best efforts. Religion says it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. Even if you fail, it will not have been in vain that you tried, for in the course of your trying you will have gained much useful experience which would give you self-confidence, courage, and a better understanding of yourself and the world, so that you are better equipped to tackle the problems of life.

Religion urges you to take a positive attitude towards life. It warns you about the difficulties you may have to face, but it asks you to rise above them, grow too strong

for them. It is impossible to conceive a situation in which life will be only an unmixed pleasure, but it is given to man to reach a state in which whether he has pleasure or pain, he remains completely unperturbed. But to reach this state he has to take life seriously, discharge his duties and responsibilities to the best of his ability. When it is said that one should remain unaffected by any change in one's fortunes, it is not meant that one has to be inert like a clod of earth. What is meant is that one should have within oneself the strength to accept both pleasure and pain with equal indifference.

This is where religion comes in. It does give you the strength you require to take both pleasure and pain in your stride. How does it give you that strength? First and foremost, it makes you conscious of your position *vis-à-vis* the world around you. It tells you—indeed, it gives you the conviction that you are supreme, that, however inimical the world may appear, it is possible for you to overcome it. In the first place, you can change it to suit your convenience; the know-how to do this may not be immediately available, but, given time and effort, you will acquire it. But this is not enough; more important is the knowledge of your own self. You do not know now who you are, and what you are capable of; religion gives you a status which comes from God, a status of supremacy because God Himself is supreme. If God is only a symbol, you are part of that symbol, and, therefore, you are also supreme. This status is not a matter of faith, it is an experience which is as true as truth itself.

Religion is realization, realization of supremacy over oneself and over the world as well.

LOVELINESS MADE MORE LOVELY

The above is from the tribute Shelley paid to Keats when the latter passed away, aged only twenty-six. How can loveliness be made more lovely? One way is to reveal its aspects not otherwise seen, or seen only superficially. To give an example : most of us admire the sunrise when we see it, but we admire it more when we see it through the poet's eye. This is because the poet shows us more of its beauty than we are able to see, not possessing the gifts he is endowed with.

Like this, a saint sees more in an object than an ordinary individual does. A lion is a lion to us ordinary people, but to Sri Ramakrishna it is the Universal Mother's mount. The very thought of this is enough to induce in him a rapturous mood of God-consciousness so overwhelming that he became oblivious to all other objects around him. An English boy, standing in a particular posture, reminds him of Krishna and fills his mind with thrills of joy, as if he is in Krishna's company. The symbol is not a mere symbol, it is the 'thing' itself. It is a question of being sensitive enough to look beyond what the senses reveal.

This kind of sensitivity lends a depth and colour to sense-experiences which are otherwise drab. It may be imagination that gives this sensitivity but if it is only imagination, it must be of an extraordinary kind. Most of us skim over life, never reaching down to its depths. How much we miss as a result ! We look at the surface of things and make some trite remarks about whether they are good or bad without, however, comprehending their true nature which remains hidden from our range of vision. A truly sensitive person looks deep down into

the heart of an object and sees in it a whole world of meaning and purpose which constitute its real essence, its real being, its self.

William Blake says that it is possible to see Eternity in an hour and a World in a grain of sand. It is the same spirit whether you see it in the microcosm or the macrocosm. The physical dimension of an object is not important, the spirit behind it is important. What is this spirit like? According to mystics, it is infinite, universal, one and the same. Different objects are only symbols of that spirit. To be able to see that infinite spirit in a finite object is the highest mystic experience a man can hope for. A sensuous man operates only on the plane of his senses which hold him a captive to what his senses can perceive; a mystic, however, operates on a supersensuous plane where his range of vision extends to infinity and embraces everything. While other people depend upon their senses for whatever experiences they have, a mystic experiences things independent of his senses, direct, and therefore, more intensely. How he does so is difficult to explain, but he not only does so, he also helps others appreciate the beauty, the grandeur, and the significance of what he sees and feels. Nothing in this world is absolutely bad or useless. If it appears so, it is because of us who see it, because of what we are. A person whose sensitivity is high sees more than what other people can see and gives something of his own beauty and peace and joy to whatever he comes in contact with. It is this fact to which Shelley refers in his tribute to Keats.

Sri Ramakrishna saw the universe as his Mother Herself. Every form in it is only a form of that Mother. He was able to see it so because he and his Mother were one in spirit.

FREEDOM

The Hindu thinking about freedom is that it is a state of mind in which you refuse to be swayed by objective conditions, however good or bad they may be. Real freedom, according to the Hindus, is in the mind, not in factors outside of yourself. Does it then mean you do not care what goes on around yourself? Are you not being selfish or callous by assuming such an attitude? one may ask. Many, in fact, attribute Indian misery to the well-known Hindu philosophy that the world is illusory. They allege this has led to Indians being impervious to their own misfortunes as well as to the misfortunes of others. Where a little effort can ensure comfort and prosperity, they prefer to remain inactive, believing—falsely, of course—that since the world itself is unreal, pleasure and pain which one experiences in it are also unreal. If this is freedom, then a clod of earth is also free.

This is a wrong reading of Indian philosophy. It is not the contention of Indian philosophy that the world does not exist; it only says that it does not exist *always*, that it is subject to change, it has a beginning and then an end. It is in this sense that the world is unreal, for Indian philosophy postulates that reality is that which is constant, unchanging, and unchangeable.

When Indian philosophy speaks of freedom, it speaks of that kind of freedom which does not depend upon external factors. If freedom means having conditions all to one's liking, then it is an impossible proposition, for experience shows that conditions can never remain the same. We cannot, for instance, be even sure of our good health always. Similarly of wealth, power, and position. Conditions change, in spite of anything we may do. If

they change for the better, we are elated, but if they change for the worse, as more often than not they do, we are upset. What sort of freedom is it? Indian philosophy says this is no freedom, this is slavery, for you are completely at the mercy of objective conditions. True, you can control the objective conditions to some extent, but you can never control them to the extent you would like, for their nature is such that they keep changing (and perhaps you would have felt bored if they did not change at all). Take the case of a friend betraying you. You have always trusted him but some day you discover he has turned against you. How can you prevent such an eventuality? Similarly bereavement. A dear relation of yours may suddenly die. What can you do about it except bear the shock quietly? Such things are bound to happen and all one can do is to take them in one's stride.

The kind of freedom that Indian philosophy envisages is that which comes from self-mastery. It says that given the will and persistent efforts one can stay untouched by changes in one's fortunes. The attitude it wants us to cultivate is to take the rough with the smooth, with equal calm. The *Gita* says that we have the right to work but no right to the fruits of our work. What it means is that we have to work with detachment, that is, work for others and not for ourselves. A free man is free from his ego, he identifies himself with others and shares their joys and sorrows. He feels deeply concerned about others because he sees himself in others and others in himself. Having completely eliminated his ego, he is no longer a fraction of humanity but humanity itself. He is the ocean and not merely a wave. The ocean is always the same whether the waves rise and fall; similarly, the free man is always the same, unconditioned by external factors.

LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE

To fail is no ignominy provided one has tried one's best, and, better equipped with the experience one has gained, is prepared to try again. The real test of merit is not in success, for success may often come fortuitously and not as the culmination of what one is or does. An easy success, or success which one has done nothing to deserve cannot satisfy a man of character; he is happy only when he wins it through hard work. A success which is a gift from somebody or from circumstances which he has not created cannot satisfy him. On the other hand, a scientist may spend a lifetime in vain to find an answer to a scientific puzzle, but he does not think that he has wasted his time, for he knows he has laid the foundation for the success which those who follow in his steps will achieve. No honest human effort is altogether wasted; it is only another milestone towards the breakthrough which is sure to come sooner or later. It is more honourable to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all.

A weak man aspires, but is not prepared to work hard to succeed. When he fails he does not blame himself, he blames his circumstances or his colleagues, as if they have conspired to deny him the success he well deserved. If there is ignominy in failure, it is when this is the attitude of a man. The ignominy is no less if such a man succeeds, for success in his case is only a matter of fluke and not because of what he is and what he has done. It is well to remember that a man's development does not depend upon success; it depends upon his hard work. A successful man is not necessarily a great man. Even a fool can succeed, given favourable circumstances. Growth

in one's intrinsic qualities is much more important than what passes as success. To choose a worthy cause and then to pursue it undeterred to the last day of one's life is the true test of a man. Success or failure, he continues to struggle. The path is strewn with many hurdles but it is exactly for that reason that it makes the struggle more satisfying. When you climb up a hill, joy awaits you not only on the top but also in the arduous steps you take, for you see yourself in the role of a conqueror. If life were all smiles, if there were no tears in it, it would not have been as exciting as it is. There would have been no growth either, for it is only when one struggles that one's latent powers come up to the surface. A man living a life of ease and comfort can never grow to his full stature; it is only a man who lives a hard life that manifests all his gifts in full. Adversity is not as bad as one imagines.

Hard work can be made into a habit. Once that habit is made, one cannot rest without putting forth one's best efforts to do what one wants to do. The harder one works, the greater is the joy one derives from the feeling that one is doing one's best. This of course is no guarantee for success, but the habit recreates the man in that it makes him conscious of the qualities he possesses which otherwise remain unknown to him. Man in fact does not know himself. He sees himself on the surface only. It is only when he is put under great pressure that those qualities make their presence known. This growth in the personality may prove a much higher reward than the success he was aiming at.

Life means aiming higher and higher, trying harder and harder. Being bold, strong, and enterprising is both the means and the end. The strong never offer excuses, the weak are happy if they have excuses to offer.

HAPPINESS

We all want to be happy but how can we be happy? We think we can be happy if we get what we want—money, power, good health, a devoted family, and so on. But there are people who have these and more and yet they are not happy; indeed it is difficult to find a man who is happy. A man may be happy for some time, he may even boast that he is the happiest man on earth but the question is how long his happiness lasts. The conditions that made him feel happy may change—they never remain the same for ever, the euphoria he had before is automatically gone. But what is paradoxical is that even if the conditions remain the same, he may not be happy any longer. It is not clear to him, much less to others, why he is not happy. What he is missing he does not know but he sees no reason why he should be happy. He in fact would gladly interchange his place with a less fortunate man provided he is assured that he will be happy.

Wherein lies happiness then? Does it lie in external conditions or in something within ourselves? According to Hindu philosophy, happiness lies in self-mastery, in being able to detach oneself from objects outside. A man is a slave who lets his happiness depend upon what he possesses or does not possess. A truly independent man is content with what he has, so long as it satisfies his minimum needs. He is more concerned with himself, with what sort of a person he is. Is he an honest man, a man who will not deviate from truth under any circumstances? Is he a man who can forgive an enemy irrespective of the harm he may have done him in the past? Is he a man who feels concerned about his fellow men, who

will not mind making any sacrifice necessary to do a good turn to others? It is not that he does not need money. He certainly will welcome money that he has honestly earned, but after spending what he must needs spend for his own comforts he will try to save some to help the needy. His priorities do not exclude cultivation of moral faculties, for he is conscious that a character well grounded in moral principles is far better an asset than anything that money can purchase. He is happy because of what he is in moral terms, because of his character, because of his moral superiority over material adversity. He may be poor, may be adjudged a total failure by worldly standards, may even be physically handicapped, but no hostile conditions or misfortune can disturb his peace of mind. It is not that he is an insensitive person, callous about what happens to him; he is highly sensitive but he knows there are situations over which no one has any hand and if despite one's best efforts to avert a disaster it does take place, the best and only sensible thing to do is to accept it. Life cannot be always smooth, there are bound to be bumps now and then. Whatever the circumstances, a man is happy if he is able to retain his calmness. He works hard but if the results are not commensurate with his efforts he does not lose heart but still keeps trying. He is happy if he has been able to try hard, success or no success. Success, as he sees it, is not a material achievement, but a moral one in the sense that it means less and less dependence on external factors, in other words, self-denial.

Happiness is a sense of freedom attained through years of self-denial. Through self-denial one discovers that happiness is not in the things one indulges oneself with but in the things one is able to deny oneself.

TEACHER AND TEACHING

According to the Indian tradition, a teacher is like a lighted lamp from which other lamps may be lighted. This underlines the fact that a teacher must himself be a highly educated man, otherwise he is not entitled to teach. Can a blind man lead another blind man?

But it will be a mistake to think that academic qualification is the only criterion of a teacher. He may have encyclopaedic knowledge, but to this must be added moral excellence of the highest order. He need not teach high moral principles, he has to *live* them. A teacher should be an example of what is best in man. He can inspire by what he is and not by what he knows. 'To know is to be'—runs a popular dictum in India. Knowledge is useless if it does not make a man perfect—perfect not merely in skills and abilities, but also in character.

The teacher's task is to impart knowledge but to do this, he must first enkindle in the pupil a thirst for knowledge. He must also train his pupil's body and mind, train his faculties, so that the pupil can use them to his best advantage. Mind is man's most powerful organ. A healthy mind under control is man's best friend and guide. Given such a mind and a desire to learn, a student can learn by his own efforts, with the assistance of the teacher or even without. In fact, one learns best when one learns by one's own efforts, for how much knowledge can a teacher pass on to his pupil? Also, the knowledge that the teacher imparts may turn out to be outdated, if not also wrong. The most a teacher can do is to give his pupil a sense of direction, that is, tell him what to learn and how to learn it and also how to apply that knowledge for his own good and the good of his community.

To acquire knowledge is good, but one must know knowledge has many uses, some good and some bad. The best use of knowledge is that it makes one conscious of one's imperfections. If a wise man is humble, it is because he knows how little he knows, or how imperfect he is. He may in fact know much but he also knows there is no limit to knowledge as there is no limit to one's development. When a man knows he has to go a long way yet, he can only deplore the little progress he has made. This saves him from complacency, man's worst enemy. No teacher can teach humility unless he is humble himself. No teacher can teach love of knowledge unless he loves knowledge himself. A good teacher teaches by example and not by preaching. He teaches not only his students but through them others also. His influence works for generations and over a wide area. He continues to lead countless men and women even long after his death through men and women he has influenced. True knowledge is that which gives man perfection, perfection not only in what he does but in what he is. Since knowledge is power, it may be used for good as well as bad purposes. Modern wars demonstrate how knowledge can be misused. Knowledge without a broadening of the heart and a sharpening of moral awareness is a worthless burden. Clever but unscrupulous men and women are a danger to society. Education which produces such people is no education. A conscientious teacher loves mankind as a whole, irrespective of creed, language, or political views. He is a free man, free from every kind of bias. He does not ask anybody to follow him, but people follow him all the same. He is loved not for his knowledge but for what he is. He is the lamp that gives light to many.

HOW TO COMMIT SUICIDE

There are many ways of committing suicide but one way, not conspicuous because not so violent, is to thwart one's own growth through negligence and laziness. This becomes all the more tragic when opportunities which come one's way are not taken advantage of and the talents with which one is born are allowed to wither away. The loss is as much personal as social, for talented men and women not giving to society what they are capable of giving leave it the poorer than what it would otherwise have been. But how frustrated the talented individuals themselves must feel when they discover, perhaps too late, they have not done as well as they might have if only they had tried hard enough! The frustration becomes all the more bitter when they find lesser men and women have gone far ahead of them through sheer industry.

This leads to the question if talents are at all necessary and if industry alone is not enough to guarantee success in life. One is in this connection reminded of Carlyle's comment that genius is capacity to take infinite pains. If the secret of success is hard work, what are talents for then? Or are talents only a myth?

No doubt talents, where they exist, are a great asset but the point that has to be stressed is that talents by themselves cannot take a man far but that he must work hard nurturing those talents till they come to full fruition. To begin with, no one knows for certain what talents one possesses; one has to try one's hand at many things and by so doing discover the particular area in which one can excel most. In fact, one never knows oneself enough; one has to explore into oneself to discover

what powers one possesses. To others, as even to oneself, these powers remain hidden; one discovers them only when one starts working, doing whatever one is called upon to do. It may be that what one is required to do is apparently trivial, but even a trivial act becomes important when it is done with a seriousness of purpose, with love, as if one is doing it for a noble cause. When one so acts, one unfolds oneself, one reveals dimensions to one's personality no one had suspected before. How unfair one often is to oneself when one thinks one is worthless, often influenced by others' uncharitable remarks or by evidence not well tested.

Indeed, it is a very sad spectacle to see a promising young person neglect himself, allowing his gifts to languish from sheer laziness or lack of self-confidence. Whereas he might have earned much well-deserved distinction in his field and contributed much to society also, he remains an inconspicuous and inconsequential mediocrity. To the extent it is deliberate, it is as if one is committing 'suicide'.

What is the remedy? The remedy is to know, to know for certain, that one can do wonders if only one tries. There is hardly anything in life which is fortuitous. Even if such a thing exists, one should refuse to depend upon it but concentrate on one's own efforts. One must deserve what one gets, otherwise one has no right to claim it as one's own. Opportunities do come one's way some time or other; not to take advantage of them is to hurt oneself, maybe with no hope of a possible repair. One who so hurts oneself is described by the Hindu scriptures as an *atmahan* (one who commits suicide).

SELF Vs. SELF

The above caption may look confusing, for what can be the difference between the two selves mentioned here? And if there is a difference, is the difference such that one is opposed to the other? What exactly is being suggested by highlighting the difference in this way?

According to Vedanta, the difference between these two selves is as between light and darkness, between knowledge and ignorance, between freedom and bondage. That is to say, if you think you are the self, you are then not the Self, and vice versa.

First to explain the nature of the self (the self with a small 's'). If you think you are the self, you are then an individual, with a distinct name and form, a character of your own hopes and aspirations, with qualities good as well as bad; you are separate from others, some of whom are your friends and some your enemies, with common interests or interests different from theirs. You also identify yourself with the experiences you have from time to time saying 'my' experiences, whether they are good or bad; similarly, you say you are a member of a particular family or community and restrict your thinking and habits to those characteristic of that family or community. Even within the family or community to which you belong, you have an identity of your own with some well-defined physical and mental contours by which you may be readily distinguished from others. In so far as you feel you are separate from others, you live in constant fear of your interests being encroached upon and in order to safeguard them you devise ways and means you think will serve your purpose best. Thus you are always busy fighting for your own happiness

and comforts regardless of how it may affect others. This preoccupation with one's own self is a dominant feature of one's own life-style when one is only a 'self'. One may have moments of magnanimity, goodwill towards others, humility, selflessness, but such moments do not last long, they are soon followed by periods of selfish and irrational desires. When this 'self' dominates, man is caught in a mesh of his own desires, he is sometimes happy but more often unhappy.

Is there a way out? Is there a way of getting out of this situation in which one finds oneself constantly buffeted by pleasure and pain, as if a plaything at the hands of one's own desires against one's better judgement? Vedanta says, 'Yes, there is a way out provided you can identify yourself with the Self.' But how does one realize one's identity with the Self? By discrimination, according to Vedanta. You acquire this discrimination through years of self-discipline and when you have this discrimination, you discover that your 'self' is a mass of attributes only, more an appearance than a reality. Your real self is the Self. You also discover this is the Self of all, you are one with others. It is one Self, one common Self which appears as many and different because of the different names and forms superimposed on It. There is one common Being who is mistakenly supposed to be many—a mistake which has cost man dearly in the sense that it is responsible for love and hatred, union and separation, pleasure and pain. But why this mistake? It is difficult to explain why this mistake, but instead of wasting time over the cause of this mistake, it would be more sensible to concentrate on realizing that we are really one in spirit. It is this sense of oneness that is the only possible basis for individual and collective peace.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

No religion can hold itself aloof from its milieu—it has to take due cognizance of what is happening around it and do whatever it can to help mitigate human suffering. Buddha says that suffering is universal. This may be an overstatement but there is no doubt that there is hardly an individual or a society without a problem. The problem may be physical or mental or both; in fact, it is almost always both. Whatever it is, a problem nags all the same. Can religion remain passive when this happens?

Religion is purported to be a panacea for all troubles. How? Because it can change man's life and conduct altogether. It can change not only individuals, it can change society as a whole. Religion demands that all disparities be removed from society. It insists on equality of treatment for all; the idea of any discrimination being made between one community and another, one individual and another, on grounds of race or religion, or on any other ground, is repugnant to it. It is not that all are equal; there is difference between one community and another, between one individual and another. Despite this difference, there is a basic unity which religion preaches. But if religion is content with merely preaching this ideal, then it is self-defeating. It has to inspire action to make the unity real. Similarly justice, peace, and progress. Indeed, there is no aspect of life which religion can dismiss as being outside its purview. If there is a heaven, it has to be demonstrated on earth. If there is a god, he has to be seen in man. Ideals have a meaning, if they are realizable.

Religion is not a declaration of intentions, it is action to fulfil those intentions. A society is religious to the

extent it acts in accordance with its declared intentions in the name of religion. If it says it believes in equality, it has to act to wipe out inequality wherever it exists. Religion has to concern itself with every aspect of human welfare, moral as well as material. The dichotomy between moral and material is illusory; there cannot be one without the other. Religion has to ensure material prosperity; it certainly cannot close its eyes to human misery wherever it may exist and in whatever form, but must do all it can to end it. Indeed, there is no human endeavour which does not fall within the purview of religion.

But should religion intervene in the affairs of State? Yes, if it has to uphold the ideals it preaches—justice, equality, peace, and prosperity. A Government is adjudged good if it acts in keeping with these ideals. To the extent it does so, the State is religious, even if it says it does not care for religion. The purpose of religion is to inspire man constantly to strive for perfection, both individually and collectively. While it is said that religion should intervene in the affairs of State, it is not suggested that religion should organize itself into a church to act as a big brother to supervise what the State is doing. What is meant is that religion, i.e. the essence of religion, should be the corner-stone of its policies and action, should inform everything the State does. This is possible where those who run the State pledge themselves to the task of upholding the ideals religion stands for.

TOWARDS EQUALITY

It has always been man's dream to have a society where there is no inequality—social, political, or otherwise. Many models have been considered, but so far none has been found which completely rules out discrimination on grounds of birth, race, religion, or political views. The ideal has remained as elusive as ever. In reality, there is inequality everywhere, at all levels, in varying degrees, and sometimes disguised, sometimes blatant.

In theory, most States offer equal rights and privileges for all. This, however, does not ensure equality, for groups and individuals still remain far apart from each other. Some develop fast, others lag behind. As time progresses, the advanced become more advanced and those who fall back continue to fall back. There seems to be no way of bridging the gulf between the two. In a situation like this, the advanced groups naturally dominate, though they may be numerically small. Rightly or wrongly, those who bring up the trail begin to feel they have been wronged; they become restive and demand power proportionate to their number. They sometimes become violent and cause bloodshed. They may eventually capture power but once again it is the cleverer among them who get on to the top and begin to rule in the name of the exploited but, really speaking, rule only for their own benefit. Soon it becomes clear that the change has brought no relief to the poor and the weak. This goes on happening again and again.

The question is, What is meant by equality? If it means equality of rights and privileges, it is possible only in theory, it can never be a reality. No two individuals

are the same; so also no two groups of people, classes, or communities. It is impossible to imagine equality among people in respect of intelligence, character, ability to do things, or moral development. Even if opportunities are the same, not all people can utilize them to the extent that some people can. The fact that some are more capable than others has to be recognized. Sometimes a genius is born in circumstances where one would least expect him. How does it happen? Again, in a family where everybody is brilliant and the conditions are most favourable, a child may be born who is intellectually and otherwise an antithesis to those around him. How to explain this anomaly?

No one can explain why things happen the way they do—some people being more intelligent, more efficient, and more gifted than others, but society should ensure that those who are less capable are not exploited. Human history is a sad story of the strong exploiting the weak. Even where there are loud protestations of equal rights and privileges, the weak continue to be exploited, sometimes openly, but more often covertly. In the case of the weak, equal rights and privileges will not do, they have to have additional rights and privileges so that they do not continue to slide downwards.

Does it then mean that equality is an impossible ideal? Is it not true then that all men are born equal? The answer is that potentially all are equal, but they are never alike. There will always be people who will be more intelligent than others. Society will always be divided into unequals, but injustice can be prevented only if a sense of oneness governs human relationships. If I hurt you, I, in fact, hurt myself. We are only many variants of the same Spirit.

HOLINESS

- What is holiness? Who is a holy man? What sort of place is a holy place? It is difficult to define holiness, but it is obvious that it is God that makes a place or person holy. Wherever God is or in whomsoever God is present is holy. But where is not God present or in what person is He not present? He is everywhere and in every being. If the criterion of holiness is His presence, then everything and everybody is holy. It is wrong to designate particular places, persons, or objects as holy, as if other places, persons, or objects are not. In fact, all that exists is holy, seeing that it comes from God, has its being in Him, and ultimately merges in Him. Why then apply the qualifying word 'holy' to any particular place, person, or God?

True, theoretically, all that exists is holy but it is holy only to the person who is able to see God in it. Though it is a truism that God is everywhere, not all of us are able to see Him everywhere. A saint is sometimes seen to be compassionate to all, more so perhaps to those whom everybody knows to be wicked. How is that? This is because he is able to see God beneath the wickedness. He thinks the wickedness is like a cloud temporarily hiding the sun; it is not a permanent feature of those people. Given education, encouragement, and a congenial environment, he knows those who pass as wicked now can overcome their wickedness and can return to their normal state which is divine. Thus, to a saint, it is a question of time, effort, and environment only for a person to overcome the weakness from which he is suffering; given these, he can improve his nature to show the divinity which is within him. To him, no one is permanently lost, for the true nature of a person can

never be permanently changed. It can only be subdued and that too for the time being. Good and bad mark only temporary phases in man's progress towards the divinity which is his true nature. This divinity can remain hidden for the time being, but can never be destroyed. Unless it is conceded that man is essentially divine, there is no hope for him. All attempts to reform him are bound to prove futile. But experience shows that man can and does improve. This is why a holy man is prepared to ignore a temporary eclipse of a man's divinity, for he knows God remains God whether He is seen or not.

A holy man, in fact, is a person who feels the presence of God inside and outside himself always. He is in constant communion with God. His life centres round God to whom he surrenders completely to be used by Him in whatsoever manner He likes. He radiates God through every pore of his being—he is so filled with God that to people around him he is God in human form. Through him people know what God is like—the real meaning and significance of God, His power, His charm.

Wherein indeed lies holiness? It is in the power to be with and in God. A holy man is to be judged not by his scholarship, the community and country he belongs to, not even by whether or not he follows the writ of an organized religion; more likely he follows no rules or follows, if any at all, only the rules he knows God would like him to follow. Holiness makes holy everything it touches—be it low or small, joy or suffering. It uplifts man into infinitude, into the peace and freedom which heaven promises; it is the fulfilment of man. Holiness is not a thing that is artificially created, it is the radiance that comes from within when God overcomes man, transforming him into Himself.

'LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT'

A light-hearted person hardly has any doubts and dilemmas; he acts impulsively without bothering too much about whether what he is going to do is right or wrong, whether it will ultimately prove good for him, leave alone for others. He is concerned only with the immediate, he is not able to look beyond what is right before him now. He grasps at whatever appears to be good and pleasant, he gives no thought to what may lie outside his present range of vision. It is the apparent that matters to him and not what may be the reality.

A serious-minded person, however, takes no step hastily. He tries to examine an issue from all possible angles and when he is satisfied that he has a solution which is not only good but also right, he decides to act. He is essentially a thoughtful person, always anxious to follow the dictates of his conscience. He may be slow in action but once he is able to hear 'the still small voice', he goes ahead without ever looking back.

But when is the still small voice heard? When one is free from excitement, when one has full control over one's mind. It is common experience that when one is excited, or when one lets prejudices get the better of one's judgement, one cannot make a correct decision. The still small voice, the voice of conscience prevails only when the mind is free from emotions, when one is able to reason free from prejudice, when one can see both sides of the picture and not just one side. The still small voice is always speaking, but it gets lost in the din which surrounds the life of a person who is carried away by his emotions. It is only when one has full control of oneself that one can hear that voice.

The same applies also in the case of the 'Kindly Light'

whose guidance Cardinal Newman seeks. Like the still small voice, the light is within, but to see it one has to have a calm mind, a mind which does not bar the coming out of the light from the depths of the heart where it lies hidden. In each of us there is this light, but it has to be brought out so that it can show us the way. The light is always there, but it is not always seen, because it cannot penetrate 'the cloud of unknowing' which covers it. It is like the sun being hidden by clouds.

But what is meant by this 'cloud of unknowing'? Man does not know that what he is looking for outside is already within him. Knowledge, power, beauty, joy—whatever he is searching for is already within him. The knowledge he thinks he gets from external sources is nothing but an evocation of the knowledge which is already within him. If he is looking for a teacher, he has to turn to himself and not to anybody else. Others can encourage, inspire, but, in the end, he has to be his own guide. Buddha told Ananda, 'Be a lamp unto yourself.' There could not have been a better piece of advice than this, better and more practical. You have to think for yourself, see for yourself, judge for yourself, in short, be yourself, which means discover your own self, the source of everything you are looking for.

Each has to be a lamp unto himself, but to be that one has to discipline oneself enough so that the layers of pride, passion, and ego which cover the light within may go and the light which is knowledge, knowledge which never fails, may reveal itself.

When one says 'Lead, Kindly Light', one is only praying to one's pure self, which is Divinity Itself. The 'Kindly Light' is one's own self, the real Self, the Self of all, which, alas, is, at the moment, unknown to us.

EXPLOITATION

There are many kinds of exploitation but the worst kind is that in which one tries to influence others to accept a viewpoint which they do not like—be it political, religious, or otherwise. Freedom of thought is man's most prized right, and, if that is denied, it is like killing him. He may continue to live, but he will continue to live like a moron, which in a way is even worse than death. As a man grows he lives more on the mental plane than on the physical. He loves to think, think in his own way which is as dear to him as life itself. When he can think freely he can grow, has at least the opportunity to grow, but when that is denied, he withers away till he becomes only a lump of flesh, no longer a man.

But is it wrong to try to guide others towards what is not only good for them individually but also for the entire community? Is any individual self-sufficient intellectually? A really sensible person will be only too glad to learn from others, for to think that one knows enough and has nothing further to learn from others is but the shortest way to one's intellectual doom. If some people are more knowledgeable, what is the harm if we learn from them? Left to ourselves, we may not learn at all, or learn only a little, but if some people, out of sympathy for us, try to teach us and, in case we are reluctant or lazy, put some pressure on us to make us learn, is it not a service for which we should be grateful to them? What objection can there be if individuals, organizations, or even the State so try to teach us?

The problem is not if the intention is only to teach, but if there is an element of coercion in the teaching and the teaching is one-sided. So long as you are exposed to various points of view and you are left free to choose

the one that appeals to you most, the condition is ideal, but if, instead, there is only one particular point of view presented to you and you are forced to accept it, it is a situation in which you feel you have been robbed of your freedom. It is admitted that if the issue is such that only a specialist can speak on it with authority, there is no doubt that you have to listen to him, but even then one specialist can say something which another specialist thinks is wrong and, in such a situation, the layman must be given the freedom to decide whose opinion he will accept. However technical the issue may be, there can be no question of any particular point of view being forced upon anybody. Each individual must be given the choice to decide what is best for him and what will be his course of action.

This may be the ideal situation but it is possible to conceive that there may be occasions when in the interests of the community as a whole curbs have to be placed on the freedom of individuals or groups of individuals to express their thoughts or act as they like. While this may be allowed in times of emergency—if there is, for instance, a foreign aggression, or if there is an internal disorder—it should be the constant endeavour of a State to assure every individual the freedom to think and speak as he or she likes best, of course so long as this does not hurt the interests of the community. Unfortunately, the trend in many States today is to hide the truth from the public, feed them on distorted facts, create in their minds biases for or against countries, communities, and ideologies according as the interests of the parties in power dictate. There is no real freedom of thought; what is there is only the freedom to think what the State wants you to think. This is exploitation at its worst.

PAIN IS PLEASURE

It is difficult to define what is pain and what is pleasure. It has been said that they are the same feeling but the difference is in the point of view from which you look at it. What is pain at one point may be pleasure at another, depending upon the context in which you have it.

This may be a good piece of philosophical jugglery, but the fact is that I want to get what I want and that is all there is to it. If I get what I want, I am happy and I want to be happy by all means. But suppose I make a wrong choice and get what turns out to be the exact opposite of what I thought it was. Pleasure then yields to pain. Ironically, this happens much too often : I make a wrong choice and then begin to regret it. This is why pleasure and pain come so close on each other's heels that it is difficult to tell when one begins and the other ends. This perhaps has led philosophers to say that pleasure and pain are in essence the same thing.

Wise people accept things as they come, never bothering too much about whether they are the kind they were looking for. If they are good they are happy, but they first test them and then decide whether they are good or not. What is the criterion they apply? Their criterion is not the appearance of things but their intrinsic merits—whether they can help them in the efforts they are making to reach the goal they have in view. They have a goal before them and they want to reach it somehow or other; to do so they are prepared to make any sacrifice necessary, even welcoming pain no matter how much. The true test of pleasure is if it is pleasure born of an achievement; if it is pleasure for which one has made

no efforts, pleasure one did not deserve but came one's way as a fluke, or was offered to one as a gift, one would scarcely attach any importance to it. We all love pleasure provided it is pleasure which carries with it dignity, which increases our self-esteem, which is a reaffirmation of our strength and power to deny ease and comfort.

Pain is always preferable if it is a step towards one's goal. But suppose one has no goal at all, what if one lives for pleasure only? It is ignominy. It is not a life that gives one a sense of pride. Even if one seeks only pleasure, one soon discovers such a thing does not exist. Pleasure, without pain, is an illusion. One soon discovers pleasure has given way to pain.

Why does one try to climb Mt. Everest? Why does one try to live in the South Pole alone? Why does one travel through the deserts of Arabia alone? In each case, there is infinite hardship involved, if not also the risk of death. Such people hate ease and comfort, they prefer hazards. Why?

Just as there are cases of physical hazards, there are also cases of mental hazards. Why do some people run away from home in pursuit of some ideal? They retire into the Himalayas, snow and ice their only companion. They may be stark naked and a few chapatis are their only food. If you meet them—they may refuse to see you—you are bound to be impressed by the peace and joy they radiate. They spurned pleasure, they welcomed pain; yet how did they get such peace and joy?

Pleasure is pain and pain is pleasure, depending upon for what purpose it occurs. Pain is indeed pleasure if it is for an ideal, for a noble cause, for a high achievement. Pleasure is pain if it is only for pleasure. Pleasure kills the spirit, perhaps the body also. Pain may kill the body but glorifies the spirit.

'FORGIVE AND FORGET'

All religions preach that if somebody hurts you, knowingly or unknowingly, you should try to forgive and forget. That is to say, do not bear any grudge against him on this account, try to overlook the offence he has caused you and behave as if nothing has happened. Not only that, take every possible opportunity to make him feel that you have nothing but goodwill towards him in spite of how he has behaved. If he is in difficulty, help him as best you can even if he has not asked for it. In doing so, be careful you do not give him the least hint that you are trying to be magnanimous; nothing can hurt a self-respecting man more than being treated as if he is a helpless man who must need seek assistance even from an erstwhile enemy. To have to accept a favour from others is in itself a humiliating situation; it becomes worse when an air of arrogance accompanies that favour. Do me a favour if you wish to and if you can, but don't let me have to sacrifice my self-respect to have that favour. It is rather better to forgo the favour than have it at the expense of self-respect. It is an art to be able to bestow a favour without letting its recipient know it. The art is seen best where the man who bestows the favour feels he himself is being favoured by the act. The position should be as if the recipient is the giver.

One forgives not because one is weak but because one is strong. A strong man can retaliate when he is hurt, but he prefers not to because he feels he can afford to ignore the offence given him. It is his sense of strength that makes it possible for him to forgive; a weak man may find it convenient to forgive since he cannot retaliate. Forgiveness, in his case, is only a euphemism for cowardice. It is not that he does not

want to retaliate; he only cannot. This is no forgiveness. This is demeaning to him as well as to the man he pretends to forgive. By pretending that he is forgiving he is only proving that he is not only a coward, he is also dishonest. A man may be weak, but if he is also dishonest, he earns additional opprobrium in the public eye. The man who gave him offence will give him offence again at the earliest opportunity. He may have felt qualms earlier about his behaviour, but now he will feel he was justified in the way he behaved and will feel provoked to behave again in the same manner because he will argue he is dealing with one who is not only weak but also dishonest.

If it is difficult to forgive, it is still more difficult to forget. Indeed, it is hardly likely that one can ever forget an offence. One may not let the offence influence one's attitude, but the memory of the offence may linger all the same. What is important is not whether one remembers it or not, but not to be influenced by it. It is more manly to remember and yet not to be influenced by it.

To forgive and to forget is a great virtue which is as much necessary for oneself as for others, for there can be no sound social relationship except on this basis. However careful one may be, one may still give offence to a friend or relation; it may be the other way round also, that is to say, the offence may come from one's own friend or relation. The offence may be unprovoked as it may be unintentional. The correct attitude for one who gives the offence is to take the earliest opportunity to apologize for the offence one has given as the correct attitude for one who receives the offence is to ignore it altogether. If one forgives, one forgives where not only relations and friends are concerned, but also others including strangers.

'HISS BUT DON'T BITE'

Sri Ramakrishna narrates the story of a cobra who, living in a playing-field, would not let children play on it because that disturbed her peace. She would come out of her hole, raise her hood, and run after the children. The children ran helter-skelter in fright at the sight of the cobra.

One day the children noticed a holy man going through the field. They thought it their duty to warn him about the snake, which they did. The holy man smiled and said, 'Don't worry, the snake can't do me any harm.' As the holy man approached the hiding place of the cobra, she came out, as usual, hissing and with her hood raised. The holy man, not in the least ruffled, waited for her to come closer. Eventually, as she came closer, a change came over her, and, instead of striking at him, she lay at the feet of the holy man, as if helpless to do anything. The holy man admonished her for her temper. He asked, 'Why do you behave the way you do when children play? Why do you frighten them away?' The cobra said, 'Sir, I'm sorry for my behaviour, but I can't control my temper. Can you teach how I can control my temper?' The holy man gave her a mantra. He said, 'Keep repeating it, this will help you control your temper in face of the greatest provocation.'

Since then the cobra was a completely changed creature. Children now came and played, but the cobra never troubled them. This surprised the children. Gradually they began to fear her less and less and soon a point came when they were bold enough to throw stones at her. The cobra tried to stay inside the hole but hunger forced her to come out even if she knew the children

were about. She was miserable, but in no case would she go back to her old ways.

One day she came out of her hole when children were still playing. Today one of the children had a novel idea of torturing her : he caught her by the tail and after twirling her round a few times let go his grip on her. The cobra fell a long distance away and the fall smashed all her bones. She lay unconscious and the children thought she was dead. After a long while she regained consciousness and with great difficulty crawled back into her hole.

Some time after this, the holy man reappeared. He asked the children if they knew anything about the cobra. They said she was dead. The holy man did not believe it. So he went to the hole and called out to the cobra. He had to wait quite some time before the cobra came out, for now she was only a skeleton. When the holy man asked why she was in that condition, she narrated the ordeals she had gone through in following his instructions. The holy man said, 'But why did you not hiss? I told you not to bite, but did not tell you that you were not to hiss even.'

Perhaps the story has a moral we all can take note of and practise. Is it always necessary to bite? If a hiss serves the purpose, why bite at all? How else are we going to eliminate violence unless we know where to stop? But this is not to say that violence can be altogether eliminated. It is part of life. Sometimes it is necessary also. In self-defence, for instance, one may make a show of violence at least, that is, 'hiss'. Non-violence is good but it should be non-violence of the strong, like the non-violence of the cobra. Violence to prevent violence is a fallacy. It can only produce more violence.

LOSE TO WIN

The habit of arguing is good, for it helps one to express oneself clearly and logically. It also helps one to test one's depth of knowledge. One can also add to one's knowledge, for the persons one is arguing with may be better read. They may also be persons who are more thoughtful, broad-minded, cultured. Any contact with such people is a privilege. To clash with such people intellectually may be daring but it is worth trying, for it is an education in itself. One learns from others in many ways, this being one of them.

But one can learn from others by arguing only if one has an open mind. If one argues just for the sake of arguing with no intention of learning, it is a pointless exercise. But why should one argue at all if one is convinced that the persons one is arguing with are superior in knowledge? Even then arguing is profitable, for it may provoke one's adversaries to give out more knowledge than they would otherwise do. If one argues intelligently with a genuine desire to bring out the truth, both sides then enjoy it. A wise man is always glad to share his thoughts with others. If he finds a person who is eager to learn but is not prepared to accept a statement without scrutiny, he is all the more happy to talk to him and meet his arguments. If he fails to convince him, if the other man is able to prove that the wise man is in the wrong, this does not cause any ill feeling between them; the wise man is rather happy.

Truth is known when there is a free exchange of views. Knowledge grows when scholars examine a point of view with an open mind, argue with each other, and, if possible, come to a consensus. There is no truth in the

world of knowledge which has not been challenged. There have even been persecutions for people who have preached truths which those in power did not like. Yet those truths have later been accepted by all. Those who argue contribute to knowledge, for by arguing they make people think and thinking is the key to knowledge.

But one should argue only to learn. One argues not to parade one's knowledge but to seek it. If there is a controversy, one should put forward one's point of view humbly, so that there is 'light' but no 'heat'. There is much in the manner in which one argues. One may lose one's temper, use harsh words, and even make personal attacks on the person one is arguing with. This may lead to exchange of hot words, but to no increase in knowledge. Often people who get excited while arguing have no substance to the points they are trying to make. They get excited because they know they have this limitation, so they try to cover this with excitement. When they are sure of their stand, they argue calmly. Even if they are not able to convince others, they do not feel discouraged, for they know truth will ultimately be known. They rather blame themselves, for they see in this their own limitations, limitations in respect of language and logic. Why else should not the other party be able to see what is crystal clear to them? It may be the opponents are arguing with false logic, are using abusive language, they are still calm and patient. They will gladly listen to what the other side has to say, will perhaps put forward new arguments to clarify their stand further, but there is nothing in their manner to suggest that they think they are superior. Their humility may even give the impression that they have lost in the debate though they have really won, for truth is on their side.

AUSTERITY

No one has achieved success in life without paying its due price. The higher the success the higher the price one has to pay. If one succeeds by fluke, it is hardly a success one can be proud of. The success that one earns by hard work is real, but that which one gets fortuitously is without substance. One must make efforts commensurate with the success one desires. Given such efforts, there is every chance that one will succeed, but if one does not, one need not feel too sad. It is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all.

Making efforts means sacrificing ease and comforts and deliberately choosing labour and hardship. If you want to climb a mountain peak, you have to be ready to face every possible hazard, including death. It is not that you want to die, but if you have to in the course of the climb you die with the satisfaction that you have died for the cause dearest to you. If you can climb to the top of the mountain the satisfaction is of course more because you know you have been amply rewarded for the hardship you have gone through and the risks you have run.

This holds equally good when the success you are seeking is not physical but moral. Suppose you promise to yourself that you will never tell a lie. It is not easy, for sometimes you feel tempted to break your promise, either for a quick success or to avoid a danger. Either way, it takes much courage to resist the temptation. But how are you compensated for the sacrifice you are making? Really speaking, you do not care for any compensation. If you are able to live the kind of life that you want to live, you think that is enough compensation for

you. An honest man is honest, not for any reward, nor out of fear; he is honest because he loves to be honest. Honesty is its own reward. Khudiram, Ramakrishna's father, became a pauper because he would not tell a lie. What reward did he get for this courage? None except that people now remember him as an exemplary character. But did he seek that kind of honour? Did he know that people were going to appreciate his sacrifice? He did not.

If you live for an ideal, you have to love it exclusively and with a passion. Physical comforts mean nothing to you, it is only the ideal that matters. Your commitment to the ideal is so complete that the whole of your being is possessed by it. Your thoughts, your speech, and your action—in short, your whole personality is coloured by it. You become the ideal. How is that? The qualities which the ideal represents were as if so long lying hidden within you, they now come up to surface. Just as butter appears on the surface when milk is churned, the 'churning' you go through leads to the appearance of these qualities in you.

But what is this churning? It is the struggle you make—physically and mentally. If you mean to realize the ideal, you struggle relentlessly, bear any amount of hardship, even torture yourself. As you climb towards the top of the mountain, every step you take becomes a torture. But you don't mind it because each step you take you are nearer the top. This applies more when you try to raise your moral standards. You suffer more, but you feel happy and proud with every hurdle you cross. The moral struggle is always more difficult than the physical, but it is also more satisfying.

Austerity is a high price but it is well worth paying for what you gain in the end.

FUNDAMENTALISM

A problem which is worrying many countries today is what has come to be known as fundamentalism. It seems strange that there are people in this age who take everything stated in the scriptures literally. The scriptures of every religion no doubt say many good things, but they also say things which, on the very face of them, are absurd. Should we believe them because the scriptures say them? It may be claimed that the scriptures are words of God. But how do we know that they are not words of man? Is it not possible that some clever people wrote them and then passed them round as words of God? Even if they are words of God, should we accept them if they are opposed to reason? Man is superior to other animals because he can think, reason, and discriminate. If he has progressed to where he is now, it is because of his capacity to discriminate between right and wrong, between what is good and what is bad. If, instead of using his reasoning, he depended on the scriptures only he would have remained where he was when the scriptures were first written. His present progress has been possible because he has been able to discard whatever he thought was useless or a hindrance to his progress. Reason has been his guide whenever he was in a dilemma. If this position changes, his future is doomed.

But cannot reason err? Is reason not influenced by one's education, upbringing, and environment? Is the reason of a child the same as the reason of an aged man? Can an uneducated man think and argue as clearly and logically as an educated man? Truly enough, one cannot always rely on one's reason; one should also watch and see what wise people say and do. One should

follow such people as far as possible. But where there is a conflict between one's reason and what the wise people say or do, one should then unhesitatingly follow one's own reason irrespective of the consequences. It is better to go by reason than by faith.

Today's trend to believe whatever is stated in the holy books, is difficult to understand. Those who do so are also fanatical to the extent that they will not tolerate any deviation from the norms of personal and social conduct laid down in the scriptures, regardless of the fact that the times have changed. They think the whole truth has been stated in the scriptures of their own religion. If there is anything not stated in those scriptures, then, it cannot be true. This is why they hate other religions. They think they are false and, if possible, they would like to crush them. What they do not understand is that there are elements in all scriptures which are eternally true and there are also elements which are true only for a particular period of time. A distinction must be made between the two. It is the perennials that matter and not that which are of passing interest. Fundamentalism arises from a confusion between the two. Society stagnates when it sticks to that which is outdated. It must be able to brush aside anything that comes in the way of its progress. Nothing hinders progress more than thinking that the past was the best. Life is a constant search for truth. If it is felt that truth has been found, then there is no urge for progress. The search for truth must continue, aided by reason and experience. Fundamentalism is wrong because it does not see the need for this search. It is also wrong because it does not recognize that this search can vary from country to country, from age to age.

BEWARE OF PRAISE

Nothing is more embarrassing to a sensitive person than being unduly praised. Those who so praise him may be well-meaning, but he nevertheless feels uncomfortable. He feels uncomfortable because such praise only reminds him of his limitations. A fool, however, enjoys being praised because he is not able to realize how ridiculous it is that he should be praised. It is in fact an implied insult but he is not able to see it in that light. A truly intelligent person is, on the other hand, always suspicious of praise; at least, he never accepts it at its face value. He knows he has far to go to reach his goal. If somebody praises him, he can only feel sorry for that man's poor judgement. Praise gives him satisfaction when it comes from persons who are superior to him. Even then he is not sure he deserves the praise. He trusts his own appraisal more than that of others.

A truly gifted man is not so much interested in recognition as in improving his gifts. If others recognize him, he knows it is no criterion of success. Success is not the same thing as recognition. Galileo discovered a truth which should have earned him a Nobel prize (if it had existed then) but the only reward he earned was public humiliation! A gifted man is always an unhappy man, for he never feels he has achieved enough. His is a constant struggle to bring out the best in him. He dislikes praise because it is a temptation to relax.

But pity the man who is carried away by praise. When a gifted man begins to enjoy being praised, take it that his decadence is at hand. If one is susceptible to praise one is also susceptible to criticism. How will the gifted man react when he is criticized? Very likely, he will

react violently even if the criticism is very well founded. This is as bad as being elated when one is praised, perhaps worse. In a sense, the critic is a man's best friend, for he can point out one's merits and demerits which one cannot see oneself. The Hindu scriptures say that one should be above both praise and criticism. This is sound advice, for both may be wrong. Relatively speaking, criticism is better, for even if it is wrong, it serves as a warning. If you are a sensible person, you will take note of it if only to make sure that the shortcomings it attributes to you are totally non-existent. One has to examine oneself more critically than the worst critic, for the path to perfection is through self-criticism and not through self-adulation, through struggle and hard work and not through ease and comfort.

A man of character is his own best judge. His standards are his own, standards he keeps pushing higher and higher. He is never satisfied with himself, for he knows his best is yet to come. If people criticize him he is not dismayed unless it reveals defects he had never suspected they existed in him. If, however, people praise him, he hardly takes notice of it unless it comes from persons really competent and knowledgeable. He may feel glad about it but would be the last person to admit it. He would much rather have criticism than praise, for the former would keep him on the move. Success is an elusive goal but there is pleasure in its determined pursuit. One avoids praise lest it denies oneself this pleasure. Praise gives a false sense of euphoria and to that extent, weakens; it extinguishes the zeal needed to meet all odds squarely with courage. Life is a series of failures, yet it is these failures that are the pillars of success. To accept failures calmly but always with a stronger will to fight back is the real test of a man.

TO READ OR NOT TO READ

It is not true that books are the only source of knowledge. One can learn from other sources also—from observation, for instance. Scholarship is not necessarily the outcome of extensive reading. What if a man reads whatever he can lay his hands on, without a thought to the quality of the book he is reading? Can such reading improve his mind? Can it give him useful knowledge? In short, are all books worth reading?

Indeed, not every book that comes out of the press is worth reading. There are books that are better not read at all. Each reader has to decide for himself what books he will read; naturally his first choice should be books that have a direct bearing on his life. If he is an engineer he should read engineering books more than books on any other subject. But if he excludes other books altogether, he may find himself handicapped even in the performance of his professional duties. Indeed, it is difficult to divide knowledge into watertight compartments. To be a good engineer, it is not enough to study engineering, one must know also a little bit of other subjects—art, history, literature, philosophy, and so on, for otherwise one would not understand man whose needs, as an engineer, one is supposed to cater to.

But 'art is long, life is short', as they say. It is not possible for anybody to know everything, however important it may be. Here comes the question of being selective. One should read only books that one must read to expand one's knowledge of oneself and one's environment. One may read also for pleasure, but, naturally, it should occupy a secondary place.

If this is the purpose of reading, is it necessary to read too many books? In fact, most books say nothing new, what they say is only a rehash of what other books have said earlier and said better perhaps; they may also deal with subjects one may do very well without knowing anything about. Knowledge is a blessing if it is not only an appendage to a man's character but if it changes his character. One seeks knowledge not only to earn more money but to be a better individual, with a character of his own—rational, firmly embedded in moral principles, with love and compassion for all, free from every vestige of parochial bias.

The question is if much reading is needed to have a character like this. Reading is necessary to the extent that it stimulates thinking, but the real learning comes when thinking is buttressed by observation. One must learn to think for oneself and also learn to observe critically. One in fact learns more from the book of life than from any other book. Hindus say that real knowledge is inside and not outside. Thinking and observation help to unfold that knowledge. There is such a thing as common sense which is not in the books or in the things one observes; it is a projection from within. It is the sum total of all that one has seen, learnt, and thought; it is the reflection of one's total experience in life. It is knowledge stored within.

A man's progress through life is not controlled by book-learning but by how he applies that book-learning, in other words, by what sort of person he is. His theoretical knowledge is important but much more important is his character. His power of will, thinking, and reasoning, his steadfastness, courage, and capacity to work hard—in short, his character counts much more than any amount of book-learning that he may have acquired.

WORLD PEACE

At an international conference of 200 writers representing 49 countries held at Sofia, capital of Bulgaria, from 23 October to 25 October 1984, an appeal was issued, signed by all the writers present, that somehow or other war be prevented and peace be preserved for the sake of the present and future generations of men and women. But what has happened that the writers, all responsible people and quite in touch with the present currents of events, should feel alarmed that war is imminent?

Indeed, nothing serious has yet happened—and may not even happen in the near future—but there are signs that the moods of the leaders of nations are changing. If they were conciliatory before, they are aggressive now. Even this would not have caused any concern if, simultaneously with this, hectic war preparations were not made by the superpowers. Why are they producing more and more deadly weapons, massing them at strategic points, as if they are apprehending or contemplating sudden attack and they want to be ready in either case? If you go on acquiring arms and keep them at the ready, obviously you have some enemy in view against whom you are going to use them. It does not matter who the enemy is, but the fact that you are armed and are in a fighting posture is disturbing. It means that any wrong move on your part or on the part of your enemy may start a war, though there will always be a dispute who fired the first shot. Both you and your enemy are armed and have taken up the fighting posture because you cannot trust each other. The root of war is this distrust. Unfortunately, this distrust has now reached a point when any talk of reconciliation will fall on deaf ears. The tide seems to be inexorably carrying us forward

towards war. The smell of the gunpowder is already in the air.

This is what the writers want to warn the public about. They feel it is their moral duty to do so. Not that they are alarmists, they are level-headed people whose objective study of modern trends in international politics has forced the conclusion on them that war is at hand. There is still time to avert the catastrophe. This is why they have appealed to the world statesmen for cool thinking, sobriety, and patience. Whether the statesmen will heed the appeal no one knows. One hopes they will. Although the zero hour is fast approaching, one still hopes the world will be spared the holocaust which the next war promises to be. What kind of a holocaust is it going to be? No one knows, but it is certain that it will be something unprecedented. Given the nuclear weapons the big powers have stockpiled, the loss in life and property will be more than anybody can imagine. Scientists say civilization will crumble and mankind will be totally annihilated. The spectre is too horrible to be true. It is the common people who have to be told what a nuclear war means, for it is they who will suffer most when there is nuclear war. This is where the role of the writers comes in.

Bulgaria has indeed done a good job in holding this conference. If nothing else, it has made the writers of 49 countries aware of their responsibilities and given them a new zeal to work for peace. Bulgaria held four such conferences earlier and this is the fifth in the series. No praise is too high for this brave little country. If her single-handed effort rouses the conscience of the heads of State she will have earned the gratitude of the entire humanity. Let the writers and scientists both join hands to fight for peace.

IN THE NAME OF RELIGION

If the purpose of religion is to lift man to a higher level of existence, one religion then is as good as another, for all religions have one common goal in view—perfection. All religions insist that man pursue Truth, also called God, under all circumstances. This is deemed the essence of religion. Creeds, dogmas, rites, and rituals are peripheral, sometimes even a hindrance. 'It is good to be born in a church, but it is bad to die in it,' says Swami Vivekananda. A distinction must be made between what is essential and what is non-essential in religion. Love of God, who is otherwise known as Truth, is essential, but ceremonialism which is intended to express that love can be carried to the point that it gives the impression that it is an end in itself. As ceremonialism, so also creeds and dogmas. To begin with, one has to have some creed or dogma but only as a temporary device, for no creed or dogma can represent the true spirit of religion or can prove useful to the last. Creeds and dogmas are man-made, though they may have the appearance of a revelation through some inspired individual or book. They are no doubt useful but they certainly are not the religious goals themselves.

Though religions have common goals, the creeds and dogmas they carry are different. This difference is understandable since they are man-made and are made at different periods of history and also for different groups of people.

Curiously, however, the merit of a religion is often judged by its creeds and dogmas. A religion is considered good if it promises a quick salvation and is only 'dos and don'ts'; on the other hand, if it wants you to think for

yourself, depend upon your own efforts and not to expect a miracle to happen in the matter of your salvation, it is considered a worthless religion. No wonder most people will rush for a religion of the first variety. Those who are thoughtful and discriminating will, however, prefer one of the second variety. Intrinsically, all religions are the same, for even when a religion appears to be simple and easy, one will find beneath its outer crust the same hard stuff—self-discipline. This is a price one must pay if one wants to attain the religious goal.

Where then is the room for conversion from one religion to another? Why should then one change the religion to which one is born? If there has to be any conversion, it has to be in intensity of efforts, conversion to trying harder and harder till one has completely exhausted oneself in the pursuit of one's goal. There are, however, people who delude themselves into thinking that their religion is superior, not only that, it is the only true religion. They say that if you do not accept their religion, then you are doomed. They quote somebody, described as an agent of God, in support of this. They forget the same claim can be made for every other religion. These people are so concerned about your welfare that they will use every possible means, fair or foul, to convert you to their religion. They run amok among the weak, the poor, and the defenceless, tempting them, threatening them, or forcing them to come into their fold. They see nothing wrong in this, for are they not trying to save the souls of people who will otherwise be lost? Whether the souls are saved or not, they succeed in their tactics, for many do join their ranks. But does God forgive the people who use these tactics to bring others to Him?

THE RIDDLE THAT IS MAN

Man is no doubt the best of all animals, yet sometimes he is as bad an animal as any other, if possible, even worse. For instance, when provoked, he can beat any other animal in cruelty. The silver lining to this is that he can also be most compassionate. It is paradoxical that he should combine these opposite qualities but it is precisely this that makes him the riddle that he is

Good and evil so overlap in him that it is difficult to put on him a clear-cut label and say that he is good or bad. It is not that he is good or bad because of the circumstances in which he is; it is true that circumstances have some influence on him but he can overcome that influence and act as he thinks best. That is to say, he is not altogether a creature of his circumstances. Whatever the circumstances, he can act according to his free will. Only man can do this, no other animal. He is his own master though he has to reckon with the circumstances in which he is. If the circumstances help him, so far so good; but if they are hostile, he has to overcome them and if he is determined enough he can. The point to be emphasized is that man is the architect of his own fate. This, however, cannot be said of a lower animal. A lower animal is dependent upon its circumstances, is shaped by them, and has hardly a will of its own. If an animal does something wrong, it is because its instincts have misled it. If it does something good—a dog may sometimes do wonderful acts of courage and loyalty—it is because of the training and affection it has received from its master. It is not that it can think, argue, and then decide what it will do; it acts instinctively or from habits formed during its training. Man, on the other

hand, can choose a course of action best suited to his interests after taking everything into account; he is not guided entirely by instincts of habits. If he so wishes he can make a complete break with his past and embark upon a new life altogether. In other words, he can use his will power in whatever way he likes, suppressing the thrust of all the impelling forces working in him.

Why is it then that man should do any wrong when he is able to discriminate between right and wrong, can have a scale of values to guide his conduct, and has also an unidentified power within himself to overcome any temptations that come his way? In fact, man is the only animal who can set himself a target and reach it too. He alone among all animals can rise to a higher level of existence morally and otherwise. Yet why is he sometimes vicious? Why does he range between two poles—one represented by animality and another represented by a trait attributable only to divinity? Which of these two extremes shows the real man? If man is an animal how can he be divine or if he is divine how can he be like an animal? The answer is that if he is divine *sometimes* he can be divine *always*. What is needed is that he should discipline himself enough so that the divinity which is lying within him may not go under but remain always on top. When a child learns to walk he is not always erect but stumbles and falls every now and then. But, by practice, he is soon able to walk erect. Similarly by practice and hard work man can also remain on the divine plane always without any chance of lapsing into animality. Divinity is his real nature and what is called animality is only a passing phase which ends soon enough, given the knowledge of his real nature.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE YOUTH

The United Nations has declared the year 1985 as the International Year of the Youth. Very thoughtfully, the Government of India has declared that the year, so far as India is concerned, may start on 12 January, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda. On that day a meeting was held at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi to mark the inauguration of the year. Among those who addressed the meeting was Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself. The full text of his speech is not available but the burden of his speech, judging from press reports, was that the youth of India should follow Swami Vivekananda. He could not have named a better personality for the youth of India to follow, for in Swami Vivekananda the youth have idealism and a practical sense, both at their best.

Swamiji was a holy man of the highest order but his chief concern was man, in particular the man in distress. He summed up his philosophy as follows : 'May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and, above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.' This was not rhetoric but his sincere conviction. He dedicated the Ramakrishna Mission, the organization he founded, to the service of mankind. To him this was religion *par excellence*.

He described Renunciation and Service as India's national ideals. He wanted a hundred thousand young men and women to work for the masses, inspired by these ideals. India had long neglected the masses. This

was a national sin for which she had had to pay dearly. Again and again she had fallen prey to foreign aggression. To atone for this sin the young people should organize themselves into a mighty force and work among the masses to raise them from the morass in which they were lying. Poverty, ignorance, and caste tyranny had reduced them to brutes. They needed to be given back their sense of identity. 'Arise, awake'—this was his call to them. The toiling masses of India represented a great power. If properly harnessed, this power would fashion India into a happy and prosperous land. He called the youth to this task of rebuilding India. He was against imitation of any exotic model. If India had to progress she must do so in her own way.

He foresaw that working people everywhere would some day seize power. This would happen in India too. Lest this lead to decline in cultural standards he wanted that the country be deluged by spiritual ideals. But he also laid great stress on the study of science and technology, for the key to the country's material progress lay in this. He was convinced that some day the country would be prosperous. But while this was much to be desired, the importance of raising the human level was no less. A country's strength lay in its human material. A country was strong if its men and women were intelligent, honest, and capable. The people are the country. However materially developed a country may be, its people must also be morally strong. However perfect its political system, the country cannot survive long unless its people are good. This is why he would say, 'Man-making is my mission.' He wanted to combine science with religion, science to take care of the country's material progress through industrialization and religion of the quality of the human material.

KNOWLEDGE Vs. WISDOM

Knowledge is good provided it leads to wisdom, but if it does not it is a useless frill only. Knowledge is information, wisdom is how you use it. If you do not—or cannot—use it to the best of your advantage, what good is knowledge? It is like a medicine you know will give you relief when you have some trouble but you do not or cannot use it though you have it with you. Knowledge is fuel while wisdom is fire. You need fuel because you need fire. If fuel does not produce fire it is useless. Knowledge by itself is not important, only when you use it, it is important. As Sri Ramakrishna says, you can keep repeating the name of an intoxicant, but that will not intoxicate you till you use it.

There are any number of scholars in the world but wise men are few and far between. But it is these few wise men who lead the world. They are simple men without any pretension to scholarship; yet when they say something the whole world listens and also follows. This is because what they say is truth, truth they have known through personal experience. Truth is not book-learning, it is what you experience, experience at first hand. When this kind of experience takes place, the person who has this experience is totally transformed. It is this experience that makes the difference between a scholar and a wise man. The wise man speaks with authority, because he has known, seen, and experienced what he talks about. According to Sri Ramakrishna, reading about Varanasi is one thing but seeing the place by a personal visit is another. Wisdom is personal experience, knowledge is only intellectual embellishment, if it is not applied or applicable.

One may accumulate knowledge as much as one can but if that knowledge is not to put to use, it is an ornament one wears only to attract notice but is never able to use in times of adversity. A scholar who does not use his scholarship for his own good and the good of others is like a beast of burden who carries his burden without knowing why he is carrying it. Wisdom comes from the practice of what one has learnt. It may be one has not learnt much, but if one has learnt the basic truths of life and has also learnt to apply them in day-to-day life, one is wise enough to help oneself and others. The present craze for scholarship is good but the goal is wisdom. Scholarship may satisfy one's vanity but not one's needs. Knowledge is important to the extent that it helps one to know what is right and what is wrong. This is crucial. Given this, knowledge in other areas is secondary. Knowledge is always welcome but it must be used to promote human welfare. First and foremost, one must be a better individual by knowledge, better in terms of one's outlook on life, in terms of one's dealings with others. Knowledge is power but it may be power for good as well as evil, depending upon how it is used. Unless it is accompanied by wisdom there is no guarantee that it will not be used for evil. This is why knowledge in itself is not so important; only when there is wisdom behind it, it is important.

Knowledge and wisdom must go together. Knowledge is the means and wisdom is the end, knowledge is the body and wisdom is the soul. Knowledge changes, but wisdom is constant. Knowledge reflects facts of life which are never the same, wisdom reflects truths which are perennial. A learned man may err, but a wise man never. He is concerned with truths which embrace mankind as a whole, and which transcend time and space.

BLISS

We all seek happiness but, alas, how many of us get it? If some people get it at all they cannot retain it for long. Much sooner than they know, the happiness they felt is gone. This is because for most of us happiness depends upon objective conditions. Some of us want money and when we get it we are happy. Others may want health, beauty, name, power, and other similar things and when they get them they are happy. But for how long? Soon enough they begin to fret and fume because they feel they have not had enough of them or there are other things they ought to have had but they have not had them yet. Paradoxically they may have the whole world at their feet, yet they will complain that they have not had enough. It is said that desires, fulfilled, lead to more desires, as butter, poured into fire, only intensifies it. On top of this there is the fear that what they have they may lose. In fact, they do lose them, for none of the factors which make for human happiness are permanent.

But we hear of and sometimes even meet people, though of course not often, who have the other kind of happiness, known as bliss, which is said to be more profound and more constant. Such people are in a class by themselves and are known as mystics. Happiness in their case is not dependent on objective conditions. What they possess is difficult to define. They seem to have within themselves some hidden source of happiness which never exhausts itself. They may be humble people without name and fame, without scholarship, without material possessions worth the name; yet they are unnaccountably happy beyond measure. They may receive jolts like everybody else does—bereavement, disease, betrayal

by friends, loss of money, and so on, but they take them all in their stride and never get upset. They know life cannot always be the same, it has ups and downs, and it is wise to accept both with equanimity.

How can one reach this state? One way is to know that nothing in this world is permanent. Since nothing is permanent, why seek anything at all? A wise man seeks nothing, he is happy with whatever he has. Good or bad, whatever comes his way he accepts, never overjoyed, never downcast. He knows where there is pleasure there is also pain, for both always go together. Pleasure without pain or pain without pleasure is inconceivable. To remain always calm, to watch things pass by as a mere onlooker, is the ideal. The idea is not to escape but to come to grips with the problems of life but with total detachment as to the consequences. One cannot succeed if one is not prepared to fail. It is only too true that 'failures are the pillars of success'.

But when is perfect happiness which is known as bliss possible? Bliss is not in things outside, but in one's own self. Bliss is not to be acquired, it is already within us. What we acquire we may also lose. Bliss is perennially within us, only we do not know it. Because we look for it outside—in money, health, beauty, power, social standing, etc.—we do not get it. We may get it but get it only for a while, for external things are external and they can never be ours, completely and for always. It is slavery to let one's happiness depend upon things outside. Perfect happiness is only in self-mastery. A man may conquer the whole world but if he has not conquered himself he is a slave. With all the power he possesses he is not happy because he still feels he has not had enough. Only when a man has conquered himself he is happy. Such a man 'having nothing hath all'.

POLITICS WITH RELIGION OR WITHOUT?

If one has to take religion seriously, there is then nothing one can do without the sanction of religion. There are people who claim that their religion is 'a way of life'. But why a way of life, it is life itself. Is it possible to conceive of anything a man may do which is not an expression of his religion? If he makes a mistake, it is a mistake because he has deviated from the path described by his religion as right. Good and evil, right and wrong—it is religion that determines the whole series of moral categories. Without religion, there is no morality; without morality, life is a chaos. Man, without morals, is *reduced* to a beast.

Religion is necessary because it gives a sense of direction to life. What should I live for? Has life any purpose? If the purpose of life is pleasure man should then seek the pleasure that is the highest and most enduring. What is that pleasure? This is debatable. Some will say that each individual has to decide for himself what pleasure is the highest. As regards durability, all will agree that no pleasure is durable for all time. In the very nature of things, pleasure is short-lived. Then there is no pleasure without pain. Pleasure and pain always go together.

This is why no religion says that pleasure is the purpose of life. The purpose of life, according to religion, is to go beyond both pleasure and pain, a state where neither can touch you. That there is such a state all religions declare, though they may not use the same language. This is a state where flesh is completely subdued. This is a state where you are convinced that you are the spirit and not the body. The body exists of course but it exists only to subserve the spirit. It has to be taken care of in

order that the spirit may thrive.

Politics is like a limb of the body and religion like the spirit. They cannot be separated; in fact nothing can be more disastrous than trying to keep politics and religion apart. Politics without religion means machiavellianism, if possible worse. This is what the world is tasting today. A religious man, a *truly* religious man, puts truth above everything else. He can sacrifice everything for truth but truth for nothing. With him means are as important as ends. He says what he means and he means what he says. If he is honest he is honest in all his actions, even when he is engaged in politics. Not only honest, but also kind, generous, restrained, peaceful, and selfless, for these are the qualities that make up the essence of religion, no matter under what name it is known. Nothing is secular with him. Whatever he does is a means towards his religious goals. His whole life is nothing but a long prayer.

One might argue : This is fine idealism but in the modern world not practicable. What if religion is used as a cover to gain political ends, if in the name of religion one community fights another? The air is thick enough with hatred and violence, the mixing of religion with politics can no longer be tolerated. in answer one might ask : What would be the consequence if politicians be given a free rein? More violence, more hatred, more conflicts. The fact has to be faced that hatred can never conquer hatred, only love can; and love, across all barriers of race, colour, and creed, bears another name which is religion. Politicians have to take religion seriously and not play with it, as they are now doing. Life can be divorced from religion only at peril to its continuity. Religion should be at the centre of everything man does, most of all perhaps politics because of its all-encompassing *influence*.

'A REBEL CHILD'

Buddhism is now a separate religion but scholars say that Buddha was born a Hindu, lived a Hindu, and died a Hindu. He himself claimed that he was a *true* Hindu. The word 'Hindu' did not then mean what it means today; it then meant, if it has to be put into words, a seeker of Truth. By this token, a Moslem is a Hindu, a Christian is a Hindu, even a materialist who does not believe in God is a Hindu, if of course he is trying to find out what is the Truth behind the phenomenal world. Religion, just like science, is nothing but an attempt to understand this Truth. Religion insists that you can understand this Truth only if you can perfect yourself. Science has an objective approach in that it depends upon collection of data and their correct interpretation. A Hindu does not object to this but doubts if Truth can be demonstrated like a piece of furniture can be demonstrated, susceptible to sense perception.

When Buddha claimed that he was a true Hindu he meant that he was true to Truth only and not to any Intermediary. This explains why in all his discourses he never referred to any book or individual as his authority. He recognized no authority other than reason and experience. He did not even claim that he himself was an authority. He would say, 'Test what I say as you test gold in fire.' He did not even want that anybody should follow him, he rather wanted that each should follow his own reason. His last—perhaps best—advice to his followers was 'Be a lamp unto yourself.' Throughout his life he gave many discourses. And what a wide area he covered as he travelled giving discourses! Multitudes followed him wherever he went. They listened to him with rapt attention for he spoke their dialect. There was

no high philosophy in what he said, no complicated logic; what he said was simple, down-to-earth. He used familiar stories and similes to illustrate his points. All world teachers do the same but Buddha was perhaps the first among them. What Buddha taught were facts of everyday experience. Death, for instance. Can anybody escape death? Is there anything that does not perish? Where is the man who can claim that he has never known unhappiness? Is not unhappiness ubiquitous? These are truths plain enough for anybody to see and understand. But what is the reason for this unhappiness? Why do people suffer? Buddha did not attribute it to any extraneous agency. Man suffers because he has no control over himself. He is always after something or other, even things that may cause him suffering. He himself is responsible for all his sufferings except those Nature inflicts. Buddha is no pessimist though the recurring theme in his discourses is *duhkha* (suffering). He is only trying to make people aware of the cause of the suffering and how it can be overcome. It can be overcome if man stops hankering after perishable things. But why is this paradox that man hankers after perishable things knowing full well that it will cause him suffering? This is an academic question and Buddha does not want man to worry too much about it. Let philosophers split their hairs about it but Buddha will be happy if man practises self-control.

But in what sense is it [Buddhism] different from Hinduism or from any other religion? It is different in the emphasis it lays on man himself. Man's trouble begins and ends in his own mind. It is a rebel child because it makes a complete break with current beliefs and practices, rejecting God, books, and miracles and depending upon reason and observed facts only.

IDENTITY

Identity is a much talked of word today. Every nation asserts that it has an identity of its own. Not only a whole nation, even a section of it, similarly a group of people living in a particular area, with a particular pigment of the skin, speaking a language or professing a religion separate from that of others, a family, even a single individual—in short, all of us are conscious of our distinctiveness and claim that we have an identity of our own. But wherein is man's real identity—in the colour of his skin, his language, religion, clothes, etc., or all these details put together?

Language, religion, and similar other distinctive factors are no doubt important but it will be a mistake to think that it is these details that determine man's true identity. Man's identity is in his inner qualities and not in what he looks like, what clothes he wears, what language he speaks, how he prays, and so on. However important these distinctive features may seem, they are only an outer covering beneath which lies the real man. Just as the shirt a man wears is not the real man, similarly these details do not constitute the real man.

What then constitutes the real man? It is difficult to define it but it is clear that there are certain common qualities in all men and women which may be identified as being their essence. However diverse they may be on the surface, the inside of them seems to be made of the same stuff : call it mind, spirit, soul, or whatever else you like. This is what binds together all men and women, if not also all living beings. This is where lies man's true identity; in other words, man is the same everywhere irrespective of his differences in skin, language, or religion.

To forget this sameness is to invite conflicts, suspicion, and tension. The basic unity underlying all differences is permanent, the differences, being superficial, are not. They change, may even disappear, because they are products of the environment in which man lives. An Indian, after years of living in England, may look very much like an Englishman. By this change he becomes identical with an Englishman, both inside and outside.

The point to be noted is that distinctiveness is not as important as sameness. Distinctiveness is natural, even necessary. Each individual is unique, so also each nation. 'Each is great in his own place' is a truism which is not to be brushed aside. Let everybody thrive but not at the cost of others. If you want to exploit others you may do so for a while, but very soon you will regret it. You may be on top now but the circumstances may so change that you will be down and under and the other party will be on top. This too is not desirable, for nothing should happen that affects the basic unity of mankind. Let the distinctiveness continue but with unity intact.

There are many cells in the human body, each of them important and independent, but not isolated. If one of them is diseased others also will get diseased. They must all be healthy and strong, then only will the body also be healthy and strong. Distinctiveness is not the same thing as exclusiveness. Let each nation be distinctive, distinctive in language, religion, in the nature of its government, but let this distinctiveness not hurt the distinctiveness of other nations. Should it hurt others in any way, it in fact hurts itself though the damage may not be seen immediately. A true sense of identity is in unity **and not in exclusiveness.**

FREEDOM IN BONDAGE

However paradoxical it may seem, the state the above caption suggests is the ideal for everybody to pursue. But how can one be free if one is in bondage? To explain, the caption means that if freedom is the goal it should be freedom in life and not in death. What value has freedom if it is achieved only after death? What happens after death is immaterial. If freedom is to be achieved it should be achieved in this very life and the sooner the better.

But what is freedom? Am I not free already? I can do whatever I please, can't I? Of course I cannot violate the law of the country. If I do I may be punished. Similarly there are certain social and moral laws which, though not all clearly defined, I have to abide by, otherwise I shall be an object of public disgrace. Barring these limitations, am I not a free man? The truth is that man is not as free as he thinks he is. If he is free why does he die or why does he suffer from diseases or get old? Natural, one might say. Does this not mean that man is subject to forces other than his own?

But this is not the only area in which man has no freedom. Why is he sometimes happy and sometimes unhappy? Left to himself he would always like to be happy but more often he is unhappy in spite of himself. This is because of circumstances beyond his control. Man in short is like a pendulum always swinging between joy and sorrow. As if he is a mere plaything at the hands of some invisible force which uses him as it likes. How can it be said then that man is free? Up to a point he may be free but beyond that he is not free. But what can man do in the circumstances? How can he be free to the extent that he will not be affected by objective conditions, good or bad?

The only way he can remain calm in spite of jolts he may receive or windfalls that chance may bring him is to realize the ephemeral nature of these things. Nothing in life is permanent, as life itself is not permanent. Everything is short-lived—health, money, power, fame and so on. Not only good things are not permanent, bad things also are not permanent. The longest night has its dawn. If you can take every turn of things with equal calmness, then you are free. Real freedom is a condition of the mind. It is a mind which is like a smooth sea, with no waves on it. A mind which is completely detached from the world, which has withdrawn itself within itself. The best example of this is the lotus-leaf on the water. It is on the water, but is not moist. If you are in the world and yet not of it, you are free. You are calm within but outwardly active. You have a firm grip on everything you are doing, yet mentally you feel you are doing nothing. It is a state of mind in which you have no desires of your own. You work not for yourself but for God, or for the community if you prefer. It is self-effacement at its best. It is renunciation, renunciation of everything selfish or extending the self till it includes every being.

Is it possible to achieve this state? For instance, can you work without expecting any return for yourself? Assuming you can, can you at the same time work with zeal? The motive behind work is gain. Where there is no gain for yourself, why should you work at all? You should work because you are going to achieve the highest gain—freedom. Now you are a slave to the vagaries of your body and mind. Don't you want to be free from this? Kill the self and you are free. If you work for yourself you are in bondage but if you work for others you are free.

'BODY FILLED AND VACANT MIND'

The ideal condition in which a man can prosper best is when his body and mind both function equally well. A healthy ' body is not enough, a healthy mind is also needed. A healthy body needs to be guided by a healthy mind, else it is a ship without a rudder. The body is only an instrument which can serve its purpose best when handled by a thoughtful and wise mind. If a mind is vacant, devoid of a purpose, weak, and incapable of taking a decision, the body, however strong it may be, becomes a useless appendage. A man becomes an animal if he thinks his physical needs are supreme and if he has no mind at all or has a mind vitiated by ill thoughts and feelings. He is a demon if he finds pleasure in doing mischief to others and he is a god if he is totally unselfish and his only pleasure is to do good to others. Most men are between these two extremes, either extremely selfish or unselfish much beyond one can expect in an average man. Call him human or whatever else you like, an unselfish man is an asset to society and adds to its strength and glory. An ideal society is one in which every individual takes unselfishness as his ideal and pursues it regardless of what it may cost him.

The Bible says that God created man in His own image. It is very likely that since He gave man the shape of his body, He gave man also some of the fine mental qualities that He possesses. What are the fine mental qualities that God is supposed to possess? One can never be sure about it since one does not know for certain if God at all exists or what He is like if He exists. God may be just an idea representing the highest degree of moral excellence. He is God because man cannot compete with Him in respect of moral excellence. Man attributes to Him

certain other qualities which he himself does not possess though he covets them very much. He feels he will be blessed if he could be like God. For ordinary men and women the task of reaching the level marked by God may be impossible but there have been people who did reach that level, judging from authentic reports available about them. Take the case of Buddha. Leave alone whether he possessed any super-natural powers or not, but the fact that as a man he stands head and shoulders above others in terms of qualities like compassion and goodwill is beyond doubt. How much one would like to be like Buddha! if there has been one Buddha, can't there be another? Can't there be many more? Man has made great advancement in many directions since Buddha's time. Thanks to man's ingenuity life has become much more pleasant and comfortable—physically of course—since Buddha came. If this has been possible, there is no reason why man should not advance morally also to the extent that he will be on the same level as Buddha. What a wonderful situation it would be if everybody became a Buddha, kind, compassionate, always wishing well of others! Today the world is threatened by a nuclear war. There would be no such threat if world leaders had the kind of mind that Buddha had, if their minds were free from anger, hatred, and greed and if they had love, goodwill, and generosity in their place.

Modern science has performed many miracles. One of them is that there are no more famines taking a toll of life like they once did. Similarly no more epidemics. The body is indeed 'filled' like it was never before. The challenge before man now is to fill the mind also. Fill it with the same stuff that made Buddha the scintillating figure that he is, the figure that has added much to the glory of mankind.

HOW NOT TO DIE IN A CHURCH

All religions have some common features—a prophet, a holy book, and a hierarchy of priests. The prophet preaches the message of God which he claims God has vouchsafed to him. The holy book is a record of what the prophet preaches, which his apostles maintain first for their own benefit and then for the benefit of posterity. As regards the priests they interpret what the holy book says, being people who have studied the holy book thoroughly, pondered over it long, and have finally succeeded in unearthing its deeper meanings which most readers are likely to miss. The priests also lay down rules about how prayers have to be said, what disciplines have to be gone through to attain the promised goals of the religion in question, about how the followers of the religion should conduct themselves, what their dealings with one another should be like, what are their social duties and obligations, how they should treat followers of other religions, and so on. As time passes and life becomes complicated, the list of these rules grows longer and longer, and these rules also acquire increasing importance. If there is anything not clear to a lay member he then turns to the priests for guidance. If, again, he offends against any commandment of God the priests determine what punishment should be inflicted on him unless it has been stated by God Himself. In either case the priests may take upon themselves the task of administering the punishment. Thus the role of the priests becomes increasingly crucial, so much so that one begins to wonder if the wish of the priests is not the wish of God Himself.

When a religion becomes so organized it becomes an

institution, a 'church'. A church functions like a temporal Government with authority to impose its will on those who, by birth or by choice, are subject to its control. The control the church exercises has its advantages as well as disadvantages. Among the advantages is the fact that it guides, inspires, and encourages. For beginners in religion this is a great help. The church, in their case, is like a good mother. But how long does a child need his mother's guidance? Till he is able to look after himself. As soon as he becomes an adult he is on his own, completely independent of his mother's care. Any interference by his mother at that stage may be harmful. Similarly the influence of the church may become counter-productive if it tries to impose its wishes upon its members after a certain period. Surely there is a stage in the course of a member's religious life when he may be trusted to decide what is best for him. If there is no such development, it means that he is still a child who must be taken care of by the church. This is not creditable for either—the member concerned or the church.

Religion is a call to undertake a voyage of discovery. Each individual has to discover for himself the truths it speaks of. The church prepares him for this voyage but it does not and cannot do anything further. He should be now entirely on his own, a free man, with his own sense of right and wrong, his own beliefs, his own hopes and aspirations. But if he has not yet outgrown the church and wants it still to hold him on leash with all its cults and creeds, it will be the saddest thing that can happen to him. It means that he began life as a prisoner of the church and is going to die also as such.

THE GREAT GATEMAN

A young man, wanting to have an audience with Holy Mother Sarada Devi, came to Udbodhan House and was about to start going up the stairs to the first floor where Mother was then staying when a hefty man barred his passage with his hands outstretched. Naturally annoyed, the young man asked, 'who are you?' The man replied, 'I am the gatekeeper here.' The young man thrust aside the impertinent gateman, ran up the stairs, and had his audience with Mother. As he was leaving Mother asked, 'Have you paid your respects to Sarat?' 'Sarat' was Swami Saradananda. The young man replied, 'No, but where is he?' Saying that he was downstairs Mother gave the young man a brief description of Swami Saradananda's appearance. The young man realized that Swami Saradananda was no other than the 'gateman'! He hurried downstairs and fell at Swami Saradananda's feet in remorse. The latter lifted him up and embracing him said, 'You were right : no one can "see" Mother unless one is impatient the way you were.'

This neatly sums up the kind of man Swami Saradananda was. As General Secretary he was the most powerful man in the Ramakrishna Mission but no one would have suspected this fact from the kind of life he lived or from the way he behaved with others. He once mildly expressed his disapproval about certain conduct of a *brahmacharin*—a monk not yet fully ordained—when the latter, in pique, said that he had come to Udbodhan House and was staying there only for the sake of Mother. In reply Swami Saradananda meekly said, 'That applies in my case also.'

But the world remembers him most for his *Lilaprasanga*,

a magnificent though incomplete record, written in classical Bengali, of his Master Sri Ramakrishna's life and spiritual practices. The circumstances surrounding the writing of the book show again the man that he was : Realizing that Sarada Devi needed a place to stay in Calcutta he had borrowed money to put up a small two-storied building, known as Mother's House, for Mother occupied its first floor, and known also as Udbodhan House, for it provided space for the editorial office of the Bengali journal of the Mission on its ground floor. How was he going to repay the debt he had incurred? He hit upon the plan of writing a book and the book he wrote was *Lilaprasanga*, which immediately caught the imagination of the Bengali readers, this being the first authentic life of Sri Ramakrishna. The book served a twofold purpose—it helped clear the debt Swami Saradananda had incurred and also helped boost the popularity of *Udbodhan*, the Mission's Bengali journal in which the book serially appeared. But suppose he had not written the book. What a loss it would have been to the spiritual world, for the book, written by one of Sri Ramakrishna's own apostles, is one in which a comprehensive account of his life and religion is to be found!

Going by the testimony of his closest associates, Swami Saradananda hid a mother's heart under his formidable exterior. A saint, scholar, friend of the poor and the lowly, and administrator (an 'executive', according to Swami Vivekananda), he combined in himself many roles, but the one of which he was most proud was that of Sarada Devi's 'gateman'. He guarded Mother zealously as if she was a gift of God too holy for the world. His services to Mother were a classic in tenderness, the kind a child bears towards his mother whom he regards as not only his protector but also his protected.

THE PRICE OF BEING A MAHATMA

No one is without detractors, just as no one is without admirers. The rule seems to be that the number of detractors and admirers varies depending upon how important a man is in the public eye. The more important the man is, the larger is the number of his admirers and detractors. It is good to have detractors, for it serves as a check against a man being carried away by unmerited adulation. Often enough, admirers cause more harm than detractors, for they keep you blind about your weaknesses (perhaps deliberately for their own reasons).

But an important man is not necessarily an honest man or a man of principles. He may just be a man more opportunistic than conscientious. His success may be entirely fortuitous. He may be a man who thinks nothing of betraying a friend, or even the cause which he says he is serving. By hook or by crook, he wants to get on, grab money, power, or a high office. To him, the dictum is 'the end justifies the means'. In short, he is an unscrupulous man. It is possible that in spite of what he personally is, he wields great power, controls the fates of many, may even be prime minister or president of a country. He may have critics galore but he also has many supporters, more than critics, for he is shrewd enough to know how to project a good public image for himself.

Contrast this with a man who places principles above everything else. He may want to succeed just as much as the other man but he by no means wants to succeed at the cost of his principles. If such a man opts to serve a public cause, many people will gather round him to support the cause, drawn more by his personal charisma than by the cause he serves. Even such a man is not

without detractors. While some people follow him blindly there are also people who oppose him equally blindly. Everything he says or does is wrong to them. If he says he is following his principles, the critics will either say his principles are wrong, or he is only using them as a cover to deceive others. A man of principles is, however, unperturbed by such criticism. If people extol him to the skies he is similarly indifferent. His only concern is that he may not deviate from his principles. His principles are not only his means, they are also his ends. They may lead to personal disaster or disaster to the cause dearest to him, yet he will follow them. If in following his principles he happens to offend his admirers and they desert him, he does not care; he will in short pay any price to follow his principles.

Such a man was Gandhiji. To him truth and non-violence were his very life. He fought the British rule because he found it rested on what he considered the very antithesis of his principles. In his long struggle against the British there were moments when he had them at a disadvantage but his principles would not let him do anything to embarrass them, much to the exasperation of his friends and admirers. Many could not make out what he was—a saint turned a politician, or a politician turned a saint. Either way, he was the greatest enigma in his time. Then consider the fast he undertook to force India to pay Pakistan the money she owed her. This might have seemed unpatriotic but he could not help it. Again, his principles dictated that he take this step. Eventually people who previously worshipped him killed him. Gandhiji must have died a happy man that he had remained true to his principles to the last. It cost him his life but what if it did? He surely thanked God that he did not have to earn a reprieve by sacrificing his principles.

TOWARDS A HAPPY NEW WORLD

How dear is the thought that a time will come when there will be no more hunger on earth, no more exploitation, no more social injustice; also there will be freedom for all, peace and amity between man and man, and life will be easy and comfortable for everybody! This has been man's dream ever since he has learnt to think, formulate his wishes and plans, decide his priorities, and much later, also recognize that his fate is interlinked with his fellow-beings, even his environment. But how is it that this dream has not yet come true?

This indeed is a riddle. Man has grown much over the centuries in every direction. He has proved his supremacy over Nature and can now do things that once seemed impossible. On the physical plane he is much better off than ever before. Yet the overall outlook of the world remains as grim as ever. Take the case of food. Given the present scale of food production, hunger need no longer be a problem; yet many people starve for various reasons, chief of them being trade manipulations by clever people. As regards exploitation, if one knew in how many covert and overt ways it goes on! Despite all the protestations of goodwill by people in power, the weak continue to be exploited. So also social injustice. Its crude forms may have changed but it continues as ruthlessly as ever. Love and amity are words much talked about as they always have been but the world is nowhere near seeing any semblance of them in practice. The common man helplessly looks on while evil forces go on playing havoc among themselves.

Why is the situation like this? One cynical view is that this is how the world is constituted and there is nothing

one can do about it. As they say, it is like a dog's tail which will always remain curly and you can never make it straight. No doubt you can help improve the situation in some areas, but maybe in doing so you will create problems elsewhere. The argument seems to be that good and evil go together and you cannot have one without the other. You can never have a world in which there is no wrongdoing, no injustice, no cruelty, no hardship. These will continue though their forms may change from time to time. Not only will these evil things continue but also their counterpart, the good things, will continue. Philosophically, this may be true, but man has no right to stop fighting evil. It is his duty as well as privilege to carry on his fight against evil. He alone can dare dream that some day he will be able to convert the earth to a paradise. The story of civilization is the story of the struggle he is making in this direction. He may or may not succeed but he keeps on struggling though why he perhaps does not know and does not even want to know.

What is he likely to gain from this apparently futile struggle? First, to learn the true nature of the world; secondly, to be perfect himself. As he keeps struggling against evil he sees more evil within himself than outside. He realizes so long as there is evil in himself he has no right to expect that the world shall be perfect. He then sets about the task of being perfect himself. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'—is the eternal call to man. This spurs him to seek perfection both inside and outside. Perfection outside is difficult but more so is the perfection inside. A man is not worth his salt if he stops short of the goal—perfection both inside and outside. The dream of a happy new world becomes a reality when both are realized.

THE ATOM AND THE UNIVERSE

If you drop a stone into a lake it is not only the water next to where the stone drops that is disturbed but the whole mass of water in the lake is disturbed—some more, some less. This happens because the water is one single mass, each drop of the water being connected with the drop next to it, so that if one drop is knocked the rest of the drops feel the shock. It is like the human body where one single diseased cell can infect the whole system, ultimately crippling it.

Indian philosophy abhors the idea of isolationism. If you think you can thrive while others are suffering you are mistaken. If others suffer you will suffer too whether you like it or not. It may be you will not suffer immediately but the problems responsible for a single individual's suffering may grow to affect the destiny of the whole community unless the community girds up its loins to nip the problems in the bud before it gets too late. The individual and the community are one single whole, united and indivisible; it is like the part and the whole, one dependent upon the other, just as the parts themselves are dependent upon each other. In the good of one is the good of all just as no single part can enjoy happiness by denying it to other parts. The concepts of one world and one human family flow from this unity of existence.

It is this sense of oneness that provides the basis of the great social virtues one hears so much about—love, goodwill, friendship, charity, and so on. Why should one care for others unless one realizes that it is to one's own interest that one should do so? Why should not one exploit others for one's own gain unless it is that to do so is to hurt one's own interest? It is this fact of identity

of interests that is the *raison d'être* for the origin of families and nations and finally, one single human family.

This sense of oneness grows as man grows in his power of understanding the forces that shape his destiny. He realizes the value of co-operation to fight the hostile forces of Nature to create an environment that will give him security and comfort. Later, he realizes that he cannot survive by fighting Nature but by striking a relationship of give and take only, for his continued hostility against Nature can in the end recoil on himself, as indeed it has started doing now, thanks to man's thoughtless depredations against Nature over the centuries. 'Save Nature' is the call now, for man has realized, hopefully not too late, that by hurting Nature man hurts himself. Everywhere today one hears of the hazards environmental pollution poses to mankind and there is a growing awareness that man and his environment are so interdependent that man can neglect his environment only at peril to himself. Man makes his environment as much as the environment makes man.

Indian thinkers say that existence itself is one. Man, animal, plant, the elements—all that exists is basically one, the same thing varying only in degrees of manifestation. The universe is like a big banyan tree, with its trunk, boughs, leaves, and shoots, an integral whole despite its diverse details and every one of its details drawing its sap from the same source. There is diversity but underneath the diversity there is a unity. The diversity is important just as the unity is important. The former is an expression of the latter. Both are identical, their essence being the same.

Social concern must focus more on the small than on the big, else progress may suffer. The atom may indeed be a drag on the whole universe.

THE GREAT SWAN

Whether true or not, the swan is credited with the power to drink only milk when a mixture of water and milk is presented to it. How it separates one from the other is a mystery if of course it does and can truly separate one from the other at all. Hindu philosophers say that, like a mixture of milk and water, the phenomenal world is also partly real and partly unreal, not absolutely unreal and also of course not absolutely real. It is paradoxical that it is a mixture of both reality and unreality but there is no other way of describing it, for if it is real at one point it is unreal at another point. It is like the dreams one experiences when one sleeps. One may dream that one is travelling, but does it ever occur to one while experiencing such a dream that there is no substance to the experience since one is in one's room lying on one's bed? It is only when one wakes up one realizes that the experience one has had is absolutely without any substance.

What is then reality? That which is always the same, unchanging and unchangeable. What we experience in the sleeping state is not real because it changes when we wake up; similarly, what we experience in the waking state is not real because it changes when we fall asleep. But is there anything that does not change? Is not reality only a mere postulate, a myth? Indian philosophers claim that reality is the basis of everything. It is its source as well as its ends. It is also its essence, its real self. This self is the material as well as the efficient cause of everything. It has many names and forms, but basically it is one and the same. The names and forms are a mere cover, but the reality is one and the same. The cover is not the reality just as the chaff is not the grain. Real wisdom lies in being able to pick up the

grain like the swan picking up the milk. God is the grain, the world its chaff. Only wise people know the difference between the two.

Because Sri Ramakrishna knew this difference he was given the appellation 'the Great Swan'. Indeed, what a swan he was! If he had a passion, it was for God only. No wonder he earned the other appellation 'God-intoxicated'. If any proof was needed about what it meant to be in constant communion with God his life demonstrated it. Every single act of his life bore testimony to his being possessed by God. And what peace, joy, and love he himself experienced and radiated for the benefit of others! Being with him was like being with God Himself, for he had managed to shed everything mundane, unreal, unholy.

Yet he loved man, for he saw God in him. Even the sinner was God to him. The sinner is not the real nature of man, it is a false attribute, a mask hiding the real man. Give him a chance, the right kind of education, a good environment, and he, a sinner now, will awaken to his divinity. No one is lost for good. The lapses one sees are temporary; to think they cannot be overcome is to deny God.

Sri Ramakrishna accepted man as he is, a mixture of good and evil, but, being a 'swan', he was able to ignore the evil, the unreal, the passing, the apparent and focus on the real, the divinity, in man. He insisted on the best, the purest, the highest, but, knowing how deceptive, how alluring, the evil, the unreal could be he was the most tolerant, kind, and loving friend and guide the errant man has ever known. Such a guide was needed in an age of doubt like the present one, an age in which man feels lost because he has lost faith in himself, in his own goodness.

COMMUNAL AMITY

Communal clashes are to be dealt with not merely as a problem of law and order but as one of attitude of mind. An individual may be himself peace-loving, but if he feels that the interests of his community are at stake he may lose all control of himself and do things he will never think of doing in cooler moments. Doubtless in other communities also there are plenty of such individuals -- basically good and never wanting to hurt anybody, yet they react violently if they think the interests of their communities are in danger. Why do they do so?

The answer lies in the kind of divisiveness with which most of us have grown up. Unfortunately, divisiveness is so ingrained in us that we cannot think of our community as part of a whole but the whole itself. We wish there were no other communities than our own. We tolerate them just as we tolerate a birthmark on our face. We do not at all feel happy if they grow in strength or influence. It is because the communities are afraid of each other that they have this kind of attitude. They feel so concerned about their security that they want to check the growth of other communities while ensuring the growth of their own.

Every country has this problem of its people being divided into separate communities based on religion, language, colour, and so on. They may live close to each other, yet there is hardly any social mixing between them. As if there are some invisible barriers keeping them apart. This aloofness may be unfortunate but worse is the fact that underlying this aloofness there is always a silent hostility between them. A little misunderstanding and this hostility at once breaks out in the form of violent clashes. More often than not, these clashes have

a rumour or an imaginary grievance as their origin. If there is a genuine grievance, redress can easily be found, given a little patience and a reasonable frame of mind. Unfortunately, leadership in most communities thrives by encouraging discontent. Once violence starts it is the hot-headed people who get the upper hand and then hell is let loose.

But what is the remedy? The remedy is to bring the communities closer by social mixing. As of now, they stand apart and they do not know each other. If they get to know each other they will see that there are good people in all communities—good in the sense that they bear ill will towards none. It is these good people who have to be active to build a bridge of friendship and goodwill between one community and another. They must take the lead in promoting social mixing. Communal amity is a question of goodwill and understanding. Since the communities have to live together, they have to live in peace. The only way to do so is to 'live and let live'. Each community has its legitimate rights but the rights must not be exercised to hurt others. The policy of aggression invariably harms both the aggressor and those against whom aggression is perpetrated. Communal amity is not only desirable, it is the only way to peace and progress for every community. It can be attained only through love and goodwill. Be it clearly understood that it cannot be attained simply by an agreement on paper. The present sense of divisiveness has to be replaced by a sense of oneness. It must be brought home to everybody that mankind is essentially one irrespective of differences in language, religion, or race. This can be achieved by closer mixing. The solution may sound simplistic but this is the only way to remove distrust and discord between the communities.

BEING AND BECOMING

In a very apt definition Swami Vivekananda described religion as 'a science of being and becoming'. Two key words in this are : science and becoming. But how can religion be a science? Religion, in common parlance, is a matter of belief. You believe that there is such a being as god though you have not seen him. Not only that, you accept a whole range of dos and don'ts as being his wish, a wish you are required to fulfil, however arbitrary it may be. It is this state of servitude, complete and unconditional, that passes as religion. Where is science in it? A prerequisite of science is a questioning mind which religion totally rejects. Science is based on observed and observable facts, it is objective; religion, on the other hand, is based on assumptions (that there is a god and so on), it is speculative, entirely subjective. How can it be described as a science?

The answer to this is that though religion is not exactly objective in the sense that science is, it is nevertheless based on observed and observable facts. A tree is known by the fruit it bears. If religion can turn a sinner into a saint how can you dismiss it as nonsense? Indeed, it is this kind of change that religion is purported to bring about. To push man towards perfection, to tell him what he should do to overcome his weaknesses, to explain why it is necessary that he should serve others—these are some of the more important ingredients of religion. Maybe there are accretions that collect over them which sometimes push these ingredients to the background but that does not discredit religion, just as misapplication of science, now a threat to man's survival, does not discredit it. Religion, in its essence, stands well vindicated through centuries of tests. How do you explain the great saints every country has produced and in every

century? What miracles they perform is not important, what is important is the kind of character they have. How is it that they stick to truth despite every temptation or fear? Wherefrom do they get this strength of mind? Again such people are compassionate, always concerned about others, and utterly unselfish. How do they acquire such qualities? If there is a miracle here is one—possessing such qualities. They are what they are, not for public approbation, not from fear of persecution, either. If religion can give people this kind of character, can you dismiss it as nonsense? Just as science has a methodology producing the same results everywhere, surprisingly religion has the same characteristic. Everywhere and in every age the methodology is the same as are the results. What religion does is for everybody to see. It performs miracles—yes, it performs miracles, indeed—in the sense that it completely transforms a man's character: under its influence a sinner becomes a saint provided he does what religion asks him to do.

The question next is about becoming. What exactly is 'becoming'? Becoming is that transformation into perfection which everyone desires. Religion gives the incentive to struggle and indicates the steps to be taken. The struggle is not so much physical as mental. It is easy to overcome physical hurdles but very difficult to overcome selfishness, anger, hatred, envy, etc. Religion shows the way to overcome these mental drawbacks. It says if there has been one Buddha, there can be other Buddhas also. Man's progress cannot be confined to the material plane only, it has to be concurrently extended to the spiritual plane. In fact, real progress in the case of man is more spiritual than physical. Stress, however, is to be laid on spiritual. Herein comes the science of religion to show how both can be combined with spirituality getting the upper hand.

