

VEDANTA THROUGH STORIES.

BY

SWAMI SAMBUDDHANANDA



with a foreword

BY

The Hon'ble Sri SYAMA PRASAD MOOKHERJEE

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Swami Sambuddhananda
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VEDANTA THROUGH STORIES

DEDICATED

TO

**Shree 1008 Srimat Swami Premanandaji Puri Maharaj
of the order of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission,
a living embodiment of purity, whose selfless
love for all was unique and unparalleled,
with deep love and reverence**

Preface

It was the desire of Swami Vivekananda that the philosophy of the Vedanta should be made easily available to the ordinary man in India and abroad. He believed that the dissemination of the ideas underlying that philosophy among the people would have consequences of great moment, such as diminishing the existing bigotries, prejudices, religious jealousies and unhealthy conflicts, and creating mutual understanding and goodwill between different communities and nations.

This book is an humble attempt to popularise the principles of the Vedanta with the help of stories, anecdotes and parables. These have been roughly grouped together in suitable categories, including a few tales and anecdotes of a seemingly secular character which have been added for the sake of variety and also perhaps as illustrating certain significant aspects of worldly life and behaviour.

I am extremely thankful to the Hon'ble Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee for his kindness in writing a foreword to this humble effort of mine. I am greatly thankful to Mr. K. C. Sen, I. C. S. Ex-judge, High Court, Bombay, now President, Industrial Tribunal, for going through the typescript of the book, and to many other friends who were generally very helpful to me in the publication.

I shall consider myself amply rewarded if this brings any comfort, solace or message of uplift or of right living to any of my readers.

Swami Sambuddhananda

Foreword

Vedanta which literally means self-realisation or fulfilment is not merely an abstract philosophy belonging to the realm of speculation and divorced from the actual mode of life. It has an intensely practical side also. As one of its greatest exponents Swami Vivekananda said, the ideal of Vedanta lived by the recluse outside the pale of society can be practised even from hearth and home and applied to all our daily schemes of life. Whatever may be the avocation of man, he can follow its fundamental principle which means service of man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God. It also teaches men to have faith in themselves and imbibe the virtues of courage and optimism as opposed to cowardice and pessimism. Finally, Vedanta as a religion does not tolerate bigotries, narrow prejudices and religious conflicts. It preaches religious tolerance, catholicity and the universal acceptance of all religions. I cannot do better than quote the words of Swami Vivekananda who illustrated this characteristic of Vedanta in his inimitable way. "I accept all religions that were in the past," said the Swami, "and worship with them all, I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan, I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix, I shall enter the Buddhistic temple where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his laws. I shall go into the forest and sit

down in meditation with the Hindu who is trying to see the light which enlightens the heart of every one. Not only shall I do these but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future."

Such is the catholicity of the Vedantic religion and naturally Swami Vivekananda laid great stress on the dissemination of the ideas underlying it among the people. In fact, one of the objects with which the Ramakrishna Mission was founded was "to spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna". One thing which has stood in the way of such widespread dissemination of Vedanta knowledge is the lack of a popular, yet authentic version which can be understood without difficulty by ordinary men and women. "Vedanta Through Stories" is such a popular version. It seeks to explain and popularise the fundamental tenets of the Vedanta with the help of anecdotes and parables collected from the Upanishads and from the lives of saints and sages like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Buddha, Shankara, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. It is a magnificent attempt and will go a long way in spreading the message of the Vedanta among those who have neither the leisure nor the background to go through different philosophical discourses.

Minister Industry & Supply
New Delhi
March 31 1950

Syama Prasad Mookherjee

INTRODUCTION

It would be necessary for the reader to have acquaintance with the main ideas underlying the Vedanta. For this purpose a short summary of such ideas is given below.

Vedanta literally means the end or the final peak of knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of the Self. The highest end of human life is self-realisation. All living beings are constantly in search of it either consciously or unconsciously. The achievement of this end is synonymous with the attainment of the acme of the highest knowledge and absolute bliss.

The true self is birthless and deathless, immortal, immutable, infinite and eternal. The paths leading to the realisation of the self are many, nay infinite in number. They are like innumerable radii leading from the circumference of existence to its centre. But the paths are beset with the thorns of ignorance and inertia, and are as difficult to traverse as the razor's edge.

Different people have different conceptions of the Self. Some would identify it with the body, some with the vital force, the mind or the intellect, and some with the primordial insentience, or a mixture of sentience and insentience, or even as a void or a state through or in which all experiences are negated. The Vedantists declare all such persons to be under

illusion According to them, the Self is nothing but a state of pure consciousness, which underlies but is altogether unlike, our bodily mental and intellectual experiences and which is the ultimate guarantee of the identity of the Self and Brahman, the Supreme Spirit

The different conceptions of the Self mentioned above are based on the schools of philosophy current at different times in the history of Indian philosophical thought

1 The vast mass of untutored men and women (they could hardly be designated a school) equate the Self with the material existence of themselves, their families and possessions, feeling (rather than thinking) any loss or diminution in that respect as a loss or reduction of what they stand for, i e their selves

2 The Charvakas or materialists identified the Self with the body for one's body is even dearer than one's son The Self so conceived is naturally subject to birth growth decay and death

3 A section of the materialists identified the Self with the sense organs as the body without the activity of the senses would be no better than inert matter and when one says "I am blind" the reference is to such sense activity

4 A more advanced section of the materialists rose to the conception of prana or the vital force

and held that was the real Self, for sense organs cease to function when bereft of the vital force

5 Another school regarded the mind as the Self according to it the functioning of the vital force is always backed by the mind as the directing agent

6 Some Buddhists known as Yogacharis regarded Buddhi or the intellect as the Self, they regarded all experience as grounded on a stream of ideas which were thus the fundamental or essential entity

7 Certain schools like the Prabhakaras and the Tarkikas held that the Self was to be equated with the profound insentience that prevails in the soundest sleep this state according to them was the ultimate seed-bed for the germination of emergence of all experience

8 Certain thinkers called Bhattas maintained that as the state of dreamless sleep consisted partly of unconsciousness and partly of consciousness the Self was compounded of a mixture of the two

9 A school of the Buddhists were Nihilists, believing that the true description of the Self was nothing or the ultimate void which was as free from content as dreamless sleep

10 The Vedantists declared all these schools to be mistaken According to them these schools have missed the fact that all experience is lit up or illumined

by pure consciousness which gives the man of realisation the quintessential intuition that he is Brahman, for even the person who says that the Self is void must need consciousness to realise that proposition. The very consciousness, the Vedantists maintain, by which the Self is negated is Atman. The Vedantists also rely on scriptural passages wherein 'It' is characterised as consciousness or pure intelligence bereft of eyes, ears or nose, of the vital force, the mind and the intellect. The Self according to them, has three facets, or aspects, existence, knowledge and bliss absolute. It is the pure illumination which lights up all experience and objects of experience which, divorced from it, are but shadowy and unsubstantial things.

In all states of normal experience the Self is covered or encased in five different sheaths which have been named (1) Annamayakosa, the gross physical sheath, (2) Pranamaya Kosa, the sheath of the vital force, (3) Manomaya Kosa, the sheath of the mind, (4) Vijnanamaya Kosa, the sheath of the intelligence and (5) Anandamaya Kosa, the sheath of bliss. Each of these is finer than the one preceding it and the finer always pervades the grosser sheaths. The Self or the Atman however is finer than the finest of all the sheaths and is altogether different in its nature from all of them. It causes its illumination shine more brightly and better through

the finer sheaths than through the grosser ones. The true nature of Atman is revealed only when one can overcome the ignorance which makes a person identify himself with one or more of the sheaths or Kosas. Of these Kosas the Sthula Sharira, the gross or physical body comprises Annamaya Kosa or the sheath that is the product of food, the Sukshma Sharira, the subtle body comprises the three Kosas Pranamaya, Manomaya and Vijnanamaya, while the Karan Sharira, the causal body comprises the Anandamaya Kosa or the blissful sheath.

This ignorance (Avidya or Maya) is by nature very persistent. It persists as long as the creation lasts through the different stages called Srishti or creation, Sthiti or preservation and Pralaya or dissolution. It has two powers: that of veiling (Avarana Shakti) and projection (Vikshepa Shakti). The veiling aspect of ignorance is negative while the projecting aspect is positive and active. For instance, a rope lying on the road is mistaken for a snake. Ignorance is essentially an illusion or an unsubstantial thing though it covers up and conceals Sachidananda (the three aspects of Brahman: existence, knowledge and bliss) as a cloud or even a small thing like a hand can cover up the sun which is many million times bigger and powerful than the cloud or the hand but however veiled or concealed the nature of the Self remains the same as effulgent as before.

Three steps have been prescribed by the Vedanta which have to be taken for the realisation of the Supreme Knowledge viz Sravaṇa or listening to the instructions of the qualified teacher Manana or reflection on such instructions and attaining true conviction as to the reality of the Self, the Nidhī-dhyasana or realisation of the true nature of the Self by patient constant and persistent practice It is only unremitting practice of these methods that can bring a state of ultimate absorption or Samadhī which is a state of self-realisation or realisation of Brahman As the necessary aids to such practice renunciation has been enjoined by all spiritual teachers The greatest renunciation is the sacrifice of one's ego, for the true nature of the Self can never be revealed so long as the ego and the consciousness of it persists

The stories narrated in this book have been divided into three chapters under the headings

- 1 Self Analysis including two sections
Ways of the World and Ways of Self-study
- 2 Self-unfoldment and
- 3 Self-fulfilment

The stories and the anecdotes and legends have been mainly taken from the Upanishads the lives of saints and sages like Śrī Rama Śrī Krishna Buddha Shankara Ramakrishna and Vivekananda their sayings and utterances Some of the stories may appear to

have very little connection with spiritual matters but they have been included in order that certain significant aspects of the lives of worldly-minded people may be borne in mind and in order to help the reader with analytical reflections on human nature. It will be found that the stories have not been divided into watertight compartments but that some of them would belong to one or more of the divisions.

The Vedanta declares that the ultimate state of self-realisation is not one that can be described in words. According to the Upanishads 'Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha', 'Whence words and the power of speech come back, with the mind baffled'. It has not been found possible to give any story relating to this condition other than what the author has been able to secure from some of the Upanishads.

The author hopes that the careful reader of this book will get hints and suggestions as how to get rid of the obstacles to spiritual realisation like fear, anger, attachment, avarice, pride, conceit and other weaknesses that prevent the development of the spiritual life and it is hoped that a perusal of this book will assist the reader in finding and realising the path enjoined by our ancient scriptures upon all seekers of knowledge.

VEDANTA THROUGH STORIES

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the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age has increased by 1.2 billion, from 1.1 billion in 1980 to 2.3 billion in 1999. The number of people aged 15 years and over has increased by 1.1 billion, from 1.1 billion in 1980 to 2.2 billion in 1999.

There are a number of reasons why the world population is growing so rapidly. One of the main reasons is that the number of people who are surviving to old age is increasing. In 1980, only 10% of the world population was aged 65 years and over. By 1999, this figure had risen to 12%.

Another reason why the world population is growing so rapidly is that the number of people who are having children is increasing. In 1980, the average woman had 2.5 children. By 1999, this figure had risen to 2.7.

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CHAPTER I—SELF ANALYSIS

SECTION I

WAYS OF THE WORLD

1 BUDDHA AND HIS DISCIPLES

Once upon a time while Buddha was preaching to his disciples a thief and a public woman came to listen to his discourse. When the sun set, Buddha said, "The sun has set" and stopped his discourse. The disciples understood that to be the signal for them to go and begin to practise meditation. The thief understood him to mean that now that the sun has set he could have full liberty for practising his nefarious profession. The woman also understood the remark as meaning that she could go and prepare to receive her visitors.

2 CALLOUS SON

A father with his son used to ply a boat on hire. Once they had to ply the boat for a long distance and both of them felt exhausted. They stopped the boat and the father went to the nearest market and purchased twelve oranges for both of them. The son went on pulling the oar while the father rested, eating the fruits. The father ate six out of the twelve oranges, but finding that he was not satisfied, took one more orange, saying, "Who can say how

many days more I shall live?" Having finished that he went to relieve his son and the boy after eating all the five oranges that were left went on resting without going to relieve his father. The father who had got thoroughly tired said, "Look here, my son, I am very tired. You must come and take my place." The son replied, "Carry on father. Who can say how long you will live to carry on this work?"

3 SHAKE BEFORE USE

A child had fallen seriously ill and its grandmother was asked to look after it. She was given a bottle of medicine which carried a label on which were inscribed the words "Shake before use" in bold letters. Reading those words she first shook the child briskly and then gave it a dose. In consequence, the child got a relapse of the fever from which it had been suffering. When the doctor came, he was surprised to find it so seriously ill. He began to enquire as to the details of the nursing and discovered the way in which the old lady had construed the words printed on the label. He told her that it was the medicine that was to be shaken and not the child.

4 ADOPTION OF A SON.

A man who was immensely wealthy, not being blessed with a son, was anxious to adopt a son who would inherit all his wealth. When his desire for adoption became known, many candidates called at

his house and each of them related the merits he possessed and the advantages the wealthy man would derive by adopting him. One of the candidates was an octogenarian who had not only a son and a grandson but a great grandson also. The wealthy man and others seated with him, when the old man appeared for interview, expressed their surprise that such an old man wanted to be adopted. The old man, however, said, "Sir, if you adopt me, it would be the best thing possible. You are now worrying as to who should inherit your wealth, but if you adopt me as your son you will not have to worry for three generations to come, for I am a great grandfather in the direct line."

5 CLEVERER THAN I

In a school for problem children, guardians were provided for the different classes of children that had to be dealt with. One particularly difficult boy, once escaping the notice of his teacher, started throwing stones at a big glass case belonging to the school. The glass case was at some distance and the boy, though he tried several times, did not succeed in hitting it. His teacher found him engaged in this mischievous activity, and seeing what he was aiming at, he also picked up a stone and threw it at the glass which was completely smashed by the impact. The boy, surprised, looked back and found that it was his teacher who had thrown the stone.

which had smashed the glass. He understood that his teacher could be his teacher even in mischief and that he did not want forcibly to restrain him in any act but to help him as much as possible, and since then he became one of the best behaved boys of the school.

6 UNPRACTICAL INTELLECTUALITY

Two friends once went out to see a mango orchard. On entering the garden they saw many beautiful creepers, fine trees, full of ripe fruits, and well-grown plants. One of them, being of a calculating turn of mind, went on counting the number of leaves and the number of branches on each tree and the number of fruits and so forth. The other, who was an epicure, went to a tree with ripe mangoes and started plucking and eating them to his heart's content. The gardener meanwhile discovered the entry of the two persons and coming near them asked them to leave the garden immediately. The second man who had eaten as many mangoes as he could desire, left immediately. The other hesitated to leave the place because he had not finished his calculations. He had to be forcibly ejected by the gardener from the garden.

7 INCURABLE HABIT.

Once upon a time a number of fisherwomen on their way back home were caught in a stormy rain.

and they sought shelter in a garden full of roses. As night came on, they lay down for sleep on the verandah of a cottage in the garden, but they found that the smell of roses, which was strong, prevented their sleep. About midnight they got up and taking their fish baskets, soaked them in the rain water and placed them as near their noses as possible. The baskets gave out the powerful fishy odour to which they were accustomed and thereafter they fell into sound sleep.

8 PRAYER WITH A RESERVATION

A poor man was praying intently to the Mother Goddess, saying, "Oh great mother, if thou givest me a rupee I shall give thee half the amount." He went on saying his prayer aloud from place to place. At last he chanced upon a half-rupee coin lying on the road, picked it up and said, "Oh mother, thou art clever, for thou hast already kept thy half of the rupee and sent me the other half."

9 INDISCRIMINATE CHARITY.

Once a thief needing some implements with which he could carry on his profession, assumed the garb of a very poor man and going to the house of a charitable person asked for ten rupees. As the householder was not in the habit of enquiring for what purposes an applicant required money, he gave the thief ten rupees. The thief then went to the

market and purchased the implements he needed. In course of time he successfully committed many thefts and burglaries

It was discovered that the cause of all the crimes committed by the thief was the generous gift received from the charitable person. Thus indiscriminate charity led to evil results

10 THE DISHONEST MISER

There was a miserly merchant who had amassed an immense fortune. He was extremely self-centred and kept very little touch with other members of the society. He had a daughter who had attained marriageable age but he found it impossible to get the necessary ceremonies of the marriage accomplished without the help of other people. He saw the leaders of society and proposed that he would feed all people for two days on the occasion of his daughter's marriage and asked them to prepare the details of the dishes that should be prepared on the occasion. He next proposed that as everybody would be busy on the day of the marriage the feeding of the people should commence on the day after the marriage.

The marriage was duly celebrated when the people who attended were treated to pan-supari and beedis. A few days later, some of the leaders came to see him and they raised the question of feeding the people, when the merchant said that he would think about it as soon as all the ceremonies subse-

quent to the marriage were over After the last of such ceremonies were over, nothing however was done by the merchant for months

One day as he returned from the market some young persons met him and asked when he intended to give the promised feast They did not get any satisfactory answer and afterwards discussions and arguments arose between them The young men became incensed by the merchant's attitude and at length started giving him blows With each blow they asked him, "How now?" The merchant replied, "What of it? Will the blows which you are landing bring you anything? Whose money is saved, yours or mine?"

11 SELF-DEFEATING WORLDLY HOPES

A milk man, while going to the market to sell milk, became absorbed with the dreams of his future He thought that with the profits he would purchase some ducks, that the ducks would give birth to a number of ducklings which he might be able to sell for sufficient profit to enable him to invest in a cow The cow would calve a number of times within a few years and would thus enable him to purchase a horse and even an elephant, and as he made the appropriate movements with his body, the milk pot slipped from his head and broke into pieces Thus all his hopes were shattered like the pot

12 WHY WORLDLY PEOPLE CANNOT ATTAIN GOD REALISATION

Once upon a time a devotee of God came to a saint of the locality and went on denouncing worldly people and their ways of life. The saint said, "Have you seen a crab? The mother crab gives birth to hundreds of small crabs and lives in a hole with her children, but she has to go out in search of food. She comes out of the hole but must on account of the little ones go into the hole again. Having given birth to hundreds of children she has no energy or thought left for herself. Worldly people, similarly, having been engaged in various concerns, exhaust their minds. How can they pay attention to the realisation of God? If any of them makes an attempt, he is immediately overwhelmed by the demands of his worldly concerns and possessions. That is why it is difficult for worldly people to attain realisation of God."

13 THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

Once upon a time a king got a tank dug and desired that it should be a reservoir of milk. So he ordered all his subjects each to bring a seer of milk and pour it into the tank the next day. One of them thought that as everybody would be pouring his share of milk it would not matter if he poured a seer of water and that he would not be detected. But

the same thought arose in everybody else's mind also When the king came in the evening of the next day expecting to see the tank overflowing with milk he found that it was full of water

14 FRIEND IN PROSPERITY.

Two friends, while on their way to a village, had to pass through a dense forest There they suddenly came across a tiger One of them immediately climbed a big tree which was near, but the other, not knowing how to climb a tree and suddenly remembering that a tiger would not touch a dead body, fell on the ground pretending that he was dead The tiger came near the man lying motionless, smelt his body for a minute or so, and then went away The man who had climbed the tree saw all this and on coming down asked his friend what the tiger had whispered in his ears His friend said, "The tiger asked me not to rely on a friend who can desert me at the approach of danger "

15 THE DANGER OF FLATTERY.

A teacher while instructing his students was describing the evil effects of flattery He said, "Have you not seen a kind of fish which you can puff up by blowing into its mouth? The more it is blown into, the more it swells, till a time comes when it bursts and dies Once upon a time a king was invaded by his enemy The matter was discussed

for hours by his cabinet. Unfortunately, he had a number of flatterers in his cabinet who assured him that nothing could happen to him as he was a very mighty king. The king felt so much flattered that he took no action or precaution, with the result that the enemy invaded his kingdom and having conquered it put him to an ignominious death."

16 FOOLISH COURTESY

Two friends were going on a pilgrimage to a certain holy place. They went to the railway station and when the train arrived one asked the other out of politeness to board the train first. The other also did not want to seem lacking in courtesy and asked the first man to board the train before him. They went on making such requests to each other when the train left the platform without either of them having boarded it. Thus they lost their chance on that day of going to the holy place.

SECTION II
WAYS OF SELF-STUDY
17 IF 52 WHY NOT 53?

A decoit with 52 murders to his credit decided to reform. With a contrite heart he went to a temple of Shiva, confessed his sins and prayed for pardon, promising never again to commit such offences. His life thereafter was one of prayers and penances.

Once while walking in a lonely forest in the evening he heard cries for help. On going to the spot where the cries were coming from, he found a band of travellers attacked by a ruffian. If he was to save them there was no alternative to killing the ruffian, and all killing he had forsworn. What was he to do? Thinking quickly, he decided, "If 52, why not 53? One more murder won't add so much to my sins." And straightaway he killed the ruffian and rescued the travellers.

But he was perturbed greatly at having broken his promise to the great Lord Shiva. He prayed to be forgiven for his lapse. Suddenly he heard the God's voice, "Take heart, my son, for you have committed no sin but an act of merit. You have, by this act, sufficiently atoned for all your previous sins."

18 THE CASE OF MISUNDERSTANDING

A beggar while on his way to a distant village saw many people riding on horses. As he was very tired he started praying aloud, "Oh God, grant that I may have a horse to ride." One of the passengers was riding a mare which was quick with child, and as it came near the beggar it gave birth to a colt. The rider was in a fix as to what should be done with the new-born colt. He saw the beggar and told him to take the young colt upon his shoulders and to follow him. The beggar realised that his prayer has been heard by God but that he had been misunderstood. He went with the colt on his shoulders saying, "Oh God, thou has misconstrued my prayer. I wanted to ride but not to be ridden by a horse."

19 SREE RAMA & HANUMAN

Once Sree Rama was highly pleased with his faithful devotee, Hanuman, and gave him a necklace of pearls. Hanuman with all humility received it, turned it over and over and broke one of the pearls with his teeth and looked inside. He then threw away the whole necklace of pearls. Lakshmana who was watching him exclaimed, "Here is a monkey who does not know the worth of pearls. Not only has he spoiled the necklace by breaking a pearl with his teeth but he has thrown it away as if it were a clod of earth." Rama told him to ask Hanuman

why he had acted in this manner. On being questioned Hanuman replied, "I looked to see whether the necklace contained any image or name of Sree Rama. As I did not find either I threw it away."

20 NON-VIOLENCE IN PRACTICE.

A ferocious snake used to live in a hole in the middle of a meadow where cowherds used to bring their cows to graze. They were all afraid of the snake. Once they found the sage Narada proceeding in the direction of the meadow. They told him that there was a ferocious snake there. Narada went in the direction of the hole and the snake came out, lay as if spell-bound at his feet and prayed to him for his blessing. Narada gave it a sacred name to meditate upon and asked it not to injure anybody any more. Thereafter a change came over the life of the snake. It no longer tried to bite any one and lived a quiet and peaceful life. The cowherds noticed the change and finding that it had become harmless began to pelt it with stones, beat and trouble it in many other ways whenever it came out of its hole. All this told heavily on the snake's health and one day, when it was almost on the point of death, Narada again was passing by the same place. The snake told him all that had happened, but Narada said, "Why do you not hiss and frighten the boys?" The snake reminded him that it had been asked not to injure anybody. "Well", said

Narada, "I have asked you not to injure anybody but I never forbade you to hiss and frighten the boys in order to keep them away. If you had done that you would have never been reduced to your present condition."

21 AMBITION AND RENUNCIATION

A man got tired of the world and wanted to lead a life of renunciation. He went to a hermitage and going up to the head of the institution enquired how he could join it. The head of the hermitage said, "There are two classes of people living here, the preceptors or Gurus who could teach and guide the disciples and the disciples who are to obey and follow the teachings of the Gurus. Which of the two classes do you want to join?" The man said with folded hands and with all appearance of humility, "May I be admitted to the class of preceptors?"

22 APPARENT & REAL.

A fisherman repeatedly cast his net in a tank but all his attempts to catch fish ended in failure. He was surprised to find that as soon as he prepared to cast his net all the fish withdrew from the water round about him. Next day he again went to the tank and found a monk with his ochre-coloured robe bathing in it and a large number of fishes playing around him. He thought that it was the ochre-

coloured garb that had attracted the fish, and putting on such a robe went into the water when he found that the fishes came near and played around him. He asked himself that if the mere fact of his personating a sadhu had such an effect, how great would be the consequences of his becoming a real sadhu. This reflection brought about a change in his mind and he gave up the fisherman's life and took to the way of religion. Ultimately he became a saint.

23 THE KING'S BROTHER-IN-LAW

A king had a Dewan who was much devoted to his duty and was very faithful to his master. At his queen's persistent requests, the king had to appoint her brother as a high official in the kingdom. This brother-in-law of the king, finding that the Dewan did not pay as much respect for him as he expected, complained to the king the Dewan's disrespectful attitude. The king said to the Dewan, "Dewan Sahib, some people in my palace have been complaining that you do not show sufficient respect to them." The Dewan said, "Raja Sahib, as God incarnated himself in ancient times in the form of a boar, his image in that form is respected by all, but that is no reason why people should pay any respect to each and every boar."

24 THE CONSEQUENCES OF ATTACHMENT

A monk who was living in a city found it unsuitable for his spiritual practices. He, therefore,

repaired to a forest and found its solitude congenial and suitable. One day, however, he found that his loin cloth had been eaten into shreds by rats. In order to get rid of the rats he procured a cat. But the next problem was how to maintain the cat. Accordingly, he brought a cow with its calf. It now became necessary that there should be somebody to attend on them. He found a boy for doing this work. The boy, however, could not live alone in the forest. So, his parents were brought to the forest. The boy grew up and attained marriageable age. He was then married to the only daughter in a certain family. Thereafter, the boy's parents-in-law also came to live in the forest. These families attracted other families and the forest soon became a crowded village which began to expand into a city. The monk reflected that all this was the consequence of his desire to protect his loin cloth.

25 INDRA & THE GARDENER.

In the sacred city of Banaras there was a beautiful garden full of flower plants and fruit trees of many kinds. One day a cow entered the garden and did a great deal of damage to the plants. The gardener on finding this state of affairs came out with a bamboo and belaboured the cow so much that it fell down and died. He then became greatly concerned with the consequences of his act, and wanting to get rid of the sin of cow-killing, reasoned

that the sin had been committed by his hands and that the presiding deity of hands, namely the king of Gods, Indra, was responsible for the sinful act and not he. It is said that the sin learnt all about the line of reasoning of the gardener and approaching Indra told him of the manner in which the gardener wanted to shirk his responsibility. Thereupon Indra disguised himself as a human being and going to the garden in question he met the gardener and began to praise the beauty of the flowers, the trees and the layout of the garden. The gardener, thus flattered, started showing Indra the different beauty spots in the garden, whereupon Indra said, "This garden defeats even the garden of Indra. Who has made it?" The gardener said, "I alone have made this garden with my own labour." Indra asked, "Do you mean that you have worked with your own hands?" and the proud gardener said, "With these hands of mine." Indra then appeared in his original form and said to the gardener, "How is it that if you made the garden with your own hands you did not kill the cow with the same hands?" The gardener was nonplussed, and it is said that the sin of cow-killing, who was nearby at once fell on the shoulders of the gardener.

26 EDUCATION OF A PRINCE

A king had a son who was extremely fond of sports, but all attempts to teach him the alphabets

or the rudiments of arithmetic failed, though a number of able teachers were appointed one after another to teach him. The king then issued a proclamation that any person who was able to teach the prince the alphabets within a period of six months would be given a lakh of rupees. There were a large number of applicants including the most learned men of the kingdom. One of the candidates was however a person who possessed no degrees at all. The king having found that men possessing degrees had been useless, decided to try the man who had no degrees and appointed him

For the first few days the teacher made no effort at all to teach anything to the prince but always went about with him. Finding that the prince was extremely fond of pigeons he asked the prince how many pigeons there were in the palace. The prince informed him that there were 500 of them. The teacher then told the prince that the number was extremely small for a palace and that it would be a good thing if there were 5000 pigeons. The prince said that he would be very glad to have so many pigeons but that his father considered them a nuisance. The teacher then said that he would persuade his father to get the required number of pigeons. Next morning the prince was surprised to see that there were a very large number of pigeons in the courtyard and that carpenters were very busy

making new dovecots for them. This increased the prince's respect for his teacher. The teacher next proposed that there should be 10,000 and next day the prince found that the number had been increased. The teacher now proposed that the pigeons should be classified according to colours: all black ones being housed in one cottage, the white ones in another and so forth. The birds were then separated according to their colours and later they were all trained so that each group flocked together, each of them going to the place allotted to it. All these developments delighted the pupil and he began to regard his teacher as the best of all the teachers that had been engaged for him.

The teacher next proposed that the pigeons should be given names so that when one of them was called by name it should come to them. With the help of servants the pigeons were arranged in rows and the teacher then began to name the birds. The first few were assigned the names of the different vowels as A, Ā etc., and then the consonants. Soon the prince got all the names by heart. The next day the pigeons were named after consonants combined with vowels, and later batches of them were given names after combined consonants and vowels. Gradually the teacher could easily prevail upon the prince to commit the names of the birds, and thus within three months the prince learnt all the alphabets and

also had learnt to write. When the matter was reported to the king he was immensely pleased. As the teacher had taught the prince something more, i.e., writing, than what had been bargained for, the king gave the teacher a reward of 3 lakhs of rupees.

27 THE BUTCHER AND THE COW

Once Sri Ramakrishna was the guest at the house of one of his nephews where a religious ceremony was going to be performed. One of the uninvited visitors of the host came into the room where Sri Ramakrishna was sitting and as soon as he left the room Sri Ramakrishna asked his disciples to get the place cleaned by a sprinkle of Ganges water and asked his nephew not to retain that servant in his house any more.

The nephew, however, did not pay much attention to what Sri Ramakrishna told him and the man was not dismissed. Some time later, Sri Ramakrishna came to know that the man had not been dismissed and told his nephew that if his advice was not followed he would leave the house then and there. The nephew consequently, though reluctantly, had to dismiss the man. Realising that his nephew had not understood the reason why he had given such advice, Sri Ramakrishna called him and said, "I shall tell you the story of a butcher who had to take a cow to the slaughter house. The cow resisted the butcher's attempt to drag it and the

latter feeling tired in his efforts to take it to the slaughter house, tied it to a tree taking particular care to see that the cow could not get even a blade of grass. He then went to a house where a great feast was going on and had a hearty meal there. The cow who had been starving all this time had now become weaker when the butcher returned after his meal. So, this time he could successfully drag the cow to the slaughter house. The gentleman who gave the feast and fed the butcher sumptuously, though confident that he had been able to accumulate a lot of religious merit, had to share the major part of the sin due to the slaughter of the cow. That sin has more than outweighed his virtues. It is not desirable that you, by association with a man who appeared to have been a man of endless vices, should become subject to heinous sin unnecessarily."

28 ANGLES OF VISION

A thief once tried throughout the whole night to effect an entry into a certain house but was unsuccessful. Being dead tired of his work at night he lay under a banyan tree on the public road and went to sleep. Another thief came that way and seeing him said, "Here is somebody evidently of my profession who having been unsuccessful in his efforts has fallen asleep." Next came a drunkard and seeing the sleeping man said, "I see a friend

who has drunk more than myself, who can neither stand nor sit nor keep awake owing to intoxication " Then came a saint through the same road Seeing the man lying prostrate he said, "This man is truly in Samadhi He is blessed indeed "

29 MERE LEARNING IS NOT ENOUGH

In the age in which Shankaracharya lived there was a great scholar and savant named Mandanamishra who was a supporter of the Mimamsa section of the Vedas Shankara in the course of his travels, in which he used to preach and popularise the Advaita Vedanta, found necessary once to defeat the doctrine propounded by Mandanamishra and suggested that they should hold a debate in order to ascertain whether Karma (the way of selfless work) according to Mandanamishra or Jnana (the way of knowledge) according to Shankara was superior The two agreed that whoever lost the debate should become the disciple of the other They found it, however, very difficult to find somebody who would sit as the judge to decide which was the winning party Mandanamishra's wife Ubhaya Bharati was very learned and well-known for her erudition in many parts of the country, and Shankara, therefore, proposed that she should be the judge Mandanamishra agreed and as Ubhaya Bharati too had no objection, she sat as the presiding judge over the debate The debate went on for days together,

at the end of which it was clear that it was Mandanamishra who was defeated. The judge, however, before giving her verdict said that it could not be said that Shankara had completely defeated Mandanamishra because the latter's wife was half of his self, and therefore unless she too was defeated Mandanamishra could not be said to have been totally defeated.

Shankara thereupon agreed to have a debate with her also and Mandanamishra was appointed as the judge in the debate. As soon as the debate started, Ubhaya Bharati put certain questions to Shankara to which a married man alone could reply. Shankara was a celibate and was not in a position to answer the question. He, accordingly, had to ask for six months' time within which he would be able to acquaint himself with the subject and facts to reply to the questions put to him. At the end of this period Shankara came back and answered all the questions put by Ubhaya Bharati to the judge's satisfaction. Mandanamishra was accordingly held to have been completely vanquished. He, therefore, left his wife and home and followed Shankara as his disciple.

30 DEPENDENCE UPON GOD

As an itinerant monk, Swami Vivekananda used to go about throughout the length and breadth of India with only one piece of cloth and a staff in

hand One day, he came to a railway station altogether tired, having been without food for the whole day He lay down for sleep at the station A confectioner in the town had a dream in which his "Chosen deity" (Ishta Devata) appeared and told him that a devotee of His was lying at the station without food and asked him to go there and offer sweets to him Immediately he took some of his preparations and water and went to the railway station and awakening the Swamiji gave him the sweets Swamiji wondered at the mysterious ways of Providence

31 THE WORLD IS BUT A DREAM

A son was born to a king He was the only child and was therefore "the apple of the eye" of both the king and the queen The prince became a favourite with all and as he grew older he was taught all the arts and the sciences One day, all of a sudden, the prince fell ill The malady went on getting worse and even the best physician of the kingdom found that all treatments were of no avail Both the king and the queen never left his side day and night and the most competent physicians and nurses continuously attended on him The king was exhausted by his constant vigil and one night he could not resist falling asleep He was awakened by the sounds of crying and weeping and learnt that the prince had passed away while he was asleep

The king sat as if he was stupefied, without speaking a single word. The queen asked him how it was that on the passing away of the only child whom he loved so much there was not a single drop of tear in his eyes. The king said, "Oh queen, when I fell asleep I dreamt that I had become the monarch of a large kingdom, much larger than of mine, and the father of seven worthy and ideal princes, each of whom was well trained in the art of administration. I handed over the charge of my kingdom to them and thereafter I was spending my days in peace and happiness with you. And now this tragedy has taken place and I am unable to make up my mind whether I should lament for the child that has left us today or whether I should mourn the loss of the seven sons and a vast kingdom. I see no difference in the two bereavements and to me the world has become nothing but a dream."

32 SHEDDING OF EGOISM

A cowherd while returning home with his cows found a saint sitting under the roadside tree plunged in meditation. Something in the face and attitude of the saint made a deep impression on him and he decided to ask the saint for being initiated into spiritual practice. When he made his prayer to the saint, the latter looked at him and asked whether he could come next day with something which was inferior to himself. The cowherd agreed and on

reaching home decided to take one of his cows with him next day. With this object he selected a cow and as he was going to tie it in a separate place from the rest of the cows in order that it might not be, through mistake, taken away to the field for grazing the next morning, the cow asked him why she was being segregated. The cowherd thereupon told her of his decision and the reason why she would be wanted the next morning, she being an animal inferior to man. The cow was greatly incensed and said, "What do you mean by saying that a cow is inferior to man? The cow is the mother of mankind and is revered by every human being. Is it possible for man to live without cows' milk? How then do you call me inferior to yourself?"

The cowherd could not answer this argument and he thereupon decided to take something else to the saint next day. He went to a field and thought that he would take a tuft of grass which must surely be inferior to man. As he was going to cut off a tuft of grass, the grass asked, "Why are you cutting me at night when nobody cuts grass?" The cowherd again explained the object with which he was cutting the grass. The grass then said, "You know, I am the food of all cows and they will give milk only when they are fed on me and you derive your nourishment from the cows' milk. How is it, then, that I am considered inferior?" The cowherd

again, could not reply to this line of argument. So he gave up the idea of taking grass. He made several other attempts to find something inferior to himself and gradually began to consider himself as the most humble being on earth, and he thought that he would after taking a bath in the river inform the saint that he had been unable to find anything inferior to himself. The next morning as he was taking his bath in the river he found lumps of night soil floating in the water. Then he thought that this thing must be inferior to himself in every respect. Accordingly he tried to remove a part of a lump of night soil with the help of a leaf but as he was trying to do so, the lump suddenly exclaimed, "Do not touch me. I do not wish to be touched by you." When the cowherd asked why, it replied, "You know that I was originally the best of fruits and other kinds of food, and the best of sweets and other offerings made to deities in temples, and it is only after these things were eaten by human beings that they have been reduced to my present condition. Mankind alone is responsible for so much humiliation inflicted on me and I do not want your contact for a second time lest worse fate befall me."

This confirmed the cowherd's belief that nothing was inferior to himself. He, therefore, finished his bath, went to the saint and said, "Revered Sir, I am

convinced that I am the lowliest being on earth and I have not, therefore, been able to bring anything inferior to myself " The saint found that the cowherd had realised that egoism must be got rid of before spiritual initiation could begin He, therefore, initiated the cowherd into spiritual practices He passed for a great saint in later age

33 HOW ILLUSION WORKS

A man while taking his evening walk at dusk came near a piece of rope lying on the ground and took it for a snake He got frightened and started running, crying out that there was a snake, he fell down on the ground and broke his leg Several other persons came out with sticks on hearing his shouts and coming near the rope, and also thinking that it was a snake, started giving it blows In the course of such operations some hit others on their heads whereupon quarrels ensued and other people came to find out what had happened They came with lanterns and discovered that the thing which had been mistaken for the snake was merely a piece of rope lying on the ground The mistake committed by one man and followed by others had resulted in a fracture of a leg, the breaking of several heads and violent quarrel which had no real cause

34 A CROW AND ITS CHILD

A young one of a crow was ill and the crow tried the treatment of all physicians but to no purpose

She felt absolutely helpless and therefore asked all her friends and relations to give her their advice as to what to do. They put forward many proposals, but the mother crow did not feel convinced as most of them had been tried before. The crow's sister finally proposed that an offer of gift or sacrifice should be made to a god or goddess in case the young one recovered. The mother crow thought for a while of the possible gods or goddesses to whom such an offering could be made, but said at last that as the young one had left none of the gods and goddesses unannoyed by pouncing upon the offerings made to them by others, she found it difficult to choose a god or goddess who could be propitiated by offerings.

35 POLITE RETORT

Once upon a time Lord Buddha was abused by a certain person. After listening to him for a while, Buddha asked, "My son, if a person to whom a present is offered declines it, to whom would it belong?" The man replied, "To him, of course, who has offered it." Lord Buddha said, "Well, my son, I decline to accept your abuse, so that you will keep it with yourself." Humbled by this reply, the man silently went away.

36 THE GREATEST OF THE ORGANS OF SENSE

A quarrel once arose amongst the various organs of the senses, viz., ears, eyes, speech, mind and the vital force as to which of them was the greatest of

all Each of them asserted that it was the greatest As they could not decide the question, they went to the creator—Prajapati or Brahman—and asked him to arbitrate Not wanting to displease any of them, he said that they should decide the matter among themselves, but they told him that with all their best efforts they had not been able to come to a decision and therefore asked him to give a decision Prajapati then said that the one whose leaving the body would cause it to stink was the greatest among them

The organs thereupon went and tried the experiment of each of them leaving the body for the period of one year, one after another, and watching the result The organ of speech was the first to leave the body and the body was left dumb for one year After the period was over, it returned to the body which reverted to its normal position as before Thereafter, the power of sight left the body for a year, with the same result except that the affected part was the eyes The ears, the power of hearing then left the body leaving it deaf for a year, but its general condition remained as good as before Similarly, the mind also left the body, which behaved like that of an infant with undeveloped consciousness, during the period Last of all came the turn of the vital force Just as it made an attempt to leave the body, all the functions of the different organs were on the point of coming to a stand-still They

all cried, "Stop Do not leave us We shall have no existence if you do so "

37 PRIDE AND ITS FALL

There was a young son of a Rishi named Balaki who was proud of his learning in the Vedas He used to display his learning to everyone and thought that he would become famous if he went and imparted his knowledge to the kings and rulers

He, therefore, went to the king of Kashi, Ajatasatru, and proposed that the king should receive instructions from him about Brahman Ajatasatru, who was well versed in the Vedas and the Vedanta, however, said in all humility that he would be prepared to learn from Balaki and that when he had mastered the Vedas, the Rishi's son would be rewarded with a thousand cows The king, however, from the beginning realised the shallowness of the young man's knowledge Balaki started by quoting a verse from the Vedas, but the king said that he knew it very well Balaki next recited another verse but unfortunately he could not quote it correctly He had to be corrected by Ajatasatru, who again said that he knew the verse very well Balaki thereupon made an attempt to give the gist of certain verses, but again it was quoted wrongly and with all humility Ajatasatru pointed out the mistake Being again and again put to shame owing to his defective

knowledge, Balaki became disillusioned and, shedding his false pride, had to admit that the king knew the subject far better than he

38 WHAT YOU SEEK IS WITHIN YOU

A man who was an inveterate smoker woke up one night and was seized with the desire to have a smoke. There was no fire in the house and he decided to go to his neighbour's house for getting the fire. As it was dark he took up a lantern that was burning in his house and going to the neighbour's house knocked at the door. The neighbour got up and asked what he wanted. The man said, "I want fire for lighting my tobacco". The neighbour said, "It is strange that though you have a fire in the lantern, you think fit to come and wake me up." "Ah yes", said the man, "I really forgot about the lantern" and went away ashamed at his own blunder.

39 LIMITATIONS OF EXPERIENCE

Once a frog that lived in the ocean came on land and as it hopped from place to place it dropped into a well. A small frog that lived in that well was surprised to see the size of the ocean frog. It asked the latter where it had come from and was told that it had come from the ocean. "How big is the ocean?", asked the small frog. "Is it as big as this?" and he jumped from one point to another in the well to indicate the size. The ocean frog told, "It is

much bigger than that " The small frog jumped a little farther and asked whether it was so big Again the ocean frog said that it was much bigger This went on for some time At last the small frog said, "You must be lying The ocean cannot be so big because there cannot be anything bigger than this well "

40 LIMITATIONS OF EARTHLY POSSESSIONS

A mendicant once went to the palace of Akbar, the emperor of India, who was known for his munificence and gifts As the emperor was at his prayers, the mendicant waited a short distance away He, however, heard the emperor finish his prayer by praying to the Almighty for more wealth, property and honour Having overheard this, the mendicant began to think that the emperor himself was nothing but another beggar and asked himself how one beggar could relieve the needs of another beggar He, therefore, went out of the palace The emperor on hearing that the mendicant had gone away, at once sent a servant to go and bring him back to the palace When the mendicant was brought before him, the emperor asked him why he had gone away without taking a gift from him The mendicant said, "Sire, I heard you saying your prayers in which you were asking the Almighty for more property, more wealth and more honour, and I found that your wants were a thousand times more than mine How

can you, who are yourself a beggar, help me in my need?" The emperor then realised his own limitations though he possessed vast powers and immense wealth

41 HOW THE SELF VANISHES BEFORE THE SUPREME LIGHT

On a dark night glow-worms flying about think that they are removing the darkness. When stars, however, begin to shine, the sky appears brighter and the light of the glow worms begins to fade. When the moon rises, the light of the stars begins to become dim and faint. When, however, the day dawns at the end of the night, the sun rises and puts out the light of all the luminaries of the night. Likewise, the egoistic self fades into insignificance when the light of the supreme self dawns in its glory.

42 GOOD & EVIL

A preceptor while instructing his disciples said, "This world of variety and multiplicity is a mixture of good and evil. There is no good without evil or evil without good. Pure unmixed good or evil does not exist by itself. Just as no ornaments can be made out of pure gold and they all require a certain amount of alloy with gold, creation is not possible without good and evil, and in this world of mixture of good and evil one should live by following the examples of swans or ants. If you put a mixture of

sand and sugar before ants they will carry away the sugar particles keeping aside the sand. Similarly, if you put a mixture of water and milk before a swan it will drink the milk keeping the water aside. Living, therefore, in the world one must practise analysis of good and evil at every stage, accepting all that is good."

43 PLEASURE AND PAIN

The preceptor continued, "The world is composed of higher and lower things, greater or smaller and is in quest of peace and happiness, and all want to avoid misery, but you must know that there is no pleasure and happiness without pain and misery. The two are, as it were, two sides of the same straight line, just as you cannot have one side of a straight line without the other, or the night without the day, or light without darkness, or pleasure and happiness without pain and misery. These are the necessary qualities of existence and are merely different aspects of the same underlying reality."

44 THE ATTAINMENT OF PEACE

The disciples thereupon asked the preceptor how it was possible to transcend the dualities mentioned by him. They enquired if there was a state beyond them and if so, how one could attain it. The preceptor replied, "As long as you live in the plane of dualities you cannot get rid of pleasure and pain, joy and grief, light and darkness and heat and

cold The three constituent components of nature are Satwa, Rajas and Tamas Tamas, inertia, is the state of no activity Rajas is the state of activity and struggle, so that Tamas and Rajas are like two opposing forces like attraction and repulsion or centrifugal and centripetal forces It is by Satwa that one can control the two and attain perfect balance or equanimity Pleasure and happiness and pain and misery are the results of two opposing forces, one being attraction and the other repulsion, and to attain peace or perfect balance we must get rid of both It is only by transcending the two opposing forces that we can attain to blessedness and peace If, therefore, you hope to live in the midst of dualities you should learn to be passive to all happenings in life and free from all attachments either to good or evil or to right or wrong "

45 THE GREATER SACRIFICE

An atheist used to meet frequently a friend who was a theist Each had regard for the other and looked upon each other as sincere friends The atheist, however, said to the theist one day, "Well, for God's sake what have you not done? You have given up all the pleasures and comforts of life" In reply the theist said to the atheist, "My sacrifice is nothing when compared with yours You have renounced the Lord, the creator of the Universe. Your sacrifice is greater than mine "

46 THE THREE ROBBERS

A traveller once met a band of three robbers who caught hold of him and robbed him of his belongings. The first robber said, "Let us kill this man or we may get into trouble". The second man said, "No, let us bind him to a tree and go away." The traveller was, therefore, tied to a tree and the three robbers went away. After a time the third robber came back, thinking that as they had got everything from the man, there was no point in restraining him further, and he untied the ropes with which he had been tied, and let him free. The first robber symbolizes Tamas or Ignorance, the second, Rajas or activity, and the third, Satwa or goodness. Tamas makes a man to commit crimes unnecessarily and multiply sufferings, and Rajas minimises the miseries of life consistently with its ordinary activities. But Satwa makes a man free from his worldly bondages.

47 FLEE NOT, BUT FACE THE TROUBLE.

Once Swami Vivekananda, as an itinerant monk happened to pass through some lonely forest near the city of Banaras. He suddenly found himself surrounded by a large band of monkeys. Not having even a staff in his hand to scare the monkeys away, he could think of no means of escaping from the monkeys except to run away. As he began to run, the monkeys also in their hundreds began to run

after him. The Swami felt exhausted and helpless, when he suddenly heard the words, "Flee not but face the trouble. Face it and it will flee from you." He stopped running at once and turning back faced the monkeys, when all of them appeared to get nonplussed, and then they started running away.

48 SVĒTAKĒTU

Svetaketu, the son of Aruni Rishi, was taught the Vedas by his father, but he became proud of his learning and wanted to go to the kingdom of Panchala in order to establish his superiority in the Vedic lore, as that part of the country was well known for its culture and learning and its king Prabahaṇ himself was reputed for his knowledge of both the scriptures and secular literature.

Svetaketu went to the king's court at Panchala, but the king had already heard that Svetaketu was a conceited young man. The king asked him whether his father had properly instructed him in the scriptures. Svetaketu replied that he had learnt everything that there was to learn. Thereupon, the king asked him five questions relating to birth and death. Svetaketu found that he could not answer those questions and said that he knew nothing about the subject. Crest-fallen he returned to his father's hermitage and told him how he had been humbled by the king. The father frankly said that he him-

self did not know anything regarding the subject-matter of the questions which the king had addressed to him. The old Rishi was, however, anxious to learn from the king what he did not know. So, he himself went to the king's palace in Panchala. Next day the king told him that he could have everything he liked but the Rishi refused to have anything and told him that he wanted spiritual knowledge and nothing else. The king thereupon asked him to stay at his palace for some time and gradually instructed him in the subject-matter of the five questions he had addressed to his son known as Panchagni Vidya. With the acquisition of such knowledge the Rishi became qualified in the supreme knowledge of the Upanishads.

49. STORY OF RATNAKAR

Ratnakar was a notorious robber who had committed many robberies and killed many men, women and children in the course of his career. He used to waylay the wayfarers passing through the forests. One day, Rishi Narada while passing through the same forest was caught hold of by Ratnakar. Narada asked him, "Why do you kill people and rob them of their belongings?" Ratnakar said that that was the only way in which he could maintain himself and his family. Narada then asked him whether he was not sorry that he was committing sins and whether any person of his family would participate

in the sins and the resultant karma Ratnakar said that all members of his family would participate in his karma Narada then asked him to go and enquire of his parents, wife and child if that was so

This question had never occurred to Ratnakar before and he now became somewhat perturbed After chaining Narada to a big tree lest he should escape, he went to his house and asked his parents whether they shared the sins which he committed everyday for maintaining them They said, "When you were a child we looked after you Now we have become old and it is your duty to maintain us Why should we now be answerable for your sins?" He then went to his wife and put the same question to her She replied, "Is it not your duty as my husband to maintain me? Did I ever ask you to rob and kill for my sake? Why should I share your sins?" All these replies made Ratnakar very despondent and he went to his son and put to him the same question The son said, "Father, I am a small boy and I am unable to work myself It is your duty to maintain me and when I attain proper age and am able to work it would then be my duty to maintain you in your old age How can I be responsible for your acts at present?" These replies worked a great change in the mind of Ratnakar who ran back to the forest, freed Narada from the chain and fell down at his feet Rishi Narada in his kindness gave him a mantra

consisting only of the name "Rama" and asked him to repeat that name everyday. The robber could not at first pronounce the sacred name but he persisted and went on repeating the name of Rama for a great many months and years. He left all his evil ways and adopted a life of austerity. After many years he attained great heights of spirituality by his devotion and singlemindedness. He became the author of the great epic, Ramayana, in which he wrote about the divine love and deeds of Rama and his consort Sita.

50 THE STORY OF EKALAVYA

Ekalavya was a prince in a country of certain aborigines. He went to Acharya Drona, the great teacher of archery, in order to learn that art. Drona would not accept anybody as his disciple who was not a Kshatriya. Ekalavya, therefore, had to come back from him, but he came with the resolute determination to learn archery at all costs. He went into the forest and, setting up an image of Drona as his Guru, began to practise penances in order to attain success. One day Drona, with Arjuna and others, went into the forest on a hunting excursion. They had a dog with them which, on seeing Ekalavya, dressed in dark and with long flowing hair, from a distance, began to bark. The barking of the dog roused Ekalavya from his meditation and in order to silence it he aimed a "Shabdabhedhi" arrow (i.e. one

which is aimed and shot merely with the aid of the victim's voice) The accuracy of the aim surprised Arjuna who himself had not learnt how to shoot the "Shabdabhedī" arrow, and he told his Guru Drona that they must go and see who had shot the arrow They all went and found Ekalavya engaged in archery practice When asked who his teacher was, Ekalavya said that Acharya Drona was his Guru Drona suggested to him that if that was so he should pay him his Gurudakshina (i.e. the teacher's fee) When Ekalavya said that he was prepared to do so, Drona revealed his identity and asked Ekalavya to give him as his fee the thumb of his right hand Without demur Ekalavya cut off the thumb and presented it to Drona Arjuna was astonished at this exhibition of noble spirit in one who was born of a lowly caste

51 THE PERILS OF UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT.

A man who had not learned to control his thoughts happened to come under a tree known as the "Wishing Tree" which granted all one's desires The man first thought that as he was tired it would be a good thing to have a cot to lie upon He at once found a cot in front of him and lay down and stretched himself upon it He next thought that if somebody massaged his tired limbs he would feel greatly refreshed At once an attendant came and massaged his body He then began to think of food

and immediately he got all the dainties he desired
Thereupon as he was lying down in the midst of the
forest, he became afraid lest a tiger should appear
and devour him Immediately a tiger appeared and
devoured him This is how one who cannot control
his thoughts meets with destruction

CHAPTER II

SELF UNFOLDMENT

1 WORLD IS LIKE A DOG'S TAIL

There was a poor man who had heard that if he could get hold of a ghost it could be commanded to bring or do anything he liked. He, therefore, went about looking for people who could help him to find a ghost. He came to a sage reputed to have great powers. The sage asked him, "What would you do with the ghost?" The poor man said, "I want the ghost to work under my command, for I desire so many things." The sage told him that he could not help him. The man, however, again went up to him the next day and began to weep saying that he must have a ghost. At last the sage, in order to get rid of him, gave him a magic word and said that if the word was repeated the ghost would come and do his bidding. He, however, told the poor man to see that the ghost was kept fully busy, otherwise the ghost would take his life. Having received the advice, the man went into a forest and uttered the magic word repeatedly whereupon the ghost made its appearance before him and said, "I have appeared by the force of your magic word. Give me some employment, otherwise I shall kill you." "Build me a palace," said the man and immediately he saw a beautiful palace standing before his eyes. The man

next said, "Bring me large quantities of money," and the next moment large piles of gold and silver coins were lying at his feet. The man next ordered the ghost to cut down the forest and to build a city in its place. The transformation took place in the twinkling of an eye and then the ghost demanded, "What shall I do now?" The man was at a loss to think of any fresh orders and this made him frightened, feeling that the ghost was now going to kill him. The ghost also told him, "Give me something to do or I shall kill you." Thereupon the poor man began to run to the place where the sage who had given him the charm was sitting. "Oh sir, protect my life," implored the man, and as he was explaining what had happened the ghost arrived saying, "I shall now eat you up," and it was on the point of swallowing the man. The sage said to the man, "You just draw your sword and cut the tail of the dog which is standing there. Give the tail to the ghost and ask him to straighten it out." The man cut the dog's tail and giving it to the ghost said, "Now straighten this out for me." When the ghost straightened the tail and let it go, it immediately curled up again. Again and again the ghost straightened it out only to find that it curled up as soon as the ghost let go of it. This went on for days and days until the ghost out of sheer despair said, "I have never been in such a trouble before." Going up to the man it said, "Will you let me off? If you will let me go

I promise I will never harm you " The man agreed and the ghost disappeared for ever

2 SHIVA & PARVATI

Shiva and Parvati were once playing dice In the midst of the game Shiva got up all on a sudden and went out. He came back after a short while and then Parvati asked him why he had left the game so abruptly. Shiva replied, "A devotee of mine was involved in danger and he remembered me " "Why," enquired Parvati, "have you come back so soon?" Shiva replied, "I went and found that he had decided to deal with the matter himself without my help "

3 DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT

A prince, who had got tired of worldly life, left his kingdom and went to a forest belonging to another king for practising penance. The king of that country, hearing that a prince was living in his forest, arranged that a royal dish with all kinds of dainties should be sent to him daily. A poor farmer, who used to pass by him daily, seeing the dainty dishes brought from the palace for the prince, decided to put on a similar garb and sit somewhere near the monk. To his utter surprise he found that the food that was served to him from the royal kitchen consisted of ordinary food while the other monk was being served with dainty dishes. When

this was reported to the king, he said, "The difference is this, that if the first monk leaves the sannyasin's garb today he will go back to his kingdom as a king, while if the other man leaves the garb and goes home he will be a farmer and nothing more "

4 TWO GARDENERS

A rich man had two gardeners for his garden. One of them was devoted exclusively to his work and used to go to the master's house every day with a basket of fruits and flowers, the products of the garden. The other used to do no work but took particular care to see his master twice every day, pay him respects and flatter him with the highest praises. The latter thought that the master was very pleased with him, but at the end of the year when the master rewarded his servants with presents for good work, he found that it was the dutiful gardener that was awarded a prize while he himself received none.

5 LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

After Swami Vivekananda had started organising his work in America in order to popularise Vedanta in that country he asked some of his brother monks to come and help him in that work. When they arrived in America, Vivekananda initiated them into the ways and customs of American

life One of the new monks had the habit of leaving his wrist watch on the table after coming back from his classes and lectures Swami Vivekananda had asked him on several occasions to keep the watch in a drawer but the young monk used to forget to follow his advice One day Swami Vivekananda told him, "I know, my dear brother, you care very little for the wrist watch, but do you not realise that by leaving the watch on the table you may be tempting some one to commit a theft? "

6 THE WAY OF SELFLESSNESS

After Swami Vivekananda had made a great name in America one of his brother monks who was proceeding to that country, consulted Sister Nivedita, who accompanied him, how he should work in the new country Sister Nivedita, seeing a knife lying by the side of the monk, asked him, "Please give me the knife." The Swami offered him the knife holding the blade in his hand so that the sister should seize it by the hilt Sister Nivedita thereupon said, "That is the right way, brother Keep yourself always on the side which is dangerous, leaving the safer side for others"

7 WORKINGS OF KARMA

A gentleman who lived with his wife and two sons got initiated by a monk of a high order The elder son was given to evil ways while the younger

was spiritually inclined and liked to spend his days in studying sacred scriptures. One day a learned man came to that village and it was arranged that he should give a religious discourse. All the people of the village went to hear the discourse. The elder brother, however, did not attend, though he was asked by his younger brother, to avail himself of the opportunity to hear a good religious discourse. When the father returned after hearing the discourse he found that his younger son had not returned. The older son, however, came back and handed over a lump of gold to his father, saying that he had picked it up on his way while returning home. The father and his elder son went with the servants in search of the younger son. They found him lying unconscious under a banyan tree. He was brought home and when he regained consciousness said that while coming back from the religious discourse his foot had struck violently against the stump of a tree and he had fallen down unconscious.

The father found it strange that the son who never thought of God even once in a day had found a lump of gold whereas the boy who was deeply devoted to God had met with an accident while returning home. Next day when his Guru came he told him all that had happened and then spoke about the doubt that had entered into his mind. He said that it seemed to him useless to say his prayers and

worship God if he was going to be awarded in this fashion. The Guru sat silent for a while engaged in deep concentration and then said that the past Karma of the elder son was so good that he could have become a king but that his evil conduct in the present life had reduced the good luck to his finding a lump of gold on the previous day, while the younger boy had been fated to die at the time the accident had taken place, but through the grace of God he had survived after meeting with a trifling accident.

8 GOOD COMETH OUT OF EVIL

A king once went out hunting with his prime minister. The king was an atheist but his prime minister had unshaken faith in God and believed that everything that befalls a man was ultimately for his good. The king saw a stag in the forest but while fixing the arrow to the bow string, one of his fingers got a cut from the sharp edge of the arrow. The prime minister assured the king that the cut he had got was for his good. This remark displeased the king, who looked around and finding a well nearby took the prime minister there and pushed him down into the well. The king told him in sarcasm that if he had fallen into the well it was for his own good.

The king now started to go back to his place. On his way he was seized by a gang of robbers who were preparing to worship the Goddess Kali. They

were in search of a man who could be sacrificed to the deity. The king was brought before the Goddess, bathed and taken to the priest for being offered to the deity. It was customary with the robbers not to sacrifice any person who was not sound and whole in body. At the suggestion of the priest the king's body was examined and the cut in his finger was detected. Thereupon the priest declined to sacrifice the king. He was accordingly allowed to go. The king now began to think over all the incidents of the day and finding that it was the cut in his finger that had saved him he realised the truth of what his prime minister had told him. He then went to the well into which he had pushed down his prime minister, and letting down a piece of cloth into the well dragged him out from the well. He told the prime minister all that had happened to him, and the latter also said that had the king not pushed him into the well the robbers would have certainly caught hold of him and sacrificed him.

9 IF ANYBODY STEALS YOUR SHIRT GIVE HIM THE CLOAK ALSO

Pavhari Baba was a great saint of Ghazipur. He used to live in a cave on a bank of the Ganges and spend most of his time in penance and meditation. One day while he was busy with meditation, a thief entered his cave and stole the only dish and lota (water pot) he possessed. When after a few

minutes, Pavhari Baba had finished his morning prayers and meditation and got up from his seat he saw the thief walking away from the cave with these two articles. He reflected that the thief must be in great need, and seeing that he had not taken his blanket as well, took it up and began to walk in the direction of the thief, trying to catch him up. The latter, however, thinking that Pavhari Baba wanted to catch hold of him, started running. The saint said, 'Don't be afraid of me in the least. I am not going to hand you over to the police. You must be in greater need than I and I am coming to give you my blanket which you have left behind.' The thief, amazed at the great generosity of the saint, came and fell at his feet. He turned over a new leaf completely, abandoning his evil ways of life. It is said that the thief later on became a saint of a high order.

10 THE WORKING OF MAYA (Part I)

While Sri Rama was in exile for fourteen years, he used to live in the forest with Sita and his brother Lakshmana, and when they had to walk from one place to another Sri Rama walked ahead followed by Sita and behind both of them was Lakshmana. Thus Sita was interposed between Lakshmana and Rama. Sri Rama represents the supreme soul, Lakshmana the individual soul and Sita represents Maya. The individual soul (Jivatma) cannot have

a vision of Supreme Soul (Paramatma) because of the veil of Maya which intervenes. It is only when Maya moves a little to one side that the individual soul (Jiva) can have a glimpse of the Supreme (Shiva)

11 THE WORKING OF MAYA (Part II)

Once God incarnated himself as a female boar, and gave birth to a number of pigs. The boar lived in a dirty place very happily with her young ones. She became so attached to the life she lived that when the time came for the Lord to return to heaven, she did not want to leave the world. The gods in heaven became perturbed at the long absence of the Lord, and going to Shiva they prayed to him that he must save the situation. He went down to the place where the boar lived and killed it with a stroke of his trident. At once, the Supreme Self left the body of the boar, smiling resplendent and went to the region of heaven.

12 THE WAY OF MAYA

Narada Rishi was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. The Lord once told him that the greatest of all his devotees was a particular householder living in a certain village. Narada Rishi was curious to see this devotee, and on going to his house found that he had to work from morning till night in order to maintain his family and he hardly found

time to perform any spiritual practice. He merely prostrated himself before the family deity once every day after taking his bath. Narada went back to Lord Vishnu and asked how it was that such a man had been described by him as the greatest of all His devotees. The latter said, "This man is so overburdened with the cares and worries of life that no one expects him to find any time to remember me, but still whatever else he may forget he never forgets to prostrate himself before me once a day. Any other man with so many cares and anxieties, and so overwhelmed with Māya would have remained wholly immersed in the activities of his life." Narada said, "It is difficult to believe that Māya can be so powerful."

Next morning Narada went out for alms. When he appeared at a particular house and asked for a handful of rice, a young girl came out and gave him alms. At the very sight of her he became enamoured of her and wanted to marry her. He went to her father and getting his consent married the girl. The couple led a very happy life, and in course of time were blessed with a child. One day the river, on a bank of which their cottage stood, began to overflow its banks, and as the water continued to rise more and more their cottage was washed away. Narada took his wife and child upon his shoulders, but the water continued to rise, with

the result that both the child and the wife were swept off his shoulders and were drowned. With great difficulty and after many a struggle, Narada could save his life. Having come out of the water, he keenly felt the loss of his wife and child, and began to lament their death. Suddenly the Lord appeared before him, immediately Narada realised that he had been a victim of Maya, and how wonderful it was that he had not been inclined to call on the sacred name of the Lord even once while he lived a householder's life. He found that his pride had been duly humbled, and confessed that now he realised how powerful and inscrutable were the ways of Maya.

13 STORY OF SATYAKAMA.

Satyakama was the son of a maidservant named Jabali. Earlier in life she had served many masters in a tavern and one of them was the father of Satyakama. In due course, the boy was sent to the house of a preceptor for education. When the preceptor asked the boy's name he said, "Satyakama" and when he was asked about his father's name he could say nothing. He came back to his mother and asked her who his father was. Jabali could merely say, "Tell your preceptor that your name is Satyakama. Jabala, that you were born when I used to serve several masters and I do not know who your father is." The boy went back to the preceptor and narra-

ted all that he heard from his mother. The preceptor thereupon said, "Satyakama, you are truly the son of a Brahmin, for none but a Brahmin would unhesitatingly tell the truth as you have done." As in those days only the Brahmin boys used to be admitted to scriptural studies, Satyakama was at once admitted into the institution of the preceptor.

12 SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND GIRISH CHANDRA

Sri Ramakrishna was invited once to see a religious drama staged by Girish Chandra Ghose, the great Bengali playwright, in his own theatre. Sri Ramakrishna with a few of his disciples went to see the performance. Unfortunately Girish Chandra was given to drink and had indulged too much in drink, and he did not behave well with his guests. Next day he realised the enormity of his conduct and repented it bitterly. He went on praying to Sri Ramakrishna to be pardoned. Ramakrishna suddenly asked one of his disciples to bring a carriage for going to Girish Chandra's house. The disciple, who was displeased with the conduct of Girish Chandra, remonstrated and refused to bring any conveyance for going to the house of a man who had behaved so ill on the previous day. But Ramakrishna was determined to go there and ultimately the disciple went and brought a carriage. Ramakrishna and two of his attendants got into the carriage, and as it was being driven towards Girish

Chandra's house Ramakrishna told the following story "Once the cowherd friends of Sri Krishna complained to him of a snake that had bitten a friend of theirs. Sri Krishna went up to the snake and asked why it had bitten the boy in question and infused poison into his body. The snake thereupon said, "As you Oh Lord, have given me poison how is it possible for me to pour nectar into the boy's body?" Sri Ramakrishna said, "Girish has given us only what he received into his system from the past years of life." This discourse taught the disciples to look upon Girish Chandra's conduct from a new point of view, viz., that our conduct is shaped by the effect of our own deeds and actions in the past.

15 THE STRAIGHT AND THE CROOKED WAYS

In a certain kingdom a mouse used to come to the cabinet room where the ministers held their meetings. One of the ministers proposed that it should be killed. Another minister opposed him saying that it was the vehicle of God Ganapati. A third minister said that it was sure to bring a snake some day in its wake and that therefore it should be killed. The matter was put to vote and the party that was in favour of killing the mouse was defeated.

Now a snake stayed in the same jungle in which the mouse lived. The snake, finding that the mouse used to go out every day early morning and come

back at night, well fed and nourished, asked the mouse one day where it got its food every day. The mouse agreed to show the snake the place where it got its food provided the snake agreed to one condition, viz., that it should move in a straight line and not in a zig-zag as usual. The snake agreed and the mouse led the way. Whenever the mouse turned back to see the manner in which the snake was following it, the latter left its usual zig-zag mode of locomotion and fell into a straight line. This led the mouse to think that the snake was observing the condition imposed on it. On their way, the minister who had been against the killing of the mouse at the cabinet meeting, found the mouse being followed by a snake. He, therefore, called some of his servants and told them to kill the snake. The snake was killed and tied to a rope by which the servants dragged it on the road in order to throw it away. The mouse now looked at the dead snake and said, "You are straight now. If you had left your crooked ways while alive you would not have been killed today."

16 THE LION'S CUB DISILLUSIONED

A lioness, who was pregnant, coming across a flock of sheep grazing, pounced upon one of them and in the exertion she gave birth to a cub. Shortly after she died. The cub found itself amongst the flock of sheep and began to live amongst them and

imitate them in all possible ways. In the course of a few months its ways became those of a sheep. It learnt to bleat like the sheep and live on grass and leaves. Its father who vainly searched for the lioness all over the place one day suddenly found the lion's cub in the midst of sheep. It came near the flock which ran away leaving the cub behind. The cub began to bleat like the sheep and tried to run away. The lion then said to it, "Why do you bleat? You are a lion, you must roar. Why do you eat grass? That is not your food." Saying so, the lion gave the cub a piece of meat, but the cub refused to eat it. The lion then dragged the cub to a stream of water and said, "Look into the water and see whether you look like a lion or like a sheep." This convinced the cub and it ate the food given by the lion. It became transformed into its original self, began to roar like a lion and its appearance and movements from that moment became truly leonine.

17 WORLDLY ATTACHMENT

A monk had a disciple who was a householder. He was deeply attached to his family, although his preceptor talked to him now and then about the unreality of the world. The preceptor spoke about the unreality of the domestic life such as that which existed between husband and wife or father and child, but the disciple found that all his happy experiences belied his preceptor's words. The monk

in order to prove the truth of his proposition, one day gave the disciple a pill and said that if he swallowed it he would appear as a dead man to others, though he would retain his consciousness in full. The monk asked him to report what he observed after taking the pill. The man accordingly took the pill and in a moment he lay still like a dead body, and the heart-beats and breathings stopped. All the members of his family gathered around him and began to weep. The neighbours took the body outside the house and preparations were made to cremate the body. Just then a mendicant appeared and asked what had taken place. The man's mother narrated to him the sad story of her son's sudden death, punctuating her tale with bitter sobs and tears. The mendicant then said that he could bring her son to life if he could get another person to die in his place. His own mother said, "I would die gladly because I have come to the end of my life, but if I go what will happen to these small children of my son? Alas, they are all so fond of me." The mendicant then turned to the man's wife and asked her whether she was ready to sacrifice her life for her husband. The wife replied, "My children are all small. Who will look after them if I die?" Shortly after this the dead man's life returned to him and he sat up as one dazed. His preceptor, for it was none other than he who had come in the garb of the mendicant, then said, "Do you still believe in

worldly attachment? Are you not now convinced that they are vain and illusory? Come away with me from the world " The man who had suddenly discovered the unreality of worldly attachment left his home and went away with the monk for ever

18 TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WORTH

A man while going to the market picked up a fine stone and thought that it might bring him a little money. He first took the stone to a seller of brinjals who said that he could offer him nine seers of brinjals for it. The man, however, did not sell it and next took the stone to a cloth shop. The shop keeper offered Rs 300/- for the stone, but the man thought of trying some other place, and next went to a goldsmith who offered him Rs 3,000/- Thinking that the stone must be a fine jewel he went to the shop of a jeweller. There he was offered one lakh of rupees. The man parted with it at that price. The jeweller finding that the stone was of rare value and wanting to conceal it from other jewellers who would visit his shop, put it in one of his shoes. After some time when he wanted to take it out from his shoe he found that it had broken into pieces. On being asked how it had broken to pieces, the diamond replied, "I do not mind my price being quoted at a few annas or 300 or 3,000 rupees but when I find that after I had been made over to a person who knew my worth that person could put me to

the indignity of being kept inside his shoe, I could not stand the disgrace and so out of shame I have broken into pieces "

19 TRUE UNDERSTANDING.

A king had a great scholar in his court who was said to be a very learned man. The king, who was interested in things of the spirit, once asked the scholar to give a discourse on the Bhagavad Gita. The scholar started explaining each verse in detail, at the end of which he used to ask the king, "Sir, have you followed the real meaning of the verse?" to which the king used to reply, "Panditji, you must understand it first yourself." The scholar did not like this reply and went on wondering why the king was using these words in his reply. In the course of the studies, he came to realise that the key to the Bhagavad Gita was renunciation of the self, and then he understood that perhaps the king was asking whether he had understood this very important principle contained in this book. This brought about a change in his life and he actually renounced his worldly home and took to the life of sannyasa. When leaving his home he sent word to the king that he had understood the meaning of the Gita and was, therefore, unable to continue the discourse.

20 THE VIRTUE OF PERSEVERANCE

Once Narada Rishi, while on his way to Vainkunta (the heavenly regions) in order to meet

Lord Vishnu, happened to pass a man who was singing praises of the Lord and who appeared to be a semi-lunatic. The man asked the Rishi where he was going and when Narada told him that he was going to Vaikuntha he asked: "Revered Sir, will you kindly enquire of the Lord if a man like me has any chance of attaining salvation?" Narada agreed to do so and bring back to him the reply he received.

As Narada was walking further he chanced to meet a monk who had been performing penance for a long time. Learning that Narada was going to Vaikuntha he also requested him to find out from the Lord for how long he had to carry on his austerities and spiritual practices before he could attain salvation. Narada agreed to do so.

In due course Narada was returning from Vaikuntha by the same way. He first met the monk who was comparatively a young man and Narada told him that he would have to practice Tapaśya (religious austerities) for 7 more births. This seemed to disappoint the young Yogi very much and he said that it was unfair on the part of the Lord to keep him waiting for such a long time. Next came the semi-lunatic who was still singing praises of Lord Vishnu. Narada told him, pointing to him a tamarind tree standing there, that it would take him as many births as the leaves of the tree before he could attain salvation. This seemed to make the man overjoyed.

and he went on dancing and singing with greater fervour and enthusiasm. Narada asked him what had made him so full of joy, and the man said, "I am so happy to learn that a man like myself even can attain salvation after millions of births." Narada thereupon said, "You have an unshaken faith in the Lord and you have the patience and perseverance for going through so many births. You many, therefore, rest assured that you will get salvation in this very birth of yours."

21 BEYOND THE REALM OF REASON

Once Swami Vivekananda while he was moving in the Himalayan regions, became the guest of a certain person in a village. He woke up one night and found that the villagers were taking part in a big procession with a man who was said to have been possessed by a ghost. A large number of people with gongs, cymbals, drums and bells followed the man who was being carried in a cot. At one stage the Swami saw a red-hot axe being applied to the hair of the man who was alleged to have been possessed. Strange to say, not a single hair was singed, and the Swami, who was a staunch adherent of ratiocination thought that there must be some trick done by the man who was using the red-hot axe. He himself therefore went near this man and touched the axe with his fingers. At once he felt a burning sensation, and exclaimed— "There are many

supernatural things which our philosophy and reason cannot explain "

22 SELF-SACRIFICE

Dadhichi, son of Atharva Muni, used to practise severe penances to such an extent that even the king of the gods, Indra, became afraid of him. Once the gods were driven away from heaven by a demon named Vritrasura. The gods then learnt that the only way to drive away the demon was to forge weapons out of the bones of Dadhichi. Indra approached Dadhichi with great diffidence but Dadhichi felt that the cause for which Indra had come was one for which he should lay down his mortal frame. He, therefore, gladly responded to the wishes of the gods and gave up his body voluntarily by the use of his yogic power. The gods then made weapons out of his bones and with the help of them killed the demon.

23 SHIVA'S SELF-SACRIFICE

Once the gods in heaven went in search of nectar which when drunk makes one immortal. They learnt that nectar was to be found at the bottom of the ocean. The gods thereupon started churning the ocean but instead of nectar a large quantity of poison, so fatal to the creation, came at the top and the gods were at a loss as to what was to be done with it. Shiva, on learning this, came and drank up all the poison and eased the situation. This act of self-

sacrifice enhanced the respect which the other gods had for Shiva and he came to be known from that day by the name "Nilakanta", i.e., blue-throated one (the blue colour being the effect of the poison imbibed)

24 THE POWER OF FAITH

A lady had great faith in the words of her religious preceptor and used to follow all his instructions with scrupulous care. She found that within a short time she developed yogic power which gave her superhuman faculties such as ability to walk over water. The preceptor who himself had not attained so much power once asked her how she was able to walk over water. She said that when she uttered the mantra which she had received from him she became oblivious of the outside world and some mysterious power enabled her to overcome all difficulties. The preceptor then asked her whether she could help him to learn to walk over water. Going near a lake with him the lady asked him to utter the mantra and having faith in it she walked over water, the preceptor saw the lady walking over the water without any difficulty, but as he tried to do the same thing he went deeper and deeper into the water. He cried out, "My child, how is it that I am not able to walk over the water like you?" The lady said, "You are thinking of God and of the difficulties of crossing the lake at the same time. Your mind is

divided between these two and this prevents you from attaining the power of walking over the water "

25 THE FOLLY OF UNBELIEF

A certain person living in Ceylon had once to cross the ocean in order to come to India. Having learnt that a certain saint possessed the gift by which one could walk over the ocean, he approached the saint and asked for his help. The saint wrote something on a leaf and folding it gave it to the man, saying "Now go and walk over the waters to the other shore but you must never try to look into the thing that I have given you." The man had great faith in the saint and he found that he had no difficulty in walking over the ocean. The question, however, how the leaf gave him that power occurred in his mind in the course of his journey, and at last he found it very difficult to restrain his curiosity. He unfolded the leaf and found the words "Sri Ram" were written within. Seeing that nothing but the name of Sri Rama was in the leaf, his faith was shaken and he was immediately drowned in the deep sea.

26 THE FORCE OF FAITH

There was once a severe drought in a certain country, and famine and other sufferings resulting from the drought were apprehended. The people decided that they should collect together and all of them should offer prayers to God for rain. There

was a boy amongst the people assembled who had brought an umbrella in his hand. Everybody began to laugh at him but he said that God was sure to grant their prayer and that was why he had brought the umbrella. The whole congregation prayed sincerely for rain at the end of which a heavy shower actually began to fall and lasted for several days. All who had come to the prayer except the boy had to return home completely drenched.

27 THE FOLLY OF REPROBATING OTHER FAITHS

When Swami Vivekananda was returning from America, as he was walking on the deck of the ship, he heard two Christian missionaries speaking ill of other faiths of the world. As they saw the Indian monk approaching them, they began to speak louder so that the Swami might hear their remarks. When the Swami could not tolerate their insolence any longer, he caught hold of the missionaries by their shoulders and said, "If you speak one word more against the other faiths, I shall throw you both into the ocean, leaving you to share a watery grave." The missionaries became frightened and apologised for their remarks.

28 THE BODY POLITIC

The Government of a certain country became disturbed by the jealousies and hatreds amongst the different members of the nation, and a civil war

began. The whole machinery of the Government came to a stop and the different parties found that the deadlock helped none of them. Finally, they thought that they should go for a solution of their troubles to a certain saint-like man who lived in that country.

This saint-like man gave a patient hearing and then said, 'Once upon a time, there was a quarrel between the different organs of the body. The hand said that it was working day and night but it was the stomach or belly which profited by its labour. Similarly other organs of sense complained that it was the belly that was getting all the benefit of their work and labour. They, therefore, decided to stop their functions. Gradually the sense organs began to feel that they were getting weaker and more exhausted. They felt that they could not function properly any more. The eyes had grown too dim to see anything, the ears too feeble to hear, the hands too weak to work and the head unable to think. They came to understand that it was the stomach, which swallowed the fruits of their labour, that was the source of their strength. Then they began to work as before for the benefit of the stomach because the latter contributed its strength and vigour to all the limbs of the body. Similarly, the saint said, was the case with the body politic, i.e. the body of a nation. Some in-

dividuals were intelligent and enlightened and self-sacrificing. They deserved to work as the head or the intelligence of the nation. Those who were strong and bold deserved to form the military strength of the nation. Those who were fit to produce food-crops and earn money deserved to serve the nation in such a capacity. Others, again, were only fit to serve others and obey their words. They, therefore, deserved to work as servants. These four classes were represented by the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vāishyas and Shudras. Each class had a particular contribution to make to the whole nation, for each in combination with the others brought about the development, prosperity and peace of the whole national body.

29 THE END OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Prachīnsalā, Śatyayajña, Indradyūma, Jana and Budil, the sons of five famous Rishis, were discussing among themselves as to what Brahman truly is. They could not come to a definite conclusion even after a long discussion, and one of them proposed that they should approach the well-known Rishi named Uddalaka with a view to dissolving the differences among themselves. According to the custom then prevalent, they all approached the Rishi each with a bundle of fuel from the forest. In such hermitages a fire used to be perpetually kept up as a symbol of life and knowledge and one who desires

to be a pupil had to bring fuel to sustain this perpetual fire

When Uddalaka saw these young men coming, he understood their object and told them that he fully realised the purpose of their visit but that as he himself had not been able to realise the Supreme he would not be able to help them. He, accordingly, directed them to king Ashwapati, the ruler of Kekaya, who, in his opinion, was competent to give them the desired instruction.

The five young men, therefore, went to the palace of king Ashwapati who was then busy over the performance of a sacrifice (Yajna). He was, however, glad to receive them and he asked them to remain as his guests till the sacrifice was over. After it was over, the king wanted to present each of them with valuable presents but they refused to accept anything, saying that they had come to ask for instruction as to the nature of the Supreme Being. Next morning the king asked them how each of them worshipped Brahman. Prachinsala said, "I worship the heaven as Brahman." Satya-yajna said that he worshipped Brahman in the orb of the sun. Indradyumna declared that he worshipped Brahman in the ether. Jana said that he worshipped Brahman in the air, and lastly, Budil declared that he worshipped Brahman in water. Uddalaka Rishi, who had also come with them, said that he

worshipped Brahman in the earth. Then king Ashwapati replied "I do not say that your methods of worship are wrong, for you are all right in regarding earth, water, fire, air, ether and the sun as manifestations of Brahman, but Brahman is not only immanent in all of them but transcends them also. The universe is but a form of Brahman."

Chh V 11-24

30. THE WIFE'S CHOICE

Rishi Yajnavalkya, who was a famous saint, had two wives, Katyayani and Maitreyi. When he thought that, according to the scheme of life adopted by the ancients, it was time for him to take to the life of Vanaprastha, i.e. life of a recluse, to be followed by the life of Yati or renunciation, he announced his intention to his two wives and said that he desired to divide all his possessions between them. Maitreyi to whom he first announced his intention thought the summum bonum of life was the realisation of the self, compared to which earthly possessions had no value at all. She, therefore, said, "Will the wealth that you desire to give me be of any use to me in realising the self? If not, why do you want to give your property to me?" The sage replied, "Well, the wife has a right to the wealth of her husband." "If so" said Maitreyi, "I must have a share in your spiritual wealth, the greatest of which is self renunciation. I must, there-

fore, ask you to let me follow your footsteps and take to Sannyasa as you are doing "

Brih II 4th Brahman

31 THE WORTH OF SEMBLANCE

A thief once entered a palace at night and found the king and the queen conversing in their bedroom. The queen was telling the king that their daughter had attained the marriageable age and the king should seek a proper young man to whom she could be married. After some discussion, they decided that as the princess had a religious bent of mind she should be given in marriage to a holy man.

The palace was situated near the Ganges, on the banks of which a large number of holy men used to live practising penances and austerities. The next day, the king asked the Dewan to go there and see if any one could be found who was suitable and willing to marry the princess.

The thief who had overheard the conversation between the king and the queen on the previous night decided to put on the garb of a holy man and sit on the bank of the Ganges next day, and he acted accordingly. The Dewan went from one holy man to another but all of them refused to marry the princess and enter into worldly life. When, however, he came to the thief in the holy man's garb and told him that if he married the princess he would get

half the kingdom as her dowry and he would inherit the other half on the death of the king, the thief remained silent. Suddenly a thought flashed across his mind that if he could get half the kingdom with the princess by merely disguising himself as a holy man, what better and more valuable things he would not get by really becoming a Sādhu (man of religion). The man became completely changed all on a sudden and he decided to take to the religious aspirant's life.

32 QUEEN MADALASA

Once a prince called Ritadhwaṇa killed a demon named Patalketū and rescued a princess named Madalasa who had been stolen away by the demon Madalasa, who was a girl of uncommon beauty, was married to Ritadhwaṇa. She, however, owing to her past merits, was blessed with divine knowledge and knew that the world was unreal and illusory, only the divine substratum being real. Therefore, when she gave birth to a son who was named Vikranta, she decided to bring him up on the fundamental principles of the Vedānta from the birth. The prince when he grew up realised the emptiness of the world and renounced the world. This mortified the king but he was helpless to prevent the prince adopting the life of renunciation. The queen had a second boy born to her who was named Suvahu. He was also brought up in the same way and as he grew older he left the palace

one day and became a sanniyasin. The third son was duly born and was named Arindama. He was also brought up in the same manner as his brothers and when he grew up he duly renounced everything and became an ascetic. All this grieved the king very much but he did not have the courage to interfere with the plans and actions of the queen.

Thereafter, the queen gave birth to a fourth son and one day the king, plucking up his courage, said to the queen, "When I named each of the three sons who have left us, you used to laugh at the names I gave them. We have lost all of them now. It is better that you should name this boy yourself and bring him up in a different way so that he might take charge of this kingdom and enable us to retire from the worldly life." The queen said, "You know that the self is nameless and formless and it is therefore that when you named our sons Vikranta, Suvahu and Arindama (i.e. the brave one, one with fine arms and the victor over enemies) that I was moved to laughter; but now I shall act as you suggest." She named the fourth boy Alarka and trained him in the ways of the world.

The king decided to make over the administration of the kingdom and retired and the queen also decided to follow her husband, and take to Vanaprastha (life of retirement). As they were leaving the palace, the queen gave a golden ring to her son

and said "My son, the ruler's tasks are difficult and the worldly life is full of trouble I ask that if at any time you get into a grievous situation you will take off this ring and look into it "

Many years king Alarka ruled the kingdom with great ability and success, but after a time troubles and difficulties began to afflict him and one day he took off his ring and found a small piece of paper inside containing certain instructions Having read these instructions, he discovered a new strength and vigour in his mind and peace in his heart He decided to leave the world and handing over the reins of the kingdom to a competent person, he retired from the world He went to the Ashram of Dattatreya and lived a life of spiritual practice and endeavour

33 TO FRIENDS, OUT OF SIGHT IS NOT OUT OF MIND

Once Sri Krishna was playing with his boy-friends As they were dancing together, and some holding his hands as he danced, he suddenly snatched away his hands, ran away into the woods and disappeared His boy-friends, however, shouted, "Krishna, you have no doubt run away from our midst but you can never run away from our hearts for you are always enshrined there as our friend "

34 LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

Avadhuta was a saint-like man who viewed ordinary incidents of life in the light of spiritual experiences. One day he found a hunter aiming at a bird with his mind absolutely fixed at the target, while a big procession passed by with the beating of drums, playing on pipes and other noises. Avadhuta said, "This man has taught me how to make the mind one-pointed in concentration and I regard him as my guru."

On another day, he saw a man angling in a pond. He was looking at the end of his rod with all attention. When a passer-by asked him about the way to a certain place, he did not even hear him. Avadhuta then said, "Let me have this steadfastness in my meditation. I look upon him as my teacher, for he has taught me a great lesson today."

On another occasion, Avadhuta saw a number of ants coming to a place where sand and sugar lay mixed and carrying away sugar particles, leaving the sand behind. Avadhuta said, "I have learned a great lesson from the ants who teach how to separate the good from the bad in this world where they are so inextricably mixed with each other."

Avadhuta once saw a kite flying with a fish in its bill and hundreds of crows following it with shrill cries. It was not possible for the kite to sit any-

where and enjoy its prey. Being continuously worried and troubled by the crows, it dropped the fish from its bill, when the crows ran after the fish, and then only the kite was left in peace. Avadhuta said, "Today I have learned a great lesson from the kite, namely, that possession is a dangerous thing in this world and that unless we leave aside all possessions we cannot live in peace."

On another occasion he found a crane on the point of approaching the edge of a tank as it had espied a fish playing in the water. At the same time a hunter was aiming an arrow at the crane but the crane remained unmindful of the danger. Avadhuta saluted the crane and said, "Thou art indeed my guru, for even the presence of danger does not disturb the concentration of thy mind."

On finding that though the bees gather honey from the flowers the honey is usually taken away from their hives, Avadhuta exclaimed, "This lesson I have learned from the bees. Never store anything for the future. It will only bring miseries."

Avadhuta once found a swan drinking the milk out of a mixture of milk and water. He said, "If one has to live in this world of good and evil, one must take what is good, leaving aside all that is bad."

35 THE PHYSICIAN AND THE PATIENT

A patient came from a long distance to consult a well-known physician who was too old to go out to distant villages. The physician examined the patient, gave him some medicines and asked him to come again for particulars of diet, after a week. The patient came with his father after a week and the physician after examination advised that the patient should on no account take molasses. The father of the patient thereupon said, "Well, sir, you might have given this piece of advice on the first day." The physician replied, "Yes, that is true; but that day a number of jars containing molasses were in this room, and had I asked your son on that day not to take molasses, my words would not have carried any weight. Your son might have thought that when I myself take molasses in large quantities, there would be no harm in his taking them."

36 AN IDEAL HOUSEHOLDER

A householder had great love and regard for his parents and superiors. He was disappointed with the life he was leading, which left him no time for spiritual practices. One day he went to a saint and asked if he could realise God while living in the world. The saint said, "God is everywhere. You should look upon your father as the veritable embodiment of God (Narayana), and mother as the Goddess of the Universe (Bhagavati). You should regard your

wife as the Goddess of fortune (Lakshmi) and your son as young Gopala (Krishna) Thus your whole family will become a family of divine beings All that you do you should regard as being done for the divine and thus your work will be dedicated to God " The householder followed these instructions and thus realised the Supreme Self

37 THE SUPREME TRUTH

Svetaketu was a spoiled child of Rishi Uddalaka He showed no intention of going to the house of a preceptor, like other boys, for receiving instruction His father, therefore, scolded him one day and thereafter he left home in search of a guru or preceptor He studied all the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama & Atharva) and the six Vedangas (Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Chhandas and Jyotish)

After finishing the studies he returned home, but he was found to be very proud and arrogant of his learning His father asked him if he had received "the great instructions " Svetaketu had not heard of this expression and asked what it meant His father said, "Know that there are many things made of earth, each different in appearance from the others This difference is due to merely name and form If they are stripped of their names and forms, what would remain is only earth Earth, therefore, is the substratum, the common principle Similarly, in the

case of gold ornaments, though they differ widely in use, shape and appearance, the differences are due to "name and form" (Namarupa). If the latter are taken away there remains merely gold. The substratum of the different iron implements you see, is merely iron. Similarly, there is something which is the basis of all that exists in the universe and the knowing of that something is the Supreme Knowledge.

Svetaketu had never been instructed in this manner and he gradually assumed an appearance of humility. He said that his teacher had never taught him what his father was saying.

Uddalaka went on, "The four Vedas and the six Vedangas which you have learnt, my son, are merely 'Apara Vidya' i.e. non-supreme knowledge, as distinguished from 'Para Vidya' or the Supreme Knowledge by which the highest principle underlying all lives and existence is known. The Supreme Being has assumed different names and forms, because finding himself alone he wanted to become many. The sun, moon, stars, mountains and rivers have appeared out of the one invisible Reality." As a practical demonstration of what he had said, Uddalaka asked his son to remain without food for 15 days. On the fifteenth day Svetaketu's mind was reduced to a 1/16th part of the whole mind and his father asked to quote certain verses from the Vedas, but he could not do so owing to the failure of me-

memory His father told him that mind is made up of the essence of food and that when it is deprived of that essence its force or vitality was proportionately reduced so that it could not function as before, and that in all stages the reality sustaining the mind was Prana or the vital force

Chh VI 1-7

38 WONDER OF WONDERS

The five Pandavas while on a journey felt thirsty, and seeing a lake nearby the youngest of them went to fetch water. Near the lake he found a crane which said, "You should not touch the water unless you can answer my questions. If you do so without answering my questions you would surely die." The youngest Pandava, Sahadev, ignored the bird, but as he touched the water of the lake he immediately fell down dead. The Pandavas finding that Sahadev was not returning sent Nakul, the next youngest brother, to fetch water. He too was accosted by the crane, but he also ignored it and as he touched the water he died. He was followed by Arjuna and then by Bhīma and each of them similarly met the same fate.

Finding that none of the four brothers returned, the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira, himself went towards the lake to see what had happened. He found all his four brothers lying dead and the crane standing not far from the edge of the lake. Yudhishtira at once recognised the bird as no other than

Dharma himself He was told by the crane the sad tale of the death of his brothers and was also told that all of them would be restored to life if Yudhishtira could answer the four questions put to him. Yudhishtira agreed. Thereupon the crane asked him, "What Sir, is the wonder of wonders in this world?" Yudhishtira said, "Thousands and thousands of beings are dying every day but those who remain alive never think that they too will have to die one day. This Sir, is the wonder of wonders." He similarly answered all the other three questions, after which his four brothers came back to life, and after slaking their thirst they all resumed their journey.

39 PRACTICE OF CONCENTRATION.

A group of students who had joined a class for the practice of concentration found it difficult to curb their minds. Finally, they approached their preceptor and asked him how to keep control over their minds. The preceptor said, you are all sitting together side by side, but if one of you attempted to sit on the shoulders of another, what would the other do? He would naturally object to the former's sitting upon him. Similarly, the mind rebels when one tries to keep it under control, it would not trouble you if you are not seeking to control it. The mind has been compared to a monkey. The monkey is itself restless by nature, but if somebody made him drink

freely of wine and then a scorpion stung him, what would be the condition of the poor monkey? Imagine him, again, after having been bitten by a scorpion, as also possessed by a demon. What language would then suffice to describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey? The human mind is similarly like the monkey, it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, stung by the scorpion of jealousy at the success and good fortune of others, and lastly, it becomes possessed, by the demon of pride or egotism. How is it possible to control such a mind? "Even if it be possible to drink all the water of the ocean, to raze to the ground all the mountains of the world, to eat fire, it is far more difficult to control the mind."

One of the boys asked how then it was possible for them to control the mind. The preceptor said that it was only by constant, vigilant and unremitting practice, for days and months and even for years that the mind might finally be brought under complete control.

40 IMMUTABLE NATURE

Once a group of villagers decided to go out on a pilgrimage to some holy places. A thief thinking that it was time for him to stop thieving and to begin expiating the sins, expressed his desire to the leaders of the party to go with them. They agreed to the proposal, thinking that the pilgrimage was more necessary

for a man of his type than even for themselves and that it might help him to turn over a new leaf

The party started for Banaras and thence they went to Mathura and Brindaban. Everyday in the course of their tour they had the curious experience of finding that some of the articles belonging to one or two of the party were missing and that they were mixed up with the baggages belonging to some other persons. Being at a loss to account for this, they suspected the thief, and one night some of the members of the party sat up the whole night in order to see who was at the bottom of the mischief. The thief was caught red-handed while he was transferring some of the articles belonging to one of the party to the belongings of another. When he was asked to explain his conduct he said, "My good Sirs, owing to my past habits I am unable to have a wink of sleep at night and I have to do something to keep my mind engaged. Having abjured thieving, the best that I could think of was to put one man's articles into another's package, and I am thankful that I am doing nothing worse."

41 UNCONQUERABLE NATURE

Certain students who had come to a Rishi for their education once asked him how it was possible to conquer one's evil habits as they found it difficult to overcome them. The preceptor said, "Old habits gradually become so much a part of one's nature

that they become practically impossible to eradicate. Even if one has conquered them, they come back at times with more than their usual force and thus reassert themselves. When boughs of coconut and palm trees fall off they leave permanent impressions on the trees throughout their life. It has been aptly said that those whose nature is low cannot get rid of it even though they rise to great heights, for they behave like the digit 9. The students were unable to follow this reference and requested the preceptor to explain it. The preceptor said, "You see, whichever number you may multiply by the digit 9 the digits in the multiple when added together will always be found to be 9; provided the digits of the resultant sum are, if necessary, again added together. For instance

9 multiplied by 2 is 18 and 1 and 8 added together make 9

Similarly, 9 multiplied by 202 is 1818 and the digits of this figure make 18, which again yields 9. Thus whatever habits—good or bad—you form would communicate their essential qualities to your actions and it is extremely difficult to get rid of them. Only by persistent efforts carried on for a long time can bad habits be replaced by good habits and a man's nature fundamentally altered."

42 NARAYANA IN BOTH THE MAHOUT AND THE ELEPHANT

Once upon a time a spiritual teacher taught his disciples that all beings are the manifestations of Narayana, the Supreme Spirit. Thereafter one of the pupils, who was given some work to be done by the teacher, saw, as he was passing along the road, an elephant coming towards him. From its movements it appeared the mahout had lost control over the animal and all the people were running away from the road. The pupil remembered that his teacher had taught that all beings were the manifestations of Narayana and thinking that the elephant also must be Narayana in essence he did not take fright like the others and calmly proceeded along the road. The mahout warned him to get out of the way but this had no effect on the young man. The elephant came, caught hold of him by his trunk and threw him away violently. He became unconscious and was carried by some persons to his teacher's Ashram. When he narrated what had happened to him the teacher asked, "The elephant is, no doubt, Narayana, but is not the mahout also as good a Narayana as the elephant? Why did you not listen to the warning of the mahout when he was warning all the people on the road?"

CHAPTER III

SELF-FULFILMENT

1 HIGHEST SACRIFICE *

After the great battle of Kurukshetra the Pandavas, to celebrate their victory, performed a great sacrifice and made liberal and bounteous gifts to the poor. Every one said that such a great sacrifice had never before been performed on the earth. But a mongoose of strange appearance came there, half of its body was golden in colour, the other half the natural brown colour of a mongoose. After rolling on the floor of the sacrificial hall it said, much to the amazement of all present, "You are all liars, this is no sacrifice." "What," they all exclaimed, "how do you say that this is no sacrifice? Have you any idea of the immense wealth spent on this sacrifice, the amount of gold, silver and jewels, the number of horses, elephants and cows given away, the millions who have been fed and been given gifts?" "I know it all," said the mongoose, "but you will please listen to what I say."

A poor Brahmin lived in a small village with his wife, his son and his daughter-in-law. They were extremely poor and lived on what gifts they received from the villagers for running a school and for spiritual ministration. There came a three years

* From Karma yoga of Swami Vivekananda

famine, a lot of people died, but the Brahmin and his family managed just to hold body and soul together. After having starved for several days the father brought home one morning a little quantity of barley flour which he had been fortunate enough to obtain. A meal having been prepared out of it, it was divided into four parts and the family sat down to the meal. Just then there was a knock at the door and when it was opened they saw a man who said he was hungry.

Now in India a guest is a sacred person, almost God for the time being, and must be treated as such. The mongoose went on. The Brahmin said, "Come in, Sir, you are welcome." He set before the guest his own portion of the food which the guest quickly ate and said, "Sir, what you have given has only increased my hunger." The wife then offered her share to the guest and when her husband showed some reluctance she said, "It is our duty as householders to follow your footprints and to see that our guests are properly fed." She then gave her share to the guest which he ate and then complained that his hunger was not satisfied. The son then in his turn offered his portion to him. The guest ate that portion also and still remained unsatisfied. Thereupon the son's wife also in pursuance of the principle followed by her elders gave him her portion. Having partaken of that the guest departed giving his blessings to all the inmates of the house. All of

them died of starvation on the same night I came there and rolled on the floor where a few grains of the food had fallen and then I saw that one half of my body had become golden Ever since I have been travelling all over the world wanting to see another great sacrifice, but I have been always disappointed. Nowhere else has the other half of my body become golden That is why I say that this was no sacrifice at all "

2 EACH IN HIS PLACE IS GREAT *

A certain king was in the habit of asking every sannyasin that came into his country who was the greater man, he who had given up the world and become a sannyasin, or he who lived in the world as a householder When some of them asserted that the sannyasin is the greater man, the king demanded that this assertion should be proved and when they could not prove the proposition they were ordered by the king to get married and live as householders

There came one day a young sannyasin who when he was asked who was the greater man, said, "Each man, Oh King, is great in his own place " When the king demanded proof, he said, "I will prove this to you if you will come and reside with me for a few days " The king accompanied the sannyasin and came to another kingdom in the capi-

* From Karma yoga of Swami Vivekananda

tal of which a great ceremony was going on. There were signs of a great celebration in the streets, the noise of drums and music, the shouts of criers, and they found that a proclamation was being made. The crier proclaimed that the princess, daughter of the king, was about to choose her husband from those assembled before her. All the princes of the neighbourhood had put on their gayest attire and assembled in the hall where the princess was to make her selection. Some of them had attendants who were to enumerate their merits and virtues and the princess was taken round on a splendid throne, stopping before each prince. She carried in her hands a garland of flowers which she would throw around the neck of the prince whom she selected.

The princess had no brother and sister and her husband would be the ruler of the kingdom after her father's death. The sannyasin and our king also went into the hall where the ceremony (the choosing of her husband) was to take place. The princess' throne was stopped before the princes one after another, but she did not care for any one of them. There was, however, another young sannyasin in the assembly who was in the midst of the young men assembled and who outshone all the others by the radiance and splendour of his personality. When the throne of the princess came near him the princess stepped out and threw the garland over his neck.

The young sannyasin, however, threw aside the garland exclaiming, "I am not one of the suitors. I am a sannyasin. What is marriage to me?" The king of the country then came up to the sannyasin and said, "My son, do you realise that you will get half of my kingdom now with my daughter and the whole kingdom after my death?" Saying this he again placed the garland on the sannyasin's neck. The young man threw it aside again, saying, "I have not come here for marriage." He quickly walked out of the assembly. The princess, however, had fallen madly in love with the young sannyasin and followed him in order to bring him back. The other sannyasin who had brought our king there proposed that they should follow the pair and they also left the assembly hall. The young sannyasin walked several miles and then entered a forest duly followed by the princess. The sannyasin went into one of the intricate paths in the forest and disappeared. The princess tried to find him out and being unsuccessful in her search she sat down under a tree and began to weep. Our sannyasin and his companion, the king, came there and tried to console her. As it was too dark to find the way out of the forest they proposed that they all should rest under a big tree which stood there and on the next morning proceed to find out the path which would take them out of the forest.

Now a little bird had built a nest on the top of that tree and lived there with his wife and three

chicks. Seeing the three persons sitting under the tree, the bird said to his wife that they ought to do something for the guests. As it was winter he thought of making some fire for the comfort of the guests and flying out brought a small quantity of dry grass in his beak and dropped it before the guests. He also dropped some fuel and the guests soon lighted a blazing fire. Then the little bird again said to his wife, "My dear, these people have nothing to eat. It is our duty to feed anyone that comes to our house." Saying this he plunged into the fire and perished. The wife of the bird also feeling that her husband's body could not provide sufficient food for the guests, fell into the fire. The little chicks also decided to follow their parents and all of them plunged headlong into the fire. The three persons at the foot of the tree understood the purpose for which the birds had given their lives. They could not partake of the food offered by the birds and in the morning the king and the sannyasin showed the princess the way out of the forest to enable her to go back to her father.

Then the sannyasin said to the king, "Oh king, you have now seen that each is great in his own place. If you want to live in the world, live like these birds who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. If you want to renounce the world, be like the young sannyasin to whom the most

beautiful woman and a kingdom meant nothing
Each is great in his own place, but the duty of the
one is not the duty of the other "

3 THE WORLD IS A CARAVANSARY

An old beggar, mistaking the palace for an inn, was entering the gates, when he was challenged by the gatekeepers "Stop, Where are you going?" demanded the gatekeepers. The beggar said, "I am entering an inn" The old man was taken to a lockup and was charged with trying to enter the palace. When the case came on for hearing, the beggar called the king as one of his witnesses. When the king appeared the beggar thus questioned him, "Sir, who is living in the palace today?" "I am," said the king "Before you who lived there?" "My father" "And before your father?" "My grandfather" "And before him who lived there?" "My great grandfather" Thereupon the beggar submitted to the court that a place which was inhabited by so many persons could not be other than an inn or a caravansary. The judge, who was also a philosopher, was impressed with the argument and ordered the beggar's release.

4 GHANTAKARNA

Ghantakarna was a great devotee of Shiva and refused to believe in any other God, nay even refused to hear the name of any other object of worship. To prevent his hearing any such names, he hung two

bells from his two ears. One evening when he began to perform the ceremony of Arati or "waving of lights" before the deity, he saw to his surprise that the image of Shiva, or Hara, turned half into Hari and the other half remained as Hara. He also found that the smoke issuing from the incense sticks that he had burnt was entering into the two nostrils of the image, one belonging to Hara and the other to Hari. A fanatical devotee of Hara that he was, he thought that he would stop the half image of Hari inhaling the incense smoke and with that object he pressed the nostril belonging to that half of the image, when a voice from heaven said, "He who is Hara is also Hari."

5 INEVITABLE KARMA

A man who had been living a miserable life for a long time after great deliberation thought that his sufferings might cease if he got initiation into spiritual life. He, therefore, went to a famous Rishi and sought his blessings. He was initiated and found real joy in the new life that he adopted.

But occasionally mishaps and calamities came to him. This used to make him very impatient and he used to run up to his Guru on such occasions. Once the latter after giving him a patient hearing said, "Everybody has to exhaust the consequences of the Karma of his past lives, nobody can avoid or resist them. Even a self-realised saint cannot take upon

himself the consequences of another man's karma by way of vicarious atonement, only God-incarnations can do so. Thus you see the mother of Sri Ramachandra, who was God-incarnate, had to undergo many sufferings in her life, and though the Pandvas were supported and helped by Sri Krishna himself, they could not avoid sufferings which followed them throughout their lives. Jada Bharat was a saint of high order, but he had to be reborn as a deer as he could not resist thinking of a young deer, which had been brought up by him in his hermitage, at the time of his death. None, therefore, can avoid the inevitable consequences of karma.

6 THE WAYS OF A SAINT

A saintly man used to sit under a mango tree for meditation. Once when the tree was full of ripe fruits two passers-by, wanting to get some of the mangoes, threw stones at them, some of which fell on the saint and hit him. The king of the place was a great devotee of the saint and used to visit him every day. When he came there in the evening he learned what had befallen the saint and immediately ordered arrest of the miscreants. They were duly arrested and brought before the king. Having ordered severe punishment for them he came to the saint and told him what he had done, thinking that the saint would be pleased. The saint, however, asked the king to release the miscreants at once and said,

"This tree when stoned did not grudge to give its fruits to the miscreants. If a tree could behave like this with such people, why should not man, with his superior intelligence and morals, also behave in the same manner? You should, therefore, immediately release the two men, give each of them a hundred mangoes and tell them to behave better in future."

7 FAITH CAN WORK MIRACLES.

A widow who had an only son lived in great poverty. When the son was 11 years of age he had to be sent to a school which was at some distance from her little hut and the way lay through a forest. On the first day when the boy came back from school he told his mother that he was afraid to pass through the lonely forest and asked her whether she could send somebody to accompany him to the school. The widow replied, "My son, we are very poor. I cannot even pay your school fee nor feed you properly." Saying this, in her helplessness, she began to weep. After some time she told her son, "My son, there is nobody to go with you, but if you are ever afraid while passing through the forest, shout for your dada (elder brother) whose name is Gopal and who lives in the forest. He will surely look after you." Next day, while passing through the forest, he shouted, "Gopal dada, I am afraid. Will you come and take me out of the forest?" A boy of twelve years at once came there and said, "Don't be afraid, my little

brother", and holding the boy's hand he accompanied him up to the end of the forest. This happened every day for a year, at the end of which the father of the boy's schoolmaster died. The day when the teacher had to perform his father's shraddha (obsequial ceremony) the boys of the school were expected to bring presents of money, sweets and other eatables for the ceremony. Our little boy asked his mother what present she could give him for his teacher. The widow, finding nothing to give, began to weep. The boy then said, "Mother, I shall ask my Gopal dada to give me something which I shall take to my teacher." As he went through the forest he met his Gopal dada and asked him to give him something which should serve as a present to his teacher. Gopal dada went inside the forest and came back with a small pot of milk. With this pot the boy went to his teacher's house, but nobody took any notice of him for a long time. He went to his teacher and showed him the pot of milk. One of the teacher's friends took the pot from his hand, and going to a place where there were bigger pots of milk he poured out the contents of the pot brought by the boy into one of the bigger pots. To his utter surprise he found that the pot was still full of milk. He emptied the pot several times into the bigger pots, and finding that the pot remained full of milk even after it had been emptied, he went up to the teacher and told him and others the wonderful quality of the pot brought

by the little boy. The news soon spread over the village and everybody came to see the surprising phenomenon. The teacher asked the boy where he had brought the pot from. The boy said that it was his Gopal dada who was living in the forest who had given him the pot. The teacher then said "Can you show your Gopal dada if I come with you?" The boy said, "Why not? Come with me to the forest now." The teacher went to the forest with the boy who shouted for Gopal dada. He got no response. Surprised that his elder brother did not appear as usual, the boy then began to shout, "Gopal dada, why are you not coming? My teacher will think that I am a liar if you do not come." A voice replied from a distance, "I cannot come before everybody, my little brother. Tell your teacher that he will see me only if he seeks me in the same way as you sought me a year ago."

8 THE BIGGEST THING OF ALL

A disciple once asked his spiritual preceptor, "What is the biggest thing in the whole universe?" The preceptor replied, "The earth, my son, is the largest thing that we see around us. We do not see the oceans, and the watery part of the globe is larger than the land. Larger than the ocean is the sky in which the planets move round the sun, but you have heard that the Lord of the universe, Vishnu, once covered the earth, sky and the nether

world with one of his feet But the heart of a holy man is bigger than the foot of Lord Vishnu, because His foot is enshrined in the holy man's heart "

9 IMAGE WORSHIP

Once Swamī Vivekananda during his itinerary arrived at Alwar The Dewan of the state kept him in his house as a guest, being impressed by the Swami's personality, learning and spirituality He once invited the Maharaja to his house to enable him to listen to the Swami's talks When the Maharaja arrived, he was given a seat of honour on both sides of which golden spittoons were placed After listening to the Swamī's talk for some time he asked him, "Swamiji, I see that you are a learned man You can remain as a Sabha Pandit in any state Why do you instead go about like a beggar from place to place?" The Swami replied, "Maharaja Sahab, I hear you have a comfortable palace Why then do you go out for hunting in different forests in your state?" The Maharaja replied that he was very fond of hunting Vivekananda then said, "I lead a beggar's life because I am fond of it " The Maharaja then said that his forefathers had installed the image of Sri Krishna in a temple inside the palace though he himself had no faith in image worship, and he asked the Swami whether image worship was not a harmful practice Swami Vivekananda sat silent for a while and then asked

some persons assembled there to get him a picture of the Maharaja. They took one picture from the walls of the big room where the conversation was going on and brought it to the Swami. The Swami showed the picture to the people around and asked them to spit upon it. All the assembled persons were surprised and nonplussed and the Dewan said, "Swamiji, what are you saying? How can any of us do what you have asked, seeing that the picture is of the Maharaja whom we all revere?" The Swami then turned to the ruler and said, "Maharaja Sahab, you see that nobody dares to spit on your picture, though it is only a paper on which your image is printed. You see the golden spittoons by your side and the silver spittoons placed in this room. None minds spitting into these spittoons of precious metals, but nobody dares to spit on this photograph, out of their respect to you. The image of Sri Krishna in your temple reminds the visitor of the Lord whom we all worship. We do not look upon the image as a piece of stone. The image represents the real God whom we wish to worship and they do worship Him in reality through the idol or image installed." The Maharaja said, "Swamiji, you have opened my eyes today. Never shall I look down upon image worship."

10 THE END OF RITUALS

A number of Brahmins were once sitting on the banks of the Ganges performing their evening religious rites. One of them, however, was observed sitting still and performing no rites. On being asked of the reason he said, "I am under asoucha (temporary defilement caused by the birth or death of a blood relative during which one cannot perform the daily religious rites). My mother, ignorance, is dead and my son, self-knowledge has been born."

11 THE UNTOUCHABLE SOUL

Once Sankarācharya, having finished his bath in the Ganges, was going up the steps when he found an untouchable in front of him. The untouchable was going down and brushed against him. "Stop", said Sankarācharya, "you have touched me". The pariah replied, "Revered Sir, I have not touched you nor have you touched me. The self can neither be touched nor be contaminated by touch. The sun is reflected equally in wine as well as in the waters of the Ganges."

12 THE STORY OF DHRUVA

Dhruva was a little boy who along with his mother was unjustly exiled by his father, who was a king, with the object of pleasing his other queen. His mother used to say that God alone could help them in their troubles. Dhruva resolved to perform

all penances and observe austerities in order to win the grace of God. After many days of penance one day he found God appearing before him and asking him what boons he would like to have. By that time all his earthly desires had fallen away from him and all that he could ask for was that he should be devoted to God and have faith in Him. When he was offered the throne of his father, he found that he had no desire for any kind of material happiness and he said that all he wanted was to live constantly devoted to the feet of the Lord.

13 THE QUALITY OF ASPIRATION

A spiritual aspirant took initiation from a Guru. After a few days' spiritual practice he grew impatient and began to ask his preceptor when he was going to realise God. The preceptor asked him to carry on the spiritual practice with patience and perseverance, but the disciple was impatient and every now and then plied his Guru with the same enquiry. One day the disciple met the Guru while the latter was going to bathe in the river. As the disciple again asked, "When shall I see God?" the preceptor told him to follow him and both went down to the river. The Guru asked the disciple to take a dip in the water, and when the disciple did so the Guru pressed down his head and kept it down forcibly for a few seconds. When he released his hold, the disciple put his head above the water. The Guru

then asked him how he had felt when his head had been forcibly kept down in the water. The disciple said, "I felt I was going to die unless I could bring my head out of water immediately and breathe." The Guru replied, "Well, when you feel that you are going to die unless you see God immediately, only then will you be able to see Him."

14 REALISATION OF BRAHMAN

A cow having fallen ill, a veterinary doctor prescribed a medicine which was to be administered to it along with butter and black pepper powder. The owner of the cow gave it the medicine mixed with the black pepper powder but not with butter. He thought as butter was a product of milk and milk was in the cow itself there was no need to add butter to the medicine prescribed. When the condition of the cow became serious he saw the doctor again, and when the doctor learned the facts he said, "It is true that there is milk inside the cow, but in order to make butter you must milk it, turn the milk into curds and then churn the curds." Similarly, Brahman is everywhere. One must follow the requisite methods, i.e. perform tapasya, etc., in order to realise it, otherwise it is impossible to obtain any benefit from the mere fact that Brahman is omnipresent.

15 REALISATION OF BRAHMAN

A preceptor once explained the same truth by an analogy. He said that though electricity is everywhere in order to utilise it for our needs we must have a dynamo, connect it by wires with bulbs, fans, etc., and that only then would electricity manifest itself through light or the functioning of the fans or other machines. Similarly, it has been repeatedly said that though Brahman is everywhere none can realise it unless one goes through the necessary spiritual practices, such as observance of austerities, devotional practices, etc. It is only through the path of such practices and austerities that the invisible can become visible and fulfil the expectations of the devotee.

16 THE TWO BIRDS SITTING ON A TREE

The scriptures speak of two birds seated on a tree, one on a higher branch and the other on a branch below. The one sitting above is calm, majestic and silent and the other is hopping from branch to branch, eating the sweet and bitter fruits hanging on the branches and feeling happy and miserable by turns. The bird on the higher branch is neither happy nor miserable but calm and self-centred and contented. The bird sitting on the lower branch now and again is feeling envious of the calmness and contentment of the other bird and

tries to sit quiet and silent like it, but in a little while it again is goaded by the desire to eat the different fruits on the branches. Now and again the light is reflected from the brilliant plumage of the bird at the top and falls on the body of the bird below which feels itself undergoing a marvelous change. It then begins to feel that the eating of the fruits, bitter and sweet, feeling happy and miserable, was a vain dream and chimera and that it is like that of the calm and glorious bird sitting overhead. This parable is told to illustrate the relationship between God, the Supreme Self, and the human soul enjoying the sweet and bitter fruits of this world. The latter now and then feels tired of its enjoyments and sorrows and turns towards the unknown God and a flood of light streams into the soul. This attitude, however, does not last long and again it begins to eat the sweet and bitter fruits of the world as before, but gradually it experiences disappointment and approaches God and on approaching nearer it finds that its individuality is melting, and as the light flows more and more strongly from God the individual soul, becoming conscious of it, finally comes to realise that it is the same self as the Supreme Self.

17 THE EYE OF FAITH

Once a Brahmin had to go away from his home to attend to an important work and he asked his son, a boy of 10 years of age, to attend to the daily puja of the family deity. The boy performed puja with all reverence and in the end offered food offerings to the God. He had been under the impression that the family deity, Gopal, physically partook of the food offered. When he found that the image took nothing of the food, he began to weep and asked Gopal to take the food offered to him, otherwise he would be abused by his father. As no response came from the image, he went and brought a log of wood with which in his anger he was about to deal a blow upon the image of Gopal. At once he saw a boy of heavenly beauty appear and partake of the food offered. By his faith his prayers were answered.

18 THE STORY OF NACHIKETA

Nachiketa was the son of Rishi Uddalaka and was aged 8 years. The Rishi performed a sacrifice of the kind known as Visvajit, which means Universe-conquering. After offering the final oblations according to the practice enjoined by the scriptures Rishi Uddalaka had to give away all he had to the Brahmins. The disciples, however, began to give away only old worn-out cows belonging to the Ashram. Nachiketa went up to his father and

said," Father, you have asked your disciples to give away everything I, your son, also belong to you To whom would you give me away?" The father at first made no reply When the question was repeated, the Rishi became annoyed and said, "I will give you to the king of death, Yama " Nachiketa, therefore, prepared himself to go to the king of death He took leave of his father and left the Ashram and went on searching the abode of Yama First, he came across a peasant in the field who on being enquired of the abode of the king of death shuddered at the idea and ran away He then met a Brahmin Pandit who on being asked where Yama lived, thought that the boy might have been scolded by his parents and wanted to put an end to his life So the Pandit said that he did not know Nachiketa thereupon told him, "If you do not know where Yama lives, you cannot claim to be a Pandit and I shall tell everybody that you are not a Pandit " Hearing this the Pandit said, "Well, the abode of Yama is towards the south" The boy started going southwards He walked for weeks and months but could not find the home of Yama While passing through the forest he found a saint engaged in meditation with some of his disciples around him He asked the saint where Yama lived and was told that Yama did not live on the earthly plane and that only by the practice of yoga could he discover the place where the king of death lived The saint

initiated Nachiketa into the mysteries of yoga practice. The boy attained occult power by such practices and at last arrived at the gate of the palace of the king of death. The latter was absent from his palace at the time for three days and the boy refused the hospitality of his prime minister till Yama came back to his palace. The king then offered the young Brahmin hospitality with water, fruits and flowers and told him to ask for three boons for the three days which he had spent at his palace without enjoying his hospitality.

Nachiketa said that first of all he wanted that his father, who must be spending an anxious time on his account, should be relieved of his worries till Nachiketa could go back to his father. The king of death granted his prayer. For his next boon he asked to be informed of the details of the sacrifice, the performance of which enables the sacrificer to attain eternal happiness, for the details of the manner in which the sacrifice was to be performed were known only to the king of death. Yama then gave the boy all the details concerned with that sacrifice.

When his turn came to ask the third boon, Nachiketa said, "Well, Sir, many people say that the Self or Atman is immutable and immortal, having no birth or death, others say that there is no birth or death and everything ends with the death of the

body Others again maintain that nothing can be known about the mysteries of birth and death Only you, Oh Yama, know the truth Please, therefore, tell me all that happens to a soul after death " The king of death was, however, very reluctant to disclose the secret and tried to dissuade the boy from pressing this request He said that the subject was very abstract and abstruse and that millions of enquirers practised life-long penances and austerities in order to know what Nachiketa was asking for He said, "Don't ask for such a boon Ask for something else You can ask for a long lease of life, a vast kingdom, beautiful wives, sons and grandsons, untold treasures, horses, elephants, honours and prosperity " Nachiketa replied that he knew that all those were earthly things and none of them was permanent The boy would not be satisfied with anything except what he had asked for So, the king of death was obliged to impart to him the true knowledge concerning the Self

Kathopanishad

19 THE PRIDE OF LEARNING

A savant was very proud of his learning One day while he was explaining a verse to his pupil which warned the reader of the temptations and allurements of life, he thought that the text was incorrect and he corrected the word "chapi" i e , also, to "napi" i e , not

Next day as he was going to bathe in the river Ganges a storm arose together with heavy rain and everyone ran back to his house. The learned man also ran towards his house but on his way he was forced to enter a temple of Shiva for shelter. He found a beautiful lady in the temple and a sudden infatuation overcoming him, he tried to catch hold of her. She, however, began to move around the image of Shiva, and he started running after her. As she repeatedly eluded him, he jumped over the image to catch hold of her. As he landed on the other side, he heard a voice issuing from the deity saying that passion even drives a learned man. That exclamation reproduced the words in the text which he had corrected on the previous day. The savant at once saw his mistake, and going back to his house restored the text to its original form.

20 VANITY OF SCHOLARSHIP

A Brahmin scholar who was busy writing a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita thought that one of the verses must have been wrongly worded. The second line of that verse (9th Chapter, 22nd verse) reads, "To persons who meditate on me as non-separate and worship me in all beings and to those who are wholly and constantly steadfast in their worship, I carry what they lack and preserve what they already have." The scholar could not understand how the Lord could himself carry any-

thing He meditated seriously on the subject for two days and nights and then he changed the text so as to mean, "I get the things they lack and preserve what they already have" During the days as he was meditating on the difficult question he could not go out for begging alms as usual, and he as well as his wife had been without food His wife told him that as he had not brought anything, she had been unable for the last two days to cook any food for him She requested him to go out immediately in search of alms The learned man went out but unfortunately his efforts all proved unavailing

Shortly before noon, however, two boys came to his house with two baskets full of milk, butter, oil, spices and other articles of food They placed these baskets before the scholar's wife and when she asked them who had sent them, they said, "He has sent these things to you" Before they went away she saw a scratch on the chest of one of the boys and when she asked how he got it, he said, "He knows all about this" The wife thought that by the word "He" the boys meant her own husband The scholar who had been on his rounds came back home late in the afternoon without having been able to collect any alms His wife immediately asked him to have his bath and get ready for his meal He asked how she was able to prepare meals when he was not able to get any alms, and his wife

told him that two boys, one of whom had a scratch right upon his chest, had brought two basketfuls of foodstuffs to his house and they had said that they had been sent by him. The scholar was convinced that the boys must be the forms the Lord himself had assumed and then brought the things that were required for his household. He also saw that the scratch upon the person of one of the boys must have been the scratch which he had made in the text of Gita. He said to his wife, "You are indeed blessed as you have seen the form of the Lord."

21 RECONCILIATION OF CONTRADICTIONS.

A judge who was hearing a forgery case found himself in a dilemma when he had finished with the depositions of two witnesses. They gave the following conflicting versions of the same incident.

The two witnesses were asked —

- (1) Where was the crime committed?
- (2) When was it committed?
- (3) With what kind of pen was the document written?

The first witness said that the crime had been committed outside a building, that the time was day time and that a reed pen had been used. But when the second witness was called to the witness box, he said that the offence had been committed in a building, that it had not been committed in daylight

and that a steel pen had been used. The learned judge found it difficult to arrive at any conclusion on these three questions of fact.

A third witness was then examined and the same three questions were put to him. He said that the offence might be said to have occurred inside or not inside a room. The judge thereupon asked how that could be, and the witness replied, "Sir, it was an unfinished building with walls on all sides but no roof. So one could describe the place as a room or no room." To the second question, this witness said that one might or might not say that it was committed in daytime. On the judge again wanting to know how could that be, he said, "Well, sir, it was not day because the sun had set nor was it at night as it was twilight." To the third question, he replied that it might be described as a reed pen or a steel pen. "How was that?" the judge asked. The witness said that a steel nib had been fitted into a reed pen. "A forgery indeed!" exclaimed the judge.

22 THE WORTH OF THE LORD'S NAME

Ajamī had a wife with whom he lived a very unhappy life. He left her and he next started living with another woman whom he had not married. He had eight sons by this woman, the youngest of whom he named Narayana. He loved this boy very much. Therefore he uttered the word 'Narayana'

many times during the day. When he was dying he kept on repeating the name of Narayana. This had its effect on his mind and he was relieved from the effects of all the sins he had committed.

23 THE SPIRIT OF RECEIVING A GIFT

A social worker who was organising the celebration of an anniversary of a national leader's death got together a batch of voluntary workers for the collection of funds. One of these workers went to a wealthy man and asked for a donation. He knew that the wealthy man was a miser and would not easily part with any money. As the worker tried to persuade him to give something, however little, the rich man lost his temper and threw a broomstick at him. The worker took up the broomstick as if it was something of great value and thanked the rich man for his gift with evident delight and satisfaction. The rich man felt abashed and he apologised for his conduct and asked the worker why he regarded the broomstick which he had thrown at him in anger as some sort of gift. The volunteer said, "Sir, you have given me a great thing, for a broomstick, though unclean, cleans away all dirt from the place where it is used. It has reminded me that I shall have to do such work myself in the organisation to which I belong and hence I am overjoyed that you have presented me with such a good thing."

24 POWER OF CONCENTRATION

One day a disciple found Swami Vivekananda turning over the pages of a volume so fast that he thought that the Swami must be looking merely at the pictures. He asked the Swami whether he was looking at the pictures in the book. Swami Vivekananda replied, "No, I am reading." The disciple said, "That requires attention, but you have been turning over the pages at the rate of a page per minute." The Swami then said, "No, I have been reading each page and have finished 11 volumes on the shelf. If you don't believe me you can ask me questions concerning any subject-matter dealt with in the 11 volumes." The disciple then started putting questions and Swami Vivekananda answered all the questions correctly. The disciple asked how it was possible for the Swami to read the big volumes so quickly. Swami Vivekananda replied, "It is possible for a Yogi who has observed the vow of continence scrupulously. When a boy is reading, his attention is first fixed on the letters composing a word and he then learns how to pronounce a word. With more practice a man does not look at each separate letter or the word itself, and by such practice a reader can read a few words together at the same time. Similarly, it is possible to take in a whole sentence at a time. But if a man who has absolute self-control and continence concentrates his mind on the page, he can read a whole paragraph

at one time, and later he will be capable of reading a whole page in this manner when the power of concentration increases as a result of strict observance of the vow of continence "

25 THE SOURCE OF POWER

In ancient times, there was a long and bitter fight between the gods (devas) and the demons (asuras) Ultimately the gods came off victorious, but thereafter they began to indulge in pride and became proud of their own prowess and possession of power It is said that the Almighty, feeling that the gods' pride must be curbed, incarnated himself as a Yaksha or a supermundane being who inhabits the upper regions, and as such Yaksha appeared before the gods Puzzled by his appearance and not knowing who he was, they deputed the god of fire (Agni) to find out who he was

Agni proudly walked towards the Yaksha, and the latter asked him, "Who art thou?" Agni replied, "I am known as Agni and some people also call me Jatavedas " "What is thy power?" asked the Yaksha, and he replied, "I can burn anything in the world into ashes and none can escape me " The Yaksha then placed a piece of dry straw before Agni and asked him to burn it Agni, however, tried with all his power to burn that wisp of straw but was unsuccessful He was surprised at the

failure of his powers and came back to the gods greatly crestfallen. The gods thereupon sent Vayu (the god of wind) to meet the strange being. When Vayu met him, the latter asked again who he was and what he could do. Vayu replied, "I am the wind and I am also known as Matarishwan. I can blow away anything that comes in my way." The Yaksha then placed the same wisp of straw and asked him to blow it away. Vayu tried with all his strength but could not move it from its place. This confused and puzzled him and he also returned to the gods amazed at the loss of his powers. Thereafter, the gods persuaded Indra to go and meet the Yaksha. As Indra approached the Yaksha, the latter vanished into the air. Indra stood confounded, when he saw the goddess Ūma (Shiva's consort) appear before him in her resplendent beauty. Indra asked her reverentially, "Where is that wonderful being who was here a moment ago?" Uma said, "That was the form the Almighty had taken. All of us exist on account of his being and it is to show you that your victory was due to his power and grace that he appeared before you and showed that without his aid none can claim any power as his own."

Kenopanishad

26 SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND.

Once upon a time, a god, a man and a devil went to Prajapati, the seniormost of the Rishis, for spiritual instruction. First the god told him that he was seeking spiritual instruction. Whereupon Prajapati merely uttered the word "Da". The Rishi similarly gave the same reply "Da" to the other two, the man and devil, as well. Each of them went on thinking what the meaning of the syllable might be. The god thought that the word must mean "Dama" or self-control. The man thought that it must mean "Dana" or gift, and to the demon it meant "Daya" or kindness. Each of them in turn went to the Rishi and asked whether his interpretation was correct. The Rishi said that all of them were correct in their own spheres. This goes to show that the meaning of each of the spiritual principles is to be discovered by an aspirant with the help of his teacher backed by his own efforts at their purest level.

Bṛihad Up Chap V II

27 FUTILE DISAPPEARANCE

Once while the preceptor was teaching his pupils about the higher states of consciousness which ignores physical experience, he said, "Once upon a time while Sri Krishna was playing hide and seek with his playmates and the Gopis, they all caught hold of his hands, but Sri Krishna all on a sudden got his hands free from their hold and

ran away. The Gopis thereupon said, "Oh Krishna, you have snatched away your hands from ours and run away but we should have truly admired your manly skill if you had snatched yourself from our hearts!"

28 PERFECT DISCIPLE

In ancient times it was customary for all intending disciples of a teacher to approach him with fuel in hand. Satyakama thus approached an old Rishi named Gautama in order to be initiated into spiritual truth. The first stage in initiation was the adoption of Brahmacharya (the life of a celibate student) and being invested with the sacred thread. Gautama duly initiated Satyakama and thereafter he became a disciple owing full loyalty to his master. One day Gautama called him and handed over four hundred cows to him. He was told to take care of the cows and to bring them back to the hermitage after their number had gone up to one thousand. Satyakama took the cows to a far-off forest and began to practise spiritual austerities. At night he used to light a fire to protect the cows from other animals. Days and months and years passed while the cows multiplied year after year, and when their number attained one thousand the God of the Wind entered into the biggest of the bulls and it came to Satyakama and said, 'Sir, our number has reached one thousand. Will you not take us back to the hermitage now?'

Satyakama, on counting the number of the cows, found that what the bull had said was true. The bull, thereupon, said that it was the God of the Wind who was speaking to him and that he was very pleased to find the devotion with which he had been attending to his duties and following the injunctions of his preceptor. He proposed to impart to him some knowledge of Brahman and said, "Satyakama, the east, west, north and south are but the different parts of one foot of Brahman. This foot is known as "Prakasvan" the illuminator. I have told you of only one foot of the four feet of Brahman. Tomorrow, the God of Fire will come and speak to you about the second foot." Satyakama started for his preceptor's hermitage, and when night came he lit a fire to effectively guard the cows. He heard a voice coming from the fire and saying, "My boy, I am Agni and I wish to impart to you the knowledge of the second foot of Brahman. This is constituted by the earth, sky and the seven seas. I have now instructed you regarding the second foot of Brahman. Tomorrow a swan will come and give you instructions as to the third foot." Next day, at night, after Satyakama had lit the fire he found a white swan coming to him on wings and as it settled down before him it began to address Satyakama. It said, "Satyakama, you ought to learn from me the secret of the third foot of Brahman. That foot is constituted by the fire that blazes before you, the

sun, the moon and the lightning These constitute the third foot of Brahman which is known as Jyotishman, the effulgent Regarding the fourth foot of Brahman you will be instructed tomorrow by an aquatic bird " Next day, after the fire had been lit and as Satyakama was meditating on Brahman, an aquatic bird came to him flying and said, "I shall tell you about the fourth foot of Brahman" Satyakama now felt himself to be fully enlightened about Brahman and went to meet his preceptor with the thousand cows in his charge Looking at his face illumined by the Supreme Knowledge, Rishi Gautama asked him whether he had been instructed on his way by any person Satyakama narrated to him all that had happened on his way to the hermitage Gautama was delighted on hearing of the instructions which Satyakama had received and explained the inner meaning of which Truth had been imparted to him, namely, that he who worships Brahman as the illuminator of all the objects attains to the endless world after death, that he who worships Brahman as the Infinite attains to infinite glory and conquers all the three worlds, that he who worships Brahman as the Effulgent Being has his conscience illumined by the high truths and conquers all the manifold shining worlds, and lastly, that he who worships Brahman in his final aspect gets the choicest spot on earth and conquers all the supporting worlds

Chh Up

29 HE SINGS FOR THE LORD

The great emperor Akbar was very fond of music, and his court musician Tansen used to entertain him with his songs. One day Akbar asked him whether there was anyone in the world who could sing better than he. Tansen immediately replied that his teacher was incomparably a better singer than he was. The emperor expressed a desire to see Tansen's teacher who lived a simple life in a hut at Brindaban on the bank of the Jumna. Akbar forthwith made arrangements to go there and reached Brindaban with Tansen.

Tansen introduced the emperor to his master and told him the object of his visit. He was then asked to sing a few songs which he did to the great delight of the emperor. Akbar found that the singing of the master was incomparably superior to Tansen's. He complimented him on his superb music and returned to his capital city. On his way he asked Tansen how it was possible for an old man, who lived a life of austerity in a hut bereft of all comforts, to sing so divinely. Tansen replied, "Sir, I sing for you, an earthly emperor, while my master sings for the Lord of the universe, and that is why his singing is so superior to mine."

30 THE UNFOLDING OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Upakoshala was one of the main students of Satyakama. Many of his students served him for a

few years and went away after they had the privilege of receiving instructions from him regarding the knowledge of Brahman, but, unfortunately, Upakoshala was not so favoured. The wife of the preceptor, who had a special affection for Upakoshala, was pained to find that her husband did not show him the favour which he deserved by his unremitting service and application to his studies. She once reminded Satyakama that Upakoshala had served him for 12 years attending to the three fires in the hermitage but that he had not been pleased to favour him with the instructions coveted by all his disciples. Satyakama, however, made no reply and all on a sudden started one day on a pilgrimage.

Upakoshala was mortified that even his guru's wife had not been able to persuade Satyakama to confer the knowledge of Brahman on him. He went on tending the three fires of the Ashram but stopped taking any food. The three fires began to discuss amongst themselves why Upakoshala who had been practising austerities for many years had not been favoured with instructions regarding Brahman by the teacher. They called Upakoshala and said, "We are exceedingly pleased with your selfless service and practice of austerities and we shall now impart to you the knowledge of Brahman", and then they said, "Know that Prana (vital energy) is Brahman, that 'Ka' the first alphabet and 'Kha' the

second alphabet are Brahman " Upakoshala said that he understood that Prana is Brahman but he did not know how the two alphabets could be Brahman The fires then said, "Know that what is 'Ka' is same as 'Kha' and what is 'Kha' is also 'Ka' "

Upakoshala began to ponder over the last sentence and knew that 'Ka' meant happiness and 'Kha' meant width and expansion Pondering still further, he came to the conclusion that what the fires intended to convey was that happiness when it becomes all-pervading is the supreme bliss which is identified with Brahman and that when the wide universe becomes pervaded with happiness or bliss that again can be identified with Brahman

By the time he had come to this conclusion, which pleased him immensely, Satyakama returned from his pilgrimage He found his disciple's face bright and effulgent and he asked him whether he had received any instructions from any person Upakoshala narrated to him all that had happened in his absence Then Satyakama, in order to supplement the lesson that Upakoshala had received, addressed him thus "My boy, the purusha (the being) that you find in the eyes of the man is the pure self because it is fearless and immortal The being that looks through the eyes and because of whom the eye functions as the organ of sight is the eye of the eyes, i e , the self or the Brahman It is

deathless, taintless, fearless and pure When a drop of water falls into the eye, it slides away and the eye remains untarnished and pure as before That is the nature of the purusha or Brahman " Satyakama then proceeded to explain why the self is also termed "Vamani", the distributor of fruits of action, and "Bhamani", the illuminator of the whole universe He then narrated the path of the gods by which blessed souls struggle after they leave their bodies to the region of the Supreme Being and explained how after death the self of the worshipper of purusha finds its way to the god of light and then to the god of the day and again to the god of the bright fortnight and thence to the northern solistice and then again to the region of the year and the sun and thence to the region of the moon, from where it is received by the god of lightning and taken up to the world of Brahman This path is known as Devayana or the path of the gods Thus Upakoshala was instructed fully about the highest path to Brahman

Ghhandogya Upanishad

31 MIRACLES OCCULT POWERS, No 1

Once upon a time the inmates of an Ashram who were devoted to spiritual practice, assembled in a place to discuss about the utility of occult powers There was a great controversy over the topic of discussion At the outset, there was a

division amongst the spiritual practitioners. One party held that the "Ashta Siddhis" — eight occult powers—viz becoming (1) the smallest of the small, (2) the largest of the large, (3) the heaviest of the heavy, (4) the lightest of the light, (5) attaining overlordship, (6) getting anything and everything at will, (7) bringing everything under subjugation, and (8) obtaining the power to pervade etc are but divine expressions and as such they are not negligible things. While the opposite party held that these powers do not contribute to the unfoldment of spiritual life of the owner in the least, but, on the other hand, they drift farther and farther away from the real moorings of the spiritual life and therefore they are abominable.

Both the parties had at last agreed to approach their preceptor who brought the controversy to an end saying, "People of small intellect seek occult powers—powers to cure disease, win law suit, walk on water and such things, but the genuine devotees of God never run after such things. They care only for that which is likely to develop their spiritual life."

Once Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was prevailed upon by his nephew Hriday to ask the Mother for some powers. Sri Ramakrishna was a man of child-like simplicity and while practising Japa in the temple at Dakshineswar said to the Mother, "Mother, Hriday asks me to pray to you for some

occult powers" The divine Mother at once showed him a vision— a middle aged prostitute, about 40 years old, appeared and sat with back to him She had large hips and was dressed with a black bordered sari She was covered with filth in no time The Mother showed him that occult powers were as abominable as the filth of that prostitute

People with a little occult power gain name and fame, power and position of a Guru, gain people's recognition, make disciples and followers People, of course, say of such a Guru, "Ah, he is having a wonderful time How many people visit him! What a number of disciples and followers he has! His house is overflowing with things and articles of enjoyment People give him presents He has such powers that he can feed any number of people if he so desires "

But all these make the man more and more attached to these powers and he forgets God altogether, the highest end of human life

32 MIRACLES OCCULT POWERS, No 2

The next day when they all assembled before the preceptor the disciples prayed to him to throw a little more light upon yesterday's subject when the preceptor furthermore said — "Once upon a time a Sadhu acquired great occult powers He was vain about them But he was a good man and had some

austerities to his credit. One day the Lord, disguised as a holy man, came to him and said, "Revered Sir, I have heard that you have great occult powers." The Sadhu received the Lord cordially and offered him a seat. Just then an elephant passed by. The Lord, in the disguise of the holy man, said to the Sadhu, "Revered Sir, can you kill this elephant if you like?" The Sadhu said, "Yes, it is possible." So saying, he took a pinch of dust, muttered some mantras over it, and threw it at the elephant. The beast struggled a while in pain and then dropped dead. The Lord said, "What power you have! You have killed the elephant!" The Sadhu laughed. Again the Lord spoke, "Now can you revive the elephant?" "That too is possible", replied the Sadhu. He threw another pinch of charmed dust at the beast. The elephant wretched about a little and came back to life. Then the Lord said, "Wonderful is your power. But may I ask you one thing? You have killed the elephant and you have revived it. But what has that done for you? Do you feel uplifted by it? Has that enabled you to realise God?" Saying this the Lord vanished.

Once a man attained the power of walking over water. He was very much proud of his attainment. One day he made a demonstration of his power by crossing over a river by foot. Most of the people were wondering at his power when a

saint-like man asked him if it were really worth something. The man with a smile said that was really a wonderful thing, whereupon the saint said, "Well, at the most it is worth only one pice. A man can cross the river by paying only one pice for the ferry boat. After all, if it has any worth it is worth only one pice and nothing more."

It is very troublesome to possess occult powers. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort, so he said, "Let the storm stop." His words could not remain unfulfilled. At the moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly, the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man and because of that sin he lost his occult powers and went to hell.

About the occult powers, Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, "Friend, if you find any one who has acquired even one of the eight powers, then know for certain he will not realise me." For powers surely beget pride, and God cannot be realised if there is the slightest trace of pride.

33 INCARNATION OF GOD

A question that troubled the disciples of a certain preceptor was whether God incarnates him-

self in order to fulfil the needs of different ages. Some of them held that as God was infinite he could never have a finite form, while others said that as God was omnipotent there was nothing that he could not do. In order to settle their doubts they approached their preceptor.

The preceptor gave his opinion as follows —
 "Brahman is not only infinite and invisible but also omnipotent and omniscient. If so, he must have the power to assume a finite form. If he cannot assume a form, he cannot be omnipotent and therefore cannot be God. If he does not know how to assume a particular form he cannot be omniscient and therefore ceases to be God. He is also almighty and has all power and everything is possible to him. Just as water is formless and assumes the shape or form of its container whether it be a cup or pot, tank, river or lake, it can assume any form. Just as water is condensed into ice and takes a different form, the same is the case with God, and He has the power to assume a shape or form when such an incarnation is needed for the good of the world. The ocean is a vast formless sheet of water. In the ocean there are bubbles, ripples and waves which are still forms though they change their aspect and form every moment."

34 APPEARANCE AND REALITY

The goddess Durga had two sons, Ganesh and Kartik. Once when she was sitting with a necklace of pearls around her neck, both the children came to her and said, "Mother, I want that necklace", and Durga could not make up her mind as to whom the necklace should be given. She, therefore proposed that it would be given to him who was able to circumambulate the whole world before the other.

Kartik was very much pleased with the proposal as he rode a peacock which was much swifter in locomotion than Ganesh's vehicle, the mouse. Kartik, therefore, at once started on his peacock to go round the world.

Ganesh, however, sat for a while pondering over his mother's proposal and at last he came and prostrated himself at Durga's feet and said, "Mother, you are the mother of the universe and the whole world is but a part of you. If I therefore go round you I shall have circumambulated the world", and so saying he went round his mother and prostrated before her. Durga, however, waited for the return of Kartik. When the latter came back he found Ganesh, his elder brother, standing before their mother with folded palms. Being surprised that Ganesh had already arrived, he asked whether he had gone round the world. Ganesh claimed that

he had done so. When Kartik demanded to know how he had done so, Ganesh replied that the whole universe was contained in his mother and that, therefore, he had merely gone round her. Durga was much pleased with Ganesh's knowledge and devotion and gave him the necklace of pearls.

35 FORMS OF GOD

A student of theology, who had learnt from his teacher that God was formless and could still assume form, found his mind upset with embarrassing questions. With his doubts he approached his preceptor and requested him to remove the difficulties that assailed his mind. The preceptor said, "God is infinite and eternal and infinite are the ways in which he manifests Himself in the world, and all things seen in the universe are nothing but Brahman." He went on saying, "A human being can conceive of the highest being as a man. Similarly, if a cow or buffalo was able to think, it would conceive of a god in the forms of a better and bigger cow or buffalo. So, as the minds of men are thus different from one another, their conceptions of God vary from person to person. There are as many forms of God as there are minds."

36 SECRET OF RESIGNATION

A young man who had become a religious mendicant from childhood was one day asked by

his preceptor to go out for begging alms. He went out from the hermitage and on arriving at a village he started begging alms from door to door. In one house, a girl came out to give alms. He had not been used to the society of women and looking at the developed figure of the girl he enquired how she had come to have abscesses on her chest. The girl's mother who was standing nearby said, "My child, they are not abscesses. They are given by the creator to every mother for suckling their children when they are born." The young mendicant began to think how wonderful it was that God had thought of making provision for newly born babies even before they were born. He thought also that if the Creator had provided for babies not yet born, He must also have provided for those that had already been born. He, therefore, decided not to beg for alms any more. He went back to the hermitage and sat meditating upon God. Henceforward his physical wants were somehow provided for and he lived a life of total resignation to the will of God.

37 THE STORY OF TEN MEN

A band of ten men started for a certain destination. On their way they had to cross a river. There being no ferry, they decided to swim across the river. After reaching the other bank, each of them began to count the persons who had crossed

the river but omitted to count himself. Thus each of them counted only nine and all calculated that one of them must have been drowned. They went on crying, wailing and mourning the loss of one, when a passer-by hearing their cries asked them what the matter was. They told him that ten of them started crossing the river, but that one of them had been drowned. The passer-by found that they were ten and said that none of them had been drowned. They were not convinced, but when he counted them audibly they found their mistake.

This story is an allegory showing the illusion for the world (Ajnan) which overtakes mind, and the individual is not able to realise that he is the immutable self. When asked he says that he does not see any such thing and that therefore it does not exist. He believes that he acts and enjoys happiness and suffers miseries by turns, but he learns from a reliable teacher that the self is none but himself; he is relieved from the effects of his illusion and becomes free from his egoistic consciousness that he is the actor, agent or sufferer.

From the standpoint of Vedanta the story illustrates all the seven states beginning with illusion (Ajnan) and ending in complete self-satisfaction (Atmatripti) as follows —

That (1) Each of the ten of the group missing to count himself is ignorance (Ajnan)

(2) Each of them concluding the tenth man to have been lost is delusion (Ajnan & Avriti)

(3) Bewailing the loss of tenth man supposed to have been drowned in the river is (Vikshep) state of misery resulting from ignorance

(4) Assurance of the existence and presence of the tenth man amongst them by a reliable man is indirect knowledge (Paroksha Jnan)

(5) Each of those who have counted hitherto is the tenth, is direct knowledge (Aparoksha Jnan)

(6) After the direct knowledge of the presence of the tenth man comes cessation of grief

and (7) cessation of grief results in complete satisfaction or Atmatrpti

38 INTERPRETATION FOLLOWS NATURE

The Creator, Brahma, created the gods, men and demons. As they began to grow older the question arose, "Who was to educate them?" They thought that the only person to whom they should go for education was the Creator himself. They, therefore, went to the *ashram* of Prajapati (Brahma) who allowed them to live as his disciples and enjoined on them a life of continence and service to their preceptor as a preliminary to imparting knowledge to them.

After a time their minds attained purity and discipline as the result of the rules they had to observe and they at last approached Brahma for instruction. Brahma, finding them fit to receive instruction, merely uttered the word, "Da (द)" and asked them if they understood its meaning. They all replied, "Yes". When the gods were asked what they understood by the word "Da (द)" they said it meant "Damyata (दम्यता)" or "control yourself". This pleased Prajapati who said, "Yes, you are perfectly right".

The men were next asked by their preceptor what they understood by the word uttered by him. They said, "We think it means 'Datta (दत्त)' i.e., give away in charity and sacrifice". Again Prajapati said, "Yes, you have understood it perfectly".

Lastly, the demons were asked how they interpreted the word. They said, "We think it means 'Dayadhvam', (दयध्वम्) i.e., be kind and compassionate". This also pleased the teacher who said that the interpretation was correct.

This story shows how people, according to their different natures, are apt to interpret a text differently and it further shows that the course of preliminary training, i.e., observance of the vow of continence and purity, had so purified the minds of the pupils that they were able to give the best possible interpretations according to their natures.

It is said that the great lesson imparted by the Creator can still be heard in the voice of the clouds in thunder, saying, "Da-Da-Da"

Brih V 2nd Brahman

39 THE HIGHEST KNOWLEDGE

King Janaka of Videha, which was famous in the olden times for great kings, saints and scholars, was the greatest of the princes in India, and was endowed with spiritual insight and Vedic knowledge. Hundreds of seekers of spiritual truth flocked there in their search for knowledge. Once the king decided to perform a sacrifice, or yajna, which was to be crowned in the end by what was known as "Bahu Dakshina", i.e., enormous gift. All the scholars in Vedic lore, sages and seers were invited on the occasion, and after the closing oblations to the gods, the time came to give away the Dakshina. The king asked the servants to bring all his cows which were a thousand in number and the horns of which were gilded with gold. The king said to the learned and enlightened assembly that he was going to make a gift of the cows to the greatest among them who was endowed with the knowledge of the self. For a time none of the persons assembled stood up to claim the privilege, but at last there arose a man of arresting personality whose head was crowned with matted hair, a middle aged man of fine physique and resplendent face who asked

his Brahmacharin named Samasrava to go and collect the cows and take them to his ashram. At this, a number of people got up and asked, "Art thou, Yajnavalkya, then, the most supreme of all men of knowledge?" Asval, the king's priest, who regarded himself as the greatest of the savants, began to put himself questions to Yajnavalkya. Yajnavalkya, however, replied to him with humility and sweetness. Asval put a number of difficult questions on Vedic lore which Yajnavalkya replied to the entire satisfaction of all. After Asval was thus silenced, many other Rishis like Artabhag, Bhujyu, Kapi, questioned Yajnavalkya with the object of showing that the latter's claim was not justified, but they too were silenced by the replies given by the great Rishi.

Thereafter a young woman named Gargi, daughter of Rishi Vachaknav, who was known to be a highly accomplished and erudite girl, interrogated Yajnavalkya thus —

- Q This earth is permeated by water. Can you say what water in its turn is permeated by?
- A Water is permeated by air.
- Q What is it that permeates the air?
- A It is permeated by ether.
- Q By what substance is ether permeated?
- A Ether is permeated by heaven (Gandharvaloka).

Q By what is Gandharvaloka supported?

A By the sun (Adityaloka)

Q What supports Adityaloka?

A Chandraloka, the region of the moon

Q What region supports Chandraloka?

A By Nakshatraloka, the stellar region

Q Can you tell me where Nakshatraloka exists?

A In Devaloka, the abode of the gods

Q Where does Devaloka exist?

A In Indraloka, the abode of the king of the gods

Q Where does Indraloka exist?

A In Prajapatiloka, the region of the Creator, Brahma

Q Can you tell me where Brahmaloka exists?

On hearing this question, Yajnavalkya stood silent for a few minutes and then said, "I warn you, Gargi, not to go further in your query, for you are transgressing the principles of the Vedas. No question can be raised or entertained with regard to the Absolute and the Eternal which is the substratum of everything that exists and which is omnipresent and transcendent.

Gargi did not press her question further, but asked two more questions as follows —

Q Whereby do the earth and the heaven remain pervaded?

A By ether (Akasa)

Q What is the origin of ether or Akasa ?

A The origin of ether and the origin of creation are the same That is the ultimate Reality which is beginningless, endless and unfathomable

Yajnavalkya went on to say, "You are asking questions regarding the Immutable Being of whom the knowers of Brahman have said, "It is neither short nor long It is not the air, ether, earth or water It is neither the eyes nor ears, nor the mind, nor intellect, nor the vital force It is attributeless and without a second" The sun and moon are being held up by It as are the earth and the heaven and it is at Its bidding that days and nights, different seasons come with unfailing accuracy It regulates the stationary quality of the mountains and fluid quality of the rivers They who leave this world without knowing It are 'Kripanas' (persons who are atheistic) and only the knowers are true Brahmanas He who merely performs sacrifices without knowing the be-all and end-all of all things of this universe, exhausts his own labours and attains no good It is the Immutable Being who sees everyone and hears everybody, though nobody can hear or see It It knows all, though nobody can know It It is the one Reality, the one Immutable and Eternal Reality that permeates everything"

Everyone present hearing such a great discourse on the highest truth by Rishi Yajnavalkya felt that he or she was blessed

Brih III 1-9 Brahman

40 THE SUPREME TRUTH (II)

The above lessons imparted to Svetaketu had the effect of bringing about appropriate humility and a desire for higher knowledge in him. Thereafter his father imparted to him the oft repeated doctrine of "Tat Twam Asi", i.e., Thou art That (there is no distinction between the Jivatma and Paramatma). Uddalaka went on elucidating this doctrine by various illustrations but the matter, being abstruse, was not at first clearly grasped by Svetaketu. When he told his father that he did not clearly understand it, Uddalaka said, "As the waters of different rivers flow down into the ocean and become one with the ocean so that the identity of the water of the rivers is lost for ever in the ocean water, the individual self finally merges into the Supreme Self and in fact becomes one with the Supreme Self. Thou art That, Svetaketu."

He asked his son to pick the fruit of a banian tree which was standing before them. Svetaketu brought a fruit and on being asked to break it open, did so. Uddalaka then said, "See, how small is the fruit but how many smaller seeds it contains. Each

seed will become a big banian tree with huge branches and thousands of leaves. All these things lie embedded in this small, almost invisible seed. Similarly, the whole creation with all its varieties lies hidden in the primordial cause, subtler than the subtlest, namely, the Supreme Self. Thou art that, Svetaketu."

Pointing to a tree he continued, "If you cut a part of it on the top or middle or at the bottom, the tree will not die but if a branch is cut off, it has been severed from the main body and it will die, for whichever part is separated from the self withers and decays. It is the self which permeates the whole body of a tree and it is the supporter likewise of the whole creation. It is the all-pervasive and omniscient self. Thou art That, Svetaketu."

Svetaketu expressed his desire to know more about the Truth which his father had expounded. His father therefore asked him to bring a lump of salt and put it in a tub of water at night, and to come to him next morning. Next morning Svetaketu came to his father with the tub of water. Uddalaka asked him to find whether the lump of salt was in the tub of water. The son replied that it had melted in the water. He was asked to taste a little water from the top, middle and bottom of the tub. The son tasted it accordingly and said that every part was equally saline in taste. Uddalaka said, "As you

cannot see the salt in the water, you cannot see the self in the body. It is subtler than the most subtle and pervades the whole of the universe. It is the only Truth. Thou art That, Oh Svetaketu."

In this way Svetaketu gradually came to grasp the Supreme Truth about the Self and there remained nothing left for him to learn from his father.

Chh Up VI

41 FRUIT OF SELF-SURRENDER

One of the disciples of Śrī Ramakrishna named Swami Subodhananda practised *tapasya* or austerities at Gaya, a holy place. It was the month of August and the river Phalgu rose in spate with a strong current on account of the heavy rains. Swami Subodhananda wanted to cross the river, which was ordinarily fordable, but as he went into it he felt that he was going beyond his depth and was being carried away by the strong current. Feeling that his last hour was approaching he reconciled himself to his death and fixing his mind on Śrī Ramakrishna he surrendered himself utterly to his Guru. He got submerged in the rushing current but suddenly he felt that a force was pushing him to the other side of the river. On reaching the other side he found himself standing in waist-deep water. He then realised that it was his absolute surrender to his Guru that has saved him from all dangers.

42 DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

A preceptor, while instructing his disciples regarding the different conceptions of the Almighty, found it difficult to explain successfully the complexities of the matter. In order to make the matter simpler, he began to narrate the following story

"Once the teacher in a school for blind children wished to convey to his pupils what an elephant was like. An elephant was brought before the school and they were asked to feel its body with their hands and to get the idea of its size and shape. The boys went out and began to feel the elephant's body with their hands, when they finished, the teacher asked them to describe the shape and size of the elephant. One of the boys, who had touched the elephant's tail, said that it was like a stout big rope. Another, who had felt the elephant's stomach, said that it was like a huge basket. A third, who had felt one of the ears, said that it was like a fan. One who had felt the trunk said that it was like a big pipe, and one who had felt one of the legs said that it was like a pillar. Lastly, one who had been on the back of the elephant said that it was like a huge mountain. Now the elephant is not like any of these descriptions but it is the sum total of them and something more. Similarly, all conceptions of the Almighty are only partially right and he is the sum total of all such conceptions and even something more, for He is the

Infinite Being and no description can suffice to tell one what actually he is like. None can define him, for all descriptions merely limit His infinity."

43 PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

Some novitiates of an Ashram were discussing the question of the existence of God and finally came to their preceptor who was asked to say what proofs there were of God's existence. The preceptor said, "One of the arguments in favour of God's existence is that the world as a whole appears to be an organisation in which the conflicts that exist are subordinated to the purpose of the total organisation. If there were no guiding force behind the world, confusion and conflict would become apparent in a short time, as would happen to an organisation which tries to function without a head or principles for its government. If you look at the manner in which animals, plants and human beings grow and develop, you must come to the conclusion that these are guided by certain over-riding active principles which must owe their origin to some conscious and intelligent Being. The precision with which the sun and the moon move and the stars and planets rise and set can be explained on no theory except that there is some guiding and over-riding principle which is the basis of their movements and the unfailing certainty that they would go on rising, setting and moving as before for a much longer period in future

than one can foresee. The same conclusion emerges from the regularity with which the seasons return and flowers, fruits and foliage appear with unfailing regularity with the different seasons of the year. The vision of the planets rotating regularly around the sun, the cycles of the months and seasons in a year and the laws that underlie the flow of winds and tides can be said to be complete only when it is based on the realisation that all these movements, regularities and laws owe their origin and support to the existence of a supreme Mind and Intelligence. In the absence of any such Supreme Spirit, the universe and the world would have long ago been reduced to chaos. Besides these arguments, there are some more subtle arguments—metaphysical and psychological—which I shall point out to you when you are more advanced in your studies.”

44 THE UNITY OF GOD

A great philosophical discussion was going on for several days in a college of Theology in order to determine whether there was only one God or more. The professors were at their wit's end and took the matter to the Head of the Institution. Having heard the different parties, he made the following observations:

“The God of the Christians, the Jehova of the Jews, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Allah

of the Mohamadans, the Buddha of the Buddhists, and the Brahman of the Vedantins are all one. Though the names are different they mean one and the same God, just as water is called by different names, such as aqua, pani and jal, for its composition all over the world is the same. By whatever name you call it, water will quench your thirst. Similarly, whoever calls God by any name whatsoever is heard by Him if the call is real and sincere, and the spiritual thirst of the devotee is quenched. The creator can only be one for we do not find any conflict or discord in creation but only harmony. Had there been more than one creator, the result would have been conflict or discord. There are, no doubt, different species of animals found throughout the world, but they do not differ fundamentally. Similarly, the Christians, Jews, Mohamadans, Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists are not different classes of human beings, but all of them are created similar to one another. Had they been made by different Creators, they would have had fundamental differences in appearance and behaviour and there would have been constant conflict between them. All are children of the one and the same God."

45 WHERE ALL RELIGIONS MEET

Once a great saint attracted aspirants of different religious faiths around him. They all discussed the question whether it was possible to find any common

basis of all the religions of the world although they differ widely in their rites and rituals, dogmas, creeds and conventions. Though they discussed the matter for several days they found no solution, whereupon they approached the saint and asked him to solve the problem for them. The saint said, "The different religions of the world, though they may differ widely in several matters, are not opposed to one another fundamentally. They have a common meeting ground. There are three parts in each religion—philosophical, mythological and ritualistic. If you examine the philosophical parts of the religions, you will find that the fundamental truths inculcated by all of them are more or less the same. Mythology presents the truths of a religion and culture through legends and stories, angels, sages and saints, and the truths that they seek to represent are essentially the same as inculcated by the philosophical parts of the religions. As to rituals, rites, conventions and dogmas, they are merely introduced for the benefit of the masses who are unable to understand and appreciate even the mythological stories, far less the philosophical truths. Thus if we start from the ritualistic parts of the religions we find them differing widely, but if we come to the mythological stories we find that their implications or underlying messages are similar, and if we finally examine the philosophical part or the background of the religions we find that they are essentially the

same All religions have, therefore, a common meeting ground in their philosophies "

46 UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS

One day Sri Ramakrishna sat on the bank of the Ganges and saw some fishermen plying their boats on the river In one of the boats certain fishermen started a quarrel and one of them, getting eniaged slapped another violently on the back Immediately the person who was attending on Sri Ramakrishna saw to his utter surprise the impression of five fingers on the back of Sri Ramakrishna When he pointed out this to the saint and asked how he could get such an impression on the back, the latter pointed to the boat and the quarrelling fishermen and said that having identified himself with the universal consciousness, the pain felt by the fisherman, who was being slapped, was as vividly felt by him as the fisherman himself and, therefore, the impression of the five fingers was as real on his body as on the fisherman's back

47 THE UNIVERSAL SELF

Once Sri Ramakrishna sat on the verandah of his room and saw a hackney carriage driven over a stretch of green grass As Sri Ramakrishna saw the deep marks of the wheels made prominently upon the lawn, two similar marks were found to have appeared upon his chest This shows that he identi-

fied himself with all planes of existence including even animals and plants and that the universal self in him felt the experience of the whole universe

48 THE NATURE OF THE SUPREME SELF

Indra was the king of the gods and Virochana was the leader of the demons or asuras. The gods and demons both knew that Brahma (Prajapati) preached self-knowledge, saying that the self was birthless, deathless and eternal and that he who knows the self becomes immortal. The gods were anxious to attain this self-knowledge and sent Indra to Brahma to get self-knowledge for they thought that with the help of such knowledge they would all become immortal and would, therefore, have no great trouble from the demons.

The demons on their part also sought self-knowledge for the same purpose and sent their leader Virochana to Brahma. Both Indra and Virochana thus arrived at Brahma's hermitage with fuel in hand. Both of them became Brahma's disciples and were indefatigable in the discharge of the duties assigned to them by the master. This went on for several years and at last when Prajapati found that these disciples had lived the life of celibacy and purity for 30 years, he asked them what was their object in coming to him. Both replied that they had come to learn self-knowledge from him. Brahma then said, "The *purusha* (being)

that you find in the eyes of mortals is the immortal self which really is Brahman " Both of them thereupon asked whether in one's reflection in water and in the mirror the self was to be seen Brahma, of course, had indicated the being which gives the power of sight to the eye and because of which all things become visible He, therefore, asked the pupils to bring a cup of water and when they had done so, to look into it The pupils saw their own images reflected in the water and said so They were asked to change their dress and again on looking into the water they saw their images in the new dress They were satisfied Brahma's object was to say that something remains unchanged in all changes and that was the real self

Virochana, however, concluded that the reflection of the body in the mirror or water was the real self He went back to the demons and told them what he had learnt The demons, therefore, identified the body with the self and concluded that it was the body that was to be taken care of, fed and clothed and that thereby they could attain salvation

Indra, as he was going back to the world of the gods, began to think over the lessons that he had been taught and concluded that the body was not the self because the body was subject to constant changes and was mortal What then must be the real self? As he could not find an answer, he went

back to Brahma and asked him to resolve his difficulty. Brahma asked him to live with him for a further period of 32 years, observing celibacy and austerities. Indra did so and at the end of the period was told by Prajapati (Brahma) that the being that moved in dreams and enjoyed the different kinds of pleasure was really the self which was immortal and fearless and was the same as Brahman. With these instructions Indra felt happy and started for the world of the gods.

On his way, he began to ponder over his lessons and again doubts assaulted him, for in dreams the self is sometimes miserable and afraid and sometimes happy and free from fear. He again went back to Brahma's *ashram* and spent another period of 32 years there, living the life of continence and purity.

At the end of that period, Prajapati told him that the being which remained content in itself and without dreaming in the deep sound sleep, was the fearless immortal Brahman. With this knowledge Indra left the *ashram* for the world of the gods.

Again doubt assailed him on his way because he was not sure that the self in dreamless sleep was conscious of itself. He again, therefore, went back to Brahma's hermitage.

Again he lived for 5 years observing the vow of continence and purity in Brahma's *ashram*, and

after that period Prajapati said, "Neither in the state of awakening nor in dreams nor in sound sleep can you know the real self, because all these states belong to the material world. The self transcends them though it lives in the body which is subject to birth, growth, maturity, decay and death, but the self itself is birthless, deathless, eternal and free and is the combination of existence, knowledge and bliss absolute which transcends all the other three states. This is the last lesson that I wish to impart to you." Thus Indra realised the supreme truth about the self and having become fully illumined with the knowledge he went back to the world of the gods who with the help of such knowledge became immortal.

Chandogya, VIII 7-12

49 PIPPALADA AND HIS DISCIPLES

Four young men, who were in search of the knowledge of the supreme Brahman, went with sacrificial fire in their hands to the venerable Rishi Pippalada and said that they wanted to become his disciples in order to acquire the knowledge of the Supreme Truth. The Rishi asked them to live in his hermitage for a year observing continence and faithfully serving the Ashram, after which they might put to him the questions of which they desired solution.

At the end of the year they came to Pippalada. One of them asked, "Venerable Sir, whence are all creatures born?" Pippalada said, "The Creator, Hīranyagarbha, desirous of manifold creation, performed austerities and created the pair, man and woman." One of the other disciples asked, "How many gods are there, and who is the greatest of them?" Pippalada replied, "The ether, air, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, eyes and ears are the gods and Prana is the greatest of them. If the Prana or the vital force goes out, the others have to follow him."

The disciples then put questions to him about the nature of Prana, the mind of man, Pranava (the mystic syllable ('AUM')) and the metaphysical principle in man. One disciple asked him if he knew "the sixteen parts" and where the Purusha existed. Pippalada replied, "The Purusha exists in this body, my son, from which arise the sixteen parts. It is the Purusha who created prana out of which have emerged faith, ether, air, fire, water, earth, the senses, mind and food. From the food came vigour, penance, the Vedas, sacrifices or Yajnas and then all the worlds, and out of the world man has come into existence." He continued, "As the flowing rivers all run towards the sea and having reached it merge into the ocean so that their names and forms disappear and then people speak only of the ocean,

the sixteen parts of the Purusha having reached Him disappear. Their names and forms merge in Him and people speak of the Purusha only. Then He becomes devoid of parts and the immortal and changeless self. It has been said of Him, 'On whom rest the kalas or parts like spokes in the nave of a chariot wheel, know Him, the Purusha worthy to be known, so that death might not hurt you.' The Purusha referred to thus is the Supreme Brahman and I know that there is nothing higher than He." Thereupon the disciples said in one voice, "Thou art our father, for thou hast taken us across Avidya or ignorance. Obeisance to the highest Rishis

Prasnopanishad

50 BHRIGU AND VARUNA

Bhrigu, the son of Varuna, went to his father and told him that he wanted to be instructed about Brahman. Instead of imparting direct instructions, Varuna adopted the method of stimulating the thoughts of Bhrigu himself, a practice in great vogue amongst the teachers of the Vedantic age. He, therefore, said, "Seek to know that from which all beings are born, by which they are sustained and into which they are being merged in the end, for that is Brahman." Bhrigu meditated on this proposition for a long time and came to the conclusion

that food must be Brahman, for all beings are born from food, their lives are sustained by food and when they die they finally are converted into food. He then went back to his father and told him about the conclusion that he had reached. The father said, "Seek to know Brahman through further meditation and austerity."

Bhrigu meditated further, observing the rules of spiritual practices, and arrived at the conclusion that Brahman must be vitality. He then went back to his father and reported the result. The father again asked him to meditate still further and find out the true Brahman.

Bhrigu practised further meditation and austerity and found that it was mind out of which all beings were born, which sustained all living beings and into which they all entered on departing from life. When he reported his conclusion to his father, the latter said, "Seek to know the true Brahman by more meditation and austerity."

Bhrigu started his quest all over again and correctly came to the conclusion that the essence of mind must be intelligence and that, therefore, ought to be the true Brahman. When he reported this to his father, the latter again repeated his former injunction.

Ultimately, Bhrigu came to realise that Ananda or Bliss is Brahman. He found that out of this all beings are born, derive their lives and their sustenance and that ultimately all beings go back into the Divine Bliss. This time his father said, "Now you have really attained the final Bliss". The process of arriving at the eternal Truth was successful in this case owing to the virtue inherent in the right type of meditation which was fostered and encouraged by Bhrigu's father.

Taittiriya, Bhriguvalli
