

SELF-KNOWLEDGE is the official organ of Shanti Sadan, the Centre of Adhyatma Yoga in the West.

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ADHYATMA YOGA

The highest spiritual wisdom experienced by the Seers of Truth in ancient times has been passed down to the present day through an unbroken line of traditional teachers. Its metaphysical side establishes, by reasoning, a strictly non-dualistic explanation of the universe; its practical side gives clear guidance as to how man should act and the means whereby the purpose of life may be fulfilled. The essentials of the teaching are:

1. That God alone is real, and all else is unreal (transient).
2. That the Self of man in essence is identical with God.
3. That the purpose of life is the conscious realization of this identity and that it can be achieved while actively engaged in the duties of life.
4. That it gives unbroken peace, poise and bliss, and the ability to impart these to others.

Adhyatma Yoga was introduced into Britain in 1929 by the late Hari Prasad Shastri, at the wish of his Teacher, the spiritually enlightened Saint, Shri Dada of Aligarh. The centre is at Shanti Sadan, 29 Chepstow Villas, London W11 3DR, where the teachings are given in the traditional way.

EVENTS FOR THE SPRING TERM 2008

Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

Lectures will be given every Wednesday and Friday evening at 8pm from Wednesday 16 January until Friday 14 March 2008. The Wednesday meetings will be a series focusing on meditation practice.

Spring 2008 One-Day Course

The course will be held on Sunday 2 March 2008 at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. For details see the inside back cover.

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The Real Nature of Man

MAN COMES into this world without knowing who sent him, or why he is sent, and at his every step is set a limit — he can hear so far and no farther, he knows so much and no more. The power which has set a limit to the tides of the sea, the power which said to the earth when it broke away from its parent body, the sun, ‘so far and no farther’, has set a limit for man also. The frustration of desires hems him in on every side — he is born in pain, lives in pain and dies in pain. There are very few of whom it can be said that they pass away like the fragrance of flowers.

The thinking man asks himself: ‘Am I born only to see frustration? Shall I always see civilizations crumbling before me? Am I created for this?’ When a man begins to ask such questions, a new chapter opens in his evolution. The seers, saints and prophets have said that man was

meant to be a ruler of circumstances, to be the architect of his destiny, that he is meant to be a lion in the forest of the world, and to move about there without restraint.

To say there is nothing but suffering possible is nonsense, for there is a desire in man which raises its head like a flame of fire, a desire to subjugate and control circumstances. Man has the intuitive knowledge that, in his essence, he is a flower which never fades; a fountain which never fails, a nightingale that eternally sings the name of the Lord — he knows this subconsciously. He is not satisfied with what happens to him, he seeks to be above all limitations and restrictions; these are facts which cannot be denied. We do not hold with the French Encyclopaedists, who say that man is born on the dung-hill of time and space, to be crushed under the heel of circumstance.

How can man rise above all limitations? This question cannot be answered satisfactorily by psychologists or sociologists, neither have scientists any solution to it. The answer has been given by the saints of God. The holy philosophy says that man can acquire freedom from suffering, once and for all, by knowing God within himself, or the nature of his own ultimate Being.

There are two entities, the conscious and the unconscious. Spirit is conscious, mind and body are unconscious. It is as St Paul said: 'Things visible are perishable, things invisible are eternal', and when, by the grace of God, and good deeds extending over many incarnations, man learns that there is a way out of all suffering and limitation, he approaches a qualified teacher, in humility, and serves him, and when the teacher being pleased with him says: 'My son, what do you want?' he replies: 'O Master, be good enough to tell me my nature.' Unless a man is disgusted with the material circumstances of life, there is no help for him. A desire to change the outer circumstances may be helpful, but it will not ensure permanent satisfaction, which only at-one-ment with the ultimate reality, or God-vision, can give.

There are three categories into which man's activities can be divided. These categories were formulated for the first time in Europe by Immanuel Kant. They are: willing, thinking and desiring. Man wills, thinks and desires. He can think nonsense, he can think of reading the thoughts of others, he can think of transmuting base metals into gold, but all this type of thinking is ultimately useless. We must

cultivate the habit of useful thinking.

Three men, each corresponding to a category of human nature, are engaged in trying to effect a permanent solution of the pressure of suffering on mankind. One attacks the problem through benevolence or *karma*; the second through devotion or *upasana*; the third through knowledge, metaphysical thinking, or *jnana*. The holy Adhyatma Yoga, which means inner communion with Reality, does not employ one only of these methods but all three.

Plato wrote on the door of his Academy: 'Let no one enter here who has not studied the first four books of Euclid', which means, in other words, that in order to study a profound system of metaphysics satisfactorily, we must make extensive preparations. Studentship demands discipline, so why not the study of metaphysics? A merely intellectual approach to the study of the Vedanta philosophy will not bring us the satisfaction that our souls desire. A mind lacking in concentration, and over-agitated by ever-changing desires, cannot be of any use in the real study of metaphysics. We must take the spiritual philosophy seriously, and study seriously, under a competent, traditional teacher, in the right spirit of meditative receptivity, and in all humility, realizing our own ignorance. We must make this study, and the practical discipline connected with it, our chief concern in life, and subordinate everything to it in a burning desire to acquire the knowledge of our real nature. If we do this, the grace of the Lord, working through the teacher, will bring the final result, which is complete and lasting freedom from all suffering, and bliss which is independent of any object and which never fails.

There are three aspects of the discipline which are essential:

1. To wish good to every living being.
2. To execute desires only after they have been scrutinised by reason.
3. To maintain inner composure of mind under all conditions and in all circumstances.

A helpful approach to the investigation of the true nature of the Self may be made by studying Dr Thibaut's translation of Shri Shankaracharya's introduction to the *Brahma Sutras*. Here it is said: "It is a matter not requiring any proof, that the object and the subject,

whose respective spheres are the notion of the 'thou' (the non-ego) and the 'ego', and which are opposed to each other as much as darkness and light are, cannot be identified. Hence it follows that it is wrong to superimpose upon the subject — whose nature is intelligence, and which has for its sphere the notion of the ego — the object, whose sphere is the notion of the non-ego, and the attributes of the object; and vice versa, to superimpose the subject and the attributes of the subject, on the object."

Now here are two categories, subject (ego) and object (non-ego). It must be carefully noted here that 'subject' and 'object' are not used by Shri Shankara in their usual and logical sense, for by 'subject' he means that which is true and real — in fact the Spirit, or Self, or whatever name may be given to the eternal element in man. Subject and object are sometimes also referred to as the knower and the known. All that is known is dark and full of suffering. Why? Because it is ever-changing and subject to limitations, whereas the real knower is light, intelligence and ever-blissful Spirit. Those two, subject and object, are different. You, the knower, are intelligent, and know; whereas the known, the object, is inert. Can light be imposed on darkness? No. They cannot both exist together. This is a simple but pregnant statement, and its implications are vast. Long before Aristotle, this difference was established — subject and object are eternally different.

In considering this statement, three thoughts are involved:

1. The whole world is composed of subject and object.
2. The subject (knower) and the object are not one and the same entity.
3. The two are opposed in nature, as are light and darkness.

This is the basis of the Vedanta philosophy.

The respective attributes of the subject and the object cannot be identified. Attributes are marks which characterize an entity, and make it different from all others. What is the difference between, say, a cow and a cat? A cow is a four-footed animal, with two horns and a long hanging dewlap, which differentiates it from all other animals. A definition must have these qualities: it must establish characteristics; it must not contrast things; it must be free from vagueness; and the

attributes must not overlap each other.

The character of an object is ever-changing. It is limited and uncertain, and is productive of suffering if we are attached to it. Anything that is limited is a cause of suffering. Space is limited, time is limited. Anything that has an opposite is changing; the body, health, all change, all are in *sansara* — that which ever flows.

What is the character of the subject? To determine the nature of our real Self (the subject), we must appeal to the inmost being of our own existence. We are immediately conscious of our essential Self, not only as existence, but as conscious existence. We can never explain away consciousness. Consciousness is awareness; it is absolute intelligence, and, as such, it is one. The subject is one but the objects are many.

Although the nature of the subject is entirely different from the nature of the object, man is blind to this elementary fact, which is proved by the following superimposition. When a man is asked: 'Are you John Smith?' he replies: 'Yes, I am John Smith', but he is not. John Smith is his body. Man is essentially spirit, but does he ever talk spirit? Every day this mistake is being made. A man says: 'I have fever', but no, it is the body that has fever. Why does man refer to his body (the non-ego) as 'I' (the ego)? He does so on account of ignorance. He superimposes the attributes of the object on the subject, although they are separate and distinct. This is the initial cause of all his sufferings.

Ignorance is not want of knowledge, but wrong cognition — erroneous knowledge. Adhyatma Yoga says that this ignorance, this power of limitation, is a power of the Lord, and that He imposes His will on a fragment of His being, in order to create the universe, as His sport. If this hypothesis seems unreasonable, another has to be produced — the thing is not to criticise, but to produce another theory. Today we see suffering, and this theory of ignorance explains this suffering.

We all want to get out of limitations and suffering. We all want immortality, consciousness and blissfulness. The constitution of man has intuitive knowledge of the state where suffering and limitations do not exist, and he wants to reach that state. How can he do so?

Limitations are caused by ignorance and the first condition for rising above those limitations is that man must recognize, in his own nature, that he is free from all restrictions. He must not believe this

theoretically, but he must realize it as a condition of his own nature. When can he realize it? When ignorance is destroyed. A tiny speck of dust falls into the eye, it sets up irritation, causes tears, pain and dissatisfaction. How can it be cured? By taking out the dust. Even so must the individual ignorance be destroyed if man wishes to be happy.

What is the method by which it can be destroyed? Man must live a life of self-control, charity, compassion, benevolence, non-violence and love of truth. You say: 'It is very difficult', but if you sit in a quiet place for a certain time every day and take the name of the Lord, those difficulties will fade away. If your mind wanders in meditation when you are tired, remain calm, take a few deep breaths and gently lead it back to the theme of your meditation. Every day, make up your mind to live this kind of life, and practise these things. This conscious immortality has to be earned, and this is the way to earn it.

There is one other essential — the love of God. Godliness and goodness are complementary parts of the same thing. You will ask how the love of God can be produced. It is not produced. You cannot love God unless you love an aspect of God, so take an incident in the life of Christ, Krishna or Shri Dada, and dwell upon it with great interest. Cultivate the feeling that all is passing, and only deserves so much attention; we must give our utmost attention to the imperishable. If we spend all our attention on the perishable, we are like the little fledgling that has straws tied to its wings, so that it will be unable to fly. Must we leave the world? No, it is not necessary to leave the world, but we must cast off our attachment to it. It is the interior world that matters — man takes his mind with him wherever he goes. Until the objects of the world cease to attract us, there will be no peace.

It is because of the veil of ignorance that the nature of man is not known, but when that veil is lifted, what was thought to be God is found to be one's own Self. Then the being is flooded with Light, all doubts are cast out, the knots of the heart are unloosened, and what remains is inexpressible peace, peace, peace.

Hari Prasad Shastri

The Triumph of Truth

Truth alone triumphs, and not untruth. By truth is maintained for ever the path called Devayana (the way of the gods), by which the desireless seers ascend to where exists the supreme treasure attainable through truth.

Mundaka Upanishad III.i.6

TRUTH ALONE TRIUMPHS, never untruth. What do we mean by truth, a word which has so many dimensions of meaning? The primary meaning of truth in a spiritual context is reality, that which really exists and abides unchanged behind the ever-changing appearances of the universe. Since truth in this sense is not seen by our senses or even guessed by our mind, we may doubt whether such a truth really exists. But there is a higher faculty in man, awakened by Yoga, through which truth can be realized. Those who have awakened that higher faculty are called sages. Their insights are recorded in the Upanishads.

Truth, being beyond words, cannot be expressed directly, but the words in the Upanishads serve as lights on our path guiding us towards direct realization, and freeing us from the influences that appear to hide the truth from us. To those who are spiritually enlightened, truth has no covering nor has there ever been one. It manifests in their experience as clearly as the midday sun in a cloudless sky.

Can we be more specific about this primary meaning of the word truth? Are there clear pointers to its presence in our own experience, or must truth be ever mysterious and hidden, as if at the bottom of a deep well, as the old saying goes? The Upanishads throw light on this matter. They reveal that truth is the innermost Self of man. The innermost Self of man is God. By God is meant Brahman, the Absolute, the all-pervasive reality and the source and support of the universe. This truth is called the Immutable, that which never changes.

In contrast, everything in the world has a beginning and an end, and is undergoing changes at every moment of its existence. But the spiritual truth underlying the world of appearances abides forever. It is the true nature of the Self of man. As such the highest truth can be verified in our own personal experience.

Let us return to the position of the mind when it first starts to reflect

on truth. It was said that the mind in its ordinary active state cannot so much as guess at the presence of the supreme truth in which, like a fish in water, it lives, moves and has its being. Like a seamless cover-up, there is no suspicion on our part that the visible world hides an invisible reality or deeper truth. Ordinarily the human mind is full of restless activity and is preoccupied with worldly matters, like our livelihood, our relationships, our hobbies and the way we seek entertainment. To most people, life's possibilities fall inside this range. Our minds spend themselves on these interests.

As long as this condition — one might even say this conditioning — prevails, the spiritual truth, which abides at a much subtler level of our being, remains hidden and excluded from our practical experience. At this stage our conviction is likely to be: 'I find no trace of immutable spiritual truth in myself or anywhere else. Therefore there is no such thing as higher truth.' This opinion is understandable and we reinforce it by our lifestyle, our words, our thoughts and our conduct generally.

But the enlightened view is different and anticipates the complete and irreversible triumph of truth. How then may we begin to probe into this deeper reality? How do we set about verifying the promise of the sages and the *raison d'être* of the Upanishads, namely, that the highest truth is realizable in this very life?

The realm we have to investigate is that which is nearest to us: our own immediate self. We discover truth as the immutable reality at the core of our own being, and realize it to be universal.

It is true that the supreme truth is not to be discovered by our thinking processes. For this truth is transcendental. But just because the ultimate truth is beyond the range of our mind and senses, this is not to suggest that the range of truth is limited by anything whatsoever. It is ever the Absolute, the supreme reality. Compared with it, all other experiences are transient events that are not ultimately real.

What does 'transcendental' mean? We can get an idea of transcendence from our own immediate experience. We can all appreciate how our own mental life, with its extraordinary range and depth, transcends the grossness and restricted nature of our physical body. We know that our thoughts can be sublime even if our body lies ill, not to mention the worlds our mind creates in dreams, while our body lies in bed. So there is a real sense in which our mind transcends our body, for

our mind is subtle whereas our body is gross. But subtler than the mind, completely pure and all-pervading, is the spirit of man, his true Self, the immutable reality. Man's only hope of perfect peace, freedom and fulfilment, is to learn to identify himself with the divine spirit within himself and to transcend his present sense of identification with the body and the mind.

While our sense of identity is fixed on our body and mind, we are insulating ourselves from the sublime glory and matchless richness that lies unnoted at the ground of our being. So if we are interested in the spiritual culture, our first step is to become more selective in our outer involvements and learn to seek the treasure of truth within our own being.

This treasure is findable, because it is our very Self. The goal to be discovered is the true nature of the seeker. The consciousness and intelligence that motivates our quest, when realized in its subjective purity, is the Self. This consciousness is the innermost principle in man and it is self-luminous. It enlivens our mind from the interior by casting a kind of reflection of its light in the mind. Yet this consciousness, that is, our own consciousness, remains totally free and transcendent. This is the testimony of the God-realized sages.

Truth being the limit of subjectivity and subtlety, we can never know it as an object or an idea. No one can say of ultimate truth: 'Yes that is truth. I see it before me.' Truth can only be realized by man as his very Self and not in any other way. The exact method through which truth may be fruitfully sought and realized in our own being is called Yoga.

It is a process of leading the mind from the gross to the subtle.

There is an old saying: 'The mind is the cause of man's bondage and the mind is also the means to his freedom.' When our mind is filled with the thoughts of the world and of the things we desire or dread, our consciousness is restricted. Our faculty of attention cannot attain that subtlety and refinement that is needed in order to penetrate the pure revealed teachings about the absolute truth. In this condition, we are effectively cut off from that which is highest and best in us. All spiritual culture begins with attempts to pacify the mind and to wean it from its obsession with the desires of the world. This is a matter of redirecting the force of our desires and interests to the peace-giving

atmosphere of spiritual thought and wisdom. Every human mind can be transmuted into peace and light, and become an altogether subtler instrument, a channel, as it were, through which truth may be revealed. This development is the result of spiritual training and discipline.

Since the inner transformation will ultimately affect the whole of the mind, the path of Yoga entails a comprehensive course. It is not just a matter of mastering particular practices or having a good knowledge of philosophy. The rays of peace and wisdom have, as it were, to penetrate our emotions, our intellect and our life of action. Such a far-reaching culture of heart and mind is more easily achieved if one is associated with a spiritual community. Active participation in the life of a spiritual community will present the challenges and elicit the responses that will enable us to grow spiritually; it will help us to break out of the shell of identification with the limited ego.

We ourselves have the power to cultivate this new inner atmosphere. But this spiritualized condition of the mind is not an end in itself. Our quest is knowledge — knowledge of truth. Inner peace is the essential condition in which the higher powers of spiritual intuition, inspiration and insight are awakened. These powers are themselves transcendental. They only come into operation when the mind has been pacified, harmonized and rendered harmless in thought, word and deed. Such a mind has ceased to be a factory of personal desires, suspicions and daydreams. It has become serene and spiritually penetrating, so that it can envisage and concentrate on the abstract spiritual teachings, such as the divinity of the Self, the underlying unity of all, the reality behind appearances, and the pure spirit at the heart of all true faiths.

When man's intuitive faculty is awakened through his increasing inner sensitivity and refinement, he will be in a position to realize for himself the immutable truth that his own innermost Self is the all-pervading reality. This realization comes in the form of the recognition that the truth we have been seeking is ever self-revealed and in reality was never really hidden, since it is exposed as the one and only reality. This is the ultimate triumph of truth.

It was said before that the spiritual reality behind the appearance of the universe is never really covered up. In the Upanishads, both the inner and outer world are illusory expressions of the one great reality, the imperishable truth. They have no existence apart from the truth.

Truth is like the infinite ocean, and the worlds, including our individualities, are like the waves. The waves are forms of water and nothing but water. There are many types of waves, distinguished by particular names based on the way they appear: rolling waves, capillary waves, breaking waves, surging waves. But all such motions are stirrings of water, which is the essential reality in all. No sane man would affirm that the waves exist independently of the water. The sages of the Upanishads remind us that in the light of the supreme Truth, all is verily Brahman, all is God. This great vision is expressed in the verse:

All this that is in front is but Brahman, the Immortal. Brahman is on the right, as well as on the left: above and below too, is extended Brahman alone. This world is nothing but Brahman, the Highest.

Mundaka Upanishad II.ii.11

It is to remove the apparent obstacles that conceal this truth from our immediate apprehension, that Yoga is practised.

There is light and peace within our own being and its source is the highest truth, Brahman, our basis. Still, we know from experience, that this Brahman nature does not necessarily come to light when we first turn within in order to seek it. When we survey our inner world, there really does seem to be a cover-up. Instead of light and peace, or intimations of a deeper reality, we are likely to encounter the confusion and disorder of our own mental processes. It is as if there is a barrier to our spiritual understanding, something that stops us getting through. This apparent barrier is made up of elements of our mental life. It keeps us in intellectual and spiritual darkness about the source of our own being.

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* a metaphor is used to denote this internal obstruction to our direct realization of the spiritual truth. It refers to the knot of the heart, and the phrase also appears in the plural: the knots of the heart (as in III.ii.9). What is referred to is not one single mental manifestation, but rather a totality of mental elements accumulated throughout our life and constantly being reinforced by our ways of thinking. The holy commentator Shri Shankara explains the knot of the heart as 'the host of tendencies and impressions of ignorance, in the

form of desires that hang on to the intellect’.

It is worth reflecting that knots are rarely formed at random. They are usually intelligently and deliberately made for a purpose, and a good knot is not likely to get loose by accident. This is good news spiritually, for it suggests that we ourselves are the knot-makers, and we ourselves, if we choose, can untie or cut these knots.

What again are these knots? Our desires and fixed ideas, when they hold us back from the realization of universal truth. But we can learn how to modify those desires and tendencies so that our inner life becomes favourable to the rise of self-knowledge. This culture is called the purification of the mind. Such purification is aimed at achieving clear-sightedness in our own inner world, enabling us to discriminate between what is passing and what is eternal. Our mind will also gain the power to concentrate on the spiritual presence at its root.

The whole process turns our mind into our ally, and makes it a means to freedom. Our mind itself will warm to the process of purification, since it brings increasing tranquillity and understanding. The consummation of this process is indicated in the following verse:

Since one becomes purified in mind through the favourableness of the intellect, therefore one can see that indivisible Self through meditation.
Mundaka Upanishad III.i.8

In Adhyatma Yoga the quest for self-knowledge runs in partnership with the spiritual refinement of the mind. This is how the intellectual knowledge about the perfection at our source is turned into direct experience.

Commenting on man’s apparent bondage, Shri Shankara points out that all these so-called knots, namely the tendencies, impressions and desires that seem to hold us back, ‘are based on one’s heart and not on the Self’. Even now our true Self is free from any adverse influence. Our most effective strategy is not to analyze the details of the apparent barrier to realization. It is to remember and affirm that our real nature is ever free and unaffected, and that everything else in experience is not the Self, and not ultimately real.

Knots need not be real. Part of a conjurer’s stock-in-trade is his ability to create illusory knots. These are known technically as false

knots or dissolving knots. Such knots deliberately appear large, complex and, to the naive onlooker, hard to untie. Then the conjurer suavely strokes the string, and the knot vanishes as if it had never existed. Even while it appears, the knot is never a problem for one who knows the trick. Let it manifest or dissolve; it does not matter. It is all an illusory appearance.

The spiritual teachings on truth have two important phases. The first phase is to modify our desires by aligning our intentions and our goal in life with the great goal of enlightenment laid down in the spiritual classics that state the ultimate truth. These classics reveal and encourage the highest standards of character and conduct. Such standards are based on unity of life, goodness, peace, charity, love and truth—truth in this sense meaning speaking truthfully, being fair, just and sincere in our dealings and in our daily life. If we make these standards our own, there will be a natural transmutation of our desires, and a subsequent loosening of the knots of the heart.

With our inner vision to some extent clarified, we are ready to enter a further phase of our spiritual development. Blessed with increasing insight, the spiritual pilgrim can appreciate more and more of the vitality and relevance of the teachings about the true nature of the Self and the unreality of the world. The texts begin to shine with glory as he realizes that they apply to him personally.

Although the knots of the heart have been identified with our desires, there is one desire that is of the greatest help in our quest for self-realization: the desire for liberation, total freedom from all limitations, infinite bliss. This is the true desire hidden in every heart. Behind all our desires is the urge for lasting satisfaction. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (VIII.iii.1-2) calls our worldly desires falsehood, because they promise much but always fall short of our expectation of perfect and lasting fulfilment. It is as if we are tricked by the idealized pictures painted in our imagination, where the reality always falls short of the ideal.

But amid all this chasing of illusions, there is a true desire implanted in our heart, and that is for absolute truth, perfect joy, nothing less than conscious immortality. This desire is true, because its object is true, and because it is fulfillable. So our search for truth means learning to ignore, that is to see through, the false desires, and to cultivate the true

desire for self-realization.

Returning to the *Mundaka Upanishad*, there is a verse (III.ii.3) which says that the intensity of our desire for truth is the decisive factor that precipitates Self-realization.

This Self is not attained through study, nor through the intellect, nor through much hearing. By the very fact that the aspirant seeks for it, does it become attainable; of him this Self reveals its own nature.

The implication is that the aspirant desires truth above all, and has ceased to hanker seriously for anything else. Tying ourselves to truth, as it were, we transcend the bonds of illusion. More than this, we know ourselves to be the truth or Brahman, without any need for a connecting medium. The Upanishad declares: 'He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman.' (III.ii.9) The verse in full runs:

Anyone who knows that supreme Brahman becomes Brahman indeed. In his line, there is not born anyone who does not know Brahman. He overcomes grief, goes beyond virtue and vice, and becoming freed from the knots of the heart, he attains immortality.

That is, he realizes his eternal identity with the Absolute. This is verily the ultimate triumph of truth.

The highest truth is transcendent and beyond word and meaning, yet it is the true being and essence of everything. If this spiritual truth did not exist nothing else would exist. Ultimate truth is inexpressible. Words like Brahman, the Absolute, can only point to it. But there is one word, much more than a word, found in most of the Upanishads, which expresses most closely the supreme reality. This is the sacred syllable OM. When rightly understood and when its repetition and contemplation are performed by a dedicated seeker in the traditional way, OM reveals its hidden potency. For ultimately, this holy syllable has the power to bring about the merging of man's limited consciousness with the infinite consciousness which is its true being and essence.

OM is a name for the supreme reality and also a symbolic form and sound through which we can learn to focus our mind on that reality. It

serves as a bridge between the apparently finite mind and the infinite spirit that is its real nature. Both as a sound and visual symbol, OM stands for the whole of human experience and the spiritual reality underlying it.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* does not itself explore the meaning of OM, but it refers to OM metaphorically as the spiritual weapon that will lead to the triumph of truth.

OM is the bow, the soul is the arrow and Brahman is called its target. It is to be hit by an unerring man. One should become one with It, just as an arrow (becomes one with its target when it has pierced it). (II.ii.4)

OM is compared with a bow which propels an arrow towards a particular target. The target is truth, or God, that is, Brahman, the absolute Reality. What again is the arrow that is placed on the bow of OM and fired at the target of truth, as it were? The arrow is our individual soul, but it is our inner being in a particular condition. That condition is our purified and concentrated mind, charged with the highest affirmation of our identity with the supreme truth.

We remember that the mind lives in truth as a wave lives in water. The essence of the mind, as indeed the essence of everything else, is truth, though its manifest form seems to be different, just as the wave is only water and water alone. If the wave were to affirm its true identity, it would declare: 'I am water, nothing but water. I have always been water, and as water shall ever abide, one with the great ocean.' In affirming this, the wave is negating its wavehood and affirming, as a matter of truth, its reality as water.

OM, as the great word of truth, signifies our reality as Brahman. In affirming OM, this apparent limited form, this wave of our individuality, is negating its illusory separate existence. We are confirming that in our true nature we are ever one with our source, the great target, the Absolute, the supreme spirit.

Normally, arrows are shot away from the archer at a target apart in space. No such thing applies in the case of Self-realization. The so-called target is our very Self. In order for our limited 'I' to penetrate our true I, it must affirm itself as that true I. This identity lies behind the meditations and affirmations used in Adhyatma Yoga, such as:

OM I am Truth, imperishable and infinite. OM

The whole meaning of all such utterances is contained in the sacred syllable OM. Repeated inwardly or meditated on, OM itself serves as a complete spiritual practice. OM is also joined to our affirmations of truth. An effective method of self-upliftment is to pronounce, slowly and peacefully, the holy word three times, followed by the affirmation, after which the OM is again pronounced three times, and to repeat this sequence for a set period. Thus:

OM OM OM All knowledge I am. OM OM OM

Other affirmations are:

All power I am.

Bliss I am.

I am Spirit, which pervades all. I was, I am, I shall be.

In this way, our mind is filled with the consciousness of its divine source, leaving no space for lesser thoughts. Such a mind transcends its phenomenal aspect and merges with truth, its real source. This merging is indicated in a verse from the *Katha Upanishad* (II.ii.15):

As pure water poured on pure water becomes verily the same, so also does become the Self of the man of knowledge...

Or in the words of the *Mundaka Upanishad* already quoted: 'He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman.'

'Truth ever triumphs, falsehood never.' Man's enquiry into the highest truth is meant to culminate in knowledge of truth. In the spiritual field, there is no equivalent to the idea that it is better to journey hopefully than to arrive. It is certainly good to journey hopefully, but not for its own sake. The point of a journey is to arrive, and consciousness of our goal is to be held in the mind from the very beginning of our quest.

We need to understand, through study and meditation, how this goal is in fact ever achieved, because the goal is the true nature of the one

who seeks the goal. It has therefore to be realized rather than achieved. Sooner or later, we need to put ourselves in contact with one in whom this knowledge is a matter of direct experience. If we make this approach in all sincerity, and with our heart calm and our outer organs under control, then, 'that man of enlightenment should adequately impart that knowledge of Brahman by which one realizes the true and immutable Spirit'. (I.ii.13) 'For the teacher too', comments Shri Shankara, 'this is imperative: that he should save from the ocean of ignorance any good disciple that approaches him duly.'

Alongside this knowledge will come the safe and time-honoured methods for facilitating this realization. It is left to us to apply these methods, and to pursue our spiritual quest with earnestness. We alone can think for ourselves, we alone can meditate for ourselves, and we alone can develop that favourable condition of the intellect that will allow the revelation of the indwelling Lord as our true Self.

Let us end with a poem by Swami Satchitanandaji, a sage of the last century, one who realized his eternal identity with the supreme truth.

Since I was united with my real Self, my joy is beyond description.

The world of dreams has gone—I alone exist.

He whom they call God, I have seen in mine own Self.

I am one, there is no duality; in fact there is neither Self nor God.

He, to meet whom they visit Mecca and Kashi, I see everywhere—there is no veil.

The ego is the veil between God and the soul, the mountain is hidden by a straw.

Since my Guru showed his grace to me, the secret has been revealed.

Illusion is dispelled, no doubts remain;

I have negated name and form, and what remains is

Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, and nothing else.

B.D.

The World Viewed From Within

The status of knowledge and the reality of the world

ONE OF THE KEY questions facing man is the relationship between knowledge and reality. It is a question about which both contemporary science and the ancient tradition of Yoga have something important to say. Of course, there are many different views held by competent scientists and it is probably true to say that there is currently no general consensus, about such questions as what consciousness is, and how it relates to the physical world and in particular to the brain.

But what probably matters more than the disagreement among scientists is what science has been able to tell us about the nature of the world we live in and of ourselves as denizens of that world. This article will attempt to begin a consideration of this topic by comparing, in broad outline, what science and Yoga have to tell us on the subject.

First let us consider the position of those who believe in what Bertrand Russell calls 'scientific common-sense'. In *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, published in 1948, he writes:

To scientific common-sense (which I accept) it is plain that only an infinitesimal part of the universe is known, that there were countless ages during which there was no knowledge, and that there probably will be countless ages without knowledge in the future.¹ Cosmically and causally, knowledge is an unimportant feature of the universe;

¹ Another modern thinker who shares Russell's view on this (although he radically disagrees with him when it comes to considering the nature of the relationship between mind and matter), is Sir Karl Popper. He rejects the idea that the self-consciousness within the individual is the [clue to] reality, or the 'thing in itself', because: 'The theory does not agree with what our present cosmology presents as a fact: a world in which there was, for æons, no trace of life or mind, in which first life and later mind emerged, and even World 3. I admit that all this can be explained away; but I feel that it has to be taken as a starting point for the mind-body problem.' (*The Self and Its Brain*, 1977, p. 201) But he adds: 'I admit the intellectual attractiveness of monism. I also admit that some form of monism may become acceptable one day', although he himself thinks this unlikely.

a science which omitted to mention its occurrence might, from an impersonal point of view suffer only from a very trivial imperfection. In describing the world, subjectivity is a vice. Kant spoke of himself as having effected a "Copernican revolution", but he would have been more accurate if he had spoken of a "Ptolemaic counter-revolution", since he put man back at the centre from which Copernicus had dethroned him. (*Human Knowledge* p.9)

Incidentally, Russell doesn't tell us here how there can possibly be *any* 'science which [legitimately] omitted to mention the occurrence of consciousness'! For, if there is no conscious scientist to produce it, we can hardly conceive of it being produced, and, alternatively, if there is one, he is, in Schopenhauer's memorable phrase, advocating 'the philosophy of the subject who forgot to take account of himself'. But Russell would no doubt say that this is really beside the point that he is making. What he is saying is that man, and all living beings, are an unimportant and trivial incident which has arisen by chance (and which we happen to be involved in), on what is, after all, only one very small and insignificant planet of a minor star on the outskirts of our galaxy, and that by far the major part of the universe as we know it appears to consist of unconscious, inert matter hurtling blindly through space.

Russell is basing his argument here on the observation that life, — and with it, consciousness and subjective knowledge — appears to be a very late development in the evolution of the physical world as we know it. To be fair to him, he does not (in any sense) ignore or belittle the importance of knowledge to us, but he thinks it is a late episode in cosmic history, something which only happens to appear suddenly 'out of the blue' as a peculiar property of matter in living things, and an entirely new and unexpected development. As such (he would argue) it is largely irrelevant to physical nature, because matter is in the main non-conscious and inert, at least in its non-living forms, and this form of matter appears to make up the vast majority of the universe.

For Russell, then, (in his own words) 'it is only when we ask, not 'what sort of world do we live in?' but 'how do we come by our knowledge about the world?' [that] subjectivity is in order.' (*Human*

Knowledge p.9) But Russell's premise is quite literally and transparently a prejudgement or prejudice about the answer to the question he is addressing. And it certainly discounts the teachings of all the great spiritual traditions. But I think it can be argued that it even fails to take account of all that science has to tell us about the historical development of life and consciousness.

As regards scientists his view is certainly not shared by all of them, as we shall see. As regards the spiritual traditions, it is sufficient at this juncture to remember the words of Jesus: 'Before Abraham was, I am', which suggests (at the least) that here is a clear claim that the divine consciousness precedes the appearance of man and that it has an existence even outside time and before creation.

There are thus these two diametrically opposed views about the place of consciousness and knowledge in the world, as well as many opinions which veer towards one view or the other. At one extreme, the most thorough-going and radical materialists deny the existence of consciousness altogether. J.B. Watson and the Behaviourists were a case in point. At the other extreme are those who hold that the mind is — and has always been — there, as the 'inside aspect of matter', a view that has been called 'panpsychism' by Popper and others. (Popper: *The Self and its Brain*, p.207 and p.68). Professor Penrose appears to hold this view.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of consciousness, we have to ask if what Russell calls 'our present cosmology' (he was writing in the early 1970s) really implies that we are products of a cold, lifeless and unfeeling universe of matter. It sounds more like the kind of world envisaged by 19th century scientists and thinkers at their most materialistic and most depressed.

The Vedantic view is that consciousness and knowledge only 'emerge' in the world of living matter because they are already immanent in what we are pleased to call the non-living world of Nature. Indeed it is a central tenet of the Vedanta philosophy that the abiding Reality behind the apparent world of relativity is Consciousness Absolute (*chit*).

In the *Gita* the Lord speaks of the world being created out of two principles which He calls his higher and lower Natures (*Gita* VII 4-6).

And in doing so, He at once makes it clear that the world is a world of *experience*, known to us through the senses and the mind, and that there is no question of a world totally without consciousness. The lower nature or *prakriti* is, He says, divided into eight elements, and these are the five subtle elements (*tanmatras*), which support the operation of the senses of hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell, together with the lower and higher minds (*manas* and *buddhi*) and the sense of egoism (*ahankara*).

This is the inferior nature (Prakriti); but, as distinct from this know My higher nature, the very life by which this universe is upheld. (VII.5)

Know that all beings have their birth in these two. So I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe. (VII.6)

There is naught else higher than I, O Dhananjaya; in Me all this is woven as clusters of gems on a string. (VII.7)

In His higher nature, which He calls 'the life of the universe', He is the underlying reality which confers existence (*sat*) on a world which is created phenomenally out of the play of His creative energy (*Maya shakti*), which he calls his lower nature.

This may give the idea that the Lord as Creator stands apart from His creation and rules it impartially from some timeless realm, but that is not what we are told in the *Gita*, where the Lord says to Arjuna:

Many births of Mine have passed, as well as of thine, O Arjuna; all these I know, [but] thou knowest not.

Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet ruling over My own nature, I am born by My own Maya. (IV.5-6)

This, in barest outline, is the picture of creation which we find given by the teachers of Yoga.

Let us now ask how the present-day picture of the world stands up to this model. Now the first interesting thing is that that this view of

the world as being created from creative energy — closely corresponds (at least in this respect) to the current view of science as to the fundamental nature of the cosmos. Unlike their 19th century predecessors, who thought of matter as a hard indestructible substance from which the world is made, existing in the absolute time and space accepted by Newtonian physics, 20th century science now self-evidently confirms the central view of Vedanta that every object and event in the universe is fundamentally a product of energy, and has been created from what we call (in modern terminology) electromagnetic force. Further that this force creates a world governed by Relativity, in which absolute time and space no longer have any place.

Unfortunately for old-fashioned materialists, the advance of science has demolished the idea of matter as the real substance from which the world is made. The old idea of 19th century thinkers that matter was the real thing — the solid substance out of which the universe was made — has been completely overthrown by modern physics. As Russell himself has written:

...relativity demands the abandonment of the old conception of “matter”, which is infected by the metaphysics associated with “substance”, and represents a point of view not really necessary in dealing with phenomena. (*ABC of Relativity*, 1925, p.208)

The world which the theory of relativity presents to our imagination is not so much a world of “things” in “motion” as a world of *events*. It is true that there are still electrons and protons which persist, but these....are really to be conceived as strings of connected events, like the successive notes of a song. It is *events* which are the stuff of relativity physics. [*Ibid.* p.222-3]

It has begun to seem that matter, like the grin of the Cheshire Cat [in *Alice in Wonderland*], is becoming gradually diaphanous until nothing of it is left but the grin, caused, presumably, by amusement at those who still think it is there. (*Mind and Matter in Portraits from Memory*, 1956, p.145)

Perhaps Shakespeare was not even being unscientific when he had Prospero speaking of the world as ‘this insubstantial pageant faded’ dissolving to ‘leave not a wrack behind’. It seems to have happened in science just as he predicted it.

Elsewhere Russell says that if the electromagnetic force which creates the world is thought of as a kind of Heraclitean fire, only the burning itself is now left and what burns has disappeared from the scientific picture of the world. It is (he says) reduced to a wave of probability undulating in nothingness. Here again science has come very near to confirming the Vedantic view.

Causation [too], in the old sense, no longer has a place in theoretical physics. [*Idem* p.225]

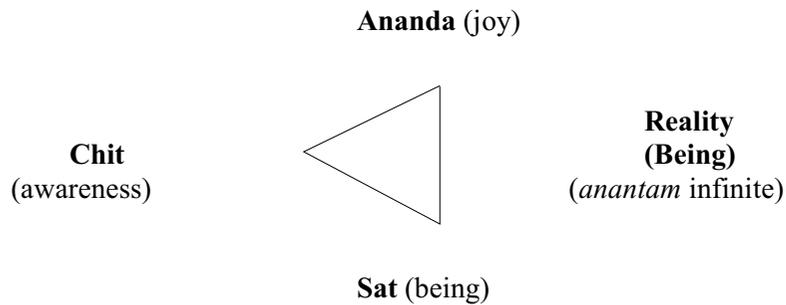
“Great principles”, such as the “uniformity of nature”, “the laws of universal causation”, and so on, are attempts to bolster our belief that what has often happened before will happen again, which is no better founded than the horse’s belief that you will take the turning you usually take....Causation, in the old sense, no longer has a place in theoretical physics. [*Idem* p 224-5]

One has to ask oneself how Russell, for whose honesty and wide knowledge one can have nothing but admiration, does not allow himself a reasonable doubt about the possibility of a spiritual dimension in the creation, when the picture which modern science arrives at is so much more puzzling and mysterious than the early scientists expected! All the more surprising when he himself can write:

It is a curious fact — of which relativity is not the only illustration — that, as reasoning improves, its claims to the power of proving facts grow less and less. Logic used to be thought to teach us how to draw inferences; now, it teaches us rather how not to draw inferences. Animals and children are terribly prone to inference: a horse is surprised beyond measure if you take an unusual turning. When men began to reason, they tried to justify the inferences that they had drawn unthinkingly in earlier days. A great deal of bad philosophy and bad science resulted from this propensity. (*ABC of Relativity* p.224)

In Vedanta the world of relativity is a phenomenal product of the creative energy or *shakti* of the Absolute. It is only in this world of

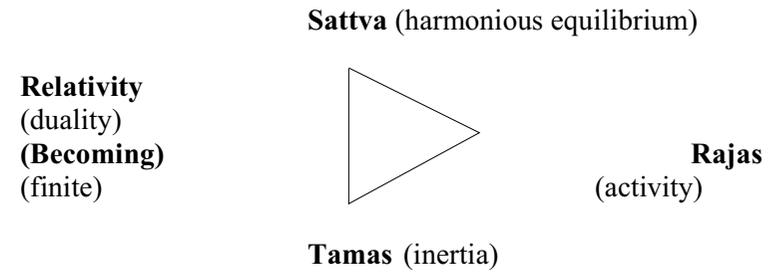
nature (*prakriti*) that time, space and causality operate. This is very close in conception to the universe created at the Big Bang, studied by science. But behind this relative world is that Absolute Reality whose nature cannot be adequately expressed by the human mind, but which sustains and supports the relative world by means of its creative power (or *shakti*). The Upanishads declare that this underlying Reality manifests its presence in the world in three ways, as *existence*, *consciousness* and *bliss*, and that its nature is infinite. Being infinite, it is beyond the finite categories dealt with by the mind, and is therefore a spiritual principle which is ‘beyond the reach of mind and speech’. It is also beyond the changes characteristic of each and every object within the world of relativity.



The second element in our world is Nature as we usually think of it (*prakriti*). Vedanta agrees with the view of modern science in regarding it as created by the play of energy. In the traditional yogic explanation this energy operates in three characteristic modes, *rajas* or activity, *tamas* or inertia and *sattva* or the harmonious equilibrium between the two. *Rajas* or activity manifests itself, for instance, in the violent motion of the atoms at high temperature, while *tamas* is seen in the relative immobility and resistance to change of things at low temperatures.

The activity of *rajas* is associated with creativity and change, well illustrated in the Big Bang with which our world began. On the mental plane *rajas* manifests itself in violence, anger and mania, whereas *tamas* is seen in indolence, laziness and sleep. The harmonious equilibrium between the two may be likened to the ‘golden mean’ or ‘middle way’, and it is significant that life evolves in the universe

neither in the hottest nor the coldest stars, but in conditions where there is a stable equilibrium midway between these two extremes.



The Second Law of Thermodynamics and the Evolution of Life

This is the law that tells us that our universe is steadily ‘running down’, that the disorderliness (entropy) is bound to increase steadily. Time is a one-way street! We expect things to get more chaotic all the time unless we take the trouble to prevent it. Old abandoned buildings fall down and become ruins. Our desks become an untidy jungle of papers unless we regularly tidy them, and we all generate enough rubbish to require the services of a regular rubbish collection. Not only the politicians produce hot air. We all do. We are continually giving off heat and contributing to increasing the random chaotic jostling of the atoms in our vicinity. Yet we are totally unlike non-living matter in one extraordinary respect.

Life seems to defy the laws of (inorganic) nature and defeat the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics at least locally and in the short run. This says that in any system there can with time only be an increase of disorderliness (in mathematical terms an increase of entropy) and never an increase in orderliness (negative entropy).

But the puzzling characteristic of living organisms is that they appear to break the laws operative throughout inorganic nature. They grow and become more orderly and are more elaborately organized as adults than they were as seeds, embryos or children. They reproduce themselves.

In the warm-blooded animals they maintain their temperature well above that of their surroundings, instead of just cooling down to the outside temperature as any non-living object does. As soon as we are

dead, our corpse will do just that, but we don't!

In all this living things appear to successfully defy the tendency to descent into chaos, required by the second Law of Thermodynamics. How do we do it? By extracting orderliness from the environment. In plants this is done by photosynthesis, building up the large molecules of carbohydrates from the small, simple molecules of carbon dioxide and water by capturing and using the energy of the sunlight. In animals it is by assimilating order from the already built-up molecules of the food that they eat, both vegetable and animal.

In a little book entitled *What is life?*, based on a series of lectures given in Trinity College, Dublin in February 1943 and published a year later by the Cambridge University Press, Erwin Schrödinger attempted to answer the question: 'How can the events *in space and time* which take place within the spatial boundary of a living organism be accounted for by physics and chemistry?' And he comments: 'The obvious inability of present-day physics and chemistry to account for such events is no reason at all for doubting that they can be accounted for by those sciences.' (*op.cit.* pp.1-2)

Why did he say this? What is the difficulty? The difficulty is that the so-called classical laws of physics are now known to be the result of the statistical behaviour of very large numbers of atoms and are not the old-fashioned 19th century 'mechanical' (or more properly dynamical) laws obeyed by each individual atom at all times.

Whitehead expressed this graphically when he said that the laws of nature were 'the communal customs of atoms'. He was drawing attention to the fact that they were only a true description of very large numbers of atoms and not of individual ones, whose behaviour was as unpredictable as the most erratic of human individuals and could only be expressed in terms of probability. In modern quantum theory, which has replaced classical physics for atomic and subatomic particles, this is recognized to be the case. For instance, the laws governing the diffusion of one liquid mixed with another are known and have been repeatedly verified, but if you add some small particles to the liquid and examine it under the microscope, you find that the particles are constantly jiggling to and fro in all directions. They are being jostled like crowds queuing for the first day of the sales by the completely random movement of the smaller invisible molecules colliding with them on all sides.

Schrödinger points out that our bodies (and particularly our brains) need to be so much bigger than atoms to obtain the conditions under which we can produce orderliness in our living body, and avoid the disturbance caused by the disorderly motion of atoms, which means that lawful behaviour is only statistical. As he says:

... the arrangement of atoms in living things is vital and it is in some senses unique in nature. In inorganic nature we can see orderliness in solids like crystals, but these are made up of vast lattice-works of identical atoms or molecules which can shift their position without significantly affecting the whole crystal. They are what physicists call *periodic crystals*.

More than ten years before Watson and Crick discovered the structure of DNA (in 1954), Schrödinger predicted (in 1943) that the genetic information would be found to be stored on an *aperiodic crystal*.

In living matter the whole controlling and organizing mechanism is, in fact, contained in the huge molecule of DNA in the nucleus, which is what can be called an aperiodic crystal. It is made up of an immense length of a double helix framework, like the two sides of a spiral staircase with a coded series of bases as the treads arranged across them from side to side. Unlike the periodic crystal, each base is vital in carrying the genetic information and even one wrong base may mean that the individual suffers from some genetic defect such as cystic fibrosis or sickle-cell disease. What is remarkable about the stability of the molecule, ensured by its design (you need two joins to come apart to lose an element as they are fixed on both sides of the staircase) is that it enables family characteristics like the Hapsburg lip to go on for hundreds of years, while mutations are relatively rare in the animal kingdom.

Another remarkable thing about living matter is that it achieves this much-better-than-crystalline stability at temperatures where metabolic reactions can be carried on comfortably within the body.

But all this also has implications for our knowledge of the world, as Schrödinger points out. We are so much larger than atoms that we cannot see them. What we can comfortably deal with are things of about our own size or larger. That is why we still measure things in the

unit of a foot or a twelfth of a foot, and used to measure it in the cubit (the length of the forearm). These units are not much use when trying to measure atoms. Atoms are so small that we can hardly conceive of them. They are measured in Angstrom units, which are one ten-thousand-millionth of a metre in length, and the atoms themselves measure about 1-2 Angstrom units.

Lord Kelvin gave perhaps some idea of how small and how numerous atoms are, compared with us, when he said that if you took a glass of water and marked every atom in it and then poured the water in the glass into the sea and made sure that it was properly mixed with all the water in the oceans, and you then took another glass of water from anywhere in that mass of water, there would still be on average 100 of your marked atoms in it.

How does all this compare with what Vedanta says about life?

Life is revealed in nature under conditions of *sattva*: a harmonious equilibrium between *rajas* (violent activity breaking up everything and leading to random chaos) and *tamas* (inertia, stability, resistance to change, in which at the limit everything is frozen into immobility).

The extreme of *rajas* is seen at the moment of creation of the world in the Big Bang when (we are told by physicists) the temperature was some thousands of millions of degrees hot — so hot that the violence of the disruptive motion of the subatomic particles (the quarks) did not allow them to coalesce and form atoms. As things cooled down first the smallest and simplest atoms, like hydrogen and helium formed, and only much later the larger atoms of the heavier elements.

The other extreme of *tamas* (inertia) is reached when things cool down to absolute zero on the Kelvin scale or -273°C , and all atomic motion ceases. Atomic motion *is* what we mean by heat and the amount of it determines the temperature.

The importance of the predominance of *sattva* in the emergence of life and consciousness in matter is illustrated, for instance, by the fact (well-known to us) that living things (like ourselves) require a narrow range of temperatures, neither too hot nor too cold, and that the higher the forms of life the less tolerant of wide ranges of temperature they seem to become. The same is true of the need for a stable environment with oxygen and water and the necessary nutrients in good supply. Only in such conditions can the larger organic molecules which support life be formed and successful metabolism be carried on.

And it is within living things where sattvic conditions are created locally that consciousness begins to manifest itself clearly as mind. Long before Darwin, Moulana Rumi was proclaiming the spiritual evolution of man in the *Masnavi* (Book IV).

From the point of view of those who regard consciousness as already immanent in the whole of creation, rather than being a freak development in the late history of the material universe, consciousness is not totally absent in inorganic nature any more than it is absent in those in deep sleep, and the gradual evolution of life in plants and animals is paralleled by a lightening of that deep sleep and the beginning of the dreaming state, while only in the higher animals and man does true awakening of the empirical consciousness begin. The Yogis add that for full awakening to the absolute consciousness hidden within the mind of man, even a further stage is required. It is to effect this and reach full self-realization that Yoga is practised.

Know that all beings have their birth in these two [natures of mine, the relative and the absolute]. So I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe. There is naught else higher than I, O Dhananjaya; in Me all this is woven as clusters of gems on a string. (*Gita* VII.6-7)

S.D.S.

POEM BY SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA

I am the existence that is never born; I am the sea that has no shore.
I am the riddle that even cosmic Intelligence cannot solve.
Some call me a scavenger; others worship me as the Lord.
Some worship me in a temple, others in a church or mosque.
To me, mosque, synagogue or temple are one.
Some invest me with a form, others contemplate me as the Absolute.
Some worship me as the Creator, yet others as a man.
Yet in existence, there is no room for duality.
Verily beside Me there never was any, nor shall there ever be.
This is the secret wisdom of the Gnostics.

Trans. Hari Prasad Shastri

PRACTICAL HINTS ON PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION

THE FOLLOWING are some hints as to the way in which preparation should be made for the practice of meditation. In worldly matters preparation is necessary for the attainment of a desired end; in spiritual matters it is even more essential. To meet a king we dress with great care. To meet the King of kings shall we not make much greater preparation?

The hour for meditation, which should be daily, must be suited to individual circumstances. The best time is early in the morning when the mind is fresh and has not yet become enveloped by worldly cares; but whatever time is chosen it should be such that disturbance is unlikely, and it should not be changed or missed unless absolutely unavoidable. The establishing of a rhythm is very helpful. The place should be quiet and very clean. Outer cleanliness is essential and it is a good plan to wash the hands and feet in warm water, and to have a special loose garment, laying aside ordinary clothes.

Much has been written by Western writers about the posture for meditation and intricate details have been given. Let it be said here, that while the posture is important, there is no need for any extraordinary contortions. The seat should be firm and level, the best position being a rug or flat cushion on the ground with legs crossed. If this is not found to be comfortable a chair may be used that is not too soft nor too low, but this must enable the head, neck and spine to be held erect. This point is important whatever posture is chosen: there should be no discomfort or strain or it will be impossible to lose consciousness of the body. The muscles relaxed, the breathing even and normal, all nervous tension gone, concentrating without undue effort on the point between the two eyebrows, the whole organism, physical, mental and spiritual is tuned and harmonised to one end. Then filling the heart with a text chosen from the holy scriptures or holy classics of any religion, or imagining the form of the Lord to be present in the heart, dwell upon it in all love. It does not matter what form you choose, but let it represent to you the highest ideal, the all-embracing, universal Lord. Dwell upon it and let the thought possess your whole being, forgetting time, space and self.

It is at this point that the mind, resenting the restriction being placed upon it and used to roam at will, may begin to grow restive and will stray far and wide over the field of its experience. It should be treated gently like a child, and brought back again and again to the meditation. To grow angry or impatient will bring no good results. The Blessed Lord says in His *Gita*: 'Indeed, doubtless the mind is restless and hard to control, but by means of practice and indifference to pleasures and objects of the world, it can be restrained.' Perseverance and patience will bring their reward.

Such preparations are good and valuable, but it is of little use to practise thus for one hour a day and to allow the mind to be filled with prejudice, narrowness, hate and selfishness, and to wander where it will for the rest of the twenty-four hours. It cannot be expected that it should suddenly obey unless control is kept upon it constantly. Nor can we expect the heart to be filled with the love of God for that short time, if for the greater part we banish thought of Him.

Certainly worldly matters will occupy the surface mind, but through the experiences and tasks of daily life come the means whereby patience, compassion, tolerance and universal love are to be practised, and the constant underlying sense of the presence of God is felt. These are not idle words. In such manner is the soul prepared for meditation, cleansed and purified; indeed so shall the whole life become one meditation offered to the one supreme Lord of all beings.

M.D.

A TEXT FOR MEDITATION

OM

In the Ocean of limitless consciousness, I am a wave.

I am reality, infinity, and I am Bliss.

OM

Searching for the Self

THE IMAGE OF the world as a wood or forest has from the time of the Arthurian legends to the present been important in European thought and literature — we may think, for example, of the ‘dark wood’ with which Dante’s *Divine Comedy* opens. It is less well known that during the same centuries a similar image has played a central role in the art and religious life of India. There is, however, a significant difference.

In Europe the forest has been a powerful image of the darkness, the confusion and the dangers the human soul encounters on its journey through the world: ‘So bitter is it,’ says Dante at the start of his poem, ‘that scarcely more so is death’. Such are the tangled forests in which the Arthurian knights meet with their adventures; in which the children of later fairy tales such as Hansel and Gretel wander lost; and which are the setting for Shakespearean plays such as *Timon of Athens* and *Cymbeline*. This ‘dark wood’ is a negative counterpart of the Garden of Eden; a place of dangers, deceptions and difficulties, even though those who wander through it may also now and then stumble upon some happier encounter or sunny glade — brief glimpses of that lost paradise for which all are in search. In Indian tradition, on the other hand, the forest is the paradise; not in itself, but because it is transformed into Paradise by the presence of the divine, of Krishna. A great part of the arts of medieval and modern India, whether in dance, sculpture, music, poetry or painting, is concerned with the joys and beauties of this paradise-wood, Brindavan; and it is not too much to say that the legends associated with it have constituted the single most fertile source of inspiration for the arts in India during the last one thousand years. So Brindavan, which has long since grown into a town full of temples and worship, is today a very special place in India.

Brindavan lies on the banks of the great river Yamuna which later flows into the Ganges, and the district all around is called Braj. It is where people come to seek Krishna — and Krishna, as Indians well understand, is our innermost and true Self, the source of inward peace and joy. All the traditions and stories about him may be understood in this allegorical manner. We may think of Radha and the other gopis who are in love with him as our ordinary, everyday selves, which forget and surrender their own nature and limitations as soon as they

begin to glimpse the beauty and reality of the higher Self. They drop what they are doing and run to Krishna. They are all searching for the Self.

Here is a typical poem on the theme written by Harischandra, who is known as ‘the Moon of India’ and died in 1882 at the age of 32. The translations presented here were made by Dr Hari Prasad Shastri, in his book *Indian Mystic Verse*. In this poem Krishna is spoken of as Shri Hari; he has many names: Gopala, Madhava, Shyama, Son of Nanda, and many more. Harischandra’s poem evokes the magical beauty of the woods of Brindavan filled with the drama of spiritual love:

In the groves of Brindavan, Hari and Radha are walking.
The moon is full and the earth bathed in its light,
It is Autumn.
The wind is blowing gently over the fields of flowers,
In the water, the lotus is in bloom.
O what beauty!
The sacred river Yamuna winds and curls;
Spray is scattered here and there;
This is a night of bliss!
Shri Hari plays His flute,
He draws the maidens of Braj with his melody.
They, leaving all, run towards Him;
Some are fastening their saris awry,
Some carry musical instruments in their hands.
I sacrifice my being at Thy feet, O Son of Nanda.

Harischandra was writing in a long tradition of Hindi poetry which continues to flourish today, and of which the golden age was the sixteenth century. At that time several of the greatest poets India has known were writing on Krishna themes, notable among them being Nanddas, Surdas, and the Princess Mirabai. Surdas, in the ancient tradition of bards, is believed to have been blind. All of his poetry is a meditation on the life of Krishna in the region of Braj, and beneath an apparent simplicity it conceals considerable sophistication. In the next poem Krishna is thought of as like the dark rain-clouds which at the time of the monsoon bring longed-for relief to the parched plains of India; rain is, of course, a traditional symbol of grace:

The cloud-coloured Lord came to help the world;
 He who is the object of eternal adoration in the Vedas,
 Who eludes the intellect of the Sages,
 Was born in Mathura and called the child of Yashoda.
 In the depth of the Yamuna
 He subdued the venomous snake Kaliya;
 He helped Bhishma to keep his vow
 In the war of the Mahabharata;
 He became the charioteer of Arjuna,
 Bestowing on him the nectar of the Gita;
 He revealed to him His universal form,
 Thus removing all his doubts.
 He inspired the mystic dance in Brindavan,
 With the gopas and gopis.
 Surdas has seen this sport of love,
 And described it with delight.

We find, then, that in the arts of both Europe and India the wood or forest plays a significant role as an image of the world, but that in the one culture it is regarded negatively, as a place of fears and dangers, while in the other it is assimilated to Paradise. But we should note that the reverse symbolism is also present in both cultures. In Europe, particularly since the Romantic movement, the forest has at times been regarded positively, though in such instances it usually stands not as a symbol of the world, but of escape from the world. In India, a notable example of the forest as ‘dark wood’ occurs in the classic Advaita Vedanta text, *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*: “I was wandering in the great dream forest of birth, decay and death created by delusion... stalked by the tiger, egotism.’ The point to be made, however, is that it is nevertheless the negative symbolism of the forest which dominates in the European tradition; the positive in the Indian tradition. Let us explore the reasons for this.

There are in the first place reasons of an historical nature. Behind the European imagery lies the fear and revulsion experienced by the Greeks and Romans as they confronted the immense, dank tracts of forest — inhabited by what were, to them, the most savage of barbarians — which stretched discouragingly across the heart of trans-Alpine Europe: Caesar writes of the Hercynian Forest that even

after sixty days’ travel no-one reached its end, or even heard where that was. Despite the Celtic and Teutonic inheritance of Europe, with its quite different background (in some Celtic traditions the sun was given to the forest in marriage), this attitude carried over into the Middle Ages; and the picture of the paradise garden shutting out with its high walls the forest beyond is well-known in medieval art: an image of the bright, ordered world of the spiritual life, contrasted with the darkness and danger beyond. On the other hand, from the earliest times in India there is evidence that people were strongly attracted by the forests, and would retire into them to be close to nature, and to develop their powers of concentration and spiritual insight. Kalidas, in his celebrated play, *Shakuntala*, has left us a picture of a forest sage or rishi, and it was a part of the Vedic tradition that boys went for several years to ashramas or forest hermitages where they received a spiritual basis for their future life. An important part of the Vedic literature, the Aranyakas (a word meaning literally ‘belonging to the forest’), and much of the Upanishads, were composed in the forests.

But such reasons are not by themselves sufficient to explain the difference in attitude of the two civilisations; for it is not the attitude towards forests which is the crucial factor, but the attitude towards the world and human life as lived in it, which the forest imagery symbolises. For the European, the world — the forest — is dark and dangerous; he feels himself lost in it and his hope is to find a way out; a path that will lead to a happier region, towards that Paradise Lost which forever haunts him: thus the movement of Dante’s poem is from the ‘dark wood’ to the quite other region of *Il Paradiso*. But for the Hindu, the wood itself becomes the paradise, and this reflects a profound difference: for the European, felicity is, and has been throughout the history of Christianity, in the world to come — we cannot find it here; for the Indian, it can — and many would say, must — be attained here and now, in the present world. Hence the importance of the concept of jivan mukti, ‘liberation in life’, for the mere fact of death will not of itself improve one’s spiritual condition. Consequently, for the Indian, the world — the forest — and the paradise we all seek are to be realized as one; and the Brindavan myths and the arts which have flowered about them are the affirmation and celebration of this unity, a vision of the world as saturated with divinity. But we should notice that the forest is not always a paradise;

it is made so by the presence of the god, Krishna, by our awareness of the divine. The moment he is absent our experience of the forest changes, as in this poem by Surdas:

The separation from Gopal has made the shady groves our enemy.
When He was with us they were cool and green,
Now they are flames of blistering fire.
Vain is the song of the winged companions,
Vain are the lotuses of the Yamuna.
The humming of the bees has become a discordant sound.
The sweet breezes, the purling streams tumbling across the meadows,
Are as the scorching rays of the sun.
O Uddhava, tell Madhava that without Him,
We feel like cripples in the burning desert.
Surdas says: Watching for the Lord
Has made our eyes as red as vermilion.

Besides their use of the imagery of the forest, the Krishna stories contain other interesting parallels with the religious traditions of Europe. Like Jesus (and also like the infant Hercules), the young Krishna is threatened with destruction. Kamsa, the evil ruler of the land, has learned that he will one day be destroyed by a child born to his cousin, Krishna's mother. Consequently he too massacres the innocents, destroying the children previously born to Krishna's parents and finally ordering a general massacre of male children; as in the Christian story, it is an image of the forces within us fearful of the spiritual life, seeking to extinguish it in the early stages. Krishna, however, is saved and grows up in the region of Braj. Here he passes his childhood, cared for by Nanda and Yashoda, his foster parents, in a simple village of cowherds (just as it was shepherds who came to the nativity of Christ), and descriptions of his charm and exploits as a child make up a large part of the Krishna literature. Here is a short poem by Surdas on the theme, in which Krishna is imagined as about four years old:

His locks plaited, His body besmeared with dust,
Shyama is playing in the courtyard;
Oh how fortunate is the crow who has run away
With the piece of bread and butter from his hand!

Shyama eats, drinks milk and jumps about,
His tender feet leave the imprint of beauty on the earth.
Says Surdas: For a glimpse of this beauty,
I would sacrifice million of suns and moons!

As we have indicated, the simplicity of such poems is deceptive. Another work, by a poet-saint who lived in Brindavan during the nineteenth century, Narayana, points more directly to the level at which they are to be understood:

His sport plunges me in the sea of astonishment!
He who is the Creator and Sustainer of the world
Is now called the son of Nanda!
He who is beyond all limitations, formless,
And of whom the Shruti [scripture] says: 'Not this, not this',
Allows Yashoda to hold his fingers in her hand
And is being taught to walk.
He whose worship leads His devotees beyond sansara,
By whose order the sun and stars move,
Who is perfect, today begs Yashoda for butter.
Narayana says: Hari depends on devotion
And shows His greatness in love.

One of the best-known episodes of Krishna's childhood is his battle with the serpent Kaliya. Kaliya is a mighty snake who lives in the depths of the Yamuna. He has taken to marauding along its banks; the villagers are desperate, and Krishna, the miraculous child, does battle with him. At first, caught in its gigantic coils, Krishna is drawn down into the waters. Forgetting — like many a *jiva* or individual soul — his true identity, he becomes powerless in the coils of the snake. It seems he will drown; but then the people on the bank call out to him 'remember who you are'. At once, Krishna breaks free of the serpent and easily subdues him. But, unlike the heroes of Western mythology who battle with serpents, unlike Perseus or St. George, Krishna does not slay the great snake. Having subdued it he spares it, and orders it back to the depths which are its home. Kaliya, who we might think of as the natural, unspiritual aspect of our own nature, has his place in the world; and it is only when he rises out of the waters, subverting the natural order and threatening to overwhelm the spiritual principle, that

he becomes a threat.

A second, equally famous, episode of Krishna's childhood is the butter theft — butter is the rich essence hidden within milk, as divinity is hidden in the world about us, and the young and mischievous Krishna is greedy for it. In the following poem by Surdas the image of the little boy Krishna, mistaking his own reflection in the shining pillar for a different person, subtly suggests the teaching of Vedanta that the cause of our confusion and suffering is Atman's mistaken identity with Jiva (that is to say, that upon the changeless spiritual awareness which is the essence of our being is superimposed the everyday individualised consciousness):

Shyama, visiting the house of a Gopi, looked about Him;
Finding the house deserted, He went in...
On her return, the Gopi saw that Hari had come, and hid herself.
Shyama approached the tub of milk and butter,
And thrusting in His hand, began to help Himself.
The Gopi could see the reflection of Hari
In the crystal pillar as He ate her butter;
She could hear Him saying: 'This is the first day of my theft,
It has gone well.' He began to feed His reflection too,
Saying to it: 'Take the whole pot, eat well, don't feel shy;
I am so pleased to see you, dear little companion.'
Hearing these words, the Gopi could not restrain her laughter.
Says Surdas: When Hari saw that He had been discovered,
He ran away, leaving the Gopi alone and disconsolate.

In all the Krishna stories a kind of magic hangs over the region of Braj. The simple life of the village, the activities of the herdsmen and women (gopas and gopis), the gentle milk-white cattle, always symbols of well-being in India, the Yamuna, one of those great, slow rivers of India winding like the stream of life through the region with the pure lotuses resting on its surface, all these are lovingly dwelt upon and combine to create an idyllic picture of rural life; a gentle, enchanted world which is already a foretaste of paradise. But without doubt, it is the episodes describing the relations of the grown Krishna, now a young man of surpassing beauty, with the gopis of Braj, which have grown to be the heart of the Krishna legends. Every one of the

gopis, whether married or not, is in love with Krishna and longs for Him:

Our eyes are thirsty for the sight of Hari,
Without Him, every moment is lengthened into years.
How can the inhabitants of Braj live?
They roam in the forests like ascetics
Who have given up their homes.
Being caught in the snare of love,
Like lotuses we anxiously await the dawn.
Surdas says: Without Hari we are as fish without water.

In this brief poem, and many others like it, and in the related painting, dancing and music, the thoughts and actions of passionate romantic love become the language in which the longing of the human soul for the divine Self is described — just as it was among the Sufis, and with Dante and others in thirteenth-century Europe. But whereas the use of this imagery forms a fragile episode in the literature of Europe, in India it flowered into an important and lasting movement, not only in the arts but in the religious life of a large part of the people. One of the most loved of India's poets is Mirabai, a Rajput princess who like Surdas lived in the sixteenth century. In the face of fierce opposition from her royal parents, which may have resulted in her death, she adopted the spiritual life and the path of devotion to Krishna. In one of her poems she writes:

Nothing is really mine except Gopal.
O my parents, I have searched the world
And found nothing worthy of love.
Hence I am a stranger amidst my kinsfolk
And an exile from their company. . .
I planted the creeper of love
And silently watered it with my tears;
Now it has grown and overspread my dwelling.
You offered me a cup of poison
Which I drank with joy.
Mira is absorbed in contemplation of Gopal,
She is with God and all is well!

The idea underlying the worship of Krishna is that emotion, particularly in its heightened form of romantic love, is so prominent and powerful a part of human beings that, rather than being placed in a position of opposition to the spiritual life, it must be harnessed and used positively for the purpose of drawing closer to the divine. An important exponent of this approach in the early sixteenth century was the saint Shri Chaitanya. In a few years he spread the worship of Krishna and Radha throughout north-east India by the example of his passionate devotion, expressed by ecstatic dancing and songs which became the hallmark of his followers; today his influence is still great in India and has reached the West in the form of the widespread Hare-Krishna movement. As a result of Shri Chaitanya and many others, devotion to Krishna has penetrated the popular life of India to a remarkable degree: appreciation of major poets such as Surdas and Mirabai is by no means confined to an educated élite, but their works are known and loved — often in the form of songs — by villagers and simple townfolk throughout the country.

Moreover, it would be wrong to think of Shri Chaitanya's school, or of the devotional or bhakti movement in general, only in terms of religious emotionalism: emotion is certainly present - as we have seen, its correct use is the essence of bhakti — but the movement shows its maturity and wisdom in the way in which it is careful to relate its teachings to ancient Hindu tradition. The *Bhagavad Gita*, in claiming that bhakti is the best path (because the most practical), links it with jnana, the path of knowledge; and there is a consistent effort to show that the teachings relating to Krishna bear out the doctrines of the Vedas and the fundamental insights of Hinduism. Shri Chaitanya gathered round him a group of theologians known as the six Gosvamins, who, writing in classical Sanskrit, produced a major body of work relating his teachings to the metaphysical tradition of the Upanishads. It is the interplay between the surface simplicity of the Krishna stories and the metaphysics underlying them which gives the literature its special quality and tension.

In the following poem Surdas conjures up the enchanted world of Brindavan, as the cows are led out to the woods in the early morning to the sound of the Gauri hymn — and then, suddenly moving to a different plane, in the final lines he marvellously suggests the way in which divinity is partly revealed, and yet at the same time concealed,

by the world:

Shri Hari is playing His flute;
 Having passed the night in Brindavan,
 Now he is moving towards the woods
 In the company of Subal, Suddama and Radha;
 He looks like the moon surrounded by stars.
 A herd of gentle milk-white cows
 With lovely curving horns,
 Wanders slowly before Him.
 Shri Hari is playing His flute;
 The peacock feather in His crown
 Is swaying softly in the breeze;
 All are singing the Gauri in chorus.
 Surdas says: The dust raised by the feet of the herd
 Has settled on His lovely face,
 Partly concealing and partly revealing
 His world-intoxicating charm.

It will be noticed that in this poem Krishna's flute is important, and it is in fact his main attribute. It is the sound of the flute echoing through the woods of Braj which reveals the presence of the god, and transforms the forest into a paradise. At the start of another poem, Surdas captures the suspension of time that comes with the realisation that divinity, the centre of the world, is here and now:

Listen, listen, O companions,
 Shri Hari is playing His flute;
 The devas and beings in all the spheres
 Are charmed by the music.
 The women of Braj run wildly towards the sound;
 The water of the Yamuna is stilled,
 The birds, the deer and the fishes are motionless,
 Like pictures on a canvas...

The gopis, the women of Braj, are the type of the perfect devotee, for so powerful is their love of Krishna that nothing, no worldly duties, no family ties or conventions, can restrain them. Krishna's flute draws them irresistibly to him. Nothing can hold them back; some, we are

told in the central scripture of the bhakti movement, the *Bhagavata Purana*, left milk or rice boiling over the fire; some were serving their husbands with food, or breast-feeding their baby, and simply left the task. Others, who were dressing themselves, ran towards the sound of the flute with their clothes in disarray. It became a matter of theological debate whether it was the married or the unmarried gopis who had the greater merit, and it was decided that it was those who were married, because they had more to lose and risked all that they had for Krishna.

Finally, let us turn back for a moment to the translator of the poems we have been considering: in the tradition which Dr Hari Prasad Shastri brought from India to England, and which we try to follow at Shanti Sadan, the path of devotion (not necessarily to Krishna; there are other forms it can take) and the path of knowledge are brought together. Each individual has his or her own particular make-up, and will need to balance these elements differently. But both are needed: devotion for motive power, and knowledge for direction. Like the cripple and the blind man of Indian folklore they are complementary, and when they come together both move towards the goal.

S.C.

POEM BY HARI PRASAD SHASTRI

Do not talk to me of a vision which you had
And which revealed to you the realm of Reality.
Tell me the method by which you were lead to it and which I can test.
My mind cannot be like a lion's den
Where beings enter and do not come out.
It is a creative laboratory where passions, prejudices,
Loves and hates, lust for power, enter and come out transformed
As poems of beauty, as radiant forms vibrating Truth and Peace
eternal.
This is the yogic method, not a mere dialectic.

The Power of Conscious Living

WE HAVE HEARD that the aim of the spiritual Yoga is realization of our own true Self, that this is the great goal to which natural evolution and all our experiences in life have been leading, and that this realization will confer the unshakeable bliss and fearlessness for which our hearts are longing. And according to the spiritual teachings the practical way to this goal is through purifying, refining and dedicating the mind, which is the instrument that makes all our experience possible.

Conscious living means maintaining an alert awareness of what is happening in the mind, including what our outer behaviour reveals about our inner state, in order to nurture the qualities that lead towards our goal, and weed out the others. Living consciously, when we are doing something we know that we are doing it; when we speak we know what we are saying and how we are saying it. Then we can see if our thoughts and actions are in line with our ideal, and make adjustments if necessary.

In a crisis, what is most needed is what we call presence of mind. At such times one feels compelled to do something, anything, and swift action may indeed be imperative. But it is this aptly-named presence of mind which determines the quality of our reactions, and thus whether the crisis is coped with or not. In daily life, the effect may be less dramatic, but in the end there is a comparable difference between the quality of a life lived with intention, and one lived unconsciously.

Conscious living is sometimes called the practice of mindfulness, and its importance is recognised by all the spiritual teaching traditions. It is clear how minding the mind is a prerequisite for making it fit for metaphysical enquiry. And there is another reason for this mindfulness of the mind, one which is given prominence in this tradition of Adhyatma Yoga. It is that by living consciously, by making ourselves the witness of our mental world, we are putting into practice and confirming the pivotal teaching that we are other than the mind; that the mind is not our true Self and that our real nature does not have its limitations.

Practised in the light of the Yoga philosophy, conscious living strikes at the root of our difficulties. According to the teachings, our sufferings are caused by the strong sense we feel that our minds are

our own selves, so that the limitations, insecurity and mortality of the mind seem to overwhelm us. The central message of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Yoga classics is that this sense of being identified with the mind is an error, an error which can be overcome through spiritual enquiry. The traditional teachings reveal to us the open secret that our true Self is not the mind, but it is the witness and illuminator and substratum of the mind; it is pure consciousness, invulnerable and unbound. To live consciously is to return to this enlightened standpoint.

In a classic Yoga text called the *Ashtavakra Gita*, there is this verse:

If, detaching yourself from your sense of identity with the body, you remain at rest in Consciousness, yours will be spontaneous bliss, eternal peace and liberation from the imagined bondage.

So how does one practise conscious living? How can we learn to keep up this self-awareness so that we know what we are doing when we are doing it? Well, this is a very practical matter and the good news is that we all have the resources we need to help ourselves. The way to practise conscious living is to begin, and to persevere. If we increasingly realize that it is difficult to keep watch over the mind and bring it to order, but that it can be done when we survey the mind from without as it were, then we are gaining valuable insight and really progressing in self-knowledge.

Let us consider some of the practical steps we can take towards realizing the spiritual teachings. One of the keys to conscious living is the regular practice of meditation on traditional lines. It is in meditation that we can really absorb the new understanding of our own nature and the supreme value of Self-realization. To live consciously means living for a purpose and evaluating things by that criterion. In meditation the vital truth is held before the inner eye while distractions are calmly dismissed, so that our thoughts and priorities can be reoriented around this new centre. If we practise meditation regularly the great goal of life will increasingly arise and remain in our conscious awareness.

In meditation and conscious living we learn to make spiritual use of two great capacities within us. These are the will and the imagination. Each of them needs to be developed and applied, and in balance,

because will without imagination is sterile and imagination without will is futile.

We all have a will and need to apply it to grow spiritually. Not using the will is not an option; such a course is really to be wilfully lazy and unteachable. The will has to be nurtured by exercise, and this is called austerity. The word austerity may bring to mind images of religious penitents mortifying and starving themselves; but in the traditional Yoga it means applying good sense and reason to achieve a given end. The key thing is having made a decision, to stick to it. The decision to practise meditation at a certain time and place is a key example. Incidentally, this helps to establish rhythms and routines, which are immensely helpful. Once a good rhythm has been really well established, then one can consider adjusting or intensifying it.

A form of austerity which is considered to be of paramount importance in the spiritual Yoga is to speak the truth. That does not mean tactlessness or being critical for its own sake. In many situations, silence will be the best option. But when we are called on to speak or express ourselves in any way, what we convey is to be true and straightforward. In our present world, doctoring information has become a profession, but in Yoga we are taught that to deliberately distort the truth is to seriously harm ourselves and to effectively cut ourselves off from the possibility of new inner light. Truthfulness may initially look like a discipline or act of will, but when it has become a feature of our mental life, it is soon recognised as being worth far more than anything we could buy with the proceeds of selling it.

Another important field for the conscious development of the will recognised in all the spiritual traditions is the practice of equanimity; that is a certain indifference to what is apparently pleasant or otherwise. This is a wide and deep subject where the essential point is not so much to resist the forces of attraction and aversion exerted by various aspects of the world, but to be firmly focused on the one reality underlying them all.

A rising capacity for true equanimity might be expressed in ways which worldly eyes would hardly recognise as spiritual practices at all. An example might be the case of someone who is travelling and finds themselves in a hotel of the better standard. The fittings and furniture are all shiny and opulent, everywhere there are staff addressing guests in the most courteous terms and professing willingness to fulfil every

requirement; and no doubt the prices are of the same kind. Under the circumstances our traveller is surprised and not a little irritated to find that it is impossible to get a cup of tea made in the manner to which he is accustomed. At this moment it would be true equanimity and very good austerity to quietly forget about tea and think only of the cultural treasures that may be seen during the visit. It is clear how in one sense this is a discipline, in another it is knowing how to be truly wealthy.

Let us consider the use of the imagination in connection with the will. We want to learn how to use the great power of the imagination in harmony with the will to further our spiritual realization. An approach we might adopt after due reflection is on these lines: it is to choose an ideal of what is most sacred and holy to us, or simply of what we most respect. The ideal might be the Buddha, or Jesus Christ, or Socrates, or even the mathematical laws that govern the cosmos, or a saint or poet, or even better a congregation of such ones. Then, we associate our self with them; think of our self in their company, in mutual recognition. Then we get into the habit of making commitments to them, and to our higher self with them. When we decide to do something, or not do something, we make our promise to our own highest ideal, and then consider the matter finished and settled for good. One must be precise about the commitment one is making, and obviously realistic. If one is not certain that one can sustain something, then it might be best to choose a more modest step in the desired direction, and commit to that.

The effective application of our will depends on a vivid sense of what is real and important and also of the great forces with which we associate if we dedicate ourselves to ethical living and spiritual enquiry. The spiritual reality is ever the same and unchanging, but our sensitivity to it and the extent to which its transforming power will work upon us, depends on our receptivity, which in turn depends on the use we make of our imagination in relation to it.

The stream of images, conversations, and associations that flows through our mind is chaotic and often frankly bizarre, but is so familiar that we may feel there is no alternative. The Yoga teachings assure us that there is. Having learnt to apply the imagination through the exercise of will, and reinforce the will through the power of imagination, at key moments, we can learn to replace the stream of mental activity with one of our own choosing, at any time.

It is important to note that whether or not to use the imagination is not an option. The imagination will inevitably present us with a stream of images and associations, and the quality of these determines whether our inner world is a sunny, tranquil place, or a dark and stormy one.

In her book *Training the Mind through Yoga*, the former Warden of Shanti Sadan, Marjorie Waterhouse, gives a practice which can be done whenever the mind is unoccupied. Miss Waterhouse points out that when we learn to drive a car, the first thing we have to learn is how to start and stop it. Until we have learnt to do this, there can be no further progress, and with just about every machine we ever come across the first thing we will want and need to know is how to get it going and how to make it stop. And so it is with our minds also. The practice Miss Waterhouse gives is simply to decide that one is going to think about a particular subject for a given length of time. The subject could be mundane or spiritual, the important thing is that having chosen it one sticks to it. And it could be one minute, or three minutes, or until one reaches the next corner, but again what matters is to fulfil the choice once made.

Miss Waterhouse suggests that although this practice sounds simple it may not prove to be so simple after all, and that efforts made in this direction will be repaid a thousand-fold because if the mind becomes accustomed to obeying directions at such times, then when we set it to serious meditation the mind will be a help and not a hindrance.

So far we have considered some of the practical steps we can take towards more conscious living, remembering all the while that these exercises are valuable not in themselves but as means towards the goal of Self-realization.

It was said that conscious living means being aware of what is happening in our mind. As well as allowing us to reform our thoughts and feelings this also means establishing our own conscious centre as independent of them, and this opens up new dimensions of inner enquiry. According to Shri Shankaracharya, the great 8th century philosopher-saint of this tradition;

That which first shows itself as the innermost Self in the body turns out in the end to be identical with the Supreme Reality, God the Absolute.

So maintaining a consciousness distinct from the mind actually implies practising an enduring awareness of the presence of God, or the Absolute, as the fundamental ground in which we all live and move and have our being.

One might wonder how one could ever grasp an idea of the ultimate reality such that it could remain at or near the surface of our conscious thoughts in daily life. In this tradition of Adhyatma Yoga, the unity of man and God is expounded in a particularly explicit and approachable form, and the serious study of this philosophy is considered an important practical aspect of the Yoga training.

Traditionally, the assimilation of the teachings occurs in three stages. First the pupil listens to the principles being given by a qualified teacher. This sounds very simple and obvious, and it is; but this apparent simplicity should reveal and not disguise the fact that one can only listen to anything, or rather one can only hear anything, when the mind has been made quiet and receptive.

When the pupil has listened to the truth in an appropriate state of mind he embarks on the second phase of study, which is to think it all through for himself. This involves putting it into his own words, and fitting the pieces together in his imagination. At this stage he will very likely come across points in the teaching that he cannot fully understand or which seem to conflict with previously accepted ideas. For example he may find that the spiritual teaching on the unity of all beings seems to contradict his own experience that the world is made up of lots of distinct things with different and incompatible qualities. Continuing the same example, the pupil might find that the solution to this particular difficulty is supplied by other points in the teaching which explain that the operations of the senses and mind give rise to different experiences of one reality, as the waves of the ocean create a myriad shimmering images of the one unchanging sun.

In some such manner the pupil goes through the spiritual teachings in all their scope and details, until they are established in his mind as the most satisfactory explanation he has ever heard, perhaps the only satisfactory explanation he has ever heard, of the human situation in all its complexity, including the external world spread out in time and space around us, our individual private inner experience, and the fusion of the two.

The pupil is now entering the third phase. The difference between

the previous stage and this one is rather like the difference between the process of making a decision, and the subsequent task of carrying it through in action. The former requires us to acknowledge our present uncertainty and to examine the various options with an open mind. But when a decision has been made then other qualities are called for. The pupil will continue to find a great variety of thoughts and feelings appearing in his mind. Some will be conscious or at least constructive and in line with the spiritual truth he has learned. Others will be stray thoughts or merely habitual associations or moods, which on examination are irrational and contradict our better judgement. Now the spiritual student no longer looks on all these thoughts and feelings with an equal eye. Those which conform to the higher truth, he cultivates; while the other sort are promptly dismissed as just low-grade mental activity with no real substance.

When this selectivity has become a spontaneous habit for him, the pupil is entering the third phase of absorbing the teaching. Now, an awareness of the great truth of non-duality has become an undercurrent determining the direction of his thoughts almost continuously.

We have made this slightly extended excursion into the way a student of the traditional Yoga is expected to assimilate the teachings because of how much it overlaps with the yogic ideal of conscious living. Initially, conscious living provides the time, energy and right mental conditions for study and reflection. Subsequently, it extends to what is sometimes called 'the practice of the Presence of God', that is an intelligent understanding of the highest truth as the ever-present ground of our being, the Self of all.

Enquirers from all the spiritual schools have found that a great aid to keeping an awareness of the sacred truth present in the mind, is to sum up all that we have heard and understood and felt in relation to the higher teachings in a brief phrase, a mantra, or in a traditional name of the supreme Truth. It may be any of the names that have been given to God, the Absolute, or the great prophets and incarnations. What matters most is that it should be one that appeals to our own heart. Many Yogis' favoured name is the syllable OM. At any time, whatever the condition of the mind, to simply repeat the name, greatly calms and raises the mind. For many serious students of the spiritual truth, the frequent and eventually almost constant, repetition of a name of God, becomes a foundation stone of conscious living.

Let us turn to the subject of conscious action. We noted earlier that conscious living means knowing what we are doing when we are doing it. The quality of our actions expresses the quality of our inner state and we will want to see that our actions are in line with the spiritual goal.

In the traditional Yoga the ideal of action is to be fully conscious of what one is doing, and something else as well. In short, it is to perform action knowing that one is performing it, and with the feeling that one is doing it not with an eye to what one will get out of it personally, but rather as an offering to the supreme Reality.

Once again, on first hearing this might sound like a very grand idea that one could not hope to keep in mind without seriously impeding one's ability to get anything done. But reflection and experience will reveal that offering the results of our efforts to the highest in all is the key to action that is really felicitous on all levels.

Ordinarily, when we act we feel inhibited by all the factors that must be taken into account. Say we are arranging something, perhaps a meal or a celebration, with the intention that those involved will enjoy it. One will do one's best to make it enjoyable, but one is aware that there may be many factors, such as tastes or circumstances, which one cannot even know of. So often when we act we are concerned not only with what we are doing but also other factors which are beyond our control.

And an even bigger distraction when we act is concern about what the outcome will be, and in particular if the outcome will be in our favour. When we are doing a task, part of our mind is engaged on the job, but all too often thoughts arise like: Will my boss get the credit? Will people misconstrue my motives? Will so-and-so react in such-and-such a way and spoil the effect? Or, will anyone notice anyway? Such thoughts seriously degrade the quality of our work, and they introduce a tension and anxiety which robs us of real contentment in what we do.

We might be aware of this, and yet feel that anxiety for the outcome of effort is, tragically, an unavoidable fact of life in this competitive world where all that matters is tangible results and everything depends on cause and effect.

For those who feel oppressed by such apparent "facts of life", and perhaps wonder if relief is only to be found in a monastery or some

such retreat from society, the traditional Yoga teachings offer wonderful new possibilities. The practice is to consciously give up one's concern that action will be imperfect, and give up anxiety over what the outcome will be for oneself personally. All attention is to be focused on doing the task in hand while the result is offered to the higher reality that necessarily exceeds the range of all limited minds and the innumerable threads of cause and effect that constitute the phenomenal world.

We are often advised to live in the present, but we are rarely told how to do so. Our minds are bound to be led into thoughts about the past and future so long as we are concerned with causes and effects and the results of action for ourselves. But by consciously offering the fruit of action, the mind can be made steady and poised. Far from interfering with our ability to act, the practice actually enables us to devote all mental attention to the need of the present moment, free of anxiety for what we cannot control and what the net result might be.

It will be clear that this dedication of the results of action cannot, or simply will not, occur, until we have seriously considered the spiritual teachings which confide to us that there is a higher unity behind visible phenomena, and that we bring ourselves into harmony and cooperation with That, when we sincerely try to apply the spiritual principles in our life. By consciously offering the outcome of action to the higher Self we affirm the spiritual Truth and take our stand upon it. In the *Bhagavad Gita* the Lord says:

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever discipline you practise, do it as an offering to Me. Thus you will be liberated from bondage to the results of action. Devoted to the practice of offering everything, you will be freed and One with Me.

In summary. We noted that conscious living means being aware of what is happening in the mind, and to know what we are doing when we are doing it. We saw that as well as making it possible to observe and reform our thoughts and behaviour, this also establishes that within us is a consciousness which is independent of the mind and body, which has none of their limitations, and that this is our true nature. We glanced at how the traditional Yoga philosophy progressively discloses to the dedicated student that this pure

consciousness at the core of every individual is in essence identical with the supreme universal consciousness. And we take our stand with our whole being on this truth when we think of the body and mind as instruments and employ them fully in the need of the moment, dedicating the results of action to the higher Self of all beings.

Living consciously in this sense is to affirm our identity with the supreme, eternal, blissful, universal Self, and to dissociate the essence of our own being from the bonds of causality that perpetuate the chain of life in the phenomenal world. This is the power of conscious living according to the traditional Yoga teachings.

P.H.

A Note on the Bhagavad Gita

The Gita is not only a gospel of works, but of works which culminate in knowledge, that is, in spiritual realization and quietude; and of works inspired by devotion, that is, a conscious surrender of one's whole self first into the hands and then into the being of the Supreme, and not at all of works as they are understood by the modern mind — not an action dictated egotistically or altruistically by personal, social or humanitarian motives, principles and ideals.

They do not know the core of the *Gita*, who hold that it teaches the gospel of human action, the ideal of disinterested performance of social duties.

That which the *Gita* teaches is not human but divine action; not the performance of social duties but the abandonment of all other standards of duty or conduct for a selfless performance of the divine will working through our nature; not social service but the action of the God-possessed, done impersonally for the sake of the world and as a sacrifice to Him, Who stands behind man and nature. The *Gita* is a book of spiritual living, not of practical ethics.

H.P.S.

The Wednesday evening talks at Shanti Sadan during the Autumn term were a series on the theme *Yoga—New Light for the Enquiring Mind*, which included lectures on *Traditional Meditation*, *The Higher Value of Emotion* and *Insights from Mystical Poetry*. One talk, called *Stories that Illumine the Way*, considered how the great teachers of all religious traditions have communicated high truths in the form of approachable and memorable stories. The Friday talks covered a wide range of spiritual subjects, including the deeper meaning of art and symbols, echoes of Yoga in the Fourth Gospel, the teachings of the Upanishads on “untying the knot of the heart”, and the statement of the pure non-dual philosophy given by Shri Sureshvara Acharya, one of the closest disciples of Shri Shankara himself, who definitively established that the classical Yoga texts all indicate the same supreme Truth. The term closed with a direct exposition on the theme that one's true Self is the Self of all, and the power of the holy syllable OM, in a talk called *Spiritual Awakening*.

The Autumn One-day Course took place Sunday 21 October 2007. The response indicated a strong appreciation of clear presentations on how the Yoga teachings may be practised and realized in daily life. Preparations are well advanced for the Spring 2008 term, which will include a series of talks on the deeper teachings behind the traditional meditation practices and how they can become the focus for a life lived more fully and consciously, and ultimately pave the way to spiritual illumination.

One-Day Course Spring 2008

Yoga of Self-Knowledge — A Path to Inner Freedom

Sunday 2 March 2008, 11am to 3.30pm

(Books and coffee will be available from 10.30am.)

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2

Talk 1: *Seeking the Self*

Meditation practice

Talk 2: *Cross the Ocean of Suffering*

Talk 3 *The Truth at the Centre of Life*