BHAKTIVEDANTA INSTITUTE

DISCUSSIONS WITH MEN OF SCIENCE

Number 2, 1979



Arguments for the Existence of the Soul

BHAKTIVEDANTA INSTITUTE

Discussions with Men of Science
Number 2, 1979

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL

Published by the Bhaktivedanta Institute

6664 Lincoln Drive
Philadelphia, Pa. 19119
USA

Gandhi Gram Road
Juhu, Bombay
India

Copyright 1979 Bhaktivedanta Institute
All rights reserved.
Printed in USA.

The following is a talk with Dr. K. K. Datey, Emeritus Professor and Director of Cardiology at both K. E. M. Hospital in Bombay and the Medical Research Center at Bombay Hospital. He has served as the personal physician of India's President, and among his 250-plus publications is the book How to Keep Your Heart Young and Healthy. Here the doctor speaks with Dr. M. A. Marchetti of the Bhaktivedanta Institute.

Dr. Marchetti: I understand that you recommend hatha-yoga exercises for your patients. Can you explain why you think yoga can be beneficial in the medical profession?

Dr. Datey: Well yoga, particularly hatha-yoga, can help one in various ways. It helps the physical condition of the patient and helps to keep the whole body fit. The practices are devised in such a way that they give exercise to every part of the body, including the nervous system, the skeletal system and joints, the lungs, the heart, the abdomen, and the internal viscera. And in order to train the mind, the exercises of meditation, etc. are superb. They train the mind in the sense that they try to give you better control over your life. These techniques are all self-regulation techniques. By following these techniques you get a better control and don't get upset so easily with the slings and arrows of life. These are some of the advantages of yoga practice.

Dr. Marchetti: So the control of the mind is a very important part of the yoga system.

Dr. Datey: The mind is more important than the body.

Dr. Marchetti: The mind and the body are two different things?

Dr. Datey: Yes, but they are closely interrelated.

Dr. Marchetti: I was wondering if you might comment on what the difference between a dead body and a living body is.

Dr. Datey: The difference between a dead body and a living body is that the living one can respond to the known stimuli.

Dr. Marchetti: What is the source of that response in the living body?

Dr. Datey: Well, the source of that response is the physiological and nervous systems' reactions.

Dr. Marchetti: But aren't the physiological and nervous systems present in the dead body as well?

Dr. Datey: They are present, but they are not operating.

Dr. Marchetti: Then what is the cause of the operation or inoperation of those systems?

Dr. Datey: If we knew what was the spark that lights or kindles the fire that keeps you going, then that would answer the 64-million dollar question!

Dr. Marchetti: I see. Well, would you agree that the difference be-

tween a dead body and a living body is consciousness?

Dr. Datey: Yes--whatever you want to call it. You can call it any name.

Dr. Marchetti: Now, the body is composed of so many atoms--carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, etc.--none of which possesses any consciousness individually as atoms, or collectively as molecules or macromolecules. So, what is the origin of the consciousness within the living body?

Dr. Datey: We still don't know exactly why at one moment a person can do whatever he wants, and at the next moment he is dead. What departs from the body? Does something depart from the body when one dies, implying that something has previously entered the body to make it alive? Take the experiences of individuals who supposedly die and then come back. They report various types of experiences. I think there are a few books on this subject--some written by doctors, and some by non-doctors--describing the experiences of these people. They actually go out of their body, and later they can describe what was happening to their body on the operating table.

Dr. Marchetti: So there is some evidence that something leaves the body and enters the body. The ancients, of course, have always talked about the existence of the ātma, or soul, as a minute particle within the body that gives consciousness and life. This is something the Bhaktivedanta Institute is interested in investigating and establishing on a completely scienctific basis.

Dr. Datey: Well, what is the ātma?

Dr. Marchetti: The ātma is the source of consciousness within the body. It is ultimately a nonphysical, nonchemical entity. It is the eternal person, who has an existence independent of the atoms and molecules of this world. In the Vedas the ātma is described as being smaller than an atom.

Dr. Datey: So where does this energy, or ātma, come from? And where does it go?

Dr. Marchetti: That is also described in the Vedas. First of all, the ātma comes from the supreme ātma, or paramātma, and it is eternally part and parcel of that Supreme. By forgetfulness of this fact the infinitesimal ātma comes under the influence of the material atmosphere and enters the material world. If the ātma is still under the influence of the material atmosphere at the time of death, he remains in the material world by taking another body, and if he is free of material desires and influences he can leave the material world and go to the world in which there is full remembrance or consciousness of God, the Supreme ātma. In any case, the ātma is conserved; he is never created or destroyed. He is an eternal, fragmental particle of the whole, just as the atom

is part of the whole universe.

Dr. Datey: This is the Hindu philosophy.

Dr. Marchetti: But we are trying to say that this is not just mythology. The descriptions in the Bhagavad-gītā, for instance, are supported by some scientific, experimental verification.

Dr. Datey: What is the verification?

Dr. Marchetti: First of all, the living body obviously behaves quite differently from the dead body. The scientists have not yet discovered what that difference is, but according to the Bhagavad-gītā, there is a particle present in the living body that is not present in the dead body. When that particle is present, the body behaves in a different way than it would without its presence.

Dr. Datey: Where is that particle?

Dr. Marchetti: Actually, it is located in the heart.

Dr. Datey: No. The heart can be dead, the heart can stop, and the patient can still function.

Dr. Marchetti: What do you mean?

Dr. Datey: The heart can stop and the patient can be revived again, even after the stoppage of the heart. So the soul can't be in the heart. Although from my experience I agree there must be something, unfortunately the instruments we have are not adequate to measure this.

Dr. Marchetti: What do you think they would have to measure?

Dr. Datey: They would have to measure the ātma. How do you measure the ātma? So far you have mentioned only some inferences.

Dr. Marchetti: Again, one has to first understand that if the ātma is nonphysical and nonchemical, then what does that leave you to measure?

Dr. Datey: Well, we would need some sort of a device to detect it. Something should be there--some vibration, or something else.

Dr. Marchetti: You were speaking of the mind before. How would you measure the activities of the mind?

Dr. Datey: Same problem: we talk about this in abstract terms only.

Dr. Marchetti: What about the science of psychology? Doesn't that try to develop certain systematic tests for measuring the mind?

Dr. Datey: No, the science of psychology measures only the reactions of the human mind. But what is the mind? We can't show what exactly the mind is through psychology.

Dr. Marchetti: When you say you can't describe the mind itself, you mean it can't be described in terms of physics and chemistry.

Dr. Datey: Yes, at the moment our science is not perfect. We do not have equipment or tests to detect these things. There may be some vibration, there may be some subtle forces. For instance, transference of thought, ESP--there is no way to detect such

things except by certain inferential methods.

Dr. Marchetti: Why do you insist on reducing every thought, or every feeling, or every conscious act to something energetic--to something that can be measured like so many billiard balls?

Dr. Datey: That is the only way you can prove it. You may talk about rebirth, but what is the proof? How can you prove that the ātma goes from one body to the next?

Dr. Marchetti: There are certain reports about rebirth in parapsychological literature. A person under hypnosis begins talking about a previous life, say, in a country that he has never visited, giving accurate details that can all be confirmed by a team of investigators. The individual couldn't possibly have known such things without having been there in a previous life. Then there are the cases of child prodigies, like Mozart, who have certain skills or knowledge that a small child could never develop from infancy, but which he could only have retained from a previous life.

Dr. Datey: These things often prove false. There is the famous case of Bridie Murphy, who under hypnosis described events in her last life in very great detail. Afterwards a check was made, and they found that the whole thing was wrong. Of course, it is not easy after one generation to determine whether the person's account of the past is correct or not. To determine who was there, after thirty or forty years, may not be very easy. These stories have also come out in India. For instance, there was one girl in Agra who could describe her past life.

Dr. Marchetti: The Bhagavad-gītā gives a very interesting argument for rebirth. It says that in one lifetime you change your body as you go from childhood to adolescence to old age. Thus you can visually see that your baby body is now completely gone, your adolescent body is similarly no longer here. You have completely changed your body several times, yet you retain basically the same abstract ego or identity.

Dr. Datey: The body changes at every moment.

Dr. Marchetti: Yet you maintain a constant, unchanging identity. Is this not proof of rebirth?

Dr. Datey: Well, eternal change is going on.

Dr. Marchetti: Yes.

Dr. Datey: But the proof that when you die the ātma goes out and enters another body--that proof remains.

Dr. Marchetti: That proof is the one I just gave you--that your baby body is dead and gone, its atoms completely dispersed within the universe, and that you are now in another body and yet are the same person.

Dr. Datey: No. The body has not

completely gone. The same body has been changed.

Dr. Marchetti: You have the same body that you had when you were a baby?

Dr. Datey: The cells have been changing.

Dr. Marchetti: Everything is changed. Is it not so?

Dr. Datey: Every few months the body changes.

Dr. Marchetti: So the body is constantly changing, but what remains the same? What is that "I" who remembers, "I was a baby," "I was a young boy"? The "I," who remains unchanged, can talk about the changing body. Is that not proof that the ātma can undergo rebirth?

Dr. Datey: Where is the proof for reincarnation?

Dr. Marchetti: The body changes, but the ātma remains the same. That is what is meant by rebirth.

Dr. Datey: But it is the same body into which the ātma had originally entered.

Dr. Marchetti: It's not the same body. Your body is now completely different from the one you took birth in.

Dr. Datey: In so far as the cells have changed—

Dr. Marchetti: Everything is different--there are different cells, different matter, a different size and shape, etc.

Dr. Datey: Yes.

Dr. Marchetti: This is the most direct proof of rebirth that can be given.

Dr. Datey: That means, in short, that you will have to go back to the law of karma.

Dr. Marchetti: That is also there, but let us keep to the topic of the atma and the body. There are two different things, the ātma and the body, and these can be observed in our daily experience. Maybe you cannot measure the ātma, yet it is a fact of conscious experience that something exists beyond the body. One might call this inferential proof, but it is exactly like the proof we have for the existence of the electron. No one has ever seen an electron. You see some streak on a cloud chamber, and you infer that it was caused by a small particle, but you never actually see the particle. You just infer its existence. In this way, much of science is based upon inference.

Dr. Datey: So the existence of something unchanged beyond the changing body is a scientific conclusion?

Dr. Marchetti: Yes.

Dr. Datey: But you still haven't proved reincarnation. The Christians, for example, do not believe in reincarnation.

Dr. Marchetti: In the 7th century A.D. the Christians actually did believe in reincarnation. The emperor Justinian passed the famous Anathema against Origen, one of the founding fathers of the Church, who was teaching reincarnation.

Dr. Datey: My points are these: one, how can you prove reincar-

nation scientifically, and two, in what way, by affecting the mind, can we help people to improve their body and improve what they are doing in their life.

Dr. Marchetti: The first point can be proven only when we understand that the ātma and the consciousness are nonmaterial principles. Unless we understand the fundamental nature of these things, we cannot hope to prove anything about them. Since the ātma is completely different from dead matter, we cannot expect to understand much about it from a purely material perspective, although certain inferences can be drawn by observing the interaction of the ātma with matter. Concerning your second point, about improving one's life, one must first ascertain the root cause of degradation of life; otherwise one may simply be attempting to treat the symptoms without curing the actual disease. According to the Bhagavad-gītā, the root cause of all problems is the unwillingness of the individual living entities to dovetail their consciousness in a cooperative loving relationship with the complete, whole, superconsciousness of God. You may practically observe that people who have actually developed God consciousness have controlled minds and bodies and live a peaceful and satisfying life.

Dr. Datey: Well, if one accepts all this then he has to accept the concept of karma, that everything happens on an a priori principle.

Dr. Marchetti: Cause and effect is the basic a priori assumption of science--indeed of all rational thought. Whatever happens must be the result of some previous cause. So the law of karma is a very scientific principle.

Dr. Datey: But the existence of the controlling factor or energy would be beyond the detection of our modern apparatus. Even in Indian methods of yoga, they talk about the kuṇḍalinī. This is quite a different thing from what you have been talking about.

Dr. Marchetti: There are so many things we can analyze and try to understand, but I think that strictly on the basis of the established sciences of physics, chemistry, and biology, we can demonstrate that higher principles beyond matter are working in the universe and that the basic principle of conscious life can never be reduced to the insentient principles of matter. To understand the fundamental, irreducible and transcendental nature of what we call consciousness will open up a new realm of thought for modern man. The aim of the Bhaktivedanta Institute is to establish this most fundamental principle of knowledge. We request all the intelligent and serious scientists to do research in this area very seriously.

Dr. Datey: Well, I can't do any laboratory analysis at this time, but I will certainly keep you a-

breast of any clinical findings in these areas.

Dr. Marchetti: Dr. Datey, thank you very much for your time.

* * * * * * * * * *

About Bhaktivedanta Institute

Founded in 1976 by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the Bhaktivedanta Institute is a center for the advanced study of the origin and nature of life. While modern science revolves around the concept that everything (including life and consciousness) can be explained and understood in terms of matter alone, the scientists and scholars of the Bhaktivedanta Institute feel that this concept is too restrictive to account for the observed phenomena of life. Instead, the Institute members utilize the insights into life, consciousness, and the self discovered by the ancient Vedic scholars, who made the study of consciousness their primary concern and who held that conscious life is primordial and cannot be reduced to physico-chemical phenomena. On the basis of this information, the members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute are developing new scientific paradigms that incorporate consciousness and other higher-order biological phenomena as irreducible features of nature.

The specific programs of the Institute include the following:

(a) To conduct research into the Vedic scientific knowledge concerning the fundamental concepts of life and its origin, the structure of matter and its interaction with life, and the nature of consciousness and the self.

(b) To investigate closely the predominant theories of modern science, particularly the theory of evolution (both chemical and biological) and the quantum theory, and to formulate new scientific paradigms (involving higher-order natural laws, psychological laws, and so on) that take into account hitherto unexplained phenomena pertaining to life and consciousness.

(c) To show how these new paradigms bear on recent developments in modern biology, biochemistry, sociobiology, socioeconomics, and biomedical ethics (including ethical questions raised by research in such fields as recombinant DNA, genetic engineering, organ transplantation, and death).

(d) To design and conduct experiments in the above areas of scientific and academic concern. Institute members will perform these experiments with the help of the most modern scientific techniques, and the experimental results will enable them to test the validity of the new paradigms.

[Note: Please send correspondence to either address given on the title page of this pamphlet.]