

## Chapter III. The One Alone

The very first experience in the history of Indian thought is the thrill of wonder. This is expressed in the hymns (*riks*) found in *Rig-veda*, the earliest revelations of the Indian mind. These hymns are all about the demi-gods (*devas*) or the Shining Ones. There are many such deities —Indra, Varuna, Mitra, and Parjanya to name a few. They appear in these hymns, one after the other. Of these, Indra, with the thunderbolt (*vajra*) as his weapon, is the chief. He is the mighty one who confers rain upon the earth. Indra is so called because he is the master of the senses (*indriyas*), that is to say, he is the mind that handles the senses. He is also known as Puruhutha —*puru* meaning “often”, *hutha* “invited”, and the entire name meaning “the God who is most called upon”.

The mind (which is identified with senses, since it masters them) is also adored in the *Vedas* as Rudra. The mind contacts the objective world and experiences it through the instrumentality of the five senses; this aspect of the mind is the Indra aspect. It has another capability. It can master the senses and become aware of the universal inner truth of the multiplicity called the objective world. This aspect of the mind is designated “Rudra”. This is why the *Vedas* describe Indra and Rudra as the One with two names.

### One God with many names

It is possible to quote many such descriptions about the other Gods. Yet, ultimately, all descriptions lead to the same conclusion. First, the hymns (*riks*) adore deities as presiding over some function or other. Then, these latter get transformed into different names and forms of the One God who has all the worlds in Itself, who is the Witness, resident in all hearts, and the Sovereign of all creation. Gradually, all other meanings and reactions are suppressed as not relevant.

For example, an element of fear is associated with the deity Varuna. Fear sprouts and spreads in some hymns, but soon the wisdom of the *Aryans* (noble seekers) subjugates the fear. Many hymns are prayers to Varuna from people afraid of being punished by him for their sins. But the idea of a terrorizing God cannot flourish on Indian soil. Nor can many Gods of many natures. Indian culture and spiritual outlook upheld the One God or Iswara.

There is the One God (Iswara)! This axiom, that there can be only One and not many, has been current in India since very ancient times. Even in the ancient *Vedic* and *Samhitha* literature, this faith is already evident as an age-long belief.

But the notion of a personal God struck the thinkers and practitioners of this land as rather elementary, a kind of unripe stage in spiritual progress. It did not satisfy their highest aspirations. This attitude, found in the revelations of sages (*rishis*), has not been understood or appreciated by scholars and writers of other countries who have studied and commented on the *Vedas* and affiliated texts. They still dwell on the earlier belief in “many gods” or the later belief in “one personal God”. Ignorance of this kind brings a smile to the lips of the Indian (*Bharathiya*).

### Daring search for the Supreme Oneness

Really, even those who learn in their mother’s laps to put faith in a God equipped with attributes, known by a name and having a recognizable form, have later to rise to a stage higher than this and become aware of the One, which is spoken of as “having many names and many forms”. The spiritual disciplines (*sadhanas*) are directed to

the realization of this truth. “The ONE —in Him alone is all this flux, all this changing cosmos established. He is the guide and guardian of every consciousness.”

All such denotations touch only the fringe of the ONE. Westerners said that one’s intelligence can succeed in this venture. But the seekers of this land showed a heroism that could not be measured or limited —a fact that cannot but be accepted. Western philosophers, renowned for their daring insights into the realms of the spirit, have shown only a tiny spark of this heroism, so they are amazed at the intuitive and experiential heights reached by the sages of India.

This feeling of wonder was charmingly expressed by Professor Max Mueller. “Into whatever unknown realms of experience their causative and positive inquiry led them, the Indian seekers ventured boldly therein. For the sake of success in this adventure, they never hesitated to discard whatever they felt as an encumbrance. They were not affected by fear of how others might judge them.” Max Mueller exhorted people to involve themselves in the nectarine stream of the search for the Supreme, flowing in India, for he felt that the Indian spiritual aspirants pursued the path of right, the path of truth.

“One alone is; the wise speak of It as many (*Ekam sath; vipraah bahudhaa vadanthi*).” This indeed is most sublimely meaningful. This is the basic truth behind the spiritual efforts of India (Bharath) for ages. Even the theistic principle and practice that will spread all over the world with unprecedented benedictions in the coming years have as their basis this great axiom laid down by the sages of India, long long ago.

### **Unity in diversity**

Hymns (*riks*) arose on various deities and divine forces because the sages (*rishis*) knew that each person can cognize “One alone is” only from their own viewpoint and that it is different for different persons, depending on the stage reached in clarifying and purifying the vision. The sages announced through that statement their discovery that the One is the subject that all the sages and saints, seers and poets, hymnists and composers adored and praised in various languages, during various moods, through various styles of expression.

Thus, consequences of the highest value to the world emerged from the declaration quoted above, “One alone is; the wise speak of It as many.” For example, many are surprised that India is the one country where religious fanaticism is absent and no one hinders or harms the religious observances of another. This country has theists, atheists, dualists, nondualists, monotheists, and others; they live together in peace and harmony, without causing or suffering injury.

Materialists stood on the steps of temples (held sacred by *brahmins* and used by them for worship) and defamed and denied God. They called upon all to follow them. They declared that the idea of God is but an insane fancy. They condemned God, scriptures, codes of morality, righteousness, and guiding principles and said that they were all superstitions designed and developed for selfish aggrandizement by the *brahmins*. They roamed the land and propagated these conclusions. No one hindered them.

Buddhism, which systematically slighted Hindu rites and religious beliefs, was allowed to coexist in an atmosphere of respect. The Jains too did not accept the *Vedas* and the *Vedic* Gods. They asked in derision how such Gods could exist and be believed in. Examples of the spirit of tolerance rooted in the revelatory statement quoted above are innumerable. Until the ravaging Muslims sprang on this country, no one in this land of India (Bharath) knew what violence meant. Only when foreign hordes fell upon them and resorted to violence did the

people come to know how intolerant humanity can be.

Hindus helped Christians to build churches in India. They showed readiness to cooperate with Christians; this is evident all over India. There was no bloodshed at any time in dealing with Christians. The stream of thought directed to the supreme Truth would not allow itself to be polluted by violence. To confirm this fact as well as to understand the validity of this attitude requires clear thinking and strength of intellect.

Buddhists, who were the very first propagators of religion, spread their faith by traveling over the world. That religion entered all countries famed in those days as civilized. The monks who ventured into those lands were tortured; hundreds were killed by imperial decree. But soon, good fortune smiled on Buddhism. Buddhism taught that violence has to be eschewed. Buddha was accepted as a God, as another Name for the One, who has many names, according to the *Vedic* dictum, “One alone is; the wise speak of It as many (*Ekam sath; vipraah bahudhaa vadanthi*).” He was Indra, He was Rudra. That was the unifying effect of the basic revelation of the sages. May this declaration be ever in the memory of people!

Indians (*Bharathiyas*), grown up in the culture of India, have deep faith in the equality of all faiths. Whether it is Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, or Christianity, they believe that no one should talk lightly of the worship of God. They believe that when anyone talks lightly of any one of the names of god or any of the forms of God whom others adore, they are insulting the one God. This was the message held forth by the Indian way of spiritual life. Those who have learned this truth and adhere to it are the real sons and daughters of India.

This truth is beyond the grasp of all; not all can achieve this knowledge: Who is the ruler of the Universe? Who is it that stands outside it and guides it? What is the cause of the existence of this cosmos? Whence did this originate? How did it happen? What caused this existence? The *Vedas* have many hymns (*riks*) dealing with these mysteries. Indians have probed them.

### **Differences due to past actions**

Creation involves putting substances together; what is put together must come apart in course of time and get liberated. The individual is created, so disintegration and death will happen. Now, some are born happy; some enjoy healthy, happy lives. Some are born miserable; others are born without hands or legs. Some are born feeble-minded or as defectives. Who hurt them or injured them? God is proclaimed as just and kind. How can such a God be so partial and prejudiced! How can such differential treatment come into the realm ruled by God? Such doubts are natural. But the vision of the sages of India who moulded the thought of this land revealed to them that God is not the cause of these differences; they are the consequences of the acts indulged in by the individual in lives previous to the present one. They result in happiness and misery, health and handicaps.

Good and bad are self-made, the effects of what was done in previous lives. Can the bodies of people and their conditions, the ups and downs people meet in life, can they not be the accumulated result of hereditary impacts and tendencies? Two things stand like parallel lines before us when we consider this subject: mental and material. If satisfactory solutions can be found in materialism for the problems relating to human nature and its special qualities, then there can be no basis for believing that there is a factor called *Atma* or the divine! But it is impossible to demonstrate that the capacity to think, for example, has evolved out of physical matter.

When an item of work is done again and again, it becomes a habit, a skill; doesn't it? Therefore, the skill or habit that a newborn exhibits must be due to constant repetition indulged in long ago. Of course, such practice

must have taken place in a previous life or many lives. So, it is necessary to posit the validity of the belief in past and future lives, for all living beings. This is a basic belief in Indian spiritual thought.