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Vedanta and Purposive
Life

*Lectures on Vedanta
and
Purposive Life*

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गणित

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
Lecture I	1
Lecture II	11
Lecture III	24
Lecture IV	34
Lecture V	45

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दुर्जनः सज्जनो भूयात्,
सज्जनश्शान्तिमाप्नुयात् ।
शान्तो मुच्येत बन्धेभ्यो,
मुक्तश्चान्यान् विमोचयेत् ॥

May the wicked become gentle,

May the gentle attain peace.

May the peaceful get rid of the bondages,

May the liberated liberate others.

PREFACE

Contemporary world is plagued by many problems, the foremost among them being communalism. Communal thinking has pervaded every aspect of our life, be it social, economic, political. We may ask ourselves why does communalism raise its head? The answer is not far to seek. Whenever society is not directed towards a goal, a goal which is nobler and higher, the outcome is communalism. This lack of direction is evident everywhere in the world today; be it the industrialised west or a developing Third World country. Society must be guided towards the goal of purposive life if we want to root out communalism, as will be revealed in the following pages. This discourse on purposive life is based on the *Chāndogya Upanisad* of the *Sāmaveda*.

LECTURE ONE

We had earlier discussed the problem of communalism and how to bring about harmony between different communal groups. The question arises why does communalism raise its head in the life of any society? Why does a particular social group come under the influence of communal thinking? Until and unless we are able to analyse and find out the origin of a problem, we cannot root it out. Basically, communalism becomes a part of life when society is not properly directed towards a goal. It is the result of social and political drift, nature abhors vacuum. Human beings have to be directed towards a goal. If that goal is non-existent as far as society is concerned, human beings will follow any goal which may even be destructive. Hence, when there is no purposive life, we are not guided towards something noble, something higher, it is but natural that any emotional appeal will propel us towards goals which even contradict the values of a society. Only in a society where there is purposive life, communalism can be really rooted out.

The particular passage on the basis of which we are going to discuss is from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* of the *Sāmaveda*.¹ The *Upaniṣad* lays down in very simple terms, though the ideas are very profound — *idaṁ sarvaṁ brahma*: Whatever is perceived by us or conceptualised by us, whatever is known by us, whatever is experienced by us is nothing but the universal consciousness of bliss. The word *khalu* means nothing but that in reality. We perceive all this variety as something different from the universal consciousness of bliss. We perceive things as individualised, divided, inert, painful and undesirable. But the upanisadic sage says that this particular way of perceiving things is faulty because there are no individuations, there are no differences. Differences appear because we are not able to see the whole.

It is something like this. When an ant looks at a human being it cannot see the whole human being from the toe to

the head. It can see only certain parts. As far as the ant is concerned, a conglomeration of many parts is existing there, but in reality that human being is one indivisible whole. Similarly, this universe is an indivisible whole. We are able to perceive it only in parts and therefore we feel that they are different from each other. It is not so. An ant seeing the toe nail or even the toe may feel that the toe nail or the toe will not be able to react when it is bitten. There is another being—the hand — which goes and strikes it or removes it. So the toe is unconscious as far as the ant is concerned. But, in reality the toe is as much conscious as the hand. Similarly, the whole universe is really a throbbing consciousness. We are not able to perceive it because our knowledge is fragmented. Similarly, there are incidents in life which are perceived as painful and miserable, but when we see them from a higher perspective, we find that they are like our own childhood. When we were children we continuously felt that our misery was because of adults. When we went to school and later to college, we felt that we were passing through a terrible phase of life. I have often heard children remark, 'Mother, when you become small and I become as big as you are, then I am going to treat you in a much better way than how you are treating me'. But when we grow up, we ourselves become parents, then we realise that those were very happy days. There was continuous protection, we were getting all the things that we wanted — all that was necessary for us to become a complete and whole human being. If our parents had not put us through that grilling, if we had not studied, if we had not gone through all those educational experiences, we could not have become a whole human being. All those memories are now nostalgic. All those experiences are now perceived by us not as a miserable period of our life, but perhaps as the best period of our life. Similarly, we pass through different phases of learning. Since all our experiences are phases of learning, we feel that we are experiencing misery. But all these experiences give us great insight and when we move to a higher level we find that actually misery does not exist. It was an experience through

which we learned something, something of a much profound nature than what we took it to be at that moment.

The *Upaniṣad* says that actually it is the universal consciousness of joy. Why it is so? The *Upaniṣad* discusses the basic reason for it.² Because all this universe has come out of Him. All this world has not come out an inert nature. An inert object can never project anything whatsoever. To project something from within consciousness is absolutely necessary. Even a simple thing like a pot is made by a conscious entity. It cannot come out of clay even though clay may lie there for thousands of years. It may be all right for a statistical scientist to claim that all of Shakespeare's works can be produced from typewriters if six monkeys sitting on the typewriters go on typing for a very long time. This may be statistically true but in reality it can never materialise. Let us consider an example to understand this letter. A patient went to a doctor, a surgeon, for an operation. The surgeon told him, 'You have come at the right moment, you will become absolutely all right. There is no doubt about it'. The patient was slightly surprised. He asked, 'Doctor, how can you be so sure about it?' The doctor replied, 'In this particular operation, there are 99 per cent casualties. Already 99 people have died on the surgical table. You are the one per cent who is left'. Statistically, it may be an accurate calculation, but does that patient have any hope of getting better. Similarly, statistically one can say that even monkeys can type the entire works of Shakespeare. But it is never going to come into effect as such.

The creation is a creation because it has come out of a conscious being. It is His projection and like any conscious creation, it is purposive. A conscious being does not act without a purpose. And that is why He sustains it: *Tadaniti*. It is sustained as long as He has planned it to be sustained. Until that particular purpose is attained, is realised, it has to go on. This is true of not merely the whole universe but also of every living being. He has projected conscious beings in this universe. Within every conscious being there is a purpose hidden. Until that purpose is realised, that being has to

go on. Once that purpose has been realised, his existence has fulfilled its purpose. It has blown itself out. Purposive life aims to discover what that hidden movement is within us and to realise it, to attain it as soon as we can. Once it has been attained — *talla*, that Conscious Being absorbs us back into Himself. We have all come out of Him and we will all be absorbed by Him within Himself. Even the greatest sinner in the universe is going to be absorbed by Him because he has come out of Him. It may take longer, but it is not possible that everything will not to be absorbed in Him and that is why the message of purposive life is not a message of pessimism. It is a message of optimism because the One who has created us has created us out of Himself, has projected us out of Himself and is going to reabsorb us within Himself. We can either facilitate the process of attaining it or we can retard the process, but we can never nullify it. So the *Upaniṣad* says, *tajjalāniti*. The whole universe, all the conscious beings, everything that exists has come out of Him, is sustained, is going to be sustained as long as the purposive life has not been fulfilled. Once we attain that goal or purpose we will be reabsorbed into that universal consciousness of bliss.

The next question arises, how are we to know whether or not we are moving towards Him? How are we know whether or not we are leading a purposive life? The *Upaniṣad* makes a very clear and simple statement: *śanta upāsita*. Peace and tranquillity is what tells us that we are near Him. Though the word *upāsana* implies a type of worship, the question is what is worship. The word *up* means near, *āsina* is to sit, to sit close, to be near. Just as when we travel from Mount Abu to Delhi, the closer we come to Delhi, the greater is the noise level. There is so much noise in Delhi that from a distance we do not hear all the noise but slowly the noise goes on increasing. And when we go from Delhi to Mount Abu, the closer we are to Mount Abu, it becomes quieter and quieter. The Supreme Consciousness, the Absolute is completely peaceful. The *Atharvaveda* says, *śāntam advaitam*: where there is duality, there is agitation, and where there is

no duality, there is no agitation, because He is absolutely bereft of any type of agitation. So the closer we move towards Him we become more and more quiet. We become more and more absorbed in Him because He is of the nature of quietness. He is quietitude itself.

How do we know that we are leading a purposive life? If our agitation decreases we know that we are moving towards Him and if our agitation increases, we know that we are moving away from Him. The *Upaniṣad* has clearly described how to practice this particular form of worship. There are innumerable ways in which we can worship Him but if we want to attain this particular experience of universal consciousness of joy, of bliss, then the way to worship Him is to become more and more bereft of all agitation. The next question is: how are we going to do it? The *Upaniṣad* tells us — *atha khalu kratumayah puruṣah*.³ The *Upaniṣad* asks: what is our reality, what is it that we really are? Whatever is our *kratu* that is what we really are. *Kratu* is a very difficult word to translate, but in a technical sense we can use the word faith for it. Whatever is our faith, whatever guides us at every moment of our life, the yardstick by which we judge all our actions, all our thoughts, that is *kratu* — *atha khalu kratumayah puruṣah*.⁴ A person is what he inwardly has faith in. Of course, the *Upaniṣad* has used the word *kratu* in a very peculiar way, because another meaning of the word *kratu* is *yajña*, that is, sacrifice. What the *Upaniṣad* is trying to hint at is that once we have selected a faith, once we have decided to follow a purposive life, we will have to sacrifice many things — *yathākraturasmīl loke puruṣo bhavati*.⁵ Whatever faith we follow here on this earth while living, *tathetaḥ pretya bhavati*.⁶ when we go from here, we will be exactly what are here. The transformation has to take place here and now. One of the major differences between Vedānta and other religious thoughts is this emphasis on the fact that heaven is here and now.

Ācārya Śāṅkara says that this whole universe is actually a forest of joy.⁷ Traditionally, it is believed that in heaven there

is a garden where there are all sorts of joys and it is called Nandanavana. Basically, it means a forest where all the joys are present. Ācārya Śāṅkara says that this whole universe is nothing but a place overflowing with joy. It is not that when we go from here we become something. It is like a journey. We embark upon a journey to go to some place, the place has changed but we have not changed. If we go from here to Germany, it does not mean that we will start speaking German. To be able to speak the German language, or to act like a German, we will have to go there and learn it. If we have been eating with our hands like a Hindu and suddenly we go to Germany, we have to sit at the table and eat with a fork and knife, will we be able to eat just because we have gone there? Often I tell people about that those particular sects which believe that if they follow a particular faith somebody will save them. I tell them that supposing there is a heaven and all this crowd who has faith in this particular prophet go to heaven, once they are in heaven, how long will it remain a heaven? Because they will go there and do the same thing that they have been doing here. If their life could be changed by having faith in that prophet, it would have changed right here and now. If that faith has not changed their life pattern here, how is it going to change later? Unless faith becomes what the *Upaniṣad* says here — *kratu*, the guiding principle of our life, it will not change us here and now. So the *Upaniṣad* says *yathākraturasmiṅloke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati sa kratum kurvīta*.⁸

Therefore, *kratu*, this faith, this purposive life is what we must bring into effect, only then we will become quiet, be bereft of agitation and be able to realise the truth enunciated here. Because of the absence of purposive life, the lack of purposive action in our society or in any society, we tend to drift, we tend to procrastinate, we do not want to face things as they are. If there is a guiding principle then we will try to change things according to that particular principle. But since that principle is lacking, we believe in letting things pass. Some miracle will take place and every thing will become all right. Some people say that Indians have a way of

muddling through things. It is true that on many occasions we have muddled through. But actually it is not so. Certain fundamental principles were present in the consciousness of the earlier generations in this country. They may not have talked about them, but they were their guiding principles and therefore they could pass through the mire. But today the new generation has not inherited those particular norms on the basis of which they can decide things. Why is it that there was a tremendous occasion for Hindus to react in a very concrete way at the time of partition of India? There may have been stray incidents but the fact remains that one part of our nation was divided and all the Hindus were driven away from there whereas the other minorities were allowed to stay on here. There was no reaction at the national level. Reactions did erupt, which is but natural, but not fundamentally. After fifty years or so why is it that suddenly there is a deluge, so to say, of that particular pattern of thinking when the situation does not seem to call for it? The answer is that at that time certain concepts were deeply embedded in us which we have not passed on to our children. So the younger people will not be able to muddle through as we were able to muddle through, because our parents gave us something which we have not bequeathed to our children. When the national consciousness is geared for a purpose, not merely existing from day to day which I call drifting, it is based on this. All groups have to merge towards a purposive life. They have to merge into a community not by wiping out the specific differences, but by following a purposive life to achieve a particular goal.

Let us consider an example to understand this better. India wanted to achieve independence. All the differences continued to exist but because we were guided by a purposive life, we knew that independence was absolutely necessary for us. It was a question of life and death. So all our attention was centred round a purposive life and we could forget our differences. Similarly, until we have the principle of a purposive life we will not become one community and it is only when we merge into one community that we will be able to

achieve this. We have before us the example of great men in different societies. When Prophet Mohammed came to Arabia, there were an inept number of different sects. There was absolute disharmony. He was able to mobilise them towards a purpose and so they became a tremendous force during that period of history. In India, a similar situation was seen when Buddhism was dissolved. Ācārya Śaṅkara found that there were at least seventy-two different groups fighting with each other. He was able to harmonise all of them towards a particular goal and that made society coherent.

Communalism breeds when emotion is appealed to. All communal movements are based on an emotional approach to life. Emotional appeal becomes fruitful when thought processes are not active and they cease to function. Emotion is a peculiar phenomenon. If it is guided by a conscious analysis of a situation, it becomes faith. But when it is not based on this analysis, it becomes a destructive force. That is precisely why in any communal group awareness is always lacking. There is no purposive life in communalism. We find that we have to have something against which we have to struggle. Communalism cannot exist as a positive entity. It always exists as a negative entity. We have to create an enemy if there is no enemy. What I am saying about communalism is equally true of racialism or any other such movement. It is the lack of awareness which makes purposive life inactive. Vedānata continuously emphasises awareness. Every moment of our life we must be aware of who we are. This continuous awareness may be an ideal, but we have to approach it. We must try to analyse every act. We must be aware of what we are going to do. Sometimes I tell people jokingly, 'If you commit a sin I will not stop you. But I will only ask you to remember the particular hell that you will have to go as a fruit of that particular sin. Remembering that you can sin as much as you like. You will not be able to.'

There is an interesting episode in Sanskrit literature. There was a Brahmin, he begot a son. The infant's astrological calculations were made and his horoscope was drawn up. The

astrologer said, 'Your child is going to be a big thief.' The Brahmin was aghast, he thought, 'what is this! I am such a virtuous person'. He said, 'It is better if the child dies rather than become a blemish on our long family tradition.' The astrologer said, 'I have told you whatever the stars foretell. I cannot change his destiny. But there is a great saint, perhaps he may be able to give you some guidance.' So the Brahmin went to the saint and told him what the astrologer had predicted. The saint told him, 'Don't worry, he will become a thief all right, but he will not be able to steal. As soon as he is five years old, bring him to me for education. The scriptures have laid down that a Brahmin should pursue Vedic studies at the age of eight, but if you want your son to gain special knowledge, you must bring him at the age of five.'⁹ The Brahmin did as he was told and the saint began to teach the child and specifically educated him about all the consequences of theft, and theft of specific things leading to particular hell. That was one of the major teachings that was given to him. When he was 20 years old his education was complete and he was sent home. After some time he got married. The wife started asking for things. So one day he decided that he was going to steal as that was the only way he could earn easy money. He went to the royal palace with the idea of stealing. He thought, 'If I have to steal, let me go and steal in one stroke at least a good sum.' After entering the palace he began to pick up one thing after another but after lifting everything, he remembered a particular verse and thought, 'This will take me through such and such hellish experience. All right, let me take something else'. The whole night he kept picking up things and rejecting them. He could not steal. Soon the king woke up because Hindus get up by 4 o'clock in the morning. Before performing his ablutions he began to compose a particular verse. He wrote a part of it but he could not complete it. Upon seeing the king that Brahmin boy hid himself behind the curtains. Being highly educated, the boy knew how to complete that verse. So when the king went to perform his ablutions he finished that verse and fled from there and reached home safely without stealing any-

thing. When the king came back, he found that somebody had completed the verse which he had left unfinished. He began to question everyone to find out who had completed it. But no one knew who had done it. The king made a public announcement that someone had entered the royal palace and completed the verse. He said, 'I am not going to ask how he entered the palace. I am not going to punish him in any way. I would like to meet the person because he has finished the verse in a very beautiful way.' After hearing this announcement, the Brahmin boy came to the palace and told the king, 'I have completed the verse.' The king asked him 'What time did you come here?' 'I came here early in the night,' he replied. 'Why didn't you steal anything, because nothing is missing from my room or from my treasury'. The boy replied, 'I wanted to steal but everything I wanted to steal, I found is going to give me greater pain than joy. That is why, I could not steal and eventually I completed the verse.' The king was very happy. He said, 'You need not steal any more. Whatever your wife demands, you can come and ask from me. I will give it to you.'

What the story is trying to convey is that it is true that one comes into this world with certain ideas, but by continuously instructing the person, by continuously creating an impression on his mind against certain conceptions, a person can be guarded against those propensities. This is the method through which we can make members of a society follow a purposive life and once this goal is realised, such aberrations as communalism and racialism cease to exist.

We have taken up the idea of purposive life because it is only through this that our nation and humanity at large can rid itself of these propensities which are contradictory to human development. How do we bring about this purposive life, this awareness, we will discuss shortly. Because it is this awareness which was able to stop that thief from stealing.

LECTURE TWO

We were discussing the concept of purposive life and we saw why purposive life is absolutely necessary for any social or national development. Unless life is purposive, it is going to be destructive. One of the greatest contributions of sage Kapila, the founder of the *Sāṃkhya* system was to logically demonstrate that purposive is always a conscious being. There are two interesting words in Sanskrit, we use them in Hindi too, *śeṣa* and *śeṣī*. *Śeṣī* is that for which the *śeṣa* exists. Literally, *śeṣa* means remainder. The remainder actually is for the sake of the whole. What has not been absorbed in the whole is the remainder. So, all the inert world is basically *śeṣa* because it is always a remainder. It is for the conscious being that all the universe exists. Purposive life, as Kapila points out, is always a conscious life — what was earlier referred to as awareness. When we do not live consciously, we become *śeṣa*, though we are really *śeṣī*. Though the whole universe has been created for conscious beings, we tend to forget this. And when we forget this, instead of being at the centre of the universe we move to the periphery of the universe. Modern man has forgotten this basic concept. The nature, or what Kapila calls *prakṛiti* or *pradhāna*, has acquired such significance that we feel that conscious beings are for the growth, for the development of inert or unconscious things. We construct large buildings thinking that we are making progress. At the same time we realise that this excessive construction activity gives rise to different types of environmental problems. Today people go on talking about environmental problems and pollution, but the moment they are told how to avoid it, they immediately withdraw and say that if this is done then progress will be retarded, little realising that progress is for conscious beings. Who is that conscious being who is going to be benefited? The answer is a blank. So this concept of remainder — the *śeṣa* — becoming the centre is one of the major problems confronting modern man.

Nature can neither be for itself nor be without a purpose, because nature is that which is continuously changing. There is continuous motion. Nothing in the universe that we perceive is changeless. The stars are moving, the planets are moving and even in the minutest atom electrons are moving. Wherever there is movement, there is change. Whenever there is change, there is bound to be a purpose, a goal. All this nature is changing for whom? It is something akin to a person weaving a cloth. Immediately we ask the question, 'For whom are you weaving? Or, in modern times, a man sees his wife knitting a sweater or a sock. Immediately he asks, 'For whom are you knitting this sweater?' Supposing her answer is: 'I am not knitting for anyone.' Then he may say, 'Are you mad?' Whenever there is movement, there is motion, there is activity. The movement of nature has to have a goal or a purpose because it is continuously moving. And because it is inert, it cannot have a purposive life of its own. It cannot be for itself. So the great sage Kapila points out that the whole nature is for the sake of the *puruṣa*. It is for the conscious being that the whole movement is moving. Thus, it is the conscious self which in reality makes purposive life possible. The conscious being has a purposive life. Everything that exists, exists for the conscious self. In a given paradigm, the self may be changing but whatever is in a particular paradigm is always meant for a conscious entity. Instead of using terms like awareness or self, which sound as if we are discussing something metaphysical or philosophical, Vedānta uses a very simple term 'I consciousness'. Our awareness, our self is simply our 'I consciousness' or 'I cognition'. The moment we use the word 'I' what we mean is the self. Since this is the central point of reference of awareness there can never be any awareness without 'I'. Whenever there is awareness, it is always awareness associated with 'I'. But the question is that sometimes we do not work for this 'I'. There are businessmen who have enough wealth, they can eat as much as they like. To put it in a traditional way, even if they eat one kilo of ghee every day, they have enough money to buy it. There is absolutely no dearth of wealth yet

they are not healthy, they are diabetic. When the doctor tells them to take rest they say that it is not possible because they have to go to work as they have an important engagement. Or, they have to go to the income tax office so they cannot rest. The question arises, what will happen if they do not go to the income tax office? Well, they may be charged a little more tax. If they pay that extra tax, will they starve? Will they not have enough money to buy medicine? Supposing they are able to save that tax, what will happen? An immediate answer is that they are not working for themselves, but for their children who have to be settled. So, here it seems that they are not working for themselves. This other self can be metamorphosed into many things. Some people work for the growth of an industry. They may say that they have nothing to gain but if they do not take an interest, the industry will be ruined. There are others who will go a step further and say that they are working for the sake of the workers. Thousands of people will be unemployed so they are working for them. Others may even say that they are working for the good of the nation, they are suffering for the nation. Perhaps some people will be bold enough to say that they are working for humanity. So, how can we say that everything is for the self? Here we can clearly see that the person feels that he is not working for himself.

Scholars of Vedānta thought about this problem and they realised that everywhere a person is working for his self. According to them, this 'I consciousness' takes three forms. Chemically, we see a substance, a pure substance, it may just be pure gold or silver. Gold may be mixed with copper, silver or with some other metal and it becomes a mixture. Though we can immediately find out that this is an alloy yet two things are present there. Then there is a compound, chemically speaking. Two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen together form a compound. Yet when we look at a drop of water or even water in the ocean we cannot perceive any hydrogen or oxygen. Special apparatus and specialised training are required to revert water back to hydrogen and oxygen. Similarly in the world we see three types of things

—a pure thing, a mixture where two things exist and we can easily discern them, and a compound where two things exist but they have become so intermingled that it is not possible to easily separate them. The same is true of the 'I'. There is a pure 'I' about which the scriptures talk, that for the moment we can call the real 'I'. We can call it the absolute 'I' or even the metaphysical 'I'. That 'I' is not what a person has to deal with in everyday life. The other two 'I' — the mixture and compound 'I' — are what we are dealing with everyday. The compound 'I' can also be called the practical 'I'. In a compound, the elements cannot be separated easily, similarly a person is connected with his mind, with his body, with his senses, and the whole thing has become a compound. It is not easy, actually it is next to impossible, to separate oneself from the mind or even from the body as long as one is alive. What happens after death is a different issue, but as long as a person is alive it is not possible for him to separate his own self from the body. Every change in the body is immediately reflected as a change in one self. The person changes as the body changes. The body grows old, he becomes old; the body becomes weak, he becomes weak. Similarly, in the case of the mind if the mind is unhappy, the person is unhappy. The same is true of intellect. If the intellect is weak, the person is a fool. In spite of what the scriptures may say or what the great sages may enunciate or what analyses may be revealed, yet the immediate reaction, whenever a situation arises, is that all this is 'I' because the separation is very difficult. We can call this the compound 'I'. Because this is the 'I' that we are going to use, we have been using and we will continue to use for all practical purposes. It can also be called the practical 'I'. This is the 'I' that we continuously talk about — 'I' mixed with something else. For example, a person is a Collector or a District Magistrate, he never takes any bribe and is very firm in his views. But supposing someone gives a present to his wife. The present has been given to his wife and not to him. Why does he reprimand his wife, 'Why have you accepted this gift?' She is not going to do anything, but the whole world will identify her accepting the gift as his accepting it. If the wife has accepted a gift, for all practical purposes

he has accepted a gift. For the *śruti* says that the son is your own self.¹⁰ Why does it say so? Supposing a person leaves behind a legacy of a million dollars, what happens when he dies? It is inherited by his sons. For all practical purposes, he is going to function as if I was functioning. Similarly when the person dies the son will perform the last rites, even the rites after death such as *śrāddha*. Now supposing instead of leaving a legacy of one million dollars, he leaves behind a debt of one million dollars. Let us go back fifty years, I am not talking of modern people. A modern man will say, 'I have inherited nothing. I have no debts to pay'. Unfortunately, our legal system will also support this view. But fifty years ago a son would feel that the debt his father had left behind was his debt and the moment he got a chance, he would be the first to pay it off. When the debt had been paid off people would say that the gentleman's debts had been paid off. No one would say that the man's debts were unpaid. Hence, when the son pays off a debt, for all practical purposes, it is as if he himself has paid it. There are occasions when the son or the wife is as good as the person himself.

Let us understand this in another way. We want to worship Lord Viṣṇu. The Lord stays in Vaikuṅṭha. There are no means, no inter-planetary satellite to take us to Vaikuṅṭha. How do we worship? We have an image. When we worship the image it is as good as worshipping Viṣṇu himself. The scriptures describe how Lord Viṣṇu should be worshipped. We go to a temple or procure an image and worship that symbol or image, that worship is accepted by Viṣṇu as if he has been worshipped. If we are able to be face to face with Lord Viṣṇu in Vaikuṅṭha, that is the practical Viṣṇu. The image is the symbolic Viṣṇu. But the real Viṣṇu is beyond that, the real Viṣṇu is not what we can perceive. The real Viṣṇu is that all-pervasive principle which is pervasive even in that particular form of Viṣṇu in Vaikuṅṭha. He is simultaneously present in every atom everywhere. Hence, there is the real Viṣṇu, the all-pervasive principle; there is the practical Viṣṇu residing in Vaikuṅṭha and then there is the symbolic Viṣṇu. Similarly, when somebody gives a diamond necklace to a District Mag-

istrate's wife, he is utilising her as the man's symbol. By giving her, he is actually giving the man. Someone may raise a doubt and say that he loves the wife, therefore he has given her a necklace. Good, let us wait and see. The issue is raised in Parliament, there is a debate and the District Magistrate is either suspended or discharged. Now, will his wife receive any more gifts from that gentleman? No. Why? The reason is because even at that time she was his symbol and once he ceases to be a District Magistrate her symbolism no longer exists. While we are worshipping the image of Viṣṇu, even at that moment we are hundred per cent sure that this is not Lord Viṣṇu. For all practical purposes, we worship as if the image is Viṣṇu. But not once do we forget that the image is not the real Viṣṇu. Similarly, the person who gives the present, is sure that the wife is different from the husband, though he is using her as a symbol. In the same way when one uses one's son or one's wife, according to the *śruti*,¹¹ it means the son, the wife are one's symbols. Since here the difference is clear, that is why chemically we can call it a mixture. It is not a compound. Why can it be very easily separated? Suppose a man is working for his son thinking that he will inherit all the wealth. If the son begins to misbehave with the father, the father will tolerate this to an extent. If, however, things go too far then the father may write in his will that not a penny of his wealth will go to his son. The entire wealth will go to a trust. So even though the father thought that he is his son and as such his symbol, his own self, it is like a mixture.

The same thing cannot be done with the body-mind complex. We sit for meditation, but the mind does not like to meditate. It goes on disturbing us. Will we be able to get rid of the mind as the father was able to get rid of his son by merely writing a will? Or if the body is suffering, are we able to get rid of the body as easily as we are able to get rid of our wife as seen in the modern world. Can we divorce our son, our body as easily? No, we cannot do it as easily, and for all practical purposes, we can say that it is impossible. This the reason why that is practical, a compound, and this is a mixture, symbolic. We can even call it metaphorical in the sense

that it is as if he was his son. A person is using it as himself knowing fully well that the son is not his self. Coming back to the real problem, at different moments in life, in different activities, in different circumstances, we may be using these three 'I', but at every moment we are using the 'I', the self. When a person does something for his family it is because he is conscious that his family represents him. The moment the family stops representing him, he will not act for it. A person is working for the nation but the moment he realises that this nation is not for him, what happens. Just take an example. It was on the banks of the Ravi in Lahore that Pandit Nehru proposed the idea of total independence. Fortunately, he survived to become the Prime Minister of India. As a result of that promise, did he try to do anything for Lahore? Was it not India? Did he try to do anything for Sindh or Baluchistan? Was that not part of India? When he talked about total independence and the promises that he made were for undivided India, but the moment he learnt that the state of Pakistan was being created, it ceased to be his symbolic self and he was able to cut it off immediately. The same thing is seen when we say that we are working for the nation or for humanity. If humanity does not symbolise us any more, if we are not able to identify our self with this particular humanity, it ceases to be our responsibility. In other words, when we work for an industry, for a nation or for a society, actually we are working for the mixture. We work for the nation even when we know that it is different from us, the nation can never become part of us in the same way as our body is part of us. And that is the basis of all nationalism. This is indeed a peculiar thing. What determines our nation? Basically, wherever our body is born that decides our nation. We may talk a lot about the greatness of Indian nationalism, but if in our next birth we are born in China, will we still remain an Indian nationalist? It is this identification with the 'I' which moves us.

To recapitulate, there is the symbolic 'I' where the difference exists and is known. The practical 'I' where the difference exists but it is not known. The final 'I' which the *Upaniṣad* describes as the supreme or the absolute 'I' which

we must aspire for. Actually, even in the case of the practical 'I' there are moments when we give importance to one or the other aspect of this compound 'I'. For example, a person is very weak and the doctor tells him to eat nourishing food. Will this person ask his wife, the symbolic 'I', to eat a balanced diet so that he can become strong? No. Because here the person is using his own body. In the practical 'I' the body is very important. On the other hand if one practises austerities like fasting on Monday or on *ekādasī*, the body is suffering. In this case the body becomes less important and one's mental or subtle body assumes greater importance. Because one knows that by practising this austerity, one will enjoy mentally when one leaves this world. In other words, one is ready to sacrifice, even within the compound 'I', the physical joys for the sake of mental joys.

Thus, we see that though there are different 'I' but the 'I' is always present. It is the *śeṣī*. Of course, the final or the metaphysical 'I' is used only when we follow the path of liberation. When we say that we want to be liberated, it is not liberation from the body which we seek because all of us will be liberated from this body when we die. We do not have to perform any action whatsoever to get rid of our body. We cannot say that we want to get rid of our mind. Everyday when we go into deep sleep, we get out of our mind. When we seek liberation it is not merely liberation from the body and mind. Here we are referring to the absolute 'I' or the supreme 'I'. The awareness of this 'I', as we will discuss later, is the final stage of purposive life. It must be remembered that in all these different selves or 'I' awareness has to be brought about. This awareness will always be individual as it can never exist in a group. Communalism, on the other hand, exists in a group. The moment we become aware of our own self, it is impossible for us to think in terms of communalism. That is why all such group movements, whether racial movements or communal movements, when they appeal to our emotions, they insist that we must forget this awareness. Even though it is impossible to obliterate this awareness,

these movements strive to make this awareness less important in our lives by continuously stressing the fact that we must not think about ourselves, we must think of something else. Vedānta, on the other hand, emphasises that we must think of ourselves but in a proper way. In a group awareness of the uniqueness or wholeness of the self is minimal. It even ceases at times. Group mentality is a very peculiar phenomenon. An individual on his own will not throw a stone at somebody else's car but in a group if everybody is throwing stones the person will also start throwing stones. Let us take another example. Perhaps a person on his own will not spend a hundred thousand rupees just to decorate a marriage pandal for one day. But when the person is in a social group and considers himself part of that group he will spend the money even though he may be against it. He feels that he is in this social group so he has to do it. What he forgets is that he is a unique individual and not part of any group.

Whether it is throwing stones or whether it is showing off one's wealth, all emotionalism starts by forgetting the uniqueness of the individual, the wholeness of the individual. We are complete as we are, we cannot become anything more than what we are, just because we are in a group. By becoming a member of a group nothing is added to our uniqueness, to our wholeness. Vedānta repeatedly emphasises this point. And that is why Vedānta cautions us about the unconscious moments in our lives. Emotionalism leads to unconscious behaviour and the moment we act unconsciously, we cease to lead a purposive life. Purposive life will always be conscious living. We will always be aware. Some people may raise the question: Vedānta has tried to emphasise this uniqueness of the individual, the wholeness of the individual, but what is becoming of our religion? This is a problem no doubt. But let us first find out what do we want out of religion. Is religion for economic gains, because nowadays some people believe that the purpose of temples is to help certain economically backward communities. The purpose of religion, according to them, is to attain economic gains. Then, of course, there are sects who distribute money

in an attempt to net those who are economically backward and put their own religious stamp on them, thinking that they have converted them, but not realising what conversion is. Are we also going to fall into the same trap and believe that economic gain is what we want out of religion? Or, do we want social gains out of religion? Is that the purpose of religion, is that our goal? Today, we find people who use religion for political gains. They visit different shrines without any commitment to the religious value of those shrines because they are able to get political mileage from this. Is that the purpose of religion? It is for this reason that Vedānta begins by making a very harsh statement.

At the beginning of his great magnum opus, *Advaita-Siddhi*, Ācārya Madhusūdan Sarasvati says that *advaita* cannot be realised until we have realised that *dvaita* is *mithyā*.¹² Unless we are able to get rid of the whole burden of this universe from our awareness, we will never be able to achieve the Absolute. As long as this world hovers in our awareness, as long as we are continuously thinking in terms of what the results in this world will be, we can never get out of politics, economics, sociology. They are bound to dominate our life leading to communalism. Today we find this concept slowly creeping in, Hinduism always tried to keep away from it. Hinduism never tried to mix religion with this world, but slowly this idea is creeping into it. We want religion to be this worldly. The moment religion becomes this worldly, this world which includes politics, economics, social situations, it will lead to communalism. When we are integrated within ourselves only then can the real religion emerge. That is what we mean by Brahman consciousness, the absolute consciousness. When this consciousness dominates, then life ceases to be this worldly. I am not saying that we will not be acting in this world, but our purpose will not be directed towards this world. A question may be asked in this context: If we continuously emphasise the uniqueness or the wholeness of the individual, what will happen to this world? The goal is not this world as Vedānta says that this world is the means to attain the Absolute. Other schools believe that the

Absolute or God or religion is the means to attain something in this world. Vedānta, on the other hand, asserts that this whole world is for the sake of attaining the Absolute. It does not deny this world. We will continue to work in this world, but we will not seek the results of this world. Vedānta reiterates that it is very important to be clear in our mind about what we want out of religion. If we use religion to obtain this world then communalism is the outcome. Because communalism is always directed towards gains in this world. If we talk to a communalist he will never talk about the Kingdom of God in heaven, he will only discuss something about this world. So, if this world is going to dictate us, then we can never lead a purposive life because that purpose will be determined by an external object. Purposive life is a conscious life. Undoubtedly, there are physiological needs and other bodily needs. These needs are this worldly. The question is not whether we are going to fulfil these needs or not. But what we are trying to emphasise is that that is not religion. Just as we have some responsibility for our family, for our nation, for humanity and we attend to all of them but without forgetting that all these are connected with us. Similarly, we try to fulfil our physiological needs, our national needs, political and economic needs. But we are aware that all this is actually for the religious goal to attain the absolute 'I' which is going to make our lives purposive. It is that which will bring liberation and peace. Liberation and peace are not possible in a group which is the foundation of communalism. No one can say that he can get liberated because he happens to belong to a group. Each individual has to be quiet if we want silence. There are occasions when I am addressing a big assembly and some people make a noise. A number of volunteers rush to the spot and they make a greater noise saying 'keep quite, keep quiet'. I often tell them that they make more noise than the audience. Similarly, if we want to be quiet, each individual has to be quiet. When each one of us is quiet then all are quiet. It is not that when all become quiet then we will become quiet. Libera-

tion and peace are always individual and that is why no communalist can ever say that liberation and peace can be attained in a group.

Sri Kṛṣṇa has pointed out in the Gita when purposive life comes into being. What is purposive life?¹³ He says, 'there is absolutely nothing which I need and there is nothing which I do not already possess. There is no need for me to act, no necessity for me to act and there is nothing which I would like to obtain, there is nothing worthwhile to obtain'. Since there is nothing objective for us to gain, that is what Ācārya Madhusūdan means when he says that it is by cancelling out the *dvaita* that the path of *advaita* can be taught. That is what the Lord says, 'In this whole universe there is nothing for me to obtain'. Once we have realised this, at least intellectually, then only the real purposive life begins. A question may arise: then why does He act. In the Mahabharat, the Lord says, 'Even though I am the supreme master being the Lord, really it is so and yet those who belong to me, the community, the society, I am slaving for them. Even though I am the Lord, I slave for those who are in some way connected with me.'¹⁴ It is this which leads to purposive life. Nothing external dictates us. It is our conscious decision which guides us. The most pressing need of India is to reconstruct and reformulate these religious ideas. It is important to note that I am saying religious ideas, not Hindu ideas or Muslim ideas. The moment we try to reform or reconstruct Hindu, Muslim or Christian religion, this is bound to result in communalism. We have to stop thinking in these terms. We have to think in terms of religion. Modern developments of thought within the different branches of sciences, especially in psychology and logic have necessitated this rethinking. People say that Hindu religion is *sanātana*, that is, eternal. So what can we change. Truth never changes. But the way we approach truth changes. That is why Vedānta has a word to understand the truth, the particular language, the particular methodology that I use is called *prakriyā*. Vedānta says that through which ever *prakriyā*, in which ever language or methodology, we

are able to realise that truth which never changes, that particular mode of understanding becomes acceptable to us. The important point is that as far as the truth is concerned, there can be no two opinions. But how to understand it? Language has to become intelligible to a particular age. It is here that the difference between the concepts of *śrotriya* and *brahmaniṣṭha* arises. We will discuss this difference later.

LECTURE THREE

We were discussing the concept of purposive life in the light of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* of the *Śamaveda*. The original *mantra*¹⁵ describes the purposive life which takes us to realise *sarvamidam* whatever is perceived — *khalu* — as nothing else but the Supreme Consciousness, the Absolute Consciousness, because out of that has emerged everything, is sustained by it and is eventually absorbed into it. It is only when we are able to overcome our agitations that we are able to go near Him — *śānta upāsīta*. How do we achieve this? The methodology is that of *kratu*. Whatever is our *kratu* here, we get the very same state of mental, psychological existence after we leave this body. Whatever we are here we remain in the future. While discussing the problem, we found that we have to be aware. It is this awareness which can make our *kratu* a living life, a purposive life. While discussing the idea of awareness, we saw that two things are necessary for us to be aware. Awareness implies awareness of all that has taken place in the history of humanity. That is what we mean by the word *śrotriya*, the scholastic. Until a person has absorbed all that has been thought of, realised, experienced by the whole of humanity, it is not possible to lay down anything for the future. This can be understood by studying a scientist. A scientist discovers things, no doubt, but only after he has acquired knowledge of all that has been discovered in the past. Similarly, a person who wants to be aware must become aware of all that has happened previously. That inheritance of humanity is what we mean by the word *śrotriya*. But as pointed out earlier, being scholastic is not enough, it may tell us what the truth is, but it has to be transformed, reconstructed, reformed in a specific way so that a particular culture at a given moment of history is able to understand. As indicated earlier, the truth remains *kūṭastha*, unchanging. But the approach to it, the *prakriyās*, the methodology through which we grasp it, changes. Unless

a person who has seen the truth face to face lives it every moment of his being, he will not be able to convey those particular final truths in the language which we can understand, by that methodology which we can understand. That awareness, when we start experimenting with it, has certain different levels.

Purposive life has to be lived not only at one level but all the levels of our existence. The ancient sages have defined awareness at four levels for practical purposes, though the division can take place in infinite ways. Awareness at the biological level, awareness at the social level, awareness at the ethical or virtuous level, and awareness at the level of truth. In Sanskrit the first is called *kāma*, the second is labelled *artha*, the third is *dharmā* and the fourth is called *mokṣa*. Our awareness has to grow on all these different levels. To begin with, we can think about awareness at the biological level because this is the level at which everyone lives. It is the most prevalent. It is more or less the inheritance of our biological evolution. Our body has passed through different stages of animal existence. Each individual in his life reproduces all the infinite time that he has gone through. Genetics is not merely inherited from our parents. It is that infinite succession from the beginning of life to this day that we inherit. This inheritance is what makes us very particular about our biological existence. We can never transcend it as long as our body exists. Though we are conscious of the body all the time, we are not consciously aware of it. Most people are unaware of all that goes on in this body, in different parts of the body — the physical apparatus, or what goes on in the sensual apparatus — whether it is cognition or conation. We are not even conscious of our vitality and strength. They are naturally present but we are not aware of them. Things suddenly strike us. Whenever there is a painful experience, it strikes us; the important point is that it strikes us, we do not strike it. That is, we do not consciously make things happen, we let them happen and that is why we are not actively aware of them. A gust of wind in the midst of summer strikes us. Or, during the winter

season, the sun's rays embrace us. The greenery of plants strikes the sensation of our eyes. The humming of birds strikes our ears. The movements of deer and other animals strike us. All this happens without our being aware of it. If someone points this out to us we will agree that this is true, but the next moment we forget all about it. And that is one of the main reasons why our life is not full of joy. It is a peculiar thing: most of the time we are not conscious of things which give us joy. We have accepted that unless we come into contact with certain things of the world, we will not experience joy. Most people are not even conscious of the joy of being physically healthy. The moment we have a headache, we become miserable. But a question can be raised that during the last one month, two months, or six months we did not have a headache, did we ever try to enjoy it? We walk. There is a joy in walking. The heels have certain sensations, the toes have certain sensations, the knees have certain sensations. Are we conscious of this? Our hands move. Are we aware of them? Often we become aware only when there is an unhealthy movement in our body. The healthy movements are just not part of our awareness. This is the reason why we are not even able to lead a purposive life at the biological level. We will discuss later that we are living at all the four levels. We are living because we are human beings, but we are not leading a purposive life. We are just living without being aware, without making life purposive.

There was once a lady in Delhi. She would often complain that God had given her nothing. She was very poor and had no one to look after her. After hearing her complain many times, I once asked her if she wanted 100,000 rupees? She told me that I was joking. I told her that I was not joking and was quite serious about it. I informed her that a rich person had lost his eyes. He wanted an eye transplant. Since she had two eyes she could give one eye to the gentleman and he would pay her 100,000 rupees. Hearing this she replied, 'How is it possible? How can I give my eye.' I told her that she had property worth 100,000 rupees and because she had two eyes she had 200,000 rupees and she still complained

that God had not given her anything. This is our attitude most of the time.

Vedānta asserts that being aware, being conscious is not merely a passive act. Objective perception, according to Vedānta, is actually subjective. How do we perceive? I will not go into the details of the epistemological problem. But the question remains that when we become conscious of an object, how does consciousness take place? There are numerous theories. Let us take the example of an inert object, a pot. How is a pot changed into pot-consciousness? What is it that changes it? How does an inert thing become conscious? Many philosophers have tried to explain this very knotty problem. Vedānta asserts that it is not the object which strikes us, our mind goes to the object to receive it. Of course, the mind goes to the object through the sense of sight or which ever sense is present. But it is the mind which is active in being aware, reaching there. Modern scientists will no doubt say that the pot sends rays of light which fall on to the retina. We all know that it is a very simple physical fact. But how do we explain the sensation that the pot is there? Actually, if we are told that the universe is in our eyes or all sounds are in our ear, will it make any sense? We are quite sure that the sounds are somewhere out there, similarly the pot is somewhere out there. If the sound strikes our ear drum, if the pot is observed on our retina, how do we get the idea of thereness. We may say that all this knowledge is inferential, we may say that actually we perceive it on the retina but we presume or infer that the object must be out there. However, it is not so simple. To infer something we must experience it somewhere in reality. For example, we have seen smoke and we have seen fire along with it. At least once we have seen the two existing together. Only then by seeing smoke, we can conclude or infer that there must be fire because we have seen smoke. But supposing we have never seen smoke and fire together, will we be able to infer anything? Here we are expected to believe that we have never seen an object outside, but we infer throughout our lives that objects are outside. Is this not too much of a mystic experience that

we are expected to believe in? So Vedānta says that actually it is the mind which perceives. Along with the mind the consciousness perceives the objective world and, therefore, actually what is considered as the objective world is really the subjective world. Consciousness is all-pervasive. It is only ignorance which makes us feel limited. The mind is able to remove the ignorance partially and that is how perception takes place. Now this aspect of the mind going out and observing things as they are and not merely inferring them is very important. That means all objective experience can be controlled by us. We can be aware of what we want to be aware of. We can cancel out any awareness which we do not want to be aware of. The other epistemological theories state that things strike us, we remain passive; but Vedānta says that we strike things, we are active. Once we realise this, we become the master of the situation rather than a slave of the situation. The first consciousness which will emerge is awareness of the body complex. The first thing that we are aware of is our own body. Slowly, we have to make this awareness an active element. In every act, in every cognition, in every perception we have to be actively involved. When we see an object, it is not the mere sensation that we perceive. Senses can give us the sensation, but perception is something more than that. Our eyes can see the colour of a microphone, the circumference, the net, etc. But do our eyes really see the microphone? Supposing a villager comes here, he can see the colours. But can he see that this instrument is a microphone? Unless our mind has the proper impressions, the proper understanding, we will not be able to see the microphone. This is something which gives us a clue, if we are able to bring all the time in our mental perception what the *Upaniṣad* says *Sarvām khalvidam brahma*.¹⁶

When a scientist sees things, he sees them differently. Every scientist will look at things from a different perspective. Let us consider an example. Mahatma Gandhi or Indira Gandhi were shot dead. If we were to ask a physicist, he will explain with what force or kinetic energy the bullet was shot, the distance it travelled, at what velocity it entered the heart,

the extent of obstruction and the amount of energy lost before it was finally embedded. He can give all these explanations and they are all true. If we were to ask a chemist, he will also give his own analysis. He will say that the bullet had certain chemical substances which entered the heart, which has its own chemical substances. A reaction took place resulting in death, i.e., the physiological apparatus stopped functioning. He is also true. If we were to ask a medical man, he will explain how the heart was affected by the impact and what changes took place in the tissues of the heart which led to death. He is also true. If we were to put together all these scientific facts, do they tell us what the death of Mahatma Gandhi or Indira Gandhi means? No. Why? Because there are social, political and economic implications. There are innumerable ways in which that particular event can be viewed. It will all depend on the particular coordinates of the mind that have been trained. Now the *Upaniṣad* tries to explain that all these are true just as the physical, chemical, biological, physiological and sociological aspects are true. However, none of them exhaust it. The *Upaniṣad* says that there is still a higher comprehension and that is all this that has happened including the action: everything is nothing but the Absolute Consciousness.

When we are living at the biological level, we must first do spring cleaning, so to say, of our body-mind complex. In the course of living, we grapple with both psychological and social problems. In short, each one who lives has to face both his inner world, that is, psychological, as well as his external world, that is, sociological or social existence. When we tackle a particular problem we develop certain attitudes. We face inner physiological, psychological, intellectual and emotional conflicts. There are certain physiological reactions in the body. For example, a child in the village slips and hurts his knee, the dust from the street is put on the wound and it heals. In the process the physiological apparatus develops certain immunities. When this child grows up and hurts himself, he does not get an anti-tetanus shot because his system has developed its own immunity in a very natural

way. On the other hand if there is a child who slips and hurts himself, say, in South Delhi where the streets are clean, the child is immediately rushed to a doctor and given an anti-tetanus shot. Why? The answer is that the child has no immunity of his own. He has to be administered that immunity. The reason for this is obvious, as soon as the child was born he was dressed in clothes. Earlier up to forty days nobody tried to clothe a child. Today, even before a child is born, clothes are stitched, even socks and shoes are bought. People often bring their infants to me for blessing. These infants are dressed from head to foot. Naturally, their physiological complex will be at the mercy of something external.

In the very process of living, we develop inner physiological complexes and intellectual attitudes toward things. Everyone does not have similar experiences, therefore experiences vary and as a result the intellectual understanding of things varies. The same is true of emotional life. If a father has been strict, the child will develop a particular attitude. If the father has been indulgent, he will develop a different attitude. All these attitudes which have been imbibed by our mind have to be cleaned if we want to lead a purposive life in the true sense of the term. They dictate us; a person who is aware and is trying to lead a purposive life does not want to be dictated by anything including these complexes. His attitude will be absolutely different.

Our ancient sages had discovered that in the body there are definite cerebro-spinal centres which are active in a particular way and must be cleaned. Technically, in Sanskrit, it is called *nāḍīsodhana*. The energy centres have to be spiritualised. The energy centres are active in us but because we are not leading a purposive life, they are active in a material way or, to some extent, in a psychological way. But they have not been spiritualised because we lead a mundane or what can be called a secular life, without any consideration of what the spirit within us is. Self-healing, self-development and self-fulfilment are the three stages through which we have to pass to bring about changes in the cerebro-spinal centres. The healing has to be within. No medicine can help us, we have

to do it on our own. Having healed all the harm that has been done, we have to develop it, so that we are able to control and direct it towards the goal of purposive life and it is only through this that self-fulfilment will take place. The essential pre-conditions of health, harmony and happiness will be established when all these different centres in the body are in harmony with each other. That is, when they are acting in a coordinated way instead of contradicting each other or being disharmonious.

Why is that the ancient people depended so little on medicine? Why is it that we cannot live even a single day without medicine? The reason is that our body, the physiological apparatus, the biological apparatus is not in harmony. Harmony is the essence of constructive and creative health. Health is not some thing passive. Biologically, when a thing is living, every moment it is acting, it is absorbing something, reacting to it, and every moment a new construction is taking place. Theoretically speaking, a person may say that he has maintained his weight. But has he maintained the substance that he calls weight? Every day we eat and drink, new substances enter the body and old ones are ejected. The body, as I often tell people, is only a whirlpool in the river of matter. Even as a river flows whirlpools are created in the flowing water. This can easily be seen by throwing a petal of a flower into the water. The petal will swirl round and round for sometime and then it will be rejected and it will be carried away somewhere else. Similarly, this whole world is a continuum of matter. Our body, our biological existence is only a whirlpool in it. The material substance stays in it for a while, it is rejected and we get a new material world and the cycle goes on. We may feel as if it is the same but it is continuously changing. That is why I said that we need constructive and creative health. We cannot remain healthy by living in a glass case. The whole modern movement of medical science is based on this premise, it tries to confine us to a glass case. The moment we are afflicted by an illness we are given a medicine to cure it. The medicine is only to cure the illness, it does not ensure creative health. The next time when the

illness recurs we will not be able to come out of it without the medicine. Health has to be constructive and creative. Everyday we recite a prayer.¹⁷ We are talking about the creative aspect as health is not merely the absence of disease. That is why we say that as long as we live *tuṣṭuvāmsastanūbbih*,¹⁸ creatively we should be able to praise the Lord. Two things are important here: *bhadram*, that is, the harmony and *tuṣṭuvāmsah*, that is, the creative. Even at the biological level we have to develop an awareness of these things then only we will be able to go beyond the body.

There was once a king who had a very large kingdom and he ruled it very wisely. One day a somologist or what is known in Sanskrit a *sāmudrika* came to the palace. This is the study of phrenology palmistry. It is the science of the whole body, just as a palmist deals only with the palm, a phrenologist deals only with the structure of the head. A somologist, a *samudrika* studies the whole body. The doorman came and announced that a great scholar had come to see the king. The king instructed the doorman to let him in. He entered and looked at the king very closely, he even removed some of the king's clothes and looked very grave and sad. The king asked him what the matter was and why was he so sad. The somologist told the king that he had been studying this science for a long time and his predictions have always been accurate. But looking at the king he had begun to have doubts about his own science. He went on to say that there was not a single sign on the king's body which indicated that he was such a virtuous king. The man added that all signs indicated that the king should have been a poor beggar and an unethical and vicious person. The somologist said that after having seen all this, he had begun to doubt his science because he knew that the king was a great and virtuous person. He said that there was only one possibility that there was some sign inside the king's body, inside his stomach. If the man could have seen that he could have concluded whether the science was correct or false. Hearing this the king immediately took out his sword and said, 'Well there is no problem. Why should you doubt the science? I

will cut open my bowels and you can see whether the signs exist there or not.' The somologist said, 'What are you doing, you may die.' The king replied, 'That is unimportant, but you would have discovered whether the science is correct or false.' The somologist said, 'You need not do this. I have already seen the sign. It is this boldness in your life which has contradicted all the signs present outside. It is this courage, this spiritual energy that you have, which is really the solution to the problem. Even without cutting up your body I have seen inside. My science is perfect and you are also perfect.'

It is that boldness, that attitude of spirituality which is important. Basically each person is like that king, king of his body-mind complex. If we only look at the external signs, we will see inert things and, therefore, we will feel that we are limited, we are acted upon, we are actors, enjoyers, or sufferers. When the *śruti* says that all this is *brahman*, all this is absolute, immediately a doubt arises, how can we be absolute. Everything else may be indirectly known but we know ourselves directly. Why do we feel that we are not absolute? The answer is because we see only the external signs, we see what the body does, what the mind does, how the senses act. Looking at all these external signs we feel that we are beggars. But the spirit is not external, it is internal. Only when a person is able to transcend this biological existence by being aware of it as a subjective element, can he discover the absolute truth which he himself weighs, which is embedded in him and which is embedded everywhere in every atom. This awareness at the biological level will allow us to transcend this cerebro-spinal complex which is not allowing us to rise. We will discuss later how to overreach ourselves, so to say, because as long as we are embedded, as long as we are rooted only in the body, we will not be able to overreach ourselves.

LECTURE FOUR

We were discussing the concept of purposive life in the light of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* of the *Sāmaveda*. The *Upaniṣad*¹⁹ lays down that real purposive life begins when we are conscious, all that we perceive, all that we conceive is nothing but *khalu* or the Supreme Consciousness. Since everything has come of this consciousness, it is absorbed back into it. Our destiny is determined: we are going to attain the highest truth. There is absolutely nothing which can stop this process. We can delay the process but we cannot reverse it. While describing the Supreme Consciousness, the *Upaniṣad* follows two different paths taking into consideration two basically different types of individuals who want to attain the Supreme Consciousness. There are some aspirants who can see the truth, the pure truth, without ever feeling that the truth may reveal things which may cut asunder all that they hold to be dear to them. People in this category are very rare. The vast majority are not that bold. They cannot directly perceive the truth as it is, they want to see it within certain limitations. The *Upaniṣad* also describes the supreme *brahman* in this way. When the supreme *brahman*, the Supreme Consciousness, is to be realised through this process, it has infinite power, infinite qualities, as Ācārya Śaṅkara has pointed out.²⁰ This particular passage deals with the Lord in this way. That is why where the emphasis is on the realisation of truth directly, the words used are those given in the *Tattirīya Upaniṣad*.²¹ The Supreme Consciousness is that from which everything originates, is sustained by it and eventually merges into it. The moment we see the truth face to face, immediately the merger takes place. Here, the *Upaniṣad* has changed the order to some extent.²² The universe is created out of the Supreme Consciousness, the universe merges into it and is sustained by it. The merging has been described as the goal, we are all going to merge into Him. After stating the goal and

the origin, the *Upaniṣad* describes something referring to here and now, *tadaniti*,²³ the Lord sustains all and that is why *śānta upāsīta*.²⁴ So here it is not merely merging into Him but also living into Him and being sustained by Him. This is one of the important points which Ācārya Śaṅkara has also emphasised. Though everything is *brahman* yet it is not merely in the conception of merging but it is in the conception of living.

I often tell people that it is easier to die for a cause than to live for a cause. Many people gave up their lives for independence. Some survived and lived to see the country become independent. Why is it that these very people are not able to sustain the spirit of sacrifice which they had before the country achieved independence? It is easier to die for independence than to live for it because here it is a continuous struggle that has to go on. The *Upaniṣad* says that we must learn to live this conception of all that is universal consciousness. In trying to do that we have to perceive different ways of living, the different patterns of living, because living is a complex phenomenon. It is not merely the stages that I am talking about. At any given moment these different directions will always be present. Purposive life, as we have already discussed, can be divided into four levels — we must be aware at the biological level, at the sociological level, at the ethical or virtuous level and at the absolute level. These levels do not occur one after the other. We must not perceive them as steps because as long as *tadaniti*, as long as we are living, we will have to live at all the four levels. Theoretically, we can think of point, or a line, or a plane, or a solid. All these four are theoretical. The moment we make a point no matter how sharp the pencil is, that point will have length, breadth, height and depth. All the four dimensions will be present in that point. Similarly, when a line is drawn, no matter how thin the line is, it has width. Or, no matter how thin a leaf of paper is, it has height. If we want to examine an existing thing, we will have to think of a solid. To understand and analyse, we can think in terms of a point, a line, a plane

and a solid. Similarly, every individual has to exist on all the four planes. Therefore awareness will always be on all the four planes.

As was pointed out earlier, in the body there are definite cerebro-spinal structures where the different consciousness act in a normal way. These spiritualising centres are very important. We must remember to take care of these centres by being aware of them. The first one lies at the very root of our cerebro-spinal system, what is known as cock's eye, that is, the root centre. In Sanskrit it is called the *mūlādhāra*. This is at the base of the spinal cord. This centre gives us stability and inner strength. Whenever we have to do something which requires maximum effort, we have to put pressure at the cock's eye level because it is the source of inner strength and firmness. Those who have specialised in this science, identify it with the earth itself. Just as the earth is the base on which we live, similarly our physical existence is oriented on this root. If there is any disturbance in this centre, it leads to disorientation, just as the whole external world becomes disoriented if there is an earthquake. When there is an earthquake, we cannot orient ourself because all our orientation is based on the fact that the earth is solid and it is not moving. All our calculations are based on that fact. If the earth begins to move, all our orientation goes haywire. In the same way if this centre is disturbed, life becomes disoriented. If there is insufficient activity, or we neglect it, it leads to alienation from the body. Though we are in the body yet our awareness becomes alienated and that leads to sickness. This is why the upaniṣadic sages have always decried asceticism of a violent type, because it brings about disorientation.

Following the upaniṣadic line, Śrī Kṛṣṇa lays down that yoga can cause misery and can also remove misery: *Yogo bhavati duḥkhabhā*. If we do not follow this properly our yoga, our method of realising God, our whole life instead of alleviating the pain will produce more pain. We have to be temperate and not an extreme ascetic as far as food and recreation is concerned, *yuktāhāravibhāra*. Being temperate

means not indulging in gluttony either. Similarly, we have to be temperate in recreation. We should not indulge in it to an extreme. All our actions must be restrained, *yuktaceṣṭasya*. All our *ceṣṭās* must be restrained. We should sleep in moderation and not keep awake the whole night. Continuous vigil for a few days is bound to lead to disorientation. Extreme asceticism will temporarily make us very joyful, elevated and we feel that we are bereft of sorrow. There are physiological reasons for feeling thus. But this will eventually lead us astray and the outcome will be sorrow. We have to be very particular that this biological level of our existence is not underactive. When there is insufficient activity, we must reinforce it and strengthen it through proper stimulations. Definite postures have been prescribed by which we can control and activate this particular level of consciousness. Proper stimulation is possible through certain breathing and other practices. If this centre is overactive then the person becomes a hypochondriac. Consciousness of the body becomes too acute. One becomes gross, crude and lacks refinement. So we have to be careful that this centre is neither underactivated nor overactivated. As I said earlier, we have to live at this level always; it is both constructive and creative. It is not that once this centre begins to function normally, we can sit back and relax. It has to be continuously cared for and this underscores the importance of awareness.

The next biological level is a little higher in the abdominal centre. It is the domain of the libido, elementary passions for food, procreation and comforts are all centred here. In Sanskrit it is called *svādiṣṭhāna* or the abdominal centre. The first is primarily concerned with the physiological aspect of biology. It is mainly concerned with basic instincts or drives such as procreation, food and comforts. If this centre becomes overactivated, the person becomes passionate and his life becomes animalistic. Most of his actions are at the animal level. A great psychologist in America once said, 'Why can't we be normal like cats and dogs?' To such people animals seem to be better off than human beings or the human situation. This eventually leads to hedonism or licen-

tiousness. The basic principle of hedonism or licentiousness is that if a particular thing can give us joy then why not have it, what is wrong. Overactivity of this centre has to be kept in check. At the same time we must ensure that it is not underactive because underactivation can lead to a number of psychosomatic diseases. Whenever our natural propensities, our instincts are not adequately satisfied, they are bound to lead to certain physical diseases where the cause is the mind. Hence, they are known as psychosomatic. In some cases individuals may even develop split personalities. They become schizophrenic. This centre has to be controlled in the same way as horses drawing a chariot are kept in check. The *Kāthopanīṣad* of the *Yajurveda* actually points out that our senses are like horses.²⁵ The reins have to be kept in the hands of the *Vijñānamaya Puruṣa*. It is only when *vijñāna* controls it that the chariot can move smoothly. When controlling horses every moment we have to be careful that the horses are under our control and are not allowed to wander freely. This underlines the importance of awareness. We have to be aware all the time. So the biological level can be divided into two parts. One is mainly the body and the other is the senses and the mind connected with instincts.

Just as man is rooted in the biological existence, he is also rooted in social existence. Man is a social being; his development can take place only in a society. Bereft of a society he will lose his humanness. This is an important point which we must always remember. It is impossible not to live in a society if we want to remain human. This is what we mean by the word *artha*, that is, the social level. We have to be aware at the social level. What constitutes a society? Basically, there are three elements which constitute a society. Every society must have a culture; it must have an economic existence sustained by each other; and it must have a political structure, that is, some kind of legislature which governs society. Whether it is the most backward society or the most advanced society, these three elements have to be present to constitute a society. There have to be certain norms of a society, that is, what is a particular society meant for. The

moment a society is formed, it has to have some methodology of functioning. How will funds be raised to ensure smooth functioning of society? When there is a structure, there will be a president, a secretary, who will look after the various functions. Thus, any group of human beings who form a society must have a culture, an economic structure and a political structure (politics should not be misunderstood as it is today). That is exactly why the Vedas have divided society into three distinct functioning units — *brāhmaṇa* is one who is concerned with culture, *ksatriya* is one who is concerned with politics, and *vaiśya* is one who is concerned with economics. It must be remembered that these are interacting factors or phases. These phases cannot be totally separated from each other. The economic structure cannot function properly if there is no law and order. Conversely, there cannot be any law and order if there are no funds available, or if there is no economic growth. So these phases are all interdependent. These three form the inner structure of a society and that is why they are called *savarnas*, that is, the inner groups. Every society will have these three elements. On the social plane we have to be aware of all these three elements.

What are the goals which every society must strive towards? Every society must ensure the survival of the species. No society can exist if it does not ensure the survival of the species. At the same time each society must ensure security during the life span of an individual. The survival of the species is a long term process, it must be guaranteed along with individual security. That is why when people talk only in terms of the future so that the future will be happy, they are talking of something which is absolutely impractical. There has to be security during the life span of the individual. At the same time there must be material progress for continual expansion. Human society can never be static, it is dynamic. Hence, there must be continual expansion of society. If society does not expand, it will die. It is like climbing a snow peak — either one goes up or one goes down, one cannot just stand there. Societies which did not pay

attention to this continual expansion collapsed, whether it was Greek society or Egyptian society. Along with material progress there should be mental progress for developing the potential of every individual in society. A society which does not allow the potential of every individual to develop is likely to die. A society is formed to bring about these four things. This can be achieved only in a social way and that is what a society is meant for. To recapitulate, a society must have a culture, economics and politics; it must ensure the survival of the species, security during the life span of an individual, and continual material and mental progress to develop the potential of every individual. The more a society aspires to achieve these goals, the greater the heights it will reach. The ideal will always be there towards which we have to strive. But at least we know the direction in which we are progressing, where we are going, even when we have absolutely no interest in the world in the ordinary sense of the term. For example, the great Ācārya Śāṅkara had nothing to gain from the world yet he saw to it that the tradition of *advaita* was carried on from generation to generation, that is, the survival of the species. Traditional knowledge has been handed down from his time to this day, not merely because he wrote books but because he created a tradition which has passed from generation to generation. There have been a number of saints. If we ask what exactly did they believe in, ten people will give ten different answers. As Ācārya Madhusūdan has pointed out, the greatness of Śāṅkara is that in spite of the fact that he has not claimed originality, he has presented the *Upaniṣads* in such a way that they have not been misinterpreted throughout centuries. Similarly for continuous progress of mental phenomena, he tried to give as much independence of interpretation to those ideas as is possible. As I had pointed out earlier, truth remains one but the approaches are many, the *prakriyās* are different. He laid down the foundations of society and the *āśramas* in a way that ensured security during the life span of an individual so that the individual could concentrate completely on the survival of the species, that is, this knowledge. So even when

a person is not directly involved in society, yet the knowledge itself becomes a base around which a society has to come into being.

This social level in our body complex is connected with the naval centre. In Sanskrit there is a very beautiful word for it, *manipūra*. All the jewels, so to say, are hidden in it. This is the centre of power. There have been scientists who have emphasised that the main centre of activity is the abdominal centre. They felt that the libido was the most important part of life. Freud, as we are aware, emphasised sex as the main centre. In reality, this centre of power, the *manipūra*, is far more important. The will to power is stronger than libido. In youth a person may be swayed, to some extent, by passionate life, but once that stage has passed, this will to power becomes most important. The ambition to succeed in business, or the ambition to become a great political leader or a great scholar, or to acquire fame are all controlled by the *manipūra*. Of course, if the *manipūra* become overactive, the individual strives for power for power's sake and his spiritual life is subordinated. The desire for love and wisdom diminishes increasingly if the individual strives for power all the time. If, on the other hand, it becomes underactive, then even the spiritual hankering is not there. There are many people who neither aspire for power nor do they aspire for any spiritual gains. They just live at a subterranean level. To avoid these extremes, we must be aware and properly activate these centres. When we think, talk reasonably, we know that harmony is important. But when we act, we forget the ideal of harmony and we tend to go to the extremes which is self-defeating. Wisdom really means being conscious, unclouded by the ignorance which leads to disharmony. That is why we have to be conscious of these two levels or aspects. Otherwise once harmony is lost, everything is lost.

There was a boy named Ummar. He was very young when his parents passed away. He had an elder married sister, Uma, who lived in a town. His parents had gone on a pilgrimage when they slipped from a mountain and died.

Ummar lived in the village and when his parents died, he would sometimes stay with his paternal uncles and sometimes with his maternal uncles. But his relatives would ill treat him because he had no money. As we know, in today's world money dominates all relationships. If a person is a multimillionaire and he is only a distant relation, five generations removed, he is still our relative. On the other hand, a person is a beggar, he may the son of a maternal uncle, we will not even recognise him. Ummar was very disheartened and he decided to go to a big city in search of a job. With no money on his person and fully aware that his relatives were not going to give him anything, he started walking towards Bombay. After he had walked a few hundred miles begging his way through, he came across an *āśrama* where there was a *paramahansa saṁnyāsī*. The *saṁnyāsī* asked him about his appalling condition. Ummar explained his situation. The *saṁnyāsī* took pity on him and initiated him into the *mantra* of Śiva and told him that no matter what happened if he repeated this *mantra* God would see to it that he did not face any difficulty. Finally, he reached Bombay. Whenever he approached someone for work he was told that he was too young to do anything. Eventually a coal merchant employed him to carry coal from one area to another. The work was very hard and the wages were only food. But through all this, Ummar continued to recite his *japa*, and every Monday he would go to the Śiva temple. There was a gentleman who was the captain of a ship and who was also a frequent visitor to the temple. When he saw Ummar at the temple every Monday, he asked him who he was. Ummar explained the whole situation. The man realised that Ummar had potential, so he asked him to come with him on the ship. Ummar went with the captain. He was very hard working. Slowly he made progress and earned some money. Eventually he decided that he had saved enough money to start some business. When they sailed to South Africa, Ummar told the captain that he wanted to set up a business there. Ummar set up a fruit shop. His hard work and honesty paid and he was successful. He hired a European to work for him and as the business expanded he made him his partner.

Twenty years had passed since he had left his home. He began to wonder that he should go back to see his village and get married. He went back, instead of going to his parental home, he went to meet his sister. He had taken with him many gifts, including money and jewellery. When his sister saw that he was carrying a lot of money, she lost her sense of harmony. She thought that he was alone and he did not need all these things whereas she did not have enough money. For twenty years he had been away and no one knew that he had come back. So she decided to kill him at night and take away all his money and jewellery. She made sleeping arrangements for her husband and her brother in one room and she made her own bed in the other room because that was the custom in those days. Nowadays, of course, the guest will be made to sleep alone. She pushed her husband's bed near the wall and her brother's bed near the door. At night both men talked for a long time. In the course of the conversation, Ummar told his brother-in-law that he had brought a large amount of wealth. When they were going to sleep, Ummar's brother-in-law thought to himself that Ummar had a lot of money and valuables, he decided to push his bed right near the door so that thieves could not come into the room at night. The sister entered the room and after she made sure that they were asleep, took a sword and cut off the neck of the person who was sleeping right near the door. She thought that she had killed her brother. After this, she decided to dispose off the body. But it was not possible for her to carry the body alone. So she decided to wake up her husband. She thought that he would know what to do and even though he was a good person, he would eventually agree to what she said. She walked near the other bed and lifted the blanket from the sleeping man who happened to be her brother and told him get up. He got up and inquired as to what the matter was. Naturally, she was terribly shocked. When the lights were switched on, her brother was aghast that his sister could have done such a thing. Anyway, the husband was dead. The people wanted to convict the sister. But she went crazy and led a very miserable life.

When a person strives towards materialistic things, he loses his sense of harmony. This is not merely the case of one woman. All of us experience this whenever we have many possessions. That is why Ācārya Śāṅkara says that these powerful things, whether it is success in business or power, when they become the goal then they definitely lead to *anartha*, they lead one astray.²⁶

Awareness is always important on the social level also. How do we know that we are aware at these two levels. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has given us the clue.²⁷ The Lord says that as long as a person is at the biological level, he has to make sure that whatever he does he is not violating the ethical norms. Whenever a person is striving for power, whether it is economic, political, social or cultural, he has to make sure that he is not guided by *kāma* and *rāga*. That is, he is not continuously thinking in terms of what 'I will gain'. Power is purified when it is bereft of certain things which 'I' gave. When an individual is at the social level, his thinking should not be in terms of his gain but in terms of the social gain: *Kāma-rāga-vivarjitam*. A person does not desire a thing for himself and he is not guided by any particular attachment that he may have. At the social and the biological level, we have to ensure that whatever we eat or do is not against the fundamental virtuous life.

LECTURE FIVE

We were discussing purposive life. We noted that there are different facets, different phases, different aspects of living. We have to simultaneously live in all these phases as long as we are alive. The particular passage of the *Sāmveda* in the *Chāndogya Upanisad* that we are dealing with emphasises this conception.²⁸ It stresses that all the different facets of life must be directed towards one goal. We all have to live that is why the last thing was *tadaniti*.²⁹ Every thing is existing because the Supreme Consciousness is present in-it, through it, not only in the external world but also in ourselves. Keeping in view the different facets or aspects, we discussed that we have to live in this body and so we have to be aware on that level. All that is unconscious must be transformed into conscious. We also discussed that we have to live like a social being and so we have to be conscious of the society around us. What does society constitute of, we will discuss in the following. The next two facets that we will discuss are subtler than these two.

At the beginning it was pointed out that every human being is bound to exist on the biological level. There is no choice. There are people who also exist on the social level. There are very few who can be absolutely out of society. They may live rightly or wrongly, but they have to live. The two aspects which we will discuss are subtler and higher. There are people who are absolutely unconscious of these levels or even if they are conscious they try to ignore them at their own cost. These two aspects cannot be realised, understood, perceived or comprehended merely on the physical level. The first two also have certain aspects which are not easily comprehensible, but being gross we can perceive them and infer them to a large extent. Most of the sociological, psychological and physical sciences depend entirely on perception and inference. But higher things cannot be perceived, they have to be realised within ourselves. It is true

that to be aware — *kratu* — we have to develop a higher sense of value. In these two higher aspects *kratu* becomes very important. Ācārya Śaṅkara defines what he means by *kratu*.³⁰ It is the certitude, *niścaya*. But he is not quite satisfied by merely saying that it is certitude. He says that it is the absolute determination that a thing is such and not otherwise.³¹ In English, there is no word equivalent to *kratu*. Even in Hindi a word connoting the sense of *kratu* is very rare. But for our purpose here, we can use the term faith in a higher sense. Certitude is something which is merely intellectual. Faith is basic, it consumes intellect but surpasses it; it consumes emotion but surpasses it. Faith is that by which we live. It is not merely what we believe, assert, intellectually perceive or what we are emotive about. It is the living principle. It is that which sustains us; it is the sustaining principle of life. No matter how many contradictions, how many miseries one faces in life, that faith remains unshaken. That is why Ācārya Śaṅkara says that it is that which does not shake.³² It is the directing inner guide. We may say that it is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end of our real life, of our real existence, of our spiritual life. In the second chapter of the Gita, Arjuna asks the question how to recognise a person of realisation. Ācārya Śaṅkara has posed a very interesting question: he asks why does Arjuna raise this question. A realised person will know himself. He does not have to depend on a textbook to tell him how to live. And the description of a realised person is of no use to an aspirant because is he going to imitate him. Ācārya Śaṅkara has given a very fitting reply. He says that whatever is the nature of the realised person must be practised by an aspirant. The description is given to enable us to practise it so that we can live it. That is why it is the beginning, the alpha, we start living it, it is also the end, the omega. When our life becomes perfect, we have attained this goal which is the end of spiritual striving. It is that which guides the growth of our personality. Otherwise our personality will never develop. We will die just as we were born.

Faith is not faith if it is not a matter of free choice, free existential choice. Faith is not something which can be imposed upon anyone because it is not merely acceptance. Faith is the result of complete absorption of our personality into that ideal. We feel it deep within ourselves. It is impossible not to be guided by it. For most people faith is merely believing, generally in the particular sect, or the particular religion in which they are born. The faith that we are talking about here is not of this type, where people are not even ready to discuss the conceptions about their real self. Most people believe they should not discuss these issues. They would rather talk of something else. The reason is because they have no faith. That is why faith is a matter of existential choice. After examining all the possible aspects not merely with our intellect but also with our emotions, we make a choice. Many people feel that they do not need a faith. They do not need a philosophy of life. Daily living, they feel is enough for them. But we must remember that is impossible for a human being to live by bread alone. It is just not possible for us not to be guided in our actions by some goal or the other. The most distinctive and central characteristic trait of human reality is the cultivation of higher values, an inner vision of something greater and nobler than ourselves. If we do not have that vision, then we are merely living in the human body without becoming human beings. Our life ceases to be a life and becomes a mere existence. It is only when that vision is present that it is able to sustain us in all our efforts, in our striving towards something higher. That is why the *śruti* says *sa kratum kurvīta*,³³ this faith has to be attained. Unless we are able to attain this faith, we will never experience fulfilment of life, both individual as well as social.

Our parents and grandparents lived a joyous life in their old age. They were happy because they believed they had completed their work in life and old age was for resting. They were very happy in that restful stage. Today, it is just the reverse. The older we grow, the more frustrated we become. We feel neglected. Why this difference? Earlier, people had

that faith, they had a purpose in life, something higher and nobler which they could see that they had attained. Today people live only on the two feet, so to say, of what we have already referred to as *kāma* and *artha*. As the scriptures have pointed out, biological living can be lived successfully only if one has a beautiful form, a beautiful body, a healthy body. The moment one grows old all this fades away. If one is merely sustaining on that level one is bound to feel nothing but frustration.

The sociological level is forbearance. One has to tolerate all kinds of situations if one wants to have a social life. One may not be feeling well but if a friend is in the hospital, one has to go and see him. Social living demands this, the culture and economics demand this. If one does not visit the friend, he may not sign a business deal, so even economics demands it, power demands it. We have seen that candidates contesting in the elections are hoarse from shouting, their eyes are blood-shot, yet the moment they go and meet people, they have to laugh and smile and appear to be happy. Social living demands all this. As one grows older, the mind, the intellect and the senses are not active. It is just not possible to maintain that level. Any person living on that level is bound to be frustrated. But this does not happen if one has higher goals, i.e., worship, kindness and control of the senses.³⁴ The scriptures say that if we have these three goals in life we will be contented. No matter how old we are, we can worship the Lord. We do not need a strong body or a strong mind to worship Him. Similarly, we can be kind to others, we do not need a strong mind or a strong body or a strong intellect for it. In the same way we can control the senses. If these three ideals are present before us, because they very concisely outline the virtuous and ethical aspects of life, there will be contentment. In youth, it is far more difficult to practise these things. At an advanced age, they become increasingly natural. If we have learnt to live according to these aspects of life, then there will be no frustration. Instead there will be a feeling of fullness or contentment: The feeling is that all that the younger generation is experiencing we have experienced.

Let us consider an example to understand this better. When children play with dolls, we do not wonder why we are not able to play with dolls. Because we know that we have played with dolls and we have passed that stage. Supposing a twenty-year old still plays with dolls, does not it look odd. Similarly we have passed through youth. But now at this advanced age, we still want to play with these social dolls, these physical dolls, the sensual enjoyments. Does not it look odd? Should not we be absolutely dissatisfied with our own self that we have not grown up and we have remained children? That is why faith may be highly developed or it may not be well developed but it has to be present to give us this fulfilment. Faith implies determination, because these concepts of worship, kindness, control of the senses — ethics and virtuous life in short — all depend on our determination. If we want to perceive them physically, it will not be possible. It is only our inner commitment which makes it worthwhile to live. By making this choice, we are able to divert all our energy into our existence. This is the supreme value. It guides us throughout life. If we have not developed this particular facet of life, then we will continue to behave like children, we will not be able to grow up, so to say.

There was a small island near a continent, it was an independent kingdom with a small population. The people had a very peculiar practice of selecting their king. They did not believe that a person should be king merely by birth. So they had developed a system by which they selected a person from a particular family and made him king for ten years. During those ten years, the king had total freedom to do what he wanted. At the end of ten years he was taken in a boat to the midst of the ocean and thrown into the ocean and no one was allowed to rescue him. Similarly, the ablest person of a family was placed on the throne and he was free to do whatever he liked for the next ten years, and after ten years he met the same fate. For this reason if anybody did a wrong act, people would curse him and say that he should become the next king. Nobody wanted to be king, because they all knew that it meant sure death after ten years. Since it

was obligatory, every family at one time or the other had to give in. Most of the people when they became king continuously thought only of the impending death. There was one brave person in that kingdom called Buddhidhana. When it was his turn to be king, he did not feel sorry about it. He was confident that with keen intellect, pure action and concentrated life somehow or other he would be able to save himself. It is this confidence which is born out of faith. When people have strong faith, they never lose courage under any circumstances.

There is a famous story about Maharana Pratap who was once left alone in a trench while he was fighting. The last person who was with him was shot and before he died he cried out aloud, 'I was the last to die and now it is best for you to run away'. Maharana Pratap turned around and answered, 'Don't talk nonsense, I am never alone, my *ekalingī* is always with me. Lord Śiva is always with me'. It is this faith which gives us strength. Buddhidhana had this faith.

As was the custom, Buddhidhana was taken to the shore, the former king handed him the keys of the treasury and explained whatever there was to be explained before he was taken in the boat and drowned. Buddhidhana was given all the royal insignia. He was crowned and rode on an elephant to the kingdom. He assumed charge and found that there was immense wealth in the treasury. He was surprised and wondered how is it that there is so much money. He began to question the treasurers and found out that the earlier kings were so afraid of death that they had enjoyed life individually without thinking in terms of the country which they were ruling. The people of that island were very industrious, so there was immense wealth but it was not being utilised. Buddhidhana had faith, he decided to utilise all the wealth for the good of the country. He set up new industries, developed agriculture, and helped the poor. Everyone was quite happy. He travelled throughout the island and found that there was a big lake. But because it had not been used for a very long time, it was full of debris. So he got the lake cleaned. From the continent some swimmers were invited to

teach him swimming. Everyday, he would go the lake and practise, he learnt how to swim under water, to hold his breath in water. In due course, he bought a large piece of land on the continent, built a house and with the help of some agricultural experts he developed agriculture on that continent. Slowly, the period of ten years drew to a close. The people were very sorry that they had to get rid of this king. As it was the custom, they had no option. All the people of the island cried because Buddhidhana had helped them so much and he had to die. But Buddhidhana was quite happy. He was taken in a boat to the middle of the ocean and thrown into the water. He had already learnt to swim. So he remained under water for some time. After some time he started swimming under water. Eventually he reached the shore of the continent, he went to his house which he had built on the continent and lived there happily. So even in the most difficult circumstances, a person with faith can find ways and means.

This is not merely the question of Buddhidhana, one person. In this large universe, the human body is a small island of which we become the rulers. We are the rulers but for a limited time. In Buddhidhana's case it was ten years; in this universe it may be sixty, seventy or eighty years. Since most people have become the king of this body-mind complex they continue to live merely at the physiological or biological level, all the time they are worried that they should enjoy life before they die. Just as in the story it was the people who drowned their king, similarly it is this body-mind complex which drowns us by passions, by desires, by continuously thinking in an egocentric way. They drown us despite the fact that we are the king. An intelligent person knows that death is a certainty. He is aware that after fifty years he has to go. But he plans ahead. He thinks that when he leaves this world, he should have a place to go to. Worship, kindness and control of the senses will take us beyond this ocean where we can buy land. No doubt Buddhidhana was also thrown into the ocean. Similarly, a person who has faith has to die, but he is sure that he has a place to go. Just as in the

ocean there are large whales, sharks, crocodiles which can attack us, similarly in this universe all these possessions and covetousness can consume us. Just as Buddhidhana had learnt to live in it, similarly we have to learn to live in it, this is possible only if we have *kratu*, the right determination, the right faith and if our faith is not static. Often when faith is not an existential choice it becomes static. Just as the body is not static, similarly our commitment cannot be static.

In India we always carry the dead weight of things individually, socially and nowadays, even politically. It is possible for the two Germanys to come together, but it is not possible for Haryana and Punjab to come together. Once we say something, it assumes such importance and we become so addicted to it that we cannot think in any other terms. In every sphere we go on carrying the dead weight. For instance, we realise that a mistake has been made, but how do we accept that it is a mistake. Hence, the dead weight has to be carried. Similarly in the case of faith, we make our faith static: Once we have accepted some belief, idea or creed we feel that we have to stick to it. We do not outgrow it. That is why it was emphasised that faith has to be dynamic, it has to be experiential, it has to be experienced with the whole of our being, it is that which gives us the real religious concept of life. Mere acceptance of something — it may be a book, a temple, a church — without completely living it will not make it a faith. That is why the essence of Vedānta lies in existential living. This is what Ācārya Śaṅkara has laid down in the second chapter. Once we have selected, once we have elected, once we have the definite determination that these Vedāntic truths are real, they have to be transformed into existential living. Vedānta is not merely knowing something intellectually, knowing something to be true; the most important thing is to live that conviction.

Of all the religions of the world, Vedānta is the only religion which does not tell a person what to do and what not to do. It does not say that if a person does such and such thing then he is following the path. The emphasis is on the fact that a person should become a non-doer. So it is not in doing

something but, as Śaṅkara has pointed out, it is in living that faith, it is in living that conviction. All the other things whether they are cognitive, conative or emotive will follow it. It is this life, this living which is described as *vijñāna* by Yājñavalkya. It is not mere ideas in our mind but it is what effect they have on the pattern of our living; unless they are able to change the pattern of our living, our total living, we have not grasped the idea. The final stage of a realised soul is that it is not by any action that he is liberated but because all the actions have left him,³⁵ and he has become absolutely *uparāma*. The word *rama* has the same meaning as the word *ramaṇa*, that which gives us joy, that which we like. No more is there any action which we like or dislike because life becomes a natural process. Kṛṣṇa has pointed out that whether we are sleeping, or we are awake, whether we are eating or speaking, whatever we may do, but we are absolutely certain that our senses will act as they must act, not because they like a thing but because that is what they were made for.³⁶ It is not merely haphazard activity, it is not merely inactivity, it is the complete fulfilment, that is, purposive life. Our senses will act as they must because that is what they are made for. The moment we try to intervene, the idea of likes and dislikes emerges. When we let the supreme power guide them, then there is no mistake.

One of the tests given in flying an aeroplane is: in a difficult situation do you have to think and plan out, or flying an aeroplane under difficult circumstances has become so natural to you that you will automatically do the correct thing. Of course, many of us do not know how to fly a plane. Supposing we are walking on the street and suddenly our foot slips. The number of muscles required to regain our balance are so many that it is impossible to plan out this action. But we have become so accustomed that without a moment's thought instinctively we straighten ourselves. Most of the things that we have been practising have become so instinctive that we do not have to think about them. If we begin to think our action will be delayed and we would fall. The same is true of our life. If we have attained purposive life, then it is not that we

seek the purpose and pursue it, but life itself has become purposive. This is what the Lord means when he says *iti dbārayan*, we are not going to interfere in it, because we have trained the body-mind complex to perfection. Life has become purposive. When that stage has been attained, it can be said that Buddhidhana has moved out of this island and settled down on the continent. The island is the individual soul, the continent is the Oversoul, the Universal Soul or the Absolute Self. Once we have reached there only then purposive life can be attained. This *kratum kurvīta* is necessary. But this can never be learnt from a book.

I am reminded of an incident. There was a young girl about seven or eight years old. A large book of the Gītā was lying on the table. I thought it was a dictionary. I asked the girl about that book. She replied that it was the Gītā. When I asked her whether she knew what it contained, she replied that it contained her father's telephone bill, her mother's electricity bill and a painting for which she had received a prize. According to her, the Gītā contained all this. We are more or less at that stage. We may perceive ourselves as scholars and know what the Gītā contains, know the words that are in the Gītā, but have we lived that knowledge? Unless it becomes our life, it is not going to help us. That is why the *śruti* says: *sa kratum kurvīta*. We have to attain this faith. When we have attained it only then purposive life is complete.

We started with the concept that all this is a manifestation of the Supreme Consciousness, the Absolute Consciousness, the Universal Self, the Oversoul or whatever we may call it — everything has come out of it, everything is living in it. Unless we are able to live in it, *tadaniti*, unless it becomes our life, the natural way of living on all these different planes, we will not attain purposive life. Let us all strive towards it and attain this purposive life. Let us all become Buddhidhana. This means that we should let knowledge or wisdom be our *dhana*, our richness and not merely the material possessions.