

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

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### ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

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### EVENTS FOR THE SUMMER TERM 2010

#### Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

Lectures will be given every Wednesday and Friday evening at 8pm from Wednesday 28 April until Friday 25 June 2010.

#### Summer 2010 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Saturday 5 June, 2pm - 5pm.

## SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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### THE SPRING OF JOY

One of the sayings of the Sufi master, Jalaluddin Rumi, is that a water-spring inside the house is better than an aqueduct outside. The outer water supply may be sufficient in times of peace, he comments, but when one's home is besieged, even a briny well inside the walls is better than a hundred sweet fountains close by.

It is an analogy for the spiritual wealth that a yogi seeks to uncover within himself. The classical teachings of Yoga tell of a joy that needs nothing outer to promote or sustain it, and is implicit in the being of man himself. This is the joy which the *Bhagavad Gita* proclaims is 'in the Self'. This joy is concealed as long as the mind is convinced that its source of satisfaction is outside, in which case, as in the water analogy, we make ourselves dependent on a hundred fountains over which we have no real control.

Can the source of joy really be within the Self? The story is told of a village chief who complained that he could not hear his son's voice in the chorus of boys singing out their lesson in the local school. The

teacher insisted that the boy was indeed singing, and proved it by silencing the other boys one by one until only the song of the chief's son became fully audible. In a similar way, the desires in the mind, and the mental activity they generate, create a kind of inner 'noise' that hides the true nature of man's spiritual Self. But when this din is reduced, and eventually silenced, the joy and peace at the root of the mind will begin to make itself felt.

Even the happiness we experience in the course of our outgoing life has its source in the Self. The moments of peace, the temporary cessation of stress when a desire is fulfilled or an anxiety dispelled, have far more to do with the experiencing mind than the objects and environments we are joined to; otherwise, others would be as pleased as we are to acquire them, which is obviously not the case, for 'one man's meat is another's poison.' The joy springs from the mental condition that settles within us — the quietening of the agitation of desire. In that momentary quiescence, an iota of the great bliss of the Self is glimpsed in our experience. But this bliss comes, as it were, through the filter of a mind still conditioned to seek joy in the objective experiences, and so it is quickly lost as fresh desires stir the psyche.

Human beings long for happiness because happiness, in its most profound phase, is the nature of the Self. The quest for joy is natural, and every person is on a learning curve which will enable them to uncover the source of joy within their own being. It has been said that we can learn slowly and allow experience itself to expose the limitations of those joys that depend on externals. We also have the chance to accelerate the process of spiritual awakening by following the guidance of the enlightened sages, who point us to the 'kingdom of heaven within'.

The articles brought together in this issue of *Self-Knowledge* suggest many ways and means as to how we can begin to make this deeper joy a reality, ranging from the account of the simple but intense quest of an unknown Russian Christian, to the sublime metaphysical insights of the upanishadic sage, Yajnavalkya. This joy is our birthright.

## The Illumined Understanding

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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, O mind, to attain peace. Here lies your welfare.      Shankara *The Thousand Teachings*

THE ILLUMINED UNDERSTANDING is the very nature of one who has realized the ultimate Truth, and is ever contented, ever fulfilled. This understanding is present in seed form in every man and woman. Following a spiritual way of life, meditating and seeking to look deeper into experience, our understanding is expanding. When Truth is realized, that understanding will be illumined and we shall no longer be in quest of any end.

Man in general is thirsting for experiences that will make him feel better, and the world is his field of opportunity, the occasion of his hopes and fears. He looks outside himself for approval and satisfaction — but on this level, things are never quite right.

The spiritual seeker is also thirsting for experience that will bring peace and light to his inner being. His search is wise. He realizes that the outer life is a caravan on the move, that ultimately he can rely on nothing exterior to himself to give him enduring security and joy. He believes in the promise of the sages — that there is peace, light and joy enshrined at the centre of his being, and that he must learn to tap that source of inner strength and joy. He turns within, thirsting for the deeper spiritual experience. This thirst is the motive power of his life and will lead to the water of immortality.

The one of illumined understanding is not thirsting for anything. He has found himself. He is not in quest of any end, because he is fulfilled. He has not only found the water, but knows that he *is* the water, and there is only water. He knows that the whole of experience appears as an extension of his own consciousness, that his innermost Self is one with the supreme power of the universe and the reality that underlies it.

Outwardly there may be no obvious difference between the ordinary extrovertive man, the spiritual seeker and the one who has realized the

spiritual Truth. One of illumined understanding may withdraw from the banquet of life or be a vigorous participator in it. But whatever way of life is manifested, there is total inner independence.

Two devotees once met after a long separation. One was a wandering monk, the other the head of a monastery. At length, the homeless one chided his brother: 'O my brother, isn't it time you renounced the honour and comfort that surrounds your position as an Abbot, and adopt the path of true renunciation, like me?' The Abbot said: 'Yes, indeed, brother. I will do so immediately. Come, let us now wander away from this region, taking each step in meditative peace.' The other one said: 'Well,....yes.....but I've just remembered that I left my little bag and blanket at your monastery. Please wait while I collect them.' The Abbot had inner light and was identified with nothing finite. There may be no outer sign whatsoever in one who has an illumined understanding, but there is an inner spirit of complete independence. We may be rich or poor outwardly. What matters is the degree of detachment we have attained inwardly, what we can let go of easily, if such demands are made on us.

As regards our everyday life, the advice is: 'Hold tightly, let go lightly.' It means that while we have these connections and responsibilities, we need to fulfil them as best we can, to hold them tightly, firmly, with care and conscious attention. Others may depend on us; we are links in the immense chain of the social order and must play our part. But always we should try to cultivate the ability to set worldly thoughts aside for the time being, and dive deeper into our self. Realizing the independence of our spiritual nature, which is our real Self, we will be able to accept all happenings with serenity and do what is necessary if we have to lose a position, a possession, a friend, a loved one. This is because we shall have developed the inner resource of a spiritual understanding, and this will help us at all times. The true peace is that which we find at the deeper level of our own being.

Always, with one of illumined understanding, there is this spirit of independence; not of rebellion, not of superiority, because their consciousness is rooted in the spirit of unity and tranquil bliss. Whatever happens on the physical plane, or in the realm of human relationships, there is no longer the fear of loss, or hope of gain, no

regrets or expectations.

The sage is always aware of the eternal glory of the immediate experience of pure being and absolute consciousness. The past and the future do not burden him. The importance we give to the past is the creation of our mind, and the pictures we make of the future are also our mental projections. The sage is hypnotized by neither; he has transcended both. In the words of the Sufi master, Jalaluddin Rumi, 'Past and future are veils. When you are freed from these two, the difficulty is solved.' The one of illumined understanding uses the mind as an instrument that serves a higher purpose, but has no independent existence. He is identified with the subtle spiritual principle on which the mind depends for its very existence, but whose peace and light can never be interfered with by the mind.

This true Self abides within us as the ground and support of our being. It is our essence, just as electricity may be said to be the essence of the lights in a room. The lights are the localized expression, but the force is universal. The consciousness expressing itself in us, apparently conditioned and personalized, is in reality the universal consciousness, pure spirit, unwavering awareness, never affected by the changes in the body and the mind.

The aim of Yoga is to help us realize our true nature. For the prepared mind, self-realization is the natural resumption of one's true identity. An actor pours his emotions and intelligence into his portrayal of a particular character; then he becomes himself again when the play has ended. The yogi learns how to progressively disidentify his true nature, his spiritual being, from layer after layer, role upon role, presented by the mind. In reality, he is none of these limitations, but is the supreme, infinite power behind all appearances.

What is the value of knowing ourselves in Truth, and of seeking to discover our essence as opposed to all the roles and qualities that we project? To reassume one's true identity as the taintless, infinite Self, is the ultimate relief, because all fear vanishes at a stroke. We realize conscious immortality, not of the body or the mind, but of our true Self. One of illumined understanding knows: 'All this world of appearances exists in me. My spiritual being is the support of all I experience. And yet my true being is not contained in anything. It is infinite and perfect.'

This is the only way to be fearless and free.

For the sage, this Truth is immediate and obvious, and not mysterious. The mystery concerns the human condition and this apparent bondage and suffering, which seem to be a stern reality. For within this phenomenal realm, man, whose true nature transcends change and suffering, seems to be fixed in an identity which is purely human and mortal. The majority of mankind live out their lives in ignorance of their true nature. As long as the riddle of life and its meaning remains a mystery, no man can be entirely at ease. Swami Rama Tirtha once raised the question: 'What is the greatest riddle?' And he answered it by saying: 'Life — because we all have to give it up!' This riddle is only solved, or rather dissolved, through self-realization, which will bring the ultimate relief and fulfilment.

### Conscious Living

How can we help ourselves to awaken spiritually? First, let us be assured of our innate spiritual strength. Mental and emotional habits may have created in us conditions of bondage and restriction. But these same inner faculties, when used consciously and with a purpose, can create new conditions leading to freedom. Many of the trends of thought that wear us down, or have us running in circles, have settled on us unconsciously, like dust gathering on a bowl of fruit. There is a classical Zen story that tells of an abbot who himself used to do the sweeping of the inner courtyard. A novice said: 'Shouldn't someone else be doing this?' The Abbot replied: 'It is most important to keep this courtyard free of dust. The dust enters from outside.' The inner courtyard is our mind and the dust stands for the impressions that are always pouring into the mind. The user of the broom, so to say, has to be oneself, and no one else. The mind receives the outer impressions almost unconsciously — the moving image on the screen, the flood of words, the free handout; and the result is restlessness and distraction, the manufacturing of new desires, the revival of old discontents. All this keeps the mind turned outwards, unreflective and identified with what is limited. More than this, it hides the true and independent nature of the 'I'. Conscious living is to exercise our inner strength and base ourselves on our real nature, which is the inner ruler and master of the mind, and

the light that gives it life. In simple terms, it means being aware that we *have* a mind, not that we *are* the mind, and that this mind has higher powers and a higher destiny which has to be pursued if we want to get the best out of ourselves.

Conscious living includes being alert to what is going on in the mind at any particular time, and changing direction if necessary. This is a great inner skill which we can develop. It includes the ability to steer the mind away from certain thought patterns which lead us nowhere or create disturbance or simply waste time; and to turn our attention onto material that is worthwhile, educative, enriching or helpful on our spiritual path.

More particularly, when we are talking, for instance, rather than be what is called 'a non-stop talker' losing ourselves in the speech, skilful living means to be aware that we *are* talking, what we are saying and why we are saying it. Similarly, when we are reading or watching something, we stay alert to our purpose, to the use of our time, and know when to stop.

Be selective. Choose the best. Seek the best. Do not allow your mind to be a passive sponge. Awaken your faculty of higher discrimination, and make your aim in life spiritual wisdom. Practise meditation. This will give you a clearer picture of your inner life, and enable you to stand back and observe your mind objectively, as a supervisor.

Then know: 'In my true nature I am neither the body nor the mind, but infinite Spirit, the true Self, the Self of all. The mind is my instrument; so is the body. My speech, my words, are my instruments. All my organs of knowledge and my organs of action are my servants. Whether these servants are working well or poorly due to illness or decay, I am essentially different from them. I am free.'

For the support and the strengthening of this insight — that there is a radical distinction between the conscious Self and its instruments, the body and mind — let us adopt the habit of keeping at hand some book of spiritual gems. For example, opening the Vedanta classic called *Direct Experience of Reality*, we will light upon verses that at once rouse our faculty of higher discrimination:

The Self is by nature eternal, whereas what is perceived and conceived is not eternal. This idea held with conviction is called the discrimination

of the real.

Another point that will enhance our awareness is to regard everything that happens as a teacher. All apparent obstacles are stepping stones, if rightly understood. There is always a spiritual dividend to be reaped from any seemingly adverse event, if we are sufficiently alert and open-minded.

A wealthy landowner once had a large rock placed in the middle of a road used by his visitors and tradesmen. He then hid among the nearby bushes to see their reaction to the big boulder. Several approached the rock. Some grumbled about the state of the road and blamed the landowner for negligence; others were annoyed at having to lead their horses around it, or drag their carts off the road to get past. But no one attempted to move it. Then a poor tradesman approached the rock with his cart of vegetables brought from a long distance, and tried his best to move it out of the way. After making great efforts, he eventually shifted it to the side of the road. To his surprise, he saw a purse lying in the road where the rock had rested. He opened it and found several gold coins. There was also a note, signed by the landowner: 'The gold is for the one who removes the obstacle from the path.'

The spiritual seeker, the one who is living consciously and with a purpose, comes to learn that every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.

Normally we dismiss unpleasant happenings as valueless, setbacks, a waste or a regret. But all these things can serve as awakeners. Perhaps at the time we had slipped into unconscious ways of functioning which led us to take our stand on wrong values leading to an unwholesome reaction. Our watchword should be: 'No remorse, inner change.' Take it as an awakener to help us to live more consciously.

We may feel it is a step down or a humiliation for us to be in the position of a learner once again. But there is one exception: if we feel that Life itself is teaching us, working for our own good. One who wants the spiritual goal is getting himself into harmony with the power behind the universe. That power is not a blank abstraction but a living, loving force. We shall find that for a spiritual man or woman, all things work together for good. Therefore, any seemingly untoward happening

has something to teach us. Firstly, we learn that it hits the shell, not the kernel. The shell is the mind and its ego, which *is* affected and reacts. But the kernel is our true Self, which nothing can hit or wound, no more than the radiant, full moon can be disturbed by the barking of dogs. Secondly, we might ask ourselves whether we were sufficiently centred, adequately mindful of the divine, when the upset occurred? If not, then it comes as a re-adjuster, like the hands that instantaneously adjust the steering wheel when the car threatens to swerve off-course. Often those same benevolent hands serve to expose to us the falsity of so-called friends.

Outer friends are not being referred to. There are also false friends within our own personality. There are seeming well-wishers like ambition, domination, self-importance, flattery, diplomacy, and so on. Many feel these are necessary features of a successful life, but the spiritual seeker realizes that they are fetters to hinder his ascent. So when thwarted or criticized, the worldly man says: 'Bad, bad.' The spiritual man says: 'What can I learn from this? What is it trying to teach me?' His attitude towards his teacher, Life, is like that supremely positive attitude towards the English weather expressed by John Ruskin: 'Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather; only different kinds of good weather.'

Our true position is not the faltering individuality but that supreme eternal Self, Atman, which is ever contented and not in quest of any end, totally independent and free.

The illumined understanding is not meant to be something we admire in others. It is destined to be our own realized state. The spiritual teachings have to be taken as a starting point for our own practice, as food for our inner enquiry. Spiritual enlightenment is our greatest potential, the supreme opportunity. It is available to us, whether we have any religion or no religion; whether we feel we know much or very little; whether our bodies are old or young, healthy or ailing. For our birthright is to realize our true nature, to rouse up the higher potentialities of our being, and identify our Self with the Infinitude that lies hidden behind the finite operations of our mind.

Let us close with the words of the Buddhist sage, Kobo Daishi:

Now opens the store of the True Word  
By which the hidden treasures are brought to light...  
The Buddhas in the innumerable Buddha-lands  
Are nothing but the Buddha within our own soul;  
...On realizing this, everyone shall attain  
The glory of illumination in this very life.

**B.D.**

### **THY LOVE**

The milk is churned and agitated,  
Its tranquillity is lost.  
But it yields butter and serves and delights us.  
So thy love agitates the heart,  
Taxes thy patience,  
Costs thee tears and sighs.  
But keep on, keep on with it.  
Love Truth at the cost of comforts.  
Some day, O friend, thou wilt see God,  
And experience immortality and bliss.

**H.P.S.**

## **The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**

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THE UPANISHADS are ancient texts used in India to give spiritual and mystical teaching. By the term ‘the Upanishads’ we mean especially the thirteen or so classical Upanishads commented on by the revered teacher, Shankara, who lived about 700 AD. It is generally thought on grounds of language used and of hints about the state of culture, that the composition of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* should be placed a little over 200 years before the Buddha, say about 7-800 years BC. It is manifestly a composite text, and some parts probably date back much earlier than others. Because it is mostly in prose, it contains at least a few scraps of the actual words used by ancient teachers teaching their pupils — which is not the case, for instance, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is composed throughout in verse. It is worth remembering that the classical Upanishads were not originally written down. They were learned by heart and passed down by the Brahmins of the priestly class from generation to generation. Parts of what we shall read in the later part of the article will be the actual words, translated of course, spoken by the sage Yajnavalkya. But before that, we shall deal with other parts of the Upanishad, which contain myths.

There are myths and myths. A myth, let us concede, is usually a mere fantastic story, relating things that did not happen and usually could never have happened. But a work of fiction, as Aristotle pointed out, may contain far more truth than a piece of history, because it may convey general truths of far more import than the particular truths contained in a historical narrative. Thus a myth may encapsulate true teaching about values that could not be communicated in any other way, as the great Greek philosopher, Plato, well knew. There are thus myths which communicate valuable truths, metaphysical or moral.

Sometimes their message is perennial and still valuable today. Even fairy-tales and nursery rhymes often seem to have a message for modern man, once the psycho-analysts get hold of them. How much more is this so in the case of the myths associated with the foundation of the great religions.

In the myth, the Spirit from whom the world came forth is

represented as feeling lonely. He created a female, and with her help, so to speak, brought forth all the creatures of the world. And he brought forth names and forms — whatever has such and such a name, has such and such a form. Then he entered into this world that he had created, like a razor fitted into its case. But although this Spirit is present within all as the ultimate principle of Consciousness, as that which affirms ‘I’ in ‘I know’, one cannot apprehend this ‘I’ as an object.

This is profoundly true. ‘I knew I was late’ means ‘I knew my body was late’. ‘I knew I was angry’ means ‘I knew my mind was angry’. The ancient text expresses this by saying, ‘One cannot see the I-principle, for in ordinary experience it is, as it were, divided; as breathing, it is breath; as speaking, speech; as seeing, the organ of sight; as hearing, the ear; as understanding, the mind. But these are in fact only names of its effects.’

Just as ancient Greeks spoke sometimes of water, sometimes of fire, as the origin of the universe, so the ancient Indians spoke sometimes of breath, *prana*, sometimes of speech, *vac*, as the origin of the universe, and worshipped them as deities. But in the present Upanishad, breath and speech are treated as mere subordinate functions of the great I-principle. It says specifically that he who worships one or other of these functions is not wise, for the I, the ultimate principle of knowledge, is only partly present in any of them.

Therefore one should worship the I-principle which is present in all of them as ‘I breathe’, ‘I speak’, ‘I see’ and so on, for in this I-principle, all the functions are one. The ‘I’ is the sign-post that must be followed to know the whole world. Not that one would know or need to know every detail of the universe. But one would know the reality of which it was a more external expression. If a person knows the I-principle within him, then in that I-principle, he knows That from which this whole universe has come forth. One comes to know the great I-principle through meditating on it as the inner essence, supporting and witnessing the individual ego.

So, this I-principle within us should be dearer to us than a son, dearer than great riches, dearer than anything else — for it is the inmost essence, and the inmost I-principle within all. If anyone holds anything other than the I-principle as dear, and a third person says, ‘He will lose

it, because it is dear to him’, that loss will surely come to pass. But he to whom the I-principle is dearest, loves something that is imperishable.

The commentator Shankara explains that the I-principle within us is the one all-pervading Self, the only eternal thing that will never pass away, and so the sole reality. It is present in the characteristic human functions such as breathing, looking, hearing, understanding and so forth. But it is not expressed completely or properly as identified with any of these functions. For when we have the feeling ‘I breathe’ we do not necessarily also have the feeling ‘I see’ and ‘I hear’; there could be darkness and silence. The ‘I’ that we feel in ‘I breathe’ is therefore not the true ‘I’, for the latter manifests equally in all functions. The true I-principle can be called the whole, of which the ‘I’ of ‘I do such and such’ is but a ray or part.

Shankara says that the ‘I’ as revealed in the various human activities is like the one sun reflected in the water of different water-pots. Just as the sun looks different as reflected in the water of different water-pots, according to the height of the water, the shape and comparative cleanliness of the pot, the jolting of the water if the pots are being carried about, so does the true ‘I’ manifest differently in the various human activities of breathing, looking and hearing, while itself remaining identical in all of them, and fully revealed in none of them.

We now pass on to make the acquaintance of one of the really great figures in Indian spiritual history, namely Yajnavalkya. Yajnavalkya appears in an earlier work, the *Shatapatha Brahmana* as a great expert in Vedic ritual. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* he appears at first as a ritualist and an expert on Vedic lore, but he gradually emerges as above all a metaphysician. We first meet him in the Upanishad in a kind of cultural quiz, organised by King Janaka of Videha, the modern Bihar, east of Banaras, or, as it is today called, Varanasi. However, the king moved over to the west to hold his quiz, somewhere near the modern Delhi, an area which, at about 700 or 800 BC, was thronged with learned priests or Brahmins eager to show off their prowess in public debate and to win the prizes offered by the king.

We hear the following in the Upanishad. Janaka, King of Videha, performed a sacrifice at which many presents were offered to the priests. The king wished to know which of these Brahmins was the most

learned in scripture. He enclosed in a pen a thousand cows. To the horns of each cow were fastened ten coins of gold. He said to them: 'Venerable Brahmins, let him who is the wisest amongst you take away these cows.' The Brahmins did not dare to take the cows. Then one of the priests, Yajnavalkya, said to his pupil, 'Samaravas, my dear boy, just drive away the cows.' He drove them away. The Brahmins were enraged, and cried amongst themselves, 'How can he dare to declare himself to be the wisest Brahmin among us?' One of them openly asked him in anger, 'Yajnavalkya, are you indeed the wisest Brahmin amongst us?' Yajnavalkya replied, 'We bow to the wisest Brahmin, but we just wish to have the cows.' It was like one of those sentences in the dialogues in Gilbert and Sullivan where the very politeness of the reply is exquisitely contrived to aggravate the insult. Well, that was putting the glove down in the ring with a vengeance, and a whole succession of abstruse questions followed from different Brahmins, mostly about the ritual, and Yajnavalkya answered them all without difficulty. They are not of much interest to us here, until we get to a certain Ushasta Chakrayana. The latter was a metaphysician, and he wanted to know about God in his highest or impersonal or supra-personal aspect, the principle called *Brahman* in Sanskrit. 'Yajnavalkya', he said, 'explain to me the Brahman that is immediately perceived, who is the Self of all things.'

Yajnavalkya knew that you could not explain the nature of Brahman by words, so he gave Ushasta Chakrayana a clue by referring to breathing. He said to him: 'That Self of yours, which is in all things, breathes in when you breathe in; he breathes out when you breathe out; he breathes up when you draw a breath up.' Ushasta Chakrayana was not satisfied. 'You have merely given a verbal designation, as one might say: "This is a horse; this is a cow." Explain to me that Brahman that is immediately present and directly perceived, that is the Self in all things.' And then Yajnavalkya came out with his great metaphysical teaching: 'You cannot see the seer of seeing; you cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot think the thinker of thinking; you cannot understand the understander of understanding. He is your Self, which is in all things. Everything else is of evil. It perishes and causes pain.'

At first sight it might look as though Yajnavalkya were saying, 'If

you want true happiness and immortality, you must acquire knowledge of the true nature of your own Self, but as a matter of fact, it can't be known.' Let us turn to our authority, the commentator Shankara, and see if his writings throw any light on this problem.

For Shankara, the true nature of the soul of a human being is the one universal Self spoken of by Yajnavalkya. One might paraphrase his thought thus: 'Unless we are liberated (the term for one who has attained direct knowledge that he is the one Self of all), we think of souls as objects and as many, ourselves being one among them. Souls are only knowable as objects from the natural or common-sense standpoint that has to be corrected by deeper thinking, as we correct our natural inclination to think of the sun as a kind of luminous ball of fire that rises up into the sky from behind the horizon at dawn, when we reflect that the apparent motion of the sun is due to the revolutions of the earth. So, souls are only knowable as objects from the uncorrected common-sense standpoint, not from the standpoint of the highest Truth. We can never know the true nature either of our own soul or of that of another as long as we continue with thinking of souls as objects.'

The soul, in its true nature, is not an object that requires to be known as an object by some other being performing the role of knowing subject. It is not self-conscious, in the sense that part of it, as subject, could know another part, as object, because its true nature is the pure undifferentiated light of consciousness. It does not require to be known as an object, nor is it capable of being known as an object, for it is itself the very light by which objects are known. 'You cannot know the knower of knowing', as Yajnavalkya put it, but you can allow it to manifest in its true nature, by coming through the yogic discipline to a conviction of the hollowness and illusory character of the world of time and space and objects with which it is overlaid. According to the ancient texts, it is not that the world of plurality disappears from view for the enlightened person. It is just that he or she now knows that it is all an illusory appearance, arising in the one homogeneous reality called *chit* or consciousness, and the liberated ones feel their identity with this one *chit*, the sole support of all phenomena.

These ancient teachings may or may not agree with what is being said today by the physicists, but in any case they are relevant to the aims



and ideals pursued in Shanti Sadan. One day our revered Teacher said to us, ‘Our purpose should be to see God as Existence, Consciousness and Bliss in whomsoever we meet — street, home or business — not to be led away by appearances, but to go deep into the light of *chit* shining in every atom, in every spiritual monad.’

Let us return now to the debating assembly. Several more Brahmins came up with questions about cosmology, and Yajnavalkya answered them. Finally there came questions from his most formidable opponent, who turns out to have been a woman, Gargi, daughter of Vachaknu. The conversation, in slightly abbreviated and paraphrased form, went something like this.

‘Venerable Brahmins’, said Gargi, ‘I shall ask him two questions. If he answers these, none of you can defeat him in questions about the Absolute.’ ‘Ask, Gargi,’ said Yajnavalkya.

‘As a warrior son of the Kashis or the Videhas might rise up against you, having strung his bow and taken his double-pointed foe-piercing arrows, even so, O Yajnavalkya, do I face you with two questions. Answer me these.’ ‘Ask, O Gargi,’ he said.

‘There is something of which they say that it is above the heaven and beneath the earth, and also between heaven and earth, and comprehends past, present and future. In what is that something woven, warp and woof?’

‘It is woven, warp and woof, in the *akasha*’, he said, ‘the shining ether.’

‘Reverence to you, O Yajnavalkya,’ she said. ‘You have answered my first question. Prepare yourself for the second.’ ‘Ask, O Gargi.’

‘In what is the shining ether woven, warp and woof?’

That, O Gargi, [replied Yajnavalkya] the knowers of the Absolute call the Imperishable, *aksharam*. It is neither gross and palpable nor subtle. It is neither short nor long; it is neither red like fire, nor liquid like water; it is not shadowy or dark; it is not air or ether; it does not stick to anything like paint; it depends not on organs of taste, smell, sight or hearing; it has no voice, no mind in the human sense, no mental ideas in the human sense, and does not depend on life and breathing — no image could represent it; it has nothing inside it and nothing outside it. Verily, at the command of that Imperishable, O Gargi, the sun and

moon stand in their respective positions, as do heaven and earth. Moments, hours, days and years follow the command of that Imperishable. At the command of that Imperishable, some rivers flow from the snowy mountains to the east, some to the west. Verily, O Gargi, that Imperishable is unseen, but is the seer, unheard but is the hearer, unthought but is the thinker. There is no other knower but He. In Him, O Gargi, is the shining ether of space woven, warp and woof.

And then Gargi said of Yajnavalkya: ‘Venerable Brahmins, you may think yourselves lucky indeed if you escape from him by bowing before him. Not one of you will defeat him in arguments about the Absolute.’ Then Gargi fell silent.

We have here what might be called a doctrine of transcendence and immanence. On the one hand God, the ultimate reality or the Absolute, is represented as transcending all finite human conceptions. On the other hand, he is represented as immanent within all, the inner ruler, the unmoved mover, under whose command, to speak metaphorically, time rolls on and the seasons pass by in perfect order. An unmoved mover, especially if He be without voice or thoughts in the human sense, does not issue commands by word of mouth. He introduces order and prompts activity by his mere presence, like a magnet, as Aristotle put it. There was a popular song in the speaker’s youth that went, ‘It’s love and love alone that makes the world go round.’ It may be suggested that this is possibly true in a deeper sense than the author of the words conceived. According to the Upanishads, all things and all living creatures are attracted, sometimes consciously, more often unwittingly, towards the light, peace and bliss of the Absolute, the source and ultimate destiny of their existence.

Another Upanishadic text expressed this idea succinctly when it says, ‘The Absolute is bliss. For truly, beings here are born from bliss; when born, they live by bliss, and into bliss, when departing, they enter.’ When it comes to human beings, the amount of bliss we actually enjoy on earth is to some extent within our control, as our minds are at least partially under our control and even more so if we are prepared to subject ourselves to training. Therefore, if Spinoza’s saying is true that our happiness depends on the quality of the objects of our love, our happiness is at least partially within our control, for the teachings of

Yoga are there to guide our minds away from what is transitory and towards the things of permanent value. There is a beautiful Sanskrit hymn attributed to Shankara which elaborates on this theme:

That is true knowledge which tranquillizes the senses. That is the true goal of all knowledge that is communicated in the Upanishadic texts. They only, in this world, are truly happy whose efforts are all bent towards a knowledge of the final truth. The rest are wandering about in a maze of error. Fortunate indeed are those yogis who, having first overcome their enemies such as conceit, infatuation, attachment and aversion, have taken refuge under the umbrella of some mighty master of Yoga, and, having attained to the state of immortality, have taken knowledge of the Absolute for their Beloved, and now live happily in the same house with her.

We see Yajnavalkya again, later in the Upanishad, alone in company with King Janaka. Janaka is pressing him: ‘What is the inner source of light and consciousness in a human being? By day there is the light of the sun, and there is guidance from the lips and deeds of others. But what about the case when he is in darkness, and alone and in total silence? What is the light that enables him even then to move about his business?’

To the question, ‘What is the Self that illumines a person when there is darkness and silence without?’ Yajnavalkya answers, ‘It is the Spirit, which has consciousness for its very nature, and dwells in the heart, illumining the mind and the sense organs from within.’ In the commentary by Shankara, paraphrased here, he says that Yajnavalkya calls the Spirit ‘this’ because it is immediately evident to everyone. Although it is stainless, motionless consciousness, it is commonly confused with the ideas that run through the mind, because it is always difficult to detect the difference between a light and what it illumines. The same sunlight looks red when falling on a red wall and green when falling on the leaves of trees. In the same way, we usually identify the pure unchanging light of the Spirit with the activities of the mind that it illumines. When illumined by a reflection of the light of the pure Spirit, the mind serves us for all our purposes, like a lamp in the dark. Shankara points out that, as a matter of fact, we would always be in

silence, darkness and solitude but for the mind illumined by a reflection of the Spirit. Yajnavalkya had already said, he remarks, that it is through the mind alone that one sees; through the mind alone that one hears. As Shankara puts it here, ‘Objects are only perceived when invested with the light of the mind. It is as if they were standing in the dark, and were perceived only as lit by the light of some lamp held in front of them. The other sense-organs are to be regarded as mere channels, serving the mind.’

Yajnavalkya had spoken of the Spirit as lying in the heart amidst the sense-organs. Shankara says that the word ‘amidst’ is used purposely to emphasize that the Spirit is different from the mind and sense-organs that are illumined by a reflection of its light. Ordinarily, people are confused and identify the static, eternal light of the Spirit with the flickering momentary forms assumed by the mind in which the light of the Spirit is reflected. So Yajnavalkya speaks of the Spirit as present amidst the mind and senses. It is as when one speaks of a tree amidst the rocks. This implies that the tree is in proximity with the rocks, but different from them.

The Spirit within the heart, says Shankara, is here referred to as ‘*purusha*’ because it is *purna* or infinite, not subject to limitations of time and space. Also because its self-luminosity is *purna* or perfect, because it illumines all else, without itself requiring to be illumined by any other principle. And it is this Spirit, of the very nature of self-existent light, which is the answer to the question put by King Janaka to Yajnavalkya, ‘What is the Self that is the ultimate light in man?’

So far, we have seen Yajnavalkya in public debate with other Brahmins, and also in private conversation with the king. In both these roles, he is seen as a learned and masterful priest, a householder and a rich man, raking in cows with pieces of gold tied round their ears rather like a company director raking in perks and an exalted salary. Now, finally, we see him in a different role. We see that all the wealth meant nothing to him. He is about to abandon his wealth and go off to live alone in the forest, as he has direct knowledge of the Self, the only wealth worth having in the long run. He proposes to share his wealth between his wives, and one of them, Maitreyi, asks if there is any hope

of immortality through wealth. As Shankara's commentary makes plain, her idea was that if she had much wealth, that would enable her to make many ritualistic sacrifices to the gods — and, would that enable her to gain immortality? Yajnavalkya replied, 'Of course, if you were rich you would live a life of luxury, but you would not get immortality.' Then Maitreyi asked him for metaphysical instruction.

Yajnavalkya spoke to her about the Self as the highest value — that for the sake of which, in the end, we would willingly sacrifice all else. We might like to think we had moments of altruism, but in the end whatever is dear to us is dear for the sake of the Self. Unfortunately, we easily confuse ends and means and fall in love with the means. Wealth is a very good case in point. As Aristotle pointed out long ago in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, wealth is only a means and not an end. A miser who hoards gold and does not use it, might just as well be hoarding stones. And so with all other good things in life that are means to the happiness of the Self. In fact, they are only means to a temporary manifestation of its happiness, that blocks the way to a more permanent manifestation. We tend to pursue these means to happiness as if they were ends in themselves, forgetting that it is only in so far as they minister to the Self that they cause happiness at all. Of course, it is not the individual self that is meant. There are variations of degree of happiness and unhappiness among individuals, but no one who is under the limitations of individuality and identified with body, mind and ego can hope to be totally free and happy. The only way to permanent happiness is to listen to the Upanishadic teachings about the true nature of one's Self as the one Spirit present in all, to reflect over them and to meditate on them.

Yajnavalkya goes on to say that the whole world is the Spirit or Self within us. He illustrates this in an interesting way. He says, 'Take the case of listening to a tattoo, beaten on a drum. If, in your efforts to make out what this sound amounted to, you were to try to hear separately every blow of the drum-sticks, you would be nowhere. But, if you perceive the drum itself, and hear the noise as a whole, you are near as need be to knowing what has happened, to hearing the drum. The argument rests, as Shankara points out in his commentary, on the

maxim that we see in life that if x cannot be perceived apart from y, x reduces to y.

The stock example of this is bubbles and water. We might think of bubbles as different from water because we use a different word to designate them. But, when we reflect, we see that bubbles are not only never perceived apart from water but actually are water, water in a certain form that is referred to for convenience by another name. As water stands behind all the myriads of bubbles, and constitutes their true essence, so the one Self as pure Consciousness stands behind all the myriads of apparent modifications of consciousness that go to make up the world of phenomenal experience.

Similarly, all the objects of the world, including our bodies, are only expressions of *chit* or Consciousness, their ultimate material cause. We cannot know their true nature if we try to attack them piecemeal: but we can know their true nature in a completely different way by rising through Yoga to an awareness of our own true nature as the one universal Spirit. This is the aim of our practice of Yoga.

I close with two parables. The first aptly sums up the need for trying to act on the teachings of the *Brihadaranyaka* that we have been reading, the second emphasizes the need to act quickly.

A king who had many queens went abroad for a long time on some business. The queens heard that the place where the king was, was famous for the manufacture of certain articles. One wrote to the king, 'I hear that the place where you are makes very fine necklaces. Please bring me back a necklace.' Another wrote, 'The place is famous for its beautiful flowers. Please bring me back some artificial flowers.' All the queens asked for something or other, except one. She wrote, 'It is a long time since I have seen you. I don't want any gifts. Just come back, and that will be everything your servant wants.'

The king kept all the letters very carefully, and brought back to each queen exactly what she had asked for. But he went to stay exclusively at the abode of the queen who had asked for him. When the other queens remonstrated, he produced their letters and said, 'See, you asked for this, that and the other, but she asked for me. Of course, as I'm living with her, I naturally give her a lot of things, but you only asked for one, and have been given it.'

It is the same with us in the world. If we seek wealth hard enough, we get it. If we seek women, we get that. If we seek earth, we get earth, if we seek water, we get water, if we seek stones, we get stones, be they diamonds or other. But, if we seek the supreme Self hard enough, we get everything, not just the miserable one million pounds of the lottery winner. So, it is better to give up the chase after external objects and seek the Self.

Now, as to the question of getting on with it. A holy man once gave the son of a banker an alchemist's stone. He said, 'Every piece of metal you touch with this will turn to gold, but I want it back in seven days, to the minute.' The banker's son racked his brains how to assemble as much iron as he could within seven days. He sent off one agent to Bombay and another to Calcutta with enormous orders for spades, hoes, sickles and iron utensils of all sorts. The plan, however, was too ambitious. The goods trains took longer than he calculated. And there was then the problem of getting them from the goods-yard to his house by ox-wagon. On the seventh day the holy man came and demanded the stone back. The banker's son begged for just a few hours more, but the holy man simply shook his head and took the stone away from him.

The holy man is God; the banker's son is the soul. The alchemist's stone is the body given us by God. It lasts just so much time and no more. When death is approaching, it is no good offering prayers and saying, 'Give me two more years and I will dig wells and do sacrifices and practise Yoga.' Death will not spare us an extra minute. The Sanskrit poets say that when death is approaching, we are apt to realize that we have been given a diamond and have thrown it away in exchange for the tawdry glass of momentary sense-enjoyments.

A.J.A.

## Meditation — From Relaxation to Wisdom

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Every man must be able to go into voluntary mental and nervous relaxation, and concentrate his mind on a symbol of God, whether it be a word, a concept or an image. It is this prolonged silence of the soul which brings before man the patterns of what he is to create, the archetypes of his contribution to the inner and outer world. Everyone has an infinite world of beauty and goodness in his mind; the few who have recognized it call it *ilaham* or inspiration. *Shri Dada of Aligarh*

'The stressed mind imagines problems, the relaxed mind sees solutions.' This saying suggests that relaxation is not necessarily a retreat to the couch, but a frame of mind that can inform all our activities, as well as our repose. When the American pilot landed his disabled plane safely on the waters of the Hudson River, he was calm enough to think clearly and act promptly — both impossible when the mind is wrenched by fear and panic.

Is there some inbuilt gift that enables one person to stay serene while others suffer mounting anxiety? What makes me irritated and impatient, while you are balanced and undismayed amid upsets and adversities? Can this inner repose be cultivated by anyone?

If we were to ask someone schooled in meditation, they would tell us two important things. First, there is the capacity in all of us equally for developing the deeper relaxation that will confer a sense of security and satisfaction whatever we are faced with in the world. Secondly, this is not just a matter of will or training. It is based on the insight that the essential ingredient of our nature is something spiritual and higher than the mental life as we know it. Our inner being is linked with the Infinite.

Starting out on regular meditation practice is not a difficult undertaking. The same challenges are encountered as when we resolve to rise half an hour earlier on a dark winter's morning. There is a force of inertia to overcome, but nothing impossible is called for; and, if a modicum of rest is sacrificed, it can be reclaimed at the end of the day. We willingly spring from the sheets if there is a treat ahead, a holiday flight to meet. And we will find that benefits soon accrue from

meditation practice, in the form of relaxation, stability of our mental life and inner strength. No other investment of our time brings greater returns.

To mature the practices, and bring out their full potential, is a path of dedication. Why is this so? The fruit is spiritual wisdom, inner light. This means nothing less than realizing the source of satisfaction within ourselves. It has been called ‘the greatest thing in the world’, giving the joy that we are looking for in every step of our life. We miss it because we do not look for it in the right place.

What is the source of true joy? There is currently an advertisement headed ‘Joy is timeless’. The text unfolds: ‘Joy is now and forever. New yet eternal. Joy is what is yearned for...’

This is not a quotation from St Augustine or Swami Rama Tirtha. At the end of the paragraph comes the revelation that joy will be ours — if we purchase a particular brand of motor car! True indeed is the reflection that the vast majority of mankind envisage joy as linkage with particular sense objects, forgetting their transiency, and overlooking the rare treasures that lie in the highest phase of our own inner being. ‘Everyone has an infinite world of beauty and goodness in his mind.’

To tap the true source of joy we need to create a clearing in the world within our mind and uncover the deeper peace that is always present within ourselves, in the mind itself — in what has been called ‘the secret chamber of the intellect’. What is this ‘secret chamber of the intellect’? It is something that, inwardly, we live with all the time, yet we somehow overlook.

Imagine a precious casket, no larger than a small handbag. The exterior is ivory, inlaid with gold, rubies and sapphires. The interior, like the Kaaba in Mecca, is empty space. When our mind is made peaceful and turned in on itself in calm but firm attentiveness, what is revealed to us is something far more valuable than any jewel or casket. Even in the early stages of meditation practice, there can be intimations of a peace, a harmony, a relief, that we have not known before — like glimpsing those rubies and sapphires. And the opening of the box, so to say, the discovery of the true nature of the light within the intellect, will confer on us the wisdom of enlightenment, the freedom of the spirit, the

revelation that our true Self, our true ‘I’ is the Infinite, and it has never been otherwise.

When we are new to the practice of meditation, we should not be surprised if we find ourselves in a field of psychological struggle. We are coming face to face *consciously* with the restless energy of our own mind and its tendency to generate thoughts and feelings; and this is an activity that normally goes on unconsciously and to no creative or progressive purpose. Now, we are beginning to channel this God-given energy towards the supreme goal, illumination.

Our challenge is aptly put by Brother Lawrence, who lived in France in the seventeenth century. He told an enquirer ‘that useless thoughts spoil all: that the mischief began there; but that we ought to reject them, as soon as we perceived their impertinence to the matter in hand or our salvation, and return to our communion with God; that at the beginning he had often passed his time appointed for prayer, in rejecting wandering thoughts, and falling back into them.’

Still on this theme, there is the story of the man who engaged in meditation, and went to the Teacher afterwards, and said: ‘I tried hard, but just couldn’t keep my mind on the practice you recommended. It seems that my mind seized the time to think about everything except the practice. I am not sure that meditation is right for me.’

The Teacher said: ‘What you have told me is promising, and for good reasons. First, you are honest with me and with yourself. Second, you are self-aware. You *knew* you were in a state of restlessness or distraction. Third, you kept to the practice, and so your will was strengthened. Fourth, you have gained some insight into the workings of the mind; that is not possible for those who never turn within.’

He continued: ‘Have you seen a man sweeping the leaves on a windy day? He forms a pile but then the wind effectively scatters it, except for a few clusters of leaves that have clumped together. Yet he keeps on doing it, and something is accomplished. And then he finds that the wind dies down, perhaps the next day, and he is able to do more. The season of falling leaves passes, and the problem doesn’t arise. Similarly, keep at the practice, don’t be daunted, be calm, be patient with yourself. You will find that the wind of the mind, that is now scattering your attention, will die down. You will be surprised, some day, to find that

your mind is relatively quiet. And you will know that something deeper, something essentially joyous, something quite wonderful and indescribable, is coming alive within you.'

Implicit in this story is the fact that the practice will develop if we repeat it every day. If we can manage to add twenty minutes to our morning or evening routine, for meditation, we will find that, after a few days, we won't want to spend a day without it. This is because it will give us a kind of strength, a balance, a self-awareness, a power to recover from upsets, that we can't easily draw up in ourselves without this daily communion with our deeper Self.

We are fortunate if we can have a special place for our meditation, even a corner of a room. Keep it clean, and treat it as a sacred spot, lighting a candle, or placing there a vase with a flower or two, or a picture of someone who represents the values of wisdom, compassion, inner peace. Decide to do your meditation at a particular time, and then keep it as a daily appointment. If you have no place that will serve this purpose, try and find somewhere on your daily round, perhaps a church, or a seat in a park or garden. Where there's a will, there's a way.

Meditation is performed seated, and a firm chair is better than a soft one that curls the body and induces sleep. The back, neck and head are held in a relatively straight line. We should try to relax in this position, without clenching or tension, yet to stay as alert as a mounted horse-guard. If our body is supple, a simple cross-legged pose will do, with the hands resting in the lap; a cushion can add firmness to the posture. The aim is to forget the body and be absorbed in the practice as much as we get absorbed in some film or TV programme.

Curiously, when we first try to meditate, we may find an increased body-consciousness: some pain, or itch, suddenly introduces itself that had never bothered us before. There may be a physical basis, but often these are passing imaginings, a resistance to the unfamiliar. Do not be put off by such phenomena, or take them too seriously. They will pass.

### **Entering Meditation**

First we need to adjust what might be called our inner posture, our psychological state. Meditation, obviously, is not an ego trip. It is more

like an ego dip. We dip our being in the inner Ganges of peace and light, and forget the concerns of our personality. What is necessary is aptly summed up in the traditional instruction:

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.

It is as if the little fish becomes aware of the ocean in which it lives and moves and has its being, and is now giving a gesture of love and thanks to that supporting ocean. The word OM is the word of peace and power, the divinity expressed in sound, and we begin and end all our practices with it.

### **Breathing Practice**

Sit in relaxation, in the meditation posture. Focus the mind on the navel and, as you breathe in, imagine that you are drawing the breath up from the navel, so that you end the breath by thinking of the space between the eyebrows. Take twenty-one breaths in this way.

Allow four or five minutes for this practice. Conscious, rhythmic, slightly deeper breathing calms the mind. To focus on this central line while we are thus breathing, and to count the breaths, draws our attention from other thoughts. It will make a kind of clearing in the mind that has great benefits.

Do not regard this as a prescription designed for beginners; it is helpful at every stage, and will yield greater tranquillity

Brother Lawrence talked about useless thoughts and his efforts to reject them. One method in Yoga, when we become aware that our mind has wandered, is to say: 'Not wanted, not wanted. OM', and gently lift our attention back to the practice.

### **Visualization Practice**

Continue your session with the following:

Draw an imaginary line of light from the top of the forehead, down between the eyebrows, down the nose, lips, throat, heart-region to the navel. Imagine this line to be a line of light, and concentrate on it for ten minutes. In the beginning, you can draw your finger down the line, if it helps you to visualize it. Then sit and just think of this line of light.

Allow about seven minutes for this exercise. The breathing practice draws us inwards to the centre. It creates a clearing in the mind, a path of peace. The line of light lights up that path. Envisage it as a straight bright light slightly interior to the body's surface, something like a thin strip-light, or like the line of pure sunlight that peeps through a split in the curtains in the morning. We can associate it with beauty, with radiance, with purity, with bliss. There is light in the being of man and this imagined light will help to awaken our awareness of the real light that is behind it. When thoughts come and try to replace the visualization, consider that you do not want them right now. Say: 'OM. Not now. Not wanted,' or some such formula drawn from your reading or personal reflection. One given by Dr Shastri is: 'You are unreal, phantoms. I banish you as undesired images.' Another response to mental interference is simply: 'Not now. Later.'

### **Meditation Text**

OM. MY MIND RESTS IN CONTEMPLATION  
OF THE EVER-SHINING LIGHT IN MY SOUL.  
THAT LIGHT AM I. OM.

After the visualization, spend about ten minutes contemplating the above text. First, we try to establish its content in our mind by quietly repeating it a few times. Meditation texts contain great spiritual nourishment, and have an affinity with the source of joy within us. Once our mind is engaged, it is more like tasting a delicious sweet, a sherbert, which will release its hidden essence the more we savour it. We can do this with the text as a whole, or with a phrase or sentence from it; and we can shift the focus, as long as our mind stays within orbit of the text and its meaning.

This particular text is an affirmation. It affirms the state we want as if it is already ours. The ever-shining light is the light of our consciousness. It is our I, our true Self. The mind wavers and vibrates. But the light behind it is still, motionless, infinite and free. Calm the mind, be centred, be at home in oneself, be self-aware, and that innermost region of our being, that pure spiritual element that is the essence of all of us, will begin to show itself in our own experience. A man is what he thinks himself to be. Think that our mind has become restful, that it is resting in this focus, and it will be so, right now.

Close the meditation period by extending your thoughts of peace and goodwill to all beings, without exception.

Are these practices for ourselves alone? It is essential that we are the prime beneficiaries, just as it is essential for one wishing to confer gifts of great wealth that he himself should be wealthy. But there is a deeper and ego-transcending purpose behind all true meditation. It is to create the conditions in which all may be led from error to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. If we are peaceful, that peace will radiate, whether we know it or not, and help to make a better world.

A great saint of the Russian church, St Seraphim of Sarov, has said that a spiritual man provides a hidden nourishment to his brothers and sisters in the world. In his words: 'When anyone goes about in a peaceful state, he ladles out spiritual gifts as it were with a spoon. When a man attains a peaceful mood, then he can give forth from himself, upon others also, the light of the illumination of his mind.'

As Hari Prasad Shastri counsels in his *Meditation – Its Theory and Practice*:

Protect your mind from outer influences more carefully than you would protect a rare diamond. Be discriminative in your reading and in your eating. The time will come when you will become aware that the spirit of God, or Truth, is quickening within you. Then darkness will be dissipated as the fog melts in a valley before the rising sun; rich then will be your life, and you will bless yourself and humanity.

**A.H.C.**

## Prayer of the Heart and Yogic Meditation

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In the book in which Dr. Shastri has recorded the life of his own teacher, Shri Dada of Aligarh, *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*, we often hear of the practice of repeating the holy name of Rama, or that of Shiva, or Krishna or Vasudeva; or simply repeating the holy *Pranava*, that is to say, the syllable ‘OM’, which symbolizes the totality of Brahman or ultimate Reality.

It is therefore interesting to find that within the Christian tradition there exists a very vivid and detailed account, perhaps the most detailed we have, of the practice of repetition — or, as the Indians would put it, saying a mantram — and of the striking results this can bring about. It is parallels of this kind, when we find them, which provide the most convincing evidence that the guidance offered to us by the major religions is essentially true and the same, and that the differences which exist are rooted in historical and cultural causes and, from the standpoint of spiritual practice, are of relatively small importance.

So we may find it interesting to look briefly at this Christian account and to consider it in relation to Indian views and practices. It is contained in a small book entitled *The Way of a Pilgrim*, first translated from the Russian original by R.M. French in 1930 (the passages quoted here are taken from this translation). The Russian author does not tell us his name and so the book is anonymous, but the manuscript was found in one of the monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece near the end of the nineteenth century and one likes to think that this is perhaps where the writer ended his days. We learn from the text that he is Russian; a simple man — not quite a peasant, perhaps, for he can read and write well, but nevertheless from a simple background somewhere in provincial Russia. He has a withered right arm; it was broken in childhood, he tells us, and never properly mended. From the text, the time he describes seems to be in the 1850s, and he tells us at one point that he is 33 years old. He has no possessions other than an old and worn knapsack. In this he carries dry bread, which he is given now and then and which is what he lives on for most of the time — although occasionally someone invites him into their house for a meal. He also

has his Bible in the knapsack, and later on, and even more precious to him, a copy of the *Philokalia*, a collection of the mystical writings of the Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Right at the beginning of the book the Pilgrim tells us how his spiritual adventure began: ‘I went to church to say my prayers there during the Liturgy’, he writes. ‘The first Epistle of St Paul to the Thessalonians was being read, and among others I heard these words — “Pray without ceasing”.’

The words stick in his mind. In fact, they act almost like a Zen koan. How is it possible, he keeps asking himself, to pray without ceasing, since a man must concern himself with other things in order to live? ‘I looked at my Bible, and with my own eyes read the words I had heard — that we ought always, at all times and in all places, to pray without ceasing. “What ought I to do?” I thought. “Where shall I find someone to explain it to me?”’

And so his search begins. He does not tell himself there must be some mistake, and decide to leave the insoluble problem aside and get on with his life, as most people would do. Because of his faith in the Bible and the words recorded in it — in this case those of St Paul — he cannot let the matter drop in this way. So he starts to go to churches where famous preachers are to be heard, thinking that before long he will hear an explanation of what it means to pray without ceasing and will be able to understand how this could be possible. ‘I heard a number of very fine sermons on prayer’, he tells us, ‘what prayer is, how much we need it, and what its fruits are; but no one said how one could succeed in prayer . . . How it was to be done was not pointed out.’

So our pilgrim gives up going to public sermons. He decides instead that he must search for some experienced and skilled person who can explain to him the teaching about unceasing prayer. He has in effect started to search for a guru, a true teacher who can explain to him, not just in theoretical and intellectual terms like the preachers of sermons, but on the basis of his own personal experience, what prayer really is and how it is possible to pray without ceasing.

And so now the pilgrim wanders for a long time and through many places. ‘Everywhere I asked’, he writes, ‘whether there was not in the neighbourhood a spiritual teacher, a devout and experienced guide, to



be found.’ At one point he comes to a large town in which there is a well-known monastery. Full of hope, he goes to see the Abbot. This is what happened:

He met me in a very friendly manner and offered me refreshment. ‘I do not need refreshment, holy Father’, I said, ‘but I beg you to give me some spiritual teaching. How can I save my soul?’

‘Well, live according to the commandments, say your prayers, and you will be saved.’

‘But I hear it said that we should pray without ceasing, and I cannot even understand what unceasing prayer means. I beg you, Father, to explain this to me.’

‘I don’t know how to explain it further, dear brother. But stop. I have a little book, and it is explained there.’ And he handed me a book, saying, ‘Look, read this page.’

I began to read the following words: ‘The words of the Apostle “pray without ceasing” refer to the creative prayer of the understanding. The understanding can always be reaching out towards God, and pray to Him unceasingly.’

‘But’, I asked the Abbot, ‘what is the method by which the understanding can always be turned towards God and pray without ceasing? How, actually, does one set about it?’

‘It is very difficult’, replied the Abbot, ‘even for one to whom God Himself gives such a gift.’

And so the Abbot could not give me the explanation, and it was the same in other places where I enquired. I went on my way — where to, I did not know myself. My failure to understand made me sad. In this way I followed the road for some days.’

And then one evening, just as dusk is coming on, the pilgrim is overtaken on the dusty road by an old man. He looks like a churchman of some sort, and he tells the pilgrim that he is a monk and belongs to a monastery which is some six miles ahead off the main road. ‘We take in pilgrims and give them rest’, he says. ‘Do come, dear brother.’

‘I did not feel like going’, the Pilgrim writes, ‘so I said that my peace of mind in no way depended on finding a resting-place for the night, but upon finding spiritual teaching.’ ‘What sort of spiritual teaching?’, he asked. ‘What is puzzling you?’

And so the pilgrim tells the old man how, about a year ago, he had heard the words ‘pray without ceasing’ at the Liturgy, and how a burning desire and thirst for knowledge awoke in him, so that from then on day and night the matter was never out of his mind. ‘I have often read the Bible and have there made sure of what I have heard’, the Pilgrim concludes. ‘The words are clear, but I have not reached the understanding that I long for, and am still uneasy and in doubt.’

At this the old man he was with crossed himself and spoke. ‘Thank God, dear brother, for having revealed to you this unappeasable desire for interior prayer. It has been granted to you to understand that the heavenly light of unceasing interior prayer is attained neither by the wisdom of this world, nor by the mere outward desire for knowledge, but that it is found in poverty of spirit and simplicity of heart.’ And so the pilgrim and the old man go back to the monastery together as night comes on.

We went into his cell and he began to speak as follows. ‘The continuous interior prayer is an uninterrupted calling upon the divine Name of Jesus — with the lips, in the spirit, and in the heart, during every occupation, at all times, even during sleep. It is couched in these terms, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. One who accustoms himself to this appeal experiences so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always that he can no longer live without it, and in time it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord.’

‘In God’s name, teach me how to gain the habit of it,’ the Pilgrim cries. ‘Read this book’, the old monk says. ‘It is called the *Philokalia*.’ The pilgrim sits down and opens the book. With the help of the old monk he finds the instructions given by St Simeon the New Theologian, and reads the following words:

Sit down alone and in silence. Lower your head, shut your eyes, breathe out gently and imagine yourself looking into your own heart. Carry your mind — that is to say, your thoughts — from your head to your heart. As you breathe out, say: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’ Say it moving your lips gently, or otherwise simply say it in your mind. Try to put all other thoughts aside. Be calm, be patient. And repeat the process very frequently.

The pilgrim tells us that he listened closely and with great delight as the old monk found relevant passages in the *Philokalia*, trying to fix in his memory the explanations of the old man and to remember every detail. He realizes he has found a true starets, the Russian term for a monk distinguished by true piety and long experience of the spiritual life, and endowed with a gift for guiding other souls.

In this way [the pilgrim tells us] we spent the whole night together and went to matins without having slept at all. Then the starets sent me away with his blessing and told me that while learning the Prayer I must always come back to him and tell him everything, making a very frank confession and report; for the inward process could not go on properly and successfully without the guidance of a teacher.

The Pilgrim finds a place to live in a village a few miles from the monastery. 'A peasant hired me for the whole summer to look after his kitchen garden, and what is more gave me the use of a little thatched hut in it where I could live alone. God be praised! I had found a quiet place.'

While tending the garden that summer he sets about learning interior prayer, and how one can pray without ceasing in the way which had been explained to him by the starets. At first things seemed to go very well. But then, he tells us, 'it tired me very much. I felt lazy and bored and overwhelmingly sleepy, and a cloud of all sorts of other thoughts closed round me.'

So, after only a week, he goes back again in distress to his starets, and tells him frankly the state he is in. The old man is not at all surprised. He tells the pilgrim that it is the attack of the world of darkness upon him, and reads from the *Philokalia* the words of Nicephorus the Recluse:

If after a few attempts you do not succeed in reaching the realm of your heart in the way you have been taught, do what I am about to say. The faculty of pronouncing words lies in the throat. Reject all other thoughts — you can do this if you will — and allow that faculty to repeat only the following words constantly, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me'. Compel yourself to do it always. If you succeed for a time, then without a doubt your heart also will open to prayer. We know it from experience.

And so the starets instructs the pilgrim to start by saying the prayer three thousand times a day:

Whether you are standing or sitting, walking or lying down, continually repeat 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me'. Say it quietly and without hurry, without deliberately increasing or diminishing the number. God will help you, and by this means you will reach the unceasing activity of the heart.

The pilgrim accepts this guidance and begins to carry out faithfully and exactly what he had been told: 'For two days I found it difficult', he tells us, 'but after that it became easy and likeable and I did it freely and willingly, not forcing myself to it as before.'

He goes back to the starets, who now tells him to increase the number to six thousand.

I felt no anxiety. Taking no notice of any other thoughts however much they assailed me, I had but one object — to carry out my starets' bidding exactly. And what happened? I grew so used to my prayer that when I stopped for a single moment I felt as though something were missing, as though I had lost something. The very moment I started the prayer again, it went on easily and joyously, so used to it had I become in a week.

Then he is instructed to say the prayer twelve thousand times a day, getting up at dawn and going to bed late in order to do this, and coming to seek advice from the starets every fortnight.

I did as he bade me. The first day I scarcely succeeded in finishing my task by late evening. The second day I did it easily and contentedly. To begin with, this ceaseless saying of the prayer brought a certain amount of weariness. My tongue felt numbed, I had a stiff feeling in my jaws and a slightly painful sensation in the roof of my mouth. The thumb of my left hand, with which I counted my beads, hurt a little. I felt a slight inflammation in the whole of that wrist. All this urged me on. My whole desire was to say the prayer of Jesus, and soon I went on with it filled with joy and relief. It was as though my lips and tongue pronounced the words entirely of themselves without any urging from me. I lived as though in another world, and I easily finished my twelve

thousand prayers by the early evening. I felt very much like still going on with them, but I did not dare to go beyond the number my starets had set me.

He goes to see his starets again and tells him everything in detail. The old monk replies:

Be thankful to God. How consoling a thing it is when He is pleased to grant the gift of self-acting spiritual prayer, and to cleanse the soul from all sensuality! It is a foretaste on earth of the bliss of Heaven. Now I give you my permission to say your Prayer as often as you wish and as often as you can. Try to devote every moment you are awake to the Prayer without counting the number of times, and submit yourself humbly to the will of God. I am sure that He will not forsake you.

The Pilgrim tells us:

Under this guidance I spent the whole summer in ceaseless oral prayer to Jesus Christ, and I felt absolute peace in my soul. During sleep I often dreamed that I was saying the prayer. And during the day if I happened to meet anyone, all men without exception were as dear to me as if they had been my nearest relations... I thought of nothing whatever but my prayer, my mind tended to listen to it, and my heart began of itself to feel at times a certain warmth and pleasure... My lonely hut seemed like a splendid palace, and I knew not how to thank God for having sent to me, a lost sinner, so wholesome a guide and master.

Our pilgrim has made progress in his search for what it means to pray without ceasing; although he has not yet reached that 'unceasing activity of the heart' of which his starets told him, when the heart opens and the prayer or mantra voices itself within it spontaneously and without apparent effort. Before going further let us see to what extent the experiences of the pilgrim coincide with the practices of Yoga and the teachings and instructions left to us by Dr Shastri. Is there any genuine common ground here? Or do the experiences of the pilgrim belong to a quite different set of ideas and practices, to a different world of Christian thought which bears at most only superficial resemblances to the Indian practices?

We have seen that the method followed by the pilgrim, and taught

to him by his starets or spiritual guide and by the writers of the *Philokalia*, is essentially as follows: the repetition of a single thought in the form of what in India would be called a mantra, in such a way that it completely fills the mind, so that other thoughts are excluded and have no opportunity to arise or to gain the pilgrim's attention. And the result of this is that after making the necessary effort the practice begins to become easy and the pilgrim starts to feel in his heart a sensation of warmth and well-being, so that the outward events of his life, including what we would think of as basic comforts and necessities, appear of relatively little importance or value.

There are many places in the writings which have been left to us by Dr Shastri, and in the Indian traditions generally, in which the repetition of a mantra is recommended as being highly effective. In the book *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching* he tells of the words of his own guru, Shri Dada, on the subject of spiritual devotion or *bhakti*. He draws a picture of Shri Dada, surrounded by his listeners, sitting near the edge of the Ganges at a beautiful spot just above Rishikesh in the Himalayan foothills. 'Devotion begins with the worship of name and symbol', Shri Dada tells his listeners. 'Sometimes, while hearing a devotional song or sermon, or reading a spiritual book, the mind is temporarily uplifted, but before long it relapses into its original worldly state.' This, he says, is like the waves of the Ganges washing over a rock and temporarily cooling it. We may perhaps compare this initial stage to the pilgrim going to the liturgy in church and hearing there the words of St Paul, 'pray without ceasing'.

The second stage follows when a guru of the traditional type has been sought for and found — just as the pilgrim, after searching for a long time, found his starets apparently quite by chance and, immediately recognizing him, placed his entire trust in him. Such a teacher, Shri Dada continues, is one who does not live on the disciples but gives his invaluable experience and learning to help and guide them. Now the teachings make a lasting impression on the heart of the pupil, and Shri Dada likens this stage to a cloth doll which is immersed in the waters of the Ganges and becomes soaked through by them — and we may think of the pilgrim in his little thatched hut in the garden engaged in repetition of the Jesus Prayer and finding it beginning to come to life in his heart.

But this is not the final stage, for the cloth doll can dry out and revert to its earlier nature; and this can happen, Shri Dada warns, if the practices are not continued and worldly interests and associations start to creep back into the heart. The third and final stage may be compared to a lump of salt which, when it is immersed in the waters of the Ganges, slowly dissolves and becomes one with them. 'How fortunate are those who experience this! He who can dissolve his mind... obtains the crown of God-realization. You will say it is difficult, difficult. But nothing is impossible to the patient and persevering.' The pilgrim has not yet reached this final stage, but he has taken the first steps towards it.

The higher consciousness, Dr Shastri says elsewhere, is not acquired without a struggle involving self-purification, concentration and discipline. By these means it can be acquired. The first requisite is a great earnestness to know the method and to practise it — and we have seen this very well illustrated by the pilgrim's initial and very determined search to find the real, practical meaning of the words 'pray without ceasing'.

Dr Shastri goes on to say that a person cannot at the same time ride in two boats moving in opposite directions, and so one cannot have many worldly interests and yet at the same time expect to make really significant progress towards finding the spiritual centre of life and one's own true inner nature. The Lord is seated in the heart of man; this is the all-important first principle. When you are able to see Him there, you can see him everywhere. Without this, there is no freedom, no real and lasting happiness and no conscious immortality. You have to find Him in your own heart.

You cannot see Him in your own heart unless you have purified your mind, unless you have banished all the desires for worldly objects [and experiences] and filled your heart with a great desire to know Him, to see Him, to be united with Him. This is a cardinal doctrine of Bhakti Yoga. It is taught by the Sufi mystics of Persia and Arabia, it is taught by Holy Christ, by Mahayana Buddhists, and the teachings of the [*Bhagavad*] *Gita* abound in this. Let us try to find out what elements there are in the human personality through which the Divine Communication comes.

Dr Shastri then says that such a communication does not come from above, it comes from within. A man who needs water has to dig down until he finds a spring, and in the same way a person who seeks to find lasting peace and bliss has to look deep down into his or her own being.

It is the ability to concentrate your heart and your mind on the inner principle that will bring you that joy and that knowledge which the soul is hungry for... To expect the communication of God from any outer source is meaningless. It must come from you... If you want to see God, see Him in your own heart.

This is exactly what the pilgrim is attempting to do. But it is not so easy, because the heart, in its usual condition, is not pure. It is tarnished and clouded over by sense impressions and images, and in this state it acts as a veil which hides the inner light and peace which is always there. 'Not only sensual images but also impressions', Dr Shastri emphasizes. And he goes on to say that it is important to know what is meant by impressions. Impressions are those desires and strong emotions which we have experienced but are no longer aware of. Nevertheless, they 'are stamped on the tablet of our heart'. Every desire or emotion leaves an impression in the heart.

There is a great deal in the literature of both Hinduism and Buddhism about these impressions, or *vasanas*, and it is said that unless we can free ourselves from them, they determine our whole activity and way of life. 'What hides God in our soul is nothing else but our desires, called in Sanskrit *vasanas* [or impressions]', Dr Shastri writes. The repetition of a mantra slowly dissolves the worldly impressions, so that the heart becomes increasingly transparent and the light of pure consciousness which is our real nature begins to shine through:

When the mind is made one-pointed, and when our devotion is continuous for a long time and the mind is detached from the objects of the world, then these pictures and impressions begin to fade away. A great lesson is to have only one dominating desire, and that single desire is to know the Lord and to be His servant.

It is just this that we see our Russian pilgrim engaged in. Probably the Christian teachers he relies on knew nothing of the theory of

impressions, but they had found from experience that repetition of the name of Jesus was extremely effective.

The pilgrim then tells us that at the end of that first summer, during which he learnt to practice the prayer, his starets died. He had known him for only a few months. Perhaps they had met no more than ten or twelve times. But it was sufficient; the starets had opened the way for him. 'Weeping freely I bade him farewell, and thanked him for the fatherly teaching he had given my wretched self', the pilgrim tells us, 'and as a blessing and a keepsake I begged for the rosary with which he said his prayers.'

And so he is left alone. Summer ends, and he is no longer needed in the kitchen garden. Again he starts on his wanderings.

But now I did not walk along as before, filled with care. The calling upon the name of Jesus Christ gladdened my way. And that is how I go about now, and ceaselessly repeat the prayer of Jesus, which is more precious and sweet to me than anything in the world. When the bitter cold pierces me, I begin to say my prayer more earnestly. When hunger begins to overcome me, I call more often on the name of Jesus, and I forget my wish for food.

His life is not without incident as he passes through the forests of Siberia. At one point he is beaten and robbed by criminals. At another a wolf attacks him. On another occasion, after falling through the ice into a river and being unable to get dry, he loses the use of his legs, but is eventually healed by the folk medicine of a peasant. On a few occasions he meets others who have similar spiritual experiences to his own. And now, with great joy, he finds that the ceaseless prayer of the heart, to which St Paul had referred in the words 'pray without ceasing' and of which the starets had told him, manifests itself more and more distinctly.

I had the feeling that the Prayer had, so to speak, by its own action passed from my lips to my heart. It seemed as though my heart in its ordinary beating began to say the words of the prayer. I gave up saying the prayer with my lips. I simply listened carefully to what my heart was saying. It seemed as though my eyes looked right down into it; and

I dwelt upon the words of my departed starets when he was telling me about this joy.

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* (2.1.10) there is a verse which reads: 'He who knows this highest immortal Brahman as existing in the heart, unties here the knot of ignorance.' And this is what the Russian pilgrim was doing, as he learnt to use the prayer of Jesus to purify his heart, to rid it of the impressions or *vasanas* which form the knot of ignorance binding us to the world and to our lower self, and to enter into the light and peace hidden deep within us — that final Reality which is what is really meant when we use such expressions as the Lord, God and Brahman.

S.C.

### HOW BEAUTIFUL!

It was a beautiful sunset. I viewed it from the deck of a steamer in mid-ocean, and was charmed by the colours and the dim brilliance of the clouds.

My soul was leaping out of my body to offer itself as a sacrifice to the Love behind the sunset who animated the inert matter with beauty and charm.

I could not contain myself, and cried; "Oh, how beautiful!"

She was standing at my side and exclaimed: "Shut up! Do not burst the drums of my ears with your noise.'

I felt like dying.

H.P.S.

# Bhakti Yoga

*A lecture given by Hari Prasad Shastri on May 21<sup>st</sup> 1943*

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SO THAT you may be able to follow what I am going to present to you today from the scriptures of the East, please go into mental relaxation and fix your attention as much as you possibly can here (heart centre), withdrawing it from every other object. If you find it difficult to do so, breathe consciously and deeply a few times and then again focus your attention on the heart centre. When the attention is focused to any extent, think that the Lord of the Universe is abiding in your heart and you are offering your love and homage to Him. By doing this practice for a while, you will be able to follow what I am going to offer to you.

Today I am going to expound the Bhakti Yoga, the Yoga which means a method of devotion, a life in general whereby our emotions are so trained and directed that they make the spiritual light within us clear to us, and we realize that there is the Kingdom of Heaven within. The Kingdom of Heaven is within, but our souls have shut their eyes to it and therefore they are in darkness, and in this darkness the souls are dreaming dreams of 'This is what I like', 'This I do not like', 'This I possess', and 'This I want to possess'. This is the kind of dream which the soul dreams in darkness, and the darkness is due to the fact that the soul recognizes, not the Kingdom of Heaven within, but its own petty kingdom.

There are two creations. One is the creation of the Lord, and the other is the tiny, arbitrary, presumptuous and often arrogant kingdom of the individual superimposed on the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is always a source of bondage. The Kingdom of God is not a source of bondage; it is freedom, it is bliss, it is all light. Man first creates his kingdom in the realm of his thought and then objectifies it in his daily life by his actions, and each intensity of the objectification of the inner kingdom conceived in the absence of recognition of the Kingdom of Heaven becomes a source of greater and greater suffering and greater and greater and yet greater bondage.

As a hypochondriac takes delight in being sick and considers himself miserable, a state which pleases him, so when man is blind to the

Kingdom of Heaven within, he becomes spiritually ill, his organs of discernment, justice and discrimination are perverted, with the result that his whole life becomes a life of continuous suffering.

This is the problem. It needs no logic to demonstrate that there is the Kingdom of Heaven within man. In the state of deep sleep, man's own kingdom is abolished temporarily. In deep sleep there is no love and there is no hatred, there is no sense of possession and no sense of egoity, there is no dislike for one and like for another, there is no fetish of nationalism. What is the result? There is that kind of real happiness in deep sleep which you find in no other object when you awake.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not realized in deep sleep, but one step has been achieved, and it is that our kingdom of ignorance has been temporarily suspended. If we could suspend it for a long time, do you not think we would be happier? All the efforts of the holy Lord Jesus and his great saints were directed towards one end, and only one end, and it was that man may realize the existence of the Kingdom of Heaven within. The way by which this Kingdom is realized is called Yoga, and when we try to realize it by controlling, purifying and directing the greatest force in our life, our desires, we call it Bhakti Yoga.

Matters will not stand as they are, because everything in nature, as Hegel points out, is in a state of flux. There is a spiritual battle going on in the heart of man, the battle which is symbolized in the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* as the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. In this battle the law is 'either kill ignorance or be killed by it; there is no other way'. Either destroy ignorance or, if not, you will be imprisoned under the bars of darkness and you will be fed on the opiate of delusion and you will dream dreams, sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant, but it will not be your real life. The real life is realization of the Kingdom of God within. All other life, whether it be the life of an Alexander of Macedon or a Julius Caesar, or an Aristotle, is a dream, dream, dream, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter, going on in rotation.

Man thinks, man desires, man wills. These are the three great functions being performed in the psychic realm of man. Why should we act? What should be the *raison d'être* of our action? Actions are of three

kinds — purposeful, dangerous and neutral. Purposeful actions are those which are meant to create something which we already know what it is; dangerous actions are those which we perform knowingly or unknowingly to add to the gloom and servitude of the soul; and neutral actions are those which deal with neither of these categories.

A man ought to live a purposeful life. You will say ‘What is a purposeful life?’ Pleasure? Animals live a life of pleasure and if man also becomes a votary of pleasure, where is his superiority, where is the rational life of which he is so proud? There are pleasures which are condemnable; there are pleasures which imprison the soul of man; there are pleasures which lead to degradation; yet there can be pleasures which open the hidden windows of the heart of man through which pour forth the rays, scintillating, lambent, of the divine Light flooding the soul with peace and with real joy called happiness.

That wealth is not a source of joy is well known; usually wealthy people become sick. It is a well-known saying that ‘wealth makes one sick’. Health up to a certain point is all right, but to be a health maniac and to think of nothing but the physical health is a sign of a deranged mind. There is mental health, there is ethical health, there is spiritual health, and unless these higher phases of health are valued, man decidedly begins to fall lower and lower.

The driving force in the life of man is his desire, desire, desire. A man is what he desires, and let man be very careful in what he desires. What should a man desire? Man should desire that which is natural, interminable happiness, peace and freedom.

Aristotle has said that there is only one road to happiness and it is through contemplation and meditation. You become a yogi when you have decided with an iron determination to direct your mental life, your physical life, your aesthetic life and spiritual life to the fulfilment of the supreme purpose of man, the realization of the Kingdom of God within. If the resolution is weak, if the resolution is made today and broken tomorrow, if a little adverse wind coming from an unknown quarter makes you perspire or makes you tremble like a sheep confronting a wolf, then life will constitute iron fetters to you. It is better that we decide upon and determine to be yogis, to lead our life to the realization of the dictum of Christ, ‘the Kingdom of God is within’.

Emotions can be a very great help in the realization of this kind of life. Votaries of ease and comfort never achieve anything in the world. Nothing achieved in the world brings real peace, joy and freedom to man, and therefore it is said in the *Gita*: ‘O Arjuna, be a yogi’. Some of you have been husbands, some of you wives, daughters, sisters, brothers and what not. Think today, what has all this brought you? Are you nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven? Do you think that you stand on the verge of that glorious region within, where peace abides for ever, and for which the Lord God has sent you into this world, and into human life? If not, we exist to tell you that you should do so.

The sooner you do so, the better it is. Each breath which is taken forgetful of the Holy Name of God is wasted. Each step that is taken for any purpose other than realization of the Kingdom of Heaven is a loss. This little place has only this one purpose, to bring uncompromisingly to the notice of all that the real object of their life is to find God within themselves, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us study how our emotions can help in this matter. The first requisite is to make a determination. ‘We will use our emotions in this service of God.’ What is the worship of God? What is the meaning of the word worship? Worship means service. I am not using service in the sense used by people: ‘Oh, I want to serve somebody.’ Service of God means, first, to know what He is, then to know where He is, and then you know what kind of service He needs. If I try to serve the sun by offering a candle light to the sun, do you think I am serving the sun? Listen carefully. What is the service of God? To carry on the behests of God, and His chief behest is: ‘Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy might’, and if the behest of God is not executed, any other service is a taint and means nothing.

What He is, is the first thing. He is perfection. Where is He? He is in your heart. What does He want? He wants you to be what He is, that is all. It is His service that you be spiritually perfect. Benevolence does form an important part of the worship of God, but it is a secondary thing, and if you feel elated at having done something wonderful for your fellow men, well my friends, beware.

When the speaker was in Japan, there was a society called the Indo-Japanese Society, and the object of the society was to do good to the

Indians who came to Japan. There was a man as director, an egoist of the first type, drawing a very fat salary, keeping two cars and other such paraphernalia — you can imagine he was doing good to the Indians who came to Japan! I went to him. I wanted a few addresses and he gave them to me. When the report of this society was published for that year, full of what good they had done, there was a prominent place given to the service that had been rendered to me, that they had given me addresses and introductions to such and such persons, and it was printed in large letters: ‘Good done to an Indian scholar’. Do you want to do that kind of good? All good that is done by those people whose hearts are bereft of the love of God, is more or less of the same type.

When you have made up your mind that by the purification and direction of your emotions you will discover the Kingdom of Heaven within, then you can call yourself a yogi. A Christian, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Hindu, and a man who has no formal denomination, can all be yogis. I am a Christian as much as a Brahmin. How could I be a Brahmin without at the same time being a Christian, but my Christianity is free from all denominations.

When you have made up your mind, follow a path. There are no freelances among the soldiers of God. Unguided by one who has seen the light from a recognized source, nobody can reach the end of Yoga or be called a yogi. Many lives have been ship-wrecked on the rock of this egotism: ‘We do not need any guide, we will find the ideal ourselves, we are quite competent to do so.’ Till you find a path or are guided to it, select the Incarnation of God whom you have to worship. Do not believe that you can worship the all-pervasive, omniscient Lord without a symbol; and Krishna or Christ, Buddha and any others, are names of the one supreme symbol, the same, the very same. Jerusalem, Brindavan, Kapilavastu and Mecca are the same city, the very same. Think of Him, pour out your love to Him, read about Him, talk about Him, give your heart to Him, give your mind to Him.

One difference now, Where does Adhyatma Yoga differ from denominational Christianity? The Jesus who was born in Bethlehem was not a man. He was a direct descent of God, and all the perfection and infinitude of God was in Him. Just as to a jeweller, a ring made of gold, a crown made of gold, a bangle made of gold, are nothing but

gold, to a true Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or to a true yogi, Christ is Krishna and Krishna is Christ, Buddha is Krishna and Krishna is Buddha. You worship Him as Christ, another man worships Him as Buddha, yet another worships Him by some other name, but they are all worshipping the same, and if you like to call them all Christ, it is Christ who dances in Brindavan. A true worshipper of Krishna or Buddha should be able to say the same thing.

Now, if you want to dedicate anything, say a bouquet of flowers to one whom you love, what do you do? You go to the best shop, you buy the most fragrant and best roses, you wrap them very carefully, you write a very humble note. You do not say: ‘I am sending you such roses as you have never seen in your life before.’ You will say: ‘Will you be good enough to accept this little attempt of a loving heart, inadequate, impure; still it is prompted by the best of feelings my heart can express.’ Transfer this simile to the spiritual realm. What offering does the Lord God want from you, and without Him none else can give you uninterrupted happiness and peace and freedom, none, none, none? He wants that you dedicate your heart to Him through Bhakti Yoga.

How will you do it? First purify your heart. To purify your heart means to banish all desires for sense objects from it. In your heart let there be no quarter for acquisition of any object of the senses. With discrimination, throw out the money changers from the temple of your heart. These money changers are love of pleasure, love of comfort and love of egoity. When the heart is barren of desire for sense objects, and when these money changers are driven out, your heart is pure. Pray to Him that He may give you this purity. Man, unaided, can accomplish very little. What he accomplishes unaided is merely a bubble, like Alexander’s empire, or like Hitler’s empire, less than a bubble.

Prayer means lifting your heart to Him. There are two expressions which are very often observed in the Jewish writings of the Old Testament: ‘I lift my soul unto Thee’, says the psalmist, David, ‘I lift my soul unto Thee’ and ‘He lost his soul’.

There are certain things which lift our soul unto Him, there are other things which tend towards loss of our soul. What is the loss of our soul? Loss of the capacity of the soul to turn towards God. It is said in the *Gita*: ‘The mind is the greatest enemy of man and the mind is the



greatest friend of man.' The mind which is controlled and directed to God is the greatest friend, the mind which is not controlled and is allowed to work according to its own way is the greatest enemy of man. The same mind, yet what a great difference it makes. It is therefore essential that we should learn how to lift our soul unto Him.

Before you do anything else in the morning, when you have performed your ablutions, take a holy book — *Gita*, *Imitation of Christ*, the *Fourth Gospel*, the *Confessions of St Augustine*, and dip your heart into it. Immerse your heart in it. Do not read it superficially, immerse your soul in it. Whatever you do, do in relaxation. Take a few passages and immerse your soul in them. I am quite sure all of you have loved some time or other in your life. Remember the day when you received your first love letter, with what great anxiety you read it. Each and every holy verse of the Scriptures is ten times more valuable than the first love letter that you received; therefore, read it and immerse your mind and let faith, absolute faith, be your guide. God demands of you faith. You must have faith, burning faith, that the *Gospel* is the word of God, the *Gita* is the word of God. If you do not understand it, then remember that the holy scripture is far greater than you. Do not shrug your shoulders, do not wrinkle your brow, calmly read it again with greater relaxation and pray: 'Show me the light so that I may understand it'. If you still do not understand, go to a friend who knows, and go to him in reverence, and try to understand.

If you do this for ten or twenty minutes every morning and your soul is immersed in it, you go to your business with two objects in view, that you will not get excited, that you will remain in mental relaxation, and that you will direct your mind towards God whatever you are doing.

Friends of the world, people of the world, how far will they help us? The only helper is He who helped Mary Magdalen, He is the only helper. Tell me whose name is the Friend of the Poor? There are many haters of the poor, there are many who love class distinction, but whose name is the Helper of the Poor, the Friend of the Poor, who sat with the sinners and publicans, tell me? He is your Friend, and think that it is He whom you are going to meet every day, in any form that He may come to you. This is the beginning of Bhakti Yoga.

**Hari Prasad Shastri**

## SHANTI SADAN NEWS

During the Spring term there was a special series for the first time on Friday evenings. The theme was *The Way of Understanding — Awakening Insights from the Masters of Yoga, Christianity and Sufism*. It included talks on Brother Lawrence and Jesus himself from the Christian tradition; Al Ghazzali and Rumi from the Islamic Sufis; and Shri Shankara, the supreme philosopher-saint of Advaita, as well as the great modern yogis Swami Rami Tirtha and Shri Dada. The underlying unity at the heart of the great teachings was clearly illustrated in the series, together with the importance of verifying the essentials by turning the examples of the masters into practice in our own lives. Visitors interested in particular spiritual personalities had the opportunity to hear how they relate to the teachings that recognise no distinctions in the highest reality.

The Wednesday evening talks were once again a series on meditation, including introductions to the principles on which meditation is based, together with guided sessions with practices that could be taken up regularly. Each of the talks also drew on the psychological and spiritual wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, the classic text on spiritual living and enquiry in active life. As in previous terms, many took the opportunity to experience directly the benefits of meditation and the universal outlook.

The Spring special course on *Awakening the Higher Consciousness* passed in an atmosphere of peaceful attentiveness, and a similar mix of talks on stages in Yoga plus meditations is planned for the Summer event.

### Summer 2010 Special Course

#### Inner Peace and Light through Yoga and Meditation

Saturday 5 June 2010, 2-5pm

#### Programme:

Talk 1 *Have Faith in Your Spiritual Self*

First Meditation session

Talk 2 *Unfoldment of Higher Love*

Second Meditation session

Talk 3 *Letting in the Light of Truth*