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# VEDANTA THROUGH STORIES

BY

SWAMI SAMBUDDHANANDA



with a foreword

BY

The Hon'ble Sri SYAMA PRASAD MOOKHERJEE

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# **VEDANTA THROUGH STORIES**

**DEDICATED**

**TO**

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

## *Preface*

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

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

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

The author shall consider himself amply rewarded if this brings any comfort, solace or message of uplift or of right living to any of his readers.

**Swami Sambuddhananda**

31st July 1950

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## *Foreword*

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



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

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

Minister, Industry & Supply.  
New Delhi,  
March 31, 1950

**Syama Prasad Mookherjee**

# INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. A more advanced section of the materialist rose to the conception of **prana** or the vital force,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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**CHAPTER I**  
**SELF ANALYSIS**  
**SECTION I**  
***WAYS OF THE WORLD***

**I BUDDHA AND HIS DISCIPLES**

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

**2 CALLOUS SON**

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



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

### **3 SHAKE BEFORE USE**

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

### **4 ADOPTION OF A SON**

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

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

## **5 CLEVERER THAN I**

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

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

## **6 UNPRACTICAL INTELLECTUALITY**

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

## **7 INCURABLE HABIT**

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

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

## **8 PRAYER WITH A RESERVATION**

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

## **9 INDISCRIMINATE CHARITY**

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

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

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

## **10 THE DISHONEST MISER**

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

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

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

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

## **II SELF-DEFEATING WORLDLY HOPES**

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

## **12 WHY WORLDLY PEOPLE CANNOT ATTAIN GOD REALISATION**

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

## **13 THE IDEAL AND THE REAL**

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

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

#### **14 FRIEND IN PROSPERITY**

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

#### **15 THE DANGER OF FLATTERY**

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



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

## **16 FOOLISH COURTESY**

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

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## SECTION II

### *WAYS OF SELF-STUDY*

#### **17 IF 'FIFTY-TWO' WHY NOT 'FIFTY-THREE' ?**

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

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

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

## **18 THE CASE OF MISUNDERSTANDING**

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

## **19 SREE RAMA AND HANUMAN**

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

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

## **20 NON-VIOLENCE IN PRACTICE**

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

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

## **21 AMBITION AND RENUNCIATION**

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

## **22 APPARENT AND REAL**

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

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

### **23 THE KING'S BROTHER-IN-LAW**

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

### **24 THE CONSEQUENCES OF ATTACHMENT**

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

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

## **25 INDRA AND THE GARDENER**

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

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

## **26 EDUCATION OF A PRINCE**

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



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

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

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

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

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

## **27 THE BUTCHER AND THE COW**

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

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

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

## **28 ANGLES OF VISION**

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

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

## **29 MERE LEARNING IS NOT ENOUGH**

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

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

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

### **30 DEPENDENCE UPON GOD**

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

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

### **31 THE WORLD IS BUT A DREAM**

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

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

### **32 SHEDDING OF EGOISM**

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



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

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

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

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

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

### **35 POLITE RETORT**

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

### **36 THE GREATEST OF THE ORGANS OF SENSE**

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

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

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

all cried, "Stop. Do not leave us. We shall have no existence if you do so." *Chh. Up. V.*

### **37 PRIDE AND ITS FALL**

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

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

knowledge, Balaki became disillusioned and, shedding his false pride, had to admit that the king knew the subject far better than he. *Brih. Up. II. 1.*

### **38 WHAT YOU SEEK IS WITHIN YOU**

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

### **39 LIMITATIONS OF EXPERIENCE**

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

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

#### **40 LIMITATIONS OF EARTHLY POSSESSIONS**

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

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

#### **41 HOW THE SELF VANISHES BEFORE THE SUPREME LIGHT**

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

#### **42 GOOD AND EVIL**

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



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

### **43 PLEASURE AND PAIN**

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

### **44 THE ATTAINMENT OF PEACE**

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

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

## **45 THE GREATER SACRIFICE**

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

## 46 THE THREE ROBBERS

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

## 47 FLEE NOT, BUT FACE THE BRUTE

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

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

#### **48 SVETAKETU**

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

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

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

*Chh. Up. V. III.*

## 49 THE STORY OF RATNAKAR

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

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

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

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

## **50 THE STORY OF EKALAVYA**

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

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

## **51 THE PERILS OF UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT**

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



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

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## **SECTION III**

### ***WAYS OF SELF-STUDY***

#### **52 THE BEGGER KING**

Once upon a time a beggar, while returning home, saw a king passing by in a golden chariot. The king suddenly stopped his chariot and, getting down, begged of him some alms. Surprised at this, the beggar wondered if it was a joke, but gave the king a grain out of the small stock he had collected by begging. When he came home he found a piece of gold lying in his stock of grain. He was again surprised and cried, "Oh! If I had known beforehand I would have given him all my grain."

#### **53 TROUBLESOME TO THE END**

There was a man in a village who used to trouble all other inhabitants in various ways. When he was on his death bed he called the villagers and implored them to hear his last request. He said, "I have committed countless sins in this life and do not know how to atone for them. I have a belief that my sins will be washed off if all you will be so good as to keep my dead body tied to a pole of bamboo, which should be set up at the junction of the cross-roads of this village." The villagers were surprised at such a strange request, but at last agreed to do what he wanted. After his death, the

people of the village tied his dead body to a bamboo pole and set it up at the junction of the cross-roads. When the police came to hear of it, a number of police came to the village and, thinking that a murder has been committed, arrested a large number of the villagers. When the case came up for hearing, the judge, having been told of what had actually happened, remarked that troublesome men will not cease to trouble people even after death.

#### **54 THE TEST OF INTELLIGENCE**

A woman of exquisite beauty used to live in a house at the end of a broad road in a city and many men would go and visit her in her house. It was the habit of this woman, who kept four human skulls, to ask her visitors which skull out of the four was that of an intelligent man, and she would add that she would live with the man who answered her question correctly. If a man could not give the correct answer, she would assume the form of a demon, which she really was, and kill him straightaway.

A wise man happened to go to her house one day and on being asked the usual question, he requested that a thin stick be brought to him. He thrust the stick through one ear of one of the skulls and it came out through the other. He said, "What this man used to hear through one ear was allowed to pass through the other ear." He took the second skull and found that the stick came out through the

mouth. He said, "This man was in the habit of speaking out all that he used to hear." Taking the third skull and passing the stick through one ear he found that it came out through the throat. He said, "This man used to swallow all that he used to hear." He took the fourth skull and on passing the stick found that it went into the part which contained the brain, and he said, "This man was intelligent and wise, for he used to hold in his brain what he heard; he was thus a man of realisation." The woman could not do any harm to this wise man.

## **55 A LESSON TO HANUMAN**

Sri Ramachandra's ascension to the throne was being celebrated for a number of days with great eclat. During this period Hanuman was appointed as the store-keeper. If anyone came and asked for anything from him, Hanuman used to reprimand and reproach him, sometimes for no fault of the said person. One day suddenly Lakshmana came and said that he should go a certain saint living in a distant place and invite him to the ceremony.

Hanuman started immediately and on reaching the place met the saint who was a man of handsome physique, but his face was like that of a pig. Hanuman gave him the invitation and invited him to sit upon his shoulders so that he could take him immediately to the capital of Ramachandra. The saint, however, brought a few lotuses and handing

them to Hanuman requested that they should be offered to Sri Rama, and said that he would be unable to sit on Hanuman's shoulders for to do so would be to defile the latter's sacred person. He however said that he would follow Hanuman shortly to Ayodhya, the capital of Sri Rama. Before leaving Hanuman asked how the saint had got a face like that of a pig. The saint said, "In my previous births I had made gifts in unstinted charity and had therefore become a *jatismara* (one who remembers all that had happened in previous births), and also gained a beautiful body, but as I used to treat the recipients of my charity with harsh words, I have been born with a face of a pig." Hanuman understood at once that Lakshmana had sent him to this saint with the evident purpose that he should learn this lesson.

Hanuman took leave of the saint and while leaving, requested him again to go to Ayodhya. By means of his yogic powers Hanuman arrived at Ayodhya immediately. He narrated the whole incident to Sri Ramachandra and asked him how the saint would be able to come there as he (Hanuman) had received a boon that nobody should see Sri Ramachandra without his consent. Sri Rama said, "well, the saint by means of his yogic powers had entered these flowers which you have carried because you were pleased with him. See, he has already arrived."

Hanuman looked round and was surprised to see to saint seated amongst the great men already assembled there.

## **56 TWO ARE ONE**

Two brothers of the same family were devoted to two different gods, one being devoted to kali and the other to Krishna. There was a fine bunch of bananas in the garden, and the elder brother thought of offering the bunch, as soon as they ripened, to Goddess Kali. The younger brother had a similar thought about offering it to Krishna. The latter, however, had to go out to a distant village for some work and on his return, which had been delayed for some reasons, he found that the bunch of bananas had already been removed by his elder brother and offered to Kali. He got enraged, and deciding to break the image of Kali, entered the room where the image was installed with a big stick in his hand. He was about to deal a blow on the image when, to his surprise, he found that the image was that of Krishna. Not being able to believe his eyes, he ran to his own shrine where also he found an image of Krishna. He ran back to the other shrine and again saw that the image there was that of Krishna and not of Kali. This experience convinced him that the two deities were not different but one and the same.

## **57 COMPLAINT OF A KING'S BROTHER-IN-LAW**

A king had a brother-in-law who used to live with him in his palace. He resented the fact that he was not shown as much respect as the king, and one day he complained to the king saying that many officials, including the manager of the royal estates, showed no respect to him at all. Once happening to meet the said manager, the king asked him if there was any truth in his brother-in-law's complaint. The manager replied, "Your Majesty, that is true, but you know that though God once incarnated himself as a pig, people do not feel bound to respect every pig they come across. That is perhaps the reason why your brother-in-law does not get as much respect from others as he expects from people."

## **58 WHEN ONE SHOULD TAKE TO RELIGIOUS PRACTICE**

A man had the idea that one should take to spiritual practices when he was old. He came to Lord Buddha and asked him whether his idea was correct. Lord Buddha said, "A Brahmin had a cow which yielded plenty of milk, more than what could be consumed by his family. He reflected that when **Sraddha** ceremony of his deceased father had to be performed a great amount of milk would be required. That ceremony was to be performed at the end of

the year. So he stopped milking the cow and thought he would get plenty of milk if he milked the cow at the end of the year. When the time of the **Sraddha** ceremony came, he went to milk the cow but the cow would yield not a drop of milk as it had dried up." "Religious practice should be started," said Lord Buddha, "from young age or it will yield no result if it be suspended up to old age."

## **59 PERSISTENCE OF NATURE**

A scorpion while passing by the side of a hillock fell down into the river which was running below. A saint who was taking his bath in the river felt pity for the creature and taking it in his hand wanted to put it back on land, but before he could do so the scorpion bit him. The saint thereupon felt excruciating pain in his palm. After a time the scorpion again fell down into the river. The saint seized it by the other hand in order to put it in a safe place. He was again bitten by the scorpion. A gentleman who was witnessing this scene, asked why he attempted to save the scorpion a second time even after having been once bitten. The saint replied, "What does it matter, my brother? To bite is the nature of the scorpion, but it is the true nature of a man to try to save every creature from danger. Just as it has followed its dharma, so have I done mine also."



## **60 SAVE MY CHILD**

The only son of a woman died premature all on a sudden to the great grief of his mother. The grieved mother who was awfully shocked at the death of her son found no other means to attenuate her sorrows than to approach Lord Buddha, who was not very far away. Lord Buddha received her coolly. The anguished mother related the catastrophe that had befallen her and entreated Lord Buddha to bring life back to her son. On her importunate requests, Lord Buddha said, "Well, I can try if you can bring a handful of mustard seed from any house where there was no death." The woman visited house after house but could not come across where there was no death. She came to the conclusion that the very condition of birth is death. Death is inevitable. Revival to life is impossible.

## **61 A KITE HAUNTED BY CROWS**

A kite pounced upon a fish in the tank and caught it in its bill. A flight of crows which saw the kite carrying fish began to haunt it heaven and hell. The kite flying from place to place, tree to tree, could not get rid of the crows cawing at it. It was so hotly pursued by crows that it had to give up the idea of eating fish and it dropped down the fish on the ground. All the crows ran after their much haunted object—the fish. The kite became absolutely relieved of the troubles. Relief comes only when

*vasanas* or desires are abandoned, when there is no hankering after worldly object.

## **62 HOW GREEDINESS LEADS TO DEATH**

Once upon a time a disciple became awfully anxious to acquire some power from his guru and approached him to be blessed with the power of of turning of gold everything that he touches. On his importunities, guru granted him the power, but warned him against the dangerous risk. Now the man could not eat his meals as it turned into gold as soon as he had touched the food, and he died of starvation.

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## **CHAPTER II**

### **SECTION I**

#### ***SELF UNFOLDMENT***

##### **I WORLD IS LIKE A DOG'S TAIL**

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

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

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

## **2 SHIVA AND PARVATI**

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

## **3 DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT**

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

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

#### **4 TWO GARDENERS**

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

#### **5 LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION**

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

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

## **6 THE WAY OF SELFLESSNESS**

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

## **7 WORKINGS OF KARMA**

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

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

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



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

## **8 GOOD COMETH OUT OF EVIL**

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

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

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

## **9 IF ANYBODY STEALS YOUR SHIRT GIVE HIM THE CLOAK ALSO**

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

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

## **10 THE WORKING OF MAYA ( Part I )**

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

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

## **II THE WORKING OF MAYA (Part II)**

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

## **12 THE WAY OF MAYA**

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

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

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

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

### **13 STORY OF SATYAKAMA**

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

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

#### **14 SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND GIRISH CHANDRA**

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

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

## **15 THE STRAIGHT AND THE CROOKED WAY**

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

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



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

## **16 THE LION'S CUB DISILLUSIONED**

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

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

## **17 WORLDLY ATTACHMENT**

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

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

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

### **18 TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WORTH**

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

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

## **19 TRUE UNDERSTANDING**

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

## **20 THE VIRTUE OF PERSEVERANCE**

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

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

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

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

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

## **21 BEYOND THE REALM OF REASON**

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

supernatural things which our philosophy and reason cannot explain."

## **22 SELF-SACRIFICE**

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

## **23 SHIVA'S SELF-SACRIFICE**

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



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

## **25 THE FOLLY OF UNBELIEF**

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

## **26 THE FORCE OF FAITH**

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

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

## **27 THE FOLLY OF REPROBATING OTHER FAITHS**

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

## **28 THE BODY POLITIC**

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

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

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

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

## **29 THE END OF ALL KNOWLEDGE**

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

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

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

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

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

*Chh. U. V. 11-24.*

### 30 THE WIFE'S CHOICE

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

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

*Brih. Up. II, 4th Brahman*

### **31 THE WORTH OF SEMBLANCE**

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

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

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

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

### **32 QUÈEN MADALASA**

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 34 LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **35 THE PHYSICIAN AND THE PATIENT**

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

### **36 AN IDEAL HOUSEHOLDER**

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

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

### 37 THE SUPREME TRUTH

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

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

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

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

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

mory. His father told him that mind was made up of the essence of food and that when it was deprived of that essence its force or vitality was proportionately reduced so that it could not function as before, and that in all stages the reality sustaining the mind was Prana or the vital force. *Chh. Up. VI. i-7.*

### 38 THE WONDER OF WONDERS

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

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



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

### **39 PRACTICE OF CONCENTRATION**

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

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

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

#### **40 IMMUTABLE NATURE**

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

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

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

#### **41 UNCONQUERABLE NATURE**

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

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

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

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

## **SECTION II**

### ***SELF-UNFOLDMENT***

#### **43 GRACIOUS SAVIOUR (I)**

A saint, who thought he had conquered his senses and was living on the spiritual plane, was once going for a drive through a crowded street in a big city. He saw a stately coach coming from the other side containing a beautiful lady, but as he wanted to have a second look he saw a monkey sitting in the coach. Having seen this he wondered whether his eyes had deceived him on the first or the second occasion; and it suddenly dawned on him that he had been saved from downfall by the grace of God.

#### **44 GRACIOUS SAVIOUR (II)**

A man of bad character once made up his mind to change his life, and seeking a great saint, became his devotee. He gave up the evil ways of his former life and tried to live a pure and holy life. One day, however, he again fell a victim to his evil proclivities and leaving his house, went to a house of ill fame. As he drew near the gate, to his utter amazement, he found the saint who was his spiritual preceptor, standing there. He was overcome with shame and ran back to his house, realising that he had been saved by his Guru.

#### **45 WHEN DISOBEDIENCE IS A VIRTUE**

A young man who was endowed with spiritual leanings from his boyhood, got initiated into the

life by a great saint. His father, however, was not in favour of the spiritual practices which the son used to perform, and used to scold him and try to dissuade from such practices. When the young man still persisted in those practices, his father used to tell him that as a father he should be shown proper respect and obedience.

The young man felt much distressed and wished to ask his preceptor as to what was his duty in such circumstances. His preceptor came to him one day and heard what had happened. The young man asked him if it was a sin to disobey his father and disrespect his wishes. His preceptor said that for the sake of realisation of Truth, disobedience to superiors often becomes necessary and that such disobedience is not a sin but a virtue. "For the sake of God", he said, "Prahlada disobeyed his father, Bibhishan his elder brother, Bharat his mother, Vali his guru and the Gopis their husbands."

#### **46 GOD THE ONLY REFUGE**

Once upon a time a deer, which was quick with child, was grazing in a lonely place in a forest, when she was suddenly confronted with a hunter who was ready to dart an arrow upon her. Looking to the left she found the hunter's hound ready to spring upon her. On the right she saw a well-laid trap and at her back the trees had caught fire and a wild fire was blazing. Finding herself in this situation, she

looked up to heaven and prayed to God to save her and the child in her womb. Suddenly a thunder storm broke with rain which extinguished the blazing fire and the dust raised by the stormy wind blinded the eyes of the hunter. A thunderbolt killed the hound and the trap was blown off. Thus the deer was miraculously saved.

#### **47 A MERCHANT AND A ROBBER**

Once upon a time a wealthy merchant left for the capital city which was about two thousand miles off on business concern. He had to carry with him fifty thousand rupees in G. P. notes of fifty of one thousand each. He had to spend two nights and a whole day in the train. He booked by first class. A robber who scented the matter managed to book himself too by first class and by the same compartment. Every night the robber finds the merchant to count fifty one-thousand-rupee notes and keep the same in the small attache case lying by his side. When the merchant slept the robber took his chance to rob the man of the amount but on opening the case he finds nothing. In the morning he finds the merchant open his attache case and count the notes as usual and repeat the same in the night once. But to his utter amazement the robber taking away the attache case while the merchant was asleep could not find anything in the box. Having thus failed repeatedly the robber, as the train was

drawing near the terminus station, thought of getting down one station ahead and took leave of the merchant saying, "Sir, I am a robber by profession and also an expert in the line. I was travelling with you with the avowed object of cheating you of the heavy amount which you had been carrying. Every night I tried to get it from your box when you had fallen asleep and every time I found nothing in the box. But again in the morning I find you to take out the amount from the same box and count it up. Where the amount used to be kept, Sir? You certainly know magic by which you could delude me in this way." The merchant replied, "Well, the money I used to keep under your bed. You did not search for it in the proper place. When you used to enter into the bathrom at night I used to put it under your bed and take it out in the morning when you would go for bath. You ought to have searched for the amount in your bed rather than mine. Seek (thyself) within and thou shalt find."

#### **48 GOD'S DISPENSATION IS UNQUESTIONABLE**

A traveller felt tired and took shelter under the shade of a big banyan tree. Yonder he found a house, on the thatched roof of which there was a creeper bearing big pumpkins. He was thinking about the injustice of God's dispensation that such a mighty tree had so small fruits and an ordinary creeper such big ones.



The banyan tree had plenty of small ripe fruits. Some of them began to fall upon his head and body. He at once comes to his senses and cried out — "Oh! God's dispensation is unquestionable. If the banyan tree had borne big fruits like the yonder creeper, people taking shelter under the shade of this huge tree would have been killed outright."

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## CHAPTER III

### SECTION I

### *SELF-FULFILMENT*

#### **I HIGHEST SACRIFICE\***

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

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

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\* From *Karma yoga* of Swami Vivekananda.

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

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

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

## **2 EACH IS GREAT IN HIS OWN PLACE\***

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

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

*From Karma yoga of Swami Vivekananda.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3 THE WORLD IS A CARAVANSARY**

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

### **4 GHANTAKARNA**

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



