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East/West Atheists: Buddha and Śaṅkara

[Transcribed and adjusted by Śrutaśravā Prabhu, but not a verbatim transcript so not identical to what is heard on the SCSMNJ MP3 dated 82.01.25.A.]

[From page nine the transcript synchronises with the SCSMNJ MP3 dated 82.01.25.B]

[Proofread by Paramānanda dās – UK]

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: There are many schools of atheist philosophers. The most famous atheist in Indian philosophy was Cārvāka Muni. His philosophy is paralleled by the extreme atheists of Western philosophy. According to their opinion, consciousness is the by-product of the chemical combinations of different material substances. With the dissolution of this physical body, neither soul nor consciousness remains. Only the physical combinations of the different elements of the body remain. Just as the combinations of different chemicals produces something more than the individual chemicals themselves, the physical combination of different material elements produce consciousness. With the dissolution of this fleshy body, nothing remains. This philosophy was first propounded in the West by Epicurus.

Then comes the Buddhist School of philosophy. They say that when the physical body is dissolved, the subtle body - the mental system - goes on to take another birth. The Buddhists admit transmigration from one body to the next, or re-incarnation. According to them, although this body may vanish, we must enter another body according to our *karma*. If we work in a particular way, then the subtle body - the mental system - dissolves, and nothing remains. According to the Buddhists, there is no soul.

Śaṅkarācārya's philosophy is similar - with a slight difference. The Buddhist School says that the individual soul does not exist. According to them there is no permanent individual soul. Śaṅkara has also said that no permanent individual soul exists. But Śaṅkara says that conscious substance (Brahman) exists as the ultimate reality. This is the difference between Śaṅkara and the Buddhists. According to Śaṅkara, consciousness itself is true; it is only the consciousness of separate existence that is false. In his view, with the dissolution of the mental system, no individual soul remains. The individual soul is only a reflection of the conscious substance which is the ultimate reality (Brahman). With the dissolution of the mental system, each soul's consciousness of individuality vanishes; it is nonexistent in the ultimate plane of reality.

According to Śaṅkara, the ultimate reality is conscious substance: Brahman. The example is given of the moon and its reflection in a mirror. Remove the mirror and there is no reflection. His view is that all individual souls are reflections from the common source: Brahman, consciousness. So, Śaṅkara says, in reality individual souls are one and the same with Brahman.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's interpretation of *Vedānta* is different from Śaṅkarācārya's. Śrī Caitanya says that we have to accept the Vedic truth in its entirety, without any modification.

Śaṅkarācārya has accepted only a few Vedic aphorisms according to his own choice. And even that is a partial representation and not the whole truth. For example, his four principle expressions from the *Vedas* are *aham brahmāsmi*: "I am Brahman;" *tat tvam asi*: "Thou art that;" *so'ham*: "I am that;" and *sarvaṁ khalv idam brahma*: "Everything is Brahman;"

Śrī Caitanya analyzed the meaning of the aphorism *sarvaṁ khalv idam brahma* [everything is Brahman] as follows: "According to Śaṅkarācārya, everything is one. He says *brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā*: 'Spirit is true, the world is false.' Śaṅkarācārya says that Brahman (spirit) exists, and that *sarva* (everything) does not exist. If this is actually true, and everything is one, then why does the question of existence or nonexistence arise at all? In the aphorism *sarvaṁ khalv idam brahma*, *sarva* - "everything" - exists and *brahma* - "spirit" - also exists. In this expression, "many" exists and "one" also exists. There is many and there is one.

"Again, if everything is one, then the question arises, "to whom we are speaking?" "For whom have the *Vedas* come with this advice?" Both the relative and the Absolute exist together; they are coexistent. The absolute and the relative are also represented in the Vedantic aphorism *tat tvam asi*: "Thou art that. *Tat* or "that" is there and *tvam* "you" is also there. Both variety and unity are found represented in the aphorism *tat tvam asi*, but Śaṅkarācārya accepts one and rejects the other. His explanation is therefore a misinterpretation of the original meaning of the *Vedānta-sūtras*. It is not a proper interpretation of the *Vedas*, because he has thrust his own idea or conception forward in the name of the *Vedānta*. Śaṅkarācārya's interpretation of *Vedānta* is artificial. It is selfish and provincial.

This is the refutation of Śaṅkarācārya given by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and, as far as we are concerned, it cannot be seen otherwise. If we try to follow the interpretation of Śaṅkarācārya, then what meaning can be found in this statement of the *Upaniṣads*:

yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante yena jātāni jīvanti

["The Absolute Truth is He from whom everything is coming, who is maintaining everything and within whom everything exists, into whom everything enters at the time of annihilation."] [*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 3.1]

What does this statement of the *Upaniṣads* mean? It is sufficient for our understanding to accept the direct meaning: Is not the self-explanatory meaning of these words sufficient to understand this simple statement of the *Upaniṣads*? Is it not specific? Does this statement say that the Absolute Truth is non-differentiated? How it can be?

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu defeats Śaṅkarācārya through common sense. The unique characteristic of His argument is that He refutes opposing views through common sense. He defeats His philosophical opponents not with abstract, difficult, and intellectual arguments but with common sense.

When Śrī Caitanya wanted to demonstrate with common sense the supremacy of Nārāyaṇa over Śiva, He said that one may just consider the position of the Ganges. The Ganges is the water that washes the feet of Nārāyaṇa, and yet she rests on the head of Śiva. From this, we can easily use common sense to see which of the two holds the superior position. When Śrī Caitanya wanted to show that Kṛṣṇa is greater than Nārāyaṇa, He pointed out that we may take the example of Lakṣmī Devī. Lakṣmī Devī aspires after the association of Kṛṣṇa.

Although she has everything she might need with Nārāyaṇa, still she has some aspiration for the company of Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand, when the *gopīs* meet Nārāyaṇa, they pray that their devotion to Kṛṣṇa may be enhanced by His grace. They have no attraction for Nārāyaṇa.

In this way, by applying our common sense, our intuition, one may judge the nature of reality. Intuition will be far more helpful than abstruse argument. *Vedānta* confirms this in the aphorism *tarkā-pratiṣṭhānāt*: "Argument can never help us reach any real conclusion." Rather it is only intuition and common sense that can really help us. This is the recommendation of Śrī Caitanya, and this is how He refuted many scholars, including even the great all-conquering *digvijayī paṇḍit* of Kashmir.

Student: The Buddhists say that after one transcends sensory experience he will find that underneath it all there is actually no foundation of life. One will find that there's nothing there but the void. According to their teaching, after our experience is removed, there is no soul, no basis of existence. How do the Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas deal with Buddhism?

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: In South India, and especially in Andhra Pradesh, there are many Buddhist scholars. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu met the Buddhists when He was passing through South India. Caitanya Mahāprabhu says:

veda nā māniyā bauddha haya' ta nāstika, vedāśraya nāstikya-vāda bauddhake adhika

["The Buddhists do not recognise the authority of the *Vedas*; therefore they are considered agnostics. However, those who have taken shelter of the Vedic scriptures yet preach agnosticism in accordance with the *Māyāvāda* philosophy are certainly more dangerous than the Buddhists."] [*Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 6.168*]

Because the Buddhists do not accept the Vedic scriptures, they are considered atheists. Śaṅkarācārya, in a hidden way, also preaches on behalf of the Buddhists. The difference between them is that Śaṅkarācārya admits the existence of Brahman as the fundamental reality, whereas the Buddhists say that ultimately nothing exists.

The Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas disagree both with Śaṅkara and with Buddha. They say that the *jīva* is an individual eternal soul. This particle of spiritual energy known as the *jīva* or spirit is tiny, like the dust-particles of earth or the pencils of rays of the sun. There is the Supreme Infinite Soul or Consciousness, and the finite sparks of consciousness. Their relationship may be compared to the relationship between a great fire and the sparks that emanate from the fire. The sparks that emanate from the fire may become covered by darkness, but when they re-enter the shelter of that great conflagration, they are again perfectly situated.

To refute the atheism of the Buddhists, we may look to the modern European philosopher, Descartes. Descartes said, "I doubt everything. Whatever you say, I doubt." Then, Descartes says, the question that arises is "Does the doubter exist - true or false?" You have to start your search for truth from there. Who am I? To whatever truth is related, whatever idea is stated, one may say, "I oppose that statement. I doubt it." Then, the question arises, does the doubter exist, or he is nonexistent? If he is nonexistent, then there can be no question of doubting. If one takes the position of an extreme sceptic, he must explain his own position. You may assert, "Whatever you have said, I doubt;" but you must discern whether or not you

really exist. That must be the starting point for any further inquiry. And what is the doubter? Is he an atom, a particle of dust? Is he without knowledge, and if so, then how he comes to assert doubt?

This should be the starting point of our inquiry. This question should be examined. Whatever one may say, the question must be asked, "Who is the sayer? Is he conscious? Does he have reason? Has he any existence at all? Or is he imaginary?" This must be the starting point for any further discussion. In this way one will come to know whether or not he exists. Who is the doubter? Is it "matter" who is putting the question? Or is a unit of consciousness putting the question? What is the origin of this question? Who is putting the question? Has it come from the conscious region? If it has then what shall be the basis of existence, consciousness or matter, a fossil or God?

Before the First World War, I was a student at President's College. In my senior year I studied philosophy under Professor Stevenson. He was a German scholar, but during the war he took Indian citizenship. I was in his class on philosophy when I was a student of law in my fourth year of college. His class dealt with ontology and psychology. Professor Stevenson's language was very simple and he used fine arguments, simply produced, to make his point. He gave four arguments against atheism, one of which I find very useful: "Consciousness is the starting point of everything." Whatever you say presupposes consciousness. Any statement presupposes consciousness.

If we examine the fossil, what do we see? It is "black," it is "hard," it has some "smell," some "attributes," but what are these things? These are all different stages of mind, of consciousness. Without the help of consciousness, no assertion can be made. No assertion is possible at all. One may say that the fossil is the most elemental substance, but a fossil means what? Some "colour," some "sensation," "hardness," some "taste;" but the background is consciousness.

After everything is analyzed, we will find that it is an idea. This is Berkeley's theory. Everything is an idea in the ocean of consciousness. Just as an iceberg floats in the salt ocean, so the fossil is floating in the conscious ocean. Ultimately everything - whatever we can assert - whatever is within the world of our experience is floating like an iceberg in the ocean of consciousness. This point can never be refuted.

I have had experience of this. Once, when I was twenty-three I had some deep and natural indifference to the world. At that time I had some experience of the reality of consciousness. I felt that the material world is floating on consciousness just as the cream is floating on the milk. Conscious reality is much deeper than the apparent reality of our present experience. The world of experience is like cream floating over the milk which is the mind. This physical world is only the visible portion of reality floating over the mental world as cream floats over milk. I felt this myself. When there is a huge quantity of milk, the cream that floats over the milk and covers it is very meagre. In the same way, I could feel at that time that this physical world is only a meagre portion of reality, and that the subtle world which is at present in the background is far more vast. At that time I could feel that the mental world is a huge and vast reality, and the physical world which is like a cover over the mental world is like the thin layer of cream that covers a vast vat of milk.

Whatever can be perceived by the eye, the ear, the tongue, the nose, the skin - all the external senses - is only the covering of reality. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* [7.5.31], Prahlāda Mahārāja says:

*na te viduḥ svārtha-gatiṁ hi viṣṇuṁ, durāśayā ye bahir-artha-māninaḥ
andhā yathāndhair upanīyamānās, te 'pīśa-tantryām uru-dāmnī baddhāḥ*

["Persons who are strongly entrapped by the consciousness of enjoying material life, and who have therefore accepted as their leader or *guru* a similar blind man attached to external sense objects, cannot understand that the goal of life is to return home, back to Godhead, and engage in the service of Lord Viṣṇu. As blind men guided by another blind man miss the right path and fall into a ditch, materially attached men led by another materially attached man are bound by the ropes of fruitive labour, which are made of very strong cords, and they continue again and again in materialistic life, suffering the threefold miseries."]

We are making too much of the covering of reality, we are devoting our mind to the external coating - *bahir-artha-māninaḥ* - but we do not dive deep into the internal substance. If only we were to do dive deep into reality - there we would find Viṣṇu. The most peaceful substance is within, but it is covered, just as milk is covered by cream, and we are making much of that cover. The real substance is within just as the fruit covered by its skin. What we experience at present is the cover, the skin, and we are making much of that, ignoring the very substance which this cover is protecting.

The primary step in the search for truth is to penetrate the covering and find out the knower, to analyse the knower, the doubter. What is he? Is he an atom like an atomic particle of dust? Or is he a fantastic atom in the conscious plane? At first we must approach reality in this way. There is the knower and the unknown, the inquirer and the inquired. This should be our starting point. Who is the inquirer? Is he iron or stone? Or he is a point of consciousness - of spirit soul?

Try to find yourself. Then gradually, you will come to know that you are the soul within: the particle of consciousness within. And just as you are spirit covered by matter, the whole world is also like that: the spiritual reality within is covered. Upon realizing yourself as spirit soul, again you will be able to see that everything is a particular part of consciousness. Within the world of consciousness, the worlds of different sorts of experience are floating. In the conscious sea, the sun, the moon, trees, stones, human beings, our beloved, and our enemies are all floating. As we approach the spiritual plane, we will find it to be nearer to our real self. And in this way, we will see that. Matter is far, far away, but the soul is near.

Try to conceive of reality along these lines. Soul, spirit, consciousness, is nearer to the soul; you are a child of that soil, and matter is far, far, away. But the interrupting planes are so close together that we don't see the nature of spiritual reality, just as if you put a finger in your eye, you can't see the finger. But if the finger is only one foot distant, we can see it very finely. Sometimes what is very close, we cannot see. I may be able to see so many things, but I cannot see myself.

Although the Buddhists and other atheists argue that consciousness is a material thing, I say that there is no material thing. If I am to answer the question of whether or not consciousness is produced from matter, then I shall say that nothing is material. Whatever

you feel is only a part of your consciousness. Everything is an idea. You are concerned only with consciousness from the beginning to the end of your experience. Beyond that you cannot go. Everything is an idea: the idea of a stone, a tree, a house, the idea of the body - it is all an idea. And the plane of consciousness is very much closer to you than what you perceive. And what is shown as a particular thing is far away. You are concerned only with ideas. You can't go outside that. Everything within your experience is a part of your mind.

Student: So, the 8,400,000 species of life is only an idea?

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: All ideas; consciousness is always in the primary position, and these ideas are real because they are also originally present in Vṛndāvana. Nothing is eliminated in our conception of reality; everything is harmonious. Everything has its proper position, nothing is to be eliminated. The only thing necessary is harmony. Only our outlook, our angle of vision, needs to be changed. But in order to have that kind of vision we must give up being self-centred. Both exploitation and renunciation must be given up. These two things are the cause of this hallucination. Everything has its contribution to the service of the Supreme centre, and if we can understand that, we become free from this relative world. The material world is a reflection of the spiritual world. There is undesirability there. From Brahma, who holds the highest position in this universe to the lowest creature, [ābrahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ - *Bhagavad-gītā*, 8.16] everything is misconceived. On the other hand, everything in Vṛndāvana contributes towards the pastimes of Rādhā-Govinda *līlā*.

Everything in Vṛndāvana is Kṛṣṇa conscious; every tree, every creeper, every shrub. How can they be useless or ordinary shrubs and creepers? Uddhava is the greatest devotee of Kṛṣṇa and he aspires to take birth as a creeper or a shrub in Vṛndāvana. What, then, is the value of the shrubs and the creepers of Vṛndāvana? Should we think that Uddhava's aspiration is imaginary, that it is theoretical, that it has no practical value?

Everything in Vṛndāvana is necessary for the pastimes of Rādhā Govinda. Everything in the spiritual environment there has its direct value. This is called *śanta rasa*, or a passive mellow. It may be understood in this way. If a man does not harm anybody, even a fly or a mosquito, that does not mean that he is paralyzed or diseased; that is a "passive" mood. So, in Vṛndāvana, service is rendered in a passive mood. The Yamunā, the trees the birds, and the insects, are absorbed in that mood.

How this is so can be understood by the analogy of a drama. In a drama, in the theatre, an actor may play the part of a dead man. As his body is being carried he can't say anything; he can't move. That does not mean that he is dead. Similarly, a devotee in *śanta rasa* may assume a passive role as a creeper, a shrub or a tree in Vṛndāvana in order to enhance the drama of Rādhā-Govinda *līlā*.

A devotee may also accept the role of a servant. He may be a king, but for the satisfaction of the Lord, he may play the part of a sweeper. While he is playing the part of a sweeper, he may perform his role so nicely that the men standing by applaud in appreciation. Actually he is a prince, but, by playing the part of a sweeper, he is applauded. So, the mood of servitude is also a contribution to the service of Kṛṣṇa.

Another example of *śanta rasa* is Rādhā-kunḍa. Rādhā-kunḍa, where Kṛṣṇa enacts His pastimes of conjugal love, is considered to be the highest place in Vṛndāvana. The gods and

devotees all praise Rādhā-kuṇḍa. Should we think it to be an ordinary body of water? What is the position of that Rādhā-kuṇḍa?

Then there is Govardhana Hill. That is also a kind of pose. Apparently it is a hill, but Govardhana is worshipped as Kṛṣṇa Himself. He also appears as a stone, as Śālagrāma; He appears in the form of the Deities.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu prays, "O Lord, please consider Me as the dust of Your holy feet." [*vibhinnāmśa jīva*] Foot-dust is generally inanimate. But when Caitanya Mahāprabhu prays, "Consider Me foot dust," the dust He speaks of is not matter; it is a unit of consciousness filled with knowledge and love. The dust of the Lord's lotus feet is the emblem of knowledge and ecstasy. In the spiritual realm, existence and knowledge is presupposed. But more than that, the souls there are points of divine love in Vṛndāvana and Navadvīpa. And with the wholesale conversion of the souls of this world, everywhere we will find the kingdom of God. Kṛṣṇa's kingdom, Mahāprabhu's kingdom exists; we have only lost the proper angle of vision by which to see it. We must once again acquire that vision. At present we are in the midst of enemies, but if our angle of vision is changed, we shall think, "No, I am in the midst of friends."

And that angle of vision is so broad that one who sees in that way becomes fearless. When Jaḍa Bharata was captured by dacoits and taken to the deity of Kali to be sacrificed, his angle of vision was so spacious that he did not care for anything. He thought, "Whatever is happening is the Lord's will. He is the proprietor and witness of all. He sees everything. Everything is His will, and I have nothing to do with the outcome." With this idea, wherever Jaḍa Bharata was taken, he went without resistance. Although he was about to be sacrificed, he was unconcerned. He thought, "I am in friendly circle. There is no danger." He was in such a plane of consciousness that no apprehension, no danger, could affect him; he thought, "I am under Kṛṣṇa's care." And so it is proved by Jaḍa Bharata's practical example that this angle of vision is not simply philosophy and imagination. This is reality.

[mayatushtas mana shanta maya shantas tu manasas sarvashasa mayadisha?????]

His Divine will is in the background of everything that exists. And when one comes in connection with that paramount power, that original plane of reality, he will not have any care, he will become fearless.

And yet in the plane of reality where Kṛṣṇa is worshipped with knowledge-free devotion, *jñāna-sunya bhakti*, that sort of posing is there. There appears to be fear and concern, but that concern is quite different in nature from material cares. Influenced by Yogamāyā, the *gopīs* and Kṛṣṇa's friends want to know, "Where is Kṛṣṇa? Kṛṣṇa is not here!" And in this way, the *gopīs* and cowherd boys run here and there searching for Kṛṣṇa. Even the cows are concerned and stop grazing, but all this is conducted by Yogamāyā for the satisfaction of Kṛṣṇa. Such is the nature of *līlā* in *jñāna-sunya bhakti*.

We are engaged in an inner search for truth. And in the *Vedas* the answer to our questions, the essence of the whole revealed truth of the scriptures, can be summarized in one word – *Om* - "yes." What is the meaning of that yes? "What you want - it exists. What you are searching for: it is there! Your inner search to live and to improve will be fulfilled: Seek and

ye shall find." If you examine yourself and search out your innermost need you will find that the revealed truth says, "Yes, that is. Your thirst will be quenched. You will be well-fed."

Student: In *Bhagavad-gītā* [7.5], the Lord says, *jīva-bhūtām mahā-bāho, yayedam dhāryate jagat*: "The spiritual energy is sustaining this material world." How are we to understand this?

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: The misguided souls of this world are from *taṭasthā loka*, and misguided by misconception they have come within this illusory angle of vision.

Kṛṣṇa says: *yayedam dhāryate jagat*: This world is dead matter. The souls entered here and movement came. They entered into this material conception, and began moving it. In that sense they are sustaining the universe, *yayedam dhāryate jagat*. But ultimately everything is sustained by Him.

Kṛṣṇa says: "Aham sarvasya prabhavo: Everything emanates from Me."
[*Bhagavad-gītā*, 10 8]

And in the *Vedas* it is said, *yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante*, [*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 3.1]
"He is the origin of everything, in its origin, its maintenance, and its annihilation."

But here in this material world, the fallen souls have entered as so many sparks that have entered like glow worms into the dark region showing the darkness as surrounding it. The *jīva* souls are like glow worms in the dark night of this material world. Somehow they are carrying on in the darkness. We can barely trace them out as a meagre light in the darkness. They are almost completely covered by darkness, but still they can be distinguished. Spirit can know itself.

Student: Who did you say was expounding the atheist philosophy in the West?

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: Epicurus is the greatest atheist of West, as Cārvāka Muni is in the East. According to him, with the dissolution of this physical body, nothing remains. And according to him there is no mental system. The mental system - what we come across in our dreams - does not have any separate existence according to him. But Śaṅkara and Buddha, both accept the existence of the mental system within the physical body. Transmigration of the soul is also admitted in their philosophy. But Buddha says that with the dissolution of the mental system - the *sukṣma-śarīra* - nothing remains.

Śaṅkara, on the other hand, says that the consciousness within the mental body is a reflection of Brahman and Brahman is the ultimate existence. According to him, with the dissolution of the body nothing remains but Brahman. Śaṅkara says:

*śloka dhenu pravakṣyāmi yad aktam yānti kotibhiḥ
brahma satyaṁ, jagan mithyā jīva brahmaiva na paraḥ*

"In a half line of this poem, I am summarizing the whole truth that has been expressed by volumes and volumes of scripture. Within only half a verse I shall give the essence of all

truths: *Brahma satyaṁ, jagan mithyā*. Brahman, spirit, is true - this world is false. And the *jīva* is nothing but *Brahman*. This is the substance of all the scriptures."

[From here, of the transcript almost synchronises with the SCSM MP3 dated 82.01.25.B]
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Proper knowledge is not possible under the philosophical systems of Buddha and Śaṅkara. If what they say is true - that the world is false - then we must ask, "Why have you come? To speak to whom? If everything is false, is your philosophy also imagination? We will have to ask Śaṅkara, "Does your coming to this world and your endeavour to refute Buddhism and establish oneness as the ultimate truth have no meaning? Who have you come to preach to? Why have you come to preach if this world has no reality? If this world is false, then why are you taking so much trouble to explain your philosophy? For what? Is your mission also imagination?"

The first great opponent of Śaṅkarācārya was Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja's refutation was very strong and based on a sound foundation. Rāmānuja argued: "What is the necessity for Śaṅkarācārya to endeavour with so much energy to establish his philosophy if it is all fictitious? To say "the world is false" is a suicidal position. Has he come here to do nothing? He has come to correct us and free us from error, but there must be errors. Error or misconception has reality, otherwise what is the necessity spending so much energy refuting so many propositions? *Māyā* exists; *Māyā* is eternal. The individual soul is eternal, and *Māyā* is also eternal.

The basis of material existence is the possibility of the *taṭasthā jīva* committing a mistake and developing misconception. The soul is *anu caitanya*: atomic consciousness, and as atomic units of consciousness, our freedom is not perfect. Our defective freedom is the cause of this illusion. The soul must have freedom. Before a crime is committed, the possibility of committing a crime is present in the ordinary peace-loving subject. The possibility of disease is there, so hospitals, medicine, and special diets are all necessary. In the same way, the possibility for misconception is there in the soul because we are weak and limited.

Māyā - the world of measurement - is unnecessary for the Absolute, but necessary for the relative position. When there is only one self-interest, *Māyā* is not necessary, but where there is division, differentiation, and distribution; when there are many ideas of self-interest, *Māyā* is necessary.

Within the world of misconception *Māyā* is the law of the country. The law helps the law-abiding, and the law punishes the law-breaking. The law is the same for everyone; and that same law means protection for the good and suppression for the bad. Law means to divide rights. One and the same law provides for protection of the good and punishment of the bad. The *svarūpa-śakti*, the Lord's internal energy, helps the good and the *māyā-śakti* punishes the bad.

Śakti, or energy, serves the purpose of the Lord, and therefore, necessarily has two aspects - *paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām* - to chastise the wicked and reward the good, [Bhagavad-gītā, 4.8]. When the Lord Himself appears, His purpose has two aspects: one for

the good, another for the bad. He also comes here with that combined purpose. So although He is one, we see these two aspects of His character.

The conception of unity is not a stale non-differentiated thing. This theory of the absolute was proposed by Rāmānuja. This is called *viśiṣṭādvaita-vāda*: oneness with difference. The philosophy of Śaṅkarācārya, on the other hand, is known as *kevalādvaita-vāda*: oneness, unity. Rāmānuja accepts that the Absolute Truth is one, but according to him, it is a differentiated oneness. He does not accept non-differentiated oneness. That it is one, he has no doubt. But that One is characterized by specification and differentiation. This philosophy is known as *viśiṣṭādvaita-vāda*, and is similar to the Panentheism of Hegel.

Student: According to what you are saying, matter is also conscious because it is coming from the Lord. In the beginning, when we first differentiate between matter and spirit, we learn that matter is dead and the living entities manipulate it - but when we develop a higher realization will we see that matter is also living?

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: Yes, and that is known as *śanta rasa*. In a higher stage of realization we can detect consciousness everywhere: within glass, stone, earth, wood - in all the innumerable shapes and colours in which matter may appear.

We are always in the midst of consciousness. Consciousness is all-pervading, but is situated in different gradations of conception. The gradation of conception may differ, but it is all consciousness, all eternal.

*tvaṁ tu rājan marisyeti, paśu-buddhim imāṁ jahi
na jātaḥ prāg abhūto 'dya, deha-vat tvaṁ na naṅśyasi*

["O King, give up the animalistic mentality of thinking: "I am going to die." Unlike the body, you have not taken birth. There was not a time in the past when you did not exist, and you are not about to be destroyed."] [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 12.5.2]

We must try to reinstate ourselves in our own plane of reality. There, without the help of this mortal element we can live happily. That transcendental plane is not a non-differentiated world. It is not that there you have no individuality. If a non-differentiated mass of consciousness can be admitted, then why should we not admit the existence of a system of consciousness? Rāmānuja says that it is a system. Śaṅkara says there is only a non-differentiated mass of light-consciousness. Rāmānuja disagrees. He says that a differentiated light-mass of consciousness is the basis of reality. It is not undifferentiated and non-distinguishable.

And Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu says that the basis of reality is *acintya bhedābheda*: inconceivable bipolarity. Everywhere there is something common and something different. Whatever opposing points you may discuss will have something common, and something different. Nothing is quite the same as anything else. And above all, the infinite is not within your fist. It is inconceivable. The unified and differentiative character of reality is inconceivable: its secret is in the hand of the Supreme power. It does not depend upon your whim. Still, that differentiated character of the Absolute will be seen differently according to

the subjective relationship we have with Him. An example of this is found in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* [10.43.17].

*mallānām aśanir nṛṇām naravarah strīṇām smaro mūrttimān
gopānām svajano 'satām kṣitibhujām śāstā svapitro śīśuḥ
mṛtyur bhojapater virāḍ aviduṣām tattvaṁ param yuginām
vṛṣṇīnām paradevateti vidito raṅgam gataḥ sāgrajah*

["When Lord Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by Baladeva, entered Kāmsa's wrestling arena, He appeared to the spectators in different ways. Everyone viewed Him according to their own relationship (*rasa*) with Him. To the wrestlers He appeared as a lightning bolt. To the people in general He appeared as the most beautiful personality. To the ladies, He appeared to be the most attractive young man, Cupid personified, and thus increased their lust. The cowherd men looked upon Kṛṣṇa as their own kinsman coming from the same village of Vṛndāvana. The kings who were present there saw Him as the most powerful ruler. His parents Nanda and Yaśodā saw Him as their most beloved child. Kāmsa, the king of the Bhoja dynasty, saw Him as death personified. The worldly-minded saw Him as the Universal Form; the unintelligent saw Him as incapable, and to the yogis, He appeared to be the Supersoul. To the members of the Vṛṣṇi dynasty, He appeared to be their most celebrated descendant."]

When Kṛṣṇa entered the arena, everyone saw Him in their own way. In this way we can understand how He satisfies everyone. When Yaśodā sees Him, she says, "My boy!" But the *gopīs* see a grown-up, not a child. His friends see Him as one of their playmates. Kṛṣṇa satisfies everyone. Even the animals in Vṛndāvana become ecstatic when they come in connection with Kṛṣṇa.

*barhāpīdam nata-vara-vapuḥ karṇayoḥ karṇikāram
bibhrad vāsaḥ kanaka-kapiśam vaijayantīm ca mālām
randhrān veṅor adhara-sudhayāpūrayan gopa-vṛndair
vṛndāranyaṁ sva-pada-ramaṇam prāviśad gīta-kīrtiḥ*

["While the *gopīs* were describing the sweet vibration of Kṛṣṇa's flute, they also remembered their pastimes with Him; thus their minds became enchanted, and they were unable to describe completely the beautiful vibrations. While discussing the transcendental vibration, they remembered also how Kṛṣṇa dressed, decorated with a peacock feather on His head, just like a dancing actor, and with blue flowers pushed over His ear. His garment glowed yellow-gold, and He was garlanded with a *vaijayantī* garland made of *tulasī*, *kuṇḍa*, *mandāra*, *parijāta*, and lotus flowers. Dressed in such an attractive way, Kṛṣṇa filled up the holes of His flute with the nectar emanating from His lips. So they remembered Him, entering the forest of Vṛndāvana, whose soil experiences the pleasure of consortherhood upon being embraced by the touch of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet." [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.21.5]

Kṛṣṇa consciousness means full-fledged theism, up to consortherhood. All conceptions of necessity are found there in their purest and most desirable position. This material world, however, is only a shadow, a black imitation of reality. Full-fledged theism means Kṛṣṇa

consciousness. In the full-fledged conception of theism, the infinite embraces the whole of the finite. It comes down to completely embrace and welcome the finite. This kind of full-fledged theism is found in Vṛndāvana. There, one negligent part of the finite may find the bliss of the embrace of the whole of the infinite. In Vṛndāvana, not a corner of the finite is left unfulfilled; every particle of sand and every creeper is well-represented there, with complete personality in the loving pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Here in this material world, however, a particle of sand is nowhere; it is ignored. But there, everything is well-attended. In Vṛndāvana there is no ignorance. No interest of anything is ignored there; everything is harmonized, and therefore the conception of Vṛndāvana in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the highest conception of full-fledged theism.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam says, "Whenever He sets His lotus feet within Vṛndāvana, the Earth personified says, 'My fate is fulfilled, I have achieved the highest fortune.' In Vṛndāvana, the earth, the very dust, feels the pleasure of the highest type of conjugal love merely by the touch of His lotus feet. Wherever Kṛṣṇa puts His footsteps, the Earth's joy knows no bounds. By His touch, the Earth feels the most intense type of ecstasy.

In Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa is *mādhurya*, sweetness personified. He is *ānanda*, ecstasy personified. And Kṛṣṇa responds to our own inner demand in every way. The Supreme Centre has the peculiar capacity of correspondence, responding to our needs and satisfying the thirst of the whole paraphernalia of existence. According to their capacity, rank, and dignity, Kṛṣṇa distributes to all souls the juice from the candy sea of transcendental mellow. [*yo yaṁ śraddhā sa eva saḥ*] One can taste the sugar-candy sweetness of the Absolute, according to one's capacity, just as sugar candy is tasted in different ways. For a normal tongue sugar candy is very sweet, but if there is a boil on the tongue even sugar candy is bitter.

When a man is working, his manager will see him as a worker; his child will see him as a father, and his wife will see him in as husband. His servant will see him as master, the dog and other animals will view him in another way. In this way the same person will be seen differently according to the relationship between seer and seen. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa will appear to those who view Him differently according to their respective *rasa*. In this way, the differentiated character of the Absolute is revealed according to the soul's subjective qualifications.

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