

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda-
Volume 9- Writings- Prose and
Poems(Original and Translated)

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Chapter 1

The Ether

THE ETHER^[1]

(This article first appeared anonymously in the February 1895 issue of the *New York Medical Times*, a prestigious monthly medical journal founded and edited by Dr. Egbert Guernsey.)

Classification or grouping of phenomena by their similarities is the first step in scientific knowledge — perhaps it is all. An organized grouping, revealing to us a similarity running through the whole group, and a conviction that under similar circumstances the group will arrange itself in the same form — stretched over all time, past, present and future — is what we call law.

This finding of unity in variety is really what we call knowledge. These different groups of similars are stowed away in the pigeon-holes of the mind, and when a new fact comes before us we begin to search for a similar group already existing in one of the pigeon-holes of the mind. If we succeed in finding one ready-made, we take the newcomer in immediately. If not, we either reject the new fact, or wait till we find more of his kind, and form a new place for the group.

Facts which are extraordinary thus disturb us; but and when we find many like them, they cease to disturb, even when our knowledge about their cause remains the same as before.

The ordinary experiences of our lives are no less wonderful than any miracles recorded in any sacred book of the world; nor are we any more enlightened as to the cause of these ordinary experiences than of the so-called miracles. But the miraculous is “extraordinary”, and the everyday experience is “ordinary”. The “extraordinary” startles the mind, the “ordinary” satisfies.

The field of knowledge is so varied, and the more the difference is from the centre, the more widely the radii diverge.

At the start the different sciences were thought to have no connection whatever with each other; but as more and more knowledge comes in — that is, the more and more we come nearer the centre — the radii are converging

more and more, and it seems that they are on the eve of finding a common centre. Will they ever find it?

The study of the mind was, above all, the science to which the sages of India and Greece had directed their attention. All religions are the outcome of the study of the inner man. Here we find the attempt at finding the unity, and in the science of religion, as taking its stand upon general and massive propositions, we find the boldest and the most vigorous manifestation of this tendency at finding the unity.

Some religions could not solve the problem beyond the finding of a duality of causes, one good, the other evil. Others went as far as finding an intelligent personal cause, a few went still further beyond intellect, beyond personality, and found an infinite being.

In those, and only those systems which dared to transcend beyond the personality of a limited human consciousness, we find also an attempt to resolve all physical phenomena into unity.

The result was the “Akâsha” of the Hindus and the “Ether” of the Greeks.

This “Akasha” was, after the mind, the first material manifestation, said the Hindu sages, and out of this “Akasha” all this has been evolved.

History repeats itself; and again during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the same theory is coming with more vigour and fuller light.

It is being proved more clearly than ever that as there is a co-relation of physical forces there is also a co-relation of different [branches of] knowledge, and that behind all these general groups there is a unity of knowledge.

It was shown by Newton^[2] that if light consisted of material particles projected from luminous bodies, they must move faster in solids and liquids than in air, in order that the laws of refraction might be satisfied.

Huyghens,^[3] on the other hand, showed that to account for the same laws on the supposition that light consisted in the undulating motion of an elastic medium, it must move more slowly in solids and fluids than in gases. Fizeau^[4] and Foucault^[5] found Huyghens’s predictions correct.

Light, then, consists in the vibrating motion of a medium,

which must, of course, fill all space. This is called the ether.

In the fact that the theory of a cosmic ether explains fully all the phenomena of radiation, refraction, diffraction and polarization of light is the strongest argument in favour of the theory.

Of late, gravitation, molecular action, magnetic, electric, and electro-dynamic attractions and repulsions have thus been explained.

Sensible and latent heat, electricity and magnetism themselves have been of late *almost* satisfactorily explained by the theory of the all-pervading ether.

Zöllner,^[6] however, basing his calculations upon the data supplied by the researches of Wilhelm Weber,^[7] thinks that the transmission of life force between the heavenly bodies is effected both ways, by the undulation of a medium and by the actual evidence of particles.

Weber found that the molecules, the smallest particles of bodies, were composed of yet smaller particles, which he called the electric particles, and which in the molecules are in a constant circular motion. These electric particles are partly positive, partly negative.

Those of the same electricity repulse those of different electricity; attracting each other, each molecule contains the same amount of electric particles, with a small surplus of either positive or negative quickly changing the balance.

Upon this Zöllner builds these propositions:

(1) The molecules are composed of a very great number of particles—the so-called electric particles, which are in constant circular motion around each other within the molecule.

(2) If the inner motion of a molecule increases over a certain limit, then electric particles are emitted. They then travel from one heavenly body through space until they reach another heavenly body, where they are either reflected or absorbed by other molecules.

(3) The electric particles thus traversing space are the ether of the physicist.

(4) These ether particles have a twofold motion: first, their proper motion; second, an undulatory motion, for which they receive the impulse from the ether particles rotating in the molecules.

(5) The motion of the smallest particles corresponds to that of the heavenly bodies.

The corollary is:

The law of attraction which holds good for the heavenly bodies also holds good for the smallest particles.

Under these suppositions, that which we call space is really filled with electric particles, or ether.

Zöllner also found the following interesting calculation

for the electric atoms:

Velocity: 50,143 geographical miles per second.

Amount of ether particles in a water molecule: 42,000 million.

Distance from each other: 0.0032 millimeter.

So far as it goes, then, the theory of a universal cosmic ether is the best at hand to explain the various phenomena of nature.

As far as it goes, the theory that this ether consists of particles, electric or otherwise, is also very valuable. But on all suppositions, there must be space between two particles of ether, however small; and what fills this inter-etheral space? If particles still finer, we require still more fine ethereal particles to fill up the vacuum between every two of them, and so on.

Thus the theory of ether, or material particles in space, though accounting for the phenomena in space, cannot account for space itself.

And thus we are forced to find that the ether which comprehends the molecules explains the molecular phenomena, but itself cannot explain space because we cannot but think of ether as in space. And, therefore, if there is anything which will explain this space, it must be something that comprehends in its infinite being the infinite space itself. And what is there that can comprehend even the infinite space but the Infinite Mind?

[1] Reprinted in *New Discoveries*, Vol. 3, pp. 55-59. Because the Swami's original handwritten article is unavailable, we have made the spelling, punctuation and grammar of his published version conform to the style of the *Complete Works*. — Publisher.

[2] Isaac Newton, 1642 – 1727.

[3] Christian Huyghens, 1629 – 1695.

[4] Armand Hippolyte Louis Fizeau, 1819 – 1896.

[5] Jean Bernard Léon Foucault, 1819 – 1868.

[6] Johann K. F. Zöllner, 1834 – 1882.

[7] Wilhelm Eduard Weber, 1804 – 1891.

Chapter 2

Notes

NOTES^[1]

[An undated and untitled, one-page manuscript in Swami Vivekananda's own handwriting]

My nerves act on my brain—the brain sends back a reaction which, on the mental side, is this world.

Something—x—acts on the brain through the nerves, the reaction is this world.

Why not the x be also in the body—why outside?

Because we find the *already created outside* world (as the result of a previous *reaction* of the brain) acts on us calling on a further reaction.

Thus inside becomes outside and creates another action, which interior action created another reaction, which again becomes outside and again acts inside.

The only way of reconciling idealism and realism is to hold that one brain can be affected by the *world* created as reaction by another brain from inside, i.e., the mixture x + mind which one brain throws out can affect another, to which it's similarly external.

Therefore as soon as we come within the influence of this hypnotic circle, or influence, created by hundreds of preceding brains we begin to feel this world as they see it.

Mind is only a phase of matter, i.e., of the ever-changing phenomena of which matter and mind are different states or views. There must be something in whose presence this eternal, phenomenal net is spread—that is the Substance, the Brahman.

[1] *New Discoveries*, Vol. 3, pp. 440-41.

Chapter 3

Lecture Notes

LECTURE NOTES

(New Discoveries, Vol. 4, pp. 213-14.)

Probably at the turn of the century, Miss Ellen Waldo gave these undated notes in Swami Vivekananda's handwriting to her friend Sister Devamata, a member of the Boston Vedanta Centre, where they were later made available for publication.

Man will need a religion so long as he is constituted as at present. The forms will change from time to time

The dissatisfaction with the senses.

The yearning beyond.

There were encroachments of religion on the domains of physical science — these [encroachments] religion is giving up every day. Yet there is a vast field covered by religion where physical science[s] are mute.

The [vain?] attempt to keep man strictly within the limits of the senses — Because — there are men who catch a glimpse now and then of the infinite beyond.

The types of men.

The worker — the mystic the emotional the intellectual.

Each type is necessary for the well — being of society.

The dangers of each —

A mixture minimizes the danger

The East is too full of mystics and meditative the West of workers — An exchange will be for the good of both.

The necessity of religion —

The four types of men

that come to religion —

the basis of Unity — the Divinity

in man. Why use this term?

the western Society has work

and intellectual philosophy —

But work must not be destructive

of others.

Philosophy — must not be only dry intellectuality

Chapter 4

Macrocosm and Microcosm

MACROCOSM AND MICROCOSM

(The Life of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I. p. 250.)

After his experience of the macrocosm within the microcosm while absorbed in meditation under the peepul tree at Kakrighat, in 1890, Swami Vivekananda jotted down in Bengali fragments of his realization in his notebook.

In the beginning was the Word etc.

The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the universal Soul in the Living Prakriti [Nature] — the objective universe. Shivâ [i.e. Kâli] is embracing Shiva: this is not a fancy. This covering of the one [Soul] by the other [Nature] is analogous to the relation between an idea and the word expressing it: they are one and the same; and it is only by a mental abstraction that one can distinguish them. Thought is impossible without words. Therefore, in the beginning was the Word etc.

This dual aspect of the Universal Soul is eternal. So what we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally Formed and the Eternally Formless.

Chapter 5

Footnotes to The Imitation of Christ

Swami Vivekananda's Footnotes to The Imitation Of Christ^[1]

In 1889, Swami Vivekananda translated into Bengali selections from Book I, chapters 1-6 of Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. They were published along with a preface in a now-defunct Bengali monthly magazine, *Sâhitya Kalpadruma*. The Swami's preface and Bengali translation, entitled "Ishânusharana",^[2] were later published in the Bengali Complete Works (first edition), VI, pp. 16-28. However, only the preface to *The Imitation of Christ* was published in the English edition of the *Complete Works*, VIII.

Swami Vivekananda's partial Bengali translation of The Imitation of Christ includes as footnotes quotations from Hindu scriptures that parallel à Kempis's ideas, comments or commentary. For the sake of clarity, these footnotes (numbered 1 through 17) have been appended to their respective verses in *The Imitation of Christ* (indicated in parentheses), arranged under their appropriate chapter headings in the book, and reproduced here in bold.

Many of the Sanskrit footnotes to the Bengali translation were later rendered into English during the course of Swami Vivekananda's lecturing or writing. For the sake of interest, these English translations have also been added to the Swami's restored footnote text. Otherwise, Sanskrit verses have been translated by the Publisher for the convenience of the reader.

—Publisher

BOOK I^[3]

Chapter 1

Of the Imitation of Christ and Contempt of all the Vanities of the World

1. "He that followeth Me, walketh not in darkness", saith the Lord [John 8.12]. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Bhagavad-Gita 7.14

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।
मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ॥

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: This My Mâyâ is divine, made up of qualities and very difficult to cross. Yet those who come unto Me, cross the river of life.^[4]

2. Let therefore our chief endeavour be to meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: *Adhyâtma Râmâyana*,

Uttara-Kanda 5.54 (RamaGita)

ध्यात्वैवमात्मानमहर्नशिं मुनिः ।
तषिठैत्सदा मुक्तसमस्तबन्धनः ॥

Publisher's Translation: Thus meditating upon the Self day and night, let the sage abide free from all bondage.

3. The doctrine of Christ exceedeth all the doctrines of holy men; and he that hath the Spirit will find therein the hidden manna. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.2.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote:

When the Israelites were afflicted by want of food in a desert, God showered on them a kind of "manna".

4. But it falleth out, that many who often hear the Gospel of Christ, are yet but little affected, because they are void of the Spirit of Christ. But whosoever would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must endeavour to conform his life wholly to the life of Christ. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.2.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote (a): Bhagavad-Gita 2.29

श्रुत्वाप्येनं वेद न चैव कश्चित् ।

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: Others, hearing of It, do not understand.^[5]

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote (b): *Vivekachudâmani*

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न गच्छति विना पानं व्याधिरौषधशब्दतः ।
विनाऽपरोक्षानुभवं ब्रह्मशब्दैर्न मुच्यते ॥

Publisher's Translation: A disease does not leave the body by simply repeating the name of the medicine; one must

take the medicine. Similarly, liberation does not come by merely saying the word *Brahman*. Brahman must be experienced.

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote (c):
Mahabharata(critical edition) 12.309.91
श्रुतेन कियेन न धर्ममाचरेत् ।

Publisher's Translation: Of what avail is reading the Vedas without practising religion?

5. What will it avail thee to dispute profoundly of the Trinity if thou be void of humility and art thereby displeasing to the Trinity? (*The Imitation of Christ* V.3.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote:

According to the Christians, God the Father, Holy Ghost, and God the Son are One in three and Three in One.

6. Surely great words do not make a man holy and just; but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.3.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: *Vivekachudamani* 58

वाग्वैखरी शब्दझरी शास्त्रव्याख्यानकौशलम् ।
वैदुष्यं वदिषां तद्वद् भुक्तये न तु मुक्तये ॥

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: Wonderful methods of joining words, rhetorical powers, and explaining texts of the books in various ways — these are only for the enjoyment of the learned, and not religion.^[6]

7. If thou didst know the whole Bible by heart and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it profit thee without the love of God and without grace? (*The Imitation of Christ* V.3.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: [reference only]

—I Corinthians 13.2.

8. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccles.) except to love God and to serve Him only. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.3.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: *Maniratnamâlâ*

के सन्तिसन्तोऽखलिवीतरागाः ।
अपास्तमोहाः शवितत्त्वनिषिटाः ॥

Publisher's Translation: They alone are holy men (Sâdhus) who are devoid of any longing for worldly objects, free from delusion and are devoted to the truth of Shiva.

9. Call often to mind that proverb "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing". (*The Imitation of Christ* V.5.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: [reference only]

—Eccles. 1.8.

10. Endeavour, therefore, to withdraw thy heart from the love of visible things and to turn thyself to the invisible. For they that follow their lusts stain their own consciences and lose the grace of God. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.5.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Mahabharata, 2.63

(Yayatigatha)

न जातु कामः कामानुपभोगेन शाम्यति ।
हवषि कृष्णवर्त्मैव भूय एवाभविर्धते ॥

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: Desire is never satisfied by the enjoyment of desires; it only increases the more, as fire when butter is poured upon it.^[7]

Chapter 3

Of the Doctrine of Truth

11. What availeth it to cavil and dispute much about dark and hidden things; for ignorance of which we shall not be reproved at the day of judgement? (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote:

According to the Christian view, God will judge all beings on the last day (the day of the dissolution of the world), and will award heaven or hell according to the virtues or vices of different individuals.

12. He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh is delivered from many an opinion. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.2.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote:

This *Word* is somewhat similar to the Maya of the Vedantists. This *Itself* was manifested in the form of Christ.

Chapter 5

Of the Reading of Holy Scriptures

13. Truth, not eloquence, is to be sought for in Holy Scripture. Each part of the Scripture is to be read with the same Spirit wherewith it was written. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Katha Upanishad 1.2.9
नैषा तर्केण मतरापनेया ।

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: Neither is the mind to be disturbed by vain arguments, for it is no more a question of argument; it is a question of fact.^[8]

14. Let not the authority of the writer offend thee, whether he be of great or small learning; but let the love of pure truth draw thee to read. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Laws of Manu 2.238
आददीत शुभां वदियां प्रयत्नादवरादपि ।

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: Learn supreme knowledge with service even from the man of low birth.^[1]

Chapter 6

Of Inordinate Affections

15. Whensoever a man desireth anything inordinately, he becometh presently disquieted in himself. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Bhagavad-Gita 2.67

इन्द्रियाणां हचिरतां यन्मनोऽनु वधीयते ।
तदस्य हरति प्रज्जां वायुरनावमविम्वसि ॥

Swami Vivekananda's Translation: For the mind which follows in the wake of the wandering senses carries away his discrimination as a wind (carries away from its course) a boat on the waters.

16. The proud and covetous can never rest. The poor and humble in spirit live together in all peace.

The man that is not yet perfectly dead to himself, is quickly tempted and overcome in small and trifling things. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.1.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Bhagavad-Gita 2.62-63

ध्यायतो वषियान्पुंसः संगस्तेषूपजायते ।
संगात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभजायते ॥
क्रोधाद्भवति संमोहः संमोहात्स्मृतविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतभ्रंशाद् बुद्धनिशो बुद्धनिशात्प्रणश्यति ॥

Publisher's Translation: By thinking about sense objects, attachment to them is formed. From attachment comes longing, and longing breeds anger. From anger comes delusion, and from delusion, confused memory. From confused memory comes the ruin of discrimination; and from the ruin of discrimination, a man perishes.

17. There is then no peace in the heart of a carnal man, nor in him that is addicted to outward things, but in the spiritual and devout man. (*The Imitation of Christ* V.2.)

Swami Vivekananda's Footnote: Bhagavad-Gita 2.60

यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य वपिश्चतिः ।
इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥

Publisher's Translation: The turbulent senses, O son of Kunti, violently carry away the mind of even a wise man striving after perfection.

[1] *Prabuddha Bharata*, September 1982, pp. 390-93.

[2] In Bengali, the word Ishâ means Christ and Anusharana, "to follow"; hence Ishânusharana means "to follow Christ".

[3] Verses are cited from Thomas à Kempis's *Of the Imitation of Christ* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961.) This translation—based on that of F. B. (the Jesuit Anthony Hoskins), which first appeared c. 1613—has been lightly edited in order to conform to the grammar, punctuation and style of the Complete Works — Publisher.

[4] *Vide* "Maya and Freedom", *Complete Works*, II:123

[5] *Vide* "The Gita II", *Complete Works*, I.

[6] *Vide* "Realization", *Complete Works*, II:164

[7] *Vide* "Maya and Illusion", *Complete Works*, II.

[8] *Vide* "Realization", *Complete Works*, II:162

[9] *Vide* "The Common Bases of Hinduism", *Complete Works*, III. 381-382

Chapter 6

The Plague Manifesto

THE PLAGUE MANIFESTO[6]*

Om Salutations to Bhagavan Shri Ramakrishna<
Brothers of Calcutta!

1. We feel happy when you are happy, and we suffer when you suffer. Therefore, during these days of extreme adversity, we are striving and ceaselessly praying for your welfare and an easy way to save you from disease and the fear of an epidemic.

2. If that grave disease — fearing which both the high and the low, the rich and the poor are all fleeing the city — ever really comes in our midst, then even if we perish while serving and nursing you, we will consider ourselves fortunate because you are all embodiments of God. He who thinks otherwise — out of vanity, superstition or ignorance — offends God and incurs great sin. There is not the slightest doubt about it.

3. We humbly pray to you — please do not panic due to unfounded fear. Depend upon God and calmly try to find the best means to solve the problem. Otherwise, join hands with those who are doing that very thing.

4. What is there to fear? The terror that has entered people's hearts due to the occurrence of the plague has no real ground. Through God's will, nothing of the terrible form that plague takes, as seen in other places, has occurred in Calcutta. The government authorities have also been particularly helpful to us. So what is there to fear?

5. Come, let us give up this false fear and, having faith in the infinite compassion of God, gird our loins and enter the field of action. Let us live pure and clean lives. Disease, fear of an epidemic, etc., will vanish into thin air by His grace.

6. (a) Always keep the house and its premises, the rooms, clothes, bed, drain, etc., clean.

(b) Do not eat stale, spoiled food; take fresh and nutritious food instead. A weak body is more susceptible to disease.

(c) Always keep the mind cheerful. Everyone will die once. Cowards suffer the pangs of death again and again, solely due to the fear in their own minds.

(d) Fear never leaves those who earn their livelihoods by unethical means or who cause harm to others. Therefore, at this time when we face the great fear of death, desist from all such behaviour.

(e) During the period of epidemic, abstain from anger and from lust — even if you are householders.

(f) Do not pay any heed to rumours.

(g) The British government will not vaccinate anyone by force. Only those who are willing will be vaccinated.

(h) There will be no lack of effort in treating the afflicted patients in our hospital under our special care and supervision, paying full respect to religion, caste and the modesty (Purdah) of women. Let the wealthy run away! But we are poor; we understand the heartache of the poor. The Mother of the Universe is Herself the support of the helpless. The Mother is assuring us: "Fear not! Fear not!"

7. Brother, if there is no one to help you, then send information immediately to the servants of Shri Bhagavan Ramakrishna at Belur Math. There will be no dearth of help that is physically possible. By the grace of the Mother, monetary help will also be possible.

— N. B. In order to remove the fear of the epidemic, you should sing Nâma Sankirtanam [the name of the Lord] every evening and in every locality.

Chapter 7

One Circle More

ONE CIRCLE MORE[6]*

[A fragmentary poem composed at Ridgely Manor, in 1899]

One circle more the spiral path of life ascends
And time's restless shuttle — running back and fro
Through maze of warp and woof
of shining
threads of life — spins out a stronger piece. (Cf. a
slightly different version of the first three lines of this
poem which appeared in Swami Vivekananda's own
handwriting on the left-hand side of the folded letter
paper containing the original draft (Vide the [7]facsim-
ile): One circle more the spiral path of life ascends
And Time's restless shuttle running

back and fro

through maze of warp and woof spins out a

stronger piece

.)

Hand in hand they stand — and try to
fathom depths whence
springs eternal love, each in other's eyes;
And find
No hold o'er that age but brings the youth anew — And
time — the good, the pure, the true.

Chapter 8

Facsimile of One Circle More

FACSIMILE

One circle more the spiral path of life ascends And
Time's restless shuttle running

back and fro

through maze of warp and woof spins out a

stronger piece.

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Chapter 9

An Untitled Poem on Shri Ramakrishna

AN UNTITLED POEM ON SHRI RAMAKRISHNA

(Complete Works (Bengali edition), VI, p. 256.)

He who was praised by the Brâhmanas, those knowers
of the Vedas who made the
sky reverberate with the sacred sounds of the sacrifice
and caused the
darkness of delusion to vanish through well-performed
rituals and the
knowledge known as Vedanta — he whose greatness was
sung in the sweet chants
of the Sâma-Veda etc., with voices thundering like
clouds (In Indian
mythology clouds can cause both thunder and lightning.)
— to that Shri
Ramakrishna, I offer my eternal worship.

Chapter 10

An Unfinished Poem

AN UNFINISHED POEM

(New Discoveries, Vol. 3. p. 490. This undated poem is preserved in the archives of the Vedanta Centre, Cohasset, Massachusetts. Cf. “My Play is Done”, [6]Complete Works, VI.)

From life to life I am waiting here at the gates — they
open not.

My tongue is parched with ceaseless prayers and dim
my eyes have grown

With constant straining through the gloom to catch
one ray long sought;

My heart is seized with dark despair, all hope well-
nigh has flown.

—

And standing on life's narrow ridge, beneath the
chasm I see —

Strife and sorrow, darkness deep of whirling life and
death,

Of mad commotion, struggles vain, of folly roaming
free.

On one side this dark abyss — I shudder to see it even —
On the other this wall . . .

Chapter 11

Bhartrihari's Verses on Renunciation

BHARTRIHARI'S VERSES ON RENUNCIATION[6]*

This is Swami Vivekananda's free translation of verses from Bhartrihari's Sanskrit poem Vairāgya Shatakam.

The Swami's translation is from Sister Nivedita's Unpublished Notes of Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda — selected verses recorded almost verbatim, but not necessarily in Bhartrihari's order, by Sister Nivedita as Swami Vivekananda translated them orally for some of his Western disciples during a Himalayan pilgrimage in 1898.

For the researcher's benefit, verses 14-15, 18, 24-26, 31, and 33 have been footnoted as corresponding verses taken from Swami Vivekananda's original handwritten translation, which was given to the Vedanta Society of Southern California by Miss Josephine MacLeod, shortly before her passing away in 1948. This footnoted handwritten version was first published in the collection of poetry entitled In Search of God and Other Poems (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1968).

Stylistic differences in Swami Vivekananda's overall translation of Bhartrihari's poem are due to those variations inherent in the two aforementioned sources. Obvious typographical and punctuation errors have been corrected.

The verse numbers, as available, correspond to Bhartrihari's numbering.

— Publisher

BHARTRIHARI'S VERSES ON RENUNCIATION

[A translation of verses from Bhartrihari's Sanskrit poem Vairagya Shatakam]

I have travelled in many countries, hard to travel in, And got no result;
Giving up pride of birth and position,
I have served all.

Like a crow stealing into a kitchen,
With fear I have eaten the bread of others in their homes,
Yet thou, Desire, who ledest to evil deeds,
Leavest me not!

(Verse 2)

I have crossed oceans to find wealth.
I have blasted mountains to get jewels.
I have spent whole nights in graveyards
repeating Mantras
And have obtained — not the broken cowrie
of blessedness
Ah, Desire, give me up now.

(Verse 3)

I have borne the wicked words of the wicked;
To please fools, when my heart is weeping,
my lips ever laughed.
Stopping my judgment, I have with folded hands
stood before unworthy persons.
Even now, my Desire, why do you make me dance
like a fool?

(Verse 4)

For this life, which is like a drop of water
on a lotus leaf,
We have not enjoyed, but enjoyments have enjoyed us.
We did not penance, but penances burnt us up.
Time did not fly, yet we are gone.
We become decrepit with age, but not so Desire. Infirmity
assails us, the skin wrinkles,
The hair whitens, the body becomes crooked,
Old age comes on.
Desire alone grows younger every day.

(Verses 5-8)

Hope is the name of this river, whose water is Desire,
 And Thirst the waves thereof.
 Passion is the crocodile living in that water,
 Vain resolves are the birds that reside
 In the tree of virtue on the shores and kill it. But there
 are the whirlpools of Delusion
 And Despondence, the high banks.
 The great Yogis are blissful because they,
 With their pure minds, never crossed this river.

(Verse 10)

Blessed are they that, living even in the
 caves of mountains,
 Meditate on the supreme Light.
 Even the birds will fearlessly drink of the
 tears of pleasure
 That flow from their eyes.
 Alas, (Here Swami Vivekananda's handwritten trans-
 lation begins.) our minds grow familiar, even in
 imagination,
 With palaces and pleasure — gardens,
 And thus our lives fleet by.

(Verse 14)

Even when the only food is gained by begging,
 and that is tasteless;
 One's bed, the dry earth;
 One's whole family, his own body;
 His only clothing, a ragged bit of cloth —
 Alas, alas, the desire for enjoyment does not leave a man.

(Verse 15)

Not knowing the power of flame, the insect falls into it.
 The fish swallows the bait, not knowing the hook inside.
 That, well aware of the vanity and dangers of the world,
 We cannot give it up —
 Such is the power of Delusion.

(Verse 18)

Have such places in the Himalayas become extinct That
 a man should go begging at others' doors?
 Have the roots in the mountain forests all disappeared?
 Are the springs all dry?
 Are the trees all withered that bear sweet fruits And bark
 for garments
 That a man should look with fear on the face of a fool,
 Whose head is turned by a little wealth?
 (Lit., "Whose eyebrows are dancing with the wind of the
 pride of a little wealth".)

(Verses 24-25)

Arise! Let us go into the forest
 Where pure roots and fruits will be our food,
 Pure water our only drink,
 Pure leaves our bed,
 And where the little-minded, the thoughtless,
 And those whose hearts are cramped with wealth
 Do not exist.

(Verse 26)

In enjoyment is the fear of disease;
 In high birth, the fear of losing caste;
 In wealth, the fear of tyrants;
 In honour, the fear of losing her;
 In strength, the fear of enemies;
 In beauty, the fear of the other sex;[7]*
 In knowledge, the fear of defeat;
 In virtue, the fear of scandal;
 In the body, the fear of death.
 In this life, all is fraught with fear.
 Renunciation alone is fearless.

(Verse 31)

The root of health has always round about it
 A thousand worms in the form of dangers and disease.
 Where fortune falls, open a hundred gates of danger.
 Whosoever is born, him death will surely swallow. Say,
 where is that Providence who ever created
 Anything that died not?

(Verse 33)[8]*

Life is like a wave upon the waters,
 Youth only remains a few days.
 Wealth is like a fancy of the mind,
 It immediately vanishes.
 Enjoyment is like a flash of lightning
 amongst dark clouds.
 Our most beloved one is only for a moment.
 Knowing this, O man, give your heart unto Brahman To
 cross this ocean of life.

(Verse 36)

. . . Living in whom gods like Indra, Brahmâ
 and others appear like a blade of grass,
 Whose anger can destroy the worlds in a moment. O
 sage, know Him, that One Supreme
 Who dies not,
 And give not your mind to false enjoyment.

(Verse 40)

Ah, where is happiness in this life?

(At best it lasts but a hundred years, of which half is spent in sleep; of the other half, half in decrepitude; of what remains — one half goes in childhood and, of the rest, still half in serving others!)

O man, in this futile, wave-like life
Where is happiness?

(Verse 49)

Now you appear as child
And now as a youth, whose whole occupation is love.
This moment poor, another wealthy,
Now a babe, and again a decrepit old man.
O actor man, at last you vanish from the stage
When death beckons you behind the scenes!

(Verse 50)

You are a king, but we have served Gurus,
Who are great in knowledge.
You are known by your wealth as a king,
We for our knowledge.
There is infinite difference between us and you, There-
fore we are not the persons to wait upon you, O Kings!

(Verse 51)

Oh, when will that day come,
When in a forest, saying “Shiva”, “Shiva”,
My days shall pass?
A serpent and a garland the same,
The strong foe and the friend the same,
The flower-bed and the stone-bed the same,
A beautiful woman and a blade of grass the same!

(Verses 85, 90)

O Shiva, when shall I be able to cut
To the very roots of my Karma,
By becoming solitary, desireless, quiet —
My hands my only plate, and the cardinal points my
clothing?

(Verse 99)

The fruits are sufficient food,
The waters of the mountain sufficient dinner,

The earth a sufficient bed,
And bark a sufficient garment —
These are all welcome.
Only I cannot bear the proud words of fools,
Whose organs are all disordered by the drink
Of the wine of new wealth!

(Verse 54)

What if you have got the wealth that fulfils every desire?
If your foot is on the heads of your foes,
What of that?
If you have made all your love wealthy,
If your body remains a Kalpa (A periodic cycle of
creation and dissolution.) — what of that?
The only thing to be desired is Renunciation
Which gives all love to Shiva.

(Verse 67)

Fear only life, that brings Birth and Death,
Have no love of friends, no lust, no attachment. Alone,
living alone in a forest,
What is more to be longed for than this Renunciation.

(Verse 68)

Going searching in the lower regions,
Going into the skies,
Travelling through all the worlds,
This is but the fickleness of the mind.
Ah, friend, you never remember the Lord
Who resides within you!
How can you get happiness?

(Verse 70)

What is there in the reading of Vedas,
The Shrutis, the Purânas and doing sacrifices? Freedom
alone takes off the weight
of this dreadful world,
And manifests Self-blessedness.
Here is the truth: the rest is all shop-keeping.

(Verse 71)

When the body is still healthy and diseaseless, When old
age has not yet attacked it,
When the organs have not yet lost their power,
And life is still full and undiminished,
Now, now, struggle on, rendering great help to yourself!
My friend, it is useless to try to dig a well
In a house that is already on fire!

(Verse 75)

In Shiva, who is the Lord of this Universe,
Or Vishnu, its soul, I see no difference,
But still, my love is for Him
Who has the young moon on His forehead.

(Verse 84)

Oh when will that time come,
When in a beautiful full-moon night,
Sitting on the banks of some river,
And in a calm, yet high notes repeating
"Shiva! Shiva! Shiva!"
All my feelings will come out through the eyes
In the form of tears?

(Verse 85)

When, wearing only the Kaupina, (Loincloth.)
Lying on the sands of the holy Ganges in Benares, When
shall I weep aloud, "O Lord of ghouls",
Saying this, and whole days shall pass like moments?

(Verse 87)

When, bathing in the pure Ganges water,
Worshipping Thee, Omnipresent, with holy fruits and
flowers,
Stretching myself on stones in a stony cave,
My whole soul shall go into meditation,
And according to the voice of my Guru,
I shall avoid all misery, and purify
The mind defiled with serving the rich.

(Verse 88)

This whole wide earth my bed,
My beautiful pillows my own two arms,
My wonderful canopy the blue sky,
And the cool evening air to fan me,
The moon and the stars my lamps,
And my beautiful wife, Renunciation, by my side, What
king is there who can sleep like me in pleasure?

(Verse 94)

This Universe is only a little circle.
What is there to desire in it?
Will the ocean go into waves
By the jumping of a little [fish]?

(Verse 92)

There was a time when I could see nothing but Women
in this world:

And now that my eyes are opened,
I can see nothing but Brahman.
Beautiful are the rays of the moon,
Beautiful are the lawns in the forest,
Beautiful is the meeting of the good,
Beautiful is poetry, and
Beautiful is the face of the beloved.
But to me none of these are beautiful,
Knowing that they are evanescent.

(Verse 79)

Oh mother earth, father wind,
Friend light, sweetheart water,
Brother sky,
Here take my last salutation
With folded hands!
For today I am melting away into Brahman,
Because my heart became pure,
And all delusion vanished
Thro' the power of your good company.

(Verse 100)

Old age watches us, roaring like a tigress.
Disease, like enemies, is striking us often.
Life is flowing out like water from a broken jar. Curious
still how men do evil deeds in this world!

(Verse 38)

Those beautiful cities.
Those mighty monarchs.
Those powerful nobles.
Those learned assemblies.
Those moon-faced women.
Those proud princes.
And those that sang their praises —
They have all been swept away from the memory
of man.
My salutation, therefore, is to Time who works
all these!

(Verse 41)

The sun by his coming and going every hour
is lessening the life of man.
Time flies without our knowledge,
Crushed as we are by the load of many works.
Seeing the evils of Birth, Old Age, Danger, and Death
We are not afraid.
Ah me, drinking the wine of delusion,
The world has become mad.

(Verse 43)

I have not learnt that knowledge which defeats all
opponents!
Nor have been able, at the point of the sword,
Which can cut thro' an elephant's back,
To send our glory even unto the skies;
Nor, under the light of the full moon,
Drunk the nectar of the budding lips of the Beloved. My
youth is gone fruitless
Like a lamp in an empty house.

(Verse 46)

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