

Vedanta: The Heart of Hindu Spirituality

The Essential Teachings of Vedanta

Part III

Critics of Vedanta observe that such a world-view dwarfs the human individual to utter insignificance. In answer to this, Vedanta says the drama is cosmic and evolves through a chain of numberless separate dramas where the One assumes the roles of many. But how does Vedanta resolve the question of evil in the realm of God and His drama? If everything is the play of God, does He not become responsible for all the sufferings of the world? Does this not make God whimsical and cruel, an irresponsible Creator who just for His enjoyment inflicts suffering on his own created beings? The seers of Vedanta never shrink from accepting evil as part of creation. They have no

use for a fairy-tale view of creation, a childish sentimentality that says God made all things bright and beautiful and had nothing to do with all things dark and hideous. Good and evil, Vedanta maintains, have no absolute reality and are value-judgments of individual minds, superimposed on the divine play. That which is good for some is evil for others, and that which is evil for some is good for others. They are different facets of the same drama. Life is role playing. *A human individual suffers when he refuses to play his role in this drama. He slips out of the fanciful world of his created ego and never thinks of it as a vast cosmic drama.*

Vedanta designates the individual ego as Maya. The role of Maya is to soften the glare of Reality and to create a dream world where fact is diluted by fiction. Maya is not a peculiar concept of Vedanta. The Buddhist tradition calls it Mara; the Taoist tradition says it is being "out of harmony with Tao;" the Judeo-Christian, Islamic and Zoroastrian traditions personify Maya, calling it Satan, Iblis, and Ahriman; the Platonists refer to it simply as delusion. Things and beings in the realm of Maya are not non-existent, though they are illusory. They are relatively real, that is, real for a short time. God as Pure Spirit is the Absolute Reality. The

beings and things of the relative universe appear real because they reflect the light of the Absolute. The message of Vedanta has two rhythms: "All this is verily Brahman" and "That thou art;" that is, God is both the Absolute and the relative Reality. One represents the dizzy height of mystical realization, the other its counter part, its humanistic expression. One is Knowledge, the other intimate Knowledge.

Harmony of religions is the natural corollary to the first three cardinal principles. Different religions are only different pathways to the same common goal - God. All roads lead to Rome, provided Rome is our destination. Vedanta

repudiates the idea of proselytisation. Proselytisation seeks to wipe out the social meaning of a person, which would be psychologically disruptive and morally reprehensible. According to Vedanta, all are proceeding toward God-realization, consciously or unconsciously, and all will reach the goal eventually. When we move toward this goal voluntarily and consciously, we call it spiritual quest; when this move is involuntary and forced by nature, we call it an evolutionary process. Harmony of religions is not uniformity. It is neither eclectic nor sectarian. It is not the brotherhood of man based on the fatherhood of God. Harmony is unity in

diversity. This harmony is something that is not to be attained by mere intellectual understanding and interfaith deliberations, nor can it be enacted by law. It is to be discovered and realized by deepening our individual God-consciousness. Essentially there is only one religion, which is the religion of God-consciousness, one salvation, which is communion or union with God, and the way to salvation is one, that is, the way of purity and holiness. It is not the literal and meticulous observance of ceremonials but the depth of spirituality that counts most. The depth of a person's God-consciousness is measured by his spiritual transformation.

To be continued....