

# THE VEDANTA.

Hindu Philosophy Explained in a New Book by Swami Abhedananda.\*



VEDANTA philosophy is expounded in a little book by Swami Abhedananda on the principles of the Yoga, as applied to the Vedanta. For Christians interested in foreign missions this book is of moment, as showing the method of reasoning which they must be prepared to meet if they are to influence the educated Hindu. To the Orientalist and the philosopher, also, the book is not without interest. Of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy, the most interesting is the Vedanta. Its origin is of uncertain date, like so much else in India, although it may have been formulated between the second and eighth centuries of our era. The keynote of all its teaching is adwaita, "non-duality"—that is, absolute unity of the universe and God. The Hindu mind, however, is one of the utmost catholicity, and to furnish the practical method of securing the knowledge of adwaita, which is kept from man by "ignorance" (avidya) arising from the "delusion" (maya) of the phenomenal world, recourse was had to an older system called Yoga. The term yoga, with which our English word yoke is ultimately cognate, is used especially of the concentration of the mind in meditation. Yet a third element entered into the philosophy before it assumed its present form. In the twelfth century the philosopher Ramanuja introduced from the popular faith the doctrine of bhakti, or love of God, which is ultimately derived from Buddhism. The universal Indian doctrine of karma, or works affecting successive incarnations, and of transmigration were, of course, accepted by the Vedanta-yoga philosophy.

It will be seen by this consideration of the system that Swami Abhedananda preaches no mushroom creed, and no Eurasian hybrid "theosophy." He aims, he tells us, to give us a compendious account of yoga, summarizing the four books of his predecessor in this country, the late Swami Vivekananda. Clearly and admirably he performs his task. His introduction discusses the meaning of religion. He presents the same problem which confronted the sages of ancient India, as overburdened with the most elaborate ritual the world has ever seen, they meditated in the forests, and gave to mankind the beauty of the Upanishads. Learning does not save—only the knowledge tat tvam asi, "that (the Infinite) art thou," and soham, "I am He," can keep from weary rounds of birth and death and bring "release" (moksha.) The Swami then turns to the question: "What is yoga?" Here he rightly lays stress on the value of concentration for the cultivation of latent powers physical and spiritual. He also declares that a teacher is necessary. Here is one of the interesting points which bind the Vedanta of India with the mystic Sufi doctrines of Persia, for the guru, or spiritual guide, in India corresponds closely to the pir, or sage, of Persia, mentioned repeatedly by Hafiz and other mystics. Next we have the five varieties of yoga in the order Hatha, Raja, Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana. The Hatha yoga, "violent meditation," aims at the complete control of the body and also of the nerves. The health and latent powers are developed according to this system, and there is a deal of hocus-pocus solemnly outlined by the Swami which ought to excite the risibilities of any but a Vedantist. The chapter is of value, however, as showing the distinctively Oriental mixture of puerility with sublimity. Raja yoga, "royal meditation," is the intellectual counterpart of the physical Hatha. This power of mental self-control is gained by eight steps, which lead up to autohypnotism with the self-suggestion of the identity of the ego with the Infinite. The Swami makes a ludicrously false statement, however, when he says (Pages 64-5) that Pythagoras, Plotinus, Proclus, Gnostic, and Christian mystics, and modern Roman Catholic monks and nuns speak in praise of Raja yoga! The third division, Karma yoga, or "work meditation," is that form of the philosophy which is best adapted "for those who believe in no creed, who are not devotional, and who do not care to worship or pray to a personal God." (Page 84.) It is a commonplace of Hindu philosophy that the karma of any one incarnation is the product of the acts of all preceding incarnations, and as modified in this life will condition incarnations yet to come. The aim of Karma yoga is the performance of acts for their own sake and with no regard to their results which might bring profit in any way to the agent. Bhakti yoga, "love meditation," is in some respects the most interesting, as it is the most human of all. It is the symbolization of God as the Beloved, and the realization that the human lover and the divine beloved are in reality the One and the All. This is the form which has penetrated Persia, and it is an analogous, though unconnected, development which gave rise to the early Christian interpretation of the Song of Songs. The fifth and last division is Jnana yoga, or "knowledge meditation." This is purely intellectual, and it reaches its culmination in the perfect realization of non-duality or adwaita. To the Western mind the teaching of the Vedanta is not flawless, beautiful as it is in many ways. This the present reviewer has stated

more fully elsewhere in these columns (NEW YORK TIMES SATURDAY REVIEW July 12, 1902, Page 477.) The section on the "Science of Breathing" is a mere amplification of the section on Hatha yoga. The most striking feature of the whole book, to the casual reader, is the last twenty-six pages, "Was Christ a Yogi!" Here one inevitably thinks of Mozoomdar's "Oriental Christ," and the comparison is not in favor of the Swami. This section of the book is unfair and inaccurate. The attempt to prove Christ a Yogi is based upon a presentation of a specious theory. It is true that Christ was all a perfect yogi should be, for He was all perfection. Such statements as Christ's "I and My Father are one" are but superficially equivalent to the doctrine of adwaita. Nowhere in the New Testament is there aught in tone or spirit which is Vedantic. Christ never teaches that all mankind are one with God, (the strongest passage in favor of the Swami, John xvii., 21-24, being intensely individualistic; He stands unique in the Bible for his claim, and there is no proof, hardly even room for reasonable conjecture, that He, even during those eighteen mysterious years, came under any non-Jewish influence. And finally the Swami is, or should be, too well informed in Oriental scholarship to quote the "Song Celestial," and "The Gospel of Buddha" to prove an exploded theory of the dependence of Christianity on the religions of India. In form the little book is excellent, and its English style is good, the only error noted being "the divers phenomena," (Page 107,) which may be due to the printer.

LOUIS H. GRAY.

\*HOW TO BE A YOGI. By Swami Abhedananda. 8vo. Cloth, Pp. 188. New York: Vedanta Society.