



## Vedanta and The Modern Mind

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**T**HE Modern mind, it is said, was formed by three persons: Charles Darwin, who lived from 1809 to 1882; Karl Marx, who lived from 1818 to 1883; and Sigmund Freud, who lived from 1856 to 1939—men representing science, politics and economics, and psychiatry. Separately or collectively they have been unable to bring a panacea to the ills of modern life, to solve the problems of mind, or to bring peace to a troubled world. The present condition of the world is such that people are frightened; if one watches world events one can not help but become alarmed. At the time that Darwin propounded his theory of evolution, it created a great sensation, it shook the foundation of the Judaeo-Christian religion. Soon after, science began to make accelerated leaps in its discoveries, exposing many mistakes in man's thinking—particularly in religion. So much so that people began to think that there would come a time when science would replace religion, when science would bring us the knowledge of the ultimate Truth or ultimate Reality. Unfortunately, science has not done that. Science

has given us vast knowledge but not wisdom. Science has given us tremendous power but not peace. Science has given us great comforts but it has not given us sanity.

If we turn to Karl Marx we find that a political system will not give us peace and happiness. A political system or an economic method is only as sound as the men who propound it. It is not a question of systems, it is a question of *who* is behind the systems. Are those men who have set forth a political system or have worked out an economic plan really dedicated to the good of society or the good of country; or are they led by personal ambition, love of power, and fame? Do they have control over their minds? Are their minds at peace? If they themselves are not at peace, they cannot give peace to others. If they do not have control over their own minds, if they do not have inner strength, they cannot give peace to others.

They begin with idealism, but soon idealism dries up. Their intentions may be good, but more often than not, a conspiracy of events will lead them to a position where all idealism is lost. That is the state of the world. The political conditions of the world are such that it is a question of survival or annihilation. It is said war begins in the minds of men. So, also, peace begins in the minds of men. The question is: how can we have peace of mind? Inevitably, one turns first to the science of the mind.

What does psychiatry say? Undoubtedly Freud was a tremendous figure; he represents a pillar of modern thought. He discovered sewage hidden in the unconscious. But what did he do? He did not know how to get "holy water" to wash out the dirt of the mind.

Jung said that Freud had his doubts. Jung himself said that he had not come to a final decision. These men merely skim the surface of the mind, they do not know the whole.

If one does not know the whole mind, one cannot solve the problems of the mind. Simply seeing some symptoms on the surface of the mind and treating them, psychiatry might be able to cure certain symptoms of mental disease; but it cannot know the whole mind. Therefore, no permanent cure can be achieved nor any permanent remedy suggested. Then, in a helpless state, man turns to religion. There he seeks help and refuge.

But what is the condition of religion? Religion represents high ideals. Even to listen to such ideals is uplifting. But religious leaders have not been able to realize those ideals in their own lives. Many of them do not even believe that these things are practical or workable. It was said of a prominent minister, by his brother, that he did not think the Sermon on the Mount practical. He believed that it was only theoretical! Clergymen *speak* of high ideals but they do not *believe* that these high ideals are practical. What is the result? Religion has become a bundle of lifeless ceremonies and rituals, physical drills, or fighting creeds. No wonder people say that religion has failed!

Religion has not failed; religion has not been given a fair trial. Religion in the West means Judeo-Christian religion. There are many theories, many doctrines; though they are dogmatic about their doctrines, theologians themselves are now challenging those doctrines. Many of their fundamental doctrines have fallen apart. For two thousand years, some Christians say,

we have been deceived; many do not believe in eternal heaven or eternal hell. Many do not believe the world was created at a particular time—4004 B.C.—on a certain Tuesday. Many fundamental theories of Christianity are found to be wanting.

No wonder many persons are reluctant to utter the word God! God is not wanted. Some say God does not exist. We cannot prove the existence of God. If that be the condition of religion, is it any surprise that people are declaring war on hypocrisy! People say one thing but do not practice it. In such a situation can Vedanta play any part? Yes. For the simple reason that Vedanta is highly rational. Vedanta does not teach a personal God as final. You cannot prove the existence of a personal God. If God is personal, where does He live? Why in the heavens? And if God exists, why are there struggles in the world? Why did He create sufferings? Why did He create sin? What is the sense in making man weak and saying he is a sinner and is condemned to eternal hell? What is the nature of God? One cannot find the answer to these questions men love to expound.

VEDANTA speaks of the *oneness* behind this universe. God is ultimately oneness. From oneness came this manifoldness. In the universe we find that things are in constant flux. Things change, therefore there must be something which is unchanging, otherwise how can we perceive the change? As a result we find we are not only body and mind, that there is something beyond the mind. If there is something beyond the mind, it is not material. The mind changes, thus the mind is material, though subtle. That which does *not* change

is eternal. That which is eternal is a spiritual entity. It is infinite. There is no division in the infinite. It is oneness and that oneness is Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. If we perceive that oneness with our human intellect, or human emotions, then that oneness becomes a personal God. Proof of a personal God is the impersonal Brahman, the Infinite. That is how Vedanta proves the existence of God. It is quite logical.

Vedanta is based on the ancient Hindu scriptures—the Vedas, the most essential portion being the Upanishads. In the Upanishads we find some startling questions raised which seem to anticipate modern minds. In one of the Upanishads we find a tremendous question. A spiritual aspirant asks: "What is that by knowing which everything else is known?" It is a simple question, but not so simple as it appears. How do we acquire knowledge? By collecting facts from external nature?

Man has landed on the moon. It is a tremendous achievement, perhaps the most important event in the history of human existence. We are elated that a seemingly impossible feat has been accomplished, and justifiably so. It is a legitimate elation, but what is gained by going to the moon? Suppose we obtain all the knowledge of the moon and have dozens of crowded passenger planes flying back and forth. There are still millions of stars and planets remaining.

We merely collect facts from nature. From one standpoint our knowledge is vast, from another standpoint it is insignificant. So Narada, a man in ancient times who wanted to know the knowledge of everything, said: "It is tiring to collect knowledge this way, it is impossible to get complete knowledge of even

the material world this way. What is *that* by knowing which everything else will be known?" And what was the answer?

There are two kinds of knowledge. There is a higher knowledge and a lower knowledge. Lower knowledge relates to the things of the material world. Higher knowledge is knowledge of the eternal, knowledge of the imperishable. Unless you have knowledge of the eternal you have no peace of mind, you cannot have real bliss. True, we shall have some joy, but it is invariably followed by misery. We may receive peace and joy, but afterwards will come misery of the same degree of intensity. In this way life goes on—from "action to reaction."

Knowledge of the external world does not give peace, so we see. The great ancient scholar, Narada, went to a teacher and said very practically: "Revered sir, I have enough of knowledge of book learning," and he gave a long list of the branches of learning he had studied—philosophy, politics, astrology, laws of pronunciation. "But," he said, "unfortunately I have no *peace of mind*. I have heard that only the knowledge of the Self will give one *peace of mind*. Please teach me how to have that knowledge of the Self."

A typical question concerning modern scholars and scientists—do they have peace of mind? That is the thing. The scientist's discoveries might be overwhelming and his scholarship might be enormous, but has he been able to attain *peace of mind*? Modern scientists and scholars are helpless. They do not know where to turn. Yet in ancient times Narada, a great scholar, a man of learning, asked the question so straight-forwardly: "I have heard that only the knowl-

edge of the Self brings *peace of mind*. Please teach me how to get that knowledge of the Self."

What did the teacher do? He did not send him to a theological institution for eight years of study, he did not ask him to read any books. Enough of that! It is in another realm where one acquires the knowledge of the Self. The teacher told Narada to meditate. This he did, and then returned to the teacher. Again he was sent away, and again he returned. At last Narada visited his teacher and told him: "I have found out. I have found out the Truth. There is no real bliss in anything finite; the bliss is only in the Infinite."

The Infinite is bliss. Whoever has known the Infinite will find bliss. There is no joy in the finite world. And what is meant by the Infinite? The Infinite means a state in which one will not see another, in which one will not hear another. That is the state of oneness, where there is no duality. There is no thinking there. Thinking presupposes three things: subject, object, and the act of thinking. That is not the Infinite. The Infinite is not thinking, it is *thought* itself. It is a state of unalloyed bliss. So Narada became a great saint. Consider the question, the daring question, and the method of teaching! That ideal could be found in this very life!

WE find the story of another spiritual aspirant who, though perhaps not a scholar, was also troubled with the same question as Narada. He went to his father, who was a great saint. (In the Upanishadic age there were several householders who were also great saints). The son went to his father and asked directly and pointedly, "Father, tell me the knowledge of Brah-

man." He said: "Give me the knowledge of Brahman, teach me how to realize Brahman."

Brahman is the ultimate Reality. Here also the father did not prescribe any course of theology. He said: *tapasyat Brahma vijijnasasva*: "Seek the knowledge of Brahman through spiritual practice." He did not give any other instruction. So practical! The boy went and meditated. First he thought: Matter is Brahman, food is matter, by eating food we sustain ourselves—so matter is Brahman. He went to his father for confirmation of his conclusion, and the father again sent him to meditate, to continue his spiritual practice.

The boy went into deeper meditation and he thought: The vital breath is Brahman, because if the breath stops, we die. He thought he had the answer, but still he had some doubt, so he went once more to his father for confirmation. His father, not satisfied, sent him again to meditate.

The son thought: Perhaps mind is Brahman. Of course mind is a subtle thing. We have no peace of mind. Mind rules us. He went to his father and his father sent him back again. Then he thought perhaps understanding [*buddhi*] is Brahman. In Vedanta they make a distinction between mind and *buddhi*. Mind means considering the "pros and cons" of the thing, words; but when you reach a final decision, it is called *buddhi*. Since mind always changes, but *buddhi* does not change as much, he thought, understanding is pure Brahman. He came to his father, and his father sent him back again to meditate.

This time he discovered without any doubt that bliss is Brahman! The perennial force of bliss was

opened up, and he was full of bliss. He said: "This is Brahman!" and added: "From bliss the universe has come into existence, it is sustained by bliss, and to bliss it goes at the end of the cycle."

So by direct experience he attained knowledge of the Self. Truth is obtained by direct experience, not from hearsay! It is direct experience! Such is the proof of the existence of God or the Ultimate Reality.

One of the Upanishads said: The Ultimate Reality, or Brahman, or God, cannot be realized by learning, by mere reading or by discussion; that knowledge, can be had, that realization can be had if one will seek it with all his heart, soul, and mind. When you long for it, when you yearn for it with sufficient intensity then only will it come. It will come from within. One of the seers of the Upanishads said: "It cannot be known by arguments, nor by intellect; it cannot be known from a person who is merely a scholar—but from a man of God." For if you are convinced by the arguments of even a person of great intellect, you are convinced only for the time being. A person of still greater intellect comes along and presents contrary arguments, and your original conviction is shaken. Argumentation will not give you the knowledge of the Self. You can have it only by direct experience.

However, if you hear from a person who *has* the direct experience—that is proof and you cannot resist it. A person who has known God directly will transform you. If you see such a man, his mere presence will be enough. When you hear the words of a person who himself is a man of God, then you can have right understanding. The proof of the existence of God or Ultimate Reality is direct experience!

These experiences are not mere speculation, not mere history of past events; these truths were realized by not one, but many saints in their own lives. In the Upanishadic age we find frequent confirmation of this truth. One saint said: "In this life I have known the Truth; even in this very body I have realized the Truth, I have realized infinite bliss. Had I not known the Truth, had I not realized the ultimate—had knowledge of the Ultimate Reality—life would have been miserable; life would have been a tragic event. Whoever has known the Truth, he alone will receive bliss." Others will have to pass through the tyranny of the mind, the troubles of life and of work.

From that standpoint, the basis of Vedanta is very strong. When Vedanta branched out into Hinduism, it brought many changes with it. It cannot be said that there are no defects in Hindu Society, that there are not blemishes in many theories; however, the proof of the ultimate Reality is there in the original system of the Upanishads. But this realization did not come to only a few individuals in ancient times. From time to time, there were saints who had similar experiences, who possessed the same knowledge.

**IF YOU** study the religious history of India, you find a strange phenomenon. It is a matter of history that in almost every century we find outstanding spiritual personalities who had this direct experience of the ultimate Reality. This experience happened during this modern age, in the person of Sri Ramakrishna, who lived from 1836 to 1886. Although Ramakrishna unquestionably helped contribute to the forming of the modern mind, most of the world does not recognize

this. It has lost sight of the fact that his influence is still felt and will continue to be felt. His faith was such that his experiences surpassed the experiences of those who lived in the days of the Upanishads, of the Vedas.

Ramakrishna was nearly constantly in a superconscious state, that was his normal condition. Only by sheer force was he able to bring his mind down to the ordinary level; but his normal state was *samadhi*. What is that state? Going to the moon is a miraculous feat. But a finite mind reaching the Infinite—what a tremendous thing that is! We say that Ramakrishna is a man of God! He had *samadhi*. But what was that experience? He transcended the finite world, he penetrated through it, he discovered what was behind it. A finite being reaching the Infinite, or in devotional language, “crossing the feet of the Infinite!” It is a tremendous thing! The whole world changes, it becomes different. He sees that God pervades everything.

In a two-fold world there is God and matter, the world of matter and the world of spirit. We live in two worlds. Saints live in one world, the Infinite, the world of infinite bliss. We live in the other world, it can be said, of misery, misery in the sense that we have not known our *real* Self. This is not a question of abject misery. It is a question of ignorance.

So Ramakrishna lived in this age. There were many people who witnessed the unbelievable events of his life. It is not simply a legend. It is not the emotional exaggeration of irresponsible devotees. Many skeptics came, agnostics came; people, as a rule, did not believe in him at that time. With the advent of English education in India, people became critical. But those

who came to scoff at Ramakrishna were transformed and remained to pray. These things happened in this modern age: a man became God on earth in the human body! Vedanta calls this "liberation while in the body."

Liberation is not political freedom, or social freedom, or freedom to do anything you like. It is not that. Liberation means freedom from the bondage of matter. Mind itself is matter. In order to have freedom from the bondage of matter, to become master of your mind, to overcome the slavery of the mind you must regard the mind as an object with floating thoughts. It is possible to realize this. Ramakrishna, in our modern age, realized this.

It is an interesting thing that in India, in Hinduism, any serious religious aspirant will ask this question, "How can I realize God?" The Upanishads said in ancient times that life is a failure if you do not obtain the knowledge of the Self in this life. It is a pity that we strive to acquire material knowledge and that this knowledge is to no avail unless we acquire the knowledge of the Self. The Upanishads emphasize that the knowledge of the Self is the only knowledge; all other knowledge is simply relative knowledge, not the final knowledge. One will find even now that some people in India, those who are a bit intense and genuine in their religious thoughts will ask that question: "Can you tell me how to realize God in this life?"

A *sannyasi* [monk] once visited our village. During his visit he started a conversation with one of the villagers, who was a simple, unlettered person. This man asked the monk: "Sir, can you tell me how to realize God?" The monk was amazed to hear such a

question! Just see the effect of Indian tradition! This poor man was not satisfied with ordinary things, and so he asked that great question.

There is a song, also most likely composed by a person of little education, which goes: "O Divine Mother, teach me to pray to thee so that by means of a single prayer the darkness of ignorance will vanish and the light of knowledge dawn." What intense yearning for God realization! The important thing is *how* to obtain knowledge of the Self. Why should one pay what amounts to superstitious homage to modern ideas? Ideas are not important; what is important is Truth. Truth is neither modern nor ancient. Truth is true for all times. Why be obsessed by modern minds, by ideas of the modern world?

I would have infinite reverence for contemporary thought, if it be true, if it be the knowledge of the infinite Truth. Then Truth is not modern, nor ancient. Truth is Truth for all times. Do not be swayed by this idea that because we have contemporary minds only contemporary ideas are valid. We talk of sages who attained the knowledge of the Self, and experienced samadhi in the Upanishadic age. This is so. Even in this modern age Ramakrishna had the knowledge of the Self.

But what about us? Are we capable of realizing that state? Is it possible for us? If it is not possible for us, you may say, do not speak of these things; it is too high an ideal for us, do not disturb us. No, Vedanta does not say that. Vedanta speaks of capability and temperament. You see, Vedanta gives you as much as you can assimilate. Vedanta does not say that the highest truth should be forced on everyone. According

to Vedanta you should proceed step by step, according to your own temperament; following your spiritual path, following your Chosen Ideal—step by step, in a long chain. If you get hold of one link, and then another, and you are steady enough, you will reach the end of that chain. It is the same way in spiritual life. If you grasp this one link and are sincere, you will realize the highest.

So it is possible for every one to realize that state, that ultimate state. It is not only possible, it is sure, it is certain. This divine state will not come from outside, it is our real Self. We are the Infinite. We are divine. However, this divinity we do not recognize, it is dormant within us. It is not sleeping, it is ever-awake, but we are not aware of that. We must know that, we must realize that! It is a matter of step by step, but we shall not go always at the same even speed, not always at four miles an hour. It might be we shall go four million miles an hour.

In spiritual life, if you are sincere, realization can come at any moment, for it is ours. That is the truth, that is the real truth, that is the goal for which we are thirsting, for which we are searching through all our blunders, through all our trials, all our mistakes. We all, unconsciously, are trying to reach that state. We have to do it *consciously*. If you can do it consciously, you are sure to succeed. If you are earnest enough in the course of your spiritual practice, that earnestness becomes intense and you shall receive realization then and there.

It is said that if you are sincere enough, you can succeed at once. Remember that this is possible, that there is the possibility for every one of us to reach

that state. Swami Vivekananda once said: "Yes, it is very difficult to realize God, to realize the ultimate Truth, but who knows if you will be the next person to get the ultimate Truth."

Nobody knows when and who will realize the ultimate Truth, but it is within us. When it will come forth, we do not know. Let us be ready and let us believe we *can* reach that state. In any case, it is possible for every one of us. Surely we shall reach that some time or other; why should you wait for an infinite time? Religion means to squeeze thousands of lives into one life. So let us squeeze many lives into this one life. Let us be earnest enough to realize the goal in this life, every one of us!