

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 AUTUMN TERM 2010

Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

Lectures will be given every Wednesday and Friday evening at 8pm from Wednesday 6 October until Friday 3 December 2010.

Autumn 2010 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 31 October, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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THE GOOD OF THE WORLD

Most spiritual seekers desire the general good, as well as their own self-fulfilment. They are concerned about the distress they hear about or see around them. The question may arise, 'Isn't it better to throw oneself wholeheartedly into good works? Engagement in meditation and spiritual enquiry can wait until later in life.'

There is no mutual exclusion between assisting the needy and working for one's own salvation. But to do anything properly, and to bring any noble project to completion, demands wholehearted commitment, and a mind that is prepared to be one-pointed in achieving its desired goal. The best workers, whether in the realm of spirituality or in social upliftment, are those who are dedicated to the cause and are prepared to give everything in order to realize its fulfilment.

It is also true that good thoughts and warm feelings are the parents of all effectively benevolent actions and trends in the world. Our spiritual activities—our prayers, meditations and deeper communion

with Reality—generate a subtle and far-spreading influence for good. Noble thoughts, based on inner attunement with the Infinite, reach far beyond the thinker, just as light radiates far beyond its physical source.

The ancient scriptures of Vedanta hold that there is one universal mind, of which our individual mind is a tiny fragment, apparently walled in by our bodily form, but in fact unconfined, and, in its higher phases, at one with the realm of pure inspiration, inner light and peace. Our handbook, *Meditation - Its Theory and Practice*, enlarges on this profound doctrine:

Our individual minds, conditioned by our bodies, are but small fractions of the divine or cosmic Mind, and possess the power of receiving from the cosmic Mind all that they require for their harmonious growth.

Our thoughts are not simply localised phenomena, but links in the chain of the mental life of the whole of mankind. Good thoughts, based on harmlessness, universal love, light and self-realization, spread outwards, and induce the same sentiments in others, whether the thinker is aware of this or not.

All attempts to practise virtue on the outer plane add their quota to the general upliftment of mankind, but, as Aristotle observes at the start of his *Ethics*, the virtuous person ‘may meet with the most atrocious luck or ill-treatment’, a fact which is evident from the happenings we observe daily in the world. This is no reason not to exercise virtue, yet something deeper is also needed if man wishes to find fulfilment that transcends disappointment and mishap.

Hari Prasad Shastri once wrote: ‘Nothing that does not arise from the depths of the soul is of any real good to man.’ It is the purpose of Adhyatma Yoga to uncover this phase of our inner being, which has within itself the supreme value and which is the ultimate support of both the individual mind and the cosmic mind. This is the Spirit of man, his innermost Self. Those who have realized it are said to be ‘intent on the welfare of all beings’. Their work in the world is undertaken in the light of this all-important spiritual perspective. Their offerings are labours of love, seeking the best outcome but unattached to the results or cast down by setbacks, for their joy, peace and fulfilment come from ‘the depths of the soul’.

Dharma—The Law of Righteousness

A lecture by Hari Prasad Shastri

Worship God. Leave all else. Worship demands singleness of purpose and concentration of the whole mind on God. As long as the heart is divided in its loyalty, and the full attention is not given to God, and until the remembrance of His holy Name is constant, the blessedness and bliss of true God-realization does not come. Our sojourn on earth is as uncertain as a dewdrop on a rose petal. Therefore, worship God. Leave all else. *Shri Dadaji Maharaj*

WHETHER we are learned or illiterate, whether wealthy or penniless, whether subject to affectionate caresses or the victims of aversion and coldness from those whom we believe we love, we are all subject to moods: moods of zeal, buoyancy, freedom from conflict, peace, strife, spiritual depression or ever deepening despair. To know how to control these ever fluctuating moods is one of the secrets of life. The adverse moods, if allowed to have their own way, become psychologically rooted, or even a psychosis.

The causes of such moods are laid in our childhood, yet there is a rationality in our emotions and they can be subjected to modification at any time in our life. When such moods are not controlled, they may cause diseases, which the physician often attributes to a deficiency of calcium, to torpidity of the thyroid gland, to excess or lack of acidity, to nervous want of balance, and so on.

To rely on physical facts alone, or to attribute all the disturbing, inharmonious conditions to psychological eruptions, is not right. Psycho-analysis and other such treatments, mostly unscientific, afford little relief in the cases under consideration. The Stoics made a standing contribution to the art of living and exercised a great influence on the over-tired Romans. They aimed at nobility and happiness in life, and alleviation of suffering through the practice of a brave and resolute attitude.

This is a fairly good summary of the Stoics’ ethics, and we agree with it as it stands, but the inadequacy of this philosophy is self-evident. It fails to consider our life as a whole and it smothers our emotions. One

need not go to a Seneca to learn this philosophy. An elderly woman, when asked why she was always cheerful, replied: 'Well, I wear this world just as a loose garment.'

When the problems of life defy solution, it is not always wise to expect them to change overnight. We can react towards them with fear and shrinking, or with courage and hope. Friends, let us be wise. Religion is a great help in removing the coverings of illusion or ignorance from the mind, and it gives a spiritual value to art, ethics and science, in the garden of this world. Religion, art, literature and science are the expressions of a complete life.

Things do not happen to us, they happen through us. Let us therefore have well balanced minds; let our emotions be on a rational basis, and our whole inner being devoted to the good of all, through spiritual knowledge, devotion and love. Knowledge means disillusionment. Truth must rid us of nescience, of our ignorant prejudices, biases, likes and dislikes of the mind, of religious fanaticism, and of the egotistic love of ourselves and our selfish comforts; then we shall see that the Lord Truth is all.

Plato is one of the few philosophers who understands the deep significance of religion, and who advocates the true rationalization of our emotions through religion, that is to say, through love. The lack of this evaluation of the emotions is evident in the philosophy of Zeno. Plato was wise; he distinguished the body from the Spirit of man. The Truth is that it is the Spirit (Atman) in us, that is manifesting through the inner organ* and which constitutes our emotional, rational, ethical and physical life. When the knowledge of Truth dawns and teaches us how to live in love, beauty and probity, we live the entire life and not the fractional life of ignorance. When life is lived fully, completely, then all neuroses, all complexes, even the deep-seated emotional complexes, vanish like fog in a valley disappearing before the rays of the morning sun.

* Inner organ: denotes the unified principle of thinking, feeling, willing, memory, discrimination and egoity, or the sense of I-ness, according to Hindu philosophy, and which constitutes our emotional, rational, ethical and physical life.

Professor Jung, in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, which is a confirmation of some of the ancient teachings of Adhyatma Yoga, writes as follows:

Among all my patients in the second half of life, that is to say, over thirty-five, there has not been one whose problem, in the last resort, was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because they had lost that which the religions of every age have given to their followers; and none of them has been really healed who did not regain the religious outlook.

We must be lovers of God, not lovers of ourselves. Is there any word, in any language, which has been so profaned, so misunderstood, as this word love? Our love must be dynamic; we must progress from love of forms to love of concepts and ideals, culminating in love of Truth above all. The following remarks of Professor J. MacMurray, in this connection, are relevant.

We have, therefore, to ask ourselves: 'Is it really the other person or ideal that I love, or is it myself? Do I enjoy him or do I enjoy myself in being with him? Is he just an instrument for keeping me pleased with myself, or do I feel his existence and his reality to be important in themselves?'

If Truth or Yoga only justifies our expectations of mere pleasure, joy or peace like that of pastured kine, if it only gives us a better business, better health or more wealth, we are only lovers of ourselves and not lovers of God.

The whole universe is under the law of righteousness, called dharma or universal harmony; and the highest attribute of God is love. Omniscience and omnipotence are nothing compared to the attribute of love. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone not only to conduct himself and live his life according to the precepts of this holy law, but to make his own contribution to it, for the sake of others and the well-being of all sentient creatures. Life has many functions, many stages of unfoldment, all moving towards its transcendental purpose; so, every human being should joyfully add to this universal harmony in any way he can, either by service, works, wealth, learning or art.

Dharma may also be defined as the response of evolution to Truth or

God. Truth is God and God is Truth; this is the very cornerstone of dharma. In the oldest classics of the world, the Upanishads, the injunction of the ancient law-giver, Manu, was: 'Dharma kills those who kill dharma' or 'Righteousness will protect those who uphold and protect righteousness.' The great sage, Bhishma, of classical India, has also said: 'Now I tell you that which is supreme in religion and in ethics. Neither for the sake of pleasure, nor wealth, nor advancement, nor even for the sake of life itself, should you destroy the dictates of this holy dharma.'

Manu further defined life as being a mode of experience designed for the fulfilment of its four great purposes: Dharma, Prosperity, Delight and Liberation (mukti) or the knowledge of God. They represent a grand analysis of life itself. Man should choose a means of earning wealth not contrary to dharma, to meet his biological, ethical and emotional needs, sharing it with others. Life, as taught by the spiritual philosophy of Yoga, is a creed for kings, not beggars. Let us enjoy the beauty of the Lord in nature, art, learning and science, and have delight in it. The transcendental reality behind all beauty, all ethics, all phenomena, is the bliss of God manifesting itself, and to come into contact with this is to fulfil the purpose of all delight. First comes the objective pleasure in life, then the subjective joy, and finally the transcendental life of bliss, freedom and the knowledge of Truth.

The dharmic or religious man knows that he is bound in varying ways to all other beings; he knows he is a link in a vast chain. The irreligious and ignorant man considers everything from the egotistic point of view, of the little limited self and its own interests. Pride, vanity and egotism, either in races or individuals, carry hell with them. Dharma is basic and essential, and if all individuals adopted this immoral activity, it would mean chaos and the very negation of the cosmos itself. The great idealist, Count Tolstoy, has truly said: 'You cannot harm others without first harming yourself.'

The doctrine of karma is the natural deduction from the law of dharma. Nations or individuals who live only for themselves or who curtail by tyranny and aggression the freedom of others, must, in the long run, suffer for it bitterly themselves.

Religion puts before us the grand ideals of dharma or the

brotherhood of man and the righteousness of God. No one religion has the monopoly of Truth, and fanaticism is the height of ignorance. A Moslem paradise excluding infidels or a Christian heaven into which others have no access, is fanaticism. The difference between a Buddha, a saint, and a tiny worm crawling on the ground, is quantitative, not qualitative. Every atom, every living being is a conditioned form of the Absolute, God, and must eventually come to the knowledge of supreme Truth. As a bird encaged all its life loses the use of its wings and cannot fly into the azure heaven, so a soul, mentally imprisoned in rigid dogmas and absolutism, remains stagnant and unenlightened.

Modern civilization, founded on capitalism, on the vast use of machinery and a lust for speed, has brought in its train an aggressive type of dissatisfaction, of class hatred, agnosticism, poverty of mind, a certain amount of spiritual bankruptcy, and has to a large extent shaken people's faith in the deeper values of life. The world-honoured Buddha, himself the essence of dharma, taught:

Evils are born of the heart; do not make light of little evils, thinking them harmless. The heart is the one source of great disaster: keep it under control. Goodness is a great armour. He who walks in the way of benevolence, who shows mercy, loving all and saving many, shall obtain the eternal blessing. He shall have restful sleep, peace when awake, shall always be prosperous, beloved of men, immune to poison, in no danger from fire or from water, and Heaven will give its protection to him.

It was the holy Zarathusthra, mighty Seer of ancient days, who saw this divine principle of love, of dharma or universal harmony, throughout the whole cosmos of God and called it righteousness. If nations lived according to the immortal dharma, there would be no destructive hatreds or wars, no need of asylums, reformatories or prisons. The modern civilization of the world today is enveloped in aggressive materialism. Let it be remembered that in spite of science, of advanced education, inventions, surgery and medicine, one of the greatest achievements of modern civilization is the art of killing.

Friends, let us beware! Let us work with dharma and for dharma, for what is called Rama Raj (the divine rule of peace on earth), which is government by righteousness, founded on the law of love and universal

harmony, for the good of all.

Dharma has certain duties which it imposes upon us. The acquirement of learning in order to share it with others is an aspect of dharma, and the cultivation, not of mere cleverness, but of wisdom. The great men of history, the really great heroes, have not been clever but wise. Alexander the Great and Napoleon were famous historical heroes—of banditry! What is that which should distinguish civilized men from monkeys or savages, but love of righteousness, dharma, love of Truth? In the *Bhagavad Gita* the Lord Shri Krishna says: ‘Love (dharma) constantly cherished towards Me slowly cleanses the heart of all corrupting passions.’

Hari Prasad Shastri

Do I Know?

Sometimes I think that I know,
Then, that I do not know.
Do I know or do I not?
I do not know that I know,
Nor that I know not.

Love, when I am merged in Thee,
I know not whether I know or do not know.
But the moment, My Own, I forget Thee,
I know I know or do not know.

H.P.S.

Affirmations of the Highest Truth

Willed by whom does the directed mind go towards its object? Being directed by whom does the life force, proceed (towards its duty)? By whom is this speech willed that people utter? Who is the effulgent being who directs the eyes and the ears?

He is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the Life of life, and the Eye of the eye. Therefore the intelligent men, after giving up (self-identification with the senses) and renouncing the world, become immortal.

That which man does not understand with the mind, by which, they say, the mind is encompassed, know That to be Brahman (the Absolute) and not what people worship as an object.

MAN HAS a higher Self which is immortal, and this is indicated in these verses from the *Kena Upanishad*. This power enables the mind to function, the eyes to see, the ears to hear. Present in all experience, this power does not have a form and cannot be thought of by the mind, let alone isolated and measured. It is limitless, self-luminous and is to be realized as our own true Self. The purpose of life is to come to this realization. The poet-sage, Nirbhayanandaji, reminds us:

Without the Self, there would have been no world.
O Nirbhaya, you are the one support of the moving and the fixed.
Seek with diligence to know the light of your personality.
When the Self is realized, the purpose of the body will have been served for ever.

If the true Self cannot be made an object, how can we make it a living force in our experience? Through *reasoning* we can infer that our personality has being and consciousness which continues unchanged through life. Through *scriptural revelation* we can know that this being and consciousness is the true Self of man, independent of bodily changes and the passing patterns of thought. Through *affirmation* we can realize our essential identity with that Self, and its absolute nature:

‘Know That to be Brahman, (the Absolute), and not what people worship as an object.’

Affirmation prepares the way for realization. How can we realize the Self, if we don’t affirm its presence, believe in it, or attempt to make it a reality? Realization is fulfilment, for Self contains within itself the supreme value, bliss absolute. In the words of the mahatma, Swami Mangalnathji:

What bliss—that I have now come to remember that whatever existed in the past was verily my own Self, and whatever I knew was indeed my self-cognition.

Whatever I saw was verily my own form; whatever I heard, that, too, was my own Self!

I was, I am and I shall be! Nothing other than my Self ever was or ever shall be!

The affirmations given in Adhyatma Yoga are concerned with the realization of ultimate Truth. They plant in our mind the idea of self-knowledge, the idea that will open the way to illumination. They remind us of our goal, God-realization or self-realization. And they clarify where Truth is to be investigated—within our own being.

The yogic affirmations, being phrased in the present tense, state the Truth as an eternal, ever valid fact, and hence, ever achieved. They strike an echo of recognition in the inner chamber of our heart, stirring into life our spiritual sense, which, if cultivated, will lead to realization. Here are some sentences of spiritual potency given by Swami Rama Tirtha, a knower of Truth:

OM All power am I. OM

OM All joy am I. OM

OM Fearless, fearless am I. OM

OM I hear in all ears. In all minds I think. OM

OM The life and light that shine through the sun and stars am I. OM

Such affirmations, taken singly and accompanied by the chanting of OM, and supported by a life of purity and spiritual intention, will give us a sense of the reality and freedom of the true Self.

The identity of the innermost Self of man with the Absolute is the

inner meaning of the Upanishads. The word for the Absolute is Brahman, a word indicating greatness, immensity, fullness and perfection. The fact of non-duality is stated directly in four short sentences, each of which is found in a different Upanishad.

I am Brahman.	<i>Brihadaranyaka Upanishad</i>
That Thou Art.	<i>Chandogya Upanishad</i>
This Self is Brahman.	<i>Mandukya Upanishad</i>
Consciousness is Brahman.	<i>Aitareya Upanishad</i>

The Upanishads as a whole give teachings about Brahman, and cause it to be known as the Self. They also expound the nature of the Self, and cause it to be known as Brahman. The realization of this identity is the consummation of the spiritual teachings and their purpose. Their fruition depends on a life dedicated to this purpose, followed by people who are open to instruction and guidance from the knowers of Truth. One cannot have the fruit of the teachings simply through reading books, any more than one can have a beautiful garden simply by subscribing to gardening magazines.

Do the Upanishads themselves abound in great affirmations phrased in the form of ‘I am’? This form of expression is implicit in some of their verses. But their verses on this theme are generally in the third person, not the first. For example, in the *Katha Upanishad* we have the verse:

The intelligent Self is neither born nor does it die. It did not originate from anything, nor did anything originate from It. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying and ancient. It is not injured even when the body is killed.

And in the *Mundaka Upanishad*:

Know that Self alone that is one without a second, on which are strung heaven, the earth and the inter-space, the mind and the vital forces, together with all the other organs; and give up all other talk. This is the bridge leading to immortality.

Here, the Self is spoken of in the third person: as ‘it’, although, being Self, it is obviously that principle that is associated with what the individual refers to as ‘I’. Nonetheless, the ‘I’ as we know it in everyday life does not feel itself to be unlimited, immortal, birthless, universal,

and so on. Therefore we may be forgiven for posing the question: ‘Are the Upanishads really referring to anything that we, as human beings, can seriously identify ourselves with?’

The answer to this question is a resounding ‘Yes!’ The main message transmitted through the writings of Shri Shankara (8th century AD) is, in effect: ‘Wake up to your divinity, which is so clearly taught in all the Upanishads.’ These great revelations of Truth are clearly and logically interpreted by him in terms of the Self of man—his ‘I’—being not separate or different, in essence, from the supreme Reality which underlies the universe. In his work known as *The Thousand Teachings* there are many verses that remind us that it is our own ‘I’ that has to be realized as the absolute.

I am without a second, unborn, deathless, not subject to old age, immortal, self-luminous, omnipresent, not a cause, not an effect, completely without taint, ever one and perfectly satisfied and so liberated.

I am the Lord, ever one and the same in all beings.

At first hearing, these are astounding statements. But their intention is not to inform the student of an ideal which, though admirable, is unattainable or in any way strange. On the contrary, it is what Shankara calls our ‘excessive attachment to the domain of cause and effect’ that is unnatural and restricting, and the purpose of the dialogues in his *Thousand Teachings* is to free us from this attachment.

If a man reflects over this dialogue he will be liberated from the onset of the great dangers that arise from ignorance. Ever free from desire, he will roam the earth free from grief, the same in all situations, a knower of the Self, happy.

We may contend that it is all very well to affirm the Self in this way, but what about the mind, with its restlessness and instability? How will such a message get through? Let us remember that the mind is not the Self, however closely we may feel that we *are* the mind. Rather, the Self, to use a metaphor from the *Bhagavad Gita*, ‘wears’ the body and mind as garments or coverings that are exterior to itself. Let us view the mind as an instrument or servant of the true Self, which abides as its

Inner Ruler, ‘the Mind of the mind’. The great yogic principle is that we can and are meant to guide our mind in this way. This is not a pretence, because our true nature is that higher power and we can invoke that power to help us bring the mind to peace. It means, in effect, addressing our mind as if it were our pupil, and we, identified with the superior spiritual power, are guiding it to peace and freedom. In *The Thousand Teachings* we find a string of verses that adopt this standpoint, and we are intended to make this our own standpoint. Here is one such affirmation:

Since I am not other than the supreme eternal (Self) I am eternally contented and am not in quest of any end. Ever contented, I do not desire my own individual welfare. Make efforts to attain peace, O mind. Here lies *thy* welfare.

The gist of this teaching is that the spiritual truth is ever complete, triumphant and revealed as the core of our being, but that we need to acquire peace of mind as the crucial condition in which we may realize the truth. But the fact remains, if we do not make friends with the idea that our ‘I’ in its true nature *is* this superior spiritual principle, then we will not know where to look for ultimate Truth.

Therefore, the supreme breakthrough in human understanding is to realize that this ‘I’ is something that transcends the limited ego of man, and is universal, limitless, one in all, yet transcending all. Just as in the baby there is the seed of the fully developed human being, so in this limited egoism, this I-sense, is hidden the infinite I. This is what the *Kena Upanishad* calls ‘the Mind of the mind, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear’. The meaning is that this true I is the conscious light and power through which these powers of knowledge work at all. The ‘Mind of the mind’ also indicates the utter superiority of this innermost principle, much as we might use such expressions as the God of gods, the Holy of holies, the Light of lights. This is what is present in the being of man. And the Upanishad reminds us: ‘Know that to be Brahman (God), and not what people worship as an object.’

Therefore, it can be seen that any solutions to our problems and difficulties in life that remain in the realm of the mind and that focus on our life in the world, fall short of ultimate realization. Falling short of

realization, these therapies and counsels cannot confer complete fulfilment. But affirmations based on the divinity of the Self, such as:

I am Light and in me there is no darkness whatever.

have practical validity and power based on ultimate Truth. They are a means of lifting our sense of identity from the restrictions of the mental world to the peace and wisdom of the self-effulgent spiritual Power that is the Mind of the mind. This is to rejoin our I-sense to its divine ground and origin, its home and true centre.

At this stage, an objection might be raised. Is it not egotistical to associate our 'I' with the Absolute, which is the same as linking it with divinity, with the being of God? Haven't we a host of predecessors in the form of self-seeking tyrants and false prophets, who have sported the same pretensions and arrogated to their egos the power supreme? This is an important question. The answer hinges on what we mean by 'I' when we make the great affirmations. The 'I' referred to is the Spirit of man, not his ego. The true Self of man is not the ego. This is the foundation of the spiritual teaching. The true Self is that unchanging consciousness which reveals the ego and the other phases of the mind, but which transcends the mind, and is 'one-without-a-second', the same in all beings. The spiritual seeker has the task of sifting the false I, the limited I, the ego, from the true Self, its divine substratum, which is pure consciousness, existence and bliss, and has no personal or individual characteristics. In our perfect being, there is no trace of egoism. No self-assertion or selfishness can abide in this region of infinite light. The affirmations are reminding us of this deeper identity, an identity that we all share. The true life begins when the ego is transcended.

Another related point is that our affirmations of identity with the true Self, contain a hidden negation of the false self. The great affirmation put in the form of the words: 'I am Brahman' (the Absolute) is not a pairing of the ego with Brahman. It is effectively saying: 'I am not the ego but Brahman'. Such affirmations are not boasts, rather the opposite. They are an effacement of the limited self and its world of wants and fears, in the supreme light of the infinite Self. This matter can give rise to confusion and delusion. Therefore, one who knows the Truth is

careful to lead the enquirer away from egoism and its various disguises, into true identification.

Then we might raise another objection: 'Isn't all this a kind of self-hypnosis? After all, you can convince yourself of anything if you try.'

As with all affirmation therapy, it is true that the spiritual thoughts and ideas are deliberately planted in the mind with a view to influence its deeper stratum, whether we call it the subconscious, the unconscious or the causal body. This is done through repetition, meditation and pondering deeply the sentences in question. But there is something unique about the yogic affirmations of true identity. They are not seeking to confer on us a new quality or insight, and they are not concerned with the world of action and appearance. They are to do with being, not doing. And this being is conceived of as an eternal Fact, the only immortal Truth about our nature, a Truth that has become apparently concealed by wrong ideas. This accumulation of wrong ideas is collectively known as spiritual ignorance. The higher spiritual affirmations are prescribed in order to negate this ignorance.

We are already hypnotized by wrong ideas, by dreams of hope and fear, by the lure of the world of the senses and their promise of lasting happiness, which is never fulfilled. And the affirmations of the divinity of man, such as: 'I alone am, ever free from all taint. The world exists within me like a mirage', are made to de-hypnotize us, to dissipate the darkness, to appeal to our true being, to bring us back to our true identity, an identity which has never been lost, only concealed. These statements work, not by adding anything to us, but through stimulating recognition. Something deep within us already knows this Truth, and the affirmations revive that spiritual sense.

In this world of cares and trivial concerns that overwhelm our consciousness and keep us bound to the surface of experience, the holy affirmations are symbols of that deeper and perfect realm of the Spirit that ever interpenetrates this world of appearances and is its true being. They remind us of the fact: That thou art.

Why is it that we may still have difficulties in affirming the Truth, so that, while part of our mind is engaged in the meditation on: 'I am peace. I am light. I am bliss', other parts of the mind stay as deniers or

doubting Thomases, and say: ‘You are no such thing’?

One reason is that we have not truly grasped the fine distinction between the ego and the Self. This is not surprising. Both are subtle. Relatively speaking, both the ego and the Self are interior. Both have the same name: ‘I’. No wonder there is confusion.

The answer is to deepen one’s enquiry, in particular to note the transient nature of the ego, and that it, too, is an object in the world of objects. It is not the true subject, and the true subject is that unbroken awareness that knows all our experiences, whether the ego is part of them or not.

Another reason for the difficulty in applying to oneself the yogic affirmations of identity with Truth, is that the mind is more at home with material things and qualities, whereas the true Self or Brahman transcends all form and quality. This is why, for most of us, the Absolute has to be approached through symbols—spiritual forms or words that mean something to our mind and can be held in the mind, yet which indicate the supreme Reality beyond the mind. In this sense, light is a symbol, peace is a symbol, the forms of the incarnations of God or of an illumined saint or sage, are symbols. And the sound and form of OM is, for the yogis, a most potent symbol. These conceptions are, as it were, means to lead our understanding to the pure abstraction of the spiritual reality which they symbolize. Withdrawing into this inner realm, with the feeling, ‘OM. I am peace. OM. I am light’, will, in time, pacify and inform the mind in such a way that something of the ultimate peace and light, whose source is the true Self, will be reflected in the mind. We will know that our orientation is right, and will have the capacity to probe more deeply.

It is a mistake to think that the quest for a reality that is formless will diminish our experience. For this spiritual formlessness is not like the formlessness of a desert or waste land. On the contrary, it is within the so-called formlessness of Brahman that the whole world of duality appears as an illusory display.

This paradox, of the formlessness of that Principle on which are strung, like pearls, heaven and earth, is the theme of several verses in the *Ashtavakra Gita*:

Wonderful am I! In spite of the body and its properties, I am one. I go

nowhere, I come from nowhere, I abide in my Self, pervading the whole universe.

All praise be to me, I am most skilful, I, without a form, uphold the universe through all eternity.

I am wonderful, adoration to my Self. I own nothing, and yet all that is thought or spoken of is mine.

There are problems in visualizing or conceptualizing such a Truth, which is actually impossible to visualize or conceptualize. But, just as it says in the Bible, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’, so, too, as the enquirer proceeds with the path of Yoga, a higher faculty in the mind awakens through which the insight into Truth deepens and widens far beyond the kind of insights yielded by the intellect. Adhyatma Yoga awakens our faculty of spiritual perception and this leads ultimately to realization.

Let us meditate on a short sentence from a holy text that has the dual virtue of reminding us that we are the masters of our inner life and can guide it, and also that affirms the highest Truth:

OM. Be still, and know that I am God. OM

B.D.

MEDITATION PRACTICES FOR PEACE AND CLARITY

Before presenting some traditional meditation practices, a little should be said about the purpose of meditation and its place in the overall spiritual training.

In Adhyatma Yoga, meditation is a spiritual exercise that is practised each day at specific times. At this time the mind is focused exclusively on something that expresses the essence of the teachings, usually a short statement or an image. The object of our meditation here is a text:

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

This text states directly the spiritual teaching that our true Self is not the body or mind, but the universal reality pervading and beyond them.

The aim of meditation is twofold: firstly, to still the mind, and secondly, to bring into our awareness what is expressed in the text or image. The two go together, replacing the stream of changing thoughts that usually fill our awareness, with one steady thought about the deeper reality within and around us. As meditation matures, this thought about reality is superseded by awareness of that reality itself.

This is why we meditate on texts from the spiritual literature which have been formulated by enlightened sages. They are about our true Self, the pure conscious awareness that illumines our minds from within. At first we think about that as an idea, and as the flow of mental activity is stilled and purified, this inner consciousness is revealed as the basis of all experience. As a drop of water dissolved in the ocean is the ocean, so is pure consciousness free of any boundary or limitation.

Because the meditation texts are distillations of the philosophy underlying this Yoga, it will be clear why study of this philosophy is another important aspect of the Yoga training. We need to come to the meditation having already reflected on some of the essential points.

One of the central teachings is that there is what one might call the Absolute, or God, or simply Reality, and it is one; there is not more than one reality. It follows that all the separations and differences we see in the world have their being in that One, while the apparent differences arise because of the way our minds and senses see things. This is in no way at odds with scientific explanations of the world, which are effective and useful at their own level; it simply states that beyond all our knowledge and experience and ignorance, there is an ultimate Reality, which is quite unlike our fragmentary view of things. Being the Reality in all, it is evidently the Reality within us, the ground of our being, and that is where it is to be sought on the spiritual path.

Another important aspect of the teaching approaches the reality within from a different perspective. This sets out in detail why our true Self is not the body or even the mind that we usually feel ourselves to be. These are really mental objects or events which we experience, but they are not our real Self. The Self is the witness of these mental activities and is not in itself affected by them; it is in fact the pure

consciousness that illumines the mind. Distinguishing between the mind with its varying states, and the pure unchanging light of consciousness, is another essential Yoga practice.

It ought to be noted that the philosophy underlying this Yoga does not try to prove that these statements about the deeper Reality, the Self, are true. The philosophy establishes that they are compatible with reason, but only direct experience can prove whether they are true or not. The philosophy gives us the essential teachings; it is for us then to think through these teachings and to satisfy ourselves that we have understood them and how they point towards a solution to our deepest concerns. Then we can put the principles into practice and make the inner investigations for ourselves.

Meditation is an essential part of this inner investigation. At the time of meditation we put aside reasoning, having understood the scope and limitations of reason. Then, we bring before our mind an expression of the higher teaching indicating the pure boundless reality that is the ground of our own being, and we focus the attention steadily upon it, to the exclusion of other ideas. Because that is the ground of our being, when the mind is sufficiently stilled and purified, it stands revealed as the ever present Self in all.

This is the briefest of outlines of meditation. The teachings are essentially simple, but require much reflection to be absorbed. And meditation is an art which must be practised with perseverance.

Along the way, our meditation practices will help us gain valuable qualities, which in turn will help deepen our meditations. Among them are inner peace and clarity. Peace does not mean inertia, and clarity is not having a blinkered view of things. These qualities spring from having a definite idea of what is absolutely real and good, and a knowledge of our true purpose in life. When we have a clear idea of our goal, everything else is seen in perspective.

It is important to decide in advance what our meditation will be, and when and for how long we will do it, and then adhere to this decision. This helps establish a rhythm, and it will help us begin to become independent of the fluctuating moods of the mind. It is also very helpful to choose a place for our meditations, and wherever we choose it should be quiet and orderly, and possibly ornamented with a sacred image.

There is one more point from the teachings that we need to be aware of. This is the symbol OM. OM has a visual form, which may be seen on the front cover of this journal, and a sound form. The three lower curves represent respectively what we experience when we are awake, when dreaming, and in dreamless sleep. The point above, separated by a broken circle, represents what illumines all three states, everything we can experience. OM is a symbol of unity, infinity and transcendence.

So, we can now come to the **meditation practices**.

1. First there is a **preparation**, that we could easily overlook, but this would be to deprive ourselves of much. To get the most from meditation we need to approach it in the right spirit. It can be put like this:

Approach the meditation with reverence and calmness. Feel that you are in the presence of the divine, within and without you. Mentally bow to that invisible power.

This inner bow is entirely interior and personal. What matters is that we do this sincerely and consciously.

2. Next is a **breathing practice**, with OM.

Practise relaxation by breathing deeply and slowly, mentally repeating OM, one half during the in-breath, and the second half during the out-breath. With each out-breath relax the muscles and nerves. Do this 21 times.

The connection between breathing and the condition of the mind is well-known. So here we breathe consciously and a little more deeply than usual, to stabilize and tranquillize the mind. This practice is deepened with the syllable OM. With the in-breath we hear the sound O, on the out-breath Mm. It is not necessary to think about its meaning, we simply use it as an inner anchor. We listen to the sound of OM and let it dissolve other thoughts and tensions. If the mind does wander, just bring it back to the breath and OM.

3. The next practice is a **visualization**.

Imagine that the morning sun is shining in the 'heart centre'. We fix our thought on this point, called the centre of vitality, where the Lord

omnipotent is seated. We visualize the morning sun radiating here and let its rays of peace, plenty and power issue forth.

So, firstly, we inwardly locate the heart centre. This is the region at the centre of the body just below the breastbone. Just rest the attention there for a short while. Then imagine at this point the morning sun. Vividly picture the morning sun with its special colour and brilliance. If the mind wanders away, again just bring it back to the heart centre and the image of the morning sun.

4. Now we come to the **meditation text**.

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

We had a chance earlier to consider this spiritual utterance. Now is the time for meditation, so we fix our attention steadily on it. We can repeat the text a few times until the meaning is in focus, and then rest the attention on that. We might take a key word, like Self, or divine sun, or light, and repeat that as a way of focusing the attention. Once again, if the mind wanders, we note its fickleness and then bring the awareness back to this lasting truth about the true Self.

5. It is traditional to **close the meditation** by extending thoughts of peace and goodwill to all beings, without exception.

It is worth repeating that the secret of meditation is to practise it regularly for a definite time, without being affected by the ideas and moods in the mind. Then we can go beyond those ideas and moods and come into contact with the deeper or higher levels within us.

In the case of meditation, nothing we invest in time and effort can be lost. We all have the feeling that our self is the most significant thing in the Universe; at the same time we know that narrow forms of selfishness lead nowhere. Meditation is the way out of this dilemma. It can lead to the discovery of a jewel beyond price—our own true, limitless, unchanging Self, and this discovery is the greatest service we can perform.

P.H.

Teachings of Attar

Based on a previously unpublished lecture by Dr A J Alston

DRAWING ON the brilliant paint-box of the Persian mystical poet, Farid al-Din Attar, let us examine three basic themes. The first is what Carlyle called the ‘condition-of-man’ question, namely, the tangle in which most of us find ourselves in worldly life. Secondly, we shall ask what practical means the spiritual teachers recommend to help us escape from this predicament. Lastly, we touch on the experiences of mystics who have enjoyed spiritual illumination through applying the means they recommend to us.

Attar lived in Nishapur, in the extreme North East of Iran and therefore in that part of it that was first exposed, during his own lifetime, to the attacks of the Mongol hordes. In fact, he is said to have been slaughtered by the Mongols when they overran Nishapur in 1234. According to a well-known legend, he is supposed to have blessed the poet Jalal al-Din Rumi when the latter was a child with his parents, making good their escape from the Mongols and fleeing to Damascus and eventually to Turkey—at that time known as Rum because it had formerly been occupied by the Byzantine or Roman empire, whence the name Rumi. As for Attar, his own name is also significant; it proclaims that he was a perfumer or druggist. We have his own word for it, that he composed his marvellous poems at intervals of leisure while seated at his drug-store and in between feeling the pulse of his patients and prescribing drugs for them.

Drugs and perfumes still go together and in our modern health and beauty emporia you can usually, if so disposed, or rather indisposed, get alkaselzer at one counter and after-shave at another. More to the point, Attar’s position as a chemist made him independent of courtly patrons, and he could write what he liked, when he liked it. His output was vast, but our material this evening will come from his four most famous Masnawis. The Masnawi is a long poem, of book length, in ballad style, which usually tells some kind of a story, though the story is apt to get lost on the way while the poet inserts hundreds of short stories to keep the reader’s interest alive. The content of a Masnawi may be romantic or vaguely historical or both, but in Attar’s case, the work is used

strictly as a medium of spiritual instruction. Attar’s Masnawis are magnificent works in their genre, second only to the incomparable Masnawi of Maulana Rumi, which they inspired.

Let us start with some of Attar’s illustrations of the unsatisfactory nature of ordinary worldly life. He draws attention to our blindness, a blindness of which we are all too often ourselves unaware. There is a peculiar blindness in our ordinary unregenerate condition. The Indian poet Kabir expressed it forcibly when he said that mud falls on our heads and we think it is rose-water. We are very often unable to see where our actions are valuable and where they are useless. We tend to want to go on doing the same old things regardless. It is a species of what the Indians call ‘moha’ or attachment. Attar compares our condition to that of a certain lunatic who threw a boulder into a china-shop. When they tried to tell him he would damage the interests of the owner of the shop, he said he was so fascinated by the clinking sound of the breaking china that he had no idea of anyone’s interests in his head. We, too, tend to become fascinated with the clinking of the perishable, highly brittle and fragile objects of the world and on this account we forget to evaluate our actions and ask ourselves where our true interest lies. One thing we are particularly apt to forget is that our stay in this world is short and uncertain.

Attar invoked on this subject another lunatic, though the incident might almost remind us of the court-jester, Yorick, in *Hamlet*. A lunatic is seated on the roadside, holding a skull in his hand, when the king comes riding by. As he didn’t get up when he should have done in the presence of the king, the king stopped and asked him what he was doing. ‘I was wondering’, said the beggar, ‘whether this was the skull of a king like you or of a beggar like me.’ Our Paramguru, Shri Dada, used to say that our life on earth was as short and uncertain as that of a dewdrop on a bud, so that it was not worth quarrelling with one another. Sometimes we feel ambitious and would like to exhibit ourselves as better than others, but the English poet had the right idea when he wrote:

The glories of our blood and state,
Are shadows not substantial things.
There is no armour against fate.
Death lays his icy hand on kings.

Sceptre and crown must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade!

A human being is both made and unmade by his imagination. As the Upanishad says, it depends on the mind whether we have bondage or release. The imagination has to be harnessed to a goal towards which we are working. Then it can project and foresee, plan and enable us to live creatively. But if we do not set ourselves any particular goal and live more or less as the mind dictates, the mind paints empty, useless, vain pictures which cover over and hide the stillness and peace of reality. That is why the *Bhagavad Gita* says, 'What is night to all beings, therein the self-controlled one is awake. Where all beings are awake, that is the night of the sage who sees.'

Attar illustrates this from the example of the bat, which is so formed that it can only fly at night. At night-time, he says, when no other creature can safely fly, the bat may think itself the king of the whole race that fly; but as soon as the sun rises, the bat sinks back into impotence. Attar says that this is an image of what happens in our own case when we act on our own account. We feel freedom and power in the short term, but when reality manifests in the manner of daylight, we become aware of our impotence as individuals.

Sometimes we are tempted to think that reason can solve our problems. We can indeed extend the significance of our experience by pondering over it, that is, by practising reflection or *vichara*. But this does not mean that one has to be a philosopher in order to pursue the spiritual life. What matters in the end is devotion and dedication to God. And Attar relates a case to show that the right result can sometimes be attained by a sort of simple-hearted stupidity. An old street violin-player had got to the point of decrepitude where no-one would listen to him playing any more or give him any money. In sheer desperation, he went into an empty old Mosque and played to God. Then he prayed to God not to be like the others and give him nothing for his trouble. At that moment the great sage Abu Sa'id came by, holding a large quantity of gold coins that a rich man had given him to give to his disciples. Abu Sa'id let his disciples go hungry and gave all the coins to the old violin-player in the dilapidated, disused mosque. The old man expressed his

thanks by saying that in future he would never play for anyone except God, because God was the only one who understood and appreciated art. The story is supposed to illustrate how God, so far from being impressed by our intellectual powers, is more likely to be touched by our simplicity.

Some think that one day science will supply all the answers that can be supplied. Physics views things abstractly, concentrating only on those aspects of the things with which it deals which are subject to measurement. Bertrand Russell remarked that the physicist has the same amount and kind of knowledge about the things with which he deals as a ticket-collector has about the people with whom he deals. He just knows their approximate physical size and appearance and the fact of whether they have or have not got the right ticket. Attar's attitude to astronomy is rather similar. The more one knows the deeper becomes the puzzle. There are many stars in the sky, he says, that are hundreds of times bigger than the earth. If you dropped a brick on to the earth from the sky, it would take 500 years to arrive. (It is not known how Attar gained these insights, but they are likely to have been far nearer the truth than anything known in Europe by the time of his death in 1234.) Compared to the nine spheres, he said, the earth is like a poppy-seed floating in an ocean. All that we can really know about the sky is the beauty of its appearance.

In one of Attar's poems a dervish gazes up at the starry heavens and says, 'O my Lord and Master, if the roof of thy prison is so beautiful, how much more beautiful must be thy garden beyond.' In another place he records having long gazed on and contemplated the stars. In the end he says it is wrong to waste one's time over these golden idols, for one will never be able to understand the meaning of their revolutions. We are like spectators watching a game of chess when we do not know the rules and the moves.

If we are thus mortal and ignorant, what is our refuge? Attar has nothing startlingly new to declare on this topic. He just calls for repentance, sincerity, altruism, effort, renunciation and, above all, the company of holy men and women. But he illumines all his themes with delightful stories and images.

Renunciation, for instance, is not usually a counsel, the hearing of

which warms the cockles of our hearts. Attar does not employ modern sales techniques, he does not assure us that we can save £20.00 by buying two, but he does make renunciation seem more attractive than it might at first appear, both by argument and examples. Renunciation, he says, is always renunciation of something good for something better. In mysticism, it means giving up this world in favour of God, that is, giving up the world in favour of something that is both more precious and more durable, as one might give up snow in favour of a jewel. A man who is an utter destitute, morally, spiritually and materially, cannot practise renunciation, as he has nothing to renounce. In order to be able to practise renunciation, you must first be in possession of something good and valuable in itself, in order to be able to renounce it for the sake of something better. What is called liberality and aristocratic generosity, he says, does not amount to renunciation. This is so even when it is pushed to the point of parting with one's possessions, unless it is done with a clear consciousness that the perishable things of this world are being given up in favour of the eternal good of God. Liberality, without this feeling, is tainted by a desire for reputation and is of little use to the recipient and of none to the donor.

Attar quotes and takes up for criticism an old and well-known maxim that might at first sight seem impeccable. The maxim runs: 'Work for the sake of the next world as if you were going to die tomorrow: and work for the sake of this world as if your life here was going to last forever' – that is, attend to our spiritual needs at once and attend to our worldly needs at leisure. But Attar quotes a saying of Jesus retained in Muslim traditions, which forbids thinking of worldly needs at all, which may perhaps be interpreted as saying that even the worldly needs must be seen as part of the pursuit of spiritual needs. Jesus says, 'This world and the next world are like east and west. If one goes towards one, one moves away from the other, and when one moves away from one, one approaches the other'.

According to the Muslim mystics, renunciation can be classified into various degrees or stages. At the lowest stage, with which most of us are acutely familiar, there is renunciation, but it is accompanied by a backsliding towards the flesh-pots of Egypt at the same time. At a higher stage, the renunciate succeeds in renouncing his claim to the

objects of the world as his own, but this renunciation is accompanied by a certain feeling of satisfaction that he has renounced something worse in favour of something better, almost as if he had succeeded in exchanging an old tin-lizzie for a BMW. It is this form of renunciation that is the constant target of the jibes of the great lyric poet Hafiz, who felt that any note of self-seeking was unworthy of a true lover. In the highest state of renunciation, there is no sense of renunciation, while the one renouncing no longer feels that he has given up anything worth having. It is as if one had a clod of earth in one's hand, and in stooping down to pick up a jewel lying on the ground, one cast aside the earth to free the hand. Somebody told the famous mystic Bayazid that there was a local preacher who was great on renunciation of the world. Bayazid made a contemptuous gesture with this hand and said, 'I should have thought that if he was going to preach, he would preach about something. But the world is nothing. How can it be the object of renunciation?'

The author Gerald Heard wrote an interesting commentary on the Lord's Prayer in which he claimed that true renunciation was like taking off an overcoat on a hot day. The poet Attar comes up with a similar image. A man came upon a porter sitting by the road-side, with his load untouched by his side. 'Why aren't you carrying your load?' asked the busybody passer-by, 'you must be losing money.' 'It may be I'm losing a few shillings', said the porter, 'but I've got a hundred-weight off my back.' The answer could be quoted as, at least, a partial defence of the Socratic view that virtue is a matter of insight. Through doing the spiritual practices given, the student gradually ushers in the sunlight of awareness of the presence of God everywhere, and dissipates the darkness of attachment to worldly objects, which are henceforth given their just place, and no more, in the economy of his life.

Although the final stages of renunciation come easily and naturally through insight—like taking off an overcoat in hot weather—insight itself is not usually gained without hard work at the discipline and a willingness to submit to the yoke and accept suffering. Only he who has suffered knows what suffering is, and the saints have usually suffered. Attar tells the story of a thief who had his hand cut off. He bore the agony of the blows without a murmur, lifted up his arm and went his

way. By and by he came to a convent of holy men, where he was invited in and stayed the night. Inside the convent he began to howl and yammer. He was asked, 'Why were you silent at the place of execution and on the road and yet now you howl and yell?' He replied, 'At the place where my hand was cut off there was no-one who could have understood what the pain was like. To scream would have been a waste of breath. Here I have found comrades who have suffered and understand what suffering is. It makes sense to scream and yell before them.'

Although suffering is not valued as an end in itself in the Muslim spiritual traditions, and they do not believe that we have obtained vicarious absolution for our sins through Jesus's sufferings on the cross, the Muslims not only stress that all the great prophets have undergone suffering, but even speak of suffering as ordained by God as an aid and reminder to ourselves to turn to God. The springtime sentiment 'God's in his heaven, all's right with the world' praised by Browning, too often includes the feeling, 'It's all right if God stays up there.' But, as we know, the feeling 'all's right with the world' is one of the most transient.

Attar believed that God ordains a certain amount of suffering as an aid to turning our attention in the right direction, that is to Himself. He pictures a Sultan in his audience chamber accompanied by the Vizier. The great hall is empty and silent. No beggar has come to ask a boon. No appellant has come, asking for the redress of a wrong. There is no evidence to the ruler that he is inspiring either hope or fear. He asks the Vizier why the audience chamber is empty of beggars and appellants. The Vizier replies, no doubt relieved to be able to come up with an answer that should leave his head safely on his shoulders, 'Your majesty, the world is so thoroughly pervaded by your justice that no appellant needs to come forward.' The Sultan replies, 'You are right. Things need a little stirring up.' And he sends out his soldiers to enforce full payment of taxes, and it was not long before the king's audience-chamber was duly buzzing. Even so, God includes sickness, ill-will, disappointment and other such items in his scheme of things, so that people should turn to Him as a ready help in time of trouble.

It was in this spirit that the poet, George Herbert, declared that God

deliberately held back rest when pouring bounties on his creatures:

For if I should (said He)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

All, however, in Attar's teaching is not doom and gloom. He speaks of God's kindness in recognizing our efforts, so to speak, to please Him, and of how He rewards them infinitely more than they merit. Attar records a tradition that also passed into the *Masnawi* of Maulana Rumi. There was once a poor Bedouin who lived in the desert where only salty, brackish water is to be found. Pushed out of his natural habitat by drought and famine, he came upon a normal river and found the water so pure and sweet to the taste that he was convinced it must have come from one of the rivers of Paradise, and he filled his water-skins with it as tight as they would go. Armed with this booty, he made for the Caliph of Baghdad, convinced that the Caliph would richly reward him for such a present. When he came before the Caliph Ma'mun, promising him water from Paradise, what he actually came up with from his water-skins was luke-warm water, already gone stale. The Caliph sipped a little of the water and ordered the man to be richly rewarded on condition that he went straight back home. When asked why he made that condition, the Caliph replied that if the man had not gone straight back home, he would have been sure to have come across the Tigris and realized the valuelessness of his gift. 'He came from far to give me a present', said the Caliph, 'and gave what he could. I did not want to make him feel ashamed of himself.' Then the poet, having recounted the tradition, addresses God and says, 'You my Lord and Master, have granted the Caliph this magnanimity, which is but a dewdrop compared to your own. I have come from the salty desert of this world. In this arid climate, I have only been able to offer you a very few acts of genuine obedience. I come from afar with a water-skin full of salty tears on my shoulder in the hope that you will grant me your compassion.' And then, as so often, he confesses his weakness and begs God for help.

What are the means at our disposal for escape from the limitations of worldly life? They boil down in the end to the love of God, but of

course love of God is differently conceived at different stages of the path. At its highest stage, it ends with absorption in the Beloved, God. The traditional tales about romantic love, notably those of Majnun and Leila and of Farhad and Shirin, which resemble more or less our Romeo and Juliet, turn up in Attar's poems, and are put to allegorical use, but that exaggerated form of romantic love which ends in the death of the lovers bears no direct relation to Attar's conception of spiritual discipline. Attar's conception of love is one of an ideal to be followed, the ideal set up and illustrated by the mystics. The God of the mystics is the only proper object of love. From Attar's point of view, the examples of Majnun and Farhad, the romantic lovers, have something to teach us about true love of God. But much more weight is attached to the example of the Afghan Emperor Mahmud and his beloved slave, Ayaz. In the case of Majnun and Leila, Leila is more or less passive, and what we hear about love we learn principally from the actions and states of the lover, Majnun.

In the case of Emperor Mahmud and his beloved slave, Ayaz, it is the other way round; we learn most from the behaviour of the loved object, the slave, Ayaz. The reason is that, since Ayaz is a noble servant, his behaviour illustrates the attitudes that we should cultivate as potential servants of God. One learns the rules of love from his fine and subtle answers as well as from observing his behaviour. When Mahmud was buying slaves, Ayaz, who, so to speak, wanted the job, was asked about his skills. He said he had one virtue better than anything else in the two worlds, i.e. better than anything in heaven or earth. 'What is that?' asked Mahmud. Ayaz said, 'If you were to put me on your throne and give me command over all the continents of the earth, I would never forget that I was a slave.' This sentiment is greater than anything in heaven or earth because the rare true lover of God never forgets that he is God's servant. It is indeed the badge of a holy soul.

Attar turns the traditions about Mahmud and Ayaz this way and that to extract this or that spiritual lesson. Here is an example. Emperor Mahmud was holding an audience, when a seller of salt burst into the audience chamber and began to shout out about his wares. After the audience, Mahmud had the man brought up to ask him to explain his bad behaviour. The man replied. 'The salt was only an excuse. I love

Ayaz, who was standing near you in the audience and I wanted to look at him.' 'How can a beggar like you', said the Emperor, 'expect to dine from the same dish as me, who owns a great empire and seven thousand elephants? You haven't even got food for your evening meal.' The man replied, 'That's all just talk. All your possessions that you have been enumerating are the equipment for attracting an object of love, but not the equipment for loving him. The equipment for loving is a burning heart. And that is what I have in full measure. Do you understand what this salt means? In the dish of your love, the salt of elimination of ego and humility is lacking.' Thus does Attar illustrate the theme that love is not anything that can be bought.

One fault in Mahmud's love as here presented was that it was tainted with egoism. Egoism, it is well known, is the veil that hides God from our eyes. Attar illustrates this as follows. A dervish asked the Sufi, Shibli, 'Who was your first teacher on the path?' 'A dog', replied Shibli. 'I saw that dog sitting thirsty on a hot day by the edge of a pool of water. Every time he put his head down to drink out of the pool, he saw his own reflection in the water, thought it was another dog, and drew back, lacking the courage to attack it. Finally, the force of thirst drove him to spring into the water. The other dog immediately disappeared. It was his own reflection that had been the partition that had held him back from the water. From that dog I learned that my own ego is the partition that holds me back from my own true nature.'

A similar anecdote about the ego concerns a king riding along a road with great pomp and retinue, who found a man sitting by the roadside. In classical Muslim poetry, kings going along the road often feel enough curiosity to stop when they pass by and a person doesn't get up, as they know that such people are taking their life in their hands by such discourtesy. The king stopped and asked the man condescendingly, 'Would you like to be me?' The man, who was of course, a kind of sage, replied, 'To be 'me' is exactly what I don't want.'

This disappearance of the ego agrees with the classical definition of love in Islamic mysticism, given by Junaid. When in the lover, the attributes of the beloved supplant his own, that is love. Only a very pure person can see God. Until we reach that state of purity we are in the position of the fly trying to make a complaint to Solomon against the

wind. The fly went into Solomon's court and complained that the wind was constantly interfering with it and blowing it about. Solomon summoned the wind. As soon as the wind arrived, the fly simply disappeared, blown right off course. Solomon gave judgement, 'The wind has done nothing wrong. It is just that the fly is not strong enough to remain in its presence.' Similarly, a human being in his individual, physical form has no eye wherewith to behold the overpowering beauty of God. Therefore God, out of His Grace, manifests himself to us in two ways, but only if we learn how to look. He is mirrored in our hearts, but we find it difficult to withdraw our minds from preoccupation with objects, so it is hard for us to see Him there.

Attar illustrates this with an anecdote about a small Indian boy. He was taken captive, but Emperor Mahmud took a fancy to him, gave him all sorts of treats and sat him, beside himself, on the throne. But the boy only began to cry. 'Why are you crying?' asked the Emperor. 'I am crying because my mother, who used to threaten me with taking me before Emperor Mahmud if I didn't behave, cannot now see that I am sitting together with him on his throne.' Even so, God is present in our hearts, but we have to learn to follow the spiritual discipline before we can learn to look there and become aware of his presence.

Equally, God also manifests Himself to us in Nature, but only to one who has developed discrimination through spiritual practice and can see the one among the many. Towards the end of one of his stories, Attar turns to the reader and says, 'When you are walking about, consider everything as the robes of the king. Do not become restless just because the king has many different robes. Make no mistake. The king is continually changing his robes. Whether the world appears black or white to you, know that it is only the robes of the King. The two worlds, heaven and earth, are just the clothing of the king. Fix your eye on the unity. To see two is to fall into the polytheism of the Zoroastrians. The king has many robes in the royal wardrobe. Do not look at the clothes. Fix your eye on the king.'

A.J.A.

The Eternal Wisdom

An extract from a portrayal by Hari Prasad Shastri of the life and teachings of the Upanishadic sage, Yajnavalkya.

IN A GREEN valley of the Himalayas, to the north of Gorakhpur, intersected by several streams and rivulets, about two hundred cows are grazing lazily. Some of them occasionally lift their heads, sniff the pure air and then bend their necks again to nibble the grass. Most of them are white, some red and others black. The black ones are small and graceful, their udders loosely hanging, laden with fresh milk.

Four youths are in charge of these cows and many others in an adjoining valley. Their leader is a lad of fifteen, and his face is beaming with intelligence and peace. The other youths are his juniors in age. They are sitting under a tree with manuscripts written on bark placed before them.

The leader, whose name is Brahmadata, says: 'Today the Teacher spoke about the nature of existence. How well our revered one speaks; how clear are his words; how lovingly he teaches us the eternal truth. Are we not fortunate to have him for our Teacher?'

One of the junior scholars replies: 'Indeed, no greater fortune could befall us. Our only regret is that we are able to do nothing for the holy one. Let us collect some fruits for the holy mothers, Maitreyi and Katyayani [the two wives of the sage, Yajnavalkya].'

They entered a wood and began to look for wild peaches, apricots and other fruits. Having gathered a large quantity, they cleaned each fruit and washed it in a neighbouring pool. Then, putting the fruits in a basket made of branches and twigs, they placed a few green leaves round them. The youngest student was asked to carry the basket to the dwelling of their Guru.

Brahmadatta collected dried branches for the fire-sacrifice to be performed that evening by Shri Yajnavalkya. By this time the cows, dividing themselves into many small herds, had gone far and deep into the valley. Brahmadata took his flute, played a tune, and the cows began to return.

In a short while, the cows were once again with their keepers. Some of them raised their faces to the sun; others sniffed the pure Himalayan

air; while yet others began to graze. Brahmadata said: 'Now we should go home, for by the time we reach the hermitage (*ashrama*) the sun will be about to set.' It was the time when their Guru took his bath and prepared himself for the evening fire ceremony.

At a sign from the youths the cows wandered ahead and the youths followed them, singing the while from the classical verses of the Vedas. After some time they drove the cows into their byre and then locked the gate.

The sun was sinking in the west and a golden glow covered the valley and the thatched roof of the modest ashrama of Shri Yajnavalkya situated in a meadow beside the river. A part of the ashrama was occupied by the holy mother Katyayani and some ten young girls who helped in the cooking and other domestic duties. Some of these girls were real daughters of the sage, while the others were adopted. Each was looked on as a member of the holy family; none was regarded as a servant or a wage-earner.

Blue smoke issued from a large shed nearby as freshly cut vegetables were placed in pans on the fire and slowly fried in butter. Kneaded flour was ready to be converted into *rotis*; rice and milk, mixed together, were being boiled.

* * *

Let us now glance at the other part of the holy ashrama. A tall, upright and majestic figure, clad in a coarse robe, came into the building. His matted locks flowed loosely on his shoulders and a long, curling beard swept his breast. He wore sandals and held his staff in his right hand. As soon as he entered, Brahmadata removed and wiped the sandals, then washed the feet of his master, drying them with a towel. After taking his bath, the Teacher sat down on a cushion of dried grass. Wood was then heaped in a large hollow dug in the ground and ignited by the friction of two sticks rubbed together. The flames leapt up and the Teacher, assisted by three of his students, who sat round the fire, poured in oblations of clarified butter and other fragrant offerings, chanting in chorus, '*Svaha!*'*

* 'Hail!' The traditional exclamation made at the time of a Vedic sacrifice.

When this ancient Vedic sacrifice, the *homa-yajna*, as it is called, had been performed, the Teacher took his evening meal. He invited his students to join him. Sitting on deer-skins, they were served hot boiled vegetables fried in butter, rice, cheese, rotis, bananas and milk, arranged in small wooden dishes. The sage closed his eyes and consecrated the meal to the Almighty.

* * *

Shri Yajnavalkya, dressed in a loose and flowing blue robe, was walking bare-footed on the cool sand beside the river in front of the ashrama. Cool breezes were wafting over the plain. Occasionally the lowing of a cow issued from the dale and mingled with the song of the small birds sitting on the trees. The holy sage thought to himself:

'Katyayani poses a problem. Although she wants the holy Truth, she still desires to serve me as the one nearest to me. My consciousness embraces the whole world as its substratum. The conflicts of passion and reason, of belief and disbelief, of macrocosm and microcosm, have been transcended by my illumined mind, which, though still having a mental appearance, is in fact.... What shall I say? Words fail! Is it emotion? No, no! It is a stirring of the love eternal. Conflicts exist only in the world of shadows; how readily they disappear in dreamless sleep and in the spiritual absorption of the mind called *samadhi*.

'Still, I value the unselfish heart of Katyayani. She is all love and is not stirred by passions. Can I say that it is an old tie of karma that draws this radiant and pure soul to me? Well, I should not allow myself to be worried over this question. Now is the time for evening worship.'

He walked towards a great tree, spreading its branches over the green lawn close to the river bank. Behind it rose a mountain peak and to the right was a pond full of blue lotuses. A large tiger-skin had been spread near a sacrificial altar, and on this the sage took his seat. The disciples gathered round, numbering more than fifty souls. Among them was a celestial looking woman of about nineteen years. Her ascetic body denoted her practice of austerity and her peaceful eyes showed her habit of contemplation. She was clad in a coarse yellow sari, some *rudraksha* beads round her neck. Already she was half absorbed in spiritual contemplation.

Once again the sacrificial fire was lit, and oblations of clarified

butter (*ghee*) were poured in, to the sound of long drawn-out cries of ‘*Svaha!*’ Smoke rose and with it the hearts of those assembled there. Brahmadata then read a chapter from the *Yajur Veda* and all present listened attentively. The holy *rishi* spoke sweetly the following words:

‘My children, the time is coming when those of you who wish to enter the path of action (*pravritti-marga*) should prepare to do so, while those who desire to follow the path of renunciation (*nivritti-marga*) will have to take the new discipline. Both paths lead to the same goal, but the path of *nivritti* is suitable for contemplatives. My children, let your decision be quick, clear and irrevocable; on either path an allegiance which is only conditional is the way to a thorny field.

‘I may have to go to King Janaka, to take part in a grand assembly of *rishis*. I may take a few of you with me. Now go to your own studies and contemplation and see that my cows are properly fed, that the mosquitoes are driven out of their sheds, and that the new calves are not exposed to the cold wind. They must have their mothers’ milk.’

Slowly the disciples began to depart in twos and threes. The young Katyayani came forward to touch the feet of the *maharishi* with her forehead. He gave his blessings to her, saying: ‘My daughter, may the eternal and immutable Self, in which all the solar systems are knit together as beads on the thread of a rosary, be revealed to you as being identical with your “I” consciousness.’

As Katyayani retired, wanting perhaps to have a few more words with her *Guru Bhagavan*, the holy Yajnavalkya left and she returned to the household.

To be continued.

Abandonment of fear of death in an unselfish cause, is salvation.

H.P.S.

Existence-Consciousness

Readers familiar with Advaita Vedanta may recognize the title as alluding to the well known Sanskrit phrase *sat-chit-ananda*, commonly translated as ‘existence-consciousness-bliss’, and denoting the essential nature of God and man. So why does our title omit ‘bliss’?

A similar phrase, *satyam-jnanam-anantam*, which can be rendered ‘existence-consciousness-infinity’, occurs in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. And, as we can see, only ‘existence-consciousness’ is common to both formulas. Further, this latter formula appears as early as the Upanishads, whereas *sat-chit-ananda* only became a well-established formula after the time of Shankara. This is one reason for the omission. Another is that, whereas ‘existence’ and ‘consciousness’ can be seen to imply each other, ‘bliss’ seems to stand apart. Non-existence and unconsciousness, it can be argued, are no more than verbal constructs, but pain and unhappiness are all too real direct experiences. This is not to deny that the highest spiritual state is, indeed, supreme bliss, but at the level of reason, the identity of all three is not so easy to establish as the existence-consciousness identity.

Existence

In the philosophy and spirituality of East and West, the concept of Being or Existence has long been considered significant. To ordinary ways of thinking this might seem bizarre, existence being such a commonplace notion. The verb ‘to be’ in all its forms as ‘is’, ‘was’, ‘will be’, and so on, is the most common verb in the language. And we are quite at home with speaking of the existence of many things; of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings. How, then, can such a common-or-garden notion as ‘existence’ have even trivial implications, much less profound ones?

The word ‘existence’ in the title applies equally to eastern and western traditions but, for the purposes of this article, we initially take it as a translation of the Sanskrit word *sat*, as it occurs in the triple designation *sat-chit-ananda*, mentioned above. When the three words are merged into a single compound, this becomes *saccidananda*. In the Advaita—the non-dual—philosophy of the Upanishads, it would be

inconsistent to present the Godhead as multiple, or even as many-faceted, and so, regarding the ‘triple’ designation, the teachings imply that a perfect realization of the meaning of any one of ‘existence’, ‘consciousness’ or ‘bliss’ would bring with it a perfect realization that all three terms are really synonymous.

Sat has been variously translated as ‘truth’, ‘reality’, ‘being’ and ‘existence’. ‘Existence’ serves best, though ‘being’ would also be quite a good choice. On the other hand, since we can have relative truths and relative realities, it is usually best, in this context, to avoid such terms as ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. For example, the waters of a mirage are, in some sense, seen. Yes, we misinterpret or misconstrue what we see. But *something* is seen and ‘a something’ is *not* ‘a nothing’. As such, the mirage has a relative truth, a relative reality.

In the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, God alone is held to be absolutely real, while the reality-status of the world is called into question. This aspect of the teaching is expressed in several ways: the world is transient, an illusion, a magic show—a *maya*, a mere appearance, unreal and so on. At its most extreme, Vedanta even seems, at times, to teach the absolute non-existence of the world appearance. Only by considering this aspect of the teachings and making sense of what might first appear to be utter nonsense—namely, the non-existence of the world—can we come to appreciate that affirming the existence of the supreme Self amounts to much more than simply setting ourselves apart from an atheist.

A recently televised discussion was held between a materialist scientist who was denying the existence of God, and a believer. Early on in the debate the man of religious faith suddenly pulled the rug out from under the atheist’s feet, by declaring: ‘Yes, I completely agree with you. The God *you* believe *I* believe in, being the God you don’t believe in, I don’t believe in such a God, either. But there *is* a God, who is neither the God you don’t believe in, nor the God you wrongly take me to believe in. In such a God, I do believe.’

Advaita can take the same line with the objector who sees the teachings on the non-existence of the world as nonsense. It can agree with the objector. In the sense in which he understands the denial of the existence of the world experience to be a nonsense, it *is* indeed a

nonsense. But such an understanding may, in fact, be a misunderstanding.

If we reflect, briefly, on some of these views on the unreality of the world, then we can come to appreciate that declaring the world to be unreal *does* make sense. And, in the process, this should also throw into relief the truth that ‘existence’ does, indeed, uniquely apply to God.

If, being ‘transient’ and ‘ever changing’ means being ‘unreal’, then who can deny that, in this sense, the world can be spoken of as unreal and so, perhaps, as ‘non-existent’, though it may be at odds with ordinary usage to say so. We’d usually say: ‘The acorn exists, even if impermanent, and if in a hundred years, it becomes a great oak tree, then, for a time, that oak tree too will exist.’ But, if the Advaitin takes ‘changing’ to mean ‘unreal’ and then ‘unreal’ to mean ‘non-existent’, who can argue with how he decides to use his words? He can always say, as Humpty Dumpty said to Alice, ‘When *I* use a word, it means just what *I* choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’ But a more serious and relevant authority than *Alice Through the Looking Glass* is the *Bhagavad Gita*. The following verse from Chapter 2, establishes, in a perfectly sane and sober way, that the Advaitin’s identification of change with non-existence is truly justified.

The real neither comes into nor goes out of being; it always exists.
And the unreal, the transient, never truly exists, even at the time when it appears to be.

We should also look at the description of the world as a *maya*, a magic show, an illusion, a mere appearance. It is not so easy to equate this with ‘non-existence’. First, the word *maya* only occurs five times in all the great Upanishads; and three of the five occurrences are in the *Shvetashvatara*, where it means the creative power of the Lord. If we take the tricks of a magician, the illusions he creates, as a *maya*, then it’s a very good description of the world. If we reflect on the elements of our experience, at root, they are bewildering, unaccountable and inexplicable. If we do not see this to be so, then it may be that the scientist has cast a spell over us. Or rather, through our uncritical worship of science, we have cast a spell over ourselves. We see science

as omnipotent in its capacity to explain everything, a claim it rarely makes for itself.

Take as a simple example, a particular colour. Science can identify it as light of a certain frequency, it can then associate that frequency with the stimulation of certain cones in the retina. Up to a point it *is* an explanation—we do not denigrate the profound and subtle achievements of science. But the pure experience, in consciousness, of, say, the colour ‘red’ has not been and never can be explained. The very notion of ‘explanation’ itself breaks down at this level. The spell of ‘scientism’ we have cast over ourselves, is to mistake correlations and correspondences as identities. The experience of seeing the colour red can be correlated with light of around 650 *nm* wavelength. But correlation is not identity. Colin McGinn, in a work entitled *The Problem of Consciousness*, made the very same point: ‘How can the subjective have its roots in the objective? What has matter in motion got to do with how a rose smells?’ And similarly with all the simple, direct, irreducible elements of our experience. In this sense the world *is* an illusion, magical, bewildering and, at root, unaccountable.

The sense in which the world exists and the sense in which it does not exist, cannot be better expressed than in a verse from Swami Mangalnathji’s *Vira Vijaya*, translated by Dr Shastri under the title *Triumph of a Hero*.

All is real as Brahman (as God), and as different from Brahman, is unreal. Thus alone can the truth be described and not otherwise.

The world appearance is not denied but, in so far as the world is taken to exist, its existence is no more than the existence of Him who alone exists as the substratum and support of that appearance.

This Truth of non-duality, indicated by the fundamental concept of ‘existence’, is not just universal in the sense of being acceptable to all peoples of all cultures and religions, but universal as arising independently from within any individual who accesses that ‘light that enlightens every man who comes into the world’, as the *Gospel of St John* expresses it. Strictly speaking, these are not really independent sources, but the self-same source that is the Supreme Self within all. And, as a river, from its source, flows in directions dictated by the shape

of the landscape through which it flows, so this spiritual truth about existence-consciousness, has expressed itself in different ways in different cultural terrains.

We find that the concept of pure Being or Existence, as it occurs in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is also seen to apply, primarily, to that Cosmic Consciousness we call God or the Absolute, and only in a very secondary sense to the things of the world.

This first appears in *Exodus*, when the voice from the burning bush instructs Moses to tell the people that ‘He Who Is’ has sent him. This ‘He Who Is’ of *Exodus* has served as *the* authority among saints and sages, philosophers and theologians for the view that Being or Existence especially applies to God. When Christ declared, ‘Before Abraham came to be, I am’, not ‘Before Abraham came to be, I was’, he was declaring an Existence transcending time, unlike the transient existence of all else that comes and goes.

This was a key text for the Christian non-dualist Meister Eckhart, who wrote, ‘creatures [meaning created things] are, in themselves, mere nothings’. And, in contrast to the nothingness of creatures, he wrote ‘God is neither this nor that’, an exact parallel to the Upanishadic phrase ‘*neti neti*’, ‘not thus, not thus.’

In our own time, the philosopher and theologian, Mascal, wrote a wonderful book on the essential Being of God. It was a defence against the onslaught on metaphysics and religious belief that began with A J Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic* and which, alas, has ever since been the dominant trend in British philosophy. And as title for his book, Mascal chose this pithy phrase from the Old Testament, *He Who Is*.

All of which falls in with the view of Vedanta that ‘existence’ is, indeed, a very special concept with a deep intuitive level of meaning. Our apprehension of being, like our certainty of consciousness, transcends knowledge as either perception or conception.

Consciousness

In modern writings on consciousness, a good definition is hard to find. Many dictionaries, if they have an entry at all, give ‘consciousness’ a superficial meaning that tends to ignore the undeniable certainty of its existence as provided by introspection. Dennett’s *Consciousness Explained* takes this approach, sidestepping the witness of experience.

But some western philosophers do see a difficulty when it comes to accounting for consciousness. Colin McGinn's book begins with a quotation from Julian Huxley:

'How it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of initiating nerve tissue is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the genie, when Aladdin rubbed his lamp..'

Unlike Dennett, McGinn sees consciousness as something to be explained, not explained away. As we have already noted, Advaita sees a limit to explanation when it comes to consciousness *as mirrored in the world*. We soon come to an essential unaccountability. But in reply to Huxley, the response of Advaita is to say that the implied question is misconceived. Consciousness is not created, it does not 'come about'. It is, was and ever shall be, but in a way that transcends the illusory time order.

Now to look at Consciousness as presented in the great Upanishads. The Upanishads contain four great sentences, or *maha-vakyas*, which indicate, in the most direct way, the intrinsic identity of the innermost Self of man with the Absolute (Brahman). And one of these sentences specifies that this 'divinity' of man is to be identified with his 'consciousness'. The sentence in question is 'Consciousness is Brahman', which appears in the *Aitareya Upanishad*, an Upanishad of the oldest of the four Vedas, the *Rig Veda*.

We already mentioned that Consciousness-Existence-Bliss really denotes a single entity and that looking at the three elements separately is somewhat artificial. And in this verse from the *Aitareya*, consciousness and existence are explicitly identified. The second half of the verse lists the classes of creatures, then culminates in the *maha-vakya*.

. . . those that are born of eggs, born of wombs, born of moisture or the earth, namely, horses, cattle, men, elephants, and all the creatures which move on feet or move on wings or do not move at all [the plants]. All these have **Consciousness as the giver of their Reality**; all these are impelled by Consciousness; the universe has Consciousness as its eye and Consciousness as its end. **Consciousness is Brahman.**

Aitareya Upanishad 3.1.3

Consciousness is identified as the existence of all.

It is interesting that, even in western philosophy, some of the most famous dicta point to this intimate link between consciousness and existence. For example, Descartes's 'I think therefore I am' and Berkeley's 'In respect to external objects, to exist is to be perceived.' Dr Shastri once commented that to come to western philosophy armed with an understanding of Advaita Vedanta, would enable one to understand, with ease, all that was worth understanding in western thought. Now, it might be as difficult to underpin, with new foundations from Vedanta, the great structure of western philosophy, as it would be to insert new foundations under a great gothic cathedral; but if ever attempted, we might come to appreciate the insights of a Kant, a Descartes or a Berkeley, even more than they themselves had appreciated them.

Arguably the most pertinent text on Consciousness is the following dialogue between the sage Yajnavalkya and the Emperor Janaka from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4.3.2-6):

'Yajnavalkya, what serves as the light for a man?' 'The light of the sun, O Emperor,' said Yajnavalkya; 'it is through the light of the sun that he sits, goes out, works and returns.' 'It is just so, Yajnavalkya.'

'When the sun has set, Yajnavalkya, what exactly serves as the light for a man?' 'The moon serves as his light. It is through the light of the moon that he sits, goes out, works and returns.' 'It is just so, Yajnavalkya.'

'When the sun and the moon have both set, Yajnavalkya, what exactly serves as the light for a man?' 'The fire serves as his light. It is through the fire that he sits, goes out, works and returns.' 'It is just so, Yajnavalkya.'

'When the sun and the moon have both set, and the fire has gone out, Yajnavalkya, what exactly serves as the light for a man?' 'Speech serves as his light. It is through the light of speech that he sits, goes out, works and returns. Therefore, O Emperor, even when one's own hand is not clearly visible, if a sound is uttered, one manages to go there.' 'It is just so, Yajnavalkya.'

'When the sun and the moon have both set, and the fire has gone out

and speech has stopped, Yajnavalkya, what exactly serves as the light for a man?' 'The self serves as his light. It is through the light of the self that he sits, goes out, works and returns.' 'It is just so, Yajnavalkya.'

So, the light of Consciousness is the supreme Light by which all exists and all is revealed. Light is always and ever the best symbol for consciousness, but the mention of sound reminds us that hearing is equally pervaded by consciousness. And in his commentary on these verses, Shankara further extends this to the sense of touch and of smell. Further, many times in his commentaries, Shankara presents, as an argument against the Buddhists' denial of a self, the fact that the utterly distinct objects of the five senses could not be experienced as belonging to a single self, if such a witness self, characterized by consciousness alone, did not exist. Nor could memory be explained if the self of past experiences were not identical, as witness consciousness, to the self of the one who recalled them.

Let us look at some aspects of ordinary experience that hint at a deeper dimension to our consciousness, than might first appear to be the case. In western culture, deeper levels of consciousness are commonly thought to be of a lower grade of intelligence, hence such labels as 'unconscious', 'subconscious', 'subliminal' and so on; perhaps down to interpretations of Freud, that see *his* unconscious as a snake pit of primitive instincts. By contrast, the *Mandukya Upanishad* sees the deep sleep state as a door to omniscience, to a *superconscious* realm, not a *subconscious* realm.

Also, when we first meet with the teachings on non-duality we tend, at a conceptual level, to set about reducing the outer world to a nothingness, so as to retain the unity of the local individual self. But the teaching is that both the objective *and* subjective poles of experience are equally unreal. They spring to life as a pair. Just as there is a noumenal reality behind the world appearance, the objective pole of experience, so, equally, there is a hidden, unmanifest consciousness within the local self. This is why we should be reluctant to equate the transient awareness of mind states with this deeper consciousness of which we are not aware.

There are many experiences, common to ourselves and to the

peoples of ancient India, whether enlightened or unenlightened, that bear testimony to this hidden consciousness, this inner controller that monitors and can communicate directly with our surface consciousness in its three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep.

Simple experiences include being awoken from deep sleep or dream by having one's name called out. And the ability to set an inner alarm clock that can wake us up at a certain time. Sleep laboratory experiments have been carried out to confirm these abilities, with rates of success well above what random outcomes might predict.

And that tip-of-the-tongue experience, when we know that we know the answer to that quiz question, but cannot bring it to mind. Who is it who knows that they know, even when that knowledge is initially void of content? It is a consciousness not manifest to us, a consciousness hidden from our immediate awareness, which nevertheless communicates with the waking consciousness.

Then there is inspiration. There are many examples, in the lives of poets, composers and artists, of inspiration welling up from the so-called subconscious on waking. In his *Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler has a table of subjects arranged in order of objectivity: from the interpretation of poetry and epic literature, at the extreme of subjectivity, right up to logic and pure mathematics as representing the most objective. Creations in science and mathematics supply impressive examples of inspiration, because, in these subject areas, the inspirations are responses from the super-conscious realm to specific problems, to well-formulated questions.

The great chemist, Linus Pauling—twice a Nobel Laureate—has given an account of how he tapped into this region of inspiration.

For solving problems that initially defeat me I deliberately make use of my unconscious mind. I think about the problem for half-an-hour in bed, and then go to sleep still thinking about it. I do this, perhaps for several nights, and then forget about it altogether. Months, or sometimes years, later, as with the structure of alpha-keratin, the answer pops into my head.

The answer is supplied whole and entire. It is not that a range of vague possible answers emerges, from which the waking mind, through its superior intelligence, has then to select. No. As the *Mandukya*

Upanishad stated, the unconscious mind is superior to the conscious mind. From his own experience, the great mathematician Poincaré also acknowledged, though reluctantly, that this deep sleep consciousness might be more intelligent than the waking mind. In his own words: 'It [the unconscious mind] knows how to choose and succeeds where the conscious self fails. In a word, is not the subliminal self superior to the conscious self?' This conclusion followed inevitably from Poincaré's own experience, yet he was not happy to give his complete assent. 'I confess', he wrote, 'that I should hate to accept it [this conclusion].'

Finally, the most dramatic evidence that consciousness has a hidden depth, far transcending surface awareness, comes from the phenomenon called 'blindsight'. If we want to know how a clock works, we would study a working clock, not a broken clock. Yet, in neurology, strange to say, great advances have been made by studying pathological cases: brains damaged by disease or trauma. The phenomenon of blindsight falls into this category.

It has been found that subjects with damage to parts of the visual cortex could nevertheless report features of the content of their visual field. Their eyes were in perfect order yet, due to brain damage, the information passing through their eyes could not have been interpreted as literally seen by them. To their own awareness, they *were* blind in certain regions of their 'vision', yet it was as if there were another person within them who could see for them and somehow communicated to their mind visual notions to which they had no direct access. Hence the oxymoron, blindsight. This phenomenon provides a powerful example of a deep hidden layer of consciousness; an inner monitor, a witness, an unconscious consciousness, so to speak, which, as the *Mandukya Upanishad* stated, is of profoundly greater intelligence than the surface consciousness of the most brilliant mind.

We often refer to the visual symbol OM, the four curves symbolizing the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep and the fourth, the *chandra-bindu* at the top, which is commonly presented as *beyond* the three states. But Shankara, in his commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, made a very important point, needed to bring this presentation on consciousness to completion. This four-fold nature of consciousness, he says, is not four separate distinct states. For each

deeper state pervades all the shallower states above it. For example, we speak of day-dreaming; the dream state is ever present as pervading the waking state, whether we are aware of it or not. And equally the fourth state pervades all three states above it, whether we are aware of it or not. 'More like a coin than a cow', was Shankara's comment on the four-fold nature of consciousness. Whether he meant the feet of the cow or its udders is uncertain, but the coin analogy seems to be that if you have a pound coin, it includes within it the value of a 50p or a 20p or a 10p, just as the supreme consciousness pervades and subsumes within it all the conscious states above it. This insight, based on an *Upanishad* over 2,000 years old, makes sense of these phenomena of inspiration, blindsight and so on. All such phenomena indicate a consciousness deeper than our surface awareness, yet able to communicate silently with these more superficial levels of consciousness, precisely because it pervades them.

We may conclude that reasoning, common experience and the findings of philosophers and scientists are all perfectly compatible with faith in this search for the Self. And for some hearts and minds, these reflections may help to clear away some of the doubts with which they are continually assaulted from modern society and a materialist media. But we are ever reminded by the spiritual teachers that the most important means for spiritual progress, are not logic, reasoning and secular studies but prayer, devotion, meditation, love, reverence and compassion.

B. O'D.

All being one, the highest expression of love is to be devoted to the one infinite Self shining through your mind, through the being of an amoeba, through the lotuses smiling in the early sunlight and swaying in the breeze. When the life of a Yogi is coloured by this idea of non-duality, his mind blossoms and the light of consciousness shines forth as the light of bliss, both being one and the same.

From H P Shastri's commentary to verse 49 of Shri Shankara's
Direct Experience of Reality

O SUN OF COMPASSION AND WISDOM

O Lord of the Universe! O One Who appears as many! Permit us to take refuge in Thee. Turbulent is our mind, unsteady our emotions, disturbed is our intellect.

Like a pigeon that has its nest in the mast of a sailing ship in the midst of the ocean, we try on our flight to make the wind our support, the rain our refuge, the clouds our mainstay.

But the pigeon realizes that what it considered to be its support was a mere void, and eventually it returns to the mast. Where else could it find support on the boundless ocean but on the mast?

So, withdraw from us all evanescent supports, and call our hovering mind, by reason of its homing instinct, to the contemplation of Thyself as our own real Self, and the Self of the world.

Many are the errors we have made, but, O Lord, Thy compassion is unerring. O Charioteer of Arjuna, Thou art the ocean of compassion, and we, deluded in maya, are the most suitable objects of Thy compassion.

Let the rain of Thy compassion descend on our desire-ridden, but thirsty, minds! You protected Queen Draupadi from humiliation in the royal assembly*; protect us; protect all; protect righteousness; protect peace.

In the dark night of nescience, when the wolves and hyenas of uncertainty and unreliability are prowling and lying in ambush, waiting to spring upon us and thus rob us of the opportunity of knowing Thee, grant, O Lord, that we may feel, now and forever:

Thou alone art truly Real, and in my true nature,
I transcend the phenomenal universe.
Verily, I am eternally free. I am not the food of sorrow.

H.P.S.

* The reference is to a famous incident in the epic poem, *The Mahabharata*.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

Throughout the Summer preparations continued for the coming Autumn term, which is always a busy one. Following the appreciative reception last term, there will be a further series of talks with practical meditation sessions each Wednesday evening. The theme of this series will be *Meditation: Awakening to Inner Freedom*. The series will begin with a talk on preparing for meditation, and conclude with one on the attainment of spiritual peace.

On Fridays there will be talks on the lives and teachings of great spiritual personalities from the Hindu, Islamic, Christian and Buddhist traditions, illustrating the universality of the non-dual teachings and how they are expressed by, and throw new light upon, the inspiration at the heart of all the world's religions.

Recent publishing activities have been dominated by the launch of *The Spiritual Awakening of Science* by the late Dr A M Halliday, a former Warden of Shanti Sadan. The book provides a historical study of key points in the development of science, emphasizing the objectives shared by science and spiritual enquiry of discerning the deeper reality beyond appearances, through objectivity, mental discipline, and reverence for Truth. Related questions are discussed by Swami Rama Tirtha in essays reproduced in *Scientist and Mahatma*, also published by Shanti Sadan, which advance the Advaita view that the existence of the supreme Reality is absolutely real, while the existence of the changing, phenomenal world is irreducibly problematic, but that the mystery can be resolved through Self-realization.