

God's play in Man

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The subject of my talk this morning is: God's play in Man. Blessed is that devotee of God who can see the universe, the cosmos as God's play. There are many ways, many manners, in which we can look upon God -- we can contemplate on God. Men of religion, philosophers, thinkers, even scientists have given a picture of God. But there is this picture of God: God as a great player. The whole universe is His playground. And, there is no end to His... to the games He plays. One such game is His play in man.

Today happens to be the birthday [of], one of... of one of the great teachers of Vedanta, Shankaracharyaji, the most eminent propounder of monistic Vedanta, Advaita. Of course, he was a bhakta. He was a mystic. He was a scholar. He was an unusually great man.

We have in our center the garden of saints. In the northwest corner is Shankara Mound and we have a statue of Shankaracharyaji. Most of you must have seen that statue, and that murti has been garlanded this morning. If you like, after the service you can go, pay your respects to this great Vedanta teacher. Usually we pay respects to him in July, the Guru Purnima Day, which will be this year sometime, twelfth of July, I think. But we shall not be able to do any function there this year. We pay to our homage to vedantic three teachers out in that lawn there in the Shankara Mound, remember. But that was... that is not his actual birthday, but today happens to be, to coincide with Shankaracharyaji's actual birthday.

But the subject of this morning's talk is very relevant to Shankaracharyaji's teachings: the play of God in man. God's cosmic play is important to develop our bhakti, devotion, our faith. An atheist thinks that nature is sufficient. Everything happens by the laws of science, the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy and so on. There is no need of assuming a God. But, a man of religion, a spiritual seeker cannot stop there. He assumes all that you discover in science is true. But at the back of all these mysterious things, mysterious truths you are discover[ing] there must be a conscious intelligence. And that conscious intelligence is God! And so he sees this universe as this play of God. He prays to God. He sings hymns to God, in terms of His creation.

As in the Bhagavad Gita [10:16-10:42] we read that this universe is really the Glory of God, and we have to meditate on specific glories.¹ Everywhere, where our attention is drawn reveals the Glory of God. So he thinks [of] God as the Creator and Sustainer and He's playing in the sky; He's playing in the stars; He's playing in these celestial bodies. Down on earth, He is playing in the

mountains, in the ocean, in the rivers, in the flowers, in the trees, living beings. For him, for a devotee of God, he likes to think of God in terms of the various movements in nature. But Shankaracharyaji says that the work of God in man is most important for man.

Let me recite a hymn, a verse written by Shankaracharyaji, in adoration to Brahman, how He is playing in the vast universe and is playing with man through these three states of experience: waking, dream, and sleep. When he is awake, he is experiencing this gross, mysterious universe and he is in love with this mysterious universe, this earth, this...whatever comes, he enjoys. Of course he enjoys both pleasure and pain, but his waking life is his most charming life. Then Brahman brings man to another level of experience, the dream state and there man experiences subtle things, thoughts. Thoughts become real. Most incoherent ideas become real. Most irrational ideas he sees and finds them as real. When he wakes up, he says to himself, "What absurd things I saw!" But it is also ... dream is also a state, an experience. You cannot deny that.

So Shankaracharyaji says, "This is all God's play." Waking experience would leave you [to] fall in love with life and this world. But you have to sleep. Without sleep you cannot live. You cannot just be satisfied with only one experience, the gross experience. So He brings the dream experience, subtle experience. And then there comes a time when the subtle also goes and everything becomes unified. That is the sleep experience. So through these three states of experience, God is playing with man as the Eternal Witness, as his True Self as the witness, as the fourth, "Turiya," of the three states, waking, dream, sleep. And the observer is God as the individual Self. Now man has to discover this play. God is playing this hide and seek game with man. So He is bringing these three states, standing alone, and waiting, God, waiting for man to discover this game.

Let me repeat this original Sanskrit verse. The purport of this verse, I have given. "Praga nan suprakani tricharnakara piagavil dat pia locham bhuktwa bhogan stavistam purapi deshanada pasi tana kama janyam vitwa saravan visheshan sabitimudarabum. Maya bhogy anum. Maya sanctya turiyam paraman amrita majam. Brahma yat tan annatto asmi."² [Mandukya Upanishad, Gaudapada-Karika Invocation] [Transcriber note: I could find no Roman transliteration of the Sanskrit invocation, so the sounds as given here are very rough. Help is needed on this one.] "I bow down to Brahman, the deathless, the birthless, immortal Being, Who is bringing to man, one after the other, these three states of experience, waking, dream and sleep. But He is the fourth, the Turiya, the Self in man, and God wants man to discover this game and be free."

The cosmos, the great objects, the mountains, the stars, the sun and the moon they are creations of God. They are also plays of God, but they are not evolved in that point where they can discover God. So one chapter of the Brihadaranakya Upanishad [3:7:1-15]³ says that God as the Inner Controller is controlling the sun, the stars, the sky, the earth and all objects in nature, but they do not know. It is only man – who can know God, who can discover that Player.

So, we read in the Upanishads how this game goes on and how eventually man – some man – it may not be in one birth, but maybe in some birth

he discovers this play of God. So we read in the Katha Upanishad [2:20]⁴ that God, when man was created with the potentiality, great spiritual potentiality, like a time bomb. Sometime the bomb will explode, but the possibility is there inside, in the bomb. So, within man there is that element of knowledge, element of freedom, like God! Man-- when He created [him], God put into man a potentiality, something like Him, which in the Bible we read, "He created man in the image of God, in the image of Himself, in His Own image." [Genesis 1:27]⁵ And Vedanta says, that is the Self.

But God wanted to play! He did not create man so that by being born he will know the truth. No. So the Katha Upanishad says, when He created man, He created his senses [to be] outgoing. "Paranci khani vyatrat svayambhus." [2:1:1]⁶ "The Self-Existent Being, that God, He created the indriyas, the sense organs of man "paranchi," -- means outgoing! He will see the outside. [chuckles] He will not see what is inside. And that is His game. He wanted to do that. "Let him enjoy. Let him enjoy this world. Let him see with his eyes; let him hear with his ears; let him smell with his nose; let him touch -- all the sense experiences. And he has a mind. Let him wonder; let him think; let him feel. But, he will not be able to easily find Me.

That is the game. So, the Katha Upanishad describes this. A man was born, though he has that intelligence, he cannot discover the truth, because his senses are outgoing. So this play goes on and God has given man the freedom to act, but in creation there is the principle of "good" and "bad" -- "dharma" and "adharma" which is not related to any other animals, any other created object. They have to follow the rule of nature. The sun is doing its function according to a strict rule, and that rule, is God's rule. All the rules, all the laws that science has discovered, discovering is [are] God's laws -- God's mind, so that these objects have a pattern of slave life that they follow the rounds which is their limit; but with man the case is different.

Man's intelligence has the freedom, free will, dharma and adharma. If you live by dharma, then you will evolve. Your intelligence, your potentiality will evolve. And more and more, you will have higher visions of truth. What is this world actually? What is "me"? What I am here for? Normally the man thinks, "I am here for living -- for enjoying, for living, for happiness and all." These are the common perspectives. But man has to discover if there are higher perspectives of life, if there are higher goals of life. So it is a game. It is a hide and seek game. God says to man, "I am hiding Myself. You discover. You have the power to discover. I have given you the conscience. I have given you the intelligence. I have given you the discretion. You can find God. You can find Me, and then be free."

So, man's life in bondage means he's playing his role but at the same time, he has an initiative of progress. That is why he craves for knowledge. He craves for progress, his prosperity, security. He craves for progeny. This is all in the game -- a part of this game. Then sometime this question comes. It may not be in one life, but sometime this question comes. "What does all this mean? I have read so many books. I have made my health all right. I have a family; I have a [few] children. I have prosperity. But at the same time I have to suffer

illness. I have to suffer bereavement. So this life is not all sunshine.” He slowly discovers this. It is a mixture of dualities. It is a mixture of opposites. So this is the dawn of spiritual enquiry. He wants to know the subtler nature of this world. And he wants to understand himself.

So we read in the Kena Upanishad, one of the Upanishads... The [word] “kena” means “by whom?” “By whom, my mind is working? By whom my eyes are able to see and my ears are able to hear? By whom my prana, my life energy is functioning?” [Kena Upanishad 1:1]⁷ That is the inner questioning, questioning about himself. That means a dissatisfaction has come, the sense of dissatisfaction has come. “The all that I am experiencing is not enough. There is something more. There is something more. I have to go deeper. I have to rise higher.”

So, just as Jesus Christ said, “Ask... It shall be given you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.” [Luke 11:9]⁸ So the same ideas we find in the Upanishads, and Shankaracharyaji explains this elaborately in his commentaries of the Upanishads, in his commentary of the Bhagavad Gita and in many of his independent works of Vedanta. So this enquiry comes, “The [question is] who is there at the back of my senses? Who is there at the back of my mind, my life principle, my vitality? Who is there at the back of my existence, that all the time I am feeling that I am, I am, I am; this world is? [From where comes] this idea of existence and the fact that I want to live... I don’t want to die?” In other words, the urge for immortality -- from where does it come? Why is not man rational enough? [He says,] “Yes I am born. I am [going to] die. What is the matter?” No. That won’t satisfy [him]. Man wants to live – as many years as possible. So, the Upanishad brings this topic: we have to find the source of this question in man. And that enquiry is self-inquiry. And the Upanishads deal with this question: how man through reason – not logical reasoning, but it is called tribasic reasoning, vedantic reasoning, examination of this world, examination of myself – my body, my mind, my ego.

For this examination, some disciplines are necessary. In Vedanta we call it the six disciplines, the six treasures. Sama means control of mind. Dama means control of senses. Titiksha means forbearance. Shradda means faith in God and faith in the teachings of the seers, and Uparati means inwardness and Samadhan means contemplation.⁹ These are the six treasures, which we have to cultivate, and by that man develops the power of vedantic reasoning, inquiry. And he begins to see that, “At the back of my eyes, there is a [? or possibly –the – couldn’t hear clearly] Seer.”

The real seer is not the eye, but the Self, but a conscious being that through the eye is seeing. And there is a conscious being that is enabling us to have the experience of sound. Sight, sound, smell, touch – all these experiences. And the mind is bringing thoughts, emotions, but at the back of all these, there is a Seer, that fourth, that turiya. So by when, with these disciplines the mind becomes more and more pure, the more and more subtle, then this mind and more and more can discover consciousness: consciousness in the eyes, consciousness in the ear. Whatever experience comes, that pure mind,

that reflective mind, is able to see the working of God, the working of God as my true Self.

The true Self is covered by five walls, is imprisoned in five walls. In Vedanta they [are] called the five koshas, the five sheaths: this gross body, the vital body, the body of the mind “manomaya kosha,” the body of the ego “vijñanamaya kosha” from where the sense of individuality is coming, and finally “anandamaya kosha” the causal body where all sense of pleasure or happiness is coming.¹⁰ But [there are] all these five koshas or walls, and in the core of that prison, there is the shining immortal self, that immortal God in me.

Now this situation, the imprisonment of God in these five walls of our personality, Shankaracharyaji calls the vedantic term, “adhyasa” superimposition.¹¹ Somehow due to maya that self is identifying Self with this body, and says, “I am the body,” identifying the Self with this mind and says, “I am thinking; I am feeling.” [It] identifies with this little ego and says, “I, I, I, I.” [It] identifies the Self with this causal body, and says, “I am enjoying. I am happy.” All these things we call “superimposition.” Now the superimposition can go [away] – by self knowledge, to know that I am nothing of these. I am neither matter, nor mind, nor prana, neither the eye, nor the ear, but I am what I am – indescribable, yet I am the support of everything.

It is in me, that real me, that Self, that this whole show is going on! Objectively, outside we call it God. God is the Master of the soul, and inside Shankaracharyaji says... Shankaracharyaji does not make this original statement. This is already in the Upanishads. Shankaracharyaji explains that, that when man finds himself, he finds that “It is Me.” When all these things are negated, when you are bold, when by your... It is not merely a word, but through gradual analysis you can be detached. You can detach from whatever you experience through the senses. You can detach yourself from the mind, from your ego, and stand on your Self. This possibility is there.

In the Upanishads, we find a character, the sage, Vama-deva. His account is given in the Brihadaranakya Upanishad and also in the Aitareya Upanishad, which is from the Rg Veda. In the Aitareya Upanishad [it] says, this rishi, this sage says, “Through so many births I had been imprisoned, as if in chains, iron chains, in this so-called body. Life after life, I was imprisoned and go through this happiness and tears, through all these dualities of life. I enjoyed, but I also suffered. And slowly I began to learn that this is not the goal of life, this imprisonment. There is such a thing as freedom. So I wanted to be free, and each life I tried – and now, I have, just as an imprisoned eagle. If an eagle is imprisoned and he sometimes he comes out of the cage, so like as a free bird, free eagle, I am now free,” he declared. We find this declaration and this course of suffering – how man suffers in the Aitareya Upanishad [3:1:4].¹²

And in the Brihadaranakya Upanishad it is also said about this same sage, Vama-deva, that he one day realized, “Aham Brahmasmi.” [1:4:10]¹³ “I am Brahman.” The highest nature of God, the highest truth of God, which is above creation, is the same as my true nature. When I am a limited man, I am a man or a woman. I am happy or miserable. I am afraid or I am fearless. So many roles I play! Each role is a game of God. But when all play is gone, then I am what I

am. So the declaration is, “Aham Brahmasmi. I am Brahman.” And it is said in that chapter of Brihadaranayka Upanishad that whoever realizes this becomes free. Whoever among the gods or among men, among sages, realizes this truth, the ultimate nature of man, then he becomes free. So God wants that! “God has created man in His image,” means through all of these experiences, one day he’ll be able to realize Me.

God can be realized on many levels, no doubt. He can be realized through forms, through devotion, through bhakti, but this is the Advaita. The nondualistic Vedanta says, the highest spiritual achievement is when you go through all these other experiences, dualistic experiences of religion or mysticism. One day, it is possible to realize that beyond all these objective experiences, “I am this” or “I am that” – whatever experience comes to us, according to Advaita Vedanta is a distortion of the highest truth.

When you say, “the vast sky” you are insulting the true nature of the sky. Really the sky is Brahman. Really time is Brahman. Really any objective thing you see or hear or smell is Brahman. At the back, there is that vast Brahman-consciousness. And any human experience is a limited... a limited experience. So if, someday you can experience the true nature of the Self, then you really come to the highest. But to go to the highest, you have to pass through different experience[s] – of devotion, prayer. Shankaracharyaji, the great teacher explains this in his works. He himself has written many wonderful hymns to Shiva, to Krishna -- to God. Devotion, concentration, meditation, study of scriptures, all these things are necessary. But the Upanishads say, “But don’t forget the highest possibility, the highest goal that a spiritual seeker can reach – the knowledge of Brahman, the ultimate knowledge of man’s true Self.” When man understands this, knows this, he becomes free from all grief and delusion. He knows for certain, just as Mundaka Upanishad [2:2:9] says, “Chidyate hrdaya-granthis bhidante sarva-samsayah.”¹⁴ “All doubts disappear. All knots of heart are broken and all karma, accumulated karma of the past... all karma is burned when this Self-knowledge comes.”

So that is the appeal of Self-knowledge. When Self-knowledge comes, then God says, “Now, no more game. I cannot play with you anymore. Even when you were a devotee of God, there was a game, wonderful games! Bhaktas, devotees of God sing and enjoy the companionship of God, the love of God, ecstasy. That is far from worldliness, no doubt. It is far from worldliness, worldly enjoyment. The enjoyment of God through devotion is a wonderful level of spiritual experience, no doubt. But passing through...

There are some spiritual seekers who do not want Self-knowledge. They want to remain separate from God. “I shall remain ever the devotee of God. From life to life, I may be born, but I shall remain a devotee of God, because by then I shall be able to adore God. I shall be able to enjoy the company of God in nature. Life... I have no passions anymore.” For a bhakta, for a devotee of God, the life of senses you see, there is no material life for him. He may be in the... he may be a family man but the perspective has completely changed. It is God! It is God, [who] is playing the role of wife. God is playing the role of children. It is God! That is a wonderful level of spiritual life, no doubt. That is also play, a

superior kind of play. God is there and I am His companion. [The] playmate is there. But the game goes on. But when man comes to the ultimate Self-knowledge, when he is able to feel, "I am Brahman" the individual self is really one with the true Self. When this knowledge of Advaita, or nondualistic knowledge comes, the game, the play is over.

So, in spiritual life, when we more and more begin to see this play of God, that is a wonderful fulfillment of life. A person who has developed that faith in God, a love of God, he is able to be in this world in the company of God. He is never sorry, even when great calamities come, he can say, "It is also God's play." God did not say, "I will play only to make you smile." No. Our cry is also a part of God's game.

God gives us maybe five children and one day, one child is taken away. A true devotee of God cries. He is sad, but he knows it is God's play. It is God's will. So he does not begin to curse God, "Oh God, why did you do it to me? You could have done to Mister So-and-So, next door!" [Audience laughs.] "But, why did you do it to me? Mister So-and-So does not go to the church, but I go to the church. Why should You do that to me?" That is our usual attitude, but a true devotee of God, his thinking is different. He is thinking, "If it is God's play, God is through all these experiences, all smiles and tears, He is making us... making me pure. He is making me... my... to strengthen my faith, to strengthen my love." He never loses his faith. In this way, his spiritual life goes, and this bhakta, this devotee of God does not mind being born again and have the same God. "If the Great Companion, God is with me, what... what do I fear? I can play, when God is with me."

That is the life of... that is also Vedanta. Devotion, bhakti is also the Vedanta. But then there is this nondualism, which Shankaracharyaji elaborately explained. Some persons want, after this play of devotion is over, he wants to have that highest experience of the Self, because by that time all his attachments have gone. He is not attached to anything, so he is prepared. He is prepared to have that experience of... that immortal self, where one knows for certain that I was never born. This whole world was really Brahman. It is Brahman, Who appeared as the manifold. Really, all the time, there is One, one Unity. Now this is called "adhyasa," superimposition. The One appears to be many. So, he discovers this truth. And, he then... for him, this game, this play is over.

So to look upon God as a Master Player in this cosmos-- and also in me-- is a wonderful approach.

[Announcements about lecture on Lord Buddha's birthday, ongoing classes, and San Francisco retreat are not included in transcription.]

Instead of my closing chant, you will listen in tape, [to] a composition of Shankaracharyaji, the Nirvana Shatkam, the Six Verses on Nirvana. Swami Vivekananda translated this Nirvana Shatkam into English. I wanted to read that, but I forgot to bring that book. The idea is: negation. As a knower of self, he is saying, "I am not this space. I am not this time. I am not the eyes. I am not this mind. I am not this ego." Everything, he is negating and standing, "Shivoham.

Shivoham.” “I am Shiva. I am Shiva.” At the end of each verse, you will see [him] saying, “I am Shiva. I am Shiva.” This has been sung by a very well known musician of Bombay. So you shall hear that tape and the six verses, Swami Vivekananda’s translation is also wonderful on this Nirvana Shatkam, written by Shankaracharyaji.

I am neither the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the mind-stuff;
I am neither the body, nor the changes of the body;
I am neither the senses of hearing, taste, smell, or sight,
Nor am I the ether, the earth, the fire, the air;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute -
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I am neither the Prana, nor the five vital airs;
I am neither the materials of the body, nor the five sheaths;
Neither am I the organs of action, nor object of the senses;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute -
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I have neither aversion nor attachment, neither greed nor delusion;
Neither egotism nor envy, neither Dharma nor Moksha;
I am neither desire nor objects of desire;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute -
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I am neither sin nor virtue, neither pleasure nor pain;
Nor temple nor worship, nor pilgrimage nor scriptures,
Neither the act of enjoying, the enjoyable nor the enjoyer;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute -
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I have neither death nor fear of death, nor caste;
Nor was I ever born, nor had I parents, friends, and relations;
I have neither Guru, nor disciple;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute -
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I am untouched by the senses, I am neither Mukti nor knowable;
I am without form, without limit, beyond space, beyond time;
I am in everything; I am the basis of the universe; everywhere am I.
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute -
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).¹⁵

1. Bhagavad Gita [10], Bhagavad Gita Trust, c. 1998-2015.
<http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/chapter-10.html> accessed February 1, 2016.
2. Mandukya Karika of Gaudapada. Agama Prakarana. [English only]
http://www.celextel.org/upanishads/atharva_veda/mandukya.html
3. Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad [3:7:1-15] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.224-228.
4. Katha Upanisad [2:20] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.617.
5. Genesis 1:27 in BibleHub <http://biblehub.com/genesis/1-27.htm> accessed February 4, 2016.
6. Katha Upanisad [2:1:1] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.630.
7. Kena Upanisad [1:1] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.581.
8. Luke 11:9 in BibleHub <http://biblehub.com/luke/11-9.htm> accessed February 23, 2016.
9. "Samadhana." in Wikipedia to verify spelling of the six treasures.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samadhana> accessed February 23, 2016.
10. "Kosha" in Wikipedia to verify spelling.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosha> accessed February 23, 2016.
11. Spelling from Glossary of Sanskrit Terms --
<http://www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/cmSanskrit.htm> accessed 10/21/12.
12. Aitareya Upanisad [3:1:4] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.524.
13. Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad [1:4:10] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.168. see also "Aham Brahmasmi" in Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aham_Brahmasmi accessed February 23, 2016.
14. Mundaka Upanisad [2:2:9] in The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953, p.684. [Slight variation in order of words as given in the lecture.]
15. Nirvana Shatkam. Six Stanzas on Nirvana, translated by Swami Vivekananda, in Vedanta Spritual Library.
<http://www.celextel.org/adisankara/nirvanashatkamsv.html> accessed March 16, 2016. [Only the English version (which Swami Shraddhanandaji intended to recite, but did not have available at the end of the lecture) is given in the transcription, though tape as sung is in Sanskrit.]