

Bringing Īśvara into one's Life

Swami Dayananda Saraswati¹

“I believe in God” is what religious people generally say. However, such a sentence is seen as meaningless according to the Vedic vision of God. The Veda does not ask us to ‘believe’ in God because God does not need to be ‘believed’ in. Rather, we can know God as all there is.

Any belief is a judgment before knowledge and is, therefore, subject to correction upon verification. For instance, at first you believe your friend when he introduces Mr. So-and-So as ‘a good man’. You have no previous knowledge of Mr. So-and-So, and so you are free to believe Mr. So-and-So is a good person. However, according to you, a good person is one who gives you money whenever you ask him. Later, when you are in need of money and Mr. So-and-So refuses you, he becomes a bad man in your eyes. You have corrected your initial belief about him.

Not all beliefs are verifiable. The belief that I will survive death is not verifiable. Whether I will go to heaven is not verifiable. That I will go to heaven by following this person is not verifiable, because there is another person who claims to be the real messiah, the latest one, and the last one to follow. Then, too, even if I get to heaven, there is no way of verifying here that I will like it—I may sorely miss watching football matches that may not be broadcast in heaven. In fact, all belief-based religions are based upon non-verifiable beliefs. That is why they are called faiths. Further, although each claims to be the best, there is no way to know which religion may be better than the other one. Nobody has any basis to prove that one religion is correct and that another is wrong, since both are based on non-verifiable beliefs.

However, certain facts which are not immediately perceivable can be known through inference and are not in the realm of blind belief. For instance, if I ask whether you had a great-great grandfather, you would have to say ‘Yes’. But if I ask whether you ever saw your great-great grandfather in person, of course, you would have to say ‘No’.

So, without having seen him, you say that he existed. Is your assertion a belief? You may say it is a belief; I say it is not. Being subject to correction upon verification, a ‘belief’ that your great-great grandfather existed also implies that you may never have had a great-great grandfather. Yet the fact that you are here proves without a doubt that you had a great-great grandfather. Similarly, there is no doubt whatsoever that your great-great-great-great-great-grandfather existed. Your knowledge that your ancestors existed is *parokṣa-jñānam*, indirect knowledge. More specifically, it is *anyathā-anupapatti*, an inference-based presumption requiring more than one logical step. All medical diagnosis is based upon this kind of inference.

The Vedic vision of God does not require your belief. This vision states that *idaṃ sarvaṃ īśvaraḥ*—all that is here is God. How can you ‘believe’ that statement? In fact, it is not a matter of belief; it is a challenge for you to know. *Idaṃ sarvaṃ īśvaraḥ* is an equation. *Idaṃ sarvaṃ*—all that is here—is equal to *Īśvara*, the Lord. All that is here, everything confronting you, is you. You, plus everything you know and don’t know is all that is here. And ‘all’ equals the Lord. That is the equation. As an equation, it requires understanding, not belief. It is like the elementary school teacher telling a student, “Five plus four is equal to ten minus one. Do you understand?” The student replied, “Well, I may not understand, but I believe you, sir.” What is required is for the student to comprehend that both sides of the equation are equal. If a statement were simply a matter of belief, no equation would be necessary.

When we say all that is here is the Lord, we are not saying that there is one God. We say there is only God. We are not monotheists. Monotheistic religion posits one God with certain features, sitting in heaven. And that God is a he, which is another problem. For how can God be limited in any way, especially by gender? So, he is a he, sitting in heaven, which is taken as a physical place. Yet how can he be located in space, since time and space are part of the created universe? If God existed somewhere in space and time, he could not then create this world of space and time. He would be another limited individual, a discrete entity, subject to the laws of space and time, as are all

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individuals in this *jagat*, world. As an individual, he would be different from me, different from you, and different from every mosquito. Thus, God could not be almighty, but would be a limited person, like my uncle, who is subject to illness and mosquito bites. Since everyone has got some power, God's limited power would be circumscribed by the power of other individuals. Even the mosquito would have some power that God lacks. The mosquito, in fact, is more powerful than the human being. Usually when you catch an animal, you set a trap, you throw a net. But when it comes to mosquitoes, it is you who must enter into the mosquito net; it is you who must escape the mosquito. So who is more powerful? In fact, every little bug, every virus, has got its own power over you. Similarly, if God is a limited being, subject to space and time, he also will be another individual, at the mercy of all the bugs, viruses and bacteria.

The Vedic vision that all that is here is *Īśvara* fits very well with modern cosmological physicists, who say that everything is a manifestation of one thing alone. They say that everything is primarily made up of basic particles, which, due to electromagnetic force, form into clusters. Finally, due to gravitational force, there is movement on a grand scale; everything is moving. The great velocity of movement keeps everything in place. In this way, the physicists explain the entire creation as a manifestation of basic particles. It is not that there was a God sitting elsewhere who simply dropped a few fully formed planets here and there. All that is here, they say, is one thing alone, and that one thing is the particle. The problem is that the physicists stop there.

The Vedic vision goes further by probing the essential nature of the particle. For instance, if everything is made up of particles, that means my physical body is nothing but particles. How were those particles able to assemble themselves to form my eyes, ears, liver and kidneys? Can we infer that these particles are intelligent? If they were not intelligent, they would not have been able to assemble themselves to form this body. When I look at my physical body, I see a manifestation of intelligence. In fact, all the disciplines of knowledge, such as chemistry, electrochemistry, biochemistry, and so on, are right here in one body. In this way, my own physical body is one body of knowledge that contains all the disciplines. So we do not think of the body as simple flesh and

bones, as inert matter. It is made of up of intelligence and it is available for knowledge. Analyzing even one sense organ is good enough for us to see that our bodies are very intelligently and efficiently organized. For instance, why must my nose be in this location? When I was a boy, I thought that if I had the chance, I would advise God to put my nose elsewhere. I thought that one less facial feature would mean that more people would pass as beautiful. A flat nose, or a long nose, for instance, are nuisances. Then I wondered where else a nose might be placed. I thought of the advantages of placing it on top of the head. No longer could a person with the flu sneeze his bugs my way when talking to me. Another advantage would be that the nose placed at such a location would serve as a chimney for those who smoke, thus sparing non-smokers from inhaling secondary smoke. So I thought that was the greatest idea. But then, I thought about this matter further and pictured the following scene. Suppose I wanted to have a cup of coffee. Being a South Indian, I didn't really know what tea was. Since tea and coffee look the same, I would have to find out whether a beverage was tea or coffee by smelling the flavor. The coffee cup would be parallel to my nose. It would not pick up the flavor of the beverage. Therefore, I would have to turn the cup over; I would have a coffee *abhiṣekam*, bath. Finally, I concluded, let the nose be where it is. Let me not poke my nose into this. It is an intelligent arrangement.

People are still doing research into the intelligent arrangement of the creation. Nothing is really understood. Your brain is not yet totally mapped. It is a wonder. Every bug is a wonder; every tree is a wonder. All that is there is in the form of knowledge available for our discovery. Therefore, everything is given. The hard reality is that there is nothing created by you or me. All of the resources are given. All of the possibilities are given. The world itself is given. My very faculty to explore, to know, is given. My mind is given; my senses are given. My hands and legs are given. I have no say over that fact. Everything is intelligently given. What is not given? Ownership.

We own nothing; we may only possess. Ownership is just a notion, like the Bombay Flats.

Bombay created a super-entity called the Housing Society. In that arrangement, many flats and many owners were created, with no one person owning the land underneath the buildings. I could never think of owning a dwelling place without owning the land. So the first time I was invited to the Bombay Flats, I was really disappointed. I saw a huge building with seven floors. I asked my host, “Is this is your house?” He said, “No, no. Of course not. I am on the fourth floor.” Reaching the fourth floor, I asked, “Is the whole floor yours?” “No”, he replied. Then he showed me his two-room flat. “Is this your flat?” I asked. “Yes”, he said. “What part of it is yours? Is the floor is yours?” “Yes”, he said. “Isn’t it also the ceiling of the fellow who lives downstairs?” “Well, yes”, he said. “Is the ceiling yours?” “Yes”, he replied. “Isn’t it the floor of the fellow who lives upstairs?” “True”, he said. Similarly, the left wall is the right wall of the fellow next door; the right wall is the left wall of the other fellow. Finally, I asked, “What blessed part of the flat do you actually own except the space?” The notion of ownership is the greatest myth in the world. In fact, there is no such thing as ownership. Every blessed thing is given. And it is taken away also, like the hair on your head. Since you can’t do anything about it, you should enjoy the advantages of being bald. Nobody can grab you by your locks. You need not buy shampoo; you need not carry a comb; you never have dandruff. So, enjoy being bald. You did not own that hair. It was given to you. Things are given and taken away, too. There really is nothing I can call mine.

Everything that has been given to you has been intelligently put together, be it a nucleus, a solar system, a galaxy, a cosmos. In fact, things function only because they have been intelligently arranged. My kidney, my liver, my eyes, my ears—all of them—are put together, and anything intelligently put together presupposes knowledge. “Have you driven a Ford lately?” they have been asking for so many years. Every year, it seems, they are coming up with a better Ford that you can afford. What does it mean? The later model is supposed to be more intelligently put together.

The fact that everything is intelligently arranged is evident. That is the reason most people believe there is a God. The problem is that they think God is sitting somewhere in space. God cannot be in space and time and create a world. There is no such thing as outside space because all outsides are inside space. The outside itself is a

spatial concept. And therefore, there is only one resolution: space, time, and everything within them, cannot be separate from God. That is why the Veda says, *so'kāmayata bahusyām prajāyeyeti*, “He desired, ‘May I become many’”; *so'sṛjata*, “He created”; and *sarvam abhavat*, “He became everything.” From the standpoint of knowledge, we say that God, having the knowledge of the creation, is a creator. From the standpoint of the creation, the material universe of names and forms which enjoy a certain degree of reality, we say the material cause is not separate from Īśvara. The creation is nothing but Īśvara manifest. God cannot go and borrow material from somebody else because there is no somebody else. There is no someplace else. Space itself is yet to come and therefore, there is nothing to separate the material from the maker. Unlike the baker who creates bread, God is both the maker and the material. The baker is separate from his material. Therefore, when you buy a loaf of bread, the baker, along with his wife and children, don't also come along. Thank God! Otherwise, you would find that when you buy a few things, there is a whole society in your home. Yet it is not always the case that the maker and material are separate. For instance, when you dream, you are the maker, an intelligent being, with knowledge of your creation. In fact, the dream which you've created is you, formed out of your own consciousness. You are the maker and the material for the dream world. This dream experience is a window for us to understand the Vedic teaching that all that is here is Īśvara. Īśvara is both the maker and the material. That is why you can worship God as a 'he' or a 'she'. From the standpoint of the material cause, God is 'she'. From the standpoint of the maker, God is 'he'. There is no real difference.

“All that is here is Īśvara” means that every phenomenon is Īśvara. You can invoke the Lord in a given phenomenon, or you can invoke the Lord as the phenomenon itself. If you invoke the Lord as the given phenomenon, it is called a *devata*, a deity, such as Agni, fire. Or in a given phenomenon, you can invoke the total. When I sit, listening to a speaker, and you try to get my attention by pulling on my little finger, how much of my attention is aroused? Only a little attention? If you pull my whole hand, do I give you a little more attention? Do I give you my total attention only if you give me a full body massage? No. When you touch my little finger, the whole of me is touched,

because I, my awareness, pervades the little finger. Similarly, Īśvara, the total, can be invoked in any given form or name. In order to do that, I need to be informed that the Lord is the whole. Our *śāstra* informs us about this truth.

It is the informed people that have validated all forms of worship. The Hindus did not touch the tribal people in India at any time. They did not look down upon the tribal forms of worship. It was not that we considered the tribal people to be non-Hindus; rather, we didn't disturb their forms of worship because of our vision. A person may have been worshipping an anthill or a tree, and we validated that. We didn't think of converting him because, in our vision, there is nothing to convert. What he is doing is okay in our vision. The Indian leaders also will not disturb the tribal people. That is the reason why conversion activity by missionaries is possible in India. India is a homeland for all religions, all cultures. We only say, mind your business. Make a Christian a better Christian. Make a Muslim a more peaceful Muslim. We tell you to encourage your people to respect others. Don't cavil at other religions. Let other people worship as they will. After all, your own religion is based on non-verifiable beliefs, anyway. Yet even though I have a lot to inform you about, I don't want to disturb you and your beliefs. I respect you as you are. I will inform you only if you want to know more about that Allah, or about the Father in Heaven. If you do want to know more, I have so much to tell you. I will tell you that God is not a matter for belief. It is a matter to be understood, because all that is here is God, finally.

How does that God come into my life? Bringing God into my life can be very, very simple. It is cognitive, based on your understanding. What is cognitive can be simple—or it can seem impossible. If you can understand, it is simple. While money is *durlahba*, difficult to gain, *vidyā*, knowledge, is *sulabhā*, easy to gain—if you are ready for it.

All that is here can be reduced to so many orders. There is a physical universe that follows a physical order. The macro universe follows an order. Even a dual phenomenon—the dual behavior of an electron, for instance—is a part of that order. The physical order covers my physical body, my mind and my senses. And the total

intelligence of the Lord is manifest in every form, from the infinitesimally small to the unimaginably large, because creation presupposes knowledge. And knowledge implies a conscious being. Just as the dreamer manifests the dream out of herself, the all-knowing conscious being is manifest in the form of *jagat*, the world. I understand the physical order to be that knowledge, that intelligence. When I study physics, or any discipline of knowledge, I really look into the mind of Īśvara. That is why any knowledge is sacred.

There is also a biological order because of which there are organisms not only in this, but in other systems. Even in another galaxy, life forms would follow a biological order. There is a physiological order because of which there is illness and health. There is a psychological order as well. Your anxiety, worry and fear—all these follow a certain order. There is an unconscious in everybody, and that follows a psychological order. Every person's behavior is within that order. A person cannot behave differently, unless he or she wants to change. Then there is also a cognitive order. The fact that we are able to know, or not know, any given thing reveals an epistemological order.

There is an order of *dharma*, an order of right and wrong. This order is commonly sensed by all of us; we don't require someone to preach to us that we should not hurt others. Every being is aware of that. I know very well that I do not want to be hurt by others, and that others do not want to be hurt by me. That I want others to speak truth to me is very clear, and that they expect the same thing from me also is clear. That I don't want to be taken advantage of, taken for a ride, is very, very clear to me. And I know others expect the same behavior. Even a thief who comes to my house with a knife in hand and demanding, "Where is the cash?!" will say, "Tell me the truth!" He, too, wants only the truth. Nobody is ignorant of this common value structure. It is the matrix that provides the necessary basis upon which human beings can conduct transactions and interact with the world. The order of *dharma* is necessary because we are not totally programmed. Being self-conscious, we have the freedom to choose. When you go against that order, there is a corresponding *karma*. When you rub against the law of *dharma*, the law of *karma* rubs against you. If you don't understand, try rubbing your bare back against an old oak tree. Let us see who rubbed what. You rubbed the tree, of course. But the tree seems to be okay while you cannot wear your T-shirt without

wincing. You rubbed against the tree and got rubbed in the process. Your sore back is *pāpa*—a result of your wrong action. When you act in accord with *dharma*, you get *punya*, or good karmic credit. Nobody rubs against *dharma* without getting rubbed. Karma is different from the concept of ‘original sin’, which asserts that because you were born of parents, you were born with original sin and are a sinner. That guilt-producing notion is just ridiculous. Further guilt is created when we are told that somebody, without even having first consulted us about it—died for our sins. I don’t want anybody to die on my behalf, or even to live on my behalf. Don’t impose that guilt on me.

If you understand that there is a law of *karma*, then you are within order. With this understanding you can have a two-step response to people. There is a one-step response when somebody dear to you is angry and you simply react to that anger. We need to understand that there is an order in that person’s behavior. Anger is a manifestation of pain. That pain, more often than not, was picked up by that person in innocence when he or she was a child. If you recognize the psychological order, then your response is not a single-step response, but a two-step response. The second step is that you are understanding. There is *Īśvara* in that step. The second step is *Īśvara*. The first step is you. If you remain at the first step of response, there is no *Īśvara* in your life, even if you go to the temple regularly. Hindu religion is not like that; it is to be lived every day, every minute. So the single step is the *jīva*—the individual, the ego, the hurt ego, the guilty ego, the smarting ego, the self-centered ego, the selfish ego, the frightened ego, the persecuted ego. If you go one step further, you are in touch with the order, with *Īśvara*. To do so, you must be aware that the psychological order is *Īśvara*. Nobody behaves out of order; everybody’s behavior is in keeping with the order. Even a person’s not understanding the order is part of the order. All you can do is wait it out and pray for that person. Even your anxiety and worry are within the order of *Īśvara*. In fact, you can validate yourself by your own awareness of *Īśvara*, who is in the form of order, psychological order. Neither your fear nor your anxiety will surprise *Īśvara*, because it is within his order, the order that is not separate from *Īśvara*.

When you go for counseling, the therapist validates you, saying, “You are okay, you are okay, you are okay.” You feel okay as long as you validate the therapist. For instance, when you go for marriage counseling, and the therapist has been married three times, what kind of trust will you have? Once a marriage counselor came to see me. He said that his practice was going very well. Then he said, “Swamiji there’s just one problem—my marriage is not going well.” What I told him worked for him. Do you know what I said to him? “When your wife wants to talk to you, charge her sixty dollars and listen to her.” He got the message. Everything went well. The problem had been that after a whole day of listening to his clients, he just didn’t want to listen any more. Your validation, your sense of being validated, is proportionate to the trust that you have in that person.

The only person in whom you can totally trust is the person who is infallible. We don’t say God is infallible; we say the infallible is God. To say that God is infallible is problematic; it is based on a belief in God, a faith in God. One politician in India lost his wife. She was a great devotee of Ganesha. When she died, he said, “I don’t believe in God anymore.” Why? “He took away my wife.” But God knows better where she should be. Perhaps he gave her a break. We don’t know. That type of faith is shallow. A rock-climber slipped from a precipice, and held on to a strong protruding root. There was no way of climbing back up. If he let go, he would fall 2000 feet to his death. He had faith in God, and prayed, “Oh God, help me.” And then God came down and said, “This is God speaking. Let go of the root.” Then this fellow cried, “Is there anyone else up there?” This is your faith, I tell you. Everything is okay as long as things go well. This is not enough. In today’s complex society, where there is so much competition, you need much more than shallow faith. You should not merely say that God is infallible. You have to see that the infallible is God, because he is in the form of order. No order is fallible. The physical order is not fallible. The biological order or psychological order—any order—is not fallible. That is why it is order. Therefore, I say the infallible is God. This cognitive change, this shift in the scales of your vision, gives you a capacity to relax. You can relax into the order.

So let there be a two-step response. The first step is you—you who are prone to respond in a shallow manner. It is the response of the selfish, the response of the angry, the response of the hurting, small, insignificant person. Just one step behind is Īśvara. Just one step. You are aware that there is order. That is how you bring Īśvara into your life.