

## AFTER LISTENING TO KRISHNAJI

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(Originally published in *The Theosophist*, April 1934. Dr. Kunhan Raja was Curator of the Adyar Library for several years and resident at the Adyar Headquarters of the Theosophical Society, having joined the Society in 1920. His interest in the development of the Library and its publications enhanced their value. Professor Raja was a prolific writer and an enthusiastic advocate of Sanskrit learning and culture. He created the journal *Brahmavidya* in 1936, and was its editor.)

Every religion, and nearly every school of philosophy, postulates two basic principles as constituting the world—Spirit and Matter. Spirit is what knows, and Matter is what is known. Spirit is what illuminates, and Matter is what shrouds this illumination. Spirit is what constitutes Life, and matter is what limits Life. Spirit is joy, bliss, and Matter weighs down and causes sorrow. Spirit is eternally true and real; Matter transforms and perishes.

In Samskrit terminology Spirit is *Sat* (real), *Chit* (wisdom), *Ananda* (bliss). Matter is the opposite of that. When one says: “I know,” what ought to be actually meant by the term “I” is the pure Spirit unalloyed and untainted by Matter. But usually one understands by the term “I” a composite constituted of Spirit, body and its adjuncts, namely the sense-organs, the mind, etc. Very often, the Spirit element is lost sight of, and the Matter element, namely the body with its adjuncts, is exalted to the level of being what is meant by “I,” what knows and experiences. This is due to a confusion of two entirely distinct elements, and this confusion is the root cause of all our sorrows. Shri Shankarāchārya puts this in the following words:

(As between Matter and Spirit), after ascribing to each the nature and the attributes of the other, resulting from the illusory cognition of the attributes and their bases which are in truth absolutely distinct each from the other, due to non-discrimination of each from the other, and after coupling the true with the untrue, there is the natural empirical experience “am this,” “This is mine,” and so on.

Shankaracharya terms this confusion *Avidyā* (ignorance), *Adhyāsa* (mutual super-imposition of the true and the untrue). Whenever a cognition presupposes a differentiation of the knower, the known, the knowledge and the means of knowing, there must be this jumble of Spirit and Matter. Because, if the Spirit is by its very nature pure wisdom, it cannot at the same time be maintained that the Spirit depends for its wisdom on an object to be known and on a means to know the object. Again, if the wisdom of the Spirit is only an attribute abiding in the Spirit, the Spirit in itself is not wise, but depends on an attribute to be wise. True knowledge consists in the cognition of the Spirit by the Spirit itself as wisdom pure and simple, without the Spirit depending on an attribute called wisdom for it to be wise, on an object to be wise about, and on some means whereby to be wise about the object. This absolute abstraction of the Spirit from all its normal entanglements—the fleeting cognitions, the objects of the physical world cognised, adjuncts like mind and the sense-organs for cognising the objects—such a pure abstraction is what Shankaracharya calls *Vidyā* (knowledge). This is perfection, *Parama-kastha*; this is “to be one with life,” *Atmaikatva*.

Krishnaji freely uses expressions such as “perfection,” “to be one with life,” “fulfilment”. The terms that we freely find in Shankaracharya are “*Niratishaya* (without a superior),” “*Brahmatmaikatva* (union of the individual with the absolute),” “*Nityashuddhabuddhamuktasvabhava* (by nature eternally pure, awake and free),” “*Kūtashtanitya* (immutably eternal)”. Shankarāchārya recognises two kinds of realities, the empirically real and the absolutely real. What is empirically real is whatever comes within our normal experience. It is real only in so far as we experience it. But whatever we experience as real, we also experience as not real with reference to some other place, time or condition. For example, a tree here is real,

but it does not exist elsewhere; the same tree is real now, but if it is cut down, it ceases to exist. A tree is real as a tree, but if it is mistaken for a house in very dim light, then as a house it is unreal. Thus what we experience as real has only a limited reality. But, says Shankaracharya, wisdom as wisdom can have no limitation. The limitation comes from the object of the wisdom, from confusing wisdom with its object, from associating them as inextricably interwoven with each other. All other Teachers hold that there cannot be knowledge without an object. It is only Shankarāchārya who holds uncompromisingly that knowledge is independent, and what is called an object for knowledge is only an external limitation to it and not a necessary or inherent factor in knowledge. When knowledge is associated with an object, consequent on knowledge, comes in desire, aversion and all the hosts of feelings that bring about misery in life. The entire misery in life is due to the fact of this introduction of the limiting factor, like “this” or “that,” as conditioning the really infinite and unconditioned wisdom. When there is wisdom pure and simple, without an object to condition the wisdom, the Spirit is in a state of perfection, without a limiting factor. The Spirit, as we ordinarily understand it, is inextricably entangled in the body and its adjuncts like the sense-organs and the mind. Being confined to this entanglement, the Spirit does not shine in its fullness. It is only in the stage of the Spirit knowing itself as pure wisdom, free from the body and its adjuncts, that there is fulfilment for the Spirit.

Life and Wisdom are not two different things. The Spirit in its state of physical entanglements is called life as a dynamic factor, and is called knowledge as a cognitive factor. The Spirit is not really a “factor” in anything; it is a complete and independent unit. But in the state of entanglement, it becomes a factor in a complex, and assumes to have “aspects”. Thus life becomes the dynamic aspect, and knowledge becomes the cognitive aspect, of the Spirit. But when the entanglement is removed and when the Spirit becomes pure, Life in its fullness and wisdom in its perfection become merged into the same thing. Then we have an “eternal becoming”. Krishnaji speaks of truth as an “eternal becoming,” and says that truth is never static. What is static is Matter. To be static is the opposite of life. Life as we know in our normal experience is a continuous becoming. But this continuous becoming is not eternal. There is an end to life, and some religions and schools of philosophies hold that there comes a new life or life in new conditions. But to Shankarāchārya, this is not truth. Change in life is due to the presence of the body and its adjuncts. It is the body that changes. When life is freed from this body, then life, instead of being a merely continuous becoming, becomes also an eternal becoming. In Shankaracharya’s terminology, Krishnaji’s term “becoming” must be translated as *Chaitanya* as opposed to *Jāda*, what is static.

In the philosophy of Shankarāchārya, there is no “goal” for life. Life is everything. The goal always presupposes a path, and becomes dependent on the path. There can be no perfection, no real fulfilment, when there is dependence. Thus perfection, fulfilment, cannot be really a “goal” to be attained through a path. Krishnaji says that it is “a pathless reality”. Shankarāchārya is absolutely uncompromising in his position that perfection cannot be the “end” of a path, the “result” of something done, the “attainment” after a discipline. Perfection is a reality. There was no time when it was not. One can attain a thing only when it was not at some time attained. One may not know that it existed, but that is different from its not being existent. “Truth is fulfilment.” In ordinary life there is not this fulfilment. Life is confined by, limited to, the particular objects of desire and action. In every experience of our ordinary life, there is an element of direct knowledge of a thing along with what is called memory. If the direct knowledge is full, there can be no room for memory. Every case of false knowledge contains an element of direct cognition and memory. Whenever there is the memory element in knowledge, there is imperfection in the knowledge. My knowledge of a tree is not simple direct knowledge though I am seeing the tree. If it were mere direct knowledge the knowledge would have taken only the form of “this,” and never the form “this tree”. The knowledge that it is a “tree” is due to the intervention of some previous knowledge; the present knowledge is related to the previous ones, and on account of the admixture of the previous ones, I get the notion that it is a “tree”. Knowledge reaches the stage of being relatively the purest when it takes the form of a mere “this” without the conditioning factor of particulars like “tree” and becomes absolutely pure when even this element of an object for the knowledge is dropped out. The element of memory, which resolves the objects of our ordinary cognitions into various particulars, is, as Krishnaji says, “an artificial acquisition”. It is a

hindrance to true knowledge. One of the objects of Yogic practice is to free the working of the mind from the intervention of this artificial acquisition. When I can know a tree as it is, not as related to the things I have seen before, when I can know a horse as it is, and not as related to the things that I have seen before, there cannot be any difference between a horse and a tree; the difference comes in on account of the intervention of memory. When there is the intervention of an artificial element, a thing cannot be called full and pure. Conversely, when a thing is full, there cannot be the presence of an artificial element. If a jar is three parts full of milk and one part of water, that milk is not pure and the jar is not “full of milk”. Conversely, if the jar is full of milk, then there is no room for the water to dilute the milk. For the knowledge to be pure, this artificial acquisition must be removed. It is then that life becomes moments of rich fulfilments. Krishnaji says that moments of rich fulfilments are the realities. It is only at the stage of absolute right knowledge that knowledge becomes free from any traces of memory. What Krishnaji calls by such terms as “perfection,” “fulfilment,” “reality” and “to be one with life” are what Shankaracharya calls *Brahmajñāna*, *Atmaikatvaviññāna* and *Pāramārthikatattva*.

Short of this knowledge of the Spirit by the Spirit itself as pure Wisdom, as pure Existence, as pure Bliss, free from attributes and free from relationships and dependences, everything is false, *Mithyā*, to use the terminology of Shankarāchārya. Every kind of doctrine, every kind of systematisation, every theory, relationships of teacher and disciple, of path and goal, everything is false, unreal. What is ordinarily called religion, namely rules of conduct consisting of prescriptions of what should be done and prohibitions of what should not be done, ceremonials, forms and sacred formulas, every one of these is an aspect of unreality, is led on by *Avidyā* or ignorance proceeding in front. Shankarāchārya says:

It is with ignorance leading the way that there proceed all our ordinary notions of things known and means of knowing them, and all scriptures with their purport in prescriptions and prohibitions for the purpose of procuring the final goal.

But Shankarāchārya is uncompromising in his position that none of them can lead to the final goal, to real fulfilment, to real perfection, to oneness, which is the only reality. Fulfilment is not a result. It is not a fruit of something done. It is an eternal reality and by no means can it be “brought into existence,” nor brought into relation in any manner or form with whatever should be done or should not be done. All our limited knowledge is wrong. All religious prescriptions and prohibitions are false. They can never “lead” to the goal. The goal is not something away from the present either in point of time or in point of space. It is an eternal reality everywhere and always, and there is no “leading” into it. Thus it cannot be related to any ceremonial, any act prescribed or prohibited. About this Brahman knowledge, Shankarāchārya says:

If this be something enjoined as a consequence of, as a fruit of what should be done, and if the goal be accepted as capable of being produced through what should be done, then Brahman turns out to be something other than eternal.

Shri Shankarāchārya is the only Teacher who has taken this uncompromising position of the absolute independence of perfection, its freedom from religion and all its rules and systematisations. All other schools of thought in Hinduism accept the value of religion and ceremonial in some form or other as a necessary preliminary to the attainment of the highest. They all accept the absolute reality of differences, of gradations. To them all, perfection is a fruit to be attained as a result of the observance of what is prescribed in religion. Shankaracharya went right against this fundamental principle of organised religion, and as such Shankarāchārya has been called a concealed heathen, a traitor to orthodox religion.

To Shankaracharya our normal experience of differences, gradations and relationships cannot be the absolute reality. It is a continuum of blind cognitions, *Andhaparamparā* as he calls it. In every form of our normal experience, there is an element of ignorance, whether it is the worldly experience or whether it is the religious experience of prescriptions and prohibitions. Perfection is not a stage in this series of blind notions. It is not to be produced by acts prescribed in religion. It has no relationships of any form. To a close student of Shankarāchārya, the talks of Krishnaji have a special appeal. Both were fighting against the same evil (“evil” only from an absolutist point of view and not in its ordinary sense), namely the dominance

of religion and ceremonial and the consequent subordination of individual action and individual efforts to external authority and influence. When Shankarāchārya says that all religions and all philosophies are false, what he meant was only that they are not ultimate truths. They have a kind of reality in so far as they are experienced. But their reality is confined to time and is not beyond time. As such, terms like “*Avidyā* (ignorance),” “*Adhyasa* (super-imposition of the true and the untrue on each other),” “*Anitya* (other than eternal),” “*Anrita* (false),” do not carry with them any unpleasant odour. There is no moral reflection on any individual person. Similarly, the terms which Krishnaji uses so freely, terms like “false,” “exploitation,” when read in harmony with his point of view, when looked at from the stand of absolute aloofness and high elevation from the petty squabbles of ordinary mortals, are seen to be free from any unpleasant odour which they may carry with them in ordinary language.

It will be preposterous for anyone to say that he has understood what Krishnaji is saying. The truth, of which he is talking, is not what could be understood from a talk. It is something which will shine in all its lustre when the shrouds that conceal its illuminations drop off. But a student of Shankaracharya finds, when listening to Krishnaji’s talk, that he is in familiar regions, in an ocean which though vast is properly charted. The talks of Krishnaji are reminiscent of much that Shankarāchārya has said. All the more absorbing is the interest which a student of Shankarāchārya finds in the talks of Krishnaji, when it is recognised that for his talks Krishnaji owes not even a hint from what Shankaracharya has said centuries ago. He has not read anything of the predecessor in the same domain. If a person has studied the three fundamental doctrines in the teaching of Shankarāchārya, namely, that in our normal experience, there is an admixture both of what is true and what is untrue, that even the Vedas are, from the absolutist point of view, false, and that Brahman has absolutely no sort of relationships with religion and ceremonial, such a study will enable him to gain a less difficult approach to what Krishnaji is now teaching, also to understand the terms that he uses in the nearest approximation to their true bearing.