

THE SUPREME POWER

By
M. K. GANDHI



EDITED & PUBLISHED

By
ANAND T. HINGORANI

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1963



1963

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
CHOWPATTY, BOMBAY-7.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The belief in the indefinable and Mysterious Power or God is as old as the human race. "Ever since its commencement, the world—the wise and the foolish included—has proceeded upon the assumption that if we are, God is; and that if God is not, we are not." But, in spite of this universal belief, there are not a few who take delight in denying the existence of God. Of such, Gandhiji says: "Let the ignorant dispute the existence; I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory."

God of Gandhiji's conception, however, is not an external entity, a deity to be worshipped and adored from afar. "God is not a Power residing in the clouds. God is an Unseen Power residing within us and nearer to us than fingernails to the flesh." From his own rich personal experience Gandhiji tells us that if we wish to see God, we must see Him in His creation and be one with it. He, therefore, advises us to identify ourselves

(Contd. on 2nd flap)

(Contd. from 1st chap)

with the whole of humanity and learn to place service above self.

This selfless service Gandhiji considers as the highest religion and it can be rendered, he says, only by those whose hearts have been purged of passions. He, therefore, lays great stress on self-purification in which prayer plays a very powerful part. Prayer, for Gandhiji, is neither a petition nor a praise. It is a longing of the soul. He regards prayer as the food for the soul and believes that it is "even more essential for the well-being of the soul than is food for the maintenance of the body."

In this book, the reader will find Gandhiji throwing light on many a complex problem which baffle the intellect and defy solution by reason. With the heart of a devotee and the eye of faith, he has explained in his inimitable way the mystery of the Universe, as also the nature and function of God and His creation. Likewise, he has also suggested the means of realizing the Supreme Power. The doubters will find their doubts dispelled and the believers their belief confirmed as a result of the perusal of these pages—at least that is our hope and prayer.

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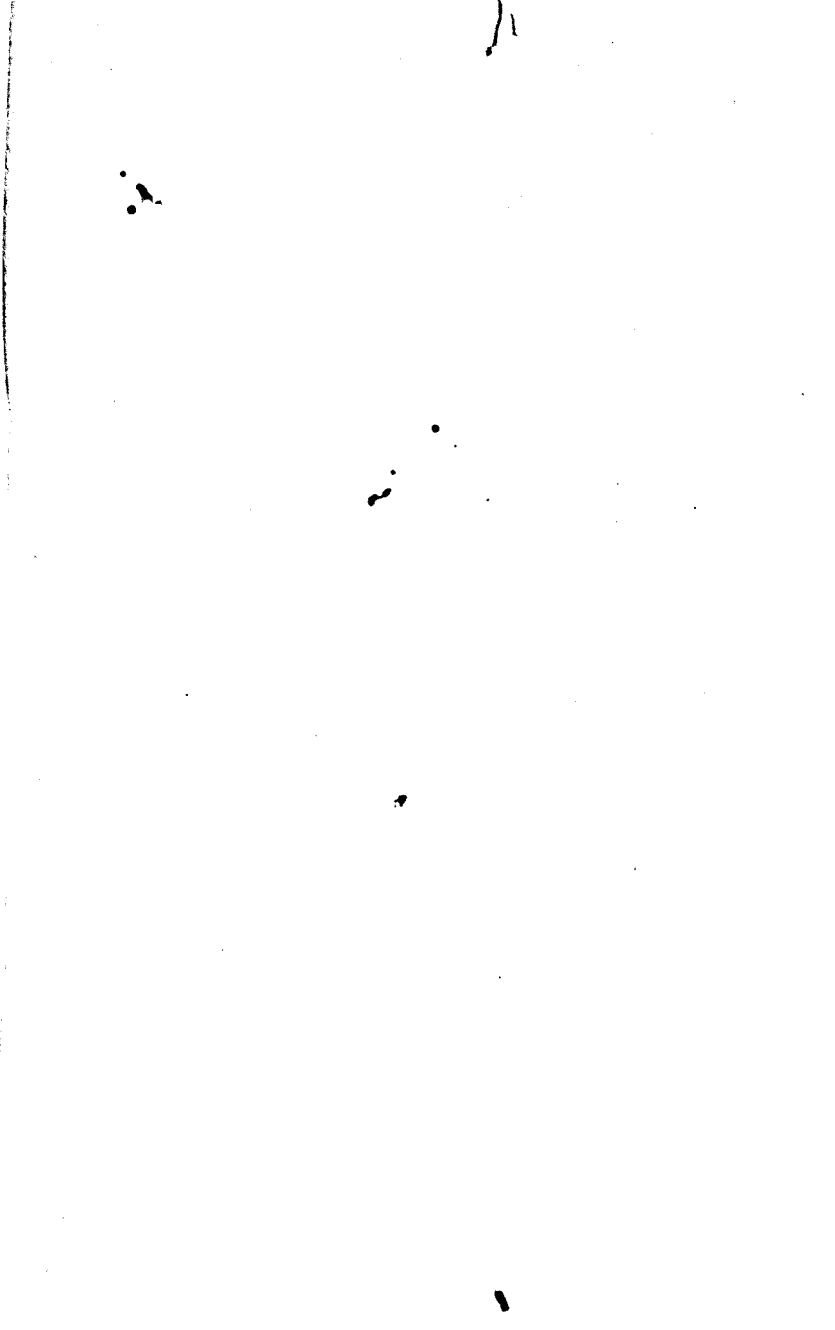
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I like Anand Hingorani's
idea of collecting my
writings under suitable
heads. The reader will not
fail to appreciate the
labours he has given to
securing attractive
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Above writing is in Gandhi's
personal handwriting.



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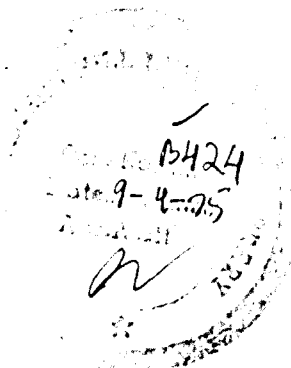
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PC
320.55
G.AN/HIN

Price: Rs. 4|- Sh. 7 or \$1.80



Printed in India

by D. J. Desai, at the States' People Press, Janmabhoomi Bhavan
Ghoga Street, Fort, Bombay-1, and published by S. Ramkrishnan
Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7 for Anand
T. Hingorani, 7, Edmonstone Road, Allahabad.

PREFACE

This universe of ours, so full of wonder, mystery and charm, has always excited in the mind of man a great curiosity to know its Creator. The sun, the moon, the stars and other heavenly bodies that we see revolving in the sky, the organic and the inorganic world that surrounds us with all its marvels and fills us every moment of our life with reverence and awe,—all these bear an eloquent testimony to the fact that there is at work, behind all this manifestation, some Supreme Power which, call it what you will, not only keeps the universe going, but also regulates even the smallest of its acts in perfect obedience to its will. This Creative Power or Force, which produces and sustains all that is, and which, though unseen, is yet all-pervading and all-embracing, is called by an infinite variety of names, such as *Ishwara*, *Parmatma*, *Khuda*, *Allah*, *Jehovah*, God, Nature, etc. However, all the great religions of the world have declared with one voice that there is only one God, one without a second.

But though God is certainly one, His manifestations are innumerable. That being so, His definitions, too, are innumerable. "But behind all that variety of definitions", says Gandhiji, "there would be also a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For, the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel, but which we do not know." To Gandhiji, however, Truth is the only correct and significant name for God. For him, God is Truth and Truth is God. God is, because Truth is.

The belief in this indefinable and mysterious Power or God is as old as the human race. "Ever since its com-

mencement, the world, the wise and the foolish included, has proceeded upon the assumption that if we are, God is; and that if God is not, we are not." But, in spite of this universal belief, there are not a few who take delight in denying the existence of God. Of such, Gandhiji says: "Let the ignorant dispute the existence; I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory."

Myself being in the category of such "ignorant" people, I had once occasion to ask Gandhiji how to cultivate faith in God. In reply to my earnest query, he wrote to say: "The way to cultivate faith in God is to recognize our nothingness and thus be humble as the particle of dust. The best of us at his very best is a tiny thing and utterly helpless. And yet, we are not so helpless the moment we know that we are sparks from the Divine which is in us. Faith does not come from reason. Faith is believing. Believe in God because those whose names we hold sacred have believed and testified."

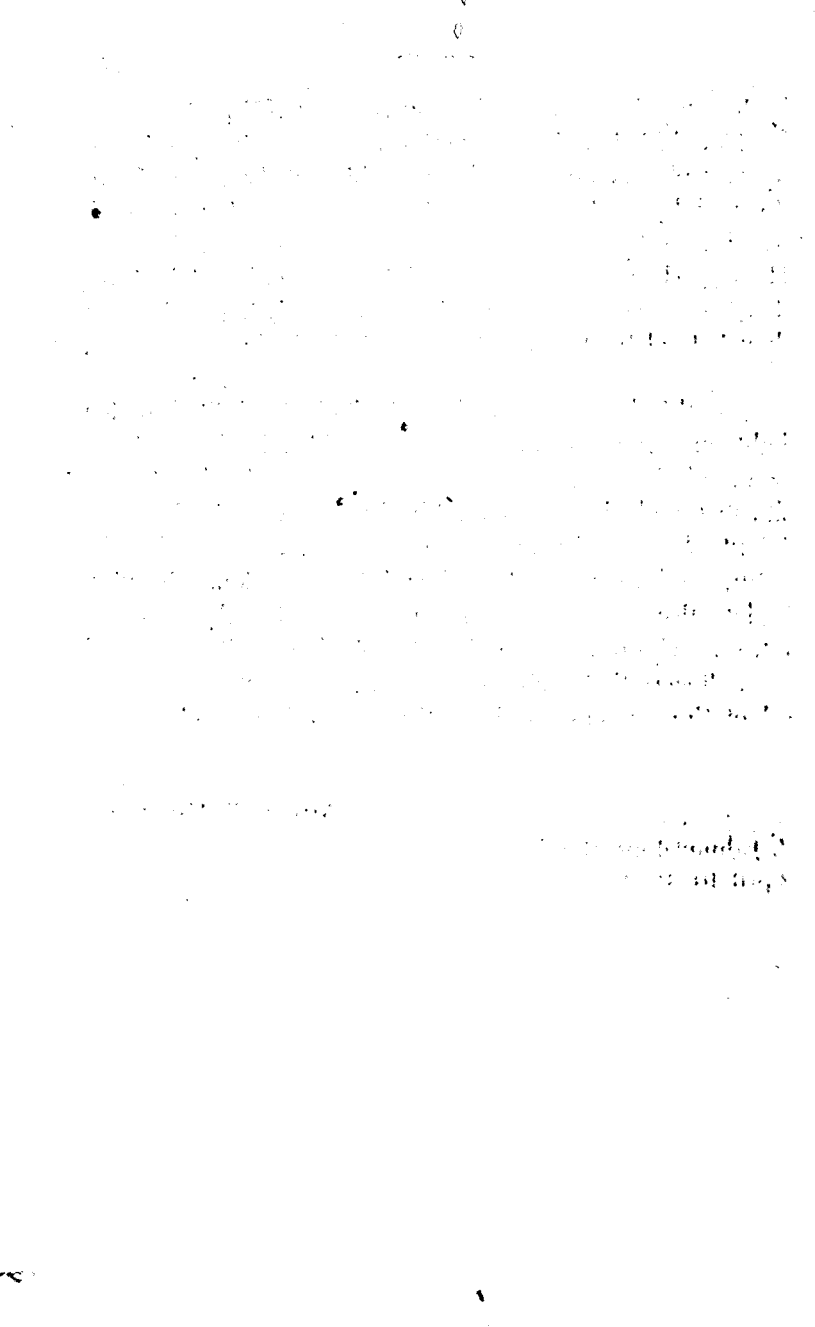
God of Gandhiji's conception, however, is not an external entity, a deity to be worshipped and adored from afar. "God is not a Power residing in the clouds. God is an Unseen Power residing within us and nearer to us than finger-nails to the flesh." From his own rich personal experience Gandhiji tells us that if we wish to see God, we must see Him in His creation and be one with it. He, therefore, advises us to identify ourselves with the whole of humanity and learn to place service above self. This selfless service he considers as the highest religion. But as this service "which has not the slightest touch of self in it", can be rendered only by those whose hearts have been purged of passions, he lays great stress on self-puri-

fication in which prayer plays a very powerful part. Prayer, for Gandhiji, is neither a petition nor a praise. It is the longing of the soul. Speaking for himself, he says: "I can do, and have often done, without food for days on end, but I cannot do without prayers even for a single day." He regards prayer as the food for the soul and believes that it is "even more essential for the well-being of the soul than is food for the maintenance of the body."

In this book, the reader will find Gandhiji throwing light on many a complex problem which baffle the intellect and defy solution by reason. With the heart of a devotee and the eye of faith, he has explained in his inimitable way the mystery of the universe, as also the nature and function of God and His creation. Likewise, he has also suggested the means of realizing the Supreme Power. The doubters will find their doubts dispelled and the believers their belief confirmed as a result of the perusal of these pages—at least that is my hope and prayer.

ANAND T. HINGORANI

7, Edmonstone Road,
April 16, 1963.



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CHAPTER I

GOD IS ONE

*“Who can name Him, and knowing what he says,
Say : ‘I believe in Him’ ? And who can feel,
And, with self-violence, to conscious wrong.
Hardening his heart, say : ‘I believe Him not’ !
The All-Embracing, All-Sustaining One,
Say : Does He not embrace, sustain, include
Thee—Me—Himself ? Bends not the sky above ?
And earth, on which we are, is it not firm ?
And over us, with constant kindly smile,
The sleepless stars keep everlasting watch !
Am I not here gazing into thine eyes ?
And does not all, that is,
—Seen and unseen—mysterious All—
Around thee, and within,
Untiring agency,
Press on thy heart and mind ?
— Fill thy whole heart with it—and, when thou art
Lost in the consciousness of happiness,
Then call it what thou wilt
Happiness !—Heart !—Love !—God !
I have no name for it !
Feeling is all in all !
Name is but sound and reek,
A mist around the glow of Heaven.”*

—Goethe's *Faust*

GOD is certainly One. He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknowable and unknown to the vast majority of mankind. He is everywhere. He sees without eyes, and hears without ears. He is formless and indivisible. He is uncreate, has no father, mother or child; and yet He allows Himself to be worshipped as father, mother, wife and child. He allows himself even to be

CHAPTER II

GOOD Vs. EVIL

THERE is an eternal struggle going on in us between the powers of light and powers of darkness, those of truth and of untruth, between God and the Devil. We have to carry on the struggle as best as we may, but we have always to be conscious of our limitations.¹

Rama and Ravana represent the eternal duel going on between the forces of good and evil. The real illumination comes from within.²

Although evil seems at times to rule the world, the eternal truth is that the world lives, so long as goodness resides even in one person. Evil is naught.³

Why evil exists and what it is,—are questions which appear to be beyond our limited reason. It should be enough to know that both good and evil exist. And as often as we can distinguish between good and evil, we must choose the one and shun the other.⁴

As the *Gita* says: "There is nothing in the world that is entirely free from fault." Let us, therefore, like the fabled swan who rejects the water and takes only the cream, learn to treasure only the good and reject the evil in everything. Nothing and no one is perfect but God.⁵

Distinction Between Good and Evil

Q. God is *Nirvikara*—free from all passions. Why does He not make us act as we ought to? His influence must be all-powerful.

A. How do we know that He does not act? He has neither truth nor untruth, neither violence nor non-violence.

Q. But it is due to Him that we have *Vikaras*—passions. If it was wrong to have passions, He would not have filled us with them.

CHAPTER III

THE LAW AND THE LAW-GIVER

THERE can be no manner of doubt that this Universe of sentient beings is governed by a Law. If you can think of Law without its Giver, I would say that the Law is the Law-giver, that is God. When we pray to the Law, we simply yearn after knowing the Law and obeying it. We become what we yearn after. Hence, the necessity for prayer. Though our present life is governed by our past, our future must by that very Law of Cause and Effect be affected by what we do now. To the extent, therefore, that we feel the choice between two or more courses, we must make that choice.¹

Nothing can happen but by His will expressed in His eternal, changeless Law which is He. We neither know Him nor His Law save through the glass darkly. But the faint glimpse of the Law is sufficient to fill me with joy, hope, and faith in the future.²

Indeed, it may even be said that the Law which holds together the Universe is indistinguishable from the Law-Maker. Speaking in human language, one might even go so far as to say that God Himself is subject to the Wheel of the Law. We are used to the saying that "the king can do no wrong." But in God's Universe even such a distinction is hardly permissible. One can only say that "there can be no wrong in the Law, for the Law and the Law-maker are one and the same." There is no scope for even the least little blade of grass to be free from the operation of God's laws.³

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself, therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the

CHAPTER IV

FAITH IN GOD

EVERYONE has faith in God, though everyone does not know it. For, everyone has faith in himself and that multiplied to *n*th degree is God. The sum total of all that lives is God. We may not be God but we are of God, even as a little drop of water is of the ocean. Imagine it torn away from the ocean and flung millions of miles away. It becomes helpless, torn from its surroundings, and cannot feel the might and majesty of the ocean. But if someone could point out to it that it is of the ocean, its faith would revive, it would dance with joy and the whole of the might and majesty of the ocean would be reflected in it.²

It is the fashion, nowadays, to dismiss God from life altogether and insist on the possibility of reaching the highest kind of life without the necessity of a living faith in a living God. I must confess my inability to drive the truth of the Law home to those who have no faith in, and no need for, a Power infinitely higher than themselves. My own experience has led me to the knowledge that fullest life is impossible without an immovable belief in a Living Law, in obedience to which the whole Universe moves. A man without that faith is like a drop thrown out of the ocean bound to perish. Every drop in the ocean shares its majesty, and has the honour of giving us the ozone of life.²

The Living Faith

I DO have a living faith in a living God, even as I have a living faith in many things that scientists tell me. It may be retorted that what the scientists say can be verified, if one followed the prescription given for realizing the facts which are taken for granted. Precisely in that manner speak the *Rishis* and the Prophets. They say

CHAPTER V

ATHEISM

ATHEIST: Your way of life appeals to me very much. It offers scope for the exercise of individual will. The idea of God introduces a determinism and that limits man. It interferes with his free will.

Gandhiji: Is there such a thing as free will? What is it? We are all mere playthings in the hands of Providence.

Atheist: What is the relationship between God and man, between Truth, and God?

Gandhiji: I used to say 'God is Truth'. That did not completely satisfy me. So I said 'Truth is God'. He and His Law are not different. God's Law is God Himself. To interpret it, man has to resort to intense prayer and merge himself in God. Each one will interpret it in his or her own way. As for the relationship between man and God, man does not become man by virtue of having two feet and two hands. He becomes man by becoming the tabernacle of God.

Atheist: When my idea of God itself is not clear, your talk of man becoming the tabernacle of God makes thing still more confusing.

Gandhiji: Yet it is the true conception. Unless we have the realization that the body is the house of God, we are less than men. And, where is the difficulty or confusion in conceiving Truth as God? You will concede that we are not tabernacles of Untruth: We are of Truth. Everyone who wants to live a true life has to face difficulties in life, some of which appear insurmountable. At that time, prayer and faith in God, that is, Truth, alone will sustain you. The fellow-feeling which makes you feel miserable because of your brother's misery is godliness. You may call yourself an atheist, but so long as

CHAPTER VI

FAITH Vs. REASON

I BELIEVE in faith, in things where reason has no place, *e.g.*, the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason: 'Yet we are seven', I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect: 'Yet there is God'.¹

Reason has its place, only it must not usurp the heart. If you will go through any twenty-four hours of the life of the most reasoning man you know, you will find that most of his acts done during that time are done by feeling, not by reasoning. The moral is that reason once developed acts automatically and rejects what is superstitious or immoral if the heart is sound. Reason is a corrective and is in its place when it remains at the door ever watchful, never moving. Life is duty *i.e.*, action. When this is reasoned away, reason has become a usurper and must be dethroned.²

Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals.³

Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.⁴

Limitations of Reason

EXPERIENCE has humbled me enough to let me realize the specific limitations of reason. Just as matter misplaced becomes dirt, reason misused becomes lunacy. If we would but render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's, all would be well.

CHAPTER VII

SEEING GOD FACE TO FACE

“CAN one see God face to face* while still living?” This question never worries a liver of the *Gita* life, for he is entitled only to strive and must not bother about the consequences. Still, I am inclined to think that perfect realization of the Supreme is impossible so long as one is subject to the limitations of life. He might reach the door, but cannot enter as he still bears his body like chains. However, he should be ever conscious of pain due to separation from God; if this pain is not felt he will be negligent in his effort^c and might even stop it altogether. The pain must not cause despondency, but must be the spring of hope everlasting and a spur to stronger effort. Remember the *Gita* promise, that the least little effort never goes in vain.† Therefore, the pain of separation too must be a source of joy for the aspirant, as he is confident that he is bound to reach his goal sooner or later.¹

No one can see God face to face who has aught of the 'I' in him. He must become a cypher if he would see God. Who shall dare say in this storm-tossed Universe, 'I have won.'? God triumphs in us, never we.²

Seeing God face to face is to feel that He is enthroned in our hearts, even as a child feels a mother's affection without needing any demonstration. Does a child reason out the existence of a mother's love? Can he prove it to

* "In the phrase 'seeing God face to face', 'face to face' is not to be taken literally. It is a matter of decided feeling. God is formless. He can, therefore, only be seen by spiritual sight."

— *Selected Letters* : p. 43.

† "Success lies in the effort itself. God has promised that effort for the good never goes fruitless and all of us have had experience of this to some extent."

— *Selected Letters* : p. 52.

CHAPTER VIII

GOD-REALIZATION

MAN'S ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities—social, political, religious—have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done through one's country. I am part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert, that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.¹

To realize God is to see Him in all that lives, *i.e.*, to realize our oneness with all creation.²

I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.³

I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one, be he a Hindu, *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, *Shudra*, or a *Panchama*, a Mussalman, a Parsi, a Christian,—man or woman.⁴

My creed is service of God, therefore, of humanity. I can neither serve God nor humanity, if as an Indian I do not serve India, and as a Hindu I do not serve the Indian Mussalmans. Voluntary service means pure love.⁵

Man's highest endeavour lies in trying to find God. He cannot be found in temples or idols or places of

CHAPTER IX

GOD IS TRUTH: TRUTH IS GOD

I CLAIM to be a votary of Truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing to me. My prayerful search gave me the revealing maxim 'Truth is God' instead of the usual one 'God is Truth'. That maxim enables me to see God face to face as it were. I feel Him pervade every fibre of my being¹

Instead of saying that God is Truth, I say that Truth is God. This was not always clear to me. I realized it only some years ago, but my conduct has been unconsciously based on that realization. I have known God only as Truth. There was a time when I had doubts about the existence of God, but I never doubted the existence of Truth. This Truth is not something material but Pure Intelligence. It rules over the Universe; therefore, it is *Ishwara* (The Lord)... This is for me almost a matter of experience. I say 'almost', because I have not seen Truth face to face. I have had only glimpses of it. But my faith is indomitable.²

If God is equated with Truth, we can see Him face to face.³

Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known. The most ignorant among mankind have some truth in them. We are all sparks of Truth. The sum total of those sparks is indescribable, as-yet-Unknown Truth, which is God.⁴

God and His Law

FOR the last few years I have been saying that 'Truth is God' instead of 'God is Truth'. The former statement is more consonant with facts, for in this world there is nothing besides Truth. Truth here should be understood in a wide sense. It is full of intelligence. God as Truth

CHAPTER X

THE INNER VOICE

THERE are moments in your life when you must act, even though you cannot carry your best friends with you. The 'still small voice' within you must always be the final arbiter when there is a conflict of duty.¹

I can but do my duty. A leader is useless when he acts against the promptings of his own conscience, surrounded as he must be by people holding all kinds of views. He will drift like an anchorless ship, if he has not the Inner Voice to hold him firm and guide him. Above all, I can easily put up with the denial of the world, but any denial by me of my God is unthinkable.²

I have no special revelation of God's will. My firm belief is that He reveals Himself daily to every human being, but we shut our ears to the 'still small voice'. We shut our eyes to the Pillar of Fire in front of us. I *realize* His omnipresence.³

Rightly or wrongly, I know that I have no other resource than the assistance of God in every conceivable difficulty, and I would like it to be believed that what may appear to be inexplicable actions of mine are really due to inner promptings.

It may be a product of my heated imagination. If it is so, I prize that imagination as it has served me for a chequered life extending over a period of now over fifty-five years, because I learned to rely consciously upon God before I was fifteen years old.⁴

The only tyrant I accept in this world is the 'still small voice' within.⁵

I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the 'still small voice' within.⁶

This ability to hear and obey the Inner Voice gives

CHAPTER XI

OURS IS BUT TO STRIVE

MAN plans but the success of his plans depends not on him but on the will of the Providence, which is the Supreme Arbiter of our destinies.¹

Providence has its appointed hour for everything. We cannot command results; we can only strive.²

It is for man to put forth his best effort; the result can then be confidently placed in the hands of God, who only helps those who help themselves.³

There is no help like self-help. God helps those who help themselves.⁴

Success or failure is not in our hands. It is enough if we do our part well. . . . Ours is but to strive. In the end, it will be as He wishes.⁵

All have but to do their duty and leave the result in God's hands. Nothing happens without God's will. Ours is only to strive.⁶

But why should failure worry us? Success is in God's hands. Our failure should spur us to greater effort. That effort lies in being true to ourselves.⁷

Success depends not upon our high skill, it depends solely upon God. And He only helps the vigilant and the humble.⁸

Ultimate success always rests in the hands of God. And, if we realize that He is the Doer as also the Destroyer, why should we worry?⁹

God has not made us omniscient so that we may be able to see whether we have achieved ultimate success or not. The poet who realized this truth has left us the legacy of his immortal phrase: 'Immortal hope lies hidden in a thousand despairs'. All we have to do is to work without hope of fruit or reward.¹⁰

A TESTAMENT OF FAITH

I AM in the world feeling my way to light 'amid the encircling gloom.' I often err and miscalculate. My trust is solely in God. And I trust men only because I trust God. If I had no God to rely upon, I should be like Timon—a hater of my species.¹

With my hand on my breast, I can say that not a minute in my life am I forgetful of God. For over twenty years, I have been doing everything that I have done as in the presence of God. But as I am a believer in God, as I never for a moment lose faith in Him, as I content myself with the joy and sorrow that He wills for me, I may feel helpless, but I never lose hope.²

I believe in the supreme power of God. I believe in Truth. I trust in God who knows how to confound the wisdom of men. He is a consummate *Jadugar* and I have placed myself in His hands. But He is a hard taskmaster. He would accept nothing short of the best you are capable of.³

I must say I do feel the presence of God—call Him Christ, call Him Krishna, call Him Rama. We have one thousand names to denote God, and if I did not feel the presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment every day that I would be a raving maniac and my destination would be the Hooghli.⁴

As days pass, I feel this Living Presence in every fibre of my veins. Without that feeling I should be demoted. There are so many things that are calculated to disturb my peace of mind. So many events happen that would, without the realization of that Presence, shake me to the very foundation. But they pass me by, leaving me practically untouched.⁵

CHAPTER XIII

SURRENDER TO GOD'S WILL

MY experience tells me that the Kingdom of God is within us, and that we can realize it not by saying: 'Lord, Lord,' but by doing His will and His work. If, therefore, we wait for the Kingdom to come as something coming from outside, we shall be sadly mistaken.¹

How shall we know the will? By prayer and right living. Indeed, prayer should mean right living. There is a *Bhajan* (hymn) whose refrain is: "Prayer has been never known to have failed anybody. Prayer means being one with God."²

God does not always allow us to do what we think is the best. I suppose we don't always know what is best.³

If all our dreams could be realized, life would become a phantasmagoria and there would be utter chaos on earth. God in His mercy, therefore, has ordained that His will alone should prevail on earth.⁴

Do we get all we want? If we did, where would our faith have any play at all? Sufficient to know that not a blade moves but by His will.⁵

We are all in God's hands. Not a blade moves but by His command. If we had all our own ways, the world will go to pieces. It is perhaps as well that our wishes are often frustrated. It is the test of our loyalty to God that we believe in Him even when He refuses to fulfil our wishes.⁶

There is meaning in our wishes (however pure) not being fulfilled. Not our will but His will be done.⁷

We are best tried when we are thwarted in what

CHAPTER XIV

'BE CAREFUL FOR NOTHING'

WE must put faith in God and be careful for nothing.¹ 'Be careful for nothing' is one of the verses that have ever remained with me and taken possession of me. If God is, why need I care? He is the Infallible Caretaker. He is a foolish man who fusses although he is well protected.²

I know it is stupid to be anxious. God is above us all to protect and guide His own :

*"Rock of Ages, cleft for me ;
Let me hide in Thee."*³

No one can protect you other than God. No man can protect another. None of us can say whether he is going to be alive the next day or even a minute after. God alone was, is and ever shall be. Therefore, it is our duty to call upon Him and rely on Him.⁴

If we have faith in God, we simply would not care to know beforehand how He may dispose of us. It is enough for us to hold ourselves perfectly in readiness for whatever happens. We are not allowed to know what tomorrow has in store for us, and our best conceived plans have a knack very often of going awry. The highest wisdom, therefore, is never to worry about the future, but to resign ourselves entirely to His will.⁵

If we are wise, we will take care of the present and the future will take care of itself. God has given us only a limited sphere of action and a limited vision. Sufficient unto the day is the good thereof.⁶

All is From God

SO long as we believe that all is from God, we should have no cause for perturbation. The only condition is

CHAPTER XV

'HELP OF THE HELPLESS'

GOD is great and compassionate. He would not try His servants beyond endurance.¹

God tries His votaries through and through, but never beyond endurance. He gives them strength enough to go through the ordeal He prescribes for them.²

God is both gentle and hard. He tries us through and through to the last suffering point, but He is so gentle as never to test us to the breaking point.³

God sometimes does try to the uttermost those whom He wishes to bless.⁴

The Divine guidance often comes when the horizon is the blackest.⁵

All the religions of the world describe God pre-eminently as the Friend of the friendless, Help of the helpless and Protector of the weak.⁶

God is great, and we are but dust. But, thanks to our pride, whilst we say with our lips God is great, our actions belie the profession and show that we think nothing of God and a 'mighty lot' of ourselves. But it is time to realize our helplessness.⁷

Those who empty themselves of all pride and all egotism have the greatest help from God.⁸

The need of the moment is to realize our helplessness. A Tamil proverb truly has it: 'God is the Help of the helpless'. This realization will show us a way out of the present impenetrable darkness. For us, helpless men and women, who have to serve from day to day and often in the face of gloomy despair, it is enough if we can sing with the Seer: 'One step enough for me'.⁹

God is the true father, mother, relative and friend. Others are only so-called; they are helpless themselves

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT IS PRAYER?

I BELIEVE that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who, in the egotism of their reason, declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes, but that he has no nose.

Whether by reason, or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the Divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well-known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of Truth. This joy, however, is not at all wordly, but springs out of communion with the Divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion.

Now, I come to the next thing, *viz.*, that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or, in its wider sense, is inward communion. In either case, the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He, therefore, who hungers for the awakening of the Divine in him, must fall back on prayer.

But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of the

CHAPTER XVII

PERSONAL TESTIMONY ON PRAYER

Q. WILL you give your personal testimony on prayer, not a theoretical discourse, but a narration of what you have felt and experienced as a result of prayer?

A. Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it, I should have been a lunatic long ago. My autobiography will tell you that I have had my fair share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair, but if I was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. Now I may tell you, that prayer has not been part of my life in the sense that Truth has been. It came out of sheer necessity, as I found myself in a plight when I could not possibly be happy without it. And the more my faith in God increased, the more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. Life seemed to be dull and vacant without it.

I had attended the Christian service in South Africa, but it had failed to grip me. I could not join them in prayer. They supplicated God, but I could not do so. I failed egregiously. I started with disbelief in God and prayer, and until at a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. But at that stage I felt that as food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul.* In fact, food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul. For, starvation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-starvation. You cannot possibly have a surfeit of prayer.

Three of the greatest teachers of the world—Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed—have left unimpeachable testimony,

*"Prayer is the food of the soul as bread is of the body."

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

SPEAKING for myself, I can say that I can do, and have often done, without food for days on end, but I cannot do without prayers even for a single day. Individual prayer is there, but no one should fight shy of collective prayer. Man is a social being. If men and women can eat together, play together and work together, why should they not pray together? Why should anyone feel the need to pray away from everybody's gaze? Is there anything sinful or shameful in prayer that it should not be said in public?

For close on 50 years, I have been a believer in public prayer. From my earliest days in South Africa, I had among my associates and co-workers men and women of every religion—Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis—who all used to join me in the prayer. In India, men and women in crowds attend my prayers wherever I go. I have been told that they do not come to attend the prayers; they come just to have my *darshan*. Even if it is so, they come because they want to join me—a man of prayer.

I am aware that I have not come as near to God as I want to. My realization of Truth and *Ahimsa* is still far from perfect, otherwise there would be no need for me to use speech. My very being would radiate Truth and *Ahimsa*, so that you would be able to see it on my face and feel its presence. I have often said that the perfect *Ahimsa* of one individual is quite enough for the whole world. Whatever measure of success I have attained in the realization of Truth and Non-violence, is the result of prayer.

Prayer should be a spontaneous upwelling of the heart. One should not pray if one feels that the prayer

CHAPTER XIX

TEMPLES AND IDOL WORSHIP

A CONGREGATIONAL prayer is a mighty thing. What we do not often do alone, we do together.... It is a common experience for men who have no robust faith to seek the comfort of congregational prayer. All who flock to churches, temples, or mosques are not scoffers or humbugs. They are honest men and women. For them congregational prayer is like a daily bath,* a necessity of their existence. These places of worship are not a mere idle superstition to be swept away at the first opportunity. They have survived all attacks up to now and are likely to persist to the end of time.¹

These places of worship to me are not merely brick and mortar. They are but a shadow of Reality. Against every church and every mosque and every temple destroyed, hundreds have risen in their places. It is wholly irrelevant to the argument about the necessity of prayer that the so-called believers have belied their belief, and that many places renowned for their sacred character have been razed to the ground. I hold it to be enough, and it is enough for my argument, if I can prove that there have been men in the world, and there are men today in existence, for whom prayer is positively the bread of life. I recommend the practice of going unobserved to mosques, temples and churches, without any preconceived ideas. I have discovered that there is something in them which appeals to the heart and which transforms those

*"It (congregational prayer) brings us all together with God. It is a real purifying bath. Just as the body becomes dirty without a bath, so also the pure soul appears impure unless the heart is washed with the water of prayer. Therefore, never miss prayers."

THE ASHRAM PRAYER

THE Ashram prayer* has become very popular. Its development has been spontaneous. The birth and growth of this prayer has not been artificial. There is a history attached to almost every *Shloka* and every selected *Bhajan*. The *Bhajanvali* contains, among others, *Bhajans* from Muslim *Sufis* and *Fakirs*, from Guru Nanak, and from the Christian Hymnary. Every religion seems to have found a natural setting in the prayer book.

Chinese, Burmese, Jews, Ceylonese, Muslims, Parsis, Europeans and Americans have all lived in the *Ashram* from time to time. In the same way, two Japanese *Sadhus* came to me in Maganwadi, in 1935. One of them was with me till the other day when War broke out with Japan. He was an ideal inmate of our home in Sevagram. He took part in every activity with zest. I never heard of his quarrelling with anyone. He was a silent worker. He learnt as much Hindi as he could. He was a strict observer of his vows. Every morning and evening he could be seen going round with his drum and heard chanting his *mantra*. The evening worship always commenced with his *mantra* 'नम्यो हो रेंगे क्यों ।' which means "I bow to the 'Buddha, the giver of true religion.' I shall never forget the quickness, the orderliness, and utter detachment with which he prepared himself the day the police came without notice to take him away

*"At the morning prayer we first recite the *Shlokas* (verses) printed in *Ashram Bhajanavali* (hymnal), and then sing one *Bhajan* (hymn) followed by *Ramadhun* (repetition of *Ramanama*) and *Gitapath* (recitation of the *Gita*). In the evening we have recitation of the last 19 verses of the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, one *Bhajan* and *Ramadhun*, and then read some portion of a sacred book."

CHAPTER XXI

RAMANAMA

RAMANAMA to me is all-sufficing. There are as many names of God as His manifestations, but sages have, as a result of their life-long penance, devised names to be uttered by the devotees, in order to be able to commune with the Nameless. There are other *mantras* than *Ramanama*, but for me that is supreme. It has become part of my life. When a child, my nurse taught me to repeat *Ramanama* whenever I felt afraid or miserable, and it has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. I may even say that the Word is in my heart, if not actually on my lips, all the twenty-four hours. It has been my saviour and I am ever stayed on it. In the spiritual literature of the world, the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas takes a foremost place. It has charms that I miss in the *Mahabharata* and even in Valmiki's *Ramayana*.¹

Rama, *Allah* and God are to me convertible terms. Millions of Hindus know Him under the name of *Rama*. As a child, I was taught to call upon *Rama* when I was seized with fear. I know many of my companions to whom *Ramanama* has been the greatest solace in the hour of their need. I present it to the reader whose vision is not blurred and whose faith is not damped by overmuch learning. Learning takes us through many stages in life, but it fails us utterly in the hour of danger and temptation. Then, faith alone saves. *Ramanama* is not for those who tempt God in every way possible and ever expect it to save. It is for those who walk in the fear of God, who want to restrain themselves and cannot in spite of themselves.²

What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge

CHAPTER XXII

REPETITION OF GOD'S NAME

THE uttering of the Sacred Name from the heart is enough to ensure the presence and benediction of God. The fact is that God is there all the time, only we do not realize it. The recitation of the Sacred Name, hallowed by the practice of an unbroken line of saints, wakes us from our ignorance and works as infallibly as an electric spark, and immediately makes the presence of God felt in our midst. I say this only for those who have faith. Those who have none should dismiss it from their minds altogether.¹

In Mira's song, the devotee asks the soul to drink deep of the nectar of God's Name. Physical food and drink result in satiety and, if over-indulged, in illness. But the ambrosia of God's Name knows no such limit. The deeper one drinks of it, the more the thirst for it grows. But it must sink deep into the heart. When that happens, all delusion and attachment, lust and envy, fall off from us. Only, one must persevere and have patience. Success is the inevitable result of such effort.²

There are many who, whether from mental laziness or from having fallen into a bad habit, believe that God is and will help us unasked. Why, then, is it necessary to recite His Name? It is true that if God is, He is irrespective of our belief. But realization of God is infinitely more than mere belief. That can come only by constant practice. This is true of all science. How much more true of the Science of all sciences?

Man often repeats the name of God parrot-wise and expects fruit from so doing. The true seeker must have that living faith which will not only dispel the untruth

CHAPTER XXIII

DISCOURSES ON PRAYER

I AM glad you have been coming. For me, it has been both a joy and a privilege, in as much as I have felt its elevating influence. I ask you to keep it up. You may not know the verses, you may not know Sanskrit and the hymns, but *Ramanama* is there for all, the heritage handed down from ages. And I tell you why I ask you to continue this congregational prayer. Man is both an individual and a social being. As an individual, he may have his prayer during all the waking hours; but as a member of society; he has to join in the congregational prayer. I, for one, may tell you that when I am alone I do have my prayer, but I do feel very lonely without a congregation to share the prayer with me. I knew and even now know very few of you, but the fact that I had the evening prayers with you was enough for me. Among the many memories that will abide in my heart after I leave, not the least will be the prayer meetings. But I shall have my congregation at the next place I reach, and forget the wrench. For one, who accepts the brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God, should find a congregation wherever he goes, and he may not hug or nurse the feeling of parting or separation. Please, therefore, keep up the prayer. You can form your own congregation in your own places, and, as a last resource, one's family can become one's congregation well enough. Do meet every evening at this hour, learn a few hymns, learn the *Gita*, do the best and the most you can for the purpose of self-purification.¹

A Daily Ritual

LET prayer become a daily obligatory ritual for you.

NO PRAYER WITHOUT FASTING

I BELIEVE that there is no prayer without fasting, and there is no real fast without prayer.¹

But both have to come from the heart. A parrot-like repetition of the choicest sentiment and mere starvation of the body would be worse than useless. Prayer and fasting avail where there is a definite consciousness of the presence of God in us, even as we have of friends living under the same roof. Self-deception will not do.²

The *Shastras* tell us that when people in distress prayed to God for relief and He seemed to have hardened His heart, they declared a 'fast unto death' till God had listened to their prayer. Religious history tells us of those who survived their fast, because God listened to them, but it tells us nothing of those who silently and heroically perished in the attempt to win the answer from a deaf God. I am certain that many have died in that heroic manner, but without their faith in God and non-violence being in the slightest degree diminished. God does not always answer prayers in the manner we want Him to. For Him life and death are one, and who is able to deny that all that is pure and good in the world persists because of the silent death of thousands of unknown heroes and heroines!³

Common Injunctions

MY religion says that only he who is prepared to suffer can pray to God. Fasting and prayer are common injunctions in my religion. But I know of this sort of penance even in Islam. In the life of the Prophet I have read that the Prophet often fasted and prayed, and forbade others to copy him. Someone asked him why he did not

PHYSICAL CALAMITIES AND GOD

I SHARE the belief with the whole world—civilized and uncivilized—that calamities such as the Bihar one* come to mankind as chastisement for our sins. When that conviction comes from the heart, people pray, repent and purify themselves. I regard untouchability as such a grave sin as to warrant divine chastisement. I am not affected by posers such as 'why punishment for an age-old sin' or 'why punishment to Bihar and not to the South' or 'why an earthquake and not some other form of punishment.' My answer is: 'I am not God. Therefore, I have but a limited knowledge of His purpose.'

Such calamities are not a mere caprice of the Deity or Nature. They obey fixed laws as surely as the planets move in obedience to laws governing their movement. Only we do not know the laws governing these events and, therefore, call them calamities or disturbances. Whatever, therefore, may be said about them must be regarded as guess work. But guessing has its definite place in man's life. It is an ennobling thing for me to guess that the Bihar disturbance is due to the sin of untouchability. It makes me humble, it spurs me to greater effort towards its removal, it encourages me to purify myself, it brings me nearer to my Maker. That my guess may be wrong does not affect the results named by me. For, what is guess to the critic or the sceptic is a living belief with me, and I base my future actions on that belief. Such guesses become superstitions when they lead to no purification and may even lead to feuds.

But such misuse of divine events cannot deter men of faith from interpreting them as a call to them for re-

*Reference is to the Bihar earthquake of 1934.

GLOSSARY

- Abhyasa* : practice; study.
- Advaita* : non-duality; absolute monoism.
- Agiari* : fire-temple of the Parsis.
- Ahimsa* : non-violence; love.
- Ahriman* : Spirit of Evil, in Zoroastrian religion.
- Ahurmazd* : Zoroastrian name for God.
- Allah* : Muslim name for God.
- Anand* : joy, bliss.
- Anekantavada* : belief in many doctrines; scepticism.
- Anekantavadi* : a believer in many doctrines; a sceptic.
- Ashram* : a hermitage; a home for community living; here reference is to Gandhiji's Ashram.
- !
- Bhajan* : hymn; a devotional song.
- Bhajanavali* : a hymnal.
- Bhakta* : a devotee.
- Bhakti* : devotion.
- Brahmacharya* : celibacy; continence; self-restraint.
- Brahman* : Supreme Being; Ultimate Reality; God.
- Buddhi* : intelligence; understanding.
- Chit* : knowledge.
- Dada Hormazda* : Zoroastrian name of God.
- Darshan* : sight; vision; glimpse.
- Dharma* : religion; duty; law of one's being.
- Dvaitism* : doctrine of Dualism.
- Gatha* : scripture.
- Hari* : Hindu name of God.
- Himsa* : violence.

Ishwara : Hindu name for God.

Jadugar : magician.

Japa : recitation; repetition.

Kalma : a Muslim prayer formula ('*La ilah illa Allah, Mohammed Rasul-e-Allah*', i.e., there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah).

Karma : action; also used in the sense of fate.

Karmayogi : one who has devoted his life to the selfless service of others.

Khuda : Muslim name for God.

Lila : play; sport.

Maharaja : King of kings.

Mantra : a Vedic verse; a sacred formula.

Maya : illusion.

Moksha : salvation; liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Nama : name.

Nama-japa : repetition of the name of the Lord.

Narayan : Hindu name for God.

Nirvana : utter extinction of egoism; Buddhist conception of salvation; supreme bliss.

Nirvikara : free from passions; passionless.

Omkar : the sacred and mystic syllable OM.

Parmatma : the Supreme Soul; God.

Parmeshwara : the Supreme Lord; God.

Pranayama : science of control over breath.

- Rahman* : the Merciful; God.
- Rahim* : the Compassionate; God.
- Ramanama* : the name of Rama—a Hindu incarnation of God.
- Ramadhun* : incantation of the sacred name of Rama.
- Rishi* : sage; seer.
- Sadhu* : a recluse; mendicant.
- Sat* : being; that which exists; truth.
- Sati* : a virtuous and chaste woman.
- Satya* : truth.
- Satyagraha* : Truth-force; soul-force; non-violent resistance.
- Satyagraha Ashram* : reference is to Gandhiji's *Ashram*
- Savarna Hindus* : caste-Hindus.
- Shastras**: Hindu scriptures.
- Shiva* : a Hindu god.
- Shloka* : verse; stanza.
- Shraddha* : faith.
- Sthitaprajna* : a man of steadfast mind or intellect.
- Swadesh* : literally, belonging to one's own country; principle of using things made locally or in one's own country.
- Swaraj* : self-rule; self-government.
- Syadvad* : philosophy of 'probability' in matters of perception by the senses; a form of scepticism which is professed by a section of Jain thinkers.
- Syadvadi* : a believer in *Syadvad*.
- Tal* : rhythmic beating of time with hands during singing.
- Tapas* : austerity; penance.
- Vaidya* : an Ayurvedic physician.
- Vairagya* : aversion or indifference to life's interests and pursuits.

Vedas : the oldest scriptures of the Hindus.

Vikars : passions.

Vishnu : a Hindu name for God.

Vishnusharanama : one thousand names of Vishnu (God).

Yoga : the science of control of the body and the mind; the science of joining or uniting together the individual self with the Supreme Self.

Yogi : One who practises *Yoga*.

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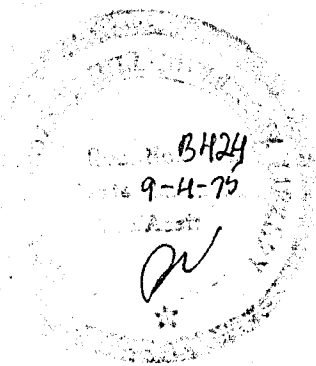
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GOD IS

“God is one and yet many; He is smaller than an atom and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. Faith is essential in this matter.”

“My logic can make and unmake innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say: ‘God is, was and ever shall be.’”

“But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one of us disdain to bow to His will, He says: ‘So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept My sway.’”

“Of such a God, let the ignorant dispute the existence. I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory.”

—M. K. GANDHI

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