
The Summary of
SĀDHANĀ
The Realization of Life
by
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With the exception of Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore was a well known figure in India in modern times. He first came to the attention of the world when in 1913 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. For many years before that date, however, he had been slowly emerging in his poems, prose, and lectures, and more especially in Santiniketan, his model school, founded near Calcutta, in 1901 as the most important Indian interpreter of Oriental thought to the West. He spent a great deal of his time traveling in China and Japan, but chiefly in Europe and America. During his tour of Europe and America in 1912, he delivered a series of lectures, which were later collected in the book under the title of Sādhana or the Realization of Life. He had been brought up in a family where texts of the Upanishads were used in daily worship; and he had had before him the example of his father, who lived his long life in the closest communion with God, while not neglecting his duties to the world, or allowing his keen interest in all his human affairs. So the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha for Rabindranath had been the things of spirit and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth. He not only used them in his preaching, but also practised in his own life.

So in this essay, which is nothing but the summary, it may be hoped, the readers will read it and grasp the tenor of his belief.

I. *The Relation of the Individual to the Universe*

The ancient civilization of India had its own ideal of perfection towards which its efforts were directed. Its aim was not attaining power. It neglected to cultivate to the utmost its capacities, and to organize men for defensive and offensive purposes, for cooperation in the acquisition of

wealth and for military and political ascendancy. The ideal that India tried to realize led her best men to the isolation of a contemplative life, and the treasures that she gained for mankind by penetrating into the mysteries of reality cost her dear in the sphere of worldly success. Yet, this also was a sublime achievement——it was a supreme manifestation of that human aspiration which knows no limit, and which has for its object nothing less than the realization of the Infinite.

Thus the state of realizing our relationship with all, of entering into everything through union with God, was considered in India to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of humanity.

Man can destroy and plunder, earn and accumulate, invent and discover, but he is only great when his soul comprehends all. It is destruction for him when he envelopes his soul in a dead shell of callous habits, and when a blind fury of works whirls round him like an eddying dust storm, shutting out the horizon. That indeed kills the very spirit of his being, which is the spirit of comprehension. Essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world, but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfilment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading Spirit, who is also the breath of his soul. Where a man tries to raise himself to eminence by pushing and jostling all others, to achieve a distinction by which he prides himself to be more than everybody else, there he is alienated from that spirit. This is why the Upanishads⁽¹⁾ describe those who have attained the goal of human life as “peaceful” and as “at-one-with-God”, meaning that they are in perfect harmony with man and nature, and therefore in undisturbed union with God,

We have a glimpse of the same truth in the teaching of Jesus when he says, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven”——which implies that whatever we treasure for ourselves separates us from others; our possessions are our limitations. He who is bent upon accumulating riches is unable, with his ego continually bulging, to pass through the gates of comprehension of the spiritual world, which is the world of perfect harmony;

Note : (1) Upanishads, the chief religious documents of ancient Hinduism.

he is shut up within the narrow walls of his limited acquisitions. Hence the spirit of the teachings of Upanishad is: In order to find him you must embrace all. In the pursuit of wealth you really give up everything to gain a few things, and that is not the way to attain him who is completeness.

Some modern philosophers of Europe maintain that the Brahma of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world. In a word, that the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realizing and affirming the presence of the Infinite in all things which has been its constant inspiration.

We are enjoined to see *whatever there is in the world as being enveloped by God.*

I bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in water, who permeated the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees.

Can this be God abstracted from the world? Instead, it signifies not merely seeing him in all things, but saluting him in all the objects of the world. The attitude of the God-conscious man of the Upanishad towards the universe is one of a deep feeling of adoration. His object of worship is present everywhere. It is the one living truth that makes all realities true. This truth is not only of knowledge but of devotion.

Buddha, who developed the practical side of the teaching of Upanishads, preached the same message when he said, "*With everything, whether it is above or below, remote or near, visible or invisible, thou shalt preserve a relation of unlimited love without any animosity or a desire to kill. To live in such a consciousness while standing or walking, sitting or lying down till you are asleep, is living and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma.*"⁽¹⁾

What is that spirit? The Upanishad says, *The being who is in his essence the light and life of all, who is world-conscious, is Brahma.* To feel all, to be conscious of everything, is his spirit. We are immersed in his consciousness, body and soul. It is through his consciousness that the sun attracts the earth; it is through his consciousness that the light-waves are

Note : (1) The Sanskrit word *Brahma* means the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth, of all things.

being transmitted from planet to planet.

Not only in space, but *this light and life, this all-feeling being is in our souls*. He is all-conscious in space, or the world of extension; and he is all-conscious in soul, or the world of intention.

Thus to attain our world-consciousness, we have to unite our feeling with this all-pervading infinite feeling. In fact, the only true human progress is coincident with this widening of the range of this feeling. All our poetry, philosophy, science, art, and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres. Man does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, nor through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness.

We have, however, to pay a price for this attainment of the freedom of consciousness. What is the price? It is to give one's self away. Our soul can realize itself truly only by denying ourselves. The Upanishad says, *Thou shalt gain by giving away. Thou shalt not covet.*

In Gita we are advised to work unselfishly, abandoning all lust for the result. Many outsiders conclude from this teaching that the conception of the world as something unreal lies at the root of the so-called "unselfishness" as preached in India. But the reverse is the truth.

The man who aims at his own aggrandisement underrates everything else. Compared to his ego the rest of the world is unreal. Thus in order to be fully conscious of the reality of all, one has to free himself from the bonds of personal desires. This discipline we have to go through to prepare ourselves for our social duties — for sharing the burdens of our fellow-beings. Every attempt to attain a larger life requires of man "to gain by giving away, and not to be greedy." And thus to develop gradually the consciousness of one's unity with all is the striving of humanity.

The Infinite in India was not a thin noentity, void of all content. The Rishis⁽²⁾ of India asserted emphatically, "To know him in this life is to be true; not to know him in this life is the desolation of death." How to know him then? "By realizing him in each and all." "Not only in nature but in the family, in society, and in the state, the more we realize

Note : (2) Rishis were those who had reached the supreme God, had found abiding peace, had become united with all.

the World-conscious in all, the better for us. Failing to realize it, we turn our faces to destruction.

It fills me with great joy and a high hope for the future of humanity when I realize that there was a time in the remote past when our poet-prophets stood under the lavish sunshine of an Indian sky and greeted the world with the glad recognition of kindred. It meant crossing the limiting barriers of the individual, to become one with the All. It was not a mere play of the imagination, but it was the liberation of consciousness from all the mystifications and exaggerations of the self. These ancient seers felt in the serene depth of their mind that the same energy which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world manifests itself in our inner being as consciousness; and there is no break in unity.

This is the noble heritage from our forefathers waiting to be claimed by us as our own, this ideal of the supreme freedom of consciousness. It is not merely intellectual or emotional, it has an ethical basis, and it must be translated into action. In the Upanishad it is said, *The supreme being is all-pervading, therefore he is the innate good in all.* To be truly united in wisdom, love, and service with all beings, and thus to realize one's self in the all-pervading God is the essence of goodness, and this is the keynote of the teachings of the Upanishads: Life is immense!

II. *Soul Consciousness*

It was the aspiration of ancient India to live, move and have its joy in Brahma, the all-conscious and all-pervading Spirit, by extending its field of consciousness over all the world. But it may be urged that this is an impossible task for man to achieve. Well, if this extension of consciousness be an outward process, then it is endless.

But, in reality, man has every day to solve this problem of enlarging his region and adjusting his burden. His burdens are too numerous for him to carry, but he knows that by adopting a system he can lighten the weight of his load. This search for system is really a search for unity, for synthesis; it is our attempt to harmonize the heterogenous complexity of outward materials by an inner adjustment. It is based on the law of that unity which is, if we only know it, our abiding strength. This discovery of truth is pure joy to man — it is a liberation of his mind. For, a mere fact is like a blind lane, it leads only to itself — it has no

beyond. But a truth opens up a whole horizon ; it leads us to the infinite. That is the reason why, when a man like Darwin discovered some simple general truth about Biology, it does not stop there, but like a lamp shedding its light far beyond the object for which it was lighted, it illumines the whole region of human life and thought, transcending its original purpose. Thus we find that truth, while investing all facts, is not a mere aggregate of facts — it surpasses them on all sides and points to the infinite reality.

As in the region of knowledge so in that of consciousness, men must clearly realize some central truth which will give him an outlook over the widest possible field. And that is the object which the Upanishad has in view when it says, *Know thine own Soul*. Or, in other words, realize the one great principle of unity that is in every man.

All our egoistic impulses, our selfish desires, obscure our true vision of the soul. For they only indicate our own narrow self. When we are conscious of our soul, we perceive the inner being that transcends our ego and has its deeper affinity with the All.

Our soul, when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self loses its significance. For its very essence is unity. It can only find out its truth by unifying itself with others, and only then it has its joy. Man was troubled and he lived in a state of fear so long as he had not discovered the uniformity of law in nature ; till then the world was alien to him. The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason which is of the soul of man and the workings of the world. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world in which he lives, and he feels an exceeding joy when he finds this out, for then he realizes himself in his surroundings. To understand anything is to find in it something which is our own, and it is the discovery of ourselves outside us which makes us glad. This relation of understanding is partial, but the relation of love is complete. In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite.

Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All.

This principle of unity which man has in soul is ever active, establishing relations far and wide through literature, art, science, society, statecraft, and religion. Our great revealers are they who make manifest the true meaning of the soul by giving up self for the love of mankind. They face calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service of love. They live the life of the soul, not of the self; and thus they prove to us the ultimate truth of humanity. We call them Mahātmās, "the men of the great soul."

It is said in one of the Upanishads: *It is not that thou lovest thy son because thou desires him, but thou loves thy son because thou desirest thine own soul.* The meaning of this is, that whomsoever we love, in him we find our own soul in the highest sense. The final truth of our existence lies in this. The supreme soul is in me as well as in my son and my joy in my son is the realization of this truth. It has become quite a commonplace fact, yet it is wonderful to think upon, that the joys and sorrows of our loved ones are joys and sorrows to us — nay, they are more. Why so? Because in them we have grown larger, in them we have touched that great truth which comprehends the whole universe.

It very often happens that our love for our children, our friends, or other loved ones, debars us from the further realization of our soul. It enlarges our scope of consciousness, no doubt, yet it sets a limit to its freest expansion. Nevertheless, it is the first step, and all the wonder lies in this first step itself. It shows to us the true nature of our soul. From it we know, for certain, that our highest joy is in the losing of our egoistic self and in the uniting with others. This love gives us a new power and insight and beauty of mind to the extent of the limits we set around it, but ceases to do so if those limits lose their elasticity, and militate against the spirit of love altogether; then our friendships become exclusive, our families selfish and inhospitable, our nations insular and aggressively inimical to other races. It is like putting a burning light within a sealed enclosure, which shines brightly till the poisonous gases accumulate and smother the flame. Nevertheless it has proved its truth before it dies, and made known the joy of freedom from the grip of the darkness, blind and empty and cold.

According to the Upanishads, the key to cosmic consciousness, to God-consciousness, is in the consciousness of the soul. To know our soul

apart from the self is the first step towards the realization of the supreme deliverance. We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. This we can do by mastering the self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul. The chick knows when it breaks through the self-centred isolation of its egg that the hard shell which covered it so long was not really a part of its life. That shell is a dead thing, it has no growth, it affords no glimpse whatever of the vast beyond that lies outside it. However pleasantly perfect and rounded it may be, it must be given a blow, it must burst through and thereby the freedom of light and air be won, and the complete purpose of bird life be achieved. In Sanskrit, the bird has been called the twice-born. So too the man who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self-restraint and high thinking for a period of at least twelve years; who has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to take up all the responsibilities of life in a disinterested largeness of spirit. He is considered to have had his rebirth from the blind envelopment of his surroundings; to have become at one with the All.

I must warn my readers against the idea that the teachers of India preached a renunciation of the world and of self which leads only to the blank emptiness of negation. Their aim was the realization of the soul, or in other words, gaining the world in perfect truth. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," he meant this. He proclaimed the truth that when man gets rid of his pride of self then he comes into his true inheritance. No more has he to fight his way into immortal right of his soul. Pride of self interferes with the proper function of the soul which is to realize itself by perfecting its union with the world and the world's God.

In his sermon to Sádhu Simha Buddha says, *It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities, but only the activities that lead to the evil in words, thoughts, or deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought, and ignorance, not that of forgiveness, love, charity, and truth.*

The doctrine of deliverance that Buddha preached was the freedom from the thralldom of ignorance — the ignorance that darkens our consciousness, and tends to limit it within the boundaries of our personal self. It is

this ignorance, this limiting of consciousness that creates the hard separateness of the ego, and thus becomes the source of all pride and greed and cruelty incidental to self-seeking. When a man lives the life of ignorance he is confined within his self. It is a spiritual sleep; his consciousness is not fully awake to the highest reality that surrounds him, therefore he knows not the reality of his own soul. When he attains Bodhi, i.e. the awakening from the sleep of self to the perfection of consciousness, he becomes Buddha.

III. *The Realization of the Infinite*

The Upanishads say : "Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him."

But what is the nature of this attainment of God? It is quite evident that the infinite is not like one object among many, to be definitely classified and kept among our possessions, to be used as an ally specially favouring us either in our politics, warfare, money-making, or in social competitions. We cannot put our God in the same list with our summer-houses, motor-cars, or our credit at the bank, as so many people seem to want to do.

We must try to understand the true character of the desire that a man has when his soul longs for his God. Does it consist of his wish to make an addition, however valuable, to his belongings? Emphatically no! It is an endlessly wearisome task this continual adding to our stores. In fact, when the soul seeks God she seeks her final escape from this incessant gathering and heaping and never coming to an end. It is not an additional object that she seeks, but it is the permanent in all that are impermanent, the highest abiding joy unifying enjoyments. Therefore when the Upanishads teach us to realize everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new.

Know everything that there is in the universe as enveloped by God. Enjoy whatever is given by him and harbour not in your mind the greed for wealth which is not your own.

When you know that whatever there is is filled by him and whatever you have is his gift, then you realize the infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts. Then you know that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all your possessions have their only significance for you, not in themselves but in

the relation they establish with the infinite.

So it cannot be said that we can find Brahma as we find other objects; there is no question of searching for him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that Brahma is everywhere.

This is the reason why Buddha admonished us to free ourselves from the confinement of the life of the self. If there were nothing else to take its place more positively perfect and satisfying, then such admonition would be absolutely meaningless. No man can seriously consider the advice, much less have any enthusiasm for gaining nothing whatever.

So our daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love.

The Upanishads say: *Be lost altogether in Brahma like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target.* Thus to be conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahma is not an act of mere concentration of mind. It must be the aim of the whole of our life. In all our thoughts and deeds we must be conscious of the infinite. Let the realization of this truth become easier every day of our life, that *none could live or move if the energy of the all-pervading joy did not fill the sky.* In all our actions let us feel that impetus of the infinite energy and be glad.

It may be said that the infinite beyond our attainment, so it is for us as if it were naught. Yes, if the word attainment implies any idea of possession, then it must be admitted that the infinite is unattainable. But we must keep in mind that the highest enjoyment of man is not the having but in a getting, which is at the same time not getting. It is evident that the real desire of our soul is to get beyond all our possessions. Surrounded by things she can touch and feel, she cries, "I am weary of getting; ah, where is he who is never to be got?"

We see everywhere in the history of man that the spirit of renunciation is the deepest reality of the human soul. When the soul says of anything, "I do not want it, for I am above it," she gives utterance to the highest truth that is in her. It is only when a man truly realizes what his possessions are that he has no more illusions about them; then he knows his

soul is far above these and he becomes free from their bondage. Thus man truly realizes his soul by outgrowing his possessions, and man's progress in the path of eternal life is through a series of renunciations.

That we cannot absolutely possess the infinite being is not a mere intellectual proposition. It has to be experienced, and this experience is bliss. The bird, while taking its flight in the sky, experiences at every beat of its wings that the sky is boundless, that its wings can never carry it beyond. Therein lies its joy. In the cage the sky is limited; it may be quite enough for all the purposes of the bird's life, only it is not more than is necessary. The bird cannot rejoice within the limits of the necessary. It must feel that what it has is immeasurably more than it ever can want or comprehend, and then only can it be glad.

Thus our soul must soar in the infinite, and she must feel every moment that in the sense of not being able to come to the end of her attainment is her supreme joy, her final freedom.

Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part with all that he has, not excepting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings. Buddha and Jesus, and all our great prophets, represent such ideas.

The finite pole of our existence has its place in the world of necessity. There man goes about searching for food to live, clothing to get warmth. In this region — the region of nature — it is his function to get things. The natural man is occupied with enlarging his possessions.

But this act of getting is partial. It is limited to man's necessities. We can have a thing only to the extent of our requirements, just as a vessel can contain water only to the extent of its emptiness. Our relation to food is only in feeding, our relation to a house is only habitation. We call it a benefit when a thing is fitted only to some particular want of ours. Thus to get is always to get partially, and it never can be otherwise. So this craving for acquisition belongs to our finite self.

But that side of our existence whose direction is towards the infinite seeks not wealth, but freedom and joy. There the reign of necessity ceases, and there our function is not to get but to be. To be what? To be one with Brahma. For the region of the infinite is the region of unity. Therefore the Upanishads say: *If man apprehends God he becomes true.*

Here it is becoming, it is not having more.

Though the West has accepted as its teacher him who boldly proclaimed his oneness with his Father, and who exhorted his followers to be perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of our unity with the infinite being. It condemns, as a piece of blasphemy, any implication of man's becoming God. This is certainly not the idea that Christ preached, nor perhaps the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seems to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian West.

But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of our soul to gain God, to utilize him for any special material purpose. All that we can ever aspire to is become more and more one with God. In the region of nature, which is the region of diversity, we grow by acquisition; in the spiritual world, which is the region of unity, we grow by losing ourselves, by uniting. Gaining a thing, as we have said, is by its nature partial, it is limited only to a particular want; but *being* is complete, it belongs to our wholeness, it springs not from any necessity but from affinity with the infinite, which is the principle of perfection that we have in our soul.

Yes, we must become Brahma. We must not shrink to avow this. Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realize the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all.

But can it then be said that, there is no difference between Brahma and our individual soul? Of course the difference is obvious. Brahma is Brahma, he is the infinite ideal of perfection. But we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma. In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, "I shall become the sea." It is the truth. The river has no other alternative. On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests, villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways, cleanse them and feed them, carry their produce from place to place. But it can have only partial relation with these and however long it may linger among them it remains separate; it never can become a town or a forest.

But it can and does become the sea. The lesser moving water has its affinity with the great motionless water of the ocean. It moves through the thousand objects on its onward course, and its motion finds its

finality when it reaches the sea.

The river can become the sea, but she can never make the sea part and parcel of herself. If, by some chance, she has encircled some broad sheet of water and pretends that she has made the sea a part of herself, we at once know that it is not so, that her current is still seeking rest in the great ocean to which it can never set boundaries.

In the same manner, our soul can only become Brahma as the river can become the sea. Everything else she touches at one of her points, then leaves and moves on, but she never can leave Brahma and move beyond him. Once our soul realizes her ultimate object of repose in Brahma, all her movements acquire a purpose. It is this ocean of infinite rest which gives significance to endless activities. It is this perfection of being that lends to the imperfection of becoming that quality of beauty which finds its expression in all poetry, drama, and art.