

VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWĀMI ABHEDĀNANDA



THE WAY TO THE BLESSED LIFE

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"They attain to the Blessed Life who have ceased to be wicked, whose doubts are cut asunder, senses are subdued, and hearts are undisturbed by desire and passion; who love to do good to all creatures, who have realized the Truth, and whose inner self is molten into the essence of Divine Self."—*Bhagavad Gita*, v, 25, 26.

THE WAY TO THE BLESSED LIFE.

In the whole animal kingdom man alone is capable of solving the problem of life. Other animals live, but they cannot ask what life is, nor can they understand its purpose or the source from which it proceeds. Human beings alone are endowed with intelligence enough to ask such questions; they alone can understand the purpose and aim of life, can trace its source and know the various aspects through which the life principle manifests itself in this world of phenomena. From time immemorial this problem of life has been discussed over and over again, and various conclusions have been arrived at, by different philosophers and thinkers of all ages and all climes. Some say that life is a great blessing, that it is the source of unbounded joy and happiness, that it is blessedness itself; while others hold that life is not worth living because it is full of misery, sorrow and suffering, disease and pain, and its end is death. It is true that our earthly life is beset with misfortune, distress, pain, anxiety, and disease, as well as various other sufferings which arise

from the constant struggle for existence; yet none but superficial thinkers will maintain that life is not worth living, or that death is its goal.

When we understand the true meaning of life we know that life is opposed to death, as light is opposed to darkness. Life, in its most abstract sense, means being; it is the same as being, or existence, and death means non-being, or non-existence. Where life is, death cannot exist. If life be a reality, then what we call death must be unreal. That which lives or exists can never die or become non-existent. And that which does not live in any form whatever, can never become existent. Existence can never become non-existence, and non-existence can never become existence. This is the law of nature. Whatever exists will continue to exist; such being the law, whether we consider our earthly life is worth living or not, we cannot say that death is the goal of life. As life or being is deathless and indestructible, so it is birthless and beginningless. That which is subject to death is a compound thing and has a beginning, but that which does not die is simple and therefore has no birth and no destruction. If we look around in this world of phenomena we shall see that that which is birthless, is deathless also, and as life is opposed to death and has no beginning, life is beyond death and birth. Again, that which is birthless and deathless does not change, but that which changes is within the realm of birth and death. As life or being in its true sense is beyond that realm, it cannot change its nature, or decay. There is no sorrow, suffering, misery, decay, death, or change of any

kind in true life, therefore it is blessed. It is blessedness itself.

True life is that eternal, self-existent power which animates all things and is the source of all activity and of all living forms. That power manifests in the animal and vegetable kingdoms as well as in man. From the minutest protoplasm up to the highest man, wherever there is any sign of life, there is the expression of this all-pervading eternal power, which is unchangeable and one in its essence. Electricity is one universal, inscrutable force, but on account of the various ways in which it is made manifest through different electric machines, it appears in many forms,—as heat, as light, or as motion. We see this every day in the electric cars; the one current gives motion, light, and heat. So is it with the universal, mysterious life force; it is one, although appearing many when manifesting through the numberless forms of existence. We may therefore say that true life is one in essence, but its apparent expressions are numberless. Our earthly lives are so many expressions of the true or Real Life which is Blessedness, which is one and eternal. Life being real, its apparent expressions must be the expressions of Reality too. These expressions are what we call apparent life. They are like so many reflections of the True Being of the universe. These expressions or manifestations of that universal Life vary in different individuals because of the variety of conditions upon which those reflections depend; again the conditions being subject to change, the reflections or expressions

of True Life appear as changeable. The apparent life can shape itself in manifold ways according to the conditions of its environments, and evolves from the lower to the higher, and from the limited towards the unlimited. Our apparent or earthly life is nothing but a symbol of the eternal Life Principle, conditioned by time and space. True Life or Being, or Blessedness, is beyond time and space, and is not bound by conditions of any kind. It is not subject to the laws of phenomena. It is independent and perfect; while the apparent life is dependent upon the laws which govern the world of phenomena, and is conditioned by time and space. True Life or Real Being does not need any help from outside. It does not require anything from beyond itself. It is self-reliant, self-complete, self-sufficient and self-loving; while the apparent life, being an imperfect reflection of the True Life, depends upon the conditions of the environments, and represents imperfectly those higher qualities of self-reliance, self-completeness, self-sufficiency, self-love and independence which make True Life a blessed and a perfect whole. When the apparent life separates itself from the True Being and isolates itself from the Life of the universe, the partial reflections of these higher qualities in the apparent life are then known as "selfishness."

If we examine the relation of this apparent life to the Real Life we understand that it is nothing but a part of that universal life. As a part is related to the whole, and cannot live independent of the whole; as a ray of light or a reflection is related to the sun and

cannot exist independent of the sun, so the apparent life is related to that True Being which is called Blessedness, and cannot exist independently. Like True Life, this apparent life possesses self-love, but, unlike the self-love which is in the True Life, is a love of the particular and not of the whole. True Life or Being loves itself or the whole, and as that whole is God, its love is divine. It lives in God and loves God. The self-love in the apparent life is love of a part alone, as separated from other parts, as isolated from the whole or God; therefore it is selfishness. The apparent self-love is nothing but an attachment to the transitory conditions through which the Life Eternal expresses itself on the physical plane. True life loves nothing but one unchangeable Reality, while the apparent life loves the changeable personality which is identified with the non-eternal form. On account of this attachment to constantly changing conditions, this apparent life or the individual ego, is subject to the changes of birth and death, is a slave to its conditions, and is sorrowful, miserable, restless, unhappy, and consequently unblessed. The apparent life or the ego appears as unblessed, because the conditions through which the True Universal Life manifests, are limited and imperfect.

Unblessedness consists in the idea of the separateness of the part from the whole, and in the bondages of other imperfections arising from this mistaken notion of individual isolation. To be united to the whole, to be free from the bondages of these imperfections, and to be perfect,—is Blessedness. Each individual

germ of life, which we have already called the apparent life, possesses an innate tendency towards the attainment of this Blessedness, and to freedom from the conditions of unblestness. Our earthly life consists in a continuous fight with the environments which have kept us away from the central Truth, or the Blessed life. We are constantly struggling to expand the sphere of self-love, by breaking down the walls of limitations which constrain the apparent life to a narrow selfishness, and thus to be united with the True Life of perfection. The evolutionists do not know the cause of variation or natural selection. They cannot say what determines life and makes it manifest differently at every step of evolution. But Vedanta philosophy says that the cause of this variation is that innate tendency in a germ of life to be united to the whole and to reach perfection. The aim of each apparent life, or ego, is to reach that state of Blessedness which is the goal of evolution. As we approach nearer and nearer perfection by passing through the various stages of physical, mental and intellectual evolution, the ways of our living become better, and by experience we learn that the best way of true living is not by obeying the dictates of the apparent life or lower self, but by following the blessed will of the universal Being or True Life. We start at first with a little, weak, and dim ray of *will* which gradually becomes wider and stronger and brighter as we ascend through the different grades of evolution. Experience teaches us the relation which exists between the individual will and the Will that governs the universe. When we

realize the true relation of the individual will to the Universal Will, then we find that the life or will which we have so long called ours is not ours, but is simply a part and parcel of that one Life, or one Will, which moves the universe. Our bodies are like so many little instruments through which the Universal Life Principle is expressing itself on the plane of phenomena. The mind, will and life of one individual are not entirely separate from those of another, but they are connected with all mind, all will, and all life by an invisible current of Reality which is one and indivisible. As long as we do not realize this, but, on the contrary, think of ourselves as separate from one another, and as not related to the universe, so long shall we follow the dictates of our limited and imperfect will and think that by so doing we shall gain the highest benefit. The result is that we make mistakes at every step, and these mistakes cause us to feel dissatisfied, unhappy and sorrowful. We do not gain what we wanted, nor do we reach the goal for which we started.

This idea of separateness, this mistaken notion makes the apparent life, or ego, think that it is free and independent while in fact it is bound hand and foot like a slave. The moment we realize our relation to the whole we are no longer bound by any conditions of selfishness, but we are free. At present we are living as slaves without being conscious of our slavery. By mistake we are imagining that we are free, but if we examine our life most minutely, we shall find that we are not free. If we look around us it would be almost impossible to find a man or a woman whom

we could call truly free. We ought to be ashamed of this state of things, but we are not, because we do not know that we are in bondage. Very few, indeed, realize that this life is a life of slavery and drudgery, and that the ego is enchained by the conditions of the phenomenal world. Amongst those who realize this, a few struggle for emancipation and a very few of these become really free. But the majority delude themselves by thinking that they are free, love the present conditions of their unblessed life, and do not seek a better state. There have been cases where a man who, born and brought up as a slave and living in the society of slaves, has preferred to remain a slave rather than become a free citizen. Think of some of the negroes of South Carolina, who actually prefer slavery to freedom. If any one gets some idea of freedom and tries to get out of slavery, his fellow slaves will think that he is going the wrong way and will try to force him to continue the old life, and strive by all means to hinder his becoming a free citizen. But a courageous man who loves freedom, and struggles day and night for emancipation, will not be dominated by the influence of others. He will seek the company of those who are also striving to be free, and of those who have wiped off the mark of slavery from their foreheads, to learn from them the means of attaining freedom.

The community in which we are now living is exactly like that of slaves. Being deluded by our vanity and self-conceit we do not realize our present condition, and never struggle for freedom. On the con-

trary, we find fault with those who do, we criticise them, call them crazy or foolish, and essay to put them behind the doors of the lunatic asylums,—such is our mental condition. Are we not slaves to our desires, our passions, our senses, to the body and all the changes that are constantly going on in the machinery of human organism? Are we not slaves of anger, hatred, jealousy, fear and sense enjoyments? Are we not slaves of greed, of wealth and possessions? Are we not slaves to ordinary desires for political power, for name and fame? Are we not constantly obeying the commands of these masters who are ruling within us? Where is our freedom? We are slaves of desires, passions, comfort, luxury, ambition, pride, beauty, anger, hatred and sense pleasures, but we do not feel in bondage, we are not conscious of the fetters. How elated and flattered we feel when any person utters sweet and kind words; how insulted, wounded, and hurt when we hear harsh and unkind words; and how we long for revenge when we are injured. Can there be any condition worse than this? Are we born to follow this course and obey these pitiless masters all our lives? We rarely ask such questions. On the other hand, we say this life is full of happiness and pleasure. While we have a longing for pleasure, we suffer and are unhappy. We are sleeping the sleep of ignorance after drinking, as it were, the cup of the fearfully intoxicating liquor of self-delusion. All humanity is madly pursuing the phantoms of hope which change their colors as one approaches them, or suddenly vanish to reappear at

a distance with fresh brightness, like will-o'-the-wisps, forcing the pursuer to chase them again. The vain pursuit of these phantoms of hope leads humanity into unbearable suffering, misery, and disappointment. We have made ourselves slaves of these deluding phantoms; and this is the way in which we are living. Each individual loves something, strives after something, but knows not what it is, or how to get it. Do you know what we are striving after? We are striving after happiness, but we do not know the conditions through which that happiness comes. It will never come under the conditions in which we are now living. Happiness does not come to a slave. He may delude himself for the time being and may think that he is happy, but when he comes to his senses and asks, am I happy now?—he finds that after all it is not happiness, it is delusion. Happiness does not exist in slavery, but in freedom. He who is free is alone truly happy. That happiness which comes through perfect freedom is eternal. If we want that unbounded and eternal happiness we shall have to become free by breaking down the chain of slavery. We should remember that if we were really free we would have been happy, and we should not need to seek happiness, because freedom is the condition of happiness. Again, before seeking freedom, we must realize the unblessed state of our earthly life, we must become conscious of the fact that the apparent life is a slave life.

The moment we come to know that we are living like slaves, that very moment we begin to feel the effects of slavery in our life and we seek the com-

pany of those that are free and blessed. We then struggle for emancipation. Whatever we want sufficiently we shall surely obtain. Who is responsible for our present slavery? We are slaves because we have bound ourselves hand and foot by our own desires; if we want to conquer them we can do so. We must not blame another person, or God, or Satan, for our slavery. We should blame only ourselves. If we seek freedom and happiness, let us struggle hard enough for them and we shall surely attain to them. This freedom is the highest ideal of all philosophy and religion. What did Jesus say? He said—"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." What is that truth, and what kind of freedom did He mean? We read the Bible, but we do not understand the true meaning of these words. Our eyes are covered with ignorance, therefore we do not see things as they are. Mere reading will not bring knowledge of truth and freedom. That knowledge will come when we really desire it and strive after it.

In the Vedanta philosophy this freedom is called *Mukti*, or *Moksha*. It means emancipation from the bondage of selfishness and all other imperfections. The Vedanta philosophy does not speculate, nor theorize, nor give any artificial scheme of salvation. It describes the conditions of our present life and shows the way to freedom. It does not ask any one to accept anything because it is written in this or that book, but it tells him to find the cause of his slavery and remove it. When the cause is removed, the effect is also gone. Proper diagnosis is absolutely neces-

sary for the successful cure of a disease. Slavery is the result of a diseased mind and the cause of that disease is ignorance, or the non-realization of our true life, in which there can be no suffering and no misery. In that true life eternal happiness reigns supreme. Where shall we find that True Life? Shall we have to go into a cave, or a forest, or a desert to find it? No. It is dwelling within the cave of each individual heart and we must search within. Our Real Life is the background of our apparent ego. It is called by many names. Some call it God, the Father in Heaven, the Blessed Life; while others call it the Soul of our souls, the Atman. The difference is only in name. The dualists call that Truth God, because they look at it from without; but those who look at that Truth from within, call it the Atman, or the Self, the true Spirit, or the divine nature of man. According to Vedanta, this true Life is one, although its expressions are many. When it is looked at through the conditions of time, space, and causation, it appears as the sun, moon, and stars, and all phenomenal forms. They are nothing but so many expressions, or appearances of that one Being or True Life. They exist as such in relation to our mind, and the True Life is behind mind. True Life is unchangeable, but mind is subject to change. Some mistakenly think that mind is all in all, but there is something within us much more subtle, much more important than what we call mind. This something is expressing itself through the changeable medium of mind, the functions of which, as every one knows, are constantly changing. Our intellect

grows, our understanding, too, is subject to growth; but does life grow? No. Life is always life, there is no growth in it, from less life it cannot grow into life; but the conditions through which the life force manifests, change and grow. We generally mistake the growth of the body for the growth of life. The body grows because it is subject to growth, but life itself is unchanging, free, and divine. It may be asked, if our true Life or divine nature is ever within us, is it not self-contradictory to say that we are living as slaves? If it be true that we are living as slaves, must we not admit that our true Life or divine nature is a slave too? This question was asked by the seekers after truth in ancient times. The sages of India knew that the true nature of man is free, divine, and perfect, and they answered this question by saying: "It is the mind which is the cause of the slavery and bondage, and of the freedom of the apparent man, or ego." Mind alone makes one act as a slave, and it is also mind which leads one to perfect freedom. When the mind is imperfect and attached to the conditions of phenomenal existence, it keeps the soul in bondage; but when that same mind has been purified, when it has been freed from all delusions, it learns to go below the surface of things and begins to discriminate the eternal from the non-eternal, the real from the unreal, True Life from death, Blessedness from unblessedness, and thus becomes the means of attaining freedom. It makes us realize what is behind mind, and brings the ego back to the centre of Truth from which it proceeded.

As long as our mind is imperfect we are far away from the central truth of Blessedness. The tendency, however, in each ego is to go back to the centre. Most of the modern thinkers say that life is a struggle with environment. But they do not tell us the object of this struggle. Is it without purpose? No. We are struggling constantly with environment to get back to the centre from which we started, and to break down the walls of selfishness. This struggle will end when the mind is purified. After passing through the various stages of evolution, each ego is bound to attain to freedom. We may not struggle for it now, but sooner or later, according to the experience which we have gathered, the struggle for freedom and perfection must begin for us. We have come into this world to gain experience. By experience is meant the manifestation of latent powers, and the knowledge of the results which proceed from it. A child is born with an undeveloped mind, its wisdom is also undeveloped; but do you think that as it grows older it gathers experience and knowledge entirely from without? No. The germ of all knowledge is already within. If the germ contained no intelligence, it would be impossible for a child to learn anything. We cannot learn if we do not have a tendency to learn. We know that knowledge is nothing but the real property of our own souls. External objects only give the suggestions which bring out that which is hidden within each soul. In trying to manifest the latent powers each soul passes through the various stages of evolution, and after gathering experience in all, reaches perfection.

Those who understand the process of evolution know how painful and tiresome it is to go through many incarnations. Of course, those who think this life is the first and last chance for reaching perfection, have some kind of consolation in the hope of going to heaven, but if they happen to fail in this, their condition is miserable for all eternity. Are not such ideas childish and unscientific? Those who have gone a little deeper, find that these are mistaken notions. The soul existed before the birth of the body and will continue to exist after the death of the body. What we are to-day is but the result of our past, and our future will be the resultant of what we are now. Each apparent life is one of the links in the chain of the evolution of each individual soul. We may remain as visible or invisible, we may go to a higher or to a lower plane, according to the results of our desires; but each of these states is temporary and comparatively brief.

This process of evolution will continue without cessation until it brings us to that state where we become free from imperfections, sorrows, miseries, etc. This is a long, slow process, therefore Vedanta asks, if perfection be the goal of life, why should we wait so long? It says, let us attain more speedily to that goal, let us live the life of blessedness, and be happy from this day; from this moment let us live as masters and not as slaves. Many people think that blessedness, the life of perfection, will come after death, in the grave; but they are mistaken, because after death the life of blessedness or perfection comes only to those who have attained it in this life. Those who have not attained it

here on earth, will not attain it in the grave. We cannot win this state by good works, nor by a belief in a creed or dogma. Virtuous deeds do not produce it as their result. The state of blessedness unfolds itself in our souls when we cease to be wretched, and do not mistake the unreal for the real. Virtue and ethical deeds help the soul by purifying the mind from all selfishness and other imperfections, and by removing the obstacles that obstruct the manifestations of the divine powers. Thus, by doing good works, we prepare the mental field and bring about those favorable conditions under which alone the seed of the divine nature within, can attain to full and perfect expression. When the mind becomes pure it begins to discriminate the real from the unreal, the eternal from the non-eternal, the true Life from the apparent; then it begins to feel the necessity for freedom, and enters consciously upon the struggle to attain it.

Two things are requisite for the attainment of the Blessed Life. First, we should understand the nature of the True Life and realize the difference between the true and the apparent life, and their mutual relation. Secondly, we should struggle for freedom by withdrawing our minds from transitory things and fixing them on that which is eternal; or in other words, we should be unattached to the non-eternal, and love that which is eternal, thus causing our wretchedness to cease. Through love, and love alone, can the apparent life be united with the True Life. Our life is determined by the things we love. If you tell me the thing you love, if you show me the thing you

love, you show me your life; because we live in what we love. If we love the highest, we live on the highest plane; if we love the mere physical form, we are on the material plane. Try to find out which thing you love most, and then you will see where you are living. Let us try to love the highest. If we love the highest we have come nearer and closer to that eternal Truth which is the centre of the universe. The Blessed Life will be ours through love. We cannot attain to that state of blessedness until we realize the unity of life, because blessedness consists not in separateness, but in oneness. The Reality of the universe is One. Truth is always One. It cannot be many, although its expression may be multiform. If we understand the unity of existence, then we have attained the state of divine Life.

Again, love means the expression of oneness. We are one with whatever we really love. Therefore, through love we will reach that unity, or Blessedness. Before we can love the highest, we must know it. Love of a thing is impossible without the knowledge of the nature of the thing. Therefore, knowledge of True Life is the first thing necessary for the attainment of Blessedness. When the apparent life, or ego, knows its real nature, it begins to love that which is unchangeable and one. What then becomes of the lower selfish life? It disappears when True Life dawns, and that moment we become free from death, disease, sorrow, suffering and pain, and reach Blessedness. Then we are far beyond the reach of trouble and misery, just as the sun is always beyond the clouds.

The clouds may hide the sun but can never touch it. The soul of that man who has realized Blessedness cannot be touched by the imperfections which proceed from selfishness. Self-love then changes into divine love, and he becomes conscious of the greatness and majesty of his true nature. Then he knows that all the powers of the universe have proceeded from the infinite source of powers which lies within each individual soul.

The soul of the apparent man then rests in unwavering repose in that One Eternal Being, or the state of Blessedness, and his body and mind work incessantly for work's sake, for helping others. When he turns his love from the many to the eternal One, he reaches the Blessed Life. The life of such a man may be called a personification of all the blessed qualities that exist on that highest plane. When the fountain of blessedness is once opened, all the blessed qualities flow through him eternally. Such a soul, such a pure spirit, is the embodiment of all the best teachings which the Scriptures of the world contain. He is the personification of the Sermon on the Mount. That blessed state was described by Jesus the Christ. He understood it and expressed it at every moment of His earthly life. He loved God; He lived in God, and through God. He manifested divinity. Each individual soul must eventually do the same. Jesus the Christ was not an exception, as is popularly understood. There cannot be any exception to the laws which govern the universe. Every so-called exception is a law. If Jesus attained to blessedness, we also can

attain; each individual soul will attain to that state of blessedness. If we cannot, then Jesus did not attain it. Such being the law, let us realize it in this life. Then all the actions of our life will be blessed, like those of Christ.

This blessed life is described in the Upanishads: "The realization of the Atman, or the eternal Truth, produces a revolution within us. At that time all the knots of desires for transitory things are torn asunder, all doubts cease forever, all questions are solved; and the soul becomes free, emancipated and perfect." The way to such a blessed life is also described: "That realization will come through constant hearing, constant thinking, and proper meditation." First of all, hear constantly and repeatedly that your true life is divine, immortal and perfect. Constant hearing will bring before your mental eye this ideal, and then you will begin to feel it. Secondly, think of your present conditions and compare them with your divine nature. See where you are, how far you are below those highest ideals. Let each of your nerves and brain cells pulsate with the idea that your true nature is divine and free. Then you will get the result of thinking. Thirdly, concentrate your mind on that Divine Being, on your True Nature, on the True Life, whose reflection the apparent life is; meditate on the central truth of oneness and unite the apparent ego with that perfect Life, perfect nature from which proceed all blessedness, holiness, happiness and peace. Through this concentration and meditation the Blessed Life is attained.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AFTER THE LECTURE.

How do you define happiness ?

Happiness is the reflection of our Blissful or Divine Nature on the mind undisturbed by desires, passions, or anxieties. Happiness comes in freedom, never in slavery.

What do you mean by freedom ?

True freedom means the emancipation of the soul from the bondages of ignorance, delusion, selfishness, and other imperfections.

Did you say that the child's mind is like a blank sheet of paper ?

No. It is an exploded theory started by Locke, that the mind of a new-born child is essentially a *tabula rasa*. Vedanta philosophy says that each child is born with certain tendencies and capacities which are the results of the child's experience during its past incarnation.

Did the soul of the child exist before its birth ?

Yes.

When was the soul created then ?

The soul was never created by anybody. It has no beginning. It exists from eternity to eternity.

Do you think each one will attain to blessedness ?

Yes. Each individual is bound to reach the Blessed life sooner or later.

Does not Vedanta teach the doctrine of eternal punishment ?

No. Vedanta teaches that God never punishes the wicked nor rewards the virtuous. Punishment and reward are but temporary reactions of our own actions.

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