

**SELF-KNOWLEDGE** is the official publication 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 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.

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### EVENTS FOR THE SUMMER TERM 2009

#### Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

Lectures will be given every Wednesday and Friday evening at 8pm from Wednesday 29 April until Friday 24 June 2009. The Wednesday evening talks will be a series on *Meditation - Light for the Inner Life*, and each will include a practical meditation session.

#### Spring 2009 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 7 June 2009.

## SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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## The Light Behind the Mind

The highest Self is a light which illumines all intellects and is illumined by none. It stands motionless amid the presence and absence of mental modifications.

*Realization of the Absolute (Naishkarmya Siddhi) 2:66*

The purpose of Yoga is to realize that our true Self is infinite consciousness, the reality behind the world of appearances. As human beings we are blessed, because we have been given the instrument that makes this realization possible. That instrument is the mind, and the condition of the mind will be our foremost concern throughout the spiritual enquiry. Let us be clear that we are not primarily interested in the myriad thoughts and feelings produced by this wonderful creative faculty. Our task is to still and purify the mind, for in this condition it reflects without distortion the light of consciousness. As our enquiry progresses, we will discover that what we really are is not the mind,

with all its struggles and limitations, but the ever free, ever perfect, self-luminous power that reveals and supports everything.

At all stages, it is our inner state that matters, because that is what determines our happiness or otherwise. Many people who appear to have all desirable things on the material plane, may inwardly be paupers, because they are deprived of inner peace, while others more humbly placed may be blessed with sweet content. This implies that our joy depends more on our inner life than on our outer circumstances. Through practising Yoga, we learn how to dive deeper into ourselves, below the surface, below the currents, to the still depths, where the pearl of peace and joy is to be found.

The discoveries made in the inner realm are, in a quiet way, revolutionary. For what is discovered goes far beyond the highest flights of thought and imagination, and is concerned with reality, not illusion or speculation. This inner quest leads to the realization of conscious immortality. By virtue of its divine origin and basis, the mind has an immense capacity for self-transformation. Not only can it 'make a heaven of hell', but its destiny is to transcend both heaven and hell, and lose itself in the absolute freedom of self-realization.

Therefore let us regard our mind, not as a fixed endowment of known resources, but as a fund of almost infinite potentialities. These potentialities can be awakened through the proper means. Our mind, being teachable, can be completely transformed through spiritual self-culture. Its present state is largely the outcome of our past choices; its condition from this moment onwards is in our hands. With patience and perseverance, our personality can be remade — not for its own sake, but so that it may serve as a pure channel for the divine light and life. Hidden within our individuality, its 'final secret', is the treasury of higher experience.

Every spiritual enquirer is encouraged to ask some basic questions. What is the purpose and aim of this unending stream of thoughts and feelings that accompanies me through life? Is there a higher purpose hidden in the apparent randomness and aimlessness? Is there a fundamental core of my being which stays unmoved and unaffected by the changes in the mind, and transcends the radical change called death? Does each thought contain its own little packet of energy, its own natural luminosity, or does it borrow its power from some deeper and constant source? What is it that knows the rise and fall of

thoughts?

These are deep questions for our reflection. They all refer to our experience here and now. Spiritual wisdom is not concerned with investigating the details of our past life. What really matters is what we are thinking of and reaching for right now. Neither Krishna, Buddha, Christ nor Lao Tzu were interested in reviewing the past life of their disciples. No spiritual teacher wants to check our *curriculum vitae*. If our aim is liberation, we do not need to worry ourselves about the past. The present moment is the root of our existence at all times. What is always present in the present moment is the ground of being and consciousness. Our aim in turning within in stillness, is to detect intuitively that deeper ground of being.

The Mahatma, Swami Rama Tirtha, whose name Rama, as we know, is a name of God, once came under the suspicion of the police. Two detectives were sent to question him. He welcomed them with open arms, saying: 'You have come to 'detect' Rama. Yes, do detect Rama. When you detect Rama [God within], you will be truly happy.' This is the purpose of our inner quest: to detect Rama.

Our personality is like the outer court of a sacred temple. It may seem to us to be all we have and are, but there is so much more to our being: imperishable treasures, a realm that is totally free from sufferings and limitations. This realm is beyond personality, yet it is the fulfilment of all our longings. Man is thirsting for total inner freedom, pure unconstrained joy. Such freedom and joy can only be realized by awakening to our true nature.

Is it possible to discover something at the core of our personality that is without limitations? Abiding at this level, even now, is the realm of spiritual peace and freedom, just beyond the reach of our normal thoughts and feelings — a dimension of our being that remains still and undisturbed, whatever thoughts are being formed in our mind, just as the sky is undisturbed by the cloud formations that may tint or darken it for a time.

In *Meditation — Its Theory and Practice*, there is a section called 'Meditation on the Process of Thought'. It speaks of the way our thoughts appear, not simultaneously, but successively, one thought following and replacing its predecessor; and there is a tiny interval between the thoughts. This interval may last for only a fraction of a second, but there is, logically, a gap between one thought and the next.

The practice given is inwardly to observe our thoughts, and try to be alert to the interval between one thought and the next, and then, with practice, to learn to extend that interval.

Our thoughts may be sublime or ordinary. There is the line of Shelley, for instance, which is made up of two thoughts:

The One remains, the many change and pass.

Or there are thoughts like:

Oh, it's my friend's birthday. I must buy him a present.

But in all cases, one thought ends and another begins. The practice is to witness this changeover and to try to detect the interval between thoughts.

Now this kind of self-observation will reveal to us a crucial fact about our inner life. One level of our inner being is made up of thoughts. A deeper level, highly subtle, most inward and never appearing as a thought itself, knows the thoughts from the inside. Who is this knower of thought and of the interval between thoughts? Unlike the thoughts, the knower of thoughts does not change. It is something in us that is fixed, eternal, ever itself.

We can ask another question: How do I know my thoughts and feelings? How do I know my intellect, so that I can say: 'O now my intellect is being so sharp, so analytical, so shining', or 'My intellect is so dull, I just can't grasp this at all'?

These mental phenomena do not possess their own light. They do not know themselves. They are known to that single, unchanging, ever-unmoved knowing principle that witnesses the thoughts from the inside, and is ever established as the core of our being.

This principle does not just *know* the thoughts. It reveals them. It is the revealing light, the source of inner light, that makes our mental life possible. Just as in the physical world, all objects are revealed, directly or indirectly, by the light of the sun, so too, the inner being of man is lit by a kind of inner sun, and that sun is our true Self. Just as in the world, we become absorbed in the visual details of things, and forget the all-embracing light that reveals the whole scene, so too in our inner world, we get lost in the movement and details of the thoughts, and forget the inner light that reveals and makes possible the whole inner experience. Our problem is that this pure inner light seems to be identified with the

mental life and to be inseparable from it. Our liberation depends on realizing the true nature and importance of that inner Sun, and that is the 'Light behind the mind'. This involves learning to disidentify the light, our true being, from the mind.

The Zen masters speak of the pure Self as man's 'original face'. 'Show me your original face, the face you had before your parents conceived you.' This 'original face' has become seemingly concealed by the illusory web of thoughts, fancies, associations and memories that make up our mental life. The 'original face' is our pure I.

When we say 'I think', we have 'I' plus something that is not 'I'. Our aim is to calm the mental process, pause, stand back and witness the thoughts, rather than be identified with them. We need to 'see' the thoughts, not to 'be' the thoughts. The thoughts are transient events and their only support or ground is our sense of identity with them. Once the independent nature of that ground, our true I, has been realized as the only substantial reality, our inner freedom will be known as ever-achieved. For that ground is the infinite light of Consciousness. Swami Rama Tirtha sings:

Day and night dissolve in the sun.  
I am light, light, light.  
Can the sun feel cold?  
Can water feel thirsty?  
The life-giving treasure lies hidden within your heart.  
Do not seek it from street to street and from door to door.

The fundamental inner Sun of the true Self stands independent of the physical and mental changes. It is ever free, pure and perfect. Can we realize it through philosophy and reasoning? We can infer its existence by reflecting carefully on the facts of our inner experience. But its nature transcends the mind's power of reasoning, as it is the ultimate light under which the reasoning process takes place. The true nature of that inner Sun is the supreme reality of the universe, divine, infinite and perfect. Its realization is accomplished only through the help of those who themselves have realized their identity with that light. Their words are recorded in scriptures and other inspired writings. From them we learn that the essential light of our being is spiritual.

The inner light is a different order of reality from the material it

illuminates. In the *Gospel of St John* it is called 'the light of man':

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

That was the true light which lighteth every man...

'The Spirit of man is the candle of God.' This Old Testament proverb signifies the same inner light.

Our inner being is animated and enlivened by a spark of celestial fire, so to say, and this light bears all the characteristics of its transcendent source. The mind as it normally functions is finite. But there is infinite light at its source and this is the light behind the mind. This light is the true Self of man, the true I. Nothing in the inner being of man deserves to be called his true Self except this undying, unwavering light, for everything else is passing and illusory. Man's true nature *is* the light, and well can he make the great affirmation: 'I am light, and in me there is no darkness whatsoever.'

This light is pure consciousness. It is not a property of the mind. It is the great reality in which all minds abide, like clouds in the sky.

The highest Self is a light which illuminates all intellects and is illumined by none.

Consciousness is not conditioned by time and space. Unlike the thoughts, which come and go, have a beginning and an end, nothing can show that the illuminating consciousness changes or ends with these thoughts. This illuminating consciousness fills the whole of experience everywhere. It is constant through all time. It does not become old and tired, because it is not material. It is the supreme spiritual light and is the true nature of man.

To those who have fathomed the secret and have learnt how to dis-identify consciousness from the mind, this infinitude and universality of the true Self is obvious and uncontradictable. Here are two short verses by Swami Nirbhayanandaji:

In inner silence watch the activities of your mind, O Nirbhaya. Then experience forever the bliss of Self.

Realize the spiritual meaning of life, O Nirbhaya, and sit in silence. Smile secretly, merged in the divine vision.

With such a vision and spiritual understanding, impulses to war and conflict become meaningless.

How can the man of discrimination, who sees the same one Self in the friend, in the enemy and in his own body, feel anger, any more than he could do so against the limbs of his own body?

*Realization of the Absolute, 2:18*

How can we discern this light behind the mind as a matter of direct experience? It is nothing objective. 'You cannot know the Knower of knowing....It is your Self', says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. This spiritual light, our real Self, is in its true nature transcendent and infinite. But in a certain sense, its light and peace are reflected in our mind, as the limitless sky may be said to be reflected in a tiny dewdrop. This reflection of consciousness is the animating force in the mind at all times, but we are not normally aware of it. It is only when our mind is bathed in peace and harmony that the spiritual nature of this reflection of consciousness in the mind becomes increasingly apparent. It is like the reflection of the moon in water. If the water is agitated, or if its surface is covered by weeds, it will not reflect the moon as it is; its image will be at best a shimmering smear, or there may be no reflection at all. Clear the weeds, let the water calm down and the image is caught, and what it represents becomes progressively clearer.

Spiritual progress involves achieving an increasingly clear reflection of the spiritual light in the higher part of our intellect. The growing capacity to apprehend this light, as a kind of reflection of the divine consciousness within, is the true well-being and fulfilment of the mind. This is the spiritual bread of life and the water of immortality. It leads to the supreme realization that one is oneself the Light and that there has never been anything but this Light, a fact that applies to everyone:

Know the Self to be infinite consciousness, self-evident, beyond destruction, enlightening all bodies equally, ever shining. In It is neither day nor night.

*Avadhut Gita*

From the spiritual standpoint, nobody is high or low. What matters is whether we are in the light or in the dark about our inner treasury. If we know about our spiritual nature, even as a matter of faith or intellectual comprehension, we are in a position to take active steps towards its realization.

Positive thinking of a spiritual kind, supported by our spirit of peace and goodwill, aids our awakening. Here is an affirmation that reminds us of our reality and also of the true value of our mind:

OM I exist forever in the divine sun, the Self. My mind reflects its light, peace and tranquillity. OM

The next affirmation goes a stage further and leads to a statement of our true identity:

OM My mind rests in contemplation of the ever-shining light in my soul. That light am I. OM

The third affirmation implies transcendence of the mind altogether:

OM I am light and in me there is no darkness whatsoever. OM

These affirmations are in the present tense. Spiritual wisdom may appear to be hidden from us at the moment, but the great truth of the divinity of man reigns supreme behind the apparent veil of which the mind is woven. To affirm it thins this veil and leads to our spiritual awakening.

There is an Islamic saying: 'How can he who knows not himself know God? True self-knowledge is knowledge of God.' This wisdom of the spirit liberates the soul and unites mankind.

Let us end with some lines by Hari Prasad Shastri from *Spring Showers*:

The day has melted into quiet dusk, and the moon has risen in her full glory.  
The temple bells are calling all to worship the eternal wisdom,  
beyond human understanding,  
The luminous One who sits in our hearts awaiting discovery,  
who dispels the mists of ignorance.  
Come, leave your books and logic, toys to amuse babes,  
And unite your souls in contemplation with the real Soul  
of the universe,  
Knowing whom nothing remains to be known.

**B.D.**

## MY WHOLE LIFE I SEARCHED FOR HIM

My whole life I searched for Him in every quarter;  
Then suddenly I found Him sitting facing me in my own heart.  
At the end of my life I found Him,  
Seated in a corner of my own heart,  
Though I had formerly searched in vain,  
Year by year, street by street.  
My heart took delight  
When it found the Charming One at its very gate.  
When my soul beheld the Beloved,  
All further search was at an end.  
O thou who searchest for Him thy whole life,  
Why dost thou not abandon the search for anything else?  
How long wilt thou go on contaminating the water of thy soul?  
Cleanse thy heart, the fountain-head of thy life,  
That the pure waters may flow.  
The waters of immortality lie within thee entire,  
Yet for the sake of a few drops  
Thou art ready to cringe before others, be they foolish or wise.  
If thou art a singer in His Assembly,  
Do not beat thy drum in every street.  
If thou desirest that wine,  
Break the flagons and cups of all other wine.  
If thou wishest to behold that beautiful face,  
Turn thy gaze from the world.  
If thou art a lover of that Witness of every heart,  
Sew up thy eye to all else.  
Do not abandon Him,  
For He is the sole source of the light in thy heart.  
Do not wash thy hands of Him in other waters,  
For He is the pure water of immortality in thy soul.

(Quoted by Swami Rama Tirtha, perhaps from the *Diwan i Shams i Tabriz* of Rumi)

*Translated from the Persian by A.J.A.*

# Awareness

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AWARENESS IS THE essential element in man and it is never obscured. Awareness takes place through the agency of the mind, but it is not created by the mind and is not a function of the mind. Awareness is also called consciousness and is above time and space. The subject is always distinct and different from the object.

Awareness knows the mind; it knows when the mind functions well and when the mind does not function well; it knows when the mind is dull and when it is bright. You often hear it said: 'Oh! Today I do not feel very bright', 'I feel dull', or 'On such and such occasion I forgot to mention this point to you'. This element in the human personality that knows the mind, is not the mind, but is the element of which mind is the object. Therefore awareness is not generated in the mind and it is not a function of the mind.

In Western philosophy awareness is taken as identical with mind; these philosophers have not risen high enough to distinguish mind from spirit. Sir William Hamilton postulates two categories, matter and mind. His students used to joke: 'What is matter? Never mind! What is mind? No matter!' That there is a category above mind does not occur to these philosophers. The Eastern philosophy starts where the Western ends, with the study of awareness or consciousness to which the mind and matter are objects.

A thing is said to be mortal or perishable which functions in time and space. Roses exist in summer, beautiful chrysanthemums exist in autumn, they function in time and are perishable, so what can be said of poor human bodies? It is a fundamental fact that Eastern philosophy wishes to establish and to understand very well. The Western philosophers give us the supposed age of the earth, the sun and the solar system; but the Eastern philosophy says: 'These are all perishable: all that exists in time and space, all objects of consciousness are perishable, all are doomed to destruction', all this in the language of the East is *avidya*, that is, nescience, which is something like an illusion.

Every object, as Socrates shows in his *Phaedo*, has an opposite. Day has night; there is substance and shadow; life has its opposite, death;

everything that can be thought of has an opposite, then mortality must have an opposite. This is the argument of Socrates. What is the opposite of mortality? Immortality. He says if you accept mortality, then you must accept immortality because every object has an opposite. Where does immortality abide? In the region beyond time and space, because in the region of time and space, changes must take place, somewhere, sometime. Where should immortality abide? Where there is no somewhere, where there is no sometime. Where is that region? Can we ever imagine such a region? That region is the soul of man, the spirit, awareness or consciousness. That which knows the operation of cause and effect cannot itself be subject to cause and effect, mortal and perishable. Therefore it is the spirit that is immortal.

It is the spirit — awareness or consciousness — that witnesses the waking, dream and dreamless conditions and also the condition which is above all these three. Western philosophy only takes into account one state, the waking. Dreams are studied only for divination. Do they take into consideration dreamless sleep? No, in Western philosophy the phrase does not exist — it is not mentioned by Comte, Bradley, Malebranche, Hegel, Croce, or any other philosopher. Western philosophy says these three states, the waking, dream and dreamless sleep, are states of the mind — but the mind is not present in dreamless sleep; it is Spirit that observes each of these states, Spirit whose presence is self-evident. After dreamless sleep we say, 'I slept so well, I was so happy', and it is remembrance that leads to the inference of a subject which experiences these states. Eastern philosophers postulate one more state, and that state is known only to spiritual and religious people and is called *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is higher intuition. Intuition does not take place in the waking state; it is out of the question in dream or deep sleep.

Imagine you are standing on a sea-shore with a glass in your hand looking at the cliffs or the downs. Imagine that the glass has a dark lens, a blue lens and also a yellow lens; sometimes you look through one lens, sometimes the other. You look at the downs through the dark lens, the blue lens or the yellow lens, and as you look at them through these glasses, you see them differently. There is, however, one way more of looking at the downs — negate the glasses, put them down and look at

the downs and then you will know the real colour. Man uses the glass of the mind — he sees ‘this is my friend’, ‘this my enemy’, ‘this is goodness’, ‘this is selfishness’, ‘this is altruism’. But if he drops the glass of the mind, he will see these things as they are. Drop the glass of the mind and you have the true perspective.

The water of a stream is crystal clear but it assumes the colour of the soil through which it flows. There is a river in Kashmir which changes its colour three or four times a day. In the same way the categories of attribute, relationship, dimension, class and so forth, colour the understanding and cause the development of overwhelming delusion. Can you drop this glass of the mind? That state in which the mind is completely dropped and the Spirit sees things without the mediation of the mind, that state above the three conditions of waking, dream and dreamless sleep, is *samadhi*, and this is the only true report of the things we see. The mind never sees objects as they really are, because it operates in the realm of duality; just as you cannot weigh water by taking it into your hands, so the mind which operates in duality can have no idea of non-duality.

*Sansara* (the world) is all that we can perceive or imagine or express, it is all *sansara*, and *sansara* appears to us through the agency of the mind. Mind is also in *sansara* and is composed of the three qualities, *sattva* (light), *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (inertia). As is said in the *Bhagavad Gita*, ‘O Arjuna, you cannot know Truth by observation’. Scientists who only weigh, measure and observe cannot know Truth. To know Truth you must drop the glass of the mind and the process for dropping this glass is Yoga. The state in which the Spirit sees without mediation of the mind is *samadhi*. It may last only a second, but the subsequent life is changed.

How does it dawn? By self-restraint, through destruction of *moha*, that is erroneous estimation of *sansara*. ‘This is my son, this is my own, this is a religion of infidels.’ What is all this? *Sansara*. Let us see carefully that it is all *sansara* and the mind itself is *sansara*. Let us then withdraw it from erroneous conceptions of what is cognized; still it voluntarily, and when stilled, transcend it, negate it and then we will have the true vision of things. Now this is the conclusion of all the Rishis (enlightened knowers of Truth). There is not one philosopher in

the West whose philosophy is accepted in its entirety by any other philosopher. When Plato died there were twenty schools each claiming to be his disciples, and then Aristotle contradicted them all and attributed his philosophy to Plato. It is the same with all Western philosophy; Croce was a disciple of Hegel, but he did not totally accept the work of Hegel. The so-called socialist philosophers, Marx, Proudhon, etc., are all quite different. From the time when the ancient Rishis crystallized their experience in ‘KHAM BRAHMAN’, ‘ALL IS GOD’, thousands of years ago, until the time of Shri Dada, Rama Tirtha and Swami Nirbhay-anandaji, through all this period, all have confirmed this one philosophy. They formulated this philosophy, not by arguments or observation, but by experiencing Truth in *samadhi*, and their conclusion is not the conclusion of one, but the united conclusion of all those of outstanding intellect, to whom the philosophy of Hegel was child’s play, and they all come to this one conclusion ‘BRAHMAN SATYAM JAGAN MITHYA, JIVO BRAHMAIVA NA PARA’, ‘God alone is real, the world is transient; the soul in essence is God and not anything else’. This is their united conclusion, there is no divergence at all — it is the truth of *samadhi*.

There are three categories: God, soul and the world. Some try to know the world in ultimate analysis, but it is an error to expect things to be as they appear to the mind. It is an even greater error to try to know the reality of the soul through the mind, so how can we know ‘What is God?’ All three categories are investigated in Eastern philosophy and all present but one answer; the essence of the universe, the soul and God is one, and it is, as I have stated at the beginning, awareness. Often in the Upanishads it is said ‘He abides in man, He abides in the cavity of the heart’. The cavity of the heart is only an expression, it means the intellect. Truth abides in man, man is Truth and it is awareness; it is called Atman. Nothing but awareness exists.

**H. P. Shastri**

# Meditation Practice

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HERE WE WILL LOOK at a set of traditional meditation practices that could be done regularly if we are interested in finding out about spiritual Yoga and meditation.

First, something is to be noted about the place of meditation within the traditional Yoga training.

This Yoga has a clear purpose. It is to enable us to discover the nature of our own true Self. It may be wondered, do we or do we not know what we really are? Is it possible to know our true self? Is it worth the trouble to find out — would it make much difference if we did know? The Yoga teachings say that until we have undergone inner training, our ideas about our real identity are very confused and incomplete. The teachings say, yes, it is possible to rediscover who we really are. And they say that Self-knowledge makes a very great difference indeed. It does not just answer a particularly interesting question. Self-knowledge is not a bit of information that takes its place among all the other facts we know about the world. It is a complete reorientation of all experience, analogous to awakening from a dream to the sure and certain knowledge that all the anxieties and sufferings that pressed upon us in the dream never impinged upon our true nature at all.

Meditation is one of the practices leading to this aim. Its purpose is to help us gain complete and direct knowledge of our true Self, which is the purpose of life itself and the highest fulfilment. If we understand the purpose of this Yoga and of meditation within it, much else about meditation will become clear.

In meditation we make the mind still by focusing it for a length of time on a single object. This has two effects; it reveals more and more about the object we are meditating on, and secondly, it reveals more about the mind that is being focused. Keeping the attention focused on something, as we have probably experienced in life, allows us to perceive more of what it really is beyond the surface appearance. And when the mind is made still and light we become increasingly aware of the consciousness in which all ideas and impressions appear; beneath

the ever flowing, ever changing mental activity on the surface of the mind we find a consciousness that is ever pure and unaffected by any of the strictures of time and space.

In the traditional meditations both these potentials are employed, by taking as the focus of meditation a symbol or statement about our own true nature. In this way meditation becomes a most powerful tool for self-discovery. The meditation text we will be focusing on here is:

*Light, power, love and knowledge; light, power, love and knowledge, are in me, are in me, are in me.*

Texts such as this are distillations of what those who have realized the supreme reality say about the true nature of the world and ourselves. In this Yoga we first make a careful study of the teachings and then, when we have understood and intellectually accepted them, we pass on to dedicated action and meditation. So let us consider the teachings summarized in this text.

First it says that light is within us. We know that the source of physical light is the sun and the stars; and it has been said that the sun is the most useful and glorious object of which we can conceive. And yet within us is something that is aware of both the light of the sun and its absence. The sun does not reveal this light; this light reveals the sun. And this light of lights is within us, it is our own consciousness.

Next the text says that power is within us. Some great force has evolved cosmos out of chaos and led life forms to develop from the amoeba to man. That power is patent in us at every moment: having brought us into being, shaped each cell of our body, it continues to sustain us. And now that power has attained a critical point; now it is our own conscious choice whether to do the best thing or not, to refine our hearts and minds and creativities or not. In this sense, our own conscious awareness is the cutting edge of evolution. This power is within us. And even this conception of power is destined to be left far behind as our spiritual enquiries deepen.

The text tells us that love is within us. Cultivating our capacity to love and learning to use it wisely are fundamental aspects of this Yoga. Love might be defined as conscious unity, or even conscious identity. When we say we love something or someone, we mean that we feel that they are an extension of ourselves, whatever affects them affects us,



they are not different from ourselves. Experiences in life, like intense romance or becoming a parent, give us glimpses of this joyous expansion out of narrow individuality. These are glimpses; the real thing itself is not a feeling that depends on fleeting circumstances; it is the recognition of unity extending beyond ourselves, our partners, our families, our nations, beyond all boundaries. This love can never let us down; it is the reality within us all.

And the text says that knowledge is within us. In the Upanishad it is said that knowledge is of two kinds, lower and the higher. Lower knowledge refers to the substance of all the sciences and liberal arts. It has pragmatic value and is certainly better than ignorance or wrong thinking. However this knowledge is always tentative and we know all too well that it is limited; the more we are an expert in one thing, the more we must realize we do not know about everything else. The higher knowledge is other than this. Regarding it there is no doubt or limit to its applicability. We cannot doubt that we are conscious; we cannot doubt our own existence. This is knowledge of the self-evident qualities of our own Self and when fully realized it will reveal the reality in all beings.

Now that we have considered our text, it is starting to become clear that what are referred to are not actually four separate principles at all. When we contemplate what is indicated by the words light, power, love and knowledge, we find that it is the same in each case; it is that which exists, which is consciousness, which is aware and recognizing, the ground of all experience. Far from presenting us with a lot of different ideas to think about, the meditation is really drawing our thoughts into focus on a single underlying principle.


Let us note also that whether we take them as separate facets or a single essence, what is being indicated in the text is supremely desirable. We might think that if we had enough light, or power or love or knowledge, any of them could lead to the fulfilment of our deepest wishes. And it is so. To have more and more light is to realize more and more deeply our true Self, which does lead to the complete fulfilment of our deepest longings. The same is true of power, love and knowledge, fully understood.

Until we come to authentic spiritual training we are constantly looking outside ourselves for satisfaction. We seek illumination, power,

love and knowledge from objects in the external world. As objects separate from our selves we can never possess them securely or know them fully, so our minds are kept constantly looking outwards and busy with a quest that can never be completed. To realize that these supremely desirable principles lie within us changes everything; now the attention can be brought into steady focus at the one point where truth and fulfilment are to be found, in the reality at the core of our own being.

This consideration of a traditional meditation text has served as the briefest of introductions to the philosophy underlying the spiritual yoga. That teaching postulates an unbroken reality in some ways analogous to an ocean of being, in which all things exist like waves and currents. Our own true nature is the infinite ocean, not the peaks and troughs that grasp our attention, and realization of this identity puts an end to all suffering and limitations. Meditation texts point towards that reality so that we may focus on it and gradually resolve into it. If that sounds at all unappealing, let us remember that the point is not to lose ourselves as drops, but to realize ourselves as the ocean.

Before we go on to the practices there is one other aspect of the teaching to which we must be introduced. This yoga, like all true spiritual teaching traditions, makes much use of symbols. One wishes to be a bit careful when referring to symbols because often when we hear about a symbol we more or less consciously make what we heard into 'just' a symbol. It would be an unfortunate error to think that spiritual symbols were 'just' anything.

In the theory and practice of Yoga there is a special place and reverence for what has been called the symbol and the symbolized, the holy name OM. As a sound it may be written OM, or more correctly as AUM. It also has the visual form, .

Many books have been written on OM. For now we will just say that it is a symbol of absolute unity, and that which transcends both unity and diversity. It represents divinity, but excludes nothing. It is an object of worship and yet leaves nothing outside itself to be worshipped by.

The three curves represent three levels of consciousness, those we experience when we are awake, when we are dreaming, and in dreamless sleep. Above them is a point; the point has no dimensions but it reveals and unifies all the three worlds; it is pure consciousness.

Between pure consciousness and the world is a complete difference in kind, represented by the unfinished circle. Yet although it is transcendent, this pure consciousness reveals the world.

OM then is a name or symbol of divinity, the highest truth. It encompasses everything, including, most importantly, we ourselves on every level. To think of it, contemplate it, repeat it, to fill the mind with it, are favourite practices of the yogis.

Here then we will look at a set of traditional yoga meditations. They are all taken from Dr Shastri's book, *Meditation – Its Theory and Practice*, which is a treasury of advice and methods which can be applied at all stages of the Yoga path.

The idea is that these practices can be taken up and done regularly, and meditation starts to become a part of our life. It ought to be emphasized that the potential benefits of meditation can only be realized if we do it regularly. Dr Shastri sometimes said to people enquiring into Yoga that they could try the practices for a certain time, say 40 days, and then decide if they wish to continue with them. In this there is nothing to lose and everything to gain. But if we start out with the idea that we will do meditation if and when we are in the mood, then there will definitely be times when we are not in the mood, the old mental patterns will remain in control, and we will not really have tried meditation at all, we will have just reinforced our preconceptions of it.

So that is the first suggestion that is made to those who would sincerely like to try meditation: decide to do it for a certain length of time. Next, choose a time of day and a place for the meditation. First thing in the morning is the ideal moment, last thing at night and noon are other possible times. Decide also how long you will do it each day and do not allow the mind to cut short the meditation because it thinks it is not going well. The place should be clean and quiet, and it is helpful to create a special space somehow, perhaps with icons or candles. The main thing is to create a regular rhythm in time and place, and sustain it for the chosen duration.

Also significant is the posture for meditation. It is said that the floor is better than a chair because one day we might find ourselves without chairs, but the absence of a floor is very unlikely. That said, a firm chair is perfectly acceptable; the main thing is that the body should be upright and self-supporting, and most important, that we should be able to

forget the body for the period of meditation. It is very unhelpful to try to meditate in bed or an armchair. Having thought about where and when we will do our practices, we come to the meditation itself.

### **First practice**

Meditation is an approach to the supreme reality, so before we undertake it we need to adjust our bearings, rather as we would pause to prepare ourselves before knocking on the door of someone we genuinely revere. This adjustment is a sort of inner bow or some such gesture expressing our recognition of an authority far greater than our individual capacities. So for a moment we pause to acknowledge that beyond our individual mind and will lies an infinitely greater reality.

### **Second practice**

Sit in relaxation, in the meditation posture. Think of the navel and place, in your imagination, the word OM there. For a few minutes just think of OM on the navel. Breathe rhythmically, concentrating the attention on the OM on the navel.

This is a preparatory practice. We are naturally aware of parts of our bodies and some points can be particularly effective as a focus of attention. So first we inwardly locate the navel and rest the mind at this point, and then imagine there the word OM that we thought about before. We can do this practice for, say, five minutes.

### **Third practice — visualization**

Visualize any sunrise you may have seen. Imagine the sun is rising higher and higher over the mountains, over the trees, over the plains. Concentrate on this picture for at least five minutes.

The key to this kind of meditation is to make the picture we are creating in our imagination as vivid and detailed as possible. Ideally, think of a sunrise you have actually seen. Recall how the sky changed colour just before the sun rose and then finally how a sliver of fire

appeared over the horizon. Think of the colour, the shape, the radiations of the sun at each stage. It may seem that we are making the mind very active in this exercise. We do want to draw out consciously the creative faculties of the mind, and then harness them into a single flow of constructive mental energy. Do not allow the mind to be distracted with wondering what ought to be happening; it just ought to be getting on with the meditation. The effect of stilling and refining the mind will become apparent in due time.

Once again we can do this for about five minutes.

#### **Fourth practice — meditation on a text**

Meditation on a text expressing the reality of our own being as revealed by the traditional teachings. We are going to focus the mind on the true nature of our own conscious Self. We remember our text is:

OM Light, power, love and knowledge; light, power, love and knowledge, are in me, are in me, are in me. OM

This text contains words and the words express an idea. We may feel that we have more or less understood the idea and more or less succeeded in focusing the mind upon it. What really matters is not the idea but the reality to which it points. The words ‘my home’ and the idea of ‘my home’ may come and go in our mind. But beyond the word and idea is the reality, what our home really is. The same is true of this meditation text; the reality it indicates is always there, complete and perfect. This is the object of our meditation.

So, we focus the attention on the meaning of this text. We just keep focusing on the meaning of the text. If the mind wanders off, bring it back to the text. Once again we will do this for five minutes.

#### **Fifth practice**

After the meditation, it is traditional to end by consciously offering our goodwill to all living beings. So for a few moments we extend our sympathy and goodwill to all, without exception.

**P.H.**

### **A VEDIC TEXT**

O Lord of Infinite Peace!

Let me not be a destroyer of virtue.

Keep me steadfast in Thy grace,

Acquiring truth and righteousness,

And make me progressive in learning and virtue.

O Friend of all!

Ruler of the inner being of all,

Grant that all living beings may look on me

As a friend, and be my friends.

Let none consider me his enemy.

Grant further, O Lord of the Universe,

That all living beings may give up

Their mutual prejudices and love one another.

OM!

**The Yajur Veda**

## Pursuit of Pleasure

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WHO DOES not like pleasure? What is pleasure? Is it not merely a satisfaction which our gratified desires bring us?

Hobbes remarks that it is the sense of good. Locke judges good and evil from the standard of pleasure and pain: 'The ultimate end of moral good and evil is the production of pleasure and pain to sentient beings,' he says. According to Hutcheson, who gives a profound and elaborate analysis of pleasure, it consists in the perfect exercise of man's noblest virtues. Shelley lays emphasis on disinterestedness as the essence of moral good. Butler seems to be sure that a deliberate pursuit of happiness inevitably results in a refined form of self-love; and that men should rather seek the moral, material and spiritual good of others — and by such a disinterested pursuit of virtue, they will necessarily enjoy the greatest happiness.

We must cultivate a benevolent disposition, free from all private and personal interest, even from self-approbation. Pure disinterestedness is ingrained in our souls, but unless it is brought to the surface by its cultivation, our ethical and benevolent actions will not bring us lasting joy. St Bernard affirmed that the fundamental characteristic of love divine is the exercise of compassion towards others, both men and the lower animals. I object to utilitarianism on account of its non-recognition of the pursuit of goodness for its own sake.

The divine poet Tulsi Das has said 'Without compassion even a perfect man is a butcher.'

To experience real happiness we must part company with the owl-winged faculty of calculation. To apply it to knowledge, the practice of virtue, or appreciation of nature, poetry or music, is to weaken our sense of appreciation. Pleasure comes when the little self is put aside or forgotten, or is merged in a disinterested exercise of virtue.

Goodwin speaks in his *Practical Justice* of the balancing of general pleasure and pain, But this is also a phase of utilitarianism. 'What shall I do to please you, my revered Guru?' asked Teerath Mal. 'To please me?' replied Shri Dadaji. 'I do not need joy or pleasures, my son. Since

I have tasted the honey of God-realization, I have lost all sense of objective joy or pleasure. Please thyself, my son, serve this holy Yoga unselfishly, give all thy devotion to Truth. Give thy best service to the poor, the aged and the sick — and then forget it. Do not seek pleasure in sensations, or in variety.'

To make pleasure an end in itself is an error. There are qualities in pleasure. We must choose those pleasures which are of a high quality, such as are to be found in devotion, poetry, or the exercise of benevolence, guided by spiritual justice. In his *Sermon on Human Nature*, Butler affirms that benevolence is a principle of human nature.

Socrates does not clearly differentiate happiness from virtue, and virtue from knowledge. How true is the statement of Aristotle that 'To the virtuous person the very performance of virtue is pleasurable. But pleasure is not the Good.' Epicurus meant by pleasure a tranquil state of mind and body, which is acquirable by a rational attitude towards the world. This philosopher, so much misunderstood and erroneously quoted, vigorously condemns gratification of the appetites.

Shri Dada says: 'Lift your mind higher and higher in devotion and through your meditations. Nothing has caused me so much sweetness as the sacrifice made by me to promote the good of others through the Yoga.'

Mere pleasure born of the contact of the senses with their objects is common both to man and the lower animals. Man would not justify his high position in the scale of evolution if he were to share the pleasure the animals delight in. Aristotle calls man a superior being by virtue of his power of ratiocination. Blind adherence to the dictates of the senses is the negation of our special prerogative, reason. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Shri Krishna very truly says:

All the pleasures born of the contact of the senses with their objects are sources of suffering. They are shadowy, and the wise do not indiscriminately indulge therein.

Though it is hard in the beginning to envisage the joys of devotion, love of Truth and service, yet they are real, they abide, and they satisfy the soul. The one defect in sensual pleasure is that the instruments of enjoyment lose their power, their edge is dulled, so to say, while the

appetite persists. In the end we grow comparable to the man who has an enormous appetite, but cannot eat.

Students of the *Gita* will remember that pleasure also belongs to the categories of *sattva* (illumination), *rajas* (passion-struggle) and *tamas* (darkness), and a true yogi pursues the joys of the first only. To quote from Holy Vyasa:

The deer loses his freedom on account of his excessive love of musk; the moth, through beauty of the flame; the elephant, of form; the snake, of sound; and the fish is hooked for bait. What will be the fate of man who loves inordinately all the objects of his five senses?

Love of God, love of the higher spiritual ideals, is the only love which gives lasting joys. Among the failures in life — the suicides, the criminals, the ever bored and ever worried — you will mostly find the devotees of carnal pleasures. When the heart is dedicated to a higher ideal, benevolent and spiritual, there is no room for despair or despondency.

‘What I have not attained in this life I will do in the next; God is in me, and I am in Him.’ This is a great consolation, which the devotee of pleasure will not experience. One who has made over his liberty to the fetish of pleasure will very likely neglect his duty. Yet one of the great joys in life is the unselfish discharge of our duty, to our family, our state, humanity and God, and poor indeed is he who is without this joy.

‘Seek pleasure, edification of the soul and self-effacement, in love of Truth and the service of God, through the love of the poor, the oppressed and the ignorant’ said Shri Dadaji.

Holy Hanuman understood the secret of joy when discarding the Empire of Lanka; he chose to serve his Lord and Master, Rama, in humility. I will appreciate the joys of health, good company, scenic beauty and art, as a master and not as a slave, and will ever keep my inner being in touch with Reality (God), pouring out all these joys at His Feet, which are represented by His creatures, high and low.

O let me not forget Thee,  
In joy or in misery

**H. P. Shastri**

## What is Truth?

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LET US CONSIDER the answer given by the Vedanta philosophy to the question ‘What is truth?’ Truth is the objective of Christ and of the philosophers of all ages, to whatever school they may belong, be it idealism, realism, agnosticism, logical positivism or any other. Through these schools many different views of the truth, or rather, attitudes towards the quest for it, have been held, and indeed are held today, though most would agree that the truth, as it really is, is one and only one.

Now a very interesting point, if you study the Scriptures of different religions in an impartial way, is that you find that, here too, the incarnations of God and the saints following their teachings also lay claim to be leading mankind to truth. In fact they are insistent that the quest is not different from the quest for God, or the quest for ‘immortal life’. This is not restricted to one particular religion. The great prayer which announces the teachings of the *Upanishads* of ancient India and epitomizes their purpose, is: ‘O Lord, lead us from error to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality’, and Christ himself proclaimed: ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life’.

Now the question certainly arises: ‘Is the truth spoken of by the great spiritual men throughout the ages the same as the truth for which the philosophers are searching?’ Today, in Western civilization many people, particularly intellectual people, perhaps would say that the philosophers were the true votaries of truth, and that the religious only used the word to hoodwink their followers; that religion was a collection of the ‘outworn superstitions of a less adult age’, as Russell has called it. According to such people as Marx and Engels, spiritual laws are myths, and the ideals of love, brotherhood and self-sacrifice are phantoms. The Yoga which we are offering does not agree with such views. It teaches that the truth is one, and that, while all philosophers are striving to discover it, it can only be known in its entirety by those who have gone within themselves and so purified the instruments of cognition (the mind and the higher faculty of spiritual intuition) that

they are capable of ascertaining truth. It teaches that all religions lead finally to this truth, and that all revealed Scriptures are descriptions of it, but fragmentary descriptions dressed in the idiom and symbology appropriate to the time and place in which they were given. It is only by personal experience that truth can be known as it is, and then, only after the soul has undergone purification by self-discipline, by loving service and the search for knowledge.

Mysticism is at the core of all religions. It is the mainspring, the vitality of religions, because its one purpose is consciously to contact God Himself. God is seated within the intellect of man himself, but when the mind is still in an unpurified condition, it does not recognize the presence of the divine element. In one Eastern classic, the mind is likened to a pool of water in which the sun is reflected. The spirit, which is by nature pure consciousness, gazes at its own reflection in the pool of the mind, but so long as the surface of the water is ruffled and ever moving, it sees a completely distorted reflection of itself, broken up by the ripples into a thousand forms and colours. Only when the surface of the water becomes calm and stilled, does the reflection assume that true, pure, single and taintless appearance of the real spirit.

So with the mind; it is in the tranquillized mind that the soul can see itself as it really is, pure, taintless, one-without-a-second. So long as the mind is agitated by a continual stream of desires and impressions, emotions of love, hatred, anger and fear, it cannot experience the peace and knowledge which are its own nature. Truth, then, according to the spiritual philosophy, is the goal of the mystic quest and of Yoga. To know it is, in fact, to know the real nature of yourself and in knowing it you are free.

It may very reasonably be asked: 'What, then, is the relation of this truth to that which the philosophers are propounding? How is it that so many different views have been held by honest and sincere men searching for the truth in the intellectual realm?' It is because the intellect is powerless to reach the supreme truth. As the Upanishads say, it is 'that from which the mind turns back', 'it is not known by reasoning, nor by the intellect, nor by much reading'. This is one of the facts about the spiritual teachings of religion that few people nowadays seem to understand, at least in the West — indeed, it was perhaps never

well understood in Europe — and that fact is that religion is the means of taking the soul to God. Its teachings are progressive and tentative, in the sense that they are designed to explain what is really inexplicable in words, to people at every stage of spiritual evolution. They have of necessity to use inadequate symbology and expressions.

Bertrand Russell completely misunderstood this point when he criticized theological truth as opposed to scientific truth, because while the former, he said, laid down dogmatic statements about the world and the things in it, and were said to be revealed truth, the scientists humbly admitted that they were only gradually getting nearer to an approximation of the truth and left it at that. However, the Upanishads use teaching by successive approximation just as much as science does, but they insist, as science does not, that the truth can be known. For the ancient Hindus there was no need for intolerance as to dogma or creed, because they recognized from the first that different philosophies appealed to different types of mind in the course of their development and that the end of all was finally one and the same. The six classical systems of the philosophy of the Vedas, which include the various dualistic and non-dualistic interpretations of the universe, were spoken of as the 'six limbs' of the Vedanta and were all recognized as ways of teaching truth — a truth which none of them could adequately express, though Shri Shankara's *Advaita* (non-dualism) came nearest to doing so. Nor is this a feature of Hinduism alone. Lao Tzu said: 'The Tao which is the subject of discussion is not the true Tao'. The Sufi, Rumi, said that as soon as you attempt to speak of truth, you put veil upon veil over it. Isaac Pennington, the English Quaker, said: 'There is no truth except the last — except the utmost, yet every truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it will be but shadow in another place (for it is but shadow from an intenser substance): and the shadow is a true shadow as the substance is a true substance.' This seems to echo the verse of *Viveka Chudamani* (Crest Jewel of Wisdom): 'All products of Brahman, which is reality, are themselves also real and there is nothing different from it. Whoever says there is anything different is not free from illusion but is like a man talking in his sleep.'

It is the knowledge that all truth achieved in the realm of relativity is provisional, tentative and uncertain that makes the spiritual teachers

seem disrespectful to the half-hearted certainties of the worldly pundits. 'What is truth?' the disciple once asked the celebrated Zen master Tokosan, and his reply was: 'A bowl of dead flies.' Our teacher has explained this as meaning that the truth which can be put into words is only a source of endless misunderstanding, argument and abuse, and leads to a bad headache rather than to real satisfaction. When one considers the lives of the great philosophers and how many of them spent their time in elucidating and answering criticisms of their previous works, one can see how much truth there is in this. 'Alas!' says Chuang Tzu, 'man's knowledge reaches to the hair on a hair but not to the eternal peace.' And the same sage gives the most illuminating and telling dissertation on the pointlessness of argument.

This does not mean to say that reasoning has no value. In the words of Socrates, 'Let us not admit unto ourselves the notion that there appears to be nothing sound in reasoning, but much rather that we are not yet in a sound condition, and that we ought vigorously and strenuously to endeavour to become sound.'

Adhyatma Yoga, the Yoga of Self-Knowledge, is a practical spiritual technique for those who want to become sound, who want to verify the truth for themselves, in their own experience. Its peculiar merit is that it offers you a chance to take up spiritual education — a subject much neglected in the curriculum of the Western world — as a serious pursuit. Adhyatma Yoga has not much to offer those who only want to satisfy their curiosity, or to dabble, nor to those who believe, like George Santayana, that the spiritual ideals are beautiful conceptions but no more than that. It has a great deal to offer those who are seriously interested in the spiritual well-being of the world, and who are willing to take active measures to improve it.

The sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* outlines the principles involved in the spiritual technique of Yoga. It is essentially a method of training and refining the mind so that one can use it to confer its greatest benefit on the soul — a knowledge of truth. In the holy philosophy it is held that the mind is the cause of the bondage and also of the release of man. It binds a man so long as it is uncontrolled, whilst he gives it a free rein to follow its own desires and impulses; but it becomes a servant of the man who has disciplined and controlled it

according to the spiritual principles given in the *Gita*. All the practices of Yoga — and it involves the whole of one's life — are merely accessories to this end of controlling the mind and directing it toward God, its source. The first verse of the sixth chapter of the *Gita* makes it clear that Yoga does not mean a life of retreat from the world, of retiring to a hermitage and cutting oneself off from the world, for it says quite clearly that he is a yogi who performs his bounden duty, without depending on the fruits of his actions, and not he who desists from acting altogether. The spiritual ideal is not one of inaction, but of continuous activity for the good of all, instead of sporadic activity for the sake of oneself. Moreover, the spiritual path is initially a self-imposed one, for no man, not even a teacher, can help the disciple if he does not want to progress. This is what the *Gita* means when it says:

Let a man raise himself by himself, let him not lower himself, for he alone is the friend of himself, he alone is the enemy of himself.

To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is the friend of himself, but to him who has not conquered himself, his own self stands in place of an enemy, like an external foe. (*Bhagavad Gita* 6:5-6)

In *Wisdom from the East*, Dr Shastri says that there is no devil other than the ego which has not yet realized its identity with God. The teachings of Yoga begin where modern Western philosophy ends. Many psychologists, like Jung and his school, now recognize that man's well-being is dependent upon the state of his mind, and that there are present within the unconscious part of man's mind those forces of darkness, primitive instincts and impulses left over from the animal stage of existence, which have, so to speak, an independent life of their own. If they are not controlled and sublimated, they can act as an internal disruptive force in the mind, seriously jeopardising the stability of the higher conscious part of the mind, leading to disharmony and such mental ailments as hysteria or neurosis. Adhyatma Yoga, however, goes much further than this, for it offers man a practical technique whereby he can gradually bring his mind under control, and even more important, purify and refine it. There are vast potentialities latent in the mind of man, and to be able to concentrate it and to direct it towards a

higher spiritual ideal brings untold benefits. Moreover, it is the only sure antidote to hatred, fear and worries, and their offshoots of war, fanaticism and narrowness.

Therefore the practical side of the Yoga teaching is perhaps the greatest benefit it can offer to the West at the present time. These verses from the *Gita* outline the meaning of Yoga. The Lord says:

Serene minded, fearless, firm in the vow of godly life, having restrained the mind, thinking on Me, and balanced, let him sit (in meditation) looking up to Me as the Supreme.

Thus always keeping the mind balanced, the yogi, with the mind controlled, attains to the peace abiding in Me, which culminates in *Nirvana* (*moksha* – liberation).

To him whose food and recreation are moderate, whose exertion in actions is moderate, whose sleep and waking are moderate, to him accrues Yoga which is destructive of pain.

As a lamp in a sheltered spot does not flicker — this is a simile of a yogi of subdued thought, practising Yoga in the Self.

When thought is quiescent, restrained by the practice of Yoga; when seeing himself by the Self, he is satisfied in his own Self;

When he knows that infinite joy which, transcending the senses, can be grasped by reason; when, steady (in the Self), he moves never from the reality;

When, having obtained it, he thinks no other acquisition superior to it; when, therein established, he is not moved even by a great pain;

This...be it known, is called Yoga. That Yoga must be practised with determination and with undepressed heart. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 6:14-23)

**S.D.S.**

## Stories that Illumine the Way

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AS SPIRITUAL students, we are blessed with an abundance of stories and parables handed down by the masters of all the spiritual traditions. These stories have one purpose only. It is to deepen our spiritual understanding and encourage us to hasten our steps towards the great goal of life, spiritual illumination. Here, for example, is an anecdote told by the Islamic mystic, Sheikh Saadi:

One night in the desert of Mecca, from great want of sleep, I was deprived of all power to stir. I reclined my head on the earth, and desired the camel-driver not to disturb me. 'How far shall the feet of the poor man proceed when the camel is weary of his load? Whilst the body of the fat man is becoming lean, the lean man may die of fatigue.' He replied: 'O brother, Mecca is in front and robbers are in the rear. By proceeding you escape; and if you sleep you die.'

On the face of it, this is simply a call to live prudently and take precautions for one's personal security. It echoes the biblical proverb that it is folly for a sailor to allow himself to fall asleep while reclining on the top of the ship's mast. But consider the saying: 'O brother, Mecca is in front and robbers are in the rear. By proceeding you escape; and if you sleep you die.' This is reminding man that life has a sublime goal which is within reach, and that we can never allow ourselves to stop on our quest until the goal of inner enlightenment is reached. If we live sleepily, unmindful of the goal, the robbers of day and night will steal away what is left of our life, and we shall miss our chance. But if we sustain the high aim, our life will be lit by ever-deepening insight.

Another story about Sheikh Saadi makes the point that the mind can be trained and transformed on spiritual lines, even if the task seems daunting to start with. One day he was drawing water from an old iron well. As he was hauling up the bucket, he noticed that the rope was made up of grasses bound together. He also noticed deep ruts in the iron wall of the well, so that the ropes naturally slipped into these ruts



when being tugged upwards. And he reflected: 'Such soft grasses, yet they have cut such deep ruts in iron. I am a man of some forty years, and my character is hardened by life's experiences. Yet if I can adopt some simple form of spiritual practice, then, little by little, my mind will be reformed.' He was encouraged, and turned to the spiritual life.

To realize our higher spiritual nature, we have sometimes to defy worldly conventions. In the life aimed at material success and social acceptability, outer appearances have always been of immense importance. We are likely to be judged, not simply at face value, but at clothes value! But we are far more than our clothes.

This point is made in a tale about the Italian 'wise fool', Guifa. Guifa did not mind how he looked: that was the problem, so no one invited him to parties. But one day, his mother dressed him smartly and he was sent to a celebration at a neighbouring farmhouse. Everyone looked at their surprise guest. They were even more surprised to see that he ate all he could with one of his hands, and with the other he was stuffing the food through the button-holes and into the pockets of his fine robes, saying: 'Eat, my clothes! For you received the invitation to come here, not I!'

It seems a silly story that makes an all-too-obvious point: that man is more than his clothing. But this insight is an important step to visualizing and realizing that the body, as well as its clothes, is what the yogis call 'not-the-Self'; it is an instrument used by the Self to achieve certain ends in life. This idea is vividly presented in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where the body itself is compared to a set of clothes that will eventually wear out. What really matters is the spiritual life we have awakened in ourselves. St Francis of Assisi called his physical form 'Brother Body'. He wrote:

Meditate as much while on this journey as if you were shut up in a hermitage or in your cell, for wherever we are, wherever we go, we carry our cell with us. Brother Body is our cell, and the soul is the hermit who dwells in it, there to pray to the Lord and to meditate.

But what about the mind, our wonderful inner instrument, through which we can learn not only to live in the world, but to transcend it?

Through spiritual education we need to liberate our mind from the grip of preconceived ideas and habitual patterns of thought, in order to clear the clouds that hide the ever-radiant Sun of the true Self.

On this need for an inner clearing, Chuang Tzu, the Taoist master, relates how a man was sent to see the sage, Lao Tzu. At the end of an arduous journey, he approached Lao's hermitage. Seeing him coming, Lao Tzu shouted: 'Who are all those people you've brought with you?' The man spun around in alarm. There was nobody in sight. Only later did he realize the Teacher was not referring to an outer crowd, but to the stock of fixed ideas the man was unconsciously carrying with him. This cargo is a burden because it keeps our minds in a state of tension and fullness, and prevents the teachings of higher truth from striking the ground of our soul and taking root there. So spiritual life is to some extent a process of letting go, of unlearning, through calming and emptying the mind. This requires viewing and training the mind as if it, too, like the body, were other than our true Self: Brother Mind!

A former Warden of Shanti Sadan, Marjorie Waterhouse, recalled how her teacher, Dr Shastri, announced that he was giving her a pupil to look after and to guide. She was secretly very happy about this, saying that her mind was 'half-deafened by the uproar of delighted acceptance'. Then she found out who the pupil was to be. 'Yes, a pupil — yourself. From now on you will take up the position of teacher, and your mind the position of pupil.' 'Of course', she confesses, 'I was highly disappointed, for I did not know then that he was giving me a practice which would start me on a long pursuit, one which would, if done faithfully, at last unmask egoity and cut at the root of self-pity and remorse. To be disidentified is a prerequisite to clear vision.'

Taking a calm, detached view of our mind, and slowly rising in authority over it — this is a central theme of her book, *Training the Mind through Yoga*. Its study will prove to us that, as seekers, we are destined to become finders; or, to put it slightly differently, 'Prepare, and you will be found.'

A.H.C.

## The Tradition of the Mahatmas or Saints

THE HINDI word *Sant* is very often translated by the English word 'saint'. Although the two words seem very similar, and it is certainly true that many of the Saints are saintly persons, there is no real connection or etymological link between the word Sant (or *Santa* in Sanskrit) and the English word 'saint'. The word 'Sant' is derived from the Sanskrit term for ultimate truth or reality, *sat*; and so 'Sant' means 'one who knows the truth', or, if we translate a little differently, 'one who has experienced the truly real' — that is to say, a person who has reached a state of high spiritual knowledge, not only in theory but in practice, and as an actual and living experience.

For a long time the Saints were largely ignored by Western scholars interested in Indian religion. And this is perhaps understandable, since this path offers little in the way of theoretical texts which scholarship can explore; and also because the Mahatmas — that is to say, the 'great souls' who are at the heart of the Sant tradition — avoid public notice, with the result that they tend to be known only to devotees who are themselves practitioners of the path. However, more recently this has changed, and the *Sant Math*, or 'tradition of the Saints', has been recognized and studied by both Indian and Western scholars. Even though these scholars do not generally penetrate to the heart of the tradition — which can only be done by practising it — some useful facts have been established which help to define the *Sant Math* to distinguish its followers from other religious groups in India.

Historically, the Saints appear in the context of the great *Bhakti* or 'devotional' movement, the beginnings of which can already be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and which subsequently swept through medieval India and transformed much of its religious life. The devotional movement aims, not at a change in the nature of our knowing (as with the Vedanta and the path of knowledge), but with a change in the nature of our willing. Instead of willing life in the world — that is to say, constantly seeking our own interests, no matter what the cost to others — the devotee wills proximity to or even union with the divinity, and it is mainly the devotional movement which has given to present-day Hinduism its emotional texture and many of its spiritual and social values.

The saints and poets of the great devotional movement in India fall into two groups. On the one hand, there are those whose devotion is strongly centred on a distinct and particular form of the divinity — that is to say, they worship *saguna Brahman*, *Brahman* or ultimate Reality as thought of 'with (*sa*) form and qualities (*guna*)'. In particular, the two great incarnations of Vishnu, whose lives and exploits are described in the ancient Sanskrit epic literature, the Lord Rama and the Lord Krishna, are worshipped in this way. These are forms which can be easily visualized and almost touched. Thus we have the poet-saint Surdas, with his deeply-felt and delightful poems describing the life of the youthful Krishna in and around Vrindavan. Or we have Tulsidas, who rewrote with moving devotion the epic story of the *Ramayana* in the language of the people of northern India.

But, on the other hand, there are those whose devotion, while being no less intense, is directed to the formless ultimate reality or Godhead, the ineffable or *nirguna Brahman* — *Brahman* 'without qualities or limitations', of which no description can be given and nothing can be said, and to which no form or limiting quality whatsoever can be attributed. This is the Brahman of which it is said in the *Upanishads* that 'the eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind'; and again, that it is *neti, neti*, 'not this, not this'. This, then, is *nirguna bhakti*, 'devotion directed to the formless Absolute'.

It is primarily this path which is followed by the Saints. Among the memorable names here are those of the poet-saints Kabir, Dadu, Namdev, Ravi Das (sometimes called Raidas) and Nanak. Here is a brief poem by Nanak, translated by Dr Shastri, which gives some idea of the outlook of the Saints:

Every plant has fire concealed within;  
Butter is hidden in milk;  
In the high and the low,  
The essence is the same.  
O holy man, He dwells in every body,  
He fills the whole and the part,  
The water and the earth are His abode.  
Nanak says: My Guru has given me mystic vision  
And I see the taintless, unchanging One in all.

In another poem Nanak writes, ‘Measureless, invisible, taintless, infinite is He! The world is under His spell.’ The Sants, then, are primarily worshippers of ultimate Reality in its purest nature, devoid of all gunas or qualities whatsoever; and their devotion is *nirguna bhakti* — devotion directed to the highest conception of Brahman, or *Para-brahman*. However, we should be careful not to think that the division between *saguna* and *nirguna*, *bhaktas* or devotees of *Parabrahman*, is by any means absolute or watertight. In general, each group understood — and still understands and respects — the position of the other. It is a choice of different means, different ways of thinking, and not of different ends, and quite often a *saguna* poet such as Surdas will speak in *nirguna* terms, and vice-versa.

As a young man in India, Dr Shastri had personal contact with sadhus and Mahatmas belonging to the tradition of the Sants, and this remained important to him. In a talk given many years later towards the end of his life, he spoke as follows:

The Santa Math the society of the saints. I have told you that the saints exist for the good of the people who are not very intellectual... It is a mistake to think that the Yoga and Vedanta are meant only for the highest intellects. It is not so... According to the Santa Math what is *ajnana*, ‘ignorance’? A very difficult question... But the holy saints declare it in very simple terms so that even a child can understand. And so spoke to me Swami Sacchidanandaji, a saint following the tradition of *Santa Math*... Then what is *ajnana*? ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is *ajnana*. The limited ‘I’, and to say about anything ‘it is mine’... Where there is this conception of duality of the spirit there will be war, there will be struggle, conflict, bloodshed... the cause of the whole trouble is the empirical limited ‘I’ and the conception ‘this is mine, this is mine’. Eliminate *avidya*, ignorance. What is the meaning of it? In *Santa Math* the meaning is: ‘Expand your “I” to infinity, or reduce it to zero.’ In higher mathematics extremes meet. It means the same thing... Either reduce the ‘I’ in humility to nothing, nothing, nothing, or expand it to infinity, which is the same thing.

Dr Shastri goes on to illustrate this by relating an incident in the life of his own teacher, Shri Dada. A *Seth* — that is to say, a very wealthy Hindu merchant — became interested in Shri Dada. This man often

came to the Sat Sangs, the gatherings of devotees which Shri Dada held from time to time. He would bring with him gifts which were distributed to the Sangha, the group of devotees who had gathered round Shri Dada, many of whom were very poor. On one such occasion he said to Shri Dada: ‘Holy Guru, will you be good enough to have *prasad* (i.e. to take food) with me?’ When he persisted, Shri Dada agreed to the request, and some days later he went to the wealthy Seth’s house, bringing with him a few members of the Sangha including several Untouchables.

He had already warned his host, ‘These are members of my family. If you have prejudices, do not invite me’, and the Seth had raised no objection. So Shri Dada went with his companions. First of all they passed through a beautiful marble arch decorated with precious stones. Shri Dada asked, ‘To whom does it belong?’ The Seth said, ‘It belongs to *Govinda* (i.e. Krishna).’ In the library Shri Dada asked, ‘To whom does this belong? You are not a lettered man.’ ‘To God; the neighbouring students come to study here.’ The Seth’s children came and touched Shri Dada’s feet; their father said, ‘They too belong to God.’ In this way, looking round the house, they came to an inner room in which were beautifully installed images of Radha and Krishna. The Seth bowed down, and then said, ‘Everything in this house, O holy man, belongs to God, but this belongs to me. This is my only possession, and I worship it. The Lord belongs to me.’ Shri Dada was touched by the man’s wisdom and initiated him a few days later. Dr Shastri adds, ‘This is the way to get rid of “my-ness”... Let us live in the feeling “all belongs to God, including myself... I am not the body, not the mind, not the owner of the family, of the home, of the property.”’

In spite of the fact that it often overlaps with the *saguna* forms of the devotional movement, it is possible to identify certain attitudes and practices which are particularly characteristic of the Sants and by which their tradition may be recognized.

First, in keeping with the path of devotion to the formless aspect of Brahman, the Sants tend to reject, or at least to minimize, the outward forms of religion. The early Sants represented what amounted to a

revolt against conventional religion and the social structures which go with it. They opened their doors to Muslims and to the lowest Hindu castes, and were often themselves of low caste. The impedimenta of established religion were largely rejected. The Sants believe that the true spiritual life is essentially interior and rooted not in book-learning or ritual, but in immediate personal experience. Only the interior transformation of the soul matters:

Why do you cry and shout in the Mosque? [asks Kabir in one of his poems]. Is your God deaf?  
Even the rhythm of the ant's moving feet  
Is heard by Him.  
[And addressing himself now to the Hindus]:  
To wear garlands and rosaries and keep your hair uncombed  
Is of little use,  
If your heart harbours the daggers of infidelity!

And Nanak, who may have been a disciple of Kabir, writes:

If I am made a king, I am not elated,  
If a beggar, I am not sorrowful;  
Whatever comes is good to me; thus do I live.  
Neither unbelief nor Islam do I embrace,  
I have nothing to gain from religious creeds;  
I am neither Hindu, Moslem, Jew nor Christian;  
My way is different from theirs.

Temple worship, the ritual of the Brahmins and the hardly less elaborate ritual of the *saguna bhaktis* directed to Krishna or Rama, holy places and great pilgrimages such as that to Mecca — all these were seen as part of the great game, the world illusion by which we fill our lives with ultimately useless activity, and in doing so cut ourselves off from the all-important inner experience of contact with Brahman, our own innermost reality. Kabir writes:

O simple traveller, this life will pass for you in vain,  
You came here for a specific purpose  
And have wasted your days in useless pursuits;

How can you cross the sea of becoming in this wise?  
Kabir says: They alone do so easily  
Who repeat the name of God with love.

Repeating the name of God with love — this for the Sants is of the greatest importance, and a second characteristic mark. While *saguna bhaktas*, the devotees of Krishna or of Rama or other forms of the deity, channel much of their devotion through the outward forms of daily religious ritual and temple worship, the Sants, ever conscious of the formless and ineffable nature of Brahman, channel their love and devotion through the chanting of the holy name, or *Nam*. For this is the way in which the individual ego, the *ahankara* or sense of 'I-ness' which keeps us separated from our own inner reality, can be dislodged from the centre of our being — where it normally rules, keeping our attention fixed on our individual interests and preventing any expansion of consciousness. Kabir writes in another poem:

O simple man, why dost thou not repeat the holy name of God?  
It is useless deliberating again and again;  
A blind man needs light and that light is the holy name;  
In that light the Invisible becomes visible;  
O light the inner lamp!

But what, for the Sants, is the name of God? The answer is that any and every name of God is the name of God. It does not matter so long as one knows that it is God — the ultimate reality and truth — to which one's devotion is directed. The name used is of secondary importance and tends to vary from group to group. But for the Sants it always refers to the formless or *nirguna Brahman*, the ultimate reality hidden, not only in the depths of the cosmos, but equally in the depths of the human heart. Kabir, for example, frequently speaks of Rama in his verses, but this name means for him not the heroic and saintly figure of the great epic — the Lord Rama worshipped by Tulsidas and other *saguna* devotees — but the formless, ineffable and all-pervasive *Parabrahman*, at once immanent and transcendent. And so he writes:

Though near, yet hidden from our eyes,  
Such is my Rama!  
He abides in all and knows all,  
Yet he is distinct from the world.  
Some worship saints and prophets,  
Others pray to images in the temples ...

And he adds at the end of the poem:  
I find Him by fixing my mind in devotion on my Guru.

Here is another distinguishing mark of the Sant tradition. The concept of the guru or spiritual guide is of course virtually universal in Hinduism, but it attained a new urgency and vitality with the Sants. Whereas the *saguna bhaktis* had the forms of Rama or of Krishna on which to concentrate the full force of their devotion, so that the guru played a relatively secondary role as a teacher and spiritual father, the Sants, as devotees of the formless *Parabrahman*, had no comparable form on which to focus. The guru provided them with a definite and accessible form, through which devotion could be directed.

As one who has himself attained the spiritual end of life, and whose only remaining purpose is to help others do the same, the guru was seen as a form of divine grace. For the Sants, it is through him — or sometimes her, because for the Sants women have the same spiritual potential as men — that the highest purpose of life may be attained. In this way the *nirguna bhakti* of the Sants often becomes in practice *guru bhakti*. Guru and deity become closely identified. For some the inner deity or *Parabrahman* is the interior guru existing in the heart. For many more the guru is understood as virtually identical with the highest reality. This special devotion directed to the guru was expressed by characteristic expressions coined by the Sants, such as *guru-deva* — ‘divine guru’ — and *Sadguru*, ‘the true guru’. These terms are often used by Kabir, who writes for example:

Except my Guru-deva, I have not met any who could hold my heart.  
All others appear to be consumed in a fire of their own lighting  
And are unable to extinguish it.

Several other notable ideas which have been given strong emphasis by the *Sant Math* and, when taken together help to distinguish them, may be briefly mentioned. The most important is the concept of a definite spiritual path, or *panth*, to use the Hindi word, carefully preserved and handed down through a chain of Mahatmas and gurus, and without the benefit of which one is in danger of wasting the precious opportunity which human life offers. Related to this is the idea of initiation, called by the Sants *diksha*, and marking the stages on the way. Another related idea is that of what is called *Sat Sang*, the meeting of devotees to share their spiritual delight and common dedication — an inner community or spiritual fellowship which travels on the path by the grace of the guru, and which exists more as an inward spiritual bond than as a matter of external form. ‘Seek the company of the Good,’ writes Kabir in one of the poems Dr Shastri translated, ‘for it is there He has His dwelling place!’

Our true nature is a changeless awareness, or consciousness, which lies behind the mind. The constant activity of the mind is not a help, but an obstacle blocking our access to this deeper reality. In this connection, and after discussing the *Vedanta* doctrine of *avidya* or ‘wrong knowledge’ as the cause of suffering, as it is found in the *shastras* or traditional texts, Dr Shastri turns once again to the Sants with these words:

Now as the Mahatmas explain it. One explanation is as the Shastras, and the other as the Mahatmas explain it. The latter is simple, direct and very telling. What is this *avidya*? This *avidya* that you are talking of is our mind, our mind, our mind... this ever active mind, clogged with desires and aversions, intoxicated with self-sufficiency, pride, conceit, *ahankara* (the ego-sense)... To negate our *avidya* we must negate our mind... What Swami Sacchidanandaji said about this matter, I think you know: ‘If you want to conquer an enemy, you want to know the strength of its fort, the position of the fortifications, the disposition of its army. If you want to destroy [the dominance of] the mind... destroy its strongest position, and that is, that you think it is real. Negate it by always thinking that this mind is unreal, its creations are unreal, its relationships are unreal, and that all its functions lead eventually to a greater and greater bondage of the soul’... This is how the Mahatmas teach. The value of *Sat Sang* is that the Mahatmas throw

a light on these questions in a way which is quite different from the *Shastrika* or dialectical way.

In later centuries, as one would expect, the Sant tradition gave rise to a number of subsidiary groups. There sprang up movements devoted to preserving the memory and teachings of some of the early poet-saints: the *Kabir-panthis*, claiming to follow the path or *panth* of Kabir, the *Dadu-panthis*, the *Nanak-panthis* and the *Raidasis* or followers of Ravi Das. Perhaps not all of these later developments would have been welcomed by those after whom they were named, as in focusing on a particular figure, they tended to lose the purity of the original devotion to the *nirguna* or formless Brahman. Dr Shastri had reservations about the teachings of the *Kabir-panthis*; and from the *Nanak-panthis* there developed the religion of the Sikhs and the later growth of militant attitudes — perhaps not without some justification, but certainly not to be found in the life of Nanak himself or the words he has left us.

Nevertheless, the original Sant tradition in its purity is still to be found in its original homeland of northern India and among the Mahatmas of the Himalayan foothills. If you read Dr Shastri's description of the life of his own teacher, Shri Dada of Aligarh, in *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*, you find there the two traditions, the metaphysical teachings of Advaita Vedanta and the devotion and practical methods of the Sants, blended into a seamless whole, and bringing wisdom and relief from suffering to both learned and sophisticated persons and to the simplest, poorest Indian villagers.

The ideas of the Sants remain very much alive in India, and it is not without interest that Gandhi is sometimes described as a modern Sant. Certainly, Shri Dada himself shows many of the features of the Sants. Whilst it is true that he was not by any means exclusively a *nirguna bhakta*, and we often find him speaking of Krishna and Rama with love, yet devotion to the formless *Parabrahman* is also very prominent in the picture Dr Shastri has left us. The touching scene in which he softens the heart of a conceited and westernized Indian medical officer, while the disciple Sahaja sings a song of Kabir, is pure Sant tradition. Like the Sants, Shri Dada tended to reject outer forms and the

limitations which come with them. He showed consistent understanding of, and sympathy for, the Muslims he encountered, even under difficult circumstances, and for the Sufis in particular. Although born into a wealthy Brahmin family, he refused to exclude anyone, showed great concern for the Untouchables in the places he lived, and taught all without distinction of caste, sex or social position, while himself living a life of great simplicity and indeed poverty. He had very few books and was not able to read Sanskrit.

On the other hand Dr Shastri was a very considerable Sanskrit scholar; but he balanced his knowledge of Advaita Vedanta with the tradition of the Sants which he had inherited. Like Shri Dada, he was in deep sympathy with the Sants. 'The duty of a teacher', he once said, 'is to teach you how to find the answer in your own heart... not to give you any dogma' — a view identical to that of the Sants. He points out that the whole of one of the spiritual classics which he translated, the *Avadhut Gita*, expresses devotion to the formless or *nirguna Brahman*, and that our true nature is a changeless awareness or consciousness which lies behind the mind.

You might remember that some words of Dr Shastri were cited above in which he spoke of Swami Sacchidanandaji as someone he had known personally, describing him as 'a saint following the tradition of *Santa Math*'. Swami Sacchidanandaji died in northern India in 1950, at the age of roughly ninety. Dr Shastri often spoke of him, describing him as a perfect Mahatma, and it is clear that he learnt from him and retained the greatest respect for him. There is no better way of ending this short introduction to the tradition of the Sants or Mahatmas than with a poem, translated by Dr Shastri, in which Swami Sacchidananda tells us of his own experience. These are his words:

Since I became absorbed in my real Self,  
My joy is beyond description!  
The world is a dream,  
And I alone exist.  
I have seen God in my own Self;  
I am One, there is no duality;

Verily there is neither Self nor God.  
Him, 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 shewed his grace to me,  
The secret has been revealed.  
Illusion is dispelled, no doubt remains;  
I have negated name and form;  
What remains is Existence, Knowledge, Bliss,  
And nothing else, and nothing else.

S.C.

### THE LOTUS OF THE HEART

*A free rendering of some verses from the Chandogya Upanishad*

Here, in the citadel of God, there is a little lotus. In it is a smaller inner space. It is His palace. We must find out what is within it. As great as yonder sky, so is this space within the heart. Within it heaven and earth are both contained; both fire and wind; both sun and moon, lightning and stars; both what a man possesses here, and what he does not possess. All that is gathered together in it; all who belong to us; both those still living here on earth and those who are departed; also all else we long for and do not obtain — we find, when we go there to God — within the lotus of the heart.

Just as men walking to and fro over a hidden treasure, find it not if they do not know the place, even thus, people about us day by day, go to that realm of God and find it not — because they are hindered by untruth.

How then can I find Him in my heart? Through self-effacement, devotion, charity, meditation and true service rendered to others and the Teacher.

H.P.S.

## History

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THE STUDY OF HISTORY has always been accepted by spiritual leaders as of the first importance. We find that Confucius himself was a teacher of history, that Goethe considered its study to be second only to the study of music in the education of a child, and the great modern Indian Saint, Shri Dada of Aligarh, held it to be of pre-eminent value. The writers of history, the historians themselves, have not always risen to the high level of their subject, for they have often sacrificed truth in the interest of nationalism, and the personal views of the writers have in many cases so distorted the facts that the coming generations are influenced rather by the prejudices, the likes and dislikes of the historian, than by the subject itself. The real reason for defeat, the faults and failures of a nation and its leaders, are carefully concealed, and so the student is often unable to discern the lessons his study should reveal. So long as man is ruled by egoism, so long will this distortion of fact continue.

How then can we know the truth? Truth cannot be hidden forever, for, like fire, it will set ablaze that which attempts to smother it, and so draw the attention of the student to those very errors the historian had tried to conceal, and in the end the lesson is revealed, at any rate to those with an alert and understanding mind.

What are the lessons of history? The first is that kings and dynasties, nations and civilisations, are all subject to growth and decay, for there is nothing permanent about them, and nothing exclusive to any nation or any group. This in itself is no mean lesson. Then there is the Law of Righteousness, which operates through nations as through individuals, and which leads to that peace and harmony known to those who do not oppose it. No country can, for long, ignore this law, though man, in his ignorance, may believe that deceit and cunning and self-seeking bring the reward he desires. At first this may not appear to be so, but this is the greatest of all lessons, for we see how terrible is the fate of those who oppose or ignore the Law of Righteousness

once it has been revealed to them.

The struggles and creative efforts of a man's life make history, but what is the true aim of mankind, what is its real goal? They are blind who think that man's activities are confined by the laws of time and space, and that he can only make progress subject to these limitations, for the real truth is that potentially he is free to transcend both, and indeed when he fails to attempt this, his apparent worldly success frequently ends in disappointment and disaster.

Columbus is normally considered to be one of the great discoverers of the world, but if we examine his career what do we find? In spite of his many gifts, high courage, great physical endurance and a genius for organisation and leadership, his end was obscure, for his motive was self-aggrandizement and his heart was full of greed and lust for power.

History is indeed a mirror in which those who will may discern the real causes of the rise and fall of men and nations. Spengler has said that men are organisms and that culture is their biography. If we substitute the word 'history' for culture, we shall be nearer the truth. Indeed man has produced culture, he has produced civilization, but if we test it by a higher law, are its benefits so precious after all? We live in a world surrounded by the so-called advantages of civilization — labour-saving devices and skyscrapers — but are we happier, are we healthier than primitive man living in his cave? Emphatically, no!

Goethe reminds us that the apprentice, who is the hero of *Wilhelm Meister*, was in reality destined to be a torchbearer, one who, by the light of his inner experience, is able to guide those of his fellow men who are lost in the darkness of their own ignorance. Such people should be the product of civilization. Herbert Spencer defined history as a record of the misdemeanours of kings, but history has other events and other individuals to chronicle, and does not exist merely to dilate on, or to conceal, the worldly lives of kings and emperors.

No far-seeing historian can ignore man's effort to cultivate human thought and enlightenment, to the end that his fellow men may become better human beings and wiser citizens, not of one country only, but of

the world itself. Who have been the torchbearers of history, who have helped to guide man's spiritual growth and to make him realize the true destiny of mankind? Surely Confucius and Buddha, Chuang Tzu and Ashoka, Socrates and Zeno are of this number and deserve that their names should be written in letters of gold, for they have, by their example, shown man what his real life could be. Man is a creator and a builder, but that which he builds must have an inner and permanent value. According to Aristotle, the highest value is happiness. But happiness is contingent on truth, and so lovers of truth — the 'torchbearers' — outlive, in the world of reality, the men of worldly attainments, such as Columbus and Magellan, who failed because their lives left the soul of man untouched, and what his soul is — so is man. Until this is realized by the historians, true history cannot be written.

It has been said that man has justified his existence if he leaves the world better than he finds it. This would be true if we realized what is meant by the word 'better'. Alas, too much stress is laid on material benefits. We think of worldly progress and forget the progress of the soul of man, which, through all these struggles, is reaching towards a higher goal. It is difficult to see eye to eye with Hegel in his contention that history shows the development of the idea of freedom. It seems that at the close of his life, Hegel was not the great thinker he was when he wrote his dialectics, for to him the freedom of the State is more important than the freedom of the individual. Without undervaluing the importance of the State, it is surely evident that it is made up of individuals, so unless each soul knows liberty and is free to develop its own *dharma*\*, that State, be it a monarchy or a democracy, Fascist or Nazi, is doomed, and doomed for ever.

Let us study history by all means, but with open eyes and a true set of values. Let us try to learn its spiritual lessons, and then instruct our heart and mind in the light of those lessons. Only by so doing shall we find that key which will unlock the secrets of history for us.

**H. P. Shastri**

\* Spiritual and moral duty.



**WHEREVER I LOOK**

Wherever I look, there is God and God alone.  
There is nothing which is separated from God.  
If God is in the beginning and God is at the end,  
Then now, also, there is God and God only  
And nothing beside Him.

Jewellery has its beginning and end in gold.  
Between, when it is jewellery, it is nought but gold.  
God Himself appears in every form,  
Somewhere as water, somewhere as fire.  
Here He is the earth, there He is the air.

Why do you search for Him in distant places  
And outside yourself?  
He is ever present and never hidden.  
What do you deem to be the world?  
It is in fact God and God alone,  
O unknowing one!

When you detach yourself from the theory of belief  
And see with the inner eye,  
Everything there is, is God and God alone.  
Everything abides in His existence.  
Nothing is born nor is there any becoming.

**H.P.S.**

A new edition has just been published of the *Ashtavakra Gita*, a work of special interest to those who wish to soak themselves in the pure non-dual teachings stated in the most direct way without rational embellishment. The new cover design features a Himalayan mountain peak rising above the cloud canopy, reflecting the sense and majesty of the teachings of the Sage Ashtavakra to his pupil King Janaka. The book contains some three hundred verses in twenty chapters. Of such teachings Swami Rama Tirtha said: 'A single verse appeals to the heart and reasserts the godhead; it rends asunder the veil of *Maya*'. The book is currently available post-free to *Self-Knowledge* readers.

During the Spring term a series of talks was given at Shanti Sadan on Wednesday evenings on the theme *Insights and Meditations from the Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*. Each of the presentations included a talk and a practical meditation session, and printed details of the practices were provided for those who wished to take them up regularly. These talks were well-received and a similar series is planned for the Summer term.

On Sunday 1 March was held the Spring 2009 course on *Yoga of Self-Knowledge - Realizing the Divinity Within*. On this occasion the timing was adjusted to fit the three talks and two meditation sessions into an afternoon. The meeting passed in an atmosphere of peaceful concentration, and this format will be adopted again of the Summer course.

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AFTERNOON COURSE SUMMER 2009

**The Yoga of Universal Wisdom**

Sunday 7 June 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2

Talk One: *The Inner and Outer Worlds*

First Meditation Practice

Talk Two: *Clearing the Mist in the Mind*

Second Meditation Practice

Talk Three: *The Liberating Truth*