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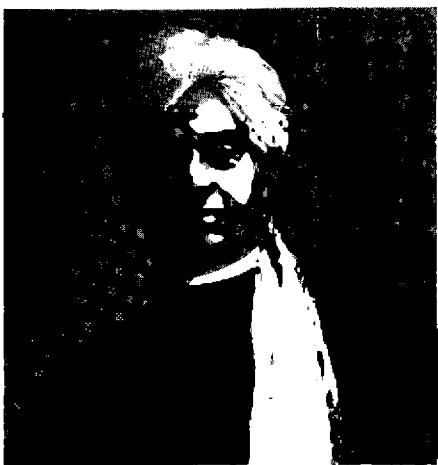
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VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE BY

SWĀMI ABHEDĀNANDA

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The Motherhood of God

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"I am the Father and Mother of the universe."—*Bhagavad Gita*, ix, 17.

"Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its Mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than any one else."—*Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna*, by F. Max Müller, p. 118.

THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD.*

The worship of God as the Mother of the universe, as our Divine Mother, is unknown to the people of the West.† Since the introduction of Christianity into Europe, the conception of God as the Creator and Father of the universe, has been preached by the theologians and priests of Christendom. Jesus, the founder of Christianity, worshipped God as His Father, and prayed to Him as the Father of the universe; consequently, those who follow Jesus and His teachings worship God through this relation, established by their Master. The relation between father and son is much higher than that of the creator and his creatures, or the master and his servant. The more we advance in spirituality and the nearer we approach God, the closer becomes our relation to Him. The worship of God is impossible without having some kind of relation between the worshipper and the object of worship.

* Lecture delivered in Tuxedo Hall New York, November 12, 1899, under title of "God, our Eternal Mother."

† In America Theodore Parker was the first who spoke of God as our Mother.

In the Hebrew religion God (Jehovah) was conceived of as the creator, ruler and governor of the universe. He was like a most powerful and despotic monarch. All creatures were related to Jehovah as subjects to their ruler. As a ruler punishes his disobedient subjects, so Jehovah punished those who disobeyed Him or His laws. The duty of a subject was almost the same as that of a slave to his master. As a slave serves his master through fear of punishment, so the Hebrews served Jehovah. The transition from such a relation to that of father and son was indeed a great step. It was no longer an external relation to power and strength, but became a kind of kinship, of internal or blood relation, such as exists between an earthly father and his son. There is a tie of love which binds a son to his father, and such a tie brings the individual soul much nearer to the Creator of the universe. As the earthly father of an individual is ordinarily considered to be his creator, because of his begetting him and bringing him into existence out of nothing, so, when the undeveloped human mind began to think of the creation of the universe, it imagined that the Creator was one who begot the universe and produced it out of nothing. Consequently the Creator became the Father of the universe.

All our conceptions of God begin with anthropomorphism, that is, with giving God human attributes in a greatly magnified degree, and end in de-anthropomorphism, that is, with making Him free from all human attributes. At the first stage of our conception

of God He appears to us as an extra-cosmic Being, as the Creator of the universe, who is separate from the universe and dwells outside of it, just as a carpenter is separate from the chair or table which he makes, or as the father is separate from the son whom he creates. The Hebrew conception of Jehovah was purely anthropomorphic. He was an extra-cosmic Being. He dwelt in a heaven outside of the universe and possessed all human attributes. He created the universe out of nothing, fashioned it and became its ruler. The same Jehovah, when considered as the Father of the universe by Jesus and His followers, did not lose His extra-cosmic nature. Even to-day the majority of Christians do not go beyond this idea of an extra-cosmic God. They worship the same extra-cosmic Jehovah as the Creator of the universe, as their father. Jehovah is always masculine. He is never described as feminine.

According to the Hebrews the masculine element of nature possessed all activity, strength and power; the male principle was recognized as the generator, and the female principle of nature was thought to be lower, insignificant, powerless and passive. The female principle of nature was the producer and bearer of what the male principle created; consequently everything that represented the female principle was considered as unimportant. This explains why womanhood was estimated so low by the writers of the Old and New Testaments, especially by the great apostle to the Gentiles. Even the very appearance and existence of woman on earth depended upon

a man's rib, according to Genesis. Although the Creator was represented by the Hebrews as masculine and all-powerful, when they explained the genesis of the world they could not deny the presence of the feminine element which helped the Creator in bringing life into existence. In the Mosaic account of Genesis we read "And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," (Gen. I. 2), which literally means that the Creator impregnated the waters or the female element of nature. And, as God, that is, the male element, was extra-cosmic, outside of nature, and possessed all activity and power, He became the object of worship; and the female element or nature was entirely ignored. Every Christian admits the existence of nature, the female principle; but she has never been worshipped or adored. The idea of Father grew stronger and stronger and the mother nature was left aside as passive and powerless, and was ultimately ignored. As long as the conception of God remains as extra-cosmic, separate from nature, which is passive, so long will He appear as Father alone. The more we comprehend God as immanent and resident in nature, the more clearly we understand that God is our Mother as well as our Father. When we see that nature or the feminine principle is inseparable from the Being or the masculine element, when we realize that nature is not passive and powerless but the Divine Energy, then we understand that God is one stupendous Whole, in whom exist both the masculine and feminine principles. Then we no

longer separate nature from God, but we recognize nature as a part of the manifested Divine Energy.

The tendency of modern science is towards this end. The doctrine of evolution, correlation of forces, persistence of energy, all these clearly prove that the phenomena of the whole universe and the various forces of the external and internal world are but the expressions of one eternal energy. The theory of evolution explains only the mode in which that eternal energy produces this phenomenal universe. Science has disproved the old theory of creation out of nothing through the fiat of an extra-cosmic God, and has shown that something can never come out of nothing. Science teaches that the universe existed in a potential state in that energy, and gradually through the process of evolution the whole potentiality has become kinetic or actual. That eternal energy is not an unintelligent energy, but is intelligent. Wherever we cast our eyes either in the external or internal world, we find the expression, not of a fortuitous or accidental combination of matter and mechanical forces, but of regular laws guided by definite purpose. This universe is not a chaos but a cosmos, one harmonious whole. It is not an aimless chain of changes which we call evolution, but there is an orderly hidden purpose at every step of evolution. Therefore, that energy is intelligent. We may call this self-existing, intelligent, eternal cosmic energy the Mother of the universe. She is the source of infinite forces and infinite phenomena. This eternal

energy is called in Sanskrit, *Prakriti*, Latin *procreatrix*, the creative power of the universe.

“ *Tvam parā Prakritih śakshatī Brahmanah*
paramātmanah,
Tvatto jdtam jagat sarvām tvam jagat janantī Shive.”

“Thou art the *Parā Prakriti* or the divine energy of the Supreme Being. Of Thee is born everything of the universe, therefore Thou art the Mother of the universe.” As all the forces of nature are but the manifestations of this Divine Energy, She is called all-powerful. Wherever there is the expression of any force or power in the universe, there is the manifestation of the eternal *Prakriti* or the Divine Mother. It is more appropriate to call that Energy mother than father, because like a mother, that Energy holds within her the germ of the phenomenal universe before evolution, develops and sustains it, projects it on space and preserves it when it is born. She is the Mother of the Trinity, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. She is the source of all activity. She is the *Sakti*, force in action. A creator, when deprived of his creative power, is no longer the creator. As the creative power is one of the expressions of that eternal Energy, so the Creator or *Brahmā* is looked upon by the Hindus as the child of the universal Divine Mother; so, is the Preserver and the Destroyer. The Hindus have understood this Eternal Energy as the Mother of the universe and have worshipped Her from prehistoric times, the Vedic period. Here you must remember that this Divine Energy is not the same as the powerless and passive nature which was rejected

and ignored by the Hebrews and the Christians. You must not mistake this worship of the Divine Mother for Nature-worship. In the Rig Veda, the most ancient of the Hindu Scriptures, we read: "The Mother Divine says 'I am the Queen of the universe, the giver of all wealth and fruits of works. I am intelligent and omniscient. Although I am one, by My powers I appear as manifold. I cause war for protecting men, I kill the enemy and bring peace on earth. I stretch out heaven and earth. I have produced the Father. As the wind blows by itself, so I produce all phenomena by My own will. I am independent and responsible to none. I am beyond the sky, beyond this earth. My glory is the phenomenal universe; such am I by My power.'"* Thus the Divine Mother is described as all in all. We live and move and have our existence in that Divine Mother. Who can live for a moment if that Eternal Energy ceases to manifest? All our mental and physical activity depends on Her. She is doing whatever She chooses to do. She is independent. She obeys none. She is the producer of every event that occurs in the universe. She makes one appear good, spiritual and divine, while it is She who makes another appear as wicked and sinful. It is through Her power we perform virtuous deeds or commit sinful acts. But She is beyond good and evil, beyond virtue and vice. Her forces are neither good nor evil, but they appear so to us when we look at them from dif-

*Rig Veda, x, *hymn*, 125.

ferent standpoints and compare them with one another.

When that all-pervading Divine Energy manifests, it expresses itself in two sets of opposite forces. The one set has the tendency towards God and is called *Vidya* in Sanskrit. The other tends towards worldliness and is called *Avidya*. The one leads to freedom and happiness, and the other to bondage and suffering. The one is knowledge, the other is ignorance. The one is light, the other is darkness. Each individual soul is the center where these opposite forces are constantly working and fighting with one another. When *Vidya*, or the powers which lead Godward, predominate, we advance towards God and become religious, spiritual and unselfish; but when its opposite, the *Avidya* power, prevails, we become worldly, selfish and wicked. When the former is predominant the latter is overcome, and *vice versa*. These powers exist in each individual, though they vary in the degree of their strength in each. The man or woman, in whom the former, that is, the Godward-leading-powers prevail, is called devotional, prayerful, righteous, pure in heart, unselfish. These qualities are but expressions of *Vidya* powers within us. Such higher powers are latent in all, even in those who do not show such qualities. All persons can rouse those latent powers by practicing devotion, prayer, righteousness, purity, unselfishness. The easiest way to attain these powers is by the worship of the *Vidya Sakti*, or that aspect of the Divine Mother or Divine Energy which represents all the powers that lead to

spiritual perfection. By worship or devotion we mean constant remembrance of that aspect. If we constantly think of the Source of all spirituality and of all the higher powers which make one spiritual, surely, those powers will be aroused in us, and we shall become spiritual, righteous and unselfish. Therefore the Hindus worship this *Vidya Sakti*. When they worship that aspect, they do not deny, or ignore the opposite aspect which leads to worldliness, but they make it subordinate to the higher *Vidya* aspect. Sometimes they think of these opposite forces separately, personify them and make them the female attendants of the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother has many attendants. All the evil forces of nature are Her attendants. She stands in the center of the universe radiant in Her own glory, like the sun when surrounded on all sides by thick dark clouds.

Wherever there is any expression of extraordinary righteousness and spirituality, there is special manifestation of the Divine Mother. There is Her incarnation. The Divine Mother incarnates sometimes in the form of a man, and sometimes in the form of a woman, to establish order and righteousness. All men and women are Her children. But there is something more in woman. As woman represents motherhood on earth, so all women, whether married or unmarried, are representatives of that Almighty Divine Mother of the universe. It is for this reason women are so highly revered and honored by the Hindus. There is no country in the world except India where God the Supreme Being is worshipped from

time immemorial as the Divine Mother of the universe. India is the only country where the earthly mother is looked upon as the living Deity, and where a man learns in his childhood "One mother is greater than a thousand fathers." You have heard many stories regarding the condition of women in India. Most of these are grossly exaggerated, some are utterly false and some are partially true. The familiar American story of Hindu mothers throwing their babes into the Ganges to become food for crocodiles, is unknown among the Hindus. In the first place, crocodiles cannot live in a strong current like that of the Ganges. I have traveled the length of this mighty river from its mouth to its source, some fifteen hundred miles, but never saw any such acts. These statements were heard by me for the first time after coming to America, though tales and pictures to this effect have been quite common in this country in books for the young. There is not time to go into a discussion of those points to-day, but so far I can assure you, that you will not find any other country "Where every living mother"—as Sir Monier Monier Williams says—"is venerated as a kind of deity by her children, where every village or city has its special guardian mother, called (in Sanskrit) *Mata*."* It is extremely difficult for a Western mind to grasp exactly what the Hindus mean when they say that every woman is a representative of the Divine Mother. A very simple illustration will give you an idea of the respect the Hindus have for women. In Sanskrit

* "Hinduism and Brahmanism," p. 222.

When two names are used together, the rule of grammar is that the more honorable should stand first. In Sanskrit we say women and men, not men and women; instead of father and mother, we say mother and father; instead of husband and wife, wife and husband, because a woman is always more honorable than a man. In India wives do not adopt their husbands' names, they do not merge their individuality into that of their husbands as women do in the West, but they keep their own name separate. If a wife's name be Râdhâ, and her husband's name be Krishna, and if we say them together, we would say Râdhâ-Krishna and never Krishna-Râdhâ. The wife's name must be said first. So we say Sitâ-Râma; Sitâ is the wife and Râma is the husband. Again, when God incarnates in a man form, as in Krishna or Râma, the wife of such an incarnation will be worshipped as the incarnation of the Mother. The wife will be worshipped first and then the husband. A Western mind does not easily appreciate the wonderful reverence for womanhood which the Hindus have.

The Divine Mother is the personal God, the same as Iswara in Sanskrit; and Brahman or the Absolute Substance or the Universal Spirit is the impersonal Being. Brahman is formless, nameless and without any attributes. It is the ocean of absolute intelligence, existence and bliss. It has no activity. It is the Godhead of Fichte, the Substantia of Spinoza. It transcends all phenomena. Before phenomenal manifestation Divine Energy rested on the bosom of that ocean of Absolute Being in a potential state. It is

the dormant state of activity somewhat like our deep sleep state when all activity is latent. As in deep sleep all the mental and physical powers exist in us in an unmanifested condition and nothing is lost, so, before the beginning of the cosmic evolution all the phenomenal forces of the universe remained dormant in that Energy. There were no phenomena, no manifestation of any powers whatever. Again, as in our waking state all the latent powers manifest and we are able to walk, move, talk and are tremendously active, so, when a portion of that Impersonal Being wakes up, as it were, and manifests the latent cosmic powers out of the sleeping Energy, the evolution of the cosmic Energy begins and the Impersonal Being appears as the Creator of the universe and its Preserver.

Then the Impersonal Being is called personal, on account of that manifested energy. According to the Hindus that impersonal Brahman is neither masculine nor feminine. But the personal God is masculine and feminine both in one. Energy and Being are inseparable in the personal God. As pure Being without energy cannot produce any phenomena and as Energy possesses all activity and is the mother of all forces and phenomena, the personal God is most appropriately called the Mother of the universe. As fire and its burning power or heat are inseparable, so Being and Energy are inseparable and one. Those who worship the masculine aspect of God, in reality worship the male child born of that Divine Mother. Because the activity, strength and power which make one masculine, owe their origin to that Divine En-

ergy. But those who worship the Divine Mother worship the Whole—all gods, all angels and all spirits that exist in the universe.

The wonderful effect of this conception of the Motherhood of God is to be found in the daily life of almost every Hindu woman as well as man. A Hindu woman thinks that she is a part of the Divine Mother, nay one with Her. She looks at all men and women of the world as her own children. She thinks herself as the blessed Mother of the world. How can such a woman be unkind to anybody? Her pure motherly love flows towards all men and women equally. There is no room for any impure thought or feeling or passion in such a heart. That perfect motherly feeling makes her ultimately live like the Divine Mother on earth. Her ideal God in human form is her own child. She worships the incarnation of God as her most beloved child. Just as Mary was the mother of Jesus, so the Hindu women in India often look upon themselves as the mother of Krishna, the Hindu Christ, or of Rama, another incarnation. Christian mothers, perhaps, will be able to appreciate this to a certain extent. If a Christian mother thinks that she is Christ's mother and loves Him as she loves her own child, the effect will be wonderful. She will then understand what Divine Motherhood is. The Hindus think this is the easiest way for women to attain to that love which makes one unselfish and divine. A mother can sacrifice everything for her child; she naturally loves the child without seeking any though there are mothers who do not

possess pure, unselfish motherly love. A true mother, however, loves her child above everything. If such a child be an incarnation of God Himself, how easy it will be for the mother to attain to the highest goal of religion. I know a lady in India who became a widow when she was young. She did not marry again. She was not like the ordinary woman of the world who thinks that a husband is essential for her happiness and that marriage is the highest ideal of life. She lived the pure life of a nun and worshipped Krishna as her own child. She became so advanced in spirituality that now hundreds of educated men and women of high rank in Calcutta come to see her, to take spiritual instruction from her. They kiss the dust of her feet as devout Roman Catholics kiss the feet of the statue of Mary, revere her and call her the Mother of God, Mother of Krishna, the Shepherd. She is still living near Calcutta. She feels in herself the presence of the blessed Mother of the universe.

Another wonderful result of this conception of God as the Mother of the universe, is that when a man worships God as his mother, he always thinks of himself as a child in its Mother's arms. As a child does not fear anything when it is near its mother, so the worshipper of the Divine Mother is never afraid of anything. He sees the Blessed Mother everywhere. In every woman he sees the manifestation of his Eternal Mother. Consequently, every woman on earth is his mother. He conquers all lust and sense desires. He sees woman in a different light. He worships every woman mentally. I have seen a man

who lived on this earth like a living child of the Divine Mother, always protected and taken care of by Her. He worshipped God as the Mother of the universe. Through that worship he became pure, righteous and spiritual. He used to say "O, my Mother, Thou art all in all. Thou art my Guide, my Leader and Strength." His Divine Mother showed him the true nature of man and woman. He bowed down before all women, young, mature and old, and said to them—"You are the living representatives of my Divine Mother on earth." How can a child have any other relation to one who is the same as its real mother? By this kind of devotion he conquered all lust and worldliness. His child-like, whole-souled and rapturous self-consecration to the Divine Mother is a landmark in the religious history of India. His whole life, which was the personification of purity, self-control, self-resignation and filial love to the Divine Mother, stands as a mighty testimony to the reality and effectiveness of the worship of God as the Mother of the universe. When he sang the praises of the Divine Mother, he gave life to every word he uttered, and no soul could hear him without being moved to tears by deep devotional feelings, without realizing that this wonderful child was in direct communion with his Divine Mother. His Divine Mother showed him that each woman was her incarnation, so he worshipped and honored all women as a son might worship his own mother. Some Western people may not understand such reverence, but a Hindu is extremely devoted to his Mother. He knows how to honor a woman.

Professor Max Müller was much impressed with the wonderful life of this great sage, and recently published his life and sayings.* He was once asked: "It we are the children of your Divine Mother, why does She not take care of us? Why does She not come to us and take us up in Her arms?" The sage replied: "A mother has several children. To one she has given a doll, to another some candy, to the third a music box, according as each one likes. Thus when they begin to play and are absorbed they forget their mother; she in the meanwhile looks after her household work. But the moment any one of them gets tired of the play, and, throwing aside the plaything, cries for the mother, 'Mamma, mamma dear!' she runs quick to him, takes him up in her arms, kisses him often and often and caresses him. So, oh man! being absorbed in your play with the playthings of the world you have forgotten your Divine Mother; when you get tired of your play, and, throwing aside the toys, you cry for Her sincerely and with the simplicity of a child, She will come at once and take you up in Her arms. Now you want to play and She has given you all that you need at present."

Each one of us will see the Divine Mother sooner or later. The Mother is always taking care of us and protecting us whether we feel it or not, whether we realize it or not." "O, Mother Divine! Thou art the eternal Energy, the infinite source of the universe. Thy powers manifest in the infinite variety of names

*See "Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna," by F. Max Müller. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

and forms. Being deluded by the power of ignorance we forget Thee, and take pleasure in the playthings of the world. But when we come to Thee, take Thy refuge and worship Thee, Thou makest us free from ignorance and worldliness, and givest eternal happiness by keeping us, Thine own children, on Thy bosom."

The lecture by the Swami Abhedananda on "The Motherhood of God" is serious, logical, awakening, and one can hardly help feeling that only use and wont prevent us from recognizing that the phrase, "The Fatherhood of God," is really assailable. * * * * * Says Swami Abhedananda, "We live and move and have our existence in that Divine Mother." At present we are, as a rule, not much beyond the old Israelitish notion of Jehovah; and here we find this enlightened Indian's teaching specially rational and wholesome. The Hebrew religion gave us the picture of a Jehovah, stern, arbitrary, and exacting as an Eastern autocrat. Says the Swami, "The same Jehovah, when considered as the Father of the universe by Jesus and His followers, did not lose this extra-cosmic nature. Even to-day the majority of the Christians cannot go beyond this idea of an extra-cosmic God." And that is where we are to-day for the most part. What if the profound Eastern idea of the Motherhood of God, allied to our already fruitful idea of the immanent (instead of transcendent) God, should turn out to be the practical emancipation of the Western mind, delivering it from the anthropomorphic images that cluster about this "extra-cosmic" God, and introducing it to a thought of God which will bring Him absolutely near? * * * * * We have long needed a little more of this "superstition" and sentiment in "this happy English isle." Let us be hospitable to all who bring out from the treasury "things new and old," the "pearl of great price." Especially let us be hospitable to the interesting thinkers who increasingly remind us of the ancient proverb that wisdom comes from the East.—*Extracts from the leading editorial of "Light," London, July 8th, 1899.*



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