

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.

EVENTS FOR THE SPRING TERM 2009

Evening Lectures and Meditations at Shanti Sadan

The Wednesday evening meetings will include talks on 'Insights and Meditations from the Heart of the Easter Mystical Teaching' followed by meditation practice. The Friday meetings will cover different aspects of the Yoga of Self-Knowledge. The term runs from Wednesday January 21st until Friday March 27th.

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The Divinity of Man

An ancient fable tells how a lion cub strayed from its den and wandered into a sheep pasture. The cub was as yet unschooled in the ways of lions, and caused no fright to the sheep, who accepted his presence without much interest. Needing nourishment, the cub resorted to nibbling grass, just like the sheep, and even tried to imitate their meek bleats and baas.

Some days later, a great lion emerged from the forest that adjoined the hills overlooking the pastureland. He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his tawny offspring browsing among the woolly ones. He sprang into the pasture; the sheep dispersed, but the cub, due to some primal instinct, was unperturbed and continued munching the grass.

'What is this?', roared the lion. 'How is it that you have become identified with these sheep?' But the cub could only bleat in response and give no explanation. The lion seized the cub by the scruff of the neck and carried him to a nearby stream. He held him over the water, so that both their images were reflected. 'Do you not see that you are not a sheep? You are a lion — a king among beasts — just as I am. It

is time for you to shake off this error.’

The lion then brought the cub some real food and, after partaking of it, released a great roar of satisfaction. The cub took the hint, realized his true nature as a lion, and gave a spirited growl.

Our true nature is divine. The essence of our being is unchanged amid the flux of thought and the reshaping of our bodies, and is pure Spirit, infinite, immortal, transcending both matter and mind. But, like the lion cub who took on the ways of the sheep, we appear to have forgotten our true nature and become identified with the mind and its thoughts, hopes and fears. The true situation is indicated in *Training the Mind through Yoga*:

Our natural position is the position of a king on his throne, but it has become habitual to us to be dictated to, and governed by the mind, the senses and events. If man’s nature is royal, the senses should be his servants, and no dictation by them should be tolerated. This normal status is demonstrated by the saints and enlightened men of all times and climes. They have based themselves on their true nature, which is detached from, and far beyond, the oscillations of any plane.

The enlightened teachers of mankind come as ‘lions among men’ to awaken us to the reality of our true Self. Just as the lion held his cub over the water in order to drive home its true identity, the sages reveal to us that we are far greater than we know. We are essentially that same Reality that they know themselves to be. Following the path to the higher Self-knowledge, and employing the means to control and tranquillize the mind, the seeker will become a Self-discoverer.

This revelation of the divinity of man is to be found in all the great scriptures and is the central message of *Adhyatma Yoga*. Within man is the supreme Self, the *Adhyatma*, and it is his true nature. At present he may appear, in the words of Hamlet, to be “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought”, and to seem to belong to his thoughts and feelings as a bond-slave. The path of Yoga will reverse this anomalous situation. This is true sovereignty and the key to real happiness, for, in the words of the sage Vasishta: ‘The kings of the earth in their earthly capitals are not as happy as are the lords of the cities of their own bodies and the masters of their own minds.’

Simple Men

THE DISSATISFACTION and general discontentment which characterize an average man’s soul indicate that his life is not on the right lines, his soul is not searching for real good in a serious way, that he is wavering in his aim, and that his vision of the goal of life is dim.

An unrestrained and indiscriminate devotion to sense objects, pursuit of excitement and sense-pleasure fatigues the soul. It is not a right and profitable use of the life energy. It shows that the emotion of love is wrongly directed. It means that man does not create beauty of conduct and forms of truth and does not do his best in the interests of others.

An examination of the state of one’s egoity is essential to a right life. If there is inordinate vanity, pride, conceit and self-importance, then the soul of man is ill. It will produce agitation, unrest and an aimless life. If education, society, art and pursuit of religious ends do not give creative peace, love of man and devotion to God, they are not right.

There was a little village in the valley of the Shivalik hills. The folk were simple and worked agriculturally. They were illiterate but devoted to virtue. Their family life was peaceful, and though poor, they were contented. Each house had its own cow to provide milk, and the kitchen-garden yielded the vegetables they needed. Each home was open to a stranger for a meal, rest and general hospitality. There was a simple temple of Shiva in the village where the male population gathered in the cool summer evenings for worship. The people did not need a doctor, except in very special cases.

In that valley I was in charge of a secondary school, at Chartgarh, between the years 1906 and 1908. Let me give a picture of one of the men of the village.

His name was Chit Rama. He was about forty-five years of age. He owned a plot of land, which he cultivated diligently. His wife, a good conservative woman of religious nature, kept house for him and looked after the family. She was highly moral, loyal, faithful and diligent. She was a loving soul and worked hard the whole day. She looked after the cow, made butter and cooked good meals. She did her worship to God with a rosary about one hour each day. She helped the neighbours in case of need.

The man worked in the field the whole day. In the very hot summer he was in his field, covered with perspiration. I often saw him at work when I went out for a walk. He greeted me kindly and often brought some fresh vegetables and milk as his free gifts to a stranger.

I asked myself: 'What keeps this man so peaceful and so hard at work in the field?' I cultivated his acquaintance and read short passages of the *Ramayana* to him when he visited me in the evening. I learned that he worked hard without any ambition or complaint.

When he returned home at sunset, he received a most hearty welcome from his devoted wife. His grand-daughter, a chubby child of five, waited with cold water. She threw her arms round the man and gave him an affectionate hug. The welcome was most sincere and affectionate. It relieved him of his fatigue and made him cheerful. He sat on a mat of straw in the courtyard, and his good woman brought his hubble-bubble. As he smoked, he chatted with her.

Two strangers who were travelling through the village came. They were received cordially and asked to stay for a simple meal. A wandering old Sadhu of about fifty came with his stringed instrument and sweetly sang a few songs of Guru Nanak. He too was given dry grain and rice. After the meal the party went to the little temple and joined in the worship of Shiva, conducted by an old Brahmin of some education.

The service over, the people talked in the open field of Rama and Sita and enjoyed the cool summer breezes in the open air. Some of the young ones sang songs in the Punjabi dialect to the accompaniment of string instruments.

It was this home life of real love, peace, hospitality and devotion, which kept the man hard at work in the field. He was a complete stranger to politics. Nature was his sweet friend and religion his main solace in life. At harvest time the poor were given the grain liberally in charity. No one was disappointed.

In the summer moonlit nights, as the cool breezes swept over the valley, I invited the people to listen to readings of *Ramayana* which I gave. They came with reverence and brought baskets of green vegetables as gifts. I prepared halva and distributed it among them, as prasad (food traditionally shared after a spiritual meeting).

There was a real peace among these simple folk. Burglary, theft, cheating and lying were unknown. I formed civil courts for them. They settled their civil differences without litigation.

When I left the village, some two hundred of them came to see me off with jars of honey, fresh butter and other things. Many were in tears as I said goodbye to them. A few of them are still corresponding with me. Each letter contains an invitation and request for darshana.* The school still flourishes and is not a high school. The literature of Shanti Sadan is in the library, and they subscribe to our quarterly.

What do you think of these simple folk and their life? May Dada grant the same peace to us all.

Hari Prasad Shastri

* Darshana: physical proximity (literally 'sight') of a holy man, to receive his blessing and teachings.

THE PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

The Purpose of Life

OUR WAKING lives consist largely of purposes and plans. Without a purpose and a commitment to fulfilling it, time hangs its head heavily. We may choose to let time pass while we are resting between bouts of goal directed activity, but we believe that time is there to be used to best effect.

Once we have a purpose and a direction, everything divides itself into things which will assist its fulfilment and those that will not. If we are hungry, there are for us two categories, the edible and the inedible. If we want to go somewhere, there are roads to take and roads to avoid. If we want to achieve something, there are people who will help us and others who will not. Devoid of purpose, all paths are equally pointless and all people equally useless to us.

However, although we are all familiar with this statement of the obvious — that our purposes give our lives meaning — we find the question of an overall purpose or meaning of life puzzling. Is there really an overall purpose to human life which would be common to a tribesman in Papua New Guinea, a dealer in commodity futures in New York and a ski instructor in the Alps? The variety of human life, language and circumstance seems to rule out the possibility of an overarching meaning. The question of life's meaning is hardly addressed in the media, and the modern world ignores it. The particular purposes we have are easy to understand, and in ordinary life seem to be sufficient to fill the time.

In traditional Hindu thought, there are three ordinary goals of life which seem to encapsulate the facts quite well. *Artha* is wealth, and the pursuit of it keeps us quite busy throughout our working lives. *Kama* means principally bringing up a family, but also includes the pursuit of legitimate pleasure. It has been identified as the life-purpose which we share with the animal kingdom. *Dharma* means law, fulfilling one's duty in life, conformity to good behaviour and conduct, righteousness, a proper respect for religion.

It would seem to be quite easy to fit ninety-five per cent of human activity into these categories and illustrate how much people of

different cultures have in common. A cosmopolitan person knows well that wherever one goes, people are very similar and are motivated by a quite small set of desires. A good-hearted person will be recognized as such anywhere in the world.

However, there is a fourth purpose or goal in the Hindu system, called *moksha* or liberation. The first three goals do not take the soul off the wheel of birth and death. *Moksha*, on the other hand, frees the soul from all limitations, restrictions and conditions whatsoever, conferring full and total satisfaction and peace. It is like a trump card because the three lower goals of life find their fulfilment in this state, as all desires are fulfilled, all duties done and all wealth is attained.

Particular religions may be more or less bound up with the three ordinary goals of human life, but the great religions have all held out the possibility of such a state to their adherents. The state of nirvana or enlightenment, which is the climax of the noble eightfold path in Buddhism, is the same as *moksha*.

In all traditional cultures, we find clear indications of the overall purpose of life which, though expressed in words, are spiritual or transcendent in nature. The modern world is strange in not having any answer to the question of the meaning and purpose of existence, and that is why it feels death to be an affront.

The path of Yoga also holds the real purpose of life to be spiritual, and as the sage Shri Dada of Aligarh once said: 'Wisdom consists in discovering the real purpose of life and the means to achieve it.' This means far more than finding a formula in words. It is a very deep thing. We need to know the purpose and also, like ordinary purposes, we need to know what to do and what to avoid in order to fulfil it.

The word 'spiritual' is popular these days but also vague. Dr Shastri wrote an essay called 'The Concrete Spiritual' because the way to liberation was anything but vague from where he stood. The first thing to understand is that enlightenment is a natural state, and the path to it is like the return of a drunken man to sobriety. Just as a piece of rubber, when twisted, will return to its natural shape when released; so, too, the human mind, when liberated from the conditioning imposed by habit and convention, is destined to 'revert' to full spiritual awareness.

We may remember in Jesus's parable of the prodigal son, the son

squanders his inheritance in reckless excess and ends up as a swineherd feeding pigs and wishing he could fill his empty belly with the bean pods they were eating. It was one of those moments when you ask yourself a few questions like, 'Is this really what I want? Do I really have to do this? How have I ended up here? Have I not made a complete fool of myself?' There is such psychological truth in the stories Jesus told. When the consequences of our own folly are laid out before us, we have the chance of being sincere. The text goes on to say, 'He came to himself.' This is really a summary of the spiritual path. Nothing can stop anyone coming to him or herself at any time, but somehow we go somewhere else and get lost. So the prodigal son, in the extremity of his need, comes to himself. He realizes that he is still a son even if he has disgraced himself. He is still known. He decides to arise and go to his father, and take up a lowly position in the ranks of the servants.

When he finally arrives, his father runs out to meet him and a great feast is held. We can say that the son experiences a greater 'coming to himself' which was neither expected nor deserved.

Yoga is precisely 'returning to oneself'. But this may not seem much to us. The American writer Mark Twain once made a perceptive remark, 'In his heart of hearts, no man respects himself much.' We see wonderful qualities in some of those around us, to the point where we may wish to worship and adore them. But when it comes to ourselves, we have long and intimate experience and know what to expect. However, this is a grievous error. Do we know ourselves? Do we feel that we have really plumbed the depths and scaled the heights of being human? We respect ourselves far too little and for the wrong things.

The Yoga teaches that along with our everyday self, the *ahankara*, each one of us has a deeper self of the nature of pure consciousness, called Atman. It is unknown in everyday experience to the point that its existence is not at all obvious, but it is knowable if the right means are adopted. It is like the light which projects the images of a film onto a screen. Everyone who watches the film is preoccupied with the action on the screen and ignores the light, but without the light, no one could see anything. A person who has come to know the light in himself is enlightened. Being at one with the innermost Self of all, one who is

spiritually illumined naturally emanates peace and benevolence wherever he or she goes.

This 'returning to oneself' starts with a conviction that we can better our condition, that there must be more to life; that one has lost oneself and can find oneself again. This is an inner search, and our age, gender, background and creed are irrelevant. What is necessary is to organize our soul, our inner world in a particular way, and then the full reality of our true Self will dawn. The organization of the soul may be compared to the journey of the prodigal son, and the arrival at his home to the full realisation. Dr Shastri wrote:

Our soul is plastic, supple, rational, instinctive, active and contemplative. 'Supple' means that you can mould it. You can make whatever you like of your soul. You can become a communist fanatic and put aside all moral obligations, or by self-control, study, self-abnegation and self-effacement you can mould it in the flame of divine light and you can become a seer. It is active and contemplative. The Yogi is a man who organizes his soul. An organism means many small disconnected things put together in order to create a whole. It is the duty of man to organize his soul, his instincts, his reason, his greed, his love of earthly things and his love of contemplation and transcendence, and to organize them into God. Each and every man himself can become God.

Why organize? Why not live like a dog? What is the supreme purpose? There is a spiritual purpose, and it is to dedicate the soul to the quest of transcendental reality. Above the world of relativity is the world of the absolute. Hegel has said that the world of spirit is the world without any conflict. It is the world of perfection, and this we call the world of transcendence. We are here to know the purpose of life and then pursue that purpose with determination. The purpose is to organize our personality and to dedicate the organized personality to the knowledge of the transcendental reality above all relativity. Nothing which is relative satisfies the soul for long. The spirit, which is the essence of the universe and of matter, is comparable to the oil in the seed, the fragrance in the rose and heat in fire; and when withdrawing our mind from our world of relativity, we consciously contemplate this unity, infinity and transcendence in our being, then we have divine

light and realize the meaning of truth and the meaning of spirit.

This is the spiritual life. I have endeavoured to remove all vagueness from your mind and to make it clear cut for you.

Every human being has the potential to turn within and receive light and inspiration from the depths of his own self. What is required is the organization of the personality on the basis of the real purpose of life. We each have many demands on our time, but if we are sincere in our spiritual quest, we will find a way of giving it priority. The monks in many monasteries pray seven times a day; the Moslem prays five times a day; the orthodox Jew has a prayer for every activity of life. All these spiritual efforts build up an atmosphere in which the higher qualities of human nature can manifest themselves.

Modern life offers an infinity of distractions to keep us on the surface of life and fritter away our time. We need to clear spaces in our routine in order to pursue the higher purpose, and we need to clear them today, because tomorrow never comes. Let us consider one thing we can do to help ourselves.

Whenever we read a book, we pick up the subtle qualities of the writer, because the topics they choose to write about, the words they use and the way they put things bears the imprint of their mind. The response evoked in us depends upon the part of their mind from which they write. It is the same with the conversations we have and the company we keep. If we keep company with people who are principally money-minded, our cupidity is likely to be stimulated. Companionship with people of learning, and participation in the exchange of ideas in a good conversation, will stimulate our desire to learn. And association with the spiritually-minded will gradually draw out the spiritual qualities that are latent within us, and encourage us to give first place to our spiritual interests. Our soul, as Dr Shastri said, is plastic and supple.

Even at an advanced age, one can turn one's mind and then one's whole being towards the inner light.

A simple way to evoke the spiritual side of one's mind is to read spiritual literature. *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*, by Hari Prasad Shastri, recently republished by Shanti Sadan, sheds a

flood of light on the spiritual life and shows how *Adhyatma Yoga* may be successfully practised in daily life. The book tells the story of his teacher, Shri Dada of Aligarh, against the background of the end of the Victorian era. The author is present as a silent witness and never mentions himself, as is the case with the Fourth Gospel. Shri Dada was perhaps the first to banish caste distinctions amongst his followers, and gave initiations to those who were ready, without any reference to their gender or caste. He took particular care of the untouchables in all the towns where he lived.

The circumstances of the book's composition are worth taking note of. Dr Shastri would make regular expeditions to the coast or to a beauty spot with his friends, and there, when everyone was seated, he would simply dictate the next section of the book, starting from where he had left off and continuing until he had reached the end of the section. He might dictate for half an hour or more, and the words he uttered were carefully taken down by one or more of those present. This was done without any sign of effort or stress, without any stimulants like coffee or cigarettes. Dr Shastri clearly had a well organized mind. The book is written in a simple poetic style. There are Sanskrit words in it but there is a good glossary and people are more familiar with Hindu thought these days.

This book will evoke, in the receptive soul, a state close to that in which it was composed, a calm, clear, wise and inspired frame of mind in tune with the spiritual purpose of life.

Even a short time kept regularly every day to read works of spiritual inspiration or to take a few steps into the ocean of meditation has the most profound consequences. The great thing is to persevere. Even a little of this dharma, says the *Bhagavad Gita*, protects one from great danger. The time will come when you will see how the spiritual efforts you make, however fumbling and inadequate they may seem, have been the most important part of your life and miraculous in their effect.

The purpose of life is to know oneself. But this does not mean knowing one's tastes and tendencies, virtues and vices. It means knowing the deeper Self which lies hidden, unsuspected, in the depth of our being. The ordinary self is really a creature of the mind. If asked to describe oneself, one provides a history, a set of measurements, a

bank balance, a family tree — all words, names and symbols, the very stuff of the mind.

Considered as an object, the human mind must be the most astonishing thing in the world. It is the ability of the mind to form sophisticated models of physical reality which has led to the scientific world in which we live. It also has the ability to present a variety of pictures of oneself to different people, some of which, if we lack integrity, will be totally inconsistent.

The mind might be compared to an extremely flexible and supple set of hands for manipulating symbols. When combined with a powerful will, there is hardly anything it cannot achieve. But it is an organ, like a hand or foot. It stops working when we are in deep sleep and puts in an appearance in a shadowy way when we dream. Therefore the self of the mind also disappears and reappears like a Jack-in-the-Box when we wake up.

But the Atman, the true Self, is ever present as the thread of consciousness which runs through all states of mind. This Self is bliss, and this insight, revealed in the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, is the theme of several discourses in *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*. It is this ultimate self-bliss that we are unknowingly seeking in all our attempts to enjoy ourselves and avoid suffering, an iota of which momentarily fills our mind when a desire is gratified and the inner agitation is temporarily quelled. The source of bliss is within.

Yoga is startlingly bold in this teaching. In order to find the satisfaction and contentment and happiness we crave, we do not need more money, power, property, learning or physical pleasure. It is only necessary to comprehend our own nature better. This is the grand purpose of life, and in order to fulfil it we have to make many choices and cut out many hindrances from our lives in order to come home to our true Self.

As he strode away from the pig-sties, the prodigal son had a new hope in his heart which found a deeper fulfilment than he could have imagined when he reached his home. He would surely have agreed with Dr Shastri's short summary of Yoga when he said, 'The path is beautiful and so is the goal.'

A.S-B.

AL-ISM AL-A'ZAM

(The greatest name of Allah)

IT IS believed by the followers of holy Mohammed that somewhere amidst the rolling, thundering, soothing and terrifying sentences of the Quran is hidden the Great Name. It is the hundredth name of Allah, the self-illuminated One. The ninety-nine are openly mentioned, but the hundredth is a mystery, and he who knows it can control nature and work miracles by a mention of it. Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and a truly sincere disciple, is said to have known the Great Name. His exploits in the field, his wisdom in society, his deep devotion to Allah and the Prophet, are proverbial in Arab literature.

It seems that the Great Name was a mantra, the letters of which are scattered in the Quran and the key to which was in the hands of the initiated only. Thousands of scholars have devoted their lives to the attempt to discover the Name, and some are reputed to have known it.

All names are names of the modes or expressions of the ultimate Reality. It is sugar which gives the sweet flavour to the mango, the apple, the cherry, guava, persimmon, banana, etc. The Upanishad declares: 'He is the honey of all this.' Adhyatma Yoga says: 'He is the honey of existence.'

The most mysterious name, the one dearest to everybody, is 'I'. They who say the sweetest sentence, 'I love you', must know that it is the 'I' heading the sentence which makes it sweet. A king, a scholar, means little unless it is: 'I am a king, I am a scholar.' In the yoga terminology 'I' is called Atman or Self.

'I' is a self-revealed Truth: it needs no demonstration. To whatever 'I' is applied, it assumes a meaning and significance. Aristotle is only a name until we have 'My Aristotle'. 'My country, my mother, my religion', are made great by the association of 'I' with them. 'I' is above all; all is an expression of 'I'.

'I' is not the body; 'I' is not the mind; 'I' is not the feeling of love or joy or otherwise. It is a mystery. In this very short word, of one letter in English, is treasured all wisdom, all joy, all wealth, all that is desirable.

‘I’ is the best text for meditation, for study, for exposition. The highest knowledge is the knowledge of the knower.

There are not many ‘I’s’. ‘I’ is above time-space, and plurality cannot be attributed to it. ‘I’ is one. The ‘I’ of Heraclitus, the ‘I’ of Plato, the ‘I’ of Dante, the ‘I’ of Shakespeare and Goethe is one ‘I’. Let us say that all the ‘I’s’ are reflections of the one supreme ‘I’.

‘I am Truth’, said Hallaj. Do you also find out the true meaning of ‘I’ and use it in its right sense. ‘I’ being universal, beyond time-space on account of its witnesshood of the many, is infinite, immortal and immutable. ‘I’ is God.

‘I’ must part company with all that is perishable, passing and mutable, a source of grief, and Atman must not associate itself with any object of the world. ‘I’ am all; there is no duality in ‘I’. None is a stranger to me. ‘I’ am all. OM!

Hari Prasad Shastri

POEM BY NAZIR

Spring in this garden we call the world, is transient,
Enjoy it without attachment, for it lasts but a day.
O Traveller, prepare to depart,
Your stay here is brief — it lasts but a day.
When they asked Hippocrates how long he had lived,
He wrung his hands and exclaimed: ‘I have lived but a day’.
O my Friends, soon we shall part,
Our companionship is brief — it lasts but a day.
O Tyrants, why do you inflict such grief on the innocent?
Know you not that your power is transitory — it lasts but a day?
O Nazir, know well that your stay in the tomb will seem long,
But remember that this life is brief.
It lasts but a day.

Translated by **H.P.S.**

The Poet Tulsidas as a Spiritual Teacher

JUST AS everyone, scholars and critics alike, accepts Kalidasa as the greatest Sanskrit poet of ancient India, so do they all accept Tulsidas as the greatest Hindi poet of medieval India. And yet, just as virtually nothing is known for certain about the life of Kalidasa, so virtually nothing is known about the life of Tulsidas. We are indeed a bit better off in regard to Tulsidas. He tells us that he began his *magnum opus* in 1574. This was in Ayodhya, birth-place of Rama, the deity whom he worshipped. Later he came to live in the city that is today known as Varanasi. It is slightly to the east of the middle of the great plain running West to East across the whole of northern India, the basin of the Ganges, bounded to the north by the Himalayas. Varanasi is on one of those specially holy spots on the Ganges where it turns up for a few miles to flow north, and Tulsi lived at the extreme southern tip of it, in what was then the village of Assi — it is the ‘assi’ at the end of Varanasi.

According to tradition, he died there in 1623. The place and date of his birth are much disputed, but the good scholar, Mala Prasad Gupta, thinks it was probably in 1545, at a place called Rajapur on the banks of the Jumna, which would yield a life of 78 years, bestriding the reigns of the Moghul Emperor Akbar and his son Jahangir; a relatively good time for the Hindus, before fundamentalism again raised its ugly head with Emperor Shah Jahan.

There are just a few autobiographical hints in Tulsidas’s work. The most shocking is his bitter complaint against his parents, that they turned him out of the house when he was yet a child and told him he could go and beg his bread in the streets like a dog. Some say that this was just a poetic way of saying that they died. Others take the words literally and think that there may have been some family upheaval, due to a superstition about the date of his birth — it was at that time thought that people born on certain days of the year would never be able to marry and have children and carry on the line of the family.

Whatever the true reason, we may conjecture that his experience of extreme poverty must have been a factor in his intimate knowledge of and sympathy with the lives of the poor. On the other hand, we have no means of explaining how he acquired his excellent knowledge of

Sanskrit in such difficult conditions of life. His great work, the *Rama Carit Manas* or Hindi *Ramayana*, retells the life of the deity Rama in the local language of the people of Varanasi. As he himself remarks in the course of it, it is based on several sources found in the ancient Sanskrit language.

Of course the great epic poem telling the story of the life of Rama, the *Ramayana of Valmiki*, translated in three volumes by our teacher, Hari Prasad Shastri, supplies the framework. But Tulsidas was, if anything, more influenced by a work called the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, appended to the *Brahmanda Purana*, a work which, as its title suggests, emphasizes the spiritual context of the story of Rama at the expense of the lavish epic and heroic detail provided by Valmiki.

Tulsidas's life-work was to bring out the ancient spiritual teaching of the Hindu traditions in the language of the people. It is a curious fact that, although the religious traditions of India, in the form we know them today, go back a good one thousand five hundred years before the spread of Christianity in Europe, the attempts to extract the teachings from the learned language of the priests and present it in the language of the people, only began in northern India at the same time as they happened in England and Europe, that is, about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD. In England, Wycliffe began to translate the Bible at the end of the fourteenth century, and he inspired the Lollards in England and Huss and others on the continent to carry on the work in Europe, which ultimately led to the Reformation and a more personal and individual conception of religion. At the same time there were saints, both men and women, in the Rhineland, the Netherlands and England, ultimately in Italy, France and even Spain, who were giving spiritual teaching in the vernacular. However, if we say that the effort to bring the traditional teachings to the people in the vernacular was roughly contemporaneous in north India, we should not forget that the whole process had happened much earlier in south India.

The Alvars were 12 saint-poets, who lived about 800 AD in the area of Madras, who poured forth devotional poetry in love of God in the form of the deity Krishna in the language of the people of that part, today called Tamil. One was a king, another a woman, and there were several outcastes. Popular Krishna-worship has a reputation for having a certain rakish or Bohemian character, in that Krishna's relationship

with the young women of Braj is painted as becoming frankly erotic, after he had grown up from being a small child. Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of the poetry was religious and indeed mystical, and not erotic in the true worldly sense. Between the tenth and twelfth centuries, some great acharyas and scholar-devotees, notably Nath Muni and Ramanujacharya, took up patronage of the songs of the Alvars, and wrote philosophical works in Sanskrit, the polished language of the nobles and priests, commentaries on the Upanishads and Gita, in which they interpreted these ancient classics in a new way, in the light of the burning devotion of these devotional songs.

Ramanuja contrived to give the songs the respectability of being acknowledged as valuable by Brahmins, without himself insisting on caste distinctions for his followers. Chronology is vague, but perhaps a generation or two later, one of his followers brought the new ideas on devotion and absence of caste restrictions up north to Varanasi; and the devotional schools of northern India were brought into being by his pupil, Ramananda. Among the latter's pupils were Kabir, the weaver, Sena the tailor, Ramdas the skinner and Pipa the Rajput prince.

The most important thing for us about Ramananda was his championship of the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, a work probably of the fifteenth century and appended to the *Brahmanda Purana*. Truth to tell, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* is closer in both spirit and content to the *Adhyatma Ramayana* than it is to the *Ramayana of Valmiki*. And the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is one of those works that attempts to marry passionate teachings about bhakti or devotion, which imply two beings, a worshipper and the object of his worship, with the non-dualist metaphysics of the Upanishads as interpreted, not so much by Shankara, as by his fourteenth century follower, Vidyananda. Point after point of Vidyananda's teaching appears in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

Students of the sixth chapter of Vidyananda's *Panchadashi* may remember his solution of a difficult point of doctrine. Shankara teaches that consciousness is infinite, and also that it is reflected in the mind of each individual human being. But how can what is infinite be reflected in anything small? Vidyananda explains this by the example of a pot filled with water. It will reflect the infinite sky and its stars. This very image, which the writer believes to have been invented by Vidyananda, is found in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

Tulsidas is less concerned with philosophy. He has a story to tell on a broad epic canvas, comprehending men and women, good and bad, saintly and selfish demons — also animals who behave like humans and talk in Hindi verse. Nothing here seems unnatural once you get caught up in the flow of the narrative, just as it seems quite natural to an audience caught up in an opera like *The Marriage of Figaro* if a Countess dictates a letter to her servant by way of singing it as a song. A good opera will stimulate our aesthetic sense to the presence of beauty in one form or another in the world; Tulsidas's purpose was to stimulate our sensitivity to the presence of God everywhere in the world.

In some passages, Tulsidas conjures up the mood of the pure non-dualism of the Upanishads, and the reader or listener is made to feel that ultimate peace can only be gained through knowledge, through an awakening to the fact that in his true nature he is the one infinite, universal consciousness and that all the realm of time, space and causation is a pain-producing illusion. Yet there are other passages in which the characters declare that they would rather not have this liberation if they could have the joy of perpetual adoration of Rama in his heaven. One could say that Tulsidas here represents two different perspectives — that of jnana, or knowledge, and that of bhakti, or devotion. Theoretically, one might think that for the one who had attained metaphysical knowledge the whole realm of devotion would disappear like a lost illusion. But the Indians see no contradiction here. To be effective, metaphysical knowledge has to be gained before death. But the enlightened one, in some sense, stays in contact with his body while it remains alive. And, as the *Bhagavad Gita* says, the enlightened one, is in fact the best of devotees. 'I am supremely dear to the jnani', says Krishna, 'and he is dear to Me'.

Tulsidas wrote other Hindi works besides the Hindi *Ramayana*, one or two of them in praise of Krishna in Braj Bhasha, the totally different dialect of western Hindi, which, characteristically, avoided the erotic parts of the story, which had been rather emphasized by the poet Sur Das, probably an elder contemporary. His most notable didactic work was the *Vinaya Patrika*, confessional poems, written in a high-flown, rather difficult style of Eastern Hindi. Our Teacher called them 'Love Letters to the Lord' and 25 pages of his beautiful translations of them are found in his book, *Indian Mystic Verse*. Teaching in a simpler and more

popular form is found in the 573 couplets on his *Dohavali*, which combines devotional with practical advice, salted here and there with a sort of impish humour.

If Tulsidas is rated the greatest Hindi poet, it is on three main counts: his sustained and lofty spirituality; his peculiar psychological insight into all kinds and conditions of people — his animals, be it noted, are manifestly people embodied in animal form; and lastly, his technical skill as a poet, his mastery of a wide variety of metres, often bristling with puns, alliteration and original and unexpected similes, as, for instance, when begging God's assistance for his devotional practices, he refers to himself as 'a desiccated rice-field'.

Rather than attempt to sketch the complex plot of the *Ramayana* or to introduce its galaxy of different characters, we shall concentrate on a few passages of the devotional teachings it contains, and also on one or two of the 'Love Letters to the Lord', prefacing such reading with brief explanations of context or mythological references as required.

Here is a poem from the 'Love Letters to the Lord' in which Tulsidas, speaking in terms of the highest Upanishadic teaching, tries to awaken the reader from the sleep of ignorance which has led him into the painful dream of worldly experience. The world, as many of us have discovered, promises to be an abode of pleasure when we are young, but its promised joys turn out to have been short and uncertain in the end. Sustained happiness is only possible if we cultivate indifference both to the pleasures and the pain of the world, and turn to the tranquillity of that which alone is permanent and real — our own true nature as God concealed within the heart. We can best do this by dwelling on the traditions about how God assumed manifest form on earth as Rama, and dwell lovingly on his Name.

Wake up, wake up, you fool of a sleeping soul!
 Know that your body, your home,
 Your relationships of affection
 Are but flashes of lightning illumining the clouds.
 In the dark night of reincarnation
 Even in sleep you experience the pain of worldly life,
 Which assails you in dreams.
 You are drowned in the waters

Of what is only a mirage;
 The snake you have imagined in a rope
 Will bring you to death with its mortal bite.
 The Vedas and the sages declare it —
 Think upon it well in your mind —
 When a person once awakens
 The pains of his nightmare torment him no more.
 O Tulsi, rouse yourself from slumber
 And all forms of pain will leave you.
 You will feel absolute love for the Name of Rama
 And have the power to keep the mind on God all day.

In this poem, Tulsidas appears to be giving a kind of Upanishadic teaching. We have forgotten our true nature as infinite consciousness and have fallen into the ocean of rebirth. In this condition, we do our best, we put on a brave face, the braver the better, but with very few exceptions, we find ourselves faced with dangers and fears. It was not the job of the spiritual poet of Tulsidas's place and time to give individual instruction. For that he would refer you to the individual teacher, the Guru. He was, however, able to give spiritual teaching on general moral themes, usually indirectly by castigating himself for the failings he wishes to help eradicate in others. Here is a love-letter in which he tries to encourage us to live with more strict sincerity. Hari, in the middle of the poem and descendant of King Raghu at the end, are names of God in the form of Rama.

How can I purify myself and make myself happy?
 The elephant has exterior tusks for show
 And a different set of his teeth within his mouth
 For actual eating.
 So do I present myself as one thing
 While in reality I am another.
 This my Lord, you know well.
 If only I could learn to suit my words to my actions
 I would cross over the ocean of repeated rebirth
 As if it were the merest puddle.
 But, instead, I continue to speak in one way

And behave in another.
 How can I hope for bliss at the feet of Hari?
 The peacock is beautiful to look upon
 And her cry is sweet to hear,
 But she feeds cruelly on a diet of poisonous snakes.
 Her speech is of one kind, her deeds of another.
 Who, O hero of the call of Raghu
 Are really dear to your heart?
 It is they who feel loving compassion
 For every living being,
 Who are without envy and devoted to your lotus feet,
 Who are firm and patient in character
 And have given up all notion of 'his' and 'mine'.
 O King of the dynasty of Raghu
 Though the defects of Tulsidas are multitudinous,
 And he soundly deserves to remain in rebirth —
 Yet deign to remember your nature as storehouse of compassion
 And grant him your grace.

There is a passage near the beginning of his *Ramayana*, his spiritual epic recounting the life of Rama, where Tulsidas encourages the reader or hearer to remember the name of Rama lovingly, as often as he can, as it is through the name that the image or form of Rama is summoned into the mind. As he specifically mentions two syllables, one has to presume he is just thinking of frequent remembrance of the name of Rama, associated with a loving remembrance of his form — and not thinking of the repetition of the name of Rama in the form of a mantram with the help of a rosary, as in that situation the name of Rama is pronounced in Sanskrit and with three syllables ('ramaya' as in 'om shri ramaya namah'). He speaks of the name and the form of Rama and says that they are not different, yet he gives the superiority to the name, as the name can conjure forth the form, whereas without the name, the form would be unrecognizable.

The passage to follow is taken from the excellent translation of the missionary, the Reverend W.D.P. Hill, a real friend of the Hindus, who has given the best English translation so far, and whose translation of

the *Gita* is perhaps not so well known as it should be. In the opening flourish of the passage, there is a reference to the two letters R and M of the name Rama, in their abbreviated form, where they are written respectively as a small squiggle and a dot over the tops of the other letters in a line of Hindi writing.

Of the two syllables of the name of the hero of the race of Raghu, one gleams like a royal umbrella and one like a jewelled crown over all the letters of the alphabet. A name and that which is named are regarded as the same, but the close connection between them is that of master and servant. Name and form are two attributes of God; they are ineffable and without origin, known only by right understanding. It is a mistake to ask which of the two is the greater and which is the less; when they hear the difference between them, the good will understand. Forms are seen to be dependent on names; the form cannot be known apart from the name. Any particular form cannot be recognized, even if placed on the hand, unless the name is known; but if without seeing the form, one meditates on the name, the form too enters the heart as an object of passionate devotion. The mystery of name and form is unutterable; it brings joy to those who understand it, but it cannot be expressed. The name bears testimony to the impersonal and the personal alike; it makes both known to a wise interpreter.

On the door-sill of your tongue, place the jewelled lamp of the Name of Rama, and you will have light within and light without.

An Indian historian of Hindi literature speaks of Tulsidas as a great harmoniser. In his *Ramayana* he sought to supply the basis for harmonising the spiritual traditions with ordinary worldly life, a householder's life with a life of renunciation of all intemperate joys. He tried to harmonise devotion and knowledge; the conception of God in personal form with God beyond all form; charming narrative with metaphysical teaching; and the deepest respect for high-caste Brahmins with the deepest sympathy and love for the wild untutored woodsmen of the forest tribes and for human beings in the externally lowly form of animals, such as the monkey, the vulture and the crow. He tried also to harmonise learning and scholarship with simplicity of heart and

innocence, and, not least to harmonise the learned language, Sanskrit, with the spoken language of the people.

The Hindus, it is well known, have more than one conception of the deity, and it goes without saying that Tulsidas, while worshipping the incarnation of Vishnu called Rama, as his chosen deity, was careful to accord full honour to the deity Shiva, and to pray to Him and ask for his help at the commencement of his great work.

There is an interesting example amongst his Love-letters to the Lord in which he says that the world in which we live is a Maya or illusion, presided over by God, and that whatever efforts we make on our own require to be supplemented by the grace of God, to whom we can turn in prayer and adoration. The God to whom Tulsidas addresses his own prayer in this matter is not, however, Rama, but the other main deity regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, namely Krishna, here addressed under his name, Madhav. Here is the poem.

O Madhav, this maya is yours.
However one may squirm and struggle,
Without your grace and compassion,
It cannot be crossed.
I have listened, pondered and reflected
And even instructed others,
But I have not yet experienced
True knowledge of the Self in my heart.
Without this knowledge the tribulations of terrestrial life
Continue to take their toll.
The nectar of realization of God
Is sweet and cooling to the taste.
He who has tapped this inner reservoir
No longer wearies himself running day and night
To the mirage of worldly objects.
Does he who possesses a splendid jewel in his house
Go out into the street to pick up bits of broken glass?
Does he who falls under the control of another in a dream
Look for that man to beg favours,
Once he is awake?

The prescribed means to knowledge and devotion
Are all effective — none are false.
Yet Tulsidas has firm conviction
That the real force which destroys delusion
Is that of Hari alone.

In another poem Tulsidas addresses his tongue, and gives it a dressing down. Why does it indulge so much in criticism of others, in insalubrious eating pursued not for bodily strength but for pleasure of taste, in useless theoretical arguments about matters which it is not given to us to know? The proper use of the tongue is to thread the cord of one's discourse with the jewels of beautiful thoughts about Rama, and to place them as a necklace upon His neck. He says:-

O my tongue, why do you not sing the praises of Rama?
Day and night you give forth the inharmonious music
Of criticism of the conduct of others.
Are you not ashamed to behave in this manner,
Dwelling, as you do,
In the noble palace of the human mouth?
My ears listen greedily
To your mischievous gossip about worldly love.
O my tongue, put a stop to this prattle
And wash out the stains upon my ears
With speeches and songs in praise of Hari.
Construct a beautiful necklace
From the gold of lofty thoughts
And the jewels of reasoned discourse.
Place it upon the neck of his Majesty, King Rama,
Who is the joy of those who resort to his feet
And the sun who rose to expand once again
The petals of the lotus of the Race of Raghu.
Give up theorizing and disputing
And also eating purely for the sake of taste.
Sing the praises of Hari, and plunge my mind
In the charming accounts of his deeds.
If, O my tongue, you do as I ask,

Tulsidas will cross over the ocean of rebirth
And your fame will pervade the three worlds.

This last blessing on his tongue, though of course only a metaphor, can be thought of as having come true in that the *Ramayana* of Tulsi is still to this day read by Indians all over the world, and not only by those who have Hindi for their mother tongue. The speaker knew a devout Gujarati lady who ran an Indian restaurant and always kept a copy of Tulsidas's *Ramayana* open by her side from which to refresh her mind when she was not occupied with custom.

We come finally to a very famous scene from Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. Here there is no spiritual teaching directly conveyed. The story has come to the point where Rama has invaded Ceylon or Shri Lanka with his formidable army of monkeys, to rid the world of the terrible demon Ravana by defeating him and killing him in battle. There is a kind of indirect message in the way Rama behaves. He is perfectly relaxed and, in the company of his closest companions, institutes a kind of poetical game, in which each one is invited to characterize the moon in a fanciful way — a game in which the Lord joins in himself in a spirit of jocular competition and without any sense of self-superiority. Here is the scene, reconstructed freely from modern versions.

Rama had encamped on Mount Suvela with his redoubtable army. On a high plateau, his brother, Lakshman, has spread a bed of soft leaves for him beneath a soft antelope-skin. Rama rested at ease with his head on the lap of one of the monkeys. He was sharpening his arrows as he listened to the information about the terrain being whispered into his ear by the younger brother of Ravana, who had defected to his side. The two monkeys, Angad and Hanuman, had the honour of shampooing his feet, while Lakshman stood behind, bow and arrow in his hands, quiver at his side. Thus shone forth Rama in nobility, grace and beauty — happy the person who absorbs himself in the contemplation of this scene.

Rama said: 'Look to the east and behold the moon rising up into the sky, like a tawny lion emerging from its lair behind the eastern mountain. It breaks the forehead of the elephant of night-darkness and pursues its proud way across the sky. The stars are strewn about the sky like pearls to decorate the dark woman called night. But what are the dark marks on the moon? Let each offer his opinion.'

One of the monkeys said: 'They are formed by the shadow of the earth!' Another said: 'The eclipse is a demon that comes to bite the moon and the marks are its scars.' Another said: 'In order to fashion Rati, loveliest of women and the consort of the God of love, the Creator had to take a piece of the moon, and the marks are the trough that this left behind.' Then the Lord himself joined in and said, 'Black poison is the moon's bosom friend and lies on his chest; that is why its rays are poisonous and torment the hearts of separated lovers.' Then Hanuman, greatest devotee of all, said: 'My Lord, the moon is devoted to you totally. So it is the image of your dark body that is impressed on its heart and gives us the impression of dark marks.' The all-wise Rama smiled when he heard Hanuman's fancy.

This is just a glimpse of one of the many beautiful moments in the poem, which, as well as being a supreme literary achievement, is a vehicle for the highest spiritual teachings on that devotion through which, in the words of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, 'he knows Me in truth'.

A.J.A.

A POEM BY SUNDAR DAS

I keep close to my heart
The holy feet of my Guru,
Who instructed me in the
Divine philosophy;
Who pointed out to me the
Partless, all-pervasive God.

Whom shall I hate and whom love?
Thy branch and the tree are One.
My mind is free from doubts and anxieties;
I am satisfied in the Contemplation of Reality.
Wonderful! All my taints are washed away!

Translated by H.P.S.

Chief Life Achievements

THE MAIN function of life is achievement. When the achievement is well scrutinized under the light of reason and tradition, and pursued with a fixed will, life becomes purposive. A life devoted to a fixed and high purpose which enriches the intellect with wisdom, promotes the moral sense and leads to the enjoyment of great art, literature, philosophy and philanthropy, is called real life, and its consummation is the attainment of the knowledge: 'What am I? What is the world? What is the ultimate cause?'

Life begins with the love of pleasurable objects and the avoidance of painful ones. This is just the beginning of the life of love. When we begin to live the higher phases of life, we do not fear the pain we encounter in the pursuit of the good and the true. One cannot learn Sanskrit grammar and logic if one is devoted to rest and sleep.

It is clear that the end of life is not the avoidance of pain but the achievement of the good and the true, to add to the knowledge of others. To learn the art of life and impart it to others is the chief duty of each and every one of us.

Achievements in the concrete world of time-space are good, if they promote moral well-being. But the real achievements are in the intellectual world and in the realm of the spirit. The material achievements do not satisfy the mind for long. The love of art, letters and philosophy is much more real. It does not exhaust the nerves and the mind but promotes moral growth in the realm of Dharma and refines the mind.

Let us understand life's main purpose and then pursue it with a fixed mind and undivided attention. It is the love of truth or God, which is realized in the tranquil, benevolent soul, inspired with devotion. Whatever serves this end must be welcome; whatever turns the mind from it is false and must be avoided. It includes love of humanity and service of the good of all on a higher plane.

Our mind is often swayed by material desires, ambitions, illusory ideals like communism, or love of the marvellous, such as the modern Theosophy or other such creeds. Such teachings are of no permanent moral or spiritual value. Our curiosity can easily be vulgarized, if we

are not careful.

Another fact which we must always remember is that life can be modified, refined and spiritualized. Professor Hocking stressed the remaking of the human personality. The ignorant ask: 'How can I love God when I have no devotion for Him?' I asked myself in my early life: 'I have no love for grammar. How can I create love for it?' Newton had little or no love for science in his early life. You can create the love of truth and God for your real good, if you follow the path of the Yoga.

Freud speaks of wise love. We speak of the creation of love-atmosphere, so that all who breathe it are inspired by love and virtue. It is true that love can exalt the mind, but not just the ordinary love of health, wealth and pleasure. If love does not lead to the sacrifice of your own interests for the good of others, it is not love. It may be infatuation or fanaticism, but not the light of love. The real significance of man lies in self-sacrifice, moral wealth and the spiritual attainment of peace.

The object of secular learning is to know the underlying unity in diversity, to resolve the mental and moral conflicts, and to create peace within and without. It is a pity that science is not concerned with values and disregards virtue in general. Such achievements are inhuman. The harmony of man, physical and mental, rests on unity and peace and silence. Every great achievement must be on the basis of virtue and the promotion of peace, creative and inspiring.

The first step in the art of civilization, which man took after the ice age some 20,000 years ago, was to cultivate the land and to domesticate the animals. In the real art of the higher civilization, called culture, man must cultivate the soil of his mind with imagination and creative peace, and domesticate the animals of anger, greed, love of pleasure and power, and the egoity which, if untamed, can be a real danger to the safety and prosperity of man.

Man must daily acquire the inner culture and tame the wolves and tigers of the love of power and pleasure. Selfless benevolence is a road to inner light and prosperity. Teach yourself to serve virtue. This is true love. See the whole in the part, or you see nothing real.

The sea which appears calm today will have high waves tomorrow.

To expect the sea to remain calm is to expect the impossible. Such is man's life. It is calm today but full of struggle tomorrow. What one can do is to have a tranquil mind which is not agitated by the events, and has the courage to face the rise and fall of fortune on the path of moral and spiritual attainments. Keep your eyes set on the ideal goal of life, spiritual peace and the creative imagination of a Plato or Goethe, and not the calm of the life of Father Anthony, who lived twenty years in the desert in the supposed spiritual light, nay, in sloth and wrong illumination. Like St Jerome, you can retire into mountain caves for a while, but the real centre of life is the active life of peace and devotion.

We are neither conquerors nor reformers of the world. God is the master of the king. We practise Dharma and do devotion to acquire peace within and to serve others with the light of devotion-knowledge. Our service is a part of devotion, and by it we reduce the empirical egoity in order to be worthy disciples of Truth. Who wants name and fame, admirers and advertisement? Not we. We live to make Dharma and Yoga illustrious and to eliminate our egoity in the cosmic spirit of the Lord. This is the highest achievement.

Hari Prasad Shastri

You called, you shouted, you shattered my deafness; you shone with dazzling light and dispelled my blindness; you were fragrant and I breathed in deeply and now I am breathless with longing for you. I tasted you and now I hunger and thirst for you; you touched me and now I burn with desire for the peace that is yours.

from The Confessions of St Augustine

When shall I be free? When 'I' shall cease to be.

Swami Rama Tirtha

The Truth at the Centre of Life

The secret of life is to find the Divine Centre within oneself and to live in and from that centre, instead of in that outer circumference of disturbances.

Swami Rama Tirtha

WHAT IS TRUTH? This is the central question of both religion and philosophy. To comprehend the meaning of Truth is to realize the highest good. Nor for nothing did Christ say: 'And ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.' So there is an inestimable advantage awaiting one who seeks to know the Truth with all sincerity and the purity that defies narrow self-interest.

Let us therefore confront some fundamental questions. What does Truth signify in a spiritual context? Where is Truth to be found? How may it be discovered and realized in practice? This is essentially a matter of learning how to turn within, and to lift our conscious attention away from its preoccupation with the world of appearances and plant it firmly in our divine centre, which is the supreme reality.

In spiritual matters we cherish simplicity and directness. So let us turn straight away to a statement about Truth made by a knower of Truth, Hari Prasad Shastri: 'Truth is Self, and Self is God, and God is the all-pervasive reality.'

Many a poet has spoken of the immortality of the soul, and affirmed: 'There is that in me which shall not die.' True indeed are such words. There is an immortal element in us which neither misfortune nor death can harass, let alone crush. But this sense of immortality has its source in a much deeper Truth. This divine, unassailable, totally free principle is our very Self.

Some of us are already familiar with the Sanskrit word, Adhyatma. Adhyatma means our Self in the spiritual sense. The word denotes inwardness and also superiority — something in us that is far deeper than the self we normally think we are, namely the body and the mind. This true Self is deeper than our personality. It is our divine centre. Our personality is external and exists in that outer circumference of disturbances. It is a fragmentary expression of the greatness of this spiritual Self

that underlies it. This spiritual Self is the ultimate source of all that we experience, within and without. It is superior to the mind, intellect and even the powers of intuition and inspiration that function in the purified mind. We could call this Self the perfectly still centre of our being. Transcending matter and its limitations of time and space, it is the Truth at the centre of all life and is therefore the inner Self of all.

Is this Self far away, beyond the reach of our awareness? No, it is the essential consciousness that underlies human awareness. Our consciousness is not confined to knowing and responding to the outer world. Human beings are also conscious of their inner world, the world within the mind. Often it is dissatisfaction with our inner state that drives us to seek the means to transcend it. There is divine knowledge at the source of man's being, and until he consciously realizes his source, he will remain restless and incomplete.

This spiritual knowledge is not to be acquired through intellectual sharpness, as one might solve a mathematical problem; nor is it lodged in a particular part of our mind. Being our very consciousness, it is as close to our mental activities as the canvas is to the painted picture. The problem is that we see only the picture and forget the canvas. Internally we see the apparent contents of consciousness, namely the sense impressions, the thoughts, the feelings and so on, and are unaware of this internal light that reveals the stream of thoughts and makes it seem so real for us. Our challenge is to awaken to the true nature of our conscious Self, our divine centre, and to put an end to this automatic and habitual sense of identity with the body and mind.

Our habitual way of thinking, based on years of repetition or reinforcement, often proves to be the main hurdle on our spiritual path. Fixed ideas, unless held intelligently and consciously, usurp the throne of our intelligence. They thwart the growth of understanding, as in the case of the one of whom it was said:

Habit with him was all the test of truth,
'It must be right: I've done it from my youth.'

The antidote is to plant and cultivate thoughts based on spiritual insight. Such thoughts help us to turn inwards. They weaken our characteristic absorption in the things of the world. They remind us of our divine nature and potentialities, and help us to discriminate between what is real

and what is transient. The inner transformation fostered by Yoga will reveal to us that our innermost Self is immortal and universal, ever perfect, pure, blissful and consciousness absolute. We are fundamentally That. 'Truth is Self, and Self is God and God is the all-pervasive Reality.'

Our inner being, thus illumined, may be compared with a walled garden bathed in bright sunlight. That sunlight is not confined to the walled garden, nor does it belong to it; it is continuous with the universal sunlight that lights everything. This universal consciousness is in us all, and is our true being.

'The secret of life is to find the divine centre within oneself and to live in and from that centre.' The kingdom of God is within you. All spiritual seekers have to prepare themselves for realization through training and discipline, through what is called 'treading the spiritual path'. There is such a path, and it does lead to direct experience of Reality.

These teachings are radical in their implications because they promote values that are in sharp contrast with our normal worldly way of assessing our needs. For the spiritual teachings identify the deepest need of all, the need for wisdom, inner light and an expansion of our being that will lead to complete fulfilment. Man cannot hope to grasp their true significance until his mind has been pacified and to a large extent purified of its negative tendencies, and is imbued with the spirit of peace and goodwill to all.

We start to understand the teachings as soon as we give them our serious attention, for they stir an echo of recognition in the depths of our mind. If our interest is sustained, our understanding will be progressive. We may not fully understand with our intellect, but there is a sense in which these spiritual teachings about our true Self are a communication from soul to soul, and are urging us to return to our Source. But to avoid errors and misunderstandings, it is crucial to study the words of the enlightened knowers of Truth. These writings throw light on the path we are destined to tread, as well as its goal. If we can establish contact with a living centre of Truth, we shall receive the regular guidance we need in order to make the spiritual advance that we crave for.

If we simply take the teachings at face value and do not strive to clarify their meaning, we are bound to make the most elementary

blunders. We may feel, for example, that we have the right to claim the highest insight for ourselves — which we do — but that we personally don't need to bother with the training or the self-discipline. But nothing will be fruitful for us if we are unwilling to make the appropriate contribution in the form of love of Truth and dedicated attention to its pursuit.

A man passed a clothes shop and was struck by the sign outside: 'All shirts £25'. The next day he came to the shop with a van and his £25. He went in and announced that he had come to buy all the shirts for £25. The manager quietly pointed out that he had misinterpreted the meaning of the sign, and that in no way could he deliver all the shirts to him for so small a price.

This spirit of acquisition, based on defective understanding or even on a pretence, does not work in the spiritual realm. In the pursuit of the higher knowledge, the inner treasury of Truth will open when we develop a correct insight and understanding into what Truth really means. The meaning and radiance of Truth are not grasped by the normal faculties of the mind but by a higher faculty of spiritual perception and understanding. This faculty is awakened only if we follow the traditional way of training. If we do so, the great Way will assuredly open up to us. In the words of the sage LaoTzu: 'He who conforms to the Way is gladly accepted by the Way.' The price is to conform to the Way with the utmost sincerity and to our full capacity. The light of our spiritual nature seated at the centre of our being will burst through into our conscious mind as soon as we lift the coverings.

In one sense, Truth — being our very Self — is never unknown to us. It is more than known. But if we do not know that we know, it is as if we don't know. The Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, gives an example. If a man is a king, but does not know it, then it is as if he is not a king. He needs to be awakened to his kingship so that he will think and act like a king. Our position is similar. We *are* that wonderful thing we seek, but we need to be awakened to a living and direct knowledge of what we really are.

To aid our awakening, there is a saying: 'Live each day as if it were your last.' For a spiritual person this is a valuable maxim. It implies that we are inwardly free from outer bonds, that we can let go of them lightly, without clinging, and that in daily life our heart is at ease with

itself, knowing that we have done our best according to our light. But for someone who is not familiar with spiritual thought, this same maxim: 'Live each day as if it were your last', can be quite alarming. To the active mind set on the fulfilment of desires, there is no vivid sense that our personal life will come to an end at any time. The fact that we cannot really accept the idea of our own termination is due to our hidden sense of the immortality of our true nature, the Spirit.

Again, every human being in his heart of hearts feels perfect, beyond criticism, of unique value and possessed of an inalienable right to be free. Our spiritual nature *is* eternally free and perfect. But this perfection, freedom, purity and immortality can never belong to the body or the mind. We need to discover the source of this perfection, the root of our hidden sense of glory and greatness. This is to be found in our spiritual Self alone — the Truth at the centre of life.

Why this lack of direct awareness of the spiritual dimension of our being? For one thing, it is our own immediate self and can never be viewed apart. We may see that which is at a tiny distance from us, but we cannot see that which we are. We can only be It, and through spiritual awakening, realize It. Such is the spiritual self of man.

The mystics have talked in identical terms about the reality called God. The ordinary man, influenced by conventional religious ideas, tends to think of God as separate from himself. The idea of the intrinsic identity of that supreme being with the essence of my limited being, is inconceivable. Surely this is so obvious a mismatch, so big a mistake, that no intelligent person could hold such a belief. According to the usual way of thinking, God is decidedly other than the self of man, and may suitably be referred to by the pronoun 'That', suggesting distance or remoteness. But to the knowers of spiritual Truth, that apparently remote entity referred to as 'That' has been realized as 'This', their own immediate experience. 'This verily is That', says the *Katha Upanishad*. To the Self-realized sage, there is nothing more self-evident than this identification. 'Truth is Self and Self is God and God is the all-pervasive Reality.'

The immediacy of Truth or Self or God within, has to be realized by using a different technique than is normally employed by the intellect. The object of our quest and endeavour, namely Truth, is not only nearest, but it is also most subtle. It is not physical, and so cannot be

apprehended by our senses, nor can it be detected by the most sophisticated analytical instruments. Science can hardly penetrate or probe the world of our thoughts in order to record what we are thinking at any given moment. This is because the world of thought is a subtler realm than that which is accessible to the instruments of science. Science may record in the most general terms that a mental event has taken place, but it can tell us nothing about the particular contents of our thoughts. The spiritual Truth, which is the all-pervasive Reality, under-lies both the physical and mental world. It interpenetrates these worlds, just as the mind interpenetrates the body. But, as the Upanishads declare, this spiritual Truth, this innermost Self of man, 'is subtler than the subtlest, and also greater than the great'. It is beyond the reach of our normal mental faculties and is only realized by the awakening of our spiritual sense of pure insight and wisdom.

In seeking Truth we are seeking the Real, our oneness with the divine Ground on which appear phenomenally the dreams of the mind and the ever-shifting details of the physical universe. In thinking unity and universality, rejecting all narrowness of outlook, we are thinking in harmony with the deeper fact behind experience, getting ourselves in unison with the whole. This is called following the way of Truth. When we consult the world's scriptures and garner from them the essential Truth — and the essential scriptural Truth always transcends narrow sectarianism — this communication is like a rope cast to us from the region of transcendence, which, if grasped, will draw us into a higher state of consciousness.

Life offers us many options, and there are always fresh attractions competing for our attention. The highest Truth, because its presentation is unassuming, seems to be inconspicuous and negligible, something we can afford to ignore, as we chase after the more obvious and well-advertised allurements that cross our path. But Truth is in fact the saving principle, man's only real friend in need, as well as in times of security.

In the writings of Swami Rama Tirtha, there is a story about two men who got caught in the swift current of the Niagara. Noticing their plight, the people on the bank threw down a rope for their rescue. One of the men ignored the rope and clasped hold of a big log being carried downstream within his reach. It seemed a real support, but both he and the log were swept into the abyss. His companion reached for the rope

and was pulled to safety. In this story the log represents the world and its seeming supports: riches, fame, power, position and so on. We hug these things, but they prove insubstantial when there is a crisis. They can never cure or even lessen the hidden anxiety and insecurity that dogs human life at every step. For these perishable things have no firm foundation and cannot in themselves create a better inward state; at best they can distract us for the time being.

The rope cast down by the rescuers symbolizes the subtle spiritual Truth, revealed to mankind by the illumined sages for our guidance and upliftment. If we seize this rope, that is, if we take to heart the spiritual message of the great ones about the divinity of our true nature, this subtle cord will prove the means by which we can free ourselves from the sufferings of life and be established in the peace and immortality of our true Self. The condition is that we need to hold fast to the way of Truth, and free our minds from self-deception and illusion.

How, then, may Truth be discovered and realized in practice? The Truth at the centre of life is the Truth at the centre of our own personal life, the Truth about the innermost Self or I. It comes to light in inner stillness. 'Be still and know that I am God.' All spiritual practices and methods conduce to this stilling of the mind, either directly or indirectly. If we practise goodwill, our mind will become more peaceful. If we soak our mind in genuine spiritual literature, the purity and power inherent in those writings will be transfused into us. We shall be reminded of our own godhead, and our minds will gain stability and serenity. If we habitually practise spiritual meditation, we are taking direct steps to regain our power over the only kingdom that really matters, the kingdom of our own mind.

The training of Adhyatma Yoga focuses on the mind. The mind is the only object to be trained and transformed. The Spirit or true Self is already perfect and needs no training or transformation. And if the mind is in a good spiritual state, the tension and stress that afflict the body will be lessened and even removed. So the mind is first to be trained in such a way that it may reflect the light of the indwelling spirit to an increasing degree. The goal of this process is the realization of one's identity with the source of that spiritual light, the supreme Reality, God within.

The mind occupies a kind of intermediary realm in the being of man. Normally we tend to think that the mind is inside and the world is

outside, and the whole of our experience seems to take place within these boundaries. But within and behind the mind is the deeper realm of the spirit. Just as the world can influence the mind and keep it in a state of disturbance, so too the mind can be made sensitive to the influence of the spirit and gain peace, light and indescribable bliss. There are not only the extravertive impressions picked up by the mind from the outside, but there are also introvertive impressions that emanate from the Truth at the centre of our being and give assurance of inner freedom and immortality. Just as with fruits that are sold in the street, the skin on the outside may collect dust or fingerprints or be brushed by car fumes, but that same skin, on the inside, is always in intimate touch with the fragrant and flavoursome flesh of the fruit; so too the human mind picks up the outer impressions, and is marked by them, but it also has a hidden potentiality to be touched and transformed by the spiritual influence and peace at its centre. The spiritual light within us will transform and guide the whole of the mind if we approach it in the right spirit. 'He who conforms to the Way is gladly accepted by the Way.'

We cannot avoid contact with the outer world, and we are not meant to. To a spiritual seeker, the world becomes a necessary school providing endless opportunities for us to take our stand on spiritual values and to act and react accordingly. We can get a clue to our spiritual progress by observing our own reactions and seeing how far they conform to the great values of inner peace, harmlessness and unity of life. While living in the world we need to live consciously and wisely, feeding our minds on ingredients that are spiritually helpful and avoiding those influences that are lowering and wasteful. Therefore in some situations our involvement should be minimal and just what is necessary, while in others we may be more open and expansive, eager to extract all we can from an influence that is clearly uplifting and helpful to us.

On this theme of careful and selective living, there is a saying. 'We cannot prevent the birds flying overhead, but we can stop them from building their nest in our hair.' The spiritual seeker has to learn to live in the world wisely, not getting unnecessarily entangled in social activities and interests that take him away from the main track and agitate the mind.

It was said earlier, quoting the Psalm, 'Be still and know that I am God'. This stilling of the mind is not the work of a day, but it is a

potentiality latent in every human being, and through this stillness, the higher spiritual knowledge will reveal itself. To quote Meister Eckhart: 'The most powerful prayer of all and the highest work of all: both are the outcome of a quiet mind. The quieter it is, the more powerful, the worthier, the deeper, the more telling and more perfect the prayer is. To the quiet mind, all things are possible.'

The quiet mind is a revealing mind. What does it reveal? The universality of the spiritual consciousness. It is not a case of discovering 'my truth' or 'your truth' or 'Buddhist truth' or 'Christian truth'. For Truth is universal and transcends all such limitations. It cannot be expressed in words, but the words emanating from an enlightened sage can serve as a light on our path, if received and cherished by us in a spirit of sincere inner quest. Here are some such words by the Tibetan sage, Milarepa:

Knowing one thing, I know all things. Knowing all things, I know them to be one. I have perfect knowledge of Reality.

This is the divine knowledge which is enshrined in the human heart, and there is nothing to prevent us from discovering it.

B.D.

O heart of mine!

Fly like a falcon

Toward the hand of His love

With His love's wings.

How long will you fly

With your own wings?

from the *Diwani Shamsi Tabriz* of Jalalu'ddin Rumi

Fearlessness

ONE OF the fellow-disciples of our teacher's teacher, a man who had realized the spiritual truth in its fullness, was an ascetic known in later life as Swami Nirbhayanandaji. He was a poet and a highly educated man but he composed his lyrics in the simple language of the people. He took popular melodies and adapted them so that his listeners could easily understand and even sing the words for themselves. This is one of his poems as translated by Hari Prasad Shastri.

Now I am happy, my Friend has prepared the couch of peace for me.
My Guru in compassion has led me to the truth.
Now I am full of fire and fearless;
I have renounced pride and fame.
My Guru presented me with the cup of pure knowledge;
The intoxication has possessed my soul;
I sleep carefree with outstretched limbs.
My mind is full of delight forever;
No longer do I enter into debate.
My intellect is bewildered.
Says Nirbhaya: Having known my Self, I am associationless.

Swami Nirbhayanandaji's name means the bliss of fearlessness, and his name embodies the teachings. Fearlessness is bliss, and bliss is fearlessness. A little reflection confirms that we are happy when circumstances make us feel secure and free of material or psychological fear. The appeal of wealth is freedom from fear of material deprivation; the appeal of success, prestige and achievement is freedom from fear of feeling worthless, unneeded and unwanted. The greatest challenge in life is fear and how to be free of it.

To resolve an issue we must first consider what is the cause of it. The root of fear is uncertainty. The future is uncertain, and so we try to protect ourselves by amassing wealth and power. But no amount of power or wealth can make us sure that some crisis or change of circumstances will not exceed our reserves. And nothing can insure us

against the inevitable loss of our physical strength and the eventual death of the body. So no worldly asset can overcome uncertainty, and attempts to overcome fear by amassing them invariably fail.

The ultimate roots of fear lie in the ultimate uncertainties. Without spiritual guidance we do not know who or what we really are, what is this life and this world in which we find ourselves, whether or not it has any real significance or purpose. We are not sure if death will simply be an end, or if it will reveal further consequences of the choices we have made in this life. As long as these uncertainties remain, so long will anxiety be firmly rooted in us.

It has often been remarked that the dramatic increase in human knowledge in recent times has actually lead to greater uncertainty. One reason for this is simply that the exponential growth of knowledge has meant that at best one can be an expert in a very specialized field, while one must admit one's ignorance of all the rest. In effect, the more we know, the more we know we do not know.

In past times, learning and education were the exclusive province of the churches, so official religious teachings on the great questions went unchallenged and perhaps many found reassurance in those teachings. From the yogic point of view there is no real conflict between science and religion, as they each address different questions; in fact, rightly understood, the two complement each other. But the rise of natural science as an independent source of knowledge has increased uncertainty about the authority of religious teachings when they appear to lack a rational or experiential foundation.

And within science itself, developments during the previous century have made us aware that human knowledge of the world involves a degree of uncertainty that can never be overcome. We now know that even the best-tested ideas about the world can be radically revised by new insights. Einstein challenged the assumption that there is one space and time in which everything exists, and the whole mental climate in which we live has been affected by the realization that this apparently fundamental certainty is nothing of the kind.

The Yoga practised at Shanti Sadan is said to be a way of finding bliss through spiritual knowledge so that we may live like Swami Nirbhayanandaji, fearless and fully alive. So it may come as a surprise at first to hear that the philosophy on which the Yoga is based does not

deny that our knowledge of the world is very uncertain. In fact it emphasizes this and even spells it out.

Long before students of relativity and quantum physics began to realize the fundamentally indeterminate nature of the world, the teachers of the traditional philosophy were saying: 'Be aware that you will never reach rock-certain knowledge of the material world; there is always something intrinsically uncertain and inexplicable about it.'

Why is this? For one thing, the world as we know it is in the framework of time-space causality. But it is we who are limited to a point in space and time: the reality beyond our experience of it is not lots of elements separated by time and space; it is a whole. Our knowledge is intrinsically incomplete simply because the world as we experience it is exactly that: the world as we experience it. We can only know through our minds and senses, so what we know will be a representation of something, not the thing itself. What lies beyond our experience, beyond all words and imagination? Evidently that is something which, by definition, our minds cannot reach.

This is a point that academic philosophers and those who dismiss spiritual enquiry as insubstantial seem to overlook. Rationally we ought to accept that there is a very big difference between things as we experience them and the great reality that exists independently of our minds. The difference between what one mind can know and total reality — must this not be vast indeed? And so, on purely rational grounds we see that what we know, all we can know, is very different from absolute reality.

If something is very different from reality, should we not say that it is in some sense unreal or illusory? Thus logical thinking supports the reasonableness of the spiritual teachings when they say that the phenomenal world is indeed not as real as it seems.

A better understanding of the roots of uncertainty is a first step towards freedom from fear. We are told on the best authority that there is no need to feel that we are isolated, vulnerable individuals oppressed by anxiety born of a vague sense that there is so much we do not know and can never know. The intrinsic uncertainty of worldly knowledge is not due to an inadequacy on our part; it is a feature of the phenomenal world itself. The recognition of the limits of our empirical knowledge is the beginning of wisdom.

In the philosophy of Yoga there are precise terms for this feature of the world. A celebrated aphorism states: 'Brahman Satyam Jagan Mithya' — God the Absolute is Real, the phenomena are illusory. The translation is usually completed with the word unreal or illusory, but there is no English word that corresponds fully to the precision of the original. The Yoga philosophy fully accepts that the world appears real and causes us pleasure and suffering. We have to deal with it, and the more we want to gain spiritual insight and freedom, the more realistic and upright we have to be in our dealings with it. And yet reason and the sages tell us that this material world as we experience it is far from complete reality, and in some sense is a veil between us and the deeper truth.

Is there anything that can be known with certainty? There is one principle that is known directly without any mediation, as it is in itself. That is the one who asks if anything is certain, the cognising principle, our own Self.

This is a central point in the theory and practice of Adhyatma Yoga. If we want to get beyond appearances, beyond the realm of duality where there is always a gap between how things seem and the reality beyond, between the knower and the known, then there is one place where this enquiry can be pursued, and that is into the nature of the knower of knowing, the pure innermost centre of our own being.

This opens up the possibility of a new response to the challenge of uncertainty and fear. No longer do we have to resign ourselves to inescapable uncertainty about the most important things, and try to insulate ourselves from fear through the pursuit of power and wealth, adherence to dogma, or simply through distraction — things which do not actually address the root cause of our unhappiness, and excessive reliance on which actually increases our vulnerabilities. Now the potential has appeared for direct and certain knowledge about the basis of all knowledge, and thus the means of finding total security and happiness. This is the motive for spiritual enquiry.

If the true Self can be known directly, why is it not obvious? Have not many clever philosophers said that they looked hard within themselves and found nothing that can be called the self or knower enduring throughout all experiences?

The philosophy of non-duality accepts, in fact it emphasizes, that the

Self cannot be known as an object. The knower cannot be a thing that is known by the knower. If it were, it would no longer be the knower; it would be the known. In the traditional Yoga, theory and practice are very closely linked. The practice of meditation will be much enhanced if we have grasped this point in principle: that the knowing self can never be an object for itself. Philosophers and psychologists who say that they cannot observe a self among the elements of inner experience and infer from this that there is no self, are falling into an impasse typical of what happens when the mind tries to exceed the limits of its abilities and does not have any reliable guide in metaphysics.

So far we have understood this much about our innermost self: as the knower of all that is known, it is the one element in our experience that is not an appearance or a representation of something else. It is the one point where there cannot be a duality between the knower and the known; where knowing is knowing the reality. On the other hand, we understand that as the knower it can never be known as an object in the way we know things and thoughts.

Evidently the self is not like anything else in the world. It is unique in many respects and clearly has a special significance. Equally, the self cannot be known in the same way as other things are known, and the techniques we use in pursuit of self-knowledge will be different from those applied in other spheres of enquiry.

These considerations have led us to something that has always had an extreme significance for us; something that affects the way we feel about every event in life, although the source of its overwhelming influence upon us has never been fully justified. That is, what we call our ego. We have always felt that our ego is the most important thing in the universe; yet, paradoxically, we may also harbour the suspicion, indeed the fear, that this feeling that our own individuality matters so much is an illusion, indeed a kind of corruption at the heart of our being. There is some truth in both these perceptions, and the Yoga philosophy and psychology explains this and prescribes the remedy.

Firstly, let us ask: 'Is what we call the ego the self that has experiences, or is it more like a thought or feeling which is experienced?' The ego seems to pass through changing states, such as sensations of expansion or contraction, and as we know all too well, the expansion of our ego is associated with what we call happiness and

elation, and its contraction is always at the core of our sorrows. So it would seem that the ego is definitely a something with qualities. We must conclude that it is an object which is experienced.

And yet the ego is not like any other object. Just as all things have their own special characteristics that make them what they are, the ego has its own defining characteristic. Just as water has fluidity, fire has heat, music has harmony of sound, so the ego has its own special quality. It is the feeling of 'I-ness' and is precisely what we mean by one's self as opposed to what belongs to another.

So much in life depends on the qualities of selfhood and otherness. One feels that this is my responsibility, while that is something I can do nothing about. This is my work or my family and it matters to me intensely, yet for almost everyone else it is a matter of complete indifference. If we deny that the ego is our self, we would seem to be saying that there is no self, in which case all those aspects of life that revolve around selfhood and otherness would be inexplicable. To say that the ego is something that we experience like other objects and is not our self, is like saying that water is not fluid or fire is not hot or space is not a container.

The Yoga psychology has an explanation for this. The English word 'ego' has a rather vague meaning and can include selfish personality traits that evolve from the sense of limited individuality, as well as the psychological core of individualism itself. There is a Sanskrit word, 'ahankara', which means precisely the inner element of I-ness that seems to be both the self of experience and something experienced. Ahankara seems to have these contradictory properties because it is in fact compounded of two separate principles. Those principles are the inner light of consciousness, which should rightly be called the Self, and the mind which the Self illumines from within. One might say that there is a point or plane where the light of consciousness reveals the mind, like sunshine falling on the surface of things, and it is this point of contact that is called ahankara.

In outer experience, light falls on the surface of objects and we experience the objects. Inwardly, the light of consciousness falls on the mind and we experience the mind. We can understand more about the ego from this comparison. When we see outer objects, what we are really seeing is light. In the absence of light we see nothing. But when light

falls on the object, we do not experience the qualities of light, we see the qualities of the object. Furthermore, the surface onto which light falls is just a two dimensional plane, not a substantial reality. And yet this surface of things is all we see of them and is the cause of all the responses they evoke in us.

There are close parallels with inner experience. Without the light of consciousness there could be no inner experience. But when the light of consciousness falls on the mind, we experience the mind and its qualities, while consciousness itself is unnoticed. And the surface of the mind illumined by consciousness is just as much a two dimensional plane as the surface of outer objects. Yet where consciousness touches the mind, we experience the mind as a compelling reality. True selfhood belongs to the light of consciousness, but when it shines on the mind, the feeling of I-ness is applied to the mind.

This then is ahankara, the core of egoity, the point where consciousness illumines the mental states. Although it is the centre around which our limited personality revolves, in truth it has no substance, and only appears with the conjunction of two utterly distinct principles, the pure light of consciousness and the mental states with all their limitations. When these two are carefully distinguished, ahankara, egoity, the sense that our Self is something limited, is exposed as insubstantial.

We remember that the goal of all our enquiries is freedom from fear by discovering the true nature and significance of our own being. The Yoga psychology explains in theory the difference between the true self and the knot of egoity at the centre of individual experience. What does this lead to in practice?

One might say that there are two tasks, one negative, the other positive. One is the purification of the mind, removing the distorting features that prevent a clear perception of reality. The other is the active moulding of the mind, or affirmation of the supreme truth. Yet nothing in Yoga really falls into neat categories. To make sincere efforts to purify the mind, is really to affirm the truth of our independence of it. And to affirm the spiritual truth is a most purifying practice. The characteristic feature of Yoga practice is that it is not intended to discover or create anything new. Eternal truth is eternally true. Yoga is concerned with taking away obstacles that prevent a direct realization of our true Self, and affirming the reality at the core of our being.

All the great religions prescribe self-purification through ethical living and unselfishness. Being good in this sense is not just a prescription for social harmony, although it certainly is that. In the light of the Yoga teaching we can understand the deeper significance of ethics and regulating the passions. As we noted, unenlightened egoity makes us feel we are the individual mind, and that when it is expanding in the attainment of its desires, we are expanding and that this is the greatest good in life. But our true nature is not what is individual in our experience. It is the unchanging light of consciousness, which shines the same in all conscious beings. We approach reality when we sense our deeper identity with all, and feel that the general good is our own true good. Christ taught us to love those around us as we love ourselves, because it is an excellent way of purifying the mind of the most distorting influence within it, the sense of being the limited individuality.

We noticed earlier the parallel between the illumination of external objects by physical light, and the illumination of the inner being by the light of consciousness. We said that when light falls on objects, we see the objects. But there is one kind of object where this is not the case. Those objects are what we call mirrors. When light falls on a mirror and then on our eyes, we do not see the mirror, we see the light.

What makes a good mirror is the evenness, that is, the purity of its surface. The more perfectly smooth it is, the more perfectly it reflects the light and transmits to the eye not its own nature but the light. Mirrors and reflecting surfaces are produced by polishing; not by creating anything new, but by removing the irregularities and blemishes. In a closely analogous way, our principal task is to polish the mind and remove the jagged edges and debris that have accumulated on it, so that it reflects less and less of its own limitations and more and more of the light of pure consciousness.

Having taken steps towards purifying the mind, the positive aspect of the enquiry arises: focusing attention on the truths indicated by the holy teachings. One might compare this to adjusting the position of a good mirror to reflect the light towards our inner gaze. In this a most important part is played by one of the central practices of the spiritual Yoga, which is regular meditation.

Students of Yoga choose a particular time each day for their meditation, putting aside other concerns, and, if possible, choosing a

quiet and clean place for the practice. There is one concern above all that is to be dismissed at the time of meditation; that is, all doubt about the nature of one's own Self. Meditation is not the time for thinking about the teachings, wondering if they are entirely rational, or if one has fully understood them. Such considerations belong to the time of study and preparation. Astronomers probably spend the majority of their time thinking about telescopes, and dealing with the mathematical and engineering problems presented by telescopes. But sometimes they must put aside the instruments and numbers and lose themselves in contemplation of the glorious vastness that lies beyond all the visible traces which captured their hearts in the first place. So too is meditation the time to look beyond the tools. Traditional Yoga meditations use a text expressing the spiritual truth, composed by one who has realized that truth. In meditation one repeats the text a few times until the truth it expresses is clear. Then thinking is left behind and the truth remains, like the blue sky above the clouds. One such text is:

OM. APPEARANCES ARE PASSING AND PAINFUL. SPIRIT IS INFINITE
BLISS AND LIGHT. I AM SPIRIT. OM.

We repeat the text a few times until the truth it expresses is in focus, and then rest in that truth. If the mind wanders off, just bring it back to the meaning of the text.

The goal of Yoga is to overcome fear by ending the great uncertainties. It was noted that the uncertainty inherent in knowledge of objects does not apply to Self-knowledge, where the knower and the known are not separate.

Can this opening into the realm of non-duality lead to a knowledge that will dispel all insecurity? The Yoga teachings say 'Yes'. To know a drop of sea-water is to know the ocean. The geometry that applies to the space in a matchbox applies equally to the space in a galaxy. And this knowledge is unique because it is identified with consciousness itself. We intuitively feel that of all the wonders in the universe, far the most wonderful is consciousness. We look at the skies in awe and nature amazes us, yet we feel that the higher life forms are of the greatest interest. And what means most in the higher forms of life is the consciousness they manifest. This principle, of supreme interest and value, is none other than our own self, the light of all enquiry.

The sages say that this evaluation is well grounded. When realized in its fullness, consciousness is revealed as not just the highest evolute of the universe but the one immutable, absolute reality in all phenomena, the ground of all being.

Where there is no separation there can be no conflict, no loss or gain, no danger or limitation. Truth transcends time and thus mortality. Self-knowledge is knowledge of the essence of all. It eradicates the ultimate source of uncertainty, the separation of knower and known, and thus resolves all fear at its root.

There is an important difference between courage and fearlessness. Courage is the strength to do the right thing in the face of fear. Fearlessness is the certain knowledge that there is nothing to be afraid of in the first place. In the spiritual enquiry, courage is a great quality because if we exercise it things will go well and we will find that our fears were unfounded. Then we have progressed towards fearlessness, which is the mature spiritual condition.

One aspect of life runs counter to the separation we feel at the level of appearances, replacing it with a feeling of deeper unity. This is what we mean by the word love. In the light of the Yoga teachings we can better understand what is meant when it is said that a fully illumined one like Christ, the Buddha or a true guru, really loves each and everyone. For us, to consciously and intelligently foster a sense of loving identity with such a being is one of the most powerful ways of dedicating what we have to give, that is, our apparent individuality, to the cause of realizing the eternal reality that is our own true Self.

P.H.

Make this thy prayer:

O Great Ruler of the Universe, give me the capacity to live according to Thy will, having found Thee in my soul. Fill my being with love of purity and tranquillity, and enable me to suppress my individual ego and surrender myself to Thee.

H.P.S.