

# VEDÂNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWÂMI ABHEDÂNANDA

ON

## Christian Science and Vedanta

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“The sensations of cold and heat, pleasure and pain are caused by the contact of transitory senses with unreal objects; they are, therefore, inconstant and ephemeral. O man! endure them and be not happy or unhappy on their account.

“He whom these disturb not, to whom pleasure and pain are the same, and who is self-controlled, is well fitted for freedom and immortality.

“The Seers of truth realize: That which is unreal (transitory) hath no existence, while Reality never ceases to exist.”—*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. II, 14, 15, 16.

## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

MOST startling are the similarities that exist between the fundamental principles of modern Christian Science and those of that ancient system of philosophy known in India as Vedanta.

The followers of Christian Science, unacquainted with the Vedas and the religious teachings of India, may in all sincerity claim originality for their founder, Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy; they may show their gratitude to her for numerous benefits received; they may shut their eyes to all other systems of philosophy and religion ancient or modern; their revealed text-book, “Science and Health,” may change its tone by additions and alterations in every chapter of every new edition; but Mrs. Eddy, herself, is fully aware that the truths which she claims to have discovered, were discovered and taught in India by the Hindu sages and

philosophers centuries before Jesus the Christ appeared on earth.

In the earliest edition of "Science and Health" Mrs. Eddy had the courage to quote certain passages from one of the most authentic books of the Vedanta philosophy, thus herself acknowledging the harmony that exists between the basic principles of the Vedanta philosophy and Christian Science. Unfortunately, for some reason, since the publication of the 34th edition, these passages have been omitted. In the 24th edition of "Science and Health," published in 1886, we find the 8th chapter devoted to Imposition and Demonstration. This chapter has been entirely suppressed in later editions. It begins with four quotations. The second is from Sir Edwin Arnold's translation of the Bhagavad Gita, entitled "Song Celestial." Those who have read the "Bhagavad Gita" know that it contains the essence of the Vedas, as well as all the truths expounded by the Vedanta philosophy. The passage runs thus:

**"Never the Spirit was born; the Spirit will cease to be never;  
Never was time it was not; End and Beginning are dreams!  
Birthless and Deathless and Changeless remaineth the Spirit  
forever;  
Death has not touched it at all, dead though the house of it  
seems!"**

Again, in the same chapter of the 24th edition Mrs. Eddy says: "The ancient Hindoo philosophers understood something of this principle when they said in the Celestial Song, according to an old prose translation: 'The wise neither grieve for the dead nor for



## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

3

the living. I myself never was not, nor thou, nor all the princes of the earth; nor shall we ever hereafter cease to be. As the soul in this mortal frame findeth infancy, youth, and old age; so in some future frame will it find the like. One who is confirmed in this belief is not disturbed by anything that may come to pass. The sensibility of the faculties giveth heat and cold, pleasure and pain; which come and go and are transient and inconstant. Bear them with patience, for the wise man whom these disturb not, and to whom pain and pleasure are the same, is formed for immortality.' ” (p. 259.) This is a quotation from one of the old translations of the “Bhagavad Gita” by Charles Wilkins, published in London in 1785 and in New York in 1867. In recent editions of “Science and Health” this has been omitted, perhaps to show that the founder of Christian Science did not draw the water of truth from any other fountain than the Christian Bible.

Now let us compare the leading propositions of Christian Science with those of the Vedanta philosophy. In the 193d edition of “Science and Health” (p. 70) these propositions are said to be four in number: First, God is all in all. Second, God is good, God is mind. Third, God, spirit, being all, nothing is matter. Fourth, Life, God, omnipotent Good, deny death, evil, sin, disease. Disease, sin, evil, death, deny God, omnipotent Good, life. Which of the denials in proposition fourth is true? Both cannot be true.

These four propositions form the four main pillars upon which rests the structure of Christian Science.

A critical student of philosophy, however, can reduce these four to two. First, accept God, who is spirit, mind, life, being, omnipotent good, and all in all. Second, deny matter and that which exists beside God. According to Christian Science, God, spirit, life, mind, being, omnipotent, infinite good, all these terms are synonymous and are applicable to the one real substance of the universe; and in the same manner, matter, sin, disease, ignorance, error, and illusion are also synonymous terms, which can be applied to that which exists as distinct and separate from the God of Christian Science. It has no existence, no reality. Therefore the whole phenomenal world with its innumerable appearances does not exist in reality. It is like a mirage, an illusion or dream of the mortal mind. But the mortal mind itself falls under the head of illusion, too; because we read on p. 8, 193d edition of "Science and Health": "Mortal mind implies something untrue, and therefore unreal, and, as the phrase is used in teaching Christian Science, it is meant to designate that which has no real existence." The world is an illusion that is seen by the illusion of the mortal mind; but the question arises, Whence comes this illusion? What causes it? Christian Science does not answer. It simply says, "Mind or God is not the author of matter and the creator of ideas is not the creator of illusions." ("Science and Health," 193d edition, p. 145.)

Thus, according to Christian Science, if God, or spirit, life, being, absolute, omnipotent good, be all in all and Truth, then the phenomenal universe, includ-



## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

5

ing matter and mortal mind, is nothing but an illusion; it does not exist in reality; it has no reality and no existence.

Now let us see what the Vedanta philosophers said on this point centuries before the birth of Christ. In this pre-Christian era a disciple went to a spiritual master and asked: "Sir, please tell me in a few words the fundamental principles of the Vedanta philosophy." The spiritual master, who was a seer of Truth, replied: "I will tell you in half a couplet the fundamental principles of the Vedanta philosophy that have been declared by millions of volumes. Brahman, or the absolute, infinite, and eternal Being, is Truth; the world is false or unreal, and the individual soul is no other than Brahman or the absolute Truth, which is absolute existence, intelligence, and bliss." This is the quintessence of Vedanta philosophy.

In Christian Science the word "God" is used to signify the absolute reality or unchangeable truth of the universe; so, in Vedanta philosophy, the Sanskrit word Brahman is used to designate that all-pervading substance, or absolute Being, which is the reality of the universe. This unchangeable reality of the universe, furthermore, forms the reality of all living creatures and all mortal things, everything that we can see, hear, or perceive with our senses. If Brahman, or the absolute Being whose nature is absolute existence, intelligence, and bliss, be the one reality and all in all, it must be one, because there cannot be many absolutes or infinities. Absolute must be one, and infinite must be one. As we find this idea in reading

“Science and Health,” so we find it also in the Vedanta philosophy. Granting, then, that the absolute reality is one, the question naturally presents itself: Why do we see so great a variety in the phenomenal universe? And what is the cause of this variety?

In answering this question, the Vedanta philosophy gives two theories. The first is the theory of illusion, and the second is the theory of evolution. The theory of illusion is very old; we find it formulated in the Vedas, and it was taught by some of the seers of the Vedic period. It was maintained and preached by Buddha, who lived 540 years before Christ, and by his followers; while later it was explained with great clearness by Sankarâcharya, the best exponent of the Vedanta philosophy, who lived in India in the sixth century after Christ. This theory of illusion is the most difficult of all theories for the ordinary mind to grasp. Even the subtlest logicians and the profoundest thinkers often fail to understand how this phenomenal world, which we perceive with our senses and which appears so real to us, can be unreal or illusory. If, however, Vedanta philosophy declares this phenomenal universe to be unreal and false, it does not deny its existence as does Christian Science. It does not say that mortal mind or matter is nothing; but, on the contrary, it is most careful to define the terms unreal and illusion. By these words Vedanta philosophy does not mean *negation*, but phenomenal or relative existence, or reality conditioned by time and space. It admits that this phenomenal world is



## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

7

unreal from the standpoint of the absolute or noumenon, but at the same time it says that it has as much (conditional) reality in it as anything presented to us by the senses can ever have.

Although Vedanta philosophy agrees with Christian Science in its fundamental principles, there is still a great difference between their respective modes of expressing the same truths. Christian Science, by denying the existence of matter and mortal mind, denies the existence of the phenomenal world and reduces it to nothingness. This reminds us of conclusions reached by some of the nihilistic philosophers of India and Europe. Hume denied the existence of mind and matter. He reduced the whole universe to a bundle of sensations, impressions, and ideas. Some of the Buddhist philosophers in India denied the existence of the universe in the same way. But this method creates great confusion in the minds of the people. For instance, I am standing before you and speaking, and you are listening; if we follow the teachings of Christian Science strictly, we shall have to deny that I am standing here and that you are sitting there. In other terms, the speaker is nothing, the hearer is nothing, the mortal mind is nothing; consequently, thoughts and ideas are nothing, the words expressed by the mortal mind are also nothing. Not only this, but the very act of denying is nothing, because the act of denying is the act of the mortal mind; it cannot be the act of an absolute or divine mind. "Where God is, no other thing can exist"; so there cannot be the denial of anything in God; the divine



mind cannot see anything outside of itself, and as mortal mind is nothing, therefore the denial itself is nothing.

This difficulty does not arise in Vedanta philosophy, because it does not deny the existence of matter, mind, and everything that is on the phenomenal plane. Although it tells us that the world is unreal, that matter is unreal, mind unreal; still it recognizes their existence, but adds that that existence cannot be separated from the absolute existence. If Brahman, or the absolute existence, be all in all, then everything that exists on the phenomenal plane is in reality Brahman, or the absolute Truth. The reality of the chair, the table, the earth, the sun, moon, and stars is the absolute existence, is divinity itself. The reality in you, in me, and in all living creatures is the same as the absolute reality of the universe; only, on account of names and forms, the one Reality appears to be many. As, for instance, the one substance, clay, appears through diverse names and forms in numberless varieties, such as pots, jars, bricks, etc., so the one absolute Reality, when clothed with varying names and forms, appears to be sun, moon, stars, animals, vegetables, etc. Matter and mind, according to Vedanta, are not two separate entities, but different expressions of the one eternal substance, which is called Brahman in Vedanta and God in Christian Science.

Instead of insistently denying the existence of matter, mortal mind, and objective phenomena, Vedanta tells us how to see through the multiplicity of names and forms the one unchangeable Being which stands

## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

## 9

as the background of all objects of material existence and gives reality to all. The names and forms have of course no absolute reality, but they have conditional reality; or, in other words, they exist in relation to our minds. The world is real, according to Vedanta, but at the same time it is not as it seems to be; it is not that which appears to us at the present moment. This is what is meant by "illusion" in Vedanta. For example, here is a chair; the substance of this chair is the absolute reality, because the absolute reality is all-pervading and one. It is in you, in me, in the table, and in everything, and that which gives reality to the chair is one with the absolute reality. But the chair appears as chair only so long as it is clothed with the name and form of chair. If we can mentally separate the name and form from the substance of the chair, that which will be left will be common wood; take away the name and form of wood, atoms and molecules will remain; take away the name and form of atoms and molecules, there will be left nothing but eternal energy, and that is inseparable from the absolute substance. In this way, if we can mentally separate the names and forms from the substance, all phenomenal objects can be reduced to one substance which is the absolute reality of the universe.

Thus, Vedanta, while giving the most logical reason for the variety of phenomena, does not deny the existence of anything. On the contrary, it tells us that the real existence or true substance of everything is Brahman or absolute reality, or God, as Christian Science calls it. The whole universe is like one infinite ocean



of reality, which is nameless and formless, and in that ocean, waves and bubbles rise spontaneously and take different names and forms. These waves and bubbles are the objects of the phenomenal universe. As in the ocean, waves and bubbles have no existence separate from or independent of the ocean itself, so the waves and bubbles known as the phenomenal objects of the universe have no existence separate from or independent of the ocean of Reality. We are like so many bubbles in the infinite ocean of reality; we owe our existence to that ocean, live there, and play for a while, then merge into it to reappear in some other form. Such is the conception of Vedanta concerning the relation of phenomena to the absolute noumenon, or the unchangeable Truth which underlies all phenomenal names and forms.

Christian Science, taking its stand on the Bible, tries to defend its position by wonderfully clever interpretations of scriptural passages, in which the meaning of each passage is stretched to its utmost limit. Common sense, however, prevents many from accepting such interpretations, as they depend neither upon logic nor upon reason, but upon the authority of an inspired founder. Vedanta philosophy explains the same truths without resting its evidence upon any book or upon the authority of any man or woman whether of antiquity or of our day. It has no founder, consequently it does not demand allegiance to any one or to any thing save Truth. Christian Science, again, by denying the phenomenal universe, places itself at variance with all science and all philosophy. It also

## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

{ 11

defies all modern scientific methods by restricting its field of investigation to that which is mentioned in the one copyrighted volume called "Science and Health"; whereas the Vedanta philosophy, admitting the existence and relative reality of the phenomenal universe of mind and matter, accepts all the truths that have been discovered by science or philosophy or by the Seers of Truth in all countries and in all ages. At the same time, it tells us that the realm of science and philosophy lies within the limits of time and space and that they cannot, in consequence, go beyond relative reality. Christian Science does not see any harmony between absolute Truth and the scientific truths discovered by so-called mortal mind; but Vedanta, on the contrary, sees perfect harmony underlying all the laws and phases of truth which human minds have discovered. Truth being one, whether it be discovered by science, philosophy, or religion, it is the same truth. It cannot be many; why should we deny its diverse aspects as long as we are on the phenomenal plane?

Christian Science, to go further, is notably uncharitable towards everything not sanctioned by its founder, while Vedanta philosophy declares that truth is universal and cannot be monopolized by any man or woman of any country. Christian Science rejects the doctrine of evolution and upholds the belief in special creation as described in the Book of Genesis, attempting to explain the account there given by the idealistic theory which was adopted by Bishop Berkeley and by a host of other idealists of ancient and modern times. Vedanta accepts the doctrine of evo-



lution and shows that of special creation to be absurd. It also courts free investigation in the realm of nature without imposing the condition that the results of all such investigations be in accord with the tenets of a specific book or of some one teacher; and it thus emancipates the human soul from bondage to any one set of scriptures or to personal authority.

In this age of agnosticism and materialism Christian Science has done an admirable work, in making people realize that this phenomenal world of ours is like a dreamland, and that all objects of sense are nothing more than objects seen in a dream. This is no small gain for Western minds; because the more we realize that this world is like a dream, the nearer we approach to absolute Truth. In this respect, what Christian Science is at present trying to do in this country has been done by Vedanta in India for centuries. Furthermore, Christian Science has rendered a great service to humanity by demonstrating the power of the mind over the body, the power of spirit over matter. Although this fact was in no way new to the spiritual teachers, sages, and best thinkers of every country, still in no other country and at no other time had there ever been so well organized a movement as that recently started by Mrs. Eddy under the name of Christian Science. Like Vedanta, it has brought health to many diseased bodies and rest to many diseased minds. Dazzled, however, by their wonderful success in healing, Christian Scientists lay exclusive claim to the method of healing given by Mrs.

Eddy, declaring it to be the only right method ; while all others, adopted by mental scientists, metaphysical healers, and other kindred sects, are wrong and unscientific. We must not, however, let these extravagant claims made by the over-enthusiastic followers of Mrs. Eddy, blind us to the fact that the power of healing is the property of every individual soul. Any one can develop the gift of healing and cure disease by the mind without becoming a Christian Scientist and without reading a page of "Science and Health."

There have been many remarkable healers in every country,—among the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Mahommadans, and those of other religious creeds. It is a great mistake to think that the power of healing comes from any outside source or from belief in this or that. It is developed by living a right life in accordance with the moral and spiritual laws of nature. Christian Science teaches that the power of healing was first shown to the world by Jesus the Christ and His disciples, and asserts that no one ever manifested that kind of healing power before He appeared upon earth ; but if we read the religious history of the world carefully, we find that long before the birth of Christ, the same healing power of the mind or spirit was practised by the followers of Buddha with marvellous success. Wherever Buddhist missionaries travelled, they healed the sick without using drugs. The yogis in India also use no drugs in curing disease, but rely entirely upon the spiritual power which they acquire through right living and the practice of yoga.

Christian Scientists, in laying such stress upon the



miraculous and exclusive power of healing manifested by Jesus, are evidently ignorant of the fact that similar Christlike healing powers were displayed by Esculapius, the ancient Greek, who was proclaimed the savior of mankind because of these very powers. He not only cured the sick of the most malignant diseases, but even raised the dead. Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, wrote in glowing terms of the gift of healing possessed by him. For many years after the death of Esculapius, furthermore, miracles continued to be wrought through the efficacy of faith in his name. Christlike healing powers, again, were shown and miracles performed by Apollonius of Tyana, who was a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth. The lives of Hindu sages, Buddhist monks, and of the yogis of India are filled with such descriptions of miraculous cures and even of the raising of the dead. Vedanta philosophy, being fully cognizant of these facts, cannot therefore admit with the Christian Scientist that Jesus was the first to exercise this power. On the contrary, it teaches that the power of healing is universal and cannot be confined within the boundaries of any one creed, sect, religion, or book.

Christian Science makes good health the standard of spirituality, a position which the most superficial observation disproves; since if good health be the standard of spirituality, then all those who enjoy perfect health should be exceptionally spiritual. The savages who live in close touch with nature, sleep under the trees, walk barefooted, and eat raw food should, because of their physical vigor, be the most

spiritual of all; yet we know that this is not the case. For this reason Vedanta does not make good health the standard of spirituality. Nor does it stop with the denial of disease, pain, and evil. It goes a step further and says, If you deny disease, pain, sorrow, and evil, why should you not also deny the existence of health and the pleasures of the body and mind? because, in this world of relativity, the one is just as much dream-like as the other. If disease be a dream, good health is likewise a dream. Why not? Good is good so long as it stands in relation to its opposite evil; otherwise it can have no existence. Some say that God is good; but that word good cannot be used in its absolute sense, because it creates confusion; that which is good demands something which is better and something best. If you say that God is good, the question naturally arises, who is better and who is best?

By denying evil its correlative is also denied; so with pain and pleasure, health and disease. If you deny ill health, you deny good health also. Therefore, logically speaking, Christian Science preaches, consciously or unconsciously, a dogma that is based on logical inconsistency. In Vedanta no such inconsistencies can be found, because it exhorts us to rise above both good and evil, pleasure and pain, sickness and health.

The curing of disease is a very good thing so long as we recognize disease, so long as we admit its existence and in the dream of ignorance seek good health, or try to avoid suffering and ill health; but the moment that we realize that our nature is above all rela-



tivity, above pleasure and pain, above conditions of mind and body, we cease to talk of disease or health. No disease, no pain, no sorrow or suffering, either physical or mental, can affect or touch the soul; neither a healthy body nor a healthy mind can enrich the perfect Being, which is divine, immortal, unchangeable, which is the Soul of our souls and which dwells in each individual. So why should we trouble ourselves first to deny disease and then to try to cure it?

Christian Science teaches a religion which rests entirely upon the Bible, which in turn is limited by the interpretations of Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy. These interpretations, furthermore, are often so obscure and occult that it requires an unusual mind to grasp their import. Few people of ordinary intelligence, even after hours of study, can understand clearly what the author means. At the same time Christian Science insists that only through an unquestioning acceptance of these interpretations can the Truth be reached. Those, on the other hand, who do not accept them, are cast relentlessly into the abyss of error. There is no hope for them, since they are completely in the wrong. By this attitude alone the religion of Christian Science lays itself open to the charge of dogmatism, sectarianism, and lack of charity towards all other faiths and religious systems; while Vedanta philosophy teaches a religion which is not based upon any book or its interpretation by any man or woman, but upon universal truth and upon the eternal laws that govern our souls and our lives. It teaches that religion which

## CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND VEDANTA.

17

underlies all special religions, and which has no particular name, no creed, no fixed form of worship, and no label of authority stamped upon it by any specific founder. It preaches the truth boldly, and at the same time accepts all the phases of truth discovered by scientists, philosophers, and seers of truth everywhere and in all ages, while enough room is left in the religion of Vedanta for the admission of any truths that may be discovered in the future. Thus Vedanta establishes the foundation of a universal religion, embracing the teachings of Jesus, of Buddha, Krishna, Confucius, Zoroaster, of Mohammed, and all other spiritual teachers of the past and of those who will come in the future; while it proclaims in a trumpet voice to the world:

“That which is eternal in the midst of non-eternal phenomena, which is the life of all living creatures, which is the infinite source of consciousness, is one. It is also the bestower of happiness to all. Eternal happiness comes to those alone who realize this absolute oneness; to them comes unbounded joy and peace, and to none else, to none else.”



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