

THE mind is the resort of all sorts of fancies. What lies dormant in the sub-conscious, wakes up our dreams and also when we are awake. Things that have no relation to one another appear inter-related and present a big and complex pattern of behaviour. Often I get absorbed in such fancies that I find it difficult to get rid of them. They do come frequently. Sometimes these fancies are delightful and profitable and their memory afterwards gives both pleasure and profit. One day at dawn when I should have relaxed peacefully, being unperturbed and free from all desires, these fanciful thoughts took possession of my mind.

Durbar of King Ego

It was durbar-time. Many courtiers were seated calmly in their places. The most elevated place was occupied by King Ego with his devoted wife, Buddhi. Among the courtiers were seen in their shining forms ten Indriyas, five Pranas, five Elements and Mind. There were other indistinct figures and also a few who were of no consequence. This large durbar-hall and its activities were just before my eyes; but I

Sadhana at a glance

Swami Akhandananda

Saraswati

fail to remember where I was and in what form I was witnessing them: I was simply a witness.

The Monarch (Ego) called Mind and bade him bring to him each of the assembly one by one, as he desired to acquaint himself with them, know their occupations and the aim of their lives. Mind withdrew to carry out his orders, bowing.

Prithvi

Mind then brought to him a middle-aged lady. Ego asked 'Who are you?'

'My name is Prithvi' replied the woman.

'What is your occupation?'

'For my livelihood' said she 'I do not have to do anything. Cold, heat, wind and space are available to me at all times, and the work of bearing the entire creation comes very naturally to me. I am never anxious nor perturbed with it.'

'What is the aim of your life?' asked Ego.

'Can there be any aim where there is no independent existence? I must do only that which is commanded by the One who gave me existence, who brought me out of the womb of Nature and who

supports me. Each of my actions is according to His will. Perhaps, He is pleased with it, I do not know, but I make no effort to please Him. I have no motive nor do I know His motive.'

'Suppose He drowns you in water, or burns you in the fire or destroys you, will you not be aggrieved?' asked Ego.

'Not at all' replied Prithvi. 'His will is my existence, and so is my death. Life and death do not exist for me; only His will does. What then is the difference between the two? In my mind the thought of happiness and misery does not arise.'

'Well, go and occupy your place, I have nothing to say to you', said Ego.

Water

Mind then brought another from the assembly. Ego asked: 'What is your name?'

'Water' came the answer.

'What is your occupation?'

'I am available to whosoever wants me for his use. The earth is moistened by me, the sun drinks me, the wind is cool because of me and I too use them when required. That is my occupation. Therefore I have no anxiety nor worry'.

'What is the aim of your life ?' asked Ego.

'I do not know' said Water. 'By His desire who has given me existence and livelihood I make a circuit from the clouds to the mountain, from the mountain to the plains, from the plains to the river and from the river again to the clouds. He that makes me go round knows its secret.'

'Are you happy with this travel ?' asked Ego. 'Suppose it stops suddenly.'

'I never desired that I should ever travel like this, nor do I wish that I should stop. When I desire neither to move nor to stand still, how can I have preference for either of these states ?'

'Suppose somebody burns you up or scorches or makes you perish,' asked Ego.

'I have to burn, get scorched or perish as the case may be.'

'Won't you be aggrieved ?'

'It is all the same to me. When I live by another's will, then I die also by another's will. By the will of another my life exists. There is neither happiness nor misery in this.'

'All right, go' said Ego.

Fire

Mind then entered with a bright figure.

'Who are you ?' asked Ego.

'I am Fire'.

'What is your occupation ?'

'Whoever wishes to have heat and light, can take from me as much as he wants. Wind, Water and Earth are useful to me. This is my nature; I have no particular desire to be such.'

'For whom do you do all this ?'

'Somebody is making me do it.'

'Suppose nobody makes you do it ?'

'I won't do.'

'Suppose He destroys you?' said Ego.

'I will perish.'

'Where did you acquire this nature?' asked Ego.

'This also is given by Him. I was proud that I have some power in me. But He has made me realise that the power is His and what little I am is due to Him. He may keep or deprive me of it, it is His will.'

'Well, you may go' said Ego.

Wind

Then came the turn of

Wind. When Ego questioned him, he said 'I am Wind, and my occupation is to blow. I cause the existence of lightning, life and fire. The entire Universe depends on me for its existence.'

'From where did you derive so much of power?'

'From where I came. My powers are mine only for the name. They came naturally to me without any effort on my part. I am only an instrument and this quality is also willed by somebody else and is not my own.'

'Suppose all your powers are taken away from you?'

'Let them be taken away. If He, to whom I belong, whose powers are mine, takes them back to Himself or deprives me of them, I cannot but be happy at that.'

'All right, you may go.'

Ether

Next Ether was brought near and when questioned by Ego, he said: 'I am Ether. Space and sound are my attributes. I sustain all the four elements and the things created by them. This I say from the point of view of those Elements only. In my eyes, they are not different from

me. To me they are not even to be seen. It is only myself that I see. Truly, this is the natural quality of the all-pervading Lord of the Universe.'

'Suppose somebody destroys you?'

'I will remain even then in the form of destruction.'

'Suppose you do not remain at all, what then?'

'In that case, He will surely remain whose I am and in whom I exist. If by destroying my existence, His existence is revealed, then it is only for the good.'

'But if you are destroyed and His existence is not revealed?'

'Then it will be His play of hide-and-seek. If I am to perish for His play, then it is indeed good.'

'The dedication of all five of you is complete,' Ego concluded.

Pran

Prompted by Ego, Mind then brought another who, though one, had a five-fold form. He was singular in shape, while the other forms were his shadows. On being questioned, he answered: 'My name is Pran. Though I am one, on account of the differ-

ence in position and vocation, I appear different in five ways as both unitary and diverse. All the activities in the world are through me. I am the motive power of every activity in this gross world !"

'Are you unitary or diverse?' asked Ego.

'In fact I am unitary, I do not have diversity at all. But it is only said so. I am diverse and that too in such a way that I will not be thought unitary at all.'

'Then you accept your illusion and captivity?' asked Ego.

'Yes. I think that bodily existence and blood circulation as well as digestion are caused by me. Even the eye will not wink but for me.'

'Wherefrom did you derive this strength?'

'I derive strength from universal life and universal soul.'

'Suppose you are not given this strength?'

'I shudder at such a possibility. I am full of the horror of death' said Pran.

'Then you don't have an unattached, balanced mind.'

'That's true', said Pran.

'You shall have to undergo punishment for this crime'.

'I am undergoing punishment even now. I cannot suffer more than what I have already suffered.'

'You are in bondage, but to break it also, it is necessary that you should be further fettered. Let your actions be limited. Be well-balanced by the aid of Ida, Pingala and Sushumna. Let all your wilful activities stop; place yourself by me. Don't get out of my sight even for a moment. What punishment is meted out to you is for your lack of motive. Surely, this will cause you sorrow, but even this distress will make for something better than your present happiness. You are not disposed equally towards life and death, have no submission to the Almighty, making no advance towards the goal. Therefore Pran! remain fettered. Stand before my eyes in steadiness.' Pran stood thus. But he began to tremble by and by.

Senses

Then Ego said to Mind: 'There are ten Senses. All need not be brought to me. With their consent, bring me one principal Sense, representing all.'

Accordingly Mind brought before him the Sense of Speech. On being questioned about the Senses, Speech said: 'We are ten in all. Five are Senses of Perception and five of Action. Senses of Action supplement the Senses of Perception, thus: If the Eye desires to look at a place the legs want to reach there, the skin desires to touch, and the hand gives effect to that desire. Senses of Perception are important, their purpose and functions are different. Some are alive to sound, some alive to touch and some others alive to form. The purpose of their being is to reach perfection in their functions. Just as the ear likes to hear a melodious sound, so do the eyes desire to see beautiful objects and the skin to feel soft touch. Harsh sound, ugly form and rough touch are disliked by them. All wish to attain perfection in their functions in different directions. For this alone they have created conflict in their lines.

Ego asked: 'Have they reflected ever on God? Did these five think that the attainment of their goal is the realization of God?'

'No, they deem their aims to be different and to reach perfection in them tantamount to attaining God.'

'Does it mean that presence of God is not felt where these aims are only partially realised?' Is not there a purpose of existence in those too that are harsh, bitter and offensive? It is a crime to be angry with them and feel distressed and that is punishable,' said Ego.

'But they are not prepared to suffer punishment.'

'If that be so, that is their greatest crime. Their first fault is that they have not accepted that in form, taste and smell it is God who is revealed. Secondly, they did not look for what should be their desired goal but developed hatred. By their conflict they have rendered the entire world unhappy. Now they are not even prepared to take punishment. For this the punishment is that they should remain fixed, each in his own sphere. They should neither go this way nor that. If anyone moves even by an inch towards a desirable object out of love, or away from a hateful object out of anger, he will be lost.'

'Lord, this is death-agony to Senses', said Speech.

'One that lives shall have to die. It is the fate of everyone to face life and death with the same mental attitude. Further, this death better than the present life. Let everybody beware. My command shall come into force this moment.'

Speech stood still in astonishment. All Senses sank down in their seats. There was none

in the darbar hall except Mind, Buddhi and Ego, I was only a witness.

Mind

Then Buddhi asked Mind: 'If there is anybody else, bring him to my presence.'

'When the Senses are inactive, how can I know or bring anybody? I am formless,' said Mind.

Buddhi said smiling: 'Do you exist?'

'I am the abode of all desires' said Mind: 'In me are congregated crores of desires of past, future and present.'

'But they will be lost now; for, Senses cannot move to regain them,' said Buddhi.

'I shall wait till they regain life,' said Mind. 'Surely, I feel empty without them. My desires are getting weak and I am dying. But no, no. I don't desire to die, Rescue me protect me'

'Your rescue is now impossible. You have embroiled yourself and the entire universe. You don't know Him to whom you belong. You did not know how to be an instrument even when you were one. Between the equality of life and death you placed difficulties and made them hard. You poisoned the nectar. That you perish is the proper punishment for your crime. Hm ! perish.' Gradually even the shade of Mind's form disappeared; and only Buddhi and Ego were distinct. I was only a witness.

Buddhi

Buddhi told Ego: 'Now,

only we two remain. My life is dependent on you. If you do not exist, I too won't exist. Till now I was serving you according to my capacity. But you didn't tell me your secret. Well, was it right on your part? You have encouraged those whose lives are dedicated. You have punished those who were proud, greedy and selfish. But is your life dedicated? Haven't you done the same crime that others have done? What is your answer to these questions?'

'Your questions are not agreeable to both of us; I was deliberately keeping this a secret. If I divulge the secret, neither you nor I will exist.'

'But this is contrary to your words' said Buddhi. 'Even now, you were teaching what is proper and improper of the likeness of life and death. Let us both perish; that is acceptable. But I don't agree that I should remain ignorant of truth.'

'Why should you destroy yourself in this way?' asked Ego. When there is no knowledge of self, how can there be its destruction? He who knows his self alone can ask the question 'Why?' My question is not 'Why?' but 'What?'

'Well, if that be so, know that all this was a play of mine. To enjoy with Senses, to think with you, to feel proud or angry, to sleep—all this was my play, just pretence. I did all, but I was nothing. I am a void, just an appearance. In practical affai-

rs I am business-like, among Sadhakas I am a Sadhaka, and among the seekers of truth I am a seeker. Some adored me and some reviled. I am not practical nor dreamy, much less am I a seeker. I do not even exist. See, I do not.'

Ego

Buddhi raised her eyes and lo! Ego really was not there. She stood dumbfounded, then said in astonishment: 'Look! He who has done all is nothing; it is indeed a wonder. Even so, why did he do all this? True, if he had not done all this, I would not have got involved in this. This opportunity would not have come to me by which I have known the truth. By doing something we attain the knowledge of not doing it. What he has done is correct, what he has said is right. He was nothing and I am nothing. What am I without him? Really I am nothing.'

All disappeared

I looked on and even Buddhi was not there. The durbar-hall too disappeared, and still I was looking. I saw with my own eyes the existence and non-existence of this vast universe. The five Elements, Pran, Senses, Mind, Buddhi and Ego—why these, the entire visible universe paraded before my eyes and disappeared, and I saw both the cause and purpose of it, and remained only a witness. But what is this witnessing? Who am I, the onlooker? If they all did exist, their non-

existence will not be. If they do not remain, their very existence is doubtful. Why only doubtful, it never was. Then who was looking at whom? Was I looking at myself? Well, how can the subject be the object? The subject, was not the object, the witness was not the testimony—both were imaginary and I was the resort of the fanciful and the real, nay, everything was object-wise.

I-in my real form

My sequence of thoughts came to an end here, and I stood in my real unperturbed form. I was not aware how time passed. When I opened my eyes, the sun was rising. These fancies paraded before my eyes—the dedication of the five elements, the Senses, the death of Mind, and the death of Mind, and the voice of Ego—everything came to my memory and I knew that this my experience was really useful in relation to achieving highest good as well as several other practical matters. If Pran, Senses and others function like the five elements merely as instruments, abandoning their difficulties and tension, then there will be no need to control them. They get themselves controlled. If they do not function in this dedicated way, there is the need to thwart them. Such a need is revealed in this fancy and the result is also clear.

Is this fancy merely amusing or does it reveal a way of Sadhana?

message of hope and contentment and inculcating purity of heart and divine thoughts, and constitutes another distinguishing feature of Hinduism.

The wheel of Karma

Consciously or unconsciously some form of Karma is being enacted every moment of life. Broadly speaking, four varieties of Karma have been recognized, Sanchita (accumulated or reserve stock), prarabdha (that which has already begun to bear fruit), Kriyamana (Present action) and Agami (Future action). Kriyamana (Present action) is the root of all. It is Kriyamana which is transformed into Sanchita and Prarabdha is formed out of a portion of Sanchita. It is kriyamana again, which forms the basis of future actions. Therefore, scrupulous care should be taken in moulding out Kriyamana or present actions.

We observe a multitude of diversities in the world,—e.g., a certain individual is rich, while another is poor; one is ailing, while another is healthy; one is happy, while another is oppressed by misery, and so on. How is this to be accounted for? Why has God,

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who recognised all as His own images, nay, His very self, created this difference? It is Hinduism alone which gives a satisfactory answer to this question. The answer lies in that we find that the experiences of Jivas at the present moment are a result of their past actions, and whatever actions are performed now will inevitably bear fruit in the future. The present experience (of pain or pleasure) cannot but be the reaction of past actions, and whatever is being done now can never go in vain. These are the main arguments in support of the doctrine of Rebirth. Future life or birth is brought about by these very actions; therefore, it lies entirely in our hands to make or mar it. We are the masters of our own fate. All living beings are revolving on this wheel of Karma. This supplies an answer to the above question.

The promulgators of other faiths did not bestow much thought on the method of improving the tone of our present actions and the means of obtaining release from the bondage of Karma, because they failed to grasp the truth

about the binding nature of Karma. If they have tackled the problem of action at all, they have done so only with a view to adjusting social relations. Hindu Religion has treated the question comprehensively in all its bearings. Why Karma goes on incessantly, and how to get cut of its clutches, is a question of philosophy. This has been discussed in a comprehensive way in the philosophical literature of Hinduism.

Having forgotten or failed to recognize the glory of his real self or his true nature as Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence, Knowledge and Bliss), the Jiva was possessed by the desire for happiness and consequently the knocking about for the satisfaction of the same began. Consciousness, through ignorance, of the existence of something else apart from him; the feeling of desirability or undesirability in respect of the same, attraction for what appears desirable and repulsion for what appears as undesirable; efforts for attaining the desirable and avoiding the undesirable; accumulation of the latencies of attraction and

repulsion, rebirth according to these latencies and impulses; this process according to the nature of birth has been going on from eternity and can end only with the disappearance of Ignorance, which lies at the root of all.

Ignorance is dispelled by knowledge. Knowledge appears in the pure heart. Purity of heart is attained by conquering the impulses of both attraction and hatred. Action which has no attraction or hatred at its back is disinterested action, and this, really speaking, is Dharma.

He who does not practise Dharma can neither reform his present life nor lay the foundation of a good life hereafter, escape from the cycle of births and deaths being out of question. It is due to this doctrine of Rebirth that Hinduism has been able to maintain intact its spiritual outlook, while other countries, whose goal of life is enjoyment and who do not believe in Rebirth, have lost even that amount of spirituality which they had accepted as an article of their faith.

Belief in the other world

The globe we inhabit is only a tiny part of the whole universe. Who knows what an infinite number of universes are dancing in the infinite space? Even in a single universe, there are many lokas and many sheaths. Owing to the variety of their Karma, the Jivas obtain different bodies and live in different forms. The bodies of earthly beings such as men, animals and birds can be perceived with the naked eye, the element of earth being predominant in them. Even of these latter, there are some so minute that they cannot be perceived with the naked eye and the help of instruments has to be taken to see them. Even so, there are bodies in which the element of water, fire, air or ether is predominant which cannot be perceived even with the help of earthly instruments. These five elements, again, have their subtle or Sattvic forms and bodies formed of these latter possess only the sheaths of Vital Air and mind—Pranamaya Kosa and Manomaya Kosa, and no sheath of the earthly element (anna-

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maya Kosa). These bodies have their own respective regions (Loka), enjoyments, associates and attendants, appropriate to their Karma or desires. Classes of Jivas are formed according to a general similarity of their Karmas, although there may be slight differences in particulars, and this is how they are divided into various species such as Devas, Pitrs, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and so on, residing in the higher regions. Evil and malignant spirits such as ghosts and genii also possess bodies made of such subtle elements. All these classes are included in the category of Jivas, but Devas and pitrs possess higher powers by virtue of their Karma, and should we be able to propitiate them, our worldly activities can meet with greater success and even our spiritual efforts can fructify without any rub or hindrance.

The Devas function also as presiding deities. The microcosm is a replica of the macrocosm. For instance, the Lord of Amaravati, the capital city of the devas is Indra. In our terrestrial region, he is the presiding deity

of the East; in the human body, he is the deity presiding over our arms. Worship of Indra is, therefore, necessary for acquiring strength of arm (muscular strength), for making the East propitious, and for attaining an abode in Heaven. Similarly, success can be attained by propitiating the deities presiding over the various elements such as earth, water, air etc. and the various organs of sense such as eyes, ears etc.. There is ample evidence in our ancient scriptures to show that through worship and propitiation of Devas, the Hinduism of ancient times attained success in the use of extraordinarily powerful weapons, in plying aerial cars according to their will, going unhampered wherever they liked, and in thought-reading etc..

The worship of the Pitrs (manes) occupies an important place in Hinduism. From the time of the Vedas up to the present day, all great souls and authorities on Hinduism who succeeded in unravelling the secrets of the occult world have unanimously emphasised its importance,

obtained first-hand knowledge of the occult worlds (Pitrloka and others) by television and by visiting those worlds through their occult powers; and whatever they have written in respect of those worlds is absolutely correct and accurate. How to perform Sradha so that our offerings may actually reach the Pitrs and ancestral spirits is a science by itself. This grand, all comprehensive view of Hinduism astounds imagination. The proper performance of the ceremony of Sradha not only gives satisfaction to the departed soul, but brings great benefit to the performer himself.

The yoke of discipline

The Scriptures declare that in the beginning of creation Sattvaguna (the principle of harmony) prevailed in nature. The whole human race consisted mainly of the Brahmans and all of them were devoted to study and meditation. Then gradually the elements of Rajas and Tamas began to develop; under the impulse of past actions, the active propensities of Jivas began to gain ground, and turning their face towards the world

they embarked on a course which landed them into the mire of sloth, error and delusion and tended to estrange them from the soul. God Himself then divided them into four classes considering their respective traits, activities, predilections, inclinations and capacity and laid down rules for the regulation of their lives, so that their undisciplined senses and wayward impulses may not drag them along the path of degradation and self-abasement. Four Varnas or orders of society were instituted, classifying men according to their respective tendencies or faculties, viz. the intellectual faculty, the faculty of administration, the faculty of charity or benevolence and the faculty of service.

Similarly the whole span of life was divided into four stages or Asramas, of which the first was characterised by an emphasis on Dharma, the second by an emphasis on Artha, the third by an emphasis on Kama (desire to attain heaven Brahmaloka, etc.) and the fourth by an emphasis on renunciation. Declaring the four Varnas (orders of

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society) to be the limbs of the Cosmic Body God saved the human beings from being thrown into confusion of castes (वर्णसंकर) and overlapping of duties (कर्मसंकर). The rules differed according to differences of climate, time, circumstances, and the power and capacity of the individuals. The intellectual side (Vijnanmaya Kosa) being more developed in man, his duties were characterised by an emphasis on the intellect, whereas the duties of the other sex were marked by an emphasis on Tapas (Penance), in as much as the emotional side (Manomaya Kosa) is more developed in the woman than in man. Thus, even though the goal was the same, various rules were made for guiding the Jivas along different paths according to the diversity of their Karma. Just as in the human body, even so in spite of the differences among the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras, the Hindu Society, consisting of the four Varnas, is one society, one body. And though the duties of the different parts differ according to the capacity of

each, the goal of all is the same. The rules framed for each group are sufficient to deliver people from the bondage of worldly existence and lead them to God-Realization.

Any nation of the world, which does not bind its life with social restrictions and scriptural laws can neither make any spiritual progress, nor can it make its earthly life peaceful and happy. There is no doubt that the system of Varnasrama is getting disorganised these days. But it is hardly justified to deny the very principle of Varnasrama, judging the system from its present diseased form. Instead of trying to demolish it, we should direct our energies towards protecting it and restoring it to its value and regulate our lives and conduct according to its principles. Attainment of perfection in spiritual life is impossible without scrupulous observance of the rules of Varnasrama Dharma. It is indeed, a matter for pride that Hinduism has embraced this system from the very beginning of its career and held on to it up to the present day, in whatever form it may be.

The role of Samskaras

Whatever a man does in his present life, and whatever he feels and thinks; are determined not only by the actions of his previous births, but also by the actions, feelings and thoughts of his parents, as also by those of his present life. It has been observed and is also proved by scientific investigation that the state of mind of the parents at the time of conception invariably casts its reflection on the life of the child. Whatever the prospective mother hears or thinks of, reacts on the child in the womb. In the Puranas, it is related that the mother of Prahlada once had the privilege of hearing discourses on Divine Love from the lips of Devarsi Narada, the result of which was that she got a child like Prahlada. The world can be greatly benefited even to-day if this truth is recognised and proper care is taken by society along this line. In Hinduism by means of purificatory rites (Samskaras) beginning from Garbhadhana (the rite performed before conception), the processes of which apart from their intrinsic merits are intended to awaken the spiritual

consciousness of the prospective parents,—the purification of the child is started when it is yet in the womb.

Not only impurities of the mind, but physical defects also are removed by the performance of Samskaras. The defects in the reproductive elements of the father and the mother are remedied by the performance of the Garbhadhana Samskara. Not only Garbhadhana (the process of conception), but all the life activities of an individual are regulated by sacred rites, each of which possess its own scientific value. Among the Samskaras, the ceremony of the sacred thread and the nuptial rites, etc., are quite well-known. These Samskaras purify the heart, and wipe out all wayward and sinful tendencies of the mind. There are innumerable people who must have been saved by their sacred thread from taking prohibited food and by the religious bond of marriage from leading a dissolute life.

All the Samskaras possess a purificatory power. 'Samskara' means washing out all **Chintamani**]

adventitious impurities and impurities are always adventitious. The self in its original state is stainless, free from all impurities. When all the impurities are removed through the performance of Samskaras or purificatory rites the transparent soul will automatically reveal itself. That is why so much emphasis is laid on Samskaras in Hinduism,—so much that even the cremation of a dead body is governed by prescribed rites (Anteyesti-Samskara).

Purity of Food

In its wider sense, the word 'Food' or nourishment means all that is taken in by the senses and the mind. Acharya Sankara has taken the word 'Ahara' (food) in this sense, so that purification of food, in this wider sense, would mean the purification of mind and heart. Truly speaking, it is not by the mouth alone that we take food, all the senses, take their respective food, and even without the co-operation of the senses, the mind alone takes its food. If all these senses including the internal sense, viz., the

mind are purified, that is, if the sense of hearing receives only words that are pure, the tongue as well utters only such words, the eyes behold only pure things, and likewise all other senses receive only pure objects, there can be nothing like it. But even if we are able to achieve purity of food in its gross, material sense, much can be achieved in the spiritual field.

The subtle elements of the food that we take enter into the composition of the mind, while its gross elements go to build and nourish the body and enter into the composition of its vital fluids. The thought or sentiment that operates behind the food, and the element of lawfulness or unlawfulness involved in procuring it, is bound to produce its effect on the person who takes the food. The food provided by a goldsmith is said to have given rise to the inclination for theft in the pure mind of a Sadhu (holy man); and food offered out of desire to get a child similarly led to some Sadhus who partook of it having a wet dream at night.

That is why in judging the purity of a dish both the sentiment of the person who offers it and the means by which it has been procured, have to be taken into consideration.

Besides this, there are other impurities connected with food, some of which are intrinsic and some adventitious. For instance, garlic and onion are impure by their very nature; they excite passions. Food which is otherwise pure, is polluted by the touch of a dog and by the glance of a vulture. Similarly the place where food is kept also determines its purity or otherwise. Even the purest of articles, kept in an impure place, are rendered unfit for consumption. The Hindu Scriptures contain many such rules for the regulation of diet, all of which are very helpful in protecting the body against inroads of diseases and in promoting mental and spiritual health. The physical and mental deterioration that is observed among the present generation is mainly attributable to their indifference in the matter of purity of food.

For the spiritual perfection of woman :

Hinduism upholds in view that worship should be offered to God alone. But it is not possible for all people to know God as He is. They have, therefore, first of all to conceive the presence of God at a particular place and thereby to develop their faith in Him till it has reached its perfection. The truth, however, is that God is present everywhere and manifest in every visible form. Wherever thought may be concentrated, there He can reveal Himself. For men, according to their respective stages of growth, we find various kinds of images recommended in the scriptures; whereas for women, the scriptures have prescribed that the gratification of carnal desire or propagation of species is not the ideal of Hindu marriage. The marriage of the Hindu is a form of initiation which provides the woman with an image through whose service she can bring her life to perfection. To visit temples and worship Images of God installed therein is no doubt highly desirable; but

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there are certain conditions in which it is not quite safe for women to undertake such worship. That is why the arrangement has been made to provide them with an image which they can worship wherever they may be. During the nuptial ceremony in Hinduism, the bride is offered to the bridegroom with the prayer that Bhagvan Vishnoo in the form of the bridegroom may accept the hand of the bride. The constant thought or remembrance of God is the only means through which God is made to reveal Himself or which leads an individual into His presence. If the wife looks upon her husband as God and performs all her duties, including the service of other members of the household, for the pleasure of her lord, her home can be transformed into Vaikuntha itself. The dignified position of the mistress of the household allotted to women in Hinduism, keeping in view the ideals of domestic peace, adjustment of social relations and attainment of spiritual perfection, has not been attained by the women of other countries—where the

ideal of life is to pursue and attain worldly objects alone—inspite of the material and scientific progress achieved by them. This fact is clearly proved by the number of divorce suits filed there every day.

Two halves of the Divine Body

Man and woman are not essentially different. They represent the two halves of the Divine Body and are thus complementary to each other. There is no question of superiority or inferiority between them. And yet owing to organic differences in their physical and mental constitutions, the duties and observances prescribed for men are different from those prescribed for women. As already pointed out above, the intellectual side is more developed in man; whereas the emotional side is more developed in the woman. Western scientists have ascertained through experiments that the male body throws out solar rays and female body throws out lunar rays. Women are temperamentally emotional, whereas the faculty of reasoning is stronger in men. This, how-

ever, does not imply that the faculty of reasoning can never be developed in women. It is fairly developed in some cases, but they are exceptions to the rule. The names Gargi, Maitreyi and Sulabha can be cited from the Upanisads as instances of this kind. But the majority of them are emotional by nature, that is why the duties prescribed for them are of the nature of austerities. The foremost consideration with the Hindu Sastras in framing a different set of rules for women has been to prevent them from being carried away by emotion. The fundamental idea behind the imposition of restriction on women has been to divert their mind from sense-enjoyment and encourage them to devote themselves wholly and solely to the worship of their lord and thereby bring their lives to perfection.

Through devotion to and worship of her husband a woman can attain all that is possible to attain through worship of God. A man who attains Siddhi (perfection) through worship of God is called a Sat (saint), and a woman

who attains perfection through worship of her husband is known as a Sati, the two words being identical except for the difference in gender. Both the words indicate identity with God, who is the only reality (Sat). A woman who has attained the state of Satihood must be taken to have become one with God.

True love is possible in life only with a single individual. The centre of love is shifted not because of love but because of self-interest. The idea behind the institution of marriage in Hinduism is to foster, not self-interest, but love.

If the cultivation of true love and attainment of God had not been our aim then like other nations and countries there would have been freedom for woman even in Hinduism to establish marital relations with more than one man successively. Practice of self-restraint is the ideal of marriage in Hinduism. The system of attaching a woman to one man for a whole life-time has been introduced in order to save woman from the lustful gaze of many men, prevent her

from establishing promiscuous contacts and keep the lustful propensities under control. This has been termed in our Dharma-Sastras as Parisankhya-Vidhi (the rule of specification). That is why, even after the husband is dead, thought of any other man does not enter the mind of a Hindu Lady. It is indeed a matter for great concern and pity that ignoring this ancient and lofty ideal of Hinduism, the present-day Hindu society is anxious to follow in the footsteps of the West and instead of strengthening the ideals of Brahmacharya (continence) and Satihood (devotion to one husband) is misdirecting its energies towards promoting the ideal of sense-enjoyment. It should be remembered that marriage or the relation of husband and wife between man and woman, is not for enjoyment, but for the practice of self-restraint. This lofty ideal of sanctity of marriage and feminine chastity is a great gift of Hinduism to the world at large, and without adopting this ideal it can never be possible for the women of any nation or

country to attain peace in this world or the next, to say nothing of attaining spiritual peace.

Concentrated Thought :

Two types of worship have been recommended in the scriptures for God-Realisation, or realisation of the self. One of them is known as Ahangaraha Upasana or worship through identity of self with Brahma, and the other is called Pratikopasana or worship through an Image or representation of God. The first of these is suitable only for those who tread the path of Knowledge (Jnana). And the second, viz., Image-worship is regarded as suitable for practicants of all stages of growth. The true meaning of Image-worship is to contemplate God in every object that comes to the view of the practicant. This contemplation should be steady and concentrated. To attain steadiness in the fixity of concentration, the scriptures have suggested various methods. They recommend, inter alia, the installation with due ceremony and chanting of Vedic Mantras particular types of images in particular types of shrines.

Through this process of consecration or installation with due ceremony (Pratishtha), the image as well as the temple are impregnated with divine energy and this helps a good deal in attaining fixity of contemplation. This method of worship has proved very efficacious for conquering the mind and opening the hidden spring of Divine Love. It is the best means of making God reveal Himself in Matter.

Even if God were not present in the image, He could easily be called there by force or concentrated thought on the part of the devotee or practicant; and if He is already there as everywhere, there should be no doubt about His manifesting Himself before the devotee? If God is conceived as formless though endowed with attributes, He must know the heart of His devotee and can fulfil the latter's desires; and being extremely compassionate He cannot withhold Himself from fulfilling the desire of the devotee. In that case, there seems to be no reason why He should not be propitiated through Image-worship. And if God is endowed with form,

as we Hindus believe, and it is His image that is worshiped then there is no reason why the mind should not get merged in Him and begin to see Him everywhere. Again, if God is an attributeless, Formless God, then there is nothing apart from God. When once it is realised that everything is God, the practicant will begin to see God everywhere and in that state worship is possible through any form. Image worship, in the case of Jnani (one who has realised God as his own self through the path of Knowledge) is the same as worship of the self, for he sees nothing but the self; in the case of the devotee, it is worship of his beloved God, for he sees his Beloved everywhere; and for aspirants in the paths of devotion and knowledge it is worship of God through Image. To realise God in all images, through worship of a particular image, is the object or goal of image-worship. He who cannot contemplate or behold God in an Image installed in a temple, how can he be expected to contemplate and see God anywhere else? Image worship is the

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most practical form of worship of God in its highest and noble sense. He who deprives himself of this form of worship will remain deprived of the realisation of infinite peace which one derives through seeing God everywhere and in every object. At one stage or another of his life he will be compelled to take this lesson from Hinduism.

No opposition to other Faiths :

God belongs to all and all belong to God. God also becomes restless and impatient to meet those who seek to attain Him. God does not take into account the caste, creed, or colour of His devotee, nor does He pay any heed to his discipline, morals or conduct. He judges him only by his heart. He who possesses a pure heart, and is eager to realise God, is bound to attain Him, to whatever religion, sect or creed he may belong. Then why should we quarrel with anybody on the score of his religious persuasions or creed? One can commence his Godward journey from the very stage of evolution at which he stands. The path opens out for him wherever

he starts from. Dharma is nothing else then this Godward path, and as such it may be different for every individual. Then where lies the point in quarrelling with one who is treading a different path? He too is proceeding towards God just as we are doing. Let him look to his own path and let me follow my own, why should we look into each other's path at all? This point of view has been emphasised at many places in our scriptures. The old warrior Bhishma, laying on his bed of arrows, offered his obeisance to God in the following words :—"I pay my obeisance to God, the soul of all religions—who is worshipped by votaries of different religions, with the desire of obtaining different rewards, through observance of practices recommended by different religions." Again, Sri Yajnavalkya says: "The religion that interferes with another religion is no religion at all; it is a pseudo-religion, the religion that offers no opposition to other religions is Religion in the true sense of the term."

धर्मं यो बाधते धर्मो न स धर्मः कुधर्मं तत् ।
अविरोधी तु यो धर्मः स धर्मो मुनिपुङ्गव ॥

Every religion takes its votaries independently to the goal along its own path. To declare one path superior to another indicates narrowness of heart, and the attempt to unify all the paths is both fruitless and impossible. Every attempt made up till now to establish one Universal Religion has gone to add a new sect to the already existing number. Therefore instead of wasting one's time and energy in quarrelling with other religions, the duty of every individual lies in carefully observing the practices of one's own religion. The antagonism and spirit of rivalry existing among the different religions can be removed only through a wider acceptance of this teaching and attitude of Hinduism.

How to understand Dharma ?

There are various methods of propaganda prevalent in the world for preaching and propagating the message of religion. People assemble in huge conclave where discourses are held, and now and then cases come to light of even force being applied to convert one individual to a particular faith. Hinduism

does not set much store by these methods. Dharma is a matter concerning the heart. One whose heart refuses to accept the principles of Dharma can never be convinced by means of discourses and speeches, nor can application of force do him any good. The utility of Dharma lies in releasing the individual from the bondage of the ego. If an individual begins to imagine that he is already a religious man, that he has understood and realised the truth of religion, and assumes the role of a preacher of religion, he is gradually driven farther away from religion, possessed as he is by the ego. All his attempts to infuse religiosity into the life of his fellow-men prove abortive and his teachings lead nowhere. That is why in ancient India, the modern practice of preaching religion through public discourses was not in vogue. True seekers of religion used to approach the Guru in all humility and reverence and offer him their personal services, thus gradually imbibed from him a knowledge of the theory and practice of religion.

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The general rule prevailing in those days was 'नानृतः कस्यचिद् ब्रूयात्' no one should be instructed in religion unless requested. The main reason why religious discourses do not produce the desired effect nowadays lies in the fact, instruction is generally given to people who are not qualified to receive instruction, and the preacher himself, being subject to pride, greed and similar other weaknesses; does not possess the necessary qualification to preach.

Religious discourses that are unsolicited are generally actuated by Rajasic and Tamasic impulses. They can be Sattvic only under one circumstance. This is when a Mahapurusa (Great soul) moved to pity at the sight of gross neglect of Dharma on the part of the people can no longer restrain himself and comes forward to point out the right path to those who are treading the wrong path without their asking. His instruction can certainly have the intended effect on the people and transform their lives. Such a soul can never be possessed by pride, greed and the like. The world is

invariably benefitted by people like him.

Observing the irreligious mentality of the present-day world, many a noble souls possessing love for Dharma begin to feel the necessity of religious propaganda and enter the field as religious preachers; but soon after instead of propagating religion, they begin indirectly to inculcate respect for their own personality. Such men should scrupulously avoid the propagation of their own personal views and fads and make it a point to preach only the message and glory of the Sastras (Scriptures).

Whatever they preach, should be based on the Sastras. The instructions about Dharma contained in the Sastras are so extensive that it is not at all necessary for any preacher to go beyond them. This also they should undertake only to draw out the latent spirit of enquiry

about Dharma lying in every heart. When this spirit is roused, every individual will on his own initiative proceed to learn the truths of Dharma from a study of the scriptures and personal service of his elders and teachers. Under such circumstances alone can the teachings of Religion be propagated in their true spirit.

These are a few distinguishing features of Hinduism, which we have briefly attempted to place before our readers. We now pray that the God of Dharma may be propitiated through this feeble attempt of ours and inspire us all to devote our lives to the practice of Dharma.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद्दुःखमाप्नुयात् ॥

“Let all be happy, let all enjoy health, Let all see happy days and let none suffer from any calamity or affliction.”