

his own particular religion then this is fine, and he should continue on this road. Sri Ramakrishna said that all religions are but different roads leading us to the same God. So how we attain realization is not too important. If we come to realise God this is what really matters. In few cases will an understanding of Advaita Vedanta lift one up realise God. Sri Ramakrishna once said that if we wish to reach the roof of our house and we try to jump up to it we will fall down. Instead, we should climb the ladder to get to the top. If we ~~try to~~ change from one ladder to another while we are still climbing we may lose our balance and tumble to the ground. In other words, if Christ is our guide to God let us not switch guides in the middle of our journey or we may become lost. If Advaita has an appeal for us we should pursue its study rigorously. But, as stated previously, this approach (Advaita) is very hard to follow and may not suit us. All religions are on the way to truth-knowledge of God. But remember this: If we only think of the trees in the forest we may never see the flowers that bloom below.

M A Y A

We have described Brahman and Atman as being qualities which are above this relative world. Yet this world obviously exists to us. The Vedantist does not say that nothing exists or that everything we perceive is just illusion. What the Vedantist does do is to stress the relative nature of the phenomenal universe. As you know, for thousands of years time was considered to be an absolute throughout the universe. In truth though, we can not speak of time as being an absolute. Time is relative to that frame of reference with which one is dealing. An event occurring in a given period of time in one inertial frame of reference will not be measured as being the same period of time with a clock that is attached to another inertial frame which is moving with respects to the first. This of course is basic Relativity. We know from Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity that the basic laws of physics must hold in any reference frame. Now what is the point in stressing these facts? The laws of physics are statements of facts which describe the phenomenal universe. In other words, these facts describe the

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universe which our conscious minds perceive. Everything in this cosmos is relative and finite. There are no absolutes in this universe. By absolute we mean that which is ~~free~~ from the laws of space, time and causation. Now Maya is a sanskrit word which has come to be thought of as meaning illusion. ~~This is not Maya!~~ Maya is a part of this universe and it is not an absolute. It is relative. We will quote a brief description of what is Maya from Max Muller's ~~introduction~~ to his translation of the Vedanta Sutas. It is an excellent description but be forewarned that his usage of the word illusion is not correct. What is Maya?

It is in fact a principle of illusion; the undefinable cause owing to which there seems to exist a material world comprising distinct individual existences. Being associated with this principle of illusion, Brahman is enabled to project the appearances of this world, in the same way as a magician is enabled by his incomprehensible magical power to produce illusory appearances of ~~animate and inanimate~~ beings. Maya thus constitutes the upadana, the material cause of the world; or if we wish to call attention to the circumstance that Maya belongs to Brahman as sakti- we may say that the material cause of the world is Brahman in so far as it is associated with Maya.

Now we can safely assume that Vivekananda was a better authority ~~on~~ Vedanta philosophy than Muller. Muller describes quite well the many facets of

Maya but misleads one as to the true definition of Maya.

Maya is a statement of the facts of this Universe, of how it is going on.

Swami Vivekananda.

Relative to Brahman, Maya is illusion; but relative to this world and the Universe Maya is a statement of fact, a law, and a reality. Hence, Maya comprises "relative truth." This Universe and its laws of time, space and causation are a part of Maya. We are influenced by Maya-not illusion. Only the Atman is free from Maya because the Atman is not subject to the influences of this Universe.

Now with this understanding that Maya, relative to us, is a statement of fact we can begin to realise what is meant by the concept of a personal God. Gods (Gods) exists in the realm of Maya. Personal Gods have distinct qualities and personalities. For the moment let us distinguish between personal Gods and Brahman. There is only one Brahman but there may be many Gods. Personal Gods are as real as this world is real. Only to the Atman do these Gods appear as illusions. But to the phenomenal Universe they are real. Now why should this be so? Why so many Gods? Well, we have defined the one true existence as

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being Brahman. Only he has infinite qualities and powers. This is because ~~that~~ ^{that} is but the manifestation of Brahman. From Brahman comes Maya, and from Maya comes the many Gods. These are the Gods that Man constantly prays to. They are personal in their existence where-as Brahman is above identity. Since these Gods are limited to finite abilities they cannot perform an infinite amount of deeds. The God Vishnu exists as truly does the God Allah. Certainly a Muslim would not accept this statement. However, from those arguments presented earlier concerning the Absolute and Brahman, Allah cannot be both the personal God and still have infinite qualities. Man is forever arguing for the proof of God's existence because in pursuit of this endeavor he constantly tries to bring God down to the relative world. But the One, Brahman, is beyond knowing since he is above all relativity. We pray to a personal God because he is real; this God is as real as this Universe. To illustrate, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva do not represent a trinity. They are real, separate and distinct. Often Western thinkers strive hard to treat the polytheism of Hindus on some purely abstract philosophy. Thus the concept of the Trinity is often attached to these

three principal Hindu Gods.. But this is a very wrong interpretation of the Hindu Gods. It is a weak attempt of Western thinkers to reconcile the Hindu Gods to Western philosophy. The Hindu knows his Gods as distinct and separate entities.

Now we believe Vedanta is the highest philosophy of religion. It is very abstract in many ways and is often difficult to understand. But Advaita Vedantic philosophy holds the concept of Monism. It is the doctrine of the one ultimate principle-Brahman. Yet it accepts that in the phenomenal universe many Gods do exist. Is this a contradiction? Not at all! Vedanta says that beyond this Universe lies Brahman who is the first cause and principle but is himself the non-created.

Sri Ramakrishna was a great Vedantist. Yet he attained to moksha (liberation) through his constant search and love for Kali-the Mother God.

The meditation on Kali that was Ramakrishna's unceasing practice constitutes the central theme of the Tantras.*

Lemaitre

Tantra: In the Hindu system, it is a philosophy in which the divine mother Kali is the ultimate reality of the universe.

How do we know that Kali exists, or that any of the various Gods exist? How do we know whether the God to whom the Christians pray (to) really exists? We see them in the form of incarnations of God. Again, remember we are not defining God and Brahman as being the same. Christ was the incarnate of the Christian God. Perhaps we should call that God Christgod to keep from being confused. In this relative universe the Gods return to earth in the form of incarnations. We see them in such persons as Christ and Lord Krishna. They come whenever there is a need for a great spiritual revival. We might point out that this is Lord Krishna's explanation for incarnations. We do not see that this is a contradiction to what Christ taught. As Christ said "I am the way" so too did Krishna. If you accept Christ as the incarnation of God, it is just as logical to say that there have been other incarnations. This is a big world. If Christ had been the only God who returned to this world then many millions of persons throughout millenary would not have been able to receive spiritual inspiration. Of course if you find this idea of personal Gods unpleasant then go back to the concept of Brahman. He is the one and only true eternal reality.

But can you not see a place for a personal God in this world? The concept of the oneness with Brahman is a beautiful thought. Yet how many of the masses of people are able to intellectually conceive of such an idea? Every man is predisposed towards certain patterns of thinking. Consequently, some persons find a closer affinity toward one God over another. Now a brief reminder: We are still speaking of Gods within the realm of Maya so be sure to orient your thinking and questions to this frame of reference. If a Christian wants to totally reject this idea of many Gods and say that only one God exists in the Universe then perhaps he should return to his scriptural authority-the Bible.

And the Lord said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.

That the sons of God saw the daughter's of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they choose.

Now perhaps you are saying, "He is putting in certain statements that seem to fit his argument." Well, that is true. But the alternative is to retranslate the Bible or interpret it according to how each of us thinks. Certainly, King James put us in a messy situation didn't he! The Hindu would find it very plausible and comprehensible that the "Sons of God" should come

to earth. It should be remarked that the Hindu's also have this one great God who is above all other Gods.. He is Indra.

We have labored on this issue of personal Gods at some length because it is very important for people to understand the complexities of this issue.. ~~Especially~~ for the Western thinker, the concept of many Gods existing in the Hindu tradition, and each of these Gods being considered real and distinct, must be realised. Now let us go into a little more detail concerning Maya since it is so very important to the philosophy of Vedanta and because it is fundamental to the workings of Hindu tradition.

Maya gives rise to statements such as, " I think therefore I am." Maya is the tree whose great mass is perceived by the senses; whose inertial qualities are felt by the senses. Yet the tree and its form is only apparent to the senses.. The tree is rather the sum of many finer masses of which these masses are yet ~~still~~ courses parts of an even finer substance.. Even then, the finest part is but a form of energy.. That the tree seems to be whole is an illusion to the senses. This is caused by the influence of Maya. Maya is space, time, and causation. From the moment of birth, Maya is directing its influence. Maya is

relative knowledge. This world exists to us because of our senses. Who is to say the world would exist if we did not exist to perceive it? This is Maya! Man is constantly striving to improve himself. He looks to the God(s) for direction. And this constant seeking for the truth is Maya. The earth is Maya, the heavens are Maya, the Gods are Maya, mathematics is Maya. One cannot escape it. So long as he lives, Man is a part of this Maya. Even death is Maya. Yet to the Atman: Maya is illusion, this world is illusion, the ego (the individualised self) is illusion. All that is seen by the Atman is illusion. Maya is that which appears to be; Brahman is that which is. Brahman is the Absolute, Maya is the relative.

But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither idealism nor realism, nor ~~is-it~~ theory. It is a simple statement of facts-what we are, and what we see around us.

Swami Vivekananda.

Then there is the tremendous fact of death. The whole world is going to death; everything is dying. All our progress, our vanities, our reforms, our luxuries, our knowledge have that one end-death...What is the goal of everything? Death is the goal of life, of beauty, of power, of wealth, of virtue, too. Somehow, we do not know why, we have to cling on to life; we cannot give it up. And this is Maya!

Swami Vivekananda.

Every day people are dying around us, and yet men think they will never die. And this is Maya.

Swami Vivekananda.

All relative things are Maya. Your happiness is another man's misery. Your wealth is another man's poverty.

What is truth? What is misery? All these things are Maya. Maya does not seek to explain the world. It simply states the facts as they exist. We shall deal more with Maya and its various manifestations later but let us once more return to Vivekananda for a closer explanation concerning this idea of the multiplicity of Gods, Maya, and Brahman. It is important that we do this because when we tread on people's ideas about God we touch a sensitive area so we must be careful and try to give an understanding answer to this difficult problem.

It is the Man who says in the New Testament, "I and my Father are One," whose power descends unto millions. For thousands of years it has worked for good. And we know that the same Man, because he was a non-dualist, was merciful to others. To the masses who cannot conceive of anything higher than a personal God, he says: "Pray to your Father in heaven." To others, who could grasp a higher idea, he said: "I am the Vine, ye are the branches;" but to his disciples to whom he revealed himself more fully he proclaimed the highest truth: "I and my Father are One."

Swami Vivekananda.

PRACTICAL VEDANTA
PRACTICAL V.

If all that Vedanta can offer is an abstract philosophical model of the real nature of things then it is really of little value to us. Man needs a workable model to live by. If Vedanta is to be a system by which we may carry out our daily lives then it must be intensely practical. As we know, Vedanta is the philosophical interpretation of the Upanishads. Through the Bhagavad-Gita the majority of Indians find the rules to carry out their lives.

But the basic question we are concerned with now is whether Vedanta is for the West. The best way to answer this is to understand what Vedanta teaches and what it stands for.

There is basically no difference between man and man. That which makes up his inner self is the same all over the world.

The same human nature is represented everywhere. All human emotions are felt and expressed in the same way everywhere. It is however, true that India developed her culture along a certain line which we call spiritual; and the West evolved a nationalistic and humanistic culture. There is no question of superiority or inferiority or even comparison between them. Both are great and both have made mistakes. Now I believe

the time has come when both must meet together on the basis of give and take. We of the Orient must learn from you and you of the West must learn from us. When there is the exchange of ideas between the two and we each learn from the other, without of course, losing our peculiarities, there will be, I believe, a perfect civilization-so far as perfection in a relative world can be expected.
Swami Prabhavananda.

One of the reasons Christianity has gained such a great following in the West is because it is a religion which men are able to relate to. Christ offers to men a living example of the way ~~they~~ should conduct themselves. In fact, if we just take the teachings of Christ as our model we would really need no other system of rules to live by. If one has truly understood the Sermon on the Mount that person has reached the highest level of spiritual attainment possible.

People of the Western world say that Christ was the only one who ever taught ~~in this~~ way, but they do not know that this is the very foundation of the ethics of Vedanta.
Swami Abhenananda.

Vedanta does not really differ in answering ~~man's~~ needs for ~~spiritual~~ realization from the teachings of Christ. Christ taught love and this power is the greatest force existing in Man. We must not reject one system of thought simply because it is explained in a different way from another.

Often we see different interpretations of what is meant by love. Gandhi's whole life was directed by the principle of love.

Love never claims, it never gives, love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself.

How very little this differs from Christ's teachings.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

Gandhi was always quick to emphasize that his fastings were out of love for his people. He did not use fasting as a weapon to force his will upon others. His fasting, more than anything else, was a visible demonstration of his love for Mankind.

One argument of Western men towards Vedanta philosophy is that it is indifferent to the needs of people. This misinterpretation of Vedanta is not the fault of Western thinkers. Actually we must blame Vedanta itself for having made its real meaning incomprehensible to the majority of men. This cause of this rests with the Upanishads. From that great body of literature arose modern Vedanta. But the Upanishads were written for the elite and often those things which are intended for the elite of our societies have the least influence on the world.

Thus, for practical purposes, they are of little real value. Even in India today the mass of people still follow the teachings of the Vedas because they answer these people's needs in a simpler and more understanding language than the Vedanta Philosophy. Another fine example of developing a philosophy which does not answer people's needs is Jainism. The demands it places on its followers are so opposed to the natural tendencies of people that its following is practically nil. Thus Jainism is of little value to anyone and this in itself makes one seriously doubt its validity. So we may state, with full assurance of agreement on your part, that if a religion cannot answer peoples' needs then it is of little worth.

What we would like to propose is that Vedanta is a very practical philosophy and a very powerful tool in meeting man's needs for something that is tangible. We cannot argue against Christianity in doing this. Nor can we deny the Holy Koran. Both are in agreement with the teachings of Vedanta. Christ is the perfect example of what we would like our lives to be. He is the reflection of all that is beautiful in human thought. But we believe, and will show, that Vedanta is the philosophy by which Christ lived and by which we too may live by. This

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will become evident to you by sharing with you what
Vedanta is ~~in~~ practice.

ONE THE NECESSITY OF RELIGION

Of all the forces that have worked and are still working, to mold the destinies of the human race, none, certainly, is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call religion.

Swami Vivekananda

A moment's reflection will direct you to the validity of those words. For we see whole nations whose laws are based upon precepts taught by various holy scriptures. There are few, if any, primitive tribes that do not govern themselves in accordance with religious rituals and rules. Indeed one needs only to refer to the studies of Margret Mead on various primitive tribes to see how dynamic the force of religion plays on molding these people's lives. Religion is that force which directs history. This is because history is governed by men and events and men are governed by their religious beliefs.

The real germ of religion is the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses

Swami Vivekananda

Man is in a constant movement to discover his true relationship to God. Even the proclaimed atheist is doing this when he attempts to deny that Man has some sort of relative relationship to God. By his denying, he is necessarily raising the very question in his heart. There is really no such thing as

an ~~atheist~~.

Man invariably finds that his senses inhibit his ability to realize God. With Christians, we find Christ coming in the form of flesh to help people towards realization. Man is unable to see God because of his limitations so there emerges the reflection of God in the flesh who is Christ.

Man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature.

Swami Vivekananda

Man needs religion because of that which is Man. Man needs to believe in something. We ~~do not~~ find ~~examples~~ of animals needing to believe in anything excepting to fulfill their immediate wants. Often we find people saying that the only thing they believe in is themselves. If this is so then that person is in ~~agreement~~ with the ~~teachings~~ of the Upanishads. For in the Upanishads hold that your real Self is the true spiritual agent.. Often those who most strongly denounce religions are those who are struggling with mixed emotions. If a person can find no time in his life time to reflect on the questions of religion it is usually because this person lacks the intellectual capacity to do so. That man who ~~never~~ ^{HAS NO RELIGION} ~~ponders religion~~ is on the same level as the lowest animal who only desires to satisfy his physical needs.

The intelligent man is one who has a religion or who has contemplated it. The really remarkable man is one who has ~~resolved~~ for himself exactly what he believes, and why, and is able to maintain steadfast against all arguments opposing it. It is not an arguable fact to state that the greatest thinkers of this world have been religious teachers. The realm of religious philosophy requires the highest intelligence to master and we should marvel if we are fortunate enough to see only a glimmer of it.

The mainspring of the strength of every race lies in the spirituality manifested in religion, and the death of that race will begin the day that spirituality wanes and materialism begins.

~~Swami~~ Vivekananda

The Upanishads teach that it is just as correct to believe in a personal God as to believe in an impersonal one. This point is a very important one! Too often one religious sect will say that another's God is not the real God. We see many denominations of Christianity demanding that their way is the only way. This is very foolish and narrow minded thinking. The Upanishads teach that if in believing in a personal God¹ leads one to spiritual realization then it has achieved its purpose. This is, after all, the real objective of all religions.

Vedanta teaches that we must seek release from ~~material~~ material wants and direct our attention to realizing God. This is in no way a contradiction to the teachings of Christ.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

All religions propose that the end aim is to discover God. So does it really matter how we define him if the result of spiritual fulfillment is that we have become a better person?

It is a curious fact that all religions, without one exception, hold that man is a degeneration of what he was, whether they clothe this in mythological words, or in the clear language of philosophy, or in the beautiful expressions of poetry.

Swami Vivekananda

So we can conclude that if man is more than an animal then he strives for high ideals. Spiritual realization is the highest level possible. Thus religion is a necessity.