

The Psychology of Conversion

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Published in 1917

Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India
The Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras. India

1. THE SUCCESSION OF PHENOMENA

[Page 1] NATURE and Nature's God, Purusha and Prakrti, in interplay, have infinite aspects. And each one of these necessarily has its day, its turn, its good time — and also, of course, its night. The English proverb says vigorously, if not delicately: Every dog has his day. So does every individual; every species of mineral, plant, animal; every nation and race, and every idea and ideal; every virtue and vice; every style of life and art; every peculiar culture and civilisation; every tendency of human nature and every science; every fashion of dressing and of thinking. Infinite aspects have infinite time and infinite space to

manifest in. जगन्ति यस्यां सविकासमासत ॥— Māgha.

“The countless worlds nestle with amplitude of space in those vast arms”. And yet they also crowd and cramp each other, [Page 2]

अन्योऽन्याभिभवाश्रयमिथुनजननवृत्तयश्च गुणाः ॥

—*Sāṅkhya-Kārikā*.

and गुणवृत्तिविरोधाच्च ॥—*Yoga-Sūtra*.

“The moods and functions of the mind and corresponding modes of matter depend upon each other, cannot exist without each other, are inseparably bound up with each other, stimulate, give rise to, almost produce each other; and yet they also perpetually struggle against and endeavour to suppress each other”. The head restrains the heart, the heart overpowers the head, the hands and feet run away with both; now the Devas prevail, now the Daityas; here the corn drives away the wild grasses out of which it has developed, there the weed wins back its own from the wheat and the rice; one custom, one virtue, one vice, one hobby, one fashion, one sport, one favourite study holds sway at one period; the opposite, which, in one view, is only a prolongation and excess and reaction of the other, dominates at another. In this unceasing whirligig of Nature, ever dancing around the motionless God of Nature, That Spectator-Consciousness which provides the motive force for the drama by Its mere “imaginative attention”,

द्रष्टृत्वेनैव प्रवर्तयति, ध्यानेनैवानुगृह्णाति

, *turn by turn* is the law and the compromise between opposites, So faith and reason, religion and science, and mysticism and rationalism, poetry and prosiness, romance and business, peace and war, love and pride, fancy which is the joy of life and fact which is the food thereof — have succeeded each other endlessly in human story, [Page 3]

2. THE TURN OF PSYCHOLOGY

Today, in the West, obeying this law, Metaphysic and Psychology, Brahma-vidyā and Adhyātma-vidyā, are coming back into their own (the interruption by the Great War, though dire, will, it is fervently to be hoped, be only temporary), and every science, formerly suspicious or even contemptuous of “the empty logomachy of the most contentious of sciences” is now boldly trying to strike its roots into their rich fertility, and derive a new sustenance therefrom in order to develop remarkable new branches and leaves. “The proper study of mankind is man” — is being appreciated anew and in new ways. It is realized that *man* is *mind* first and body afterwards, if immediately; that the diligent study of psychology is almost more necessary than that of physiology, in order to secure the *mens sana, in corpore sano*. As a consequence, we have all kinds of investigations and writings about Psychology — the Psychology of the normal mind, the Psychology of the abnormal mind, *i.e.*, of Insanity and other mental diseases, Experimental Psychology, Physiological Psychology, Comparative Psychology, the Psychology of the Child, of the Animal, of the Crowd, of Leadership, of Revolution, of Industrialism, of Politics, of Society, of Evidence and Witnesses, of Sex, and finally, of Religion. Books have actually appeared with titles as above, and new lines are being constantly struck out. When all these rich discoveries come, some day, to be summed up in one great science [Page 4] and art of Psychophysics, then we may have the ancient (and for all practical purposes lost) science and art of Yoga restored on a higher level.

3. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

The Psychology of Religion affords specially promising material. According to the Hindû way of looking at things, inner and outer, in Religion, in Dharma, is the means of the *Synthesis of all Life*. The best western mind has realized that “sciences are not many, Science is one; all sciences are but parts of one Science”. The Hindû mind prefers to use the word Religion, or rather Dharma, in place of the word science, and would say “religions are not many; Religion is one; all religions are but aspects of one Religion”.

एकमेव दर्शनं ख्यातिरेव दर्शनम् ।— *Yoga-Bhāshya* I. 4. “The Vision is one, the Vision of the nature of Spirit as other-than-Matter, as not-Matter, and so including all Matter”.

(ख्यातिः = सत्त्व- पुरुषान्यताख्यातिः ।)

And Science is one, Religion is one, True Vision is one, because the Life, the Consciousness is One that manifests in all these infinite forms. This one and secondless Religion is, to the Hindû mind, “the crown, the Finality of Experience”, the Metaphysic which is the foundation of all knowledge.

वेदमेकं स बहुधा कुरुते हितकाम्यया ॥

“The Veda, Wisdom, is one; the Seer subdivides it into many for facility of understanding and use”. [Page 5]

And the crown of the Veda is the Vedānta. As a modern writer says “True religion, apart from dogma, is

the sublimed essence of the knowledge of the highest things of the world". — Moore, *Origin and Nature of Life*, Home Univ. Lib., p. 1. This is the new way of explaining to the modern mind, in language it prefers, the old statement that

सत्यान्नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion other or higher than Truth". But Religion is more than the sublimed essence of *knowledge* alone; it is also the sublimed essence of *emotion*, and, again, of *action*; as Truth is also correspondingly triple, being not only Truth, but Beauty and Goodness also

सत्यं, प्रियं, हितम् ॥

The Vision of that scientific Truth which is "completely unified knowledge" is the Head of Religion. The achievement of the Good of others by the sacrifice of self is its Limbs. The ecstasy of Prayer, of Devotion, of Worship, to and of the Beautiful, the Ideal, the Divine, the Source of all Life and all Power, the Omnipotent — is its Heart. The way of Knowledge, the way of Devotion, the way of Works, corresponding respectively to the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, and the Omnipresent — these three make up the triple and triune way of Dharma which equally include the Jñana-kānda, the Bhakti-kānda and the Karma-kānda; Rationalism, Mysticism and Practicalism; Gnosis, Pistis and Energism — on both the arcs of life, the Life of Pursuit, Pravrtti, and the Life of Renunciation, Nivrtti, in different degrees and different ways. [Page 6]

Looked at thus, Dharma-Religion may equally be regarded as the one Science, the One Law, or the One Art. It becomes the whole Code of Life, using up all available Wisdom, Beauty, Active Power, for the ever higher development of mankind in all departments of life. Such at least seems to have been the old Hindû Ideal of Dharma. How the modern West will re-develop the conception of Religion, in theory and practice, is hidden away as yet in the depths of its Oversoul. But the attitude of the scientists is becoming distinctly more favourable, more sympathetic, even now and then reverent, towards poetry, romance, fairy story, the element of the mystical in Nature and human nature, towards the Heart of Religion in short. And the students of the Psychology of Religion, and writers thereon, now mostly avoid the superior attitude of the entomologist studying a curious insect. While no doubt pursuing, and rightly pursuing, the methods of *exact science* by means of observation, experiment, questionnaires, collections of statistics, etc., they yet clearly indicate also that the mood and the time for contemptuous treatment of the psychical element in man are gone, and that the *mystery* which always, invariably, remains behind at the end of every, even the thickest, textbook of physical science, in the shape of the *why* of every single natural phenomenon — who knows *why* two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen change into water under the stress of electricity ? — that *mystery* is here present, a little more visibly, from the very beginning. The [Page 7] study of the physical sciences has only enhanced the sense of wonder, of awe, of humble reverence, for the Final Mystery, the Universal Consciousness, which is the Ultimate Source of all powers, psychic, biotic and physical, and which is not only at the heart of the universe but in its head and limbs as well; the study of the religious consciousness in a scientific way can only further enhance that sense, bring increased appreciation of spiritual things, and lead to greater wisdom in dealing with religious education and religious phenomena generally.

Of the works, in the English language on the Psychology of Religion, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* is perhaps the best known, naturally because of the brilliance of expression of the gifted author. Starbuck, Leuba, Pratt and others have also done, and are doing, good work.

4. THE PHENOMENON OF CONVERSION

A vital phenomenon in the psychology of the religious consciousness is that known as *conversion*. Etymologically, it means a *turning round* from one direction to another. (*Skt. vrt.*, to exist by circling round and round, for things manifest by spinning, revolving motion, cyclical periodicity.) In religion, it ordinarily means turning from one creed to another. In the psychology of Religion, it means the turning, as the consequence of a great internal struggle, from self-seeking, egoism and egotism, [Page 8] vice, sin, evil, unbelief, disbelief, enmity towards man and God, to selflessness, other-seeking, altruism and humanity, virtue, purity, holiness, faith in and love of God and man.

As the writer in Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* says:

Conversion, the greatest of moral events, is not the monopoly of one religion. It is a human as well as a Christian fact. As there is one blood in the veins of all nations, and one breath in all nostrils, so there is one Divine Spirit brooding over and striving within all souls. God has made all men with a capacity for conversion, with possibility of response to the highest call.

The phenomenon in fact belongs to human nature in all times and all climes. It is noticed only when sudden, acute, demonstrative; and is dealt with wisely or unwisely by those concerned, according to their *lights*, or their *darknesses*, as the case may be, with lasting consequences in good or ill to the individual. It is not so noticed when comparatively mild, gradual, and under the surface, as it is in many cases. As regards the special forms and features of it as developed in the atmosphere of the Hindû culture and civilisation, the following quotation from Hastings *Encyclopedia*, regarding the Hebrews, equally describes the general attitude of Sanātana Dharma:

The aim of Hebrew parents . . . was to train a child in the service of God and in the atmosphere of healthy piety, that in his manhood he should need no sudden, violent, convulsive return unto Jahveh from a life of sin and shame. [Page 9]

At the same time, in the steadiest-flowing stream there will be spots which are marked by rapids; and in the most healthy and evenly-moving individual life, there will be cyclical periods, climacterics, psycho-physical crises.

5. THE HINDÛ WAY OF DEALING WITH IT

In framing its scheme of life, and developing its system of culture and civilisation, the Hindû Sûtrātmā or Oversoul has marked such critical *turning points* — each a *conversion* — with rites and sacraments, ever mindful of its basic principle, *viz.*, the earth a little and heaven a little more; the body of Matter no doubt, but the soul of Spirit with even greater certainty; immersion into the evil of fleshly existence unavoidably, but *conversion* out of it into the holiness of the spiritual life as rapidly, progressively, fully as possible.

It is well known that Hinduism, in order to work out this principle, divides the individual life into two halves; (a) the half of Pravrtti, *going forward* into matter and pursuit of the things of sense, and (b) the half of Nivrtti, renunciation thereof and return to the spiritual state. And each of these is again subdivided into two, making the four stages of student, family-man, publicist and ascetic. By means of these four, the soul was enabled to realize the two main ends of life, *viz.*, (a) *kāma*, worldly pleasure (refined and kept within due bounds by the two other subsidiary ends, *viz.*, *artha* and *dharma*, profit and [Page 10] virtue),

and (b) moksha, spiritual happiness and peace, final emancipation from all the fetters of the soul, ignorance, doubts, blind beliefs and blind disbeliefs, desires and passions, etc., Spiritual Liberty, in short, including all minor liberties, political, social, etc..

निष्कैगुण्ये पथि विचरतां को विधिः को निषेधः ॥

“The soul, the jiva, the self that has realized Itself as beyond and behind the three gunas, the three qualities, the three functioning's of the mind-and-body — that soul has found within itself the Fount of all Law, and needs no external injunctions and prohibitions; not that whatever it may do shall be regarded as right, but that it will be directed from within itself to do only that which is right. Its evolved and illumined conscience will advise it right, whether the body fail to carry out the advice or not. It has become a law unto itself only because it knows itself to be bound up with, nay, identical with all selves; and that its freedom is a freedom only to help and not to harm others”.

To understand this scheme of life, it must always be borne in mind that it is only a type, an ideal, for the normal man in the normal conditions of the Hindû culture-civilisation as a whole — its

संपद्धर्म and not आपद्धर्म,

the duty in abnormal circumstances) in short; and that things are designated in accordance with their *prominent* features and functions only and can never be named so as to exhaust all their properties at once. [Page 11]

वैशेष्यात्तु तद्वादस्तद्वादः ।
- Brahma-Sutra

Thus every race, every nation, and again every occupation, has its distinctive type of face. But this is only by predominance. In detail, there are also endless variations from this type within each race and nation and occupation.

So, for the normal, typical, man of Manu — classed into one or the other of the four main classes, for educational, political, commercial and industrial purposes — the normal, typical, life was subdivided and planned out as above. And the first half of this was devoted to the (a) preparation for, and, then, (b) the actual pursuit of the things of sense; devoted, quite frankly, to selfishness, self-seeking, living at the expense of others, parents, elders, etc., during the stage of preparation, *i.e.*, (a) Brahmacharya; and of compeers and competitors during the stage of the actual pursuit, *i.e.*, (b) Gārhashthya. These correspond to “the state of sin”. The second half was devoted similarly to (c) preparation for, and, then, (d) actual and complete renunciation, unselfishness, self-denial, self-sacrifice and other-seeking, by unremunerated public services suitable to the needs and circumstances of the day, in the stage of (c) Vānaprastha, and by the abolition of the sense of property, of possessions, of a separate self, and by identification with the Cosmic Life of Universal Consciousness in (d) Sannyāsa. These correspond, in the highest and fullest sense, with “the state of grace”. [Page 12]

6. UPANAYANA AS SYMBOLICAL OF PRELIMINARY CONVERSION

The formal beginning of the student stage is marked by the sacrament of Upanayana (with which the Christian rites of *baptism* and *confirmation* seem to possess some analogy). The investiture, with the sacred thread, of the boy passing into adolescence and youth, by the preceptor to whom he has been *led up* and who in turn is to *lead him up* (upa-nayana) to the Supreme Self — this investiture is symbolical of his second birth into the status of the Spirit (or, of the descent upon and birth of the Spirit in him, as the Christian expression is), of his *conversion* and *regeneration*. Of course, the conversion and regeneration are *completed* only when the sacraments of Vānaprastha and Sannyāsa have also been performed; but the beginning is made here. The Brahmacharya stage, directly preparing for the family-life, also prepares for the subsequent stages, though a little more distantly. The seeds are sown here of that philosophical detachment and aloofness, of the strongest action no doubt, but with resignation as to fruits, of the calm of mind, of those noble ambitions, more heavenly than earthly, which will later on develop into complete renunciation and retirement. The stormy psycho-physical readjustments between soul and body that mark the delicate, difficult, wonderful period of adolescence, with their vehement doubts, yearnings and questionings, [Page 13] naturally provide the fruitful soil wherein those seeds can be sown by the tender wisdom of parents and Spiritual Teachers.

7. SANNYĀSA, THE FINAL CONVERSION

It may be said, not incorrectly perhaps, that as the sacrament of Upanayana belongs to the stage of *adolescence* and puberty, and marks that preliminary conversion wherein the soul seeks to orient itself rightly to its worldly surroundings and to gain the clear vision and the strong help from the Superphysical Source of all power which will enable it to apply itself to its tasks here with righteousness and success; so the sacrament of Sannyāsa belongs to the stage of the climacteric and of *senescence* and surfeit with sense-experiences — also a very difficult period of much backward and forward movement — wherein the soul completes its conversion from the things of the life *here* to those of the life *hereafter* (in the philosophical sense of moksha, and not merely the theological sense of heaven).

8. CONVERSION IN THE THOUGHTFUL SOUL

In the Jñāna-mārgi (or predominantly intellectual temperament), the soul-struggles take the form of vehement questionings: “What am I, whence, whither ? Why all this vast misery, these endless frustrations, mis-matings, destructions ? Why Death ? Why and how this world-process at all ? ” The [Page 14] traditional “qualifications of those entitled” to study Vedānta, the *adhikāris*, viz., Viveka, Vairāgya, etc., indicate the nature of the psychical condition of the enquirer who is undergoing the internal storms of *conversion*. And this seems to be the oldest, ideal, typical, and most comprehensive form of *conversion* in Hinduism.

The classical portraiture of this form is to be found in the *Katha-Upanishat*. The boy Nachiketā insistently asks Yama, the King of Death: “Tell me that which will rid me of all fear of you, O Death; fear of any- and everything other-than-Myself; that which will make Me independent of all else-than-I; which will assure me that I am my own master and not at the mercy and caprice of any Other; that which will make me immortal, by convincing me that I am Not-Mortal. I want no other boons”. “What shall it profit a man if he

gain the whole world and lose his own soul ? ” is the Christian phrase. The dialogue between the venerable sage Vyāsa and his boy-son Shuka — in the *Mahābhārata (Shāntiparva)* — is to the same effect. In this instance (in one version), it is the father who endeavours to arouse those struggles in the soul of his son.

अन्धकारे प्रवेष्टव्यं दीपो यत्नेन धार्यताम् ॥

“Thou hast to enter into the darkness — light thy lamp, and hold it carefully”.

आत्मानमन्विच्छ गुहां प्रविष्टं पितामहास्ते क्व गताः पिता च ॥

[Page 15] “Where are gone thy father and forefathers; seek the Âtman, hidden in the cave of the heart”. “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die ? ” is the corresponding Christian phrase.

But the most famous, most detailed and most poetical description of the *passion*, the *agony*, of the Soul, seeking, seeking, the solution of the awful mystery, is to be found in the first sections of the *Yoga-Vāsishtha*, which is also known as the *Mahā-Rāmāyana*, the *Great Rāmāyana* (said by tradition to be also the work of the sage Vālmīki) in distinction from the other *Rāmāyana*, great enough as epic, but smaller, as describing only the outer conquests of Rāma over external foes, while the *Mahā-Rāmāyana* describes his inner victories over the psychical Titans of doubt and despair.

विवेकवैराग्यवतो बोध एव महोदयः ॥

“The thoughtful, discriminating, and earnest questioner will find and understand, without fail”. “The seeker will find”. “Knock and the door will open”. And hundreds of other cases are mentioned in the *Purānas* and *Itihāsas*.

The Buddha's, Mahāvīra Jina's, Shankarāchārya's, are other famous and historical conversions of the same type. And presumably the more earnest-minded and sensitive spirits amongst the following of each must have passed through their respective Masters' experience in more or less close degree, generation after generation, since Their day. Cases of such earnest, whole-hearted questioning, where [Page 16] finding or not finding the solution is a real matter of joy or misery, even of life or death, will probably be found, though not very commonly, of course, in almost every College of young men.

In such cases *conversion* and *regeneration* merge into each other, whereas in Christianity, apparently, a distinction is drawn between the two (*vide Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Hastings' Encyclopedia*). The former is said to take place by the struggle of the soul itself; the latter by Divine Grace.

In the Vedānta scheme the two are aspects of the same phenomenon. The struggle of the soul is the condition of the inflow of the grace; the cries of the drowning man evoke the energies of the rescuer; the wail of the baby makes the milk flow from the mother. It is true that, ordinarily, such flow of grace,

दया, प्रसाद, is regarded as proceeding from a Divine Being *other* than the soul in distress, from a

personal deity in short; and is a more prominent feature in the psychology of the devotional than that of the intellectual conversion and regeneration. But the basic principle is the same, and the same phrases and expressions apply equally to the Impersonal or Universal and to the Personal. Thus the *Mundaka Upanishat* says:

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूं स्वाम् ॥

“That Whom the seeker is seeking, That same Ātmā espouseth the seeker in turn and discloseth Its Glory to him”. [Page 17]

Indeed, in the Impersonal Principle we find the explanation, the reason why, of the personal fact. The greater (god) responds to the cry for help of the lesser (soul), because the lesser and the greater (human soul and divine soul) are all equally compacted of the same Essence, the One Spirit; and the Universal Spirit discloses Itself to be individual *jīva*, as soon as the latter turns to it, *because* the two are one and the same ; and the *jīva* receives assurance and inspiration of Universal Love and Immortality *because* it realises its identity with the Eternal and all-including Ātma. It is but natural and right that the concrete should be the visible copy of the invisible Abstract which includes all concretes. Other features common to all the three main kinds of *conversions* corresponding with the three main temperaments, will appear as we proceed.

The *state of grace* supervening upon the conversion of the *thoughtful* soul is mainly a state of metaphysical realisation of the oneness of all Life and Nature, and, subserviently, of consequent tenderness for all life and self-sacrificing performance of all duty. It may be said to be the technical *jīvan-mukfi*.

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥—*Isha*

“He who seeth all in the Self, and the Self in all, he hateth none, he loveth and serveth all”.

The West, because of its predominantly active (*rājasa*) temperament, favors *Philosophies of Change* and *of Life* [Page 18] (conceived as a perpetual *progress*) like those of Bergson and Eucken, to mention the latest names; and, as yet, recoils from the notion of Changelessness as the Fundamental Fact of the Universe, and of Change as only an Illusion therein. Hence the Vedāntic form of *conversion* seems to be practically non-existent there, and the Vedāntic metaphysic, even when approached by such Hegelians as Green, Bradley and Royce, is not carried to its full and legitimate consequences, and remains a speculation, without rising to the level of living and *act-ual* Truth, that which can be and is *acted* upon, to the level of a Religion satisfying all the deepest needs of life.

It is apparently only in India that we have “*Applied Metaphysic and Psychology*” (Brahma-vidyā and Adhyātma-vidyā), as the West has “*Applied Science*”; and here such application has developed the *varna-and-āshrama-dharma*; an all-satisfying Religion, social polity, culture, civilisation; with a full reconciliation of the Transcendental and the Empirical (paramārtha and vyavahāra), the Altruistic and the Egoistic (vishvajānīna and ātmanīna), the Communal and the Individual, the Whole and the Part, the

Real and the Illusory, the Changeless and the Changeful, Spirit and Matter; and with a culmination in that *Yoga-samādhi* of Sannyāsa and स्थितप्रज्ञता (*Bhagavad-Gītā*) which is the perfected *conversion* wherein are experienced Beatitude, and Grace, and Salvation from the primal, congenital sin of Avidyā. [Page 19]

भक्तिः परेशानुभवो विरक्तिरन्यत्र चैष त्रिक एककालः॥
- Bhagavata

9. CONVERSION IN THE EMOTIONAL SOUL

The remarks just made naturally lead us to the second class of conversions, *viz.*, those of the devotional temperament, of the man of feeling as distinguished from the man of thought, of the soul in which bhakti-emotion is predominant.

To such souls the struggles preceding conversion (especially when they take place during adolescence) do not arrive in the philosophical form of definite questionings, but, apparently, of a vague yet deep distress, without ability to understand what the distress consists in, like that of the hungry infant which does not know and is unable to say "I am hungry", but feels relieved at once as soon as milk is given to it, or as that of the uninstructed youth and maiden who suffer from spring-sadness in acute form, but do not understand, and feel rejoiced when they have fallen in love with each other. They do not suffer from the more impersonal Vedāntic *viveka*. *vairāgya*, *mumukshā*, etc., but from a more personal longing for divine help and compassion from *above*, for the gracious love and support of some being more than human, which only would make their life happy and successful.

Marriage with a physical spouse is the physical sacrament crowning adolescence, bringing relief from its trials and troubles, and completing physical *conversion*. So marriage with an individual super-physical Spouse, a Divine Lover and Beloved, is the psychical sacrament crowning the soul-adolescence of the devotee, Nuns were "married to the Christ"; [Page 20] the Church was "the bride of the Christ"; "God is the bridegroom of the soul". The pleasurable as well as the painful delicacies of sensation, subtleties of sentiment, minute refinements and shades of emotion, the exaltations and depressions, the transports of joy and sorrow, the despairs of loss and the ecstasies of attainment — are the same in kind in both cases. Only the object in the one case is a concrete human being; in the other, an ethereal, superphysical, ideal entity. In Hindû life, this soul-marriage generally takes the shape of attachment to an *ishta-deva*, a *loved deity*, the ideal Superman or Superwoman, by means of a *mantra* which is communicated to the neophyte by his spiritual guru. The *mantra* is generally in the form of "Om ! obeisance unto — — (the name.....of the deity)". The *devatās* selected, are, naturally, those that correspond to the character, the ruling passion, the heart-desire of the neophyte, and differ in grades and degrees of *personality*, *i.e.*, are more *ideal* and distant or more *anthropomorphic* though of course all *divine*, according to the votary's requirements — Sûrya, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Granesha, Narasimha, Durgā, Lakshmî, Saraswatî, or Rāma, Krshna, Hanuman, etc.. The martial-minded man naturally worships Mars; the seeker of worldly wisdom, Minerva (her most famous votary, Ulysses, is *cunning*); the pleasure-hunter, Venus and Bacchus; the aspirant for sovereignty, Jupiter; the money-lover, Plutus; the artist-craftsman, Vulcan; and so on. It may be noted, however, that Vishnu, Shiva, and [Page 21] Shakti are more especially the deities of the devotional temperament, and saviors of the soul in the general sense; also Rāma and Krshna, who are only more specifically human forms of Vishnu; whereas the other deities, including the physical Sun, belong more to the actional temperament, as bestowers of

specific gifts, health, wealth, strength, etc. The hymns to the former show the soul-struggles which belong to conversion proper; those to the latter, only steady and specific desires.

It should be remembered that the spouse-love of Purusha and Prakrti, in its fullness, is the source of, and includes., its three principal modifications and forms of parental, filial and fraternal compassion, reverence and affection and all their infinite shades and derivatives.

त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव ।
त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव त्वमेव सर्वं मम देवदेव ॥

“Thou art father, thou art mother, thou art brother, thou art friend and boon companion too; thou art wisdom, thou art riches — thou art all to me, my God of gods !” According to their different temperaments, votaries emphasize the one mode or the other. The worshipers of Shakti profess to think of her as the mother; of Ramā as the father; of Krshna as the beneficent friend, or lover and beloved, or as the babe.

And the Supreme Consciousness, which is behind all objects of devotion as well as all votaries, does, naturally, answer prayer and meet desire in the [Page 22] longed-for form, in a literal and concrete as well as a general sense.

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ॥—*Gītā*.

“I love My lovers in the forms in which they desire Me”.

विभर्ति विविधा मूर्तिभक्तानुग्रहकाङ्क्षया ॥

And elsewhere:

“He puts on many forms for the sake of many votaries”.

When even a human being above the common can be “all things to all men”, when almost every average person also is a parent to one, a spouse to another, a child to a third, a brother or sister to a fourth, a friend to a fifth; it is no wonder that supermen and divine individuals should be able to put on different shapes (which are to them as clothes to us) in response to different demands.

The selfsame electric force manifests itself in the telegraph, the lamp, the fan, the heater, the automobile, the great engines — according to the need and the skill of the inventor. Even so the highest and subtlest and most essential and ultimate of forces, Will force, Thought force, Prayer force, manifests itself in those highest forms of expression, individualised centres of various qualities and intensities, according to the need and the skill of the devotee.

मन्त्रमूर्तिरमूर्तिस्त्वम् ॥ मन्त्रमूर्तिर्देवता ॥

[Page 23]

“Thy form, O Formless ! is the form of the *mantra*, the invoker's thought”. “The *deva* takes the forms of

the *mantra*".

The visions of the seers, the reports of the super-physical experiences of the mystics, and even (on a lower and often unwholesome level) the recorded cases of *yaksha*, and *yakshini* or *gandharva* and *apsarā* lovers, *succubi* and *incubi*, fairy-brides and ghost-bridegrooms, *etc.*, are illustrations, in different ways, of the same general law by which the heart's desire fulfils itself by means of individualised forces of Nature, *i.e.*, *Devas*, *Jīvas*, of high and low degree, who are all only manifesting *foci* of the One Supreme Force of Nature, *viz.*, Consciousness.

This, the emotional kind of conversion, is, it would seem, the most common all over the world, the metaphysical conversion being confined, in the West, in imperfect form, to the speculations of thinkers and the imaginations of poets, as when Shakespeare exclaims: "We are such stuff as dreams are made of". To the man of feeling, whole-hearted submission to, faith in, dependence on, and assurance of, loving help from a concrete Person is indispensable. "I take refuge in Buddha". "Muhammad is *the* Prophet". "My hope is in Shiva alone". "Repent ye, and be converted, and lean on Jesus, the Saviour". "God is Love".

नाविरतो दुश्चरितात् , (*Katha*) ; शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् (*Gṛh̥t̥*).

"None who hath not ceased from sinful ways and repented may find Him"; "I surrender myself unto Thee; do Thou direct me"; *etc.* The state of grace here is the utter love of [Page 24] and taking refuge in and submission and surrender to one's special personal deity, and turning away from other deities.

सा (भक्तिः) त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा ।

अन्याश्रयाणां त्यागोऽनन्यता ॥

—*Nārada-Bhakti-Sūtra*.

सा परानुरक्तिरीश्वरे ॥—*Shāṇḍilya*.

As Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the way", so Krishna said to Arjuna:

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

"I will free thee from all sins; have no fear".

But, in the latter case, the "I" means the Universal Self to the man of thought, and the personal embodiment of it in Krishna to the man of feeling — one result of which latter interpretation is the "turning away from other deities", the sectarianism, which is inevitable wherever and whenever the personal predominates over the Impersonal in thought and feeling. Emotion, necessarily, intensifies individuality and brings *ahankāra* to a point — with some useful and some harmful consequences, as usual. (See *Yoga-Sūtra* II. 3-9.) All devotees, all sects, feel the same feelings, use the same words, but disagree with each other, because the objects of devotion are differently conceived.

त्वदन्यो वरेष्यो न मान्यो न गण्यः ॥

—Upamanyu's Shiva-Stuti [Page 25]

“Other than thee is not to be regarded as good and great, is not to be honoured, is not to be counted at all!”

The story of Vyāsa's banishment from Kāshi for an excessive and overbearing laudation of Nārāyana in the Temple of Shiva, is recorded at length in the *Kāshī Khanda*.

In Hindû life, the initiation with *mantras* referred to above, has, in most cases, become a family matter, and hereditary, rather than an affair of individual spontaneity — whence sects and *sampradāyas*, and a hackneying and vulgarizing of the experiences of conversion — as is inevitable with all *concrete* forms which necessarily degenerate and require renewal, like the human body in new births.

The classical instances of bhakti-conversion, in Hindû story, are those of Ajāmila (a fowler, as Peter was a fisherman), Ganikā (a Mary Magdalene), etc.. The more famous historic ones are those of Rāmānuja, Chaitanya, Vallabha, Sûra, Tulasîdāsa etc.. Scores of minor cases are mentioned in the *Bhaktamāla* (the Hindû *Lives of the Saints*). Apart from gnostic traditions, the experience of Jesus, his temptation by and victory over the forces of evil, may perhaps be thought to have been of this class.

10. CONVERSION IN THE ACTION-LOVING SOUL

The third kind of conversion is obviously connected with the third kind of temperament, the sanguine, that, of the man of action, the karma-mārgî [Page 26] soul. Such a soul craves to be married, not to the Universal Spirit of all with the bonds of jñāna, nor to an individual deity (of course regarded as the highest) with the bonds of bhakti, but with the bonds of karma-enterprise, to an ambition — for name and fame, or wealth, or power, etc.. It is true that in Hinduism, as in other religions, even for these, the help of an *ishta-deva* is sought; but the feeling towards them is different from what it is in the case of the bhakti-mārgî. In the case of the latter, communion with the deity is itself the end, the soul-nourishment, the immediate source of joy. In the case of the former, the deity is frankly a means. The special religious form that the karma-mārga *conversion* takes in Hinduism is that of *yajña-dikshā*, initiation in a formal *sacrifice* — of which dozens of kinds are mentioned in the books of ritual — a specific *sacred act* which is believed to produce a specific result, mostly in the shape of superphysical or psychical energy or *samskāra*, which has a reaction upon the affairs of this life also. But this line in religion is practically extinct in India. *Yajñas* of the milder form, *rudra-yāga*, *soma-yāga*, etc., are performed now and then, at rare intervals, in one or another of the *sacred cities* — but it is mostly a matter of forcing and artificiality, of spasmodic effort, made by perfervid orthodoxy, to save an ancient form from dying out altogether. It is recognized generally that “the worship of Brahmā, the god of action, is dead” (it is so in India, in more senses than one, unfortunately), while that of [Page 27] Vishnu and Shiva, the gods of knowledge and desire, is living, even as in Greek mythology Uranus (Space) was displaced by Chronos-Saturn (Time) and he by Zeus (Energy).

In a certain sense, instances of karma-mārga conversions, mixed strongly with intellectual elements, might be seen in Muhammad (the Prophet of Islām), in Dayānanda (the Founder of the Ārya Samāj),

Vivekānanda (of the Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission), etc. (The story of Dayānanda's *conversion* is to be found in Lālā Lājpat Rāi's work on *The Ārya Samāj*.) In another way, Shivāji (instructed by his Guru, Rām Dās), Ranjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab (taunted by his mother from a mischievous and idle youth into a resolute and successful warrior and kingdom-builder), and many such others, are also instances of actional conversions. The case of Arjuna, in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, may be regarded as the most famous classical case of such. Hamlet's "to be or not to be", may also be regarded as a conversion-struggle (rather abortive, however) of the *actional* kind.

The state of grace in actional conversion is the state of resolute determination to do the act that is right and is required by duty, whatever the consequences.

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥— — Gita.

"My doubt and confusion have departed, and I will do what Thou sayest". [Page 28]

11. COMPARATIVE AND COMMON FEATURES

The period of adolescence is, generally, the period for most such conversions. As already said, it is the period of an extraordinary psycho-physical crisis and readjustment between soul and body. In the typical all-round life (out of which all others differentiate) running along the lines of Manu's Code, and not governed by any specific temperament, abnormality, or sect, the soul is, during that magical, mystical, romantic, stormy and terrible period of adolescence, drawn opposite ways, by the opposite attractions of Matter and of Spirit, in the conflict between *kāma* and *bhakti*, physical love and spiritual devotion, the spouse's pleasure and the parent's compassion, *ishq-i-majāzi* and *ishq-i-haqīqi*, human craving and the Love Divine. The beauty of the flesh, the keen joy of sense, on the one side; the *instinctive, intuitional*, feeling of the inherent sin and sorrow of the individualised and competitive life of this world, and of the blissful calm of the non-bodily life of the Spirit, on the other; these tear it in two. For it is true that man is necessarily born in *sin*, in the deepest sense. To the view of the Vedānta, the act of procreation is an act of ahankāra, of self-assertion, self-multiplication; in a sense, it is the very quintessence of selfishness; the act of being born and taking and keeping up a body is also an act of *sin* for every act of taking nourishment, of self-preservation, also deprives another, *some other, of food*, of the means of sustenance. These two [Page 29] elemental appetites of the flesh, the hunger and the love-lust, which rule mankind, and together with the hunger for "name and fame", "a local habitation and a name", make up the *three* appetites, or

एषणात्रय of the Samskrit scheme, i.e., लोकेषणा, the craving for honor, वित्तैषणा, for wealth, दारसुतैषणा, for power — of sex and progeny typically — these are the very source and origin of all

sin, and are rooted in that primal sin (called क्लेश in Yoga) and error of Avidyā, falsehood, the false identification of the Universal Spirit with a handful of essentially *impure* flesh and blood and bone — out of which the world-process arises. But such sin of self-seeking is the necessary first factor of life, otherwise there would never be any individual, separate, living beings at all; and transcendence thereof, the rising above it, by the merit of a self-sacrifice, is the equally necessary second factor of life — to be experienced in this or a later birth.

वित्तैषणां यज्ञदानैर्गृहैर्दारसुतैषणाम् ।
आत्मलोकैषणां देव कालेन विसृजेद्बुधः ॥

The wise man should fulfil, exhaust, and redeem the craving for wealth and possessions by means of public and pious works and charities; the craving for spouse and progeny by the joys and the duties of the home; the wish for name and fame in this world, and for the consequent high place in the next world, by long life and — lapse of time. *Bhāgavata*, ch, x. 84.

This inherent sinfulness of the separate and individualised and unavoidably competitive life is [Page 30] felt by the adolescent soul, from the standpoint of Purusha; and the compulsion to take it up is also equally felt by it, from the standpoint of Prakrti — and every individual is compounded of both Purusha and Prakrti. In the case of the more concrete-minded, and of the middle-aged or aged and experienced, this sense of sin, which is more *ideal* in the innocent youth, takes the more concrete and *real* form of remorse and repentance also:

पापोऽहं पापकर्माऽहं पापात्मा पापसंभवः ।
पाहि मां पुण्डरीकाक्ष सर्वपापहरो भव ॥

“Sinful am I, sin-acting, sin-souled, sin-born;
Save me, wash away all my sins, O Lord !”

In this case, the conversion is not completed by mere repentance, without confession and expiation. All these,

पश्चात्ताप, प्रख्यापन, and प्रायश्चित्त, , are needed to secure the state of grace.

This sense of an inner conflict, between indulgence and forbearance, between the worldly life and the saintly life, the wish to be and the wish not to be mixed up with the toils and turmoils of this world; and the need for intellectual solution, for loving help, for determinate and active resolve, is the common prelude to all kinds of conversion. Technical Samskrt names for these moods of inner conflict seem to be

वैराग्य and निर्वेद, आर्ति and खेद, and विषाद

संदेह,

, respectively, in the three cases of the men of thought, feeling and action. The corresponding states of

grace would be those of [Page 31] ज्ञान and शान्ति (wisdom and peace), भक्ति and आनन्द

(love and joy) , निश्चय and शक्ति (resolution and power) . In the well-balanced soul, all should be present in due proportion, though one will predominate.

The reconciliation of the opposite tendencies is brought about, in Manu's Ideal Scheme, by the youth's

initiation (Upanayana) in the course of which the teacher teaches him “the rules of purity of mind and body, of good manners and morals, of the offerings to the physical and superphysical fires, *and of worship and meditation*”. For this last, he is taught the *Gāyatrī-mantra*, the Invocation of the Sun-God, as our visible Deity also, the self-evident source of all our light and life, but primarily as the most glorious available embodiment and symbol of the Universal Spiritual Sun, Paramātmā and the type and source of all personal gods whatsoever, according to the *Purānas*.

नमः सवित्रे जगदेकचक्षुषे जगत्प्रसूतिस्थितिनाशहेतवे ।
त्रयीमयाय त्रिगुणात्मधारिणे विरिञ्चिनारायणशंकरात्मने ॥

Salutation to Thee, O Sun ! that art the Progenitor, the Eye of the Moving, the Cause of the Birth, Growth and Death of the world, the Source of the Threefold Veda-wisdom, the Bearer of the Three Gunas, the One Deity whose three sheath-spheres, physical, subtle, and causal, are known as the three gods, Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva!

The *Bhavisya Purāna* (Pt. III), tells how the great souls that help humanity, seers, sages, heroes, poets, messengers, inventors and discoverers, *etc.*, [Page 32] all *descend* from the Sun and re-ascend thereto after their work here is done.

In the Teacher's home the youth also learns how the primal sin of identifying the Self with a body of flesh, becomes transformed into the threefold *social debt*, to the ancestors, the teachers, and the nature-gods; how these are redeemed by parental love and filial reverence, by the spreading of knowledge, and by philanthropic service and the performance of those *sacred acts* which help on the beneficent activities of nature-spirits; how the claims of both Matter and Spirit are reconciled in our human state and at our stage of evolution by, first, storing knowledge, then sanctified wedlock and the rearing of noble progeny, then by public service, and finally by complete renunciation of the world and surrender and mergence of the individual to and into the Universal. In this way, in the words of William James (*Varieties of Religious Experience*), “higher and lower feelings, the useful and the erring impulses — beginning by being a comparative chaos within us — end by forming a stable system of functions in right subordination”. All this that the youth learns in the first stage of life, he *realises* during the next three stages, completing his *conversion* ' ever more and more fully.

“Seeking nothing, he gains all,
Forgoing self, the Universe grows 'I'.”

He gives up all sense of separateness together with his worn-out body, and realises that “I am the Changeless Universal Consciousness, in which all change appears as a dream”. Such is the final [Page 33] salvation, the completed conversion, from Matter to Spirit, wherein science and philosophy, ambition and contentment, change and changelessness, merge into an all inclusive Religion, and differentiated knowledge, desire and action, Wisdom, Love, and Power, all are lost in their Primum or Matrix — truly Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent because Undifferentiated Consciousness.

To the more concrete-minded soul, a more concrete deal and support is necessary, and a *mantra* of a particular *ishta-deratā* is communicated, as said before. It seems that in Hindū life, the devotional temperament comes to real conversion more often in or after middle age than in adolescence.

An intermediary, a teacher, a priest, an elder, is generally needed — on the principle that the sick man cannot well prescribe for himself, even though he be a qualified physician, much less when he is not

such. And on occasions of great joy and great sorrow, of great trials and struggles, of tumults and transports in the mind, a benevolent third person is necessary, who has experienced them himself, but has outgrown them, and has now the calmness and wisdom which are necessary to help others effectively. But there are exceptions to every rule, and variations from every norm. And such an intermediary is not absolutely indispensable in every case.

12. CONCLUSION

It also appears that just as knowing, feeling and acting succeed one another in a perpetual rotation in [Page 34] every individual's life, so the corresponding temperaments, intellectual, emotional, and active, also yield place to one another in succession, in the experience of every *Jīva*, in the course of a single lifetime (as do childhood, youth, manhood, old age, etc., or the reigns of the various astrological planets, *dashās*) as well as in the course of many births and rebirths. Over-devotion to study is followed by an imperative want of emotional relaxation; that by the necessity for a bout of physical activity and hard work; that again by a craving for further knowledge, and so on. In simple words, work and play follow each other.

The opening chapters of the *Vishnu-Bhāgavata* tell how Vyāsa, after having rearranged the *Vedas*, written the *Mahābhārata*, and composed the *Brahma-Sūtras*, felt want and heartache. And Nārada came and advised him: "You have spoken from the head, mostly, in terms of knowledge, of duty, of ritual, of right and wrong, of the Attributeless and Changeless Infinite. Sing now, from the heart, of the Abounding Glories of the Supreme, in terms of feeling !" And Vyāsa composed the *Bhāgavata* and stilled his heartache. The theme of that precious work is also the Secondless One, but not as Brahman, the Impersonal Immense, not even as Paramātmān, the Supreme Self of all, but as Bhaga-vān, the Lord of Glories. [Page 35]

वदन्ति तत्तत्त्वविदः तत्त्वं यज्ज्ञानमद्वयम् ।
 ब्रह्मेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्दयते ॥—*Bhāgavata*.
 ऐश्वर्यस्य समग्रस्य वीर्यस्य यशसः श्रियः ।
 ज्ञानवैराग्ययोश्चैव षण्णां भग इतीङ्गना ॥—*Vishnu Purāna*.

Further, to fulfil the law of rotation of the mind's functions, the same Vyāsa will become, so the *Purānas* say, one of the seven high Ministers and Councillors of the Manu of a subsequent world-cycle, to help him actively in the administration of his planets' affairs.

As another illustration of the same law, we see that in the history of Indian philosophy, in the biography of the Indian *Sūtrātmā*, so to say, the mind, having ascended to the climax of the *Jñāna-mārga* in the *transcendental* or "*Pāramārthika*" *advaita-dar-shana* of Shankara, felt that empyrean to be too cold and ethereal for its sustenance, and moved into the somewhat more substantial and warm regions of the *Vishishtādvaita* of *Rāmānuja*, and thence again into the still more definite *empirical* or *Vyāvahārika* world of the *Dvaita* of Madhva, wherein the Supreme is enthroned amidst Powers and Principalities, invested with all

कल्याणगुण', surpassing excellences and glories that evoke the adoration and satisfy the heart of man.

Yet again, while the succession of the mind's three functions is true, their simultaneity is also a fact, as mentioned at the outset, one always prevailing as the *mahādashā* in Astrology and the other two as *avāntara-dashās*. And so while the bhaktas as a class, attach their faith and aspiration to a concrete personal deity, and sannyāsīs to the Impersonal, yet many sannyāsīs too have an *ishta-deva* and, on the other hand, many sects of devotees, and karma-mārgīs and men of action have elaborate philosophical theories — [Page 36] all which only means, again, what was pointed out at the outset of this paper, that

“Nothing in the world is single
All things, by a law divine,
In one another's being mingle”
(I -Thou both are Mine).