

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

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SHANTI SADAN, 29 CHEPSTOW VILLAS, LONDON W11 3DR

to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN TERM 2010

Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

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

Autumn 2010 Afternoon Course

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

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Though still confused his service be to Me,
I soon shall lead him to a clearer morning;
Sees not the gardener, even while buds the tree,
Both flower and fruit the future years adorning?

These lines, from the Prologue to Goethe's *Faust*, gently indicate the position of every seeker after Truth. The 'confusion' is caused by the many longings that still surge in the heart. The 'clearer morning' is the growing conviction that spiritual insight alone will bring lasting satisfaction and absorb the tiny sparks of temporal desires into the pure flame of inner illumination.

The sage Shri Dada once said: 'Your thoughts after a time will return to you with interest.' Spiritual thoughts, based on peace, harmony, goodwill and enlightenment, are the best investment for our personal psychological future. Our mind is always with us, and its presentations

are the result, not only of the food of experience that we digest, but also the private reflections we indulge in. Spiritual life is the opportunity to select the outer stimuli that remind us of the higher life, and cultivate thoughts and feelings that expand our understanding and deepen our peace.

Goethe tells of a family who were brought up in an unused chapel, where the murals on the walls depicted the life of Christ. So pervasive was this influence, that the family imbibed its spirit completely and lived, dressed and moved as did the holy figures shown on the murals. The mind truly is like a sponge, and what it produces is largely the result of the material it is habitually absorbing during the day.

A brighter future for our inner life is always possible through the cultivation of good thoughts and good feelings right now. We do not have to invent such sentiments. There is a heritage of wisdom, in the form of the spiritual classics and sayings of the Masters, that is fully available to us. To choose a saying that appeals to our heart, that points to our higher nature, and that is universal in its implications, and to savour it in our mind, will produce an immediate expansion of outlook. To resort habitually to such practices, will make the mind our friend and ally on our spiritual quest, and banish all confusion.

Jesus also spoke of sowing good seeds in one's inner being, and the result will be a harvest of spiritual peace and light. Although the supreme Truth transcends the mind, the approach to its realization can only be through this 'inner gardening'. The divine promise is that all confusion will be dissipated, and the flower and fruit of life, enlightenment, will be ours for ever.

* * *

Know the Supreme Being to be without beginning and without end; the enlightener of all lights; the undecaying, unborn and incomprehensible one. He is the root of thy consciousness; He is the nature of thy soul.

Shri Dada of Aligarh

Dharma and Illumination

O friend, now I am telling you the secret which is superior to all teaching and all religions, and constitutes the greatest good in life, namely: Do not deviate from the path of cosmic and eternal harmony called Dharma, even if it costs you your life, far less for the sake of the pleasures of this world or out of consideration for others.

Mahabharata (from Bhishma's dying sermon)

When a man knows the solitude of silence, and feels the joy of quietness, he is then free from fear and sin, and he feels the joy of the Dhamma.

The Dhammapada

How do we awaken spiritually to inner joy and peace, and a sense of the underlying unity of all? We do so by following the way of Dharma. Dharma means dynamic spiritual living. It is to live in such a way that meets and fulfils our present stage of spiritual development, and helps us on to the next stage. It means a progressive awakening of our higher potentialities so that we advance on the path of light and fulfil our divine destiny.

Dharma has many meanings: the law of universal harmony; righteousness; duty; even religion itself. The Hindus call their religion the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion, or the eternal wisdom. The word is equally prominent in the teachings that fell from the lips of the Buddha, where the Sanskrit word Dharma becomes the Pali word Dhamma. But the meaning is the same, and is equally broad and profound.

The Dhamma is the whole body of Buddhist teachings on inner development leading to nirvana, and on ethical living. 'I take refuge in the Dhamma' is one of the solemn utterances made by every Buddhist. In the *Dhammapada* it is called 'the path to perfection'.

Religions sometimes give us commandments and rules where the underlying idea seems to be that if we please God in this life by fulfilling those obligations, he will reward us in an afterlife. But Dharma is something deeper than this. It concerns our link, not with an outer God, but with our own deeper Self. It is getting in tune with our

spiritual nature, God within, and uncovering a light and peace that is usually concealed by our obsession with worldly life.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Dharma is called the nectar of immortality, because it leads to the recognition of the immortality of the Self.

Those devotees are most dear to Me who follow the nectar of the spiritual law (Dharma) as spoken of by Me; who have an unwavering faith; to whom I am the highest (value and goal) and who are ever devoted to Me. (12:20)

Presented in this way, Dharma seems a very grand principle, something that only serious students of religion would concern themselves with. But actually, the way of Dharma is as natural as the desire to breathe fresh air and avoid stale air, and what it involves can be very simply expressed.

For example, the sage Shri Dada used to visit a primitive community who lived in the woods. They were branded as criminals and regarded by the people as dangerous and therefore shunned. Shri Dada arranged for a visit, and when he first stood before them, he sang them a very short song about Dharma:

What keeps the heavens from falling?
What supports the earth? What causes the rain?
It is Dharma.
To speak the truth, to be kind to all,
To be honest and gentle,
Remembering ever the holy name of Rama, is Dharma.

He and his disciples became closely involved with the community, and he reminded them:

Compassion is the basis of Dharma and the heart which is not moved by the sufferings of the people around it, is not a dharmic heart. When you approach such people, do so with a genuine feeling of love.

These are universal ideas at the core of all religions, of all true spiritual thought. The same principle is expressed in Blake's 'The Divine

Image', where the human-hearted virtues are seen as an expression of the divine:

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.
....Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

Dharma is not aimed at pleasing an outer God, but entering into harmony with our own higher nature, coming into tune with the Infinite within. Then, let us ask, what is the highest within us? This is brought out in the lines of the Japanese Buddhist sage, Kobo Daishi:

The Buddhas in the innumerable Buddha-lands
Are nothing but the Buddha within our own soul.

To speak of the Buddha within our own soul means that there is spiritual illumination and complete fulfilment already present at the core of our being. This is what is highest in us, what the Bible calls our divine image. It is the essential divinity of man. Yet it has to be uncovered, brought out, through a course of action based on spiritual self-development. And this is the unfoldment of the Dharma, as we recognize that there is a course of life that will lead us to spiritual illumination.

The progress is, first, to saturate the mind in the spiritual values of wisdom and compassion. These values spring from the fountainhead of our own true being. It is then that our actions will be freed from their selfish motivation. They will function in harmony with the highest, the divine presence. This divine presence within us transcends individuality. Yet in its expression in the phenomenal world, it ever works for the good of all. A modern spiritual writer has expressed it like this:

The man who is fully obedient to Dharma, conforming himself to his divine image, has surrendered his own will and he fulfils his role as obediently as the actor plays the part laid down for him. Every movement is directed, not by forethought or desire, but by the ruling of the immanent principle, which is his own Self.

Man's highest responsibility, and most rewarding course, is to live according to Dharma. To understand what this means does not call for a deep study of any particular philosophy. We have to learn to understand the contents of just one book that we always carry with us: the book of our own heart.

As we move forward in life, the workings of the law of Dharma make themselves felt as a certain pressure in our inner being. This pressure first manifests as a restlessness. We find that whenever we push ourselves forward, driven by purely selfish motives, we may achieve a short sense of satisfaction, but not peace of mind. On the other hand, if we find ourselves acting in a genuinely thoughtful and unselfish way, perhaps even sacrificing a personal pleasure in order to help, or when we act without being troubled by thoughts of success or failure, our inner being experiences a kind of calmness and sense of well-being. Our awakening to the law of Dharma begins when we detect this pattern, which we will soon discover is a law emanating from our own higher being.

The Sufi master, Jalaluddin Rumi, brings out this simple, but subtle principle, when he writes:

When you are aware of doing a good action, you obtain a feeling of spiritual life and joy;
And when a fault and evil deed issues from you, that feeling of life and rapture disappears.

This is the law that tutors us, through our own personal experience, that if we harm another, we harm our self—not necessarily physically, but by causing a narrowing of our consciousness and a thickening of the veil that hides from us our own divine nature. Macbeth expresses this when, having expanded his power by harming others, he sadly reflects:

Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
And broad and general as the casing air,
But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.

These internal reactions are in fact signals from the highest in us, the 'Buddha within our own soul', telling us: If you want to be truly free and fulfilled, don't be wrapped up in the little world of your personal cravings. Look beyond your individual interests. Set your sight on something higher, something that is totally free and that will liberate you forever from 'saucy doubts and fears'.

Dharma means expansion of consciousness beyond self to infinity. Or rather, it means widening our understanding of self, so that it expands beyond identification with the body and mind, beyond merely family concerns, beyond partisanship with a club, party or country; beyond even conventional religious orthodoxy. The path of Dharma will expand our consciousness until we know our true Self to be the Self of all and the only substantial reality.

As human beings we are all endowed with fellow feeling, with mercy, pity, peace and love, with compassion and considerateness, and with the courage to take our stand on truth. But these qualities are often undeveloped, or else they function in a very limited arena. Unless we are instructed in the benefits of widening our inner horizon, our whole life may be spent in the narrow groove of self-interest.

Most of us are the soul of thoughtfulness and considerateness where it concerns our own wishes. A boy staying at a hotel with his parents, went into the television lounge, where about a dozen people were absorbed in a particular programme. Without giving it a thought, he went forward and switched to another channel. When challenged, he said: 'Well, isn't it better for one person to be selfish, than twelve?'

So at a certain stage in our evolution as conscious beings, harbouring, unsuspected, the divine nature within us, our main strategy in life is to get what we want, regardless of the wishes of those around us—although we often find ways of disguising this motivation.

A further stage is when our consciousness is sufficiently expanded to embrace the members of our family. But this too can be a constricted outlook on life, especially when our sympathies end at the boundaries of our clan. Napoleon promoted himself as one living in the best interests of France. But when he crowned himself Emperor, he made sure that his relatives were set up as heads of state: as King of Naples, King of Holland, King of Rome, King of Spain, and so on. Whose good was he really thinking of?

The urgencies of Dharma, when we truly become aware of this law of inner peace and expansion, go far beyond all limited considerations and allegiances. When we harmonize with Dharma, and continually adapt to its evolving demands and promptings within our own being, we shall be led to the infinity of illumination. As such, this great law, working through the human heart, and holding together the whole universe, goes beyond the confines of any particular faith. All religions belong to it. True religion is an expression of Dharma, and has no narrowness whatsoever. You may have heard the expression: 'He was not a religious man. He lived religion.' This is Dharma, manifesting its fragrance and atmosphere, without being labelled in any way.

There was a rich man known for his gifts to religious orders. He lived in a place where several religions were practised, and he followed the dictum found in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali: to practise goodwill to the pious, whatever persuasion or faith they may represent.

Once this wealthy man arranged a gathering to which representatives of all these faiths were invited. He said to the religious leaders, 'Don't you come personally, because you will be recognized. You will be instantly labelled as Christian, Moslem, Buddhist. Send a follower. But please do not wear any distinctive dress or robe. Let us not categorize ourselves by our appearance. Let us come together as human beings, as children of God.'

At the party, each was told to mix and mingle with others, but on one condition: he was not to declare his or her particular faith, or ask others about their faith. 'Just for once, forget the labels, and the preconceived ideas they give rise to.'

Time passed and people ate and so on, but there was very little conversation, and some slipped away early, using the excuse of other business. Afterwards, someone said to the patron: 'Wasn't this unfair? These people are identified with their faiths. What else can they talk about?' The host said: 'I believe there is a deeper essence which is greater and wider than any label, any denomination. I believe the spirit of religion is universal.' 'But what could they talk about?' 'There are many things. The unity of life, the all-pervasive nature of God, the value of charity, the importance of stilling the mind, the ways and means of calming the mind in order to pray deeply, the need to know oneself, the

transient nature of the world, that man's deepest need is spiritual, that to harm another is to harm oneself. There is really so much we can talk about, and try to go deeper into. To me, these are the fundamentals of religion.'

It was said before that Dharma is dynamic spiritual living—living not according to fixed patterns that never change through life, but in a way that makes for the progress of our soul to enlightenment. The divine Truth we revere is universal. And Dharma means progressively to adjust the workings of our mind, so that more and more of the light of the spirit, the wisdom of the buddha nature, may be reflected and manifested in our consciousness, and penetrate our actions and reactions. A meditation text that points to the illumined understanding for which the life of Dharma is preparing us, is:

OM. IN THE OCEAN OF LIMITLESS CONSCIOUSNESS
I AM A WAVE. I AM REALITY, INFINITY AND BLISS. OM

Dharma assumes that as mental and spiritual beings we are evolving. Our physical form may be more or less fixed, apart from the natural variations brought on by growth and ageing. But our inner life is by no means fixed. The sage Shri Dada once said: 'Do not be angry with your mind, and do not condemn yourself. Your mind is what you have made it; you can unmake it and remake it.' The initial emphasis is on internal change, through meditation and spiritual living, rather than altering our circumstances.

At certain stages in our life, a change of circumstances may be desirable and necessary, but spiritual practice and our entry into the higher life of Dharma, should not wait for this change. Actually, all we really have at our disposal are the minutes and hours we are living here and now. If we can learn to convert the present experience into inner peace and light, the future will take care of itself. So part of our Dharma is to get in tune with the infinite in our own being here and now.

One of the greatest, yet perhaps the rarest, of spiritual qualities, is contentment. The mind is naturally restless, and complaints about our fate, our situation, our friends, our treatment, come easily to our lips, and even more easily fill our thoughts. But a great spiritual achievement is to develop the sense of contentment, the ability to remember and count our blessings, and discount our woes. In other words, it is to

maintain our spiritual convictions, our trust, our inner communion, our deepening quest, in spite of the adverse circumstances.

A Rabbi was once asked to comment on a certain saying of the elders: 'A man must bless God for the evil in the same way that he blesses Him for the good that happens to him.' The Rabbi said, 'Go and see Rabbi Sussya. He will give you an explanation.' When questioned, Rabbi Sussya laughed, saying, 'I am surprised that you've been sent to me. Go elsewhere—find someone who has suffered tribulation in his life. As for me, I have never experienced anything but good all my days.' But the enquirer knew that this man had endured great misfortunes through much of his life. And then he understood the meaning of the old saying and why he had been sent to Rabbi Sussya.

Part of Dharma is to cultivate contentment, in spite of the bitter dishes that life sometimes serves us. Our automatic reaction, usually expressed as 'Oh dear', or 'How disagreeable', 'How terrible', can be changed. Our response will spring from a deeper understanding and acceptance. A spiritual person learns from all experiences and also holds firm to the higher insight: 'This has happened, yes, but my true Self is unaffected.'

How is this inner conviction brought about? Dharma is the path of expanding consciousness. To speak of expanding consciousness suggests that we are not yet one hundred per cent alive, that the potentialities of our mind have not yet found full outlet and expression. It is the aim of the spiritual practices and the following of the path of perfection called Dharma, to arouse the sleeping faculty of wisdom within us. This faculty is lodged, so to say, in a higher part of our mind that is not generally operative. It will only begin to stir and make itself felt when our ordinary mental faculties have been brought to a stillness that is more or less free from desire. This is a major spiritual achievement, and if pursued, however imperfectly, the mind will become aware of something within itself that cannot be named or described, but which has infinite value. This internal spiritual faculty or dimension of our being, is the source of all the virtues—of contentment, compassion, peace, love, and the capacity to take our stand on Truth come what may.

The true secret of the contentment of a spiritual person is not a

matter of will power; its source is the opening up of this extension of our inner being, so that the wisdom of the spirit is now revealed and functioning within us. This faculty shines through in the innermost phase of our mental life. It is itself subject to purification, deepening and expansion, until it fills the mind and dominates our thinking processes.

One's Dharma changes and evolves as one grows spiritually. The progression is from goodness to wisdom. If we look at the utterances and deeds of a master like Jesus, we will find that they cannot always be described as what the world calls agreeable or 'nice'. One has only to think of the occasion when, at one of his gatherings, someone drew his attention to the presence of his mother, Mary, and his brothers standing outside desiring to speak with him:

But he answered:....Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Matthew 12:46-50

This is just one example of a response that few, if any, could have predicted from someone who was clearly a good and upright man. Yet, when pondered, one can learn to appreciate that such expressions are always based on a deeper understanding, whether or not Jesus's hearers were ready to see matters in a new light. Always he had the deeper welfare at heart, the deeper welfare being the way the human mind can throw off its veils and coverings, and realize the highest within itself, the kingdom of heaven within.

For the serious seeker of Truth, too, the demands of wisdom and spiritual progress increase as one follows the way of Dharma. A stage has to be reached where social convention, the desire to be popular or to preserve our ease and comfort, give way to a deep and courageous response that is absolutely true to oneself. This response springs from a deeper centre, and reflects our growing spiritual awareness.

Therefore, Dharma is dynamic. Its unfoldment within us depends on strengthening our inner communion with the deeper spiritual reality. Those who are convinced of the underlying unity of all, and meditate on

it, do not need to make special efforts to do good or be good. Their main Dharma is to continue to deepen their enquiry, their devotion and the spiritual practices that have been revealed to them. Through this, the Dharma will flow into the outer life and inspire our actions and reactions. More than this, our practices and way of life will harmonize our inner being with the highest Truth, the power behind everything. We will fulfil the Dharma that is right for our present stage of development, and be naturally led on to the next stage.

What is the goal of Dharma? We remember that earlier statement: ‘The path of Dharma will expand our consciousness until we know our true Self to be the Self of all and the only substantial reality.’ This is the step beyond Dharma, and it is called moksha, or liberation. It is to know oneself to be, not just a wave, but perfectly identified, in essence, with that ocean of limitless consciousness and bliss.

This realization confers total inner freedom, not in an afterlife, but in this very life, while still apparently supporting a human body and dwelling in a world of appearances, outwardly much like any other person. Perfect freedom of mind, yet always functioning in harmony with that higher Law, that deeper Reality, is the way of the enlightened.

This freedom from all traces of psychological tension, this enlightened way of action and being in harmony with the supreme spiritual Force, is hinted at in a short poem by the Zen master, Dogen, entitled ‘On Non-Dependence of Mind’:

Water birds
going and coming
Their traces disappear
But they never
forget their path.

B.D.

New Publication

The Spiritual Awakening of Science

by Dr A M Halliday, Warden of Shanti Sadan from 1963 to 2006.
360 pages, paperback, £12.00.

This book contains the series of lectures published in Self-Knowledge between 1999 and 2006, with additional material that covers the history of science from ancient times to the nineteenth century.

THE WORD ‘science’ comes from the Latin verb *scire*, to know. Its primary meaning is ‘the state of knowing’. The true scientist is motivated by the innate urge to deepen and expand that state of knowing. Scientific knowledge bears on the empirical world—the world unfolded before our five senses. Yet the thirst for understanding has much in common with the spiritual quest, where the aim is nothing less than ‘to know That by which all this [universe] is known’.

Shanti Sadan’s latest publication, *The Spiritual Awakening of Science*, leaves no doubt that the greatest scientists were filled with wonder at the manifest universe around them, and also obsessed with a desire to understand its inner workings. This is true of the pioneers that the book focuses on: Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, Newton, Faraday and Clerk Maxwell. Their aim was not fame and fortune, but to fathom the truth, and to enjoy ‘the state of knowing’ for its own sake.

All were men of religion, though not necessarily religious in any narrow sense. For Newton, God was everywhere and the Force behind all forces. Late in his life, and referring to what he called ‘the System of the World’ described in his *Principia*, he wrote to a friend that he had in mind such principles as would encourage ‘the belief of a Deity’, and that nothing would give him greater joy than to find that his book would prove useful for that purpose.

The greatest minds are not naive, and are forever interrogating experience in order to elicit and uncover its mysteries. Leonardo was a man of spiritual wisdom, and his own incessant and diverse probing of nature was never divorced from his awareness of the supreme and divine Intelligence that underlies and makes possible the world of phenomena. He records in his private Notebooks, ‘Among all the

studies of natural causes and reasons, Light chiefly delights the beholder... Thus, if the Lord—who is the light of all things—vouchsafe to enlighten me, I will treat of Light...'

The Spiritual Awakening of Science reminds the modern reader of the implicit and unassuming spirituality of the pioneers of science. It also suggests that the urge for a deeper understanding, even if its focus is the world of appearances, is a highly evolved human faculty that has its source in the Spirit or true Self of man. The consummation of the urge to *know*, persistently expressed, for example, by the infant Clerk Maxwell when he would ask: 'What's the go o' that?', is the need to know everything—to be omniscient. It is present in us as the questioning child, but life generally diverts and dilutes this desire with more mundane considerations. In Clerk Maxwell, the desire was undiverted and undiluted, and he went on to fathom and specify the laws governing electricity and magnetism. Omniscience is not achievable through investigating nature, but—and this crucial point is clearly made in the chapter called 'The Vital Spark'—through turning the investigative beam on one's own self, the nature of the innermost consciousness and being that turns out to be 'the light of all things'.

Another of the book's themes is that the scientific investigator and the spiritual seeker need to create the psychological conditions to ensure their quest is not muddied by prejudice or distraction. Understanding nature means 'looking to see', and not superimposing received ideas or pet theories on the subject of our investigation. This open-mindedness goes hand in hand with deep thought and one-pointed, self-forgetting contemplation. And it can only be accomplished where there is a love of knowledge for its own sake, and not for any personal gain. Newton's capacity for sustained, undistracted concentration is proverbial:

He himself, when asked how he made his discoveries, answered quite simply: 'By thinking about them all the time'; and he repeated this on another occasion when he explained: 'I keep the subject constantly before me and wait till the first dawns open little by little into full light.'

The same qualities are essential if one is to advance on the spiritual path to self-realization.

Yet the path of science, as of spirituality, is strewn with obstacles,

some external and others springing from our own character and conduct. After the first flowering of mathematics and astronomy in ancient Greece and Egypt, the scientific spirit found itself consistently opposed and frustrated by systems of belief, both secular and religious. The intellectual world was dominated by the influence of Aristotle, and used his writings and speculations as a touchstone of truth, rather than look to see what is really there. Religious opposition and punishment sprang from the Christian Churches, eager to safeguard the tenets of the faith and suppress the threat of free, and therefore, potentially heretical thinking. Such great thinkers as Roger Bacon and Galileo found themselves sharply disciplined for their unbiased investigations. It was Bacon whose researches and thinking were based on the scientific principle that only careful observation and experiment could yield true knowledge of nature. 'He held that this alone gave certainty, while everything else was conjecture.'

The inner obstacles, which could cause misery for the scientist himself and a burden to his colleagues, were psychological traits like envy, competitiveness, stubbornness and personal vanity. The stories of Newton and Faraday show these influences at work, not in the protagonists, but in those who saw in them potential rivals.

The Spiritual Awakening of Science thus gives a selective history of scientific development, seen against the background of the universal values promoted by the great spiritual traditions. Even today, one can discern two strong streams apparent in scientific research and development—the genuine desire to solve the mysteries of nature for the sake of satisfying the desire to know; and the wish to impose still more power over nature (and human beings) for less exalted ends. And even the apparently pure desire for understanding can be mixed with the all-too-human desire for name and fame, resulting from 'my' discovery! The spiritual seeker also has to reckon with mixed motives moving his or her own heart; as Meister Eckhart pointed out, most seekers want God *along with* something else. The book under question shows how some of these great scientific trailblazers manifested the self-forgetfulness of true inspiration. Such examples give a seeker of the supreme spiritual Truth—the only knowledge that will bring lasting satisfaction—something to reflect on.

Bound or Free?

A previously unpublished lecture by Dr A M Halliday

IN THE inorganic world from which life first springs, we find scattered collections of matter in the galaxies of stars set in vast tracts of empty space. In our own solar system, all that we can really speak about in detail, there are no apparent signs of life elsewhere on other planets, still less any indications of the presence of conscious minds, and there are only, we are told, a few thousand million other places, very few, in the total universe that we know, which have similar sorts of conditions to our solar system.

The universe of the astronomers shows us matter spread out in time and space, sometimes solid, sometimes liquid and sometimes gaseous, obeying the classical laws of physics, such as Newton's laws of motion, and on close examination exhibiting many of the phenomena familiar to us nowadays, from studies of the structure of the atoms and the arrangements of the elements. At the level of the atoms and molecules which make up matter, there is a constant movement—a bit like the jostling within a large crowd. That movement is what experience as heat; indeed, that, essentially, is all we know heat to be: simply the movement within atoms and molecules.

With regard to this movement of the atoms of the physical world, what we find is that it lies between two extremes: one representing stillness, or extreme inertia, and the other, the most violent agitation or motion. At any one point in space and time we can measure where we are on this scale by finding out what the temperature is. This is a direct measure of the violence or passivity of the atomic crowd. At the unattainable (you can get very near it but you can't actually reach it) extreme of cold, absolute zero, 0° on the scale introduced and named after Lord Kelvin in the nineteenth century, which is close to 273°C below our familiar freezing point, all movement ceases. As it is approached when lowering the temperature, all matter tends to become solid, rigid and crystalline, as all the innate motion or agitation of the atoms, which is what manifests itself as heat and turns solids first into liquids and then into gases, is gradually eliminated.

Approaching the other extreme of high temperatures, the motion of

the atoms becomes more and more violent, and the atoms themselves begin to break up, or coalesce with each other in violent collision, as they do all the time in the centre of the bright stars like the sun, where the temperature is some 15 million $^\circ\text{K}$. Even at the surface of the sun the temperature is 6000°K , which is fairly hot. At these temperatures matter is entirely gaseous, and nuclear fusion and fission are going on all the time, providing the energy which sustains the intense out-flowing of light. In order to produce and sustain this out-pouring of light and heat, the sun is losing more than four million tons of its mass every second, in accordance with the well-known equation of Einstein, $E=mc^2$. You have to find the energy somewhere for this and it is done by this loss of mass of the sun, largely by losing hydrogen atoms to produce helium.

In yogic terms, we could say that the inorganic world of matter ranges from extreme *rajas*, the most violent and energetic activity we know, to extreme *tamas* in the frozen world, typified perhaps in some of the outermost planets, like Pluto and Uranus, or to a mild extent in our own globe in the Arctic regions. Between these two extremes of temperature, at an intermediate temperature where solids, liquids and gases can co-exist, there is found here, and perhaps here and there in the universe, certain specific conditions in which life as we know it can develop. Neither in extreme *tamas* nor in extreme *rajas* is this possible. Neither in inertia nor violent motion can that essential, harmonious equilibrium of *sattva*, which is necessary to life, be found; but only in the balanced equilibrium of the two.

What then is life? Physically speaking, it is the development within matter of what we call 'organisms': complex structures involved in a continuous interchange of solids, liquids and gases with the environment, which we call 'eating', 'drinking' and 'breathing'. Every living organism, however small or simple, exhibits a mixture of intense activity and structural intricacy, not at all like the inert, inorganic crystals with their repetitive and monotonously uniform structure. Nor like the violent, anarchic, random and purposeless movement of the hot gases in the sun. But on the contrary, a stable structure, almost infinitely varied in the detailed arrangement of its parts, and apparently able to defy the physical conditions governing the behaviour of inorganic matter.

The bodies of living organisms persist as elaborate arrangements of matter, exhibiting an extraordinarily stable dynamic equilibrium, in spite of very energetic interaction with their environment, all the while maintaining a largely unchanging, finely structured network. Anyone who has had the good fortune to look at the detailed structure of even the simplest of living cells under the microscope, will be amazed, when they first see it, at the beauty and intricacy which it exhibits.

Moreover, the characteristics of a living organism, its ability to grow, develop, replicate itself and adapt to changes in the environment, are not at all like the passive, fixed and enduring structures of the inorganic solids. And then, above all, there is its unique dependence on the complex double helical molecules of DNA: physical structures which Schroedinger likens, I think legitimately, to tiny centres of government in the nucleus of each cell, a master plan encoded in a single group of atoms existing only in either one, or at most two copies at the time of fertilization, which then replicates itself in each and every cell of the body.

Again, from the purely physical point of view, life produces orderliness of an undreamt of quality and complexity, out of the disorderliness of inorganic matter, and in so doing changes the rules, or, if you like, moves the goal-posts, so that the restrictions imposed on matter by the laws of physics no longer seem to apply. Living beings do not obey Newton's First Law of Motion and remain at rest or in uniform motion in a straight line until acted upon by an external force. Far from it. But equally life requires what the yogis would characterize as *sattvic* conditions to manifest itself, and whereas in nature matter exists indifferently at either low or high temperatures in atomic agitation varying between most violent motion and inertia, living organisms require a balanced equilibrium between motion and inactivity for their appearance and their continued existence, and a relatively narrow range of temperatures and the right mix of elements in their environment.

This is as much as one can say, physically, but of course there are other things about life. One fundamental characteristic of life, as soon as it appears, is the presence of purposeful activity. Even the single-celled amoeba seeks nourishment and withdraws from stimuli threatening danger. With the appearance of purpose it shows the

beginnings of the urge to freedom, which becomes more and more manifest as life evolves into higher forms. It also reveals hitherto hidden potentialities in the universe of matter: the first stirrings of the awakening of self-consciousness.

It is the teaching of the yogis, and of other mystics, like Rumi, that consciousness is seen as sleeping in plants, dreaming in animals and fully awakening in man. And just as in Darwinian evolution there are steps which represent the start of a whole new epoch—such as the emergence of the land animals from the ocean and the development of the vertebrates and, later, the mammals—so one can compare the major developments in consciousness represented by the first appearance of living from non-living matter; the awakening of instinct and feeling; and the development of reason and judgement in man and his tool-making predecessors.

In the yogic conception, consciousness is enveloped in five sheaths. The outermost is represented by the physical body of the living organism, and this encases four other sheaths: the next inner one after the physical body being the *prana-kosha*, or the sheath of life, representing the vital functions, which one sees in the plant world. Within the *prana-kosha*, or the sheath of life, there is the sheath of the lower mind, concerned with sensations, feelings, impulses and urges. And within this, the intellectual sheath, seat of the faculty of reason or judgement; and finally, what the yogis call the *karana-sharira*, the causal sheath, still largely unconscious in most men, but the seat of stored memories and hankerings based on past experience.

In evolution each of these sheaths awakens one after the other. One can see in the plants the awakening of the vital sheath: something more than the mere physical organism is present in the form of what we identify as 'life', the vital processes or 'breaths', as they are called in the yogic classics. Then, in animals there is the beginning of the awakening of consciousness in the form of the instincts, feelings and the urges. This is the awakening of the *manas* sheath, or the sheath of the lower mind. But it is not until one comes to man himself that one finds the beginning of the awakening and gradual unfolding of the intellectual sheath, of the sheath of the *buddhi*, in which reside the faculties of reason and judgement. In the course of evolution, then, each of these

sheaths in turn becomes active, and the awakening of each can be said to represent an advance in the search for freedom, which is such a characteristic feature of life.

One may say in passing that the *antahkarana*, what is called 'the inner organ of experience' in man, is made up of the two sheaths: the '*manas* sheath' and the '*buddhi* sheath': the lower mind with its sense faculties, and intellect and reason, the higher mind.

What do we mean by freedom, and how is it that life and man can be said in any sense to escape the iron rule of the laws of physics? While life certainly reveals an entirely new range of properties and potentialities within the material world, we cannot say that it actually departs from the laws of physics, and the question still remains as to whether it frees man from being bound by these laws, and whether he can really be said to have a free choice, a free will.

This has been the subject of philosophical and theological debate throughout history, and even some of the most spiritually minded philosophers, one might say, have taken a surprisingly negative view on this subject. Spinoza, for instance, who was called by the poet, Novalis, the 'God-intoxicated' philosopher, held that man only felt himself to have free will, because he was ignorant of the natural causes which led him to desire what he desired, and to pursue what he pursued. He said it was like a falling stone, believing that it had decided to fall of its own volition, whereas in fact it had no choice in the matter.

Yet it is interesting to find Spinoza, somewhat inconsistently, one might think, holding that passion was what led man into mental bondage, because it allowed him to be overcome by the lower urges, and he became, so to speak, a powerless passive instrument in their hands. Whereas if man learnt the vanity and futility of riches, fame and pleasure, he says, and instead turned to the search for supreme happiness and the greatest good, he could attain the highest contentment and peace of mind, and free himself from this servitude to the passions. Spinoza lays very great stress on this. He speaks of his 'ideal', which is to pass from the first inadequate kind of knowledge, which consists of opinions and imagination derived from vague and confused experience—the sort of experience you get from the lower mind (*manas*)—to the second kind of knowledge, what we might call

scientific or rational knowledge, which consists of sound and adequate ideas, derived from experience and sanctioned by reason. But the final ideal, according to Spinoza, is to pass on to the third and highest kind of knowledge, which he calls 'intuitive knowledge', and which he characterized as the 'greatest endeavour of the mind and its greatest virtue'. 'The more possessed anyone is of this class of knowledge', he says, 'the more conscious he is of himself, and God, and the more perfect and blessed he is.'

For Spinoza, then, like the yogis, it is by directing the mind away from the passions and inadequate ideas, derived from sense-experience and opinion, and through meditation, seeking the knowledge of the Self and God, that the greatest good in life is to be achieved, and quite evidently he believed that man could exercise his free will in this respect.

In the Mohammedan religion, to which Rumi belonged, there is a strong tradition of pre-destination, rather like that found among some of the Calvinists in the West. This spirit is expressed in a number of passages from the *Masnavi*, such as:

Before the painter and the brush the picture is helpless, and like a child in the womb. Before Omnipotence, all the people at the court of audience of this world are as helpless as the embroiderer's fabric before the needle. Now He makes the picture thereon of the Devil, now of Adam; now He makes the picture thereon one of joy, now of grief.

Or again, and he refers here to the famous verse in the *Koran*: 'Thou didst not throw when thou threwest.'

If we let fly an arrow, that action is not from us: we are only the bow. The Shooter of the arrow is God.

But it has to be added that Rumi counters this conclusion frequently elsewhere in the *Masnavi*, as when he says:

But our sense of guilt is evidence of free will. If there were not free will, what is this shame? And what is this sorrow and guilty confusion and abashment?

There are, of course, people who are charmed by the idea of fatalism, and attracted, as so many were in the nineteenth century, by Omar Khayyam, following him in believing that we are helpless pawns controlled by Fate:

'Tis all a checker board of nights and days
Where Destiny with men for pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.
The ball no question makes of Aye's and No's,
But right or left, as strikes the player goes.
And He that toss'd thee down into the field,
He knows about it all—He knows—He knows!

Grand, noble resignation is really the only appropriate answer if the individual is powerless in the grip of an all-powerful Fate, and, at first hearing, the beauty of the poetry is so beguiling that one feels almost convinced. But what is this we read in the same poem?

Come, fill the cup and in the fire of spring
The winter garment of repentance fling:
The bird of time has but a little way
To fly—and lo! the bird is on the wing.

Now there is clearly something wrong here. You don't try and persuade someone to do something you want to do, inviting them to join you in indulging in the pleasures of the grape, or anything else, unless you have an implicit belief that both you and they have the power of choice and can exercise it. So all Omar's talk of pre-destination is really only a specious argument provided in order to persuade the reader to go along with what he himself wants to do, and that clearly implies that both he and his reader must be free to choose.

Rumi tells the story of the prisoner in the dock, who pleaded before the judge that he wasn't responsible for the crime that he had committed, because he was compelled to commit it by his pre-ordained nature. To which the judge cogently replied that he accepted all the prisoner said, but unfortunately for him, by the same token, he was

pre-ordained by his nature to pass a very stiff sentence indeed.

Of course, we all have moods, and sometimes feelings of fatalism may overcome us, and we may feel like resigning ourselves to fate, but that is only a passing sentiment. You may know the old verse:

The Devil was sick,
The Devil a saint would be.
The Devil was well,
The devil a saint was he!

We all know Rousseau's famous dictum: 'Men are born free and are everywhere in chains.'

Well, are they born free? Exactly how free are we and what exactly is it that binds us? The individual, one may say, is bound certainly by external outer circumstances. Those who lived in slavery or on the galleys, had every reason to know this. But what Yoga says is that there is a much subtler form of slavery, or bondage, to which man is liable, and it is bondage to the inner traits of his mind, many of them left over from the more primitive stages of his evolution, and this is where something useful can be done. For the spiritual teachers tell us, rather like Spinoza, that if we learn to take our stand on the higher part of our nature, then the lower propensities will be deprived of all their power of leading us astray. If we live a life governed by wisdom and reason, relying on our higher faculties, we will not be swept away by the irrational prejudices, likes and dislikes of the lower mind. This is the practical application, both of Spinoza's doctrine about the three kinds of knowledge, and of the yogic teaching too.

If we look at life, we find that it is characterized both by unconscious and conscious activity, and that both conscious and unconscious activity can be purposeful and beneficial, but that they are different. In the animals, for instance, instinctive behaviour can be very purposeful, as we see in nest-building or migration. But it is difficult to say in that case whether the purpose is that of the individual or of Nature. When we come to ourselves, we are fortunate that we do not have to decide to digest our food, although we do in fact do so and it's a very purposeful activity. We have, of course, to attend to the eating of it. With breathing we have a halfway house between voluntary and involuntary activity.

It is sometimes the one, sometimes the other, and we can decide to breathe consciously, but we don't have to bother if we don't want to.

But what this means is that we can get the unconscious, or semi-conscious part of our mind, to work for us to our advantage, if we know how to form the right habits, and if we know how to use the power of suggestion, positively and intelligently, to achieve the right results. Much of the Yoga practices and meditations are based on these principles. We all know that to learn to do something new is difficult, and requires much more conscious effort, than to do something which we are already used to and skilled at through practice. If we apply this to our meditation, and create a daily rhythm, we shall advance rapidly in the science of meditation and reap the full benefits of it.

It may still be asked, how far we have free-will? And the answer of the yogis is, that we have a measure of free-will which we can increase. Everyone is predictable to some extent. Fortunately there are good pension schemes, and they are one of the greatest benefits of modern life, and have added immeasurably to the freedom of the individual, particularly freedom from worry. Yet actuarial practice depends for its success on the ability to predict as accurately as possible how individuals are going to behave, and to calculate within a reasonable margin of error, the incidents of burglaries, or deaths from a particular disease, or road-accidents. It is perhaps significant that so many insurance policies exclude cover for acts of God, although it is not clear exactly what this means. It is probably a reflection of the fact that rare natural disasters, like earthquakes or meteors, are less easy to deal with statistically, as one is not, in predicting these, supported by safety in numbers and does not really know what it is customary to expect. I never think that people should complain about opinion polls and weather forecasts being so poor. It is tremendously cheering, surely, to discover how unreliable they are, for it means that, after all, we have the capacity to surprise them with our freedom of choice, and that even Nature's behaviour is not cut and dried.

Relative freedom is to be achieved by taking our stand on the higher faculties of our nature, and rejecting the dictates of the lower. Man is a mixture of instinct, emotion and reason, an amphibious being only half made at this stage of evolution and not yet fully evolved. And one of the

great binding forces, as Spinoza points out when he says that the great enemy of man is becoming subject to passion, is echoed by Socrates in one of his dialogues, when he explains to his followers the extraordinary phenomenon that people, through desire, actually bind themselves to the objects of the world by their own active efforts.

How far, ultimately, can we escape from the determinism of the physical laws of science? Are we determined by the physical laws of science? Erwin Schroedinger, in discussing the results of the scientific investigation of living matter, says that in his view the space-time events in the body of a living being, which correspond to the activity of its mind, to its self-conscious or any other actions, are, if not strictly deterministic, at any rate statistico-deterministic, and that this view would be regarded as a fact by every unbiased biologist, 'if there were not the well-known unpleasant feeling about declaring oneself to be a pure mechanism, for it is deemed to contradict free-will as warranted by direct introspection'. He says:

But immediate experiences in themselves, however various and disparate they maybe, are logically incapable of contradicting each other. So let us see whether we cannot draw the correct non-contradictory conclusion from the following two premises. One: my body functions as a pure mechanism according to the laws of nature. Two: yet I know by incontrovertible, direct experience that I am directing its motions, of which I foresee the effects that may be fateful and important, in which case I feel and take full responsibility for them.

The only possible inference from these two facts is, I think, that 'I', 'I' in the widest meaning of the word; that is to say, every conscious mind that has ever said or felt 'I', am the person, if any, who controls the motions of the atoms, according to the laws of nature.

And he goes on actually to invoke the evidence of the Upanishads and the mystics throughout the ages in support of this view, and to point out that the 'I' is the canvas, or ground stuff, upon which experiences and memories are collected.

This is one eminent scientist's explanation of this koan of the apparent conflict between the experience of free-will and determinism;

of whether we are bound or free. It is not the only one. Another not necessarily incompatible one, is the view of the great atomic scientist, Niels Bohr, who was enormously impressed with the finding that when you actually investigated atomic events, you found these curious paradoxes: for instance, the paradox of the electron, or the photon, which sometimes behaves as a wave and sometimes as a particle. And he began to believe, thinking about it deeply, that this was a characteristic of the investigation of things in the world when you looked at them. He instances the fact that you are both an observer of the world, apparently apart from it, and also an active agent in the world. It is another example of two apparently incompatible things, for both of which there is very clear evidence.

Bohr epitomized this characteristic of the world as what he called 'complementarity'; and when he was given the highest honour of the Order of the Elephant, in Denmark, for his work on atomic science, he chose as his Coat of Arms, the Chinese symbols, Yin and Yang: these two symbols which are joined together, and represent the two opposite principles from which the world is formed. He also put as his motto on the Coat of Arms 'Contraria sunt Complementa'—'Contraries are Complementary' .

Subjectively we have free choice. Objectively it looks as if outer circumstances and past habits are the cause determining what we do. This for Bohr was another example of this phenomenon of complementarity.

Another great modern physicist, Heisenberg, speaking about causality and the predictability of future events, said that: 'In the statement, "If we know the present, we can predict the future", it is not the deduction, but the premise which is wrong.' And this followed from his well-known principle of indeterminacy, which he himself discovered. Not only do we not have in practice a complete description of the present circumstances in order to allow us to predict the future; it is in principle absolutely impossible that we ever should have such a description. This is because in determining, at the atomic level anyway, one parameter, we have actually to interact with the events in such a way that it prevents us from ever knowing the rest of the story. If, for instance, we accurately determine the position of an atomic particle, this severely limits our ability to measure accurately the speed.

This emphasizes what the yogis say: namely, that all these pictures that we have of the world, however adequate they may be—the scientific picture, the deterministic picture, the subjective picture—are ultimately appearances which are only reconciled when we know the Reality.

From the point of view of the yogic teachings, the ideas of free will and determinism are relative conceptions, arising within the mind as it probes the appearances presented by the phenomenal world, and neither have an absolute validity or reality, although both convey a partial aspect of the truth. Swami Rama Tirtha says in one of his lectures:

All attempts of philosophy or science to pry into the ineffable have failed helplessly. Time, space and causality, contemplated either from the subjective or objective point of view, defy all efforts to discover their nature. The ultimate nature of matter, motion, force or energy presents insurmountable difficulties to the enquiring mind. Atomic theory is beset with contradictions. From this it is apparent that the interior of nature will forever remain a mystery to the mind, and that it is not given to the human intellect to sound the depth of the cosmos.

The Veda says that this ingrained question must necessarily find its solution, though not through philosophy, science or earthly love. The question itself, being included in the *anirvachaniya maya*—the insoluble riddle of the whole world—forms a part of the indescribable mystery it wants to unravel. As an eagle cannot out-soar the atmosphere in which he floats, so thoughts cannot transcend the sphere of limitations. So long as the questioners and the objects questioned about remain, the prison walls of maya are there, and there can be no rising above the appearances. The goal may be reached by special culture, and when reached must dissolve altogether the question as well as the answer.

Vedanta aims at this goal independently of the enslaving process connected with ordinary pleasures, ecstasy, love and the like. Being lost in such vision, one is the Brahman Itself, unknowable to the mind or intellect. A man who gets even a glimpse of such realization stands above fear and anxiety. Unshakeable strength of character is the necessary outcome of this realization or religion, hence the desirability of religion.

Finally here is a verse from the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Whoever, resorting to Me, strives for liberation from decay and death, they realize in full that Brahman, that Supreme Reality, underlying the innermost individual Self, and they know all about action.

THE CAUSE AND CURE OF PAIN

IMAGINE A YOUNG MAN lying paralysed in a stately room exquisitely furnished. You place before him figs from Algeria, luscious grapes from Spain, persimmons from Japan and flowers from the gardens of Italy. They mean nothing to him. You introduce into his chamber young beauties from the valley of Kashmir. He does not give them a look. You play for him records of Caruso or Galli-Curci, but he is bored. All he wants is to be restored to his normal health.

Such is the case with the soul of man. As long as it is in an unhealthy condition, nothing gives pleasure, only its semblance for a moment. The hedonistic pleasures only increase the thirst for further joy. A love for them is only a sign of the sick soul. Youth, wealth, friends, the season of spring, learning, love, are no more than forms cut in ice, glittering and attractive, but melting each minute.

Among the other qualities of man, the one which is very prominent is self-deception. A Japanese, ninety years old, was introduced to the writer. After a short conversation he remarked: 'I am yet good for another twenty years.' The poor man died of pneumonia after a month. Gandhiji announced that he was going to live to a hundred and twenty. The notion that marriage, travelling, horse-racing, drinking and exercising sway over others will make a man happy, is nothing but self-deception.

What is the cause of the illness of the soul? Sin? No, sin is a symptom of the disease. The illness is *avidya*, nescience, and its cure is *vidya*, knowledge of truth. What is truth? It is the Self of man, the perceiving, experiencing entity in man. It is the highest good, it is

immortality, it is omniscience. One-pointed enquiry (*jijnasa*) into the supreme reality is the highest duty of man. The philosophy of Shri Shankara and his great followers is devoted to this end. In short, the realization of the highest good lies in man's achievement of the knowledge of the nature of Self.

According to Plato, inner perfection is realized through dialectics. Shankara calls it *vichara*, the exercise of the rational element in man to know the highest reality, and the mind must be tranquil and penetrative. What is meant by inner tranquillity? It is want of distraction by the sense-objects and the false pleasures. You visit a chemist's shop to buy a tonic prescribed by your doctor. There are spread out on the counter scores of tonics attractively labelled and displayed. You do not mind them, you want the one prescribed for you. The state of the mind which is not distracted by the promise of pleasure and power, and in which the enquiry: 'What am I, and what is Brahman?' is pursued, is called inner tranquillity. The chain of transmigration is almost endless. The region of the sense and mental consciousness is darkness.

The mind must give up the old habits of attachment to shadows, the passing objects, and apply itself to discipline and *upasana* (worship), prayer, group devotion and active good to the children of God on a universal level. Thus prepared, the mind penetrates into the supreme mystery by meditation.

They are indeed most fortunate ones who have heard this message and started on the path under the care and love of Shri Dada. They will overstep the boundary of illusion and see the supreme light of Self. 'There is no other path to liberation, conquest of death and ignorance.'

Hari Prasad Shastri

A Verse of Kabir

As the fish loves water,
As the greedy man loves wealth,
As the mother loves her child,
So God loves devotion.

translated by H.P.S.

Unity of Life in the Bhagavad Gita

THE GITA is the central scripture of Hinduism and has been described as a summary of the teachings in the older scriptures called the Upanishads—the milk from the cow of the Upanishads. *Bhagavad Gita* means ‘the song of the Lord’. To understand a song, one needs to understand the words, but the music and poetry are equally important. Rationality has its limits, and most of the important values in life have to be apprehended through the feelings. A piece of logic may be understood with intellect and will power alone, but can we understand a poem or great drama unless our heart is in the right place? Can rationality engender a feeling of unity with other human beings? Can one who is not good-hearted understand reality? So it is good to remember that when we are examining the Gita, we are studying a song of wisdom and liberation, which breathes a spirit of fearlessness, detachment, self-control and the highest degree of psychological and spiritual integration.

The teachings in the Gita are extensive in their range, and, for purposes of instruction, adopt different standpoints. They may appear inconsistent, but this is not the case. Under the old system of astronomy, which took this planet as the centre of the solar system, it was difficult to account for planetary motion. The more carefully these motions were measured, the harder it became to explain them; but when the sun was put at the centre, everything could be accounted for with a few simple equations. By analogy, if one knows where to put the weight, if one knows what is central, the diverse teachings of the Gita all fall into place.

In India, the tradition is to refer to commentators when the meaning of a text is sought. Dr Shastri recommended the commentaries of Shri Shankara (c.700 AD), a mighty intellect, whose commentary appeals to reason. Some of his preoccupations are distant from us, as he had the task of more or less replacing the intellectual footings of Hinduism. He was no historical critic. He brought out the meaning of the text on the basis of his *sampradaya*, his tradition of interpretation. He did not try to work everything out through reason, but took his stand on the non-dualistic—*advaita*—revelation implicit in the older scriptures, the

Upanishads. Shankara referred to himself as an *ekatva-vadin*, a philosopher of oneness, a monist. What is this revelation of unity?

Shri Krishna, the divine incarnation through whose lips the teachings are given, describes the wise man thus:

He [is one] who experiences the unity of life, sees his own Self in all beings and all beings in his own Self, and looks on everything with an impartial eye....He who sees Me in everything and everything in Me, him shall I never forsake, nor shall he lose Me.

Here we are presented with a vision or way of seeing which is alien to our ordinary mind. Self or I or me is different from you or he. The word ‘I’ is used to express distinctness. We may say, ‘I don’t agree with you’ to express opposition, or ‘I like that too’ to express commonality, but we are always asserting, when we say ‘I’, that a distinct and different person is agreeing or otherwise with someone else. But the enlightened person of this verse sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself, which means that for him or her, all sense of difference is extinguished. He realizes the unity of life.

This means that such a person has the real satisfaction which everyone seeks through their activities or in their recreation. What makes us really happy is the discarding of the sense of separation, of individuality, of being cut off from the world, from our neighbour, from the transcendent. This is what every ‘high’, every ecstasy, provides. Dr Shastri warned against the coarse and self-destructive methods by which people seek to ‘decentralize the ego’. There are other ecstasies: of aesthetics, of appreciation of poetry and literature, ecstasies of study, namely the slow, patient building up of the mind until a new vision is obtained; ecstasies of goodness and benevolence, not to mention the ecstasies of religion. These ‘highs’ are self-creative and also socially creative, in that they tend to share themselves and build communion between people. All these ecstasies take us out of the little ego, which makes us feel cut off. But as the words ‘unity of life’ indicate, whether we have a little fearful ego, a knotted, complex, self-harming ego or a pompous self-important ego, the truth is that we are all part of a grand cosmic whole, a dance or song, whether we feel like death or are on top of the world. We can’t escape the unity of life.

The wise man experiences this unity and his ecstasy is permanent

and cannot be taken away from him. There is a word in the dictionary, 'ecstasy', which seems appropriate because 'ec' in ecstasy means 'out of', ecstasy meaning 'to stand out of oneself'; whereas 'enstasy' means 'to stand inside oneself'. The teaching directs us within towards the deeper self, the self of our selves in the heart of our hearts. Find that Self, or be found of it, and the battle of life is won, the pearl of great price is bought.

Is this Self personal or is it impersonal? The Upanishads call the Self 'Brahman', meaning the impersonal Absolute. But the one signal difference between these older scriptures and the *Bhagavad Gita* is the presence of Krishna, who is certainly a person. Krishna, like Jesus, is both God and man, although this relation is conceived rather differently than that in the Christian tradition. He invites his disciples to be devoted to Him, to be 'My-minded', just as Jesus invites his to 'Abide in Me'. He also speaks of himself to his warrior disciple, Arjuna, in a way which no mortal would; as does Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.

In chapter 7, Shri Krishna describes his lower and higher nature or *prakriti*. The lower nature is divided eightfold into earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect and egoism. In this conception, there are five physical elements. Every physical object is meant to be made up of different proportions of these elements. Thus a bird has more air in its composition than a tortoise. This is a proto-scientific idea and nowadays we have more precise knowledge of the chemical elements of which things are made. But the eightfold division was not intended to give information of that kind. It provides a holistic and ego-diminishing line of thought: the human being and the universe are made up of these eight levels or elements, each more subtle than the one before.

We can see that there is no difference between the earth in my particular body and the earth in the physical world as a whole, just as no one would pretend that the H₂O in his body was somehow special and different from the H₂O in the clouds or rivers. Likewise the air in one's lungs or distributed throughout the body is not a private possession. No one can tell you that the O₂ in your lungs belongs to you personally. So at each level the particular and the universal are seen to be the same.

When we pass through the element space in our progress up the eight, we enter subtler aspects of experience: mind, intellect and

egoism. Intellect in Sanskrit is called *buddhi*, from the root *budh*, to be awake or to awaken. A strong *buddhi* is not at the mercy of the fickle thoughts which arise in the mind. A depressed person cannot stop himself from listening to the stream of negative thoughts and thereby gives them more sway over him. An Isaac Newton will direct his mind to a problem so powerfully that he forgets to eat his supper. A strong *buddhi* is awake to the way the condition of the mind, and the circumstances and changes of life, will assist or retard its settled purpose. Following the analogy of the physical elements, there is a universal mind of which our individual minds are indistinguishable fragments, and a universal intellect which invisibly guides the workings of the world according to the divine purpose. The human being is the universe in miniature. The *bindu* is in the *sindhu* and *sindhu* in the *bindu*. The drop is in the ocean and the ocean in the drop.

Higher than the intellect is the egoism, the sense of oneself as a separate individual. Opposed to the 'I' of the ordinary man stands the files and ranks of all the 'I's of other people. He may cooperate or compete with these others, but he always has to maintain himself as a particular person among other particular people. Furthermore, as we are in the realm of comparison, as there are egos which are bigger and stronger than others, we have to conceive of an ego which is the biggest and strongest of all, the universal ego, the super-ego, the Lord and ruler of all things. The individual ego of a human being is essentially no different from this super-ego, for at every level, not just the physical, the particular property or element is essentially one and the same with the universal. But as long as the ego feels individual, respect for the Lord is wise.

When we first hear this teaching, it is likely that we will agree with the idea that no difference can be found between the water in the body and the water outside, but the notion that the individual ego and the universal ego are indistinguishable is hard to accept. As mentioned before, when we use the word 'I', it is commonly for the purpose of distinguishing ourselves from other people. We say 'I like this', 'I want that', 'I am young and full of life' or 'I am old and my get up and go has gone.' If we use the word 'I' to distinguish ourselves from others, how much the more do we use it to distinguish ourselves from God, from

Truth, from immortality. But according to this teaching, your 'I' is a little fragment of the universal 'I'.

The question of what we associate with the word 'I' is cardinal. It would seem that there is nothing with which people cannot identify themselves. If we travel the world, we can see that everywhere people like to build cities near rivers, have streets, roads, temples, cultures, languages and schools, but in different places these are all different. Here they are all identified with hot food and there they can't stand it. Here the people are polite and considerate, there they are brusque and offhand. They are all just people with bodies, minds, intellects and egos, but their tastes and inclinations are arbitrary and based on where they happen to be born. Identification is a kind of glue by which we attach self to objects. These identifications are the source of all the conflicts in the world, the feeling that 'I am I', 'We are we' 'Us and them'. The Yoga teaches us to relax these fictional identifications and enjoy freedom and enlightenment.

Some people are identified with their bodies; they feel that they are material people living in a material world. Because physical bodies are separate things, and they think they are a body, it is not possible for them to experience a feeling of unity with others. But whatever they think, it remains a fact that the body is composed of the elements, either the eight of Hindu tradition or the ninety-two of chemistry, and will decompose back into elements again. In Hamlet's phrase, man is the quintessence of dust and to dust he will return. If the body is your possession, it can only be said that the elements are conglomerated according to various rules and are just briefly yours. You have the tenancy of the body but not the freehold in perpetuity.

Other people may be more refined and are inclined to regard their thoughts and feelings as their own personal and private property. The centre of their identity is this stream of perceptions and conceptions. But that's a prejudice. The electrical activity in one's brain is tempered lightning. The thoughts we think are just as subject to fashion as the clothes we wear. Very few people really have their own thoughts, just as very few have their own opinions. We have the tenancy of our minds and not the freehold, just as of our bodies. We cannot absolutely say, they are mine.

So if I am neither the body nor the mind, what is my self? This is the question of questions. For our encouragement, the teaching makes it clear that the magnificence and glory of the Self, your Self, is beyond words. Self is indefinable. Nevertheless, it can be known. And on the way to that knowledge, words can be well and truthfully employed.

Shri Krishna told us that he had two natures, the lower nature being eightfold and also a higher *prakriti*. In chapters 7, 9 and 10, he tells us directly who and what he is. We should keep in mind these words: 'I am the Self, seated in the heart of all beings.' He is the divinity within us all, that in us which is not glued to the world and its concerns.

There is nothing Higher than Me. All is strung upon Me as rows of pearls upon a thread. O Arjuna! I am the fluidity in water, the light in the sun and the moon. I am the mystic syllable OM in the scriptures, the sound in space, the virility in man. I am the fragrance of earth, the brilliance of fire. I am the life-force in all beings and I am the austerity of the ascetics. I am the eternal seed of being. I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the splendour of the resplendent. I am the strength of the strong, of them who are free from attachment and desire, and, O Arjuna! I am the desire for righteousness.

Shri Krishna is here showing us how to think about the Self, my self, your self. He does not say: 'I am all these things and you are not', because he tells us: 'I am the Atma (innermost Self) seated in the heart of all beings', just as he tells Arjuna: 'I am Arjuna among the Pandavas.' He is giving expression in the best way, in the truest poetry, to the nature of reality. Ask yourself, is the reality in me really any different to the reality in the universe? How can it be? We say this reality is the same as the real Self, and its nature is consciousness.

This way of thinking is worth taking to heart. Instead of saying, 'I have a backache, I have a painful bunion, I have lost my money, I am going to get my own back on that so and so' or whatever else the mind is habituated to present to you, take Shri Krishna's words:

I am the Father of the Universe and its Mother, I am its Nourisher and Grandfather, I am the knowable and the pure. I am Om I am the goal, I am the Sustainer, I am the Lord and the Witness, I am the Home, the Shelter, the Lover and the Origin....

This 'I' doesn't refer to the person about whom a memoir or biography might be written. It will be found that the deeper levels of our being will respond wholesomely to deep reflection on these words.

People naturally and modestly feel that such words cannot refer to themselves. They are right in a way, and may like to consider that they are listening to the voice of the Lord in themselves. What really matters is that the mind should concentrate on these divine self-declarations as one-pointedly as possible and learn to relish their beauty. It is this dwelling or rumination which evokes a deeper response. They are deep words and, as the Psalmist says, deep calls unto deep.

It is a shame that people feel alienated from the scriptures and their message; they are usually afraid that their desires are going to be curtailed by the moral and ethical demands which all scriptures place on their readers. Enquiring no further, they do not hear the promise of infinity and immortality, nor do they realize it.

Shri Krishna gives expression to his higher nature and there is one chapter where he devotes twenty verses to expressing his divine qualities. In general, the principle is that whatever people worship as the best, the most powerful, whatever forces their admiration and awe, that is an aspect of Shri Krishna's higher nature, a window into himself. And with unparalleled generosity, he says, 'I am the Self seated in the heart of all beings....I am Shri Krishna among the Vrishni-clan and Arjuna among the Pandavas.' Thus he declares himself to be the very person he is talking with. What gift can be greater than the gift of oneself?

By contrast we find the limited version of the Self, the narrow selfish self, excoriated in chapter 16. This chapter sets out the two cultures, the divine and demoniac, the battle of good and evil. It is a war that plays itself out in the human heart as it struggles between sensuality and spirituality. There are fourteen devastating critical verses written well over two thousand years ago, and it is remarkable how well they describe people one would rather not know today. Shri Krishna says:

All beings are of two classes, godly and godless. The godly I have described; I will now describe the other. The godless do not know how to act, or how to renounce. They have neither purity nor truth. They do not understand the right principles of conduct...

Giving themselves up to insatiable passions, hypocritical, self-sufficient

and arrogant, cherishing false conceptions founded on delusion, they work only to carry out their own unholy purposes.

Poring anxiously over evil resolutions, which only end in death, they seek only the gratification of desire as the highest good, seeing nothing beyond.

Such people are fortunately rare, but examples come easily to mind. Yet the battle between good and bad, virtue and vice, right and wrong, goes on inside us all the time and plays itself out in the way we react or respond to other people, in the choices we make in our use of leisure time. There are many hidden costs to wrong-doing or vice, not least, the loss of what you could have done in the time—something creative and edifying. Edification means construction. All constructive pursuits require effort and commitment, whereas the simple principle behind all vice is that you can get something—happiness, pleasure, elation, excitement—without work.

But there is something beyond good and evil, and that is wisdom. It is wisdom to know that good and evil are inextricably linked, and still to work for the good. Arjuna found himself faced with the task of killing his own beloved teachers, and could not tell right from wrong. But he learned that he must still fight the good and righteous fight. He learned to fight with detachment and in peace. The man who sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself is not troubled by the battle between good and evil even when he participates.

There are many metaphors in the Advaita philosophy to elucidate this wisdom. Imagine a collection of gold figures. They all have the human form. Further imagine that they are animate. One of them says, 'I am taller than that one.' Another boasts, 'I am stronger than this one.' Another sighs, 'I do not have as many friends as this one.' Yet another declares, 'I make more money than the rest of you.' A really wicked one proclaims, 'I have slain one enemy, I will slay others, I am worthy to enjoy, I am the Almighty, I am perfect, powerful and happy.' Not only does he identify himself with his little self, but he is deluded about his relations with others. Sooner or later, his pride and anger will awaken an even greater pride in those around him and he will be destroyed.

Among them is a wise man who sees himself in all beings, and all beings in himself. He says: 'Put them all in a furnace and you will see

that all these forms are nothing but gold. They were gold when they were pluming themselves and when they were running themselves down. They were gold when they were fighting and when they were at peace. I also am pure gold.' Compared to the fact of being gold, all the little differences are like the play of children.

What then is the substance of which we are all made? What is the primeval matter? This teaching gives an answer. Consciousness is the fundamental substance, and in the Upanishads it is called Brahman. Scientists are giving thought to the question of consciousness, but it is hard to say exactly what it is in words or symbols. This is because words depend on consciousness, whereas consciousness does not depend on words. But consciousness has much in common with light. When Shri Krishna says, 'I am the fluidity of water, I am the splendour of the sun and the moon, I am the virility in man, I am the lion among beasts and the eagle among the birds', he is naming the qualities or archetypes of things. Just as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet—the colours of the rainbow—are all contained invisibly in pure white light, so all the qualities and archetypes which call forth our admiration, wonder and worship are contained invisibly in pure consciousness. And this pure consciousness is what we are made of, so to speak. It is what we are, and better still, if Shri Krishna is the Self of all beings, it is who we are.

How to set about realizing this truth? The Yoga teachings address all sides of human nature and the whole human condition. An ordinary teacher will help you develop particular skills such as dancing, cooking, and so on. Yoga takes the inner world as that which needs training, so there is work for our will-power, feelings and intellect. But essentially the Yoga teaches felicity, happiness, bliss to be our nature.

We have considered a line of thought about the reality within us and the nature of the true Self. There are many helpful thoughts to be found here and there, and one of life's secrets is to make them one's own by thinking them deeply or, perhaps, thinking them deeper. Anyone who makes the thoughts of the *Bhagavad Gita* his or her own will join Shri Krishna in his song of liberation.

A.S-B.

The Role of Reason in Meditation

THERE ARE three terms in Sanskrit related to reflection and reasoning, as tools of spiritual enquiry: *tarka*, *vichara* and *manana*. *Tarka* means much the same as the English word 'logic', the technical study of valid thinking. *Vichara* means spiritual enquiry in the broadest sense that would include delving into, and discussion of, the meaning of the texts. The word *manana* incorporates, to some extent, the meanings of the other two words, but particularly refers to the quiet private contemplation on the meaning of a meditation text, before our formal meditation period, but also in a controlled and concentrated way during the meditation itself. In Hari Prasad Shastri's little book, *Meditation: Its Theory and Practice*, there is a section on reason and in that section, he writes of reason, intuition and spiritual vision as faculties, the exercise of which 'can lead to a knowledge of Truth', and he sees these three functions of the human intellect as aspects of a single faculty; as 'facets of the prism which is man'.

We offer a few reflections on the function and value of reasoning. In those words of Dr Shastri, the word 'can' is important; reasoning *can* lead to truth. It is only an instrument: like a surgeon's scalpel, it can improve your health, or, if used incompetently, can injure you. This is why some writers on spirituality see reasoning as the enemy of truth, using 'rationalist' almost as a term of abuse. Our tradition does not take this negative view of reason, though on the value of reasoning in the spiritual quest, we can seem, at times, to be somewhat ambivalent.

On the one hand, we recognize that the ultimate reality is beyond sense experience, beyond words, thoughts and concepts; so we might conclude, rather too quickly, that logic and reasoning are utterly worthless. On the other hand, we are told that meditation should be preceded by *manana*, that is, by reflection on the meaning of the text and by subjecting it to a searching analysis aimed at satisfying ourselves that what we have heard is meaningful, and compatible with reason. Not proven by reason, but not incompatible with reason either. One could feel confused, ever being prompted to vacillate between these two convictions: reasoning is of value; reasoning is worthless.

In that passage by Dr Shastri, reason is certainly considered to be of value, though we also recognize that reasoning can be erroneous. But, other than its use in special areas; in science, in jurisprudence, in philosophy or mathematics, many would balk at the idea that the study of logic and reasoning can help us to think correctly. ‘How ridiculous, I’ve been doing it all my life. I don’t need lessons in thinking. It’s like seeing and hearing. To see, I simply look; to hear I just listen. I don’t need lessons in seeing and hearing and likewise in thinking; I just use my brain, I simply think.’

Now, this may be true much of the time, but, in many contexts, it is a seriously flawed line of argument. A singer, a musician, a conductor, all have to be trained to hear—to be encouraged to attend to what their more experienced mentors can hear.

The artist, too, has to be reminded to reproduce what he truly sees and not what he believes he ought to see. For example, we tend to see shadows as grey—after all, they are on a scale between the black of darkness and the white of bright light, so they must be grey. But not so; the impressionist painters, in particular, appreciated the truth that we see shadows as coloured; perhaps blue, or green, or purple, depending on the predominant bright colour in the scene. In the same way, training in logic, in how to reason and think correctly, makes perfect sense.

But even when the technical errors of invalid logic are removed from our thinking, far more insidious factors, such as emotional bias, prejudice and narrowness, may still contaminate our thinking. Here it is purity of mind, the *sattvic* intellect mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* that is needed. It warns against the conclusions of the dull or *tamasic* intellect, which ‘sees the part as if it were the whole’ and of the *rajasic* intellect, which argues from the prejudices of personal ambition and desire.

Now, acknowledging that reason and logic have a role to play in the spiritual quest, as Dr Shastri asserted in that opening quotation, we still need to consider how we can and should apply our thinking to the theory and practice of Yoga. One ideal is that we should reason in such a way as to deepen our understanding, not merely broaden or widen our knowledge by endlessly accumulating more and more facts and observations.

Reasoning that is ‘many-branched and endless’—to use another phrase from the *Bhagavad Gita*—can be so divergent that it does not conduce to a deeper understanding of any one point. In discussions we have all met, and probably been, those for whom everything reminds them of something else. ‘Oh! Yes, there is a parallel verse in John’s Gospel’ or ‘Of course, exactly the same point is made in Zen Buddhism’. Breadth of learning may impress others, but the depth of our own understanding is far more important. Concentration means returning, again and again to the original point. To be continually reminding ourselves, not of something else or something other or something similar, but of the original point.

At the other extreme, thinking can be so limited and uncreative as to do no more than circulate the same narrow thoughts and ideas in a completely sterile way.

There is a problem in the interpretation of scripture, and of literature in general, called ‘the hermeneutic circle’ which suggests an ideal between these two extremes. The circularity to which this label refers is that we cannot understand the whole without fully understanding the parts and we cannot understand the parts except in the context of the whole. Hence ‘circularity’ in our attempt to arrive at truth and understanding. The whole depends of the parts, yet the part depends on the whole.

This notion of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ provides us with a useful model for fruitful thinking on the meaning of the meditation text. Not wide ranging and shallow thinking, nor sterile, repetitive thinking on a single point, nor the going round in circles that so often expresses futility; ‘motion as in a windmill, busy standing still’, but rather moving back and forth between analysis and synthesis, ever spiralling in on a deeper and deeper understanding. After all, this is how a child—or an adult, for that matter—builds up a more accurate understanding of language.

Another aspect, which is a common feature of meditation texts, and of the yogic philosophy in general, is the use of illustrations, similes and analogies. One might think: ‘If you cannot explain a point in its own terms, then why try to explain it in terms of images and ideas that are a poor replica of the original point?’ This may be true of some analogies,

but others can be very precise, and very illuminating and fruitful to contemplate. Light, or infinite space or an unbounded sea are especially appropriate illustrations for the all-pervading consciousness of the Supreme Self. That reasoning by analogy is the very essence of fruitful thinking in spiritual matters is supported by such authorities as St Thomas Aquinas and St Paul, as also by Dorothy Emmet in her notable work, *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*.

Many speak of the practice of Yoga as scientific in that, as in science, we perform experiments and expect to obtain results. And this is, indeed, true of both science and practical Yoga. But there is another side to science; not its practical experiments, but its theories that seek to explain the laws behind the physical phenomena. These theories are rightly regarded as mathematical analogies for the physical laws, laws which *as laws* are inaccessible to the senses, even when the physical manifestation of those laws is accessible.

This analogical reasoning in science mirrors analogical reasoning in Yoga; another respect in which Yoga can be seen as scientific. Not only in the practical aspects but in the theoretical aspects of both.

The Sun and its light are often used as analogous to the supreme Self and its all-pervading Consciousness. We speak of seeing objects by the light of the sun, but strictly speaking we only ever see the light of the sun. The light is reflected from the object, in certain directions, the various colours being accounted for by certain frequencies of the light being absorbed. In this sense, although we speak of seeing objects, we are really only seeing the light by which their existence is inferred. Applying this ramification of the light analogy to the supreme Consciousness for which it is an analogy, implies that when we are conscious of objects we are really only conscious of the Self in the objects. So, pursuing the implications of an analogy and contemplating the relationships between the elements of the analogy, can awaken precious insights into the spiritual realm for which the analogy stands.

This very example may shed light on the meaning of that glorious verse from Swami Mangalnath's *Triumph of a Hero*:

I am the existence of all existent objects and the knowability
of all that can be known by perception or conception.

B.O'D.

Further Teachings* of Al-Ghazali

A FEW WEEKS ago, we learnt how an old woman from Haiti was rescued after seven days and nights from under the rubble that was Haiti Cathedral, where she was praying at the time of the earthquake. Asked how she managed, she said: 'I talked only to my Boss—God. I didn't need any more humans.'

This incident could have come straight out of the pages of the eleventh century Moslem sage and philosopher, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali. His greatest work, one of some thirty or so books he wrote, is called *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, a tome of more than a thousand pages. It is packed with short examples of devotion, resignation, renunciation of dependence on anything except God, and the ways and means to reach spiritual illumination. So saturated is this text in the spirit of true religion, far above any narrowness or dogmatism, that another writer has said: 'If all the spiritual knowledge of the world were lost, I could revive it with *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*.'

Then who was Al-Ghazali? He was born in 1058 and he passed out of this world some fifty-three years later, having made an indelible mark on the whole of Islamic civilization, through the wisdom of his writings and the fact that he lived what he taught. He came from north-east Iran, and in due time established himself as a leading scholar and divine in Baghdad. He had spiritual inclinations from an early age, but, as he readily admits, he went the way of the world. This, for him, meant supreme eminence as a scholar and lecturer, an authority on matters religious, philosophical and legal, and he gained renown throughout the Moslem world. He studied everything, not just Islamic traditions, and was well up on Christianity, Judaism, Greek philosophy, logic, natural science, and so on. He didn't just study these things, but drew his own conclusions, making use of what was good, and discarding what was mediocre or irrational.

* An article, 'Al-Ghazali—A Great Light of Islam' was published in *Self-Knowledge*, Autumn 2008 (Vol. 59, No. 4).

One surprising omission is any reference to the great spiritual teachings emanating from India at the time, such as the Upanishads. We can only guess that these had not been translated into languages known by Al-Ghazali, and therefore escaped his knowledge. Nonetheless our Teacher, Dr Shastri, has called Al-Ghazali a pure Upanishadic teacher.

But this was not always so. On his own confession, Al-Ghazali, until his mid-thirties, was a vain and proud man, delighting in name, fame and wealth, steeped in a sense of self-superiority. His family is said to have had a residence and retinue that rivalled that of the Caliph, and he was also the Caliph's favourite teacher and preacher. Even the ruler of Moslem Spain consulted Al-Ghazali for legal advice and judgments, such as his knowledge of jurisprudence.

What saved Al-Ghazali from drowning in this champagne sea of worldly eminence, was his link with Sufism. The Sufis are the mystics of Islam, the seekers of direct knowledge of God, through the pursuit of spiritual practices in a spirit of intense devotion. As we know, they are still flourishing, and this is partly due to the writings of al-Ghazali himself; for the Sufis were and are persecuted by the orthodoxy for their bold and independent spiritual approach. But Al-Ghazali made out the strongest possible case that Sufism was not in conflict with the mainstream of Islam but a more intense expression of it; and Sufis all followed the main items of Islamic faith, such as the ritual prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and so on. The way of Sufism, Al-Ghazali insisted, was implicit in the life of the Prophet Mohammed himself, and is sanctioned in such statements of his as 'Allah is nearer to Thee than the neck vein', and the tradition 'He who knows himself knows his Lord'. That is to say, there is a divine element in man, and the way to fulfilment is through the acquisition of self-knowledge in the deepest spiritual sense.

For a time, in his childhood, Al-Ghazali and his brother Ahmad, who himself became a great poet and preacher, were put under the charge of a Sufi friend of the family. Perhaps reflecting on these childhood days, Al-Ghazali, who was always interested in educating children, and had strong views on it, tells the following story.

A certain Sufi has told how, as a boy of three, he used to get up at night to watch his uncle at prayer. One day the uncle said 'Wouldn't you

also like to praise your Creator?' The boy asked how. The uncle answered: 'When you put on your night-gown, say three times within your heart, without moving your tongue, "God is with me, God is watching me, God is looking upon me."' The boy learnt to say it, and then his uncle told him to say it seven times each night, which he did; and then, eleven times.

In adult life, this Sufi recalled how the sweetness of the words sank into his heart. At the end of a year his uncle said: 'Bear in mind what you have learnt and continue to do this for the rest of your life.'

The story in some way typifies the Sufi approach. It contains an actual practice, with specific details how to do it. The practice is progressive. Note that in another text, by no means for children, Al-Ghazali writes:

This is but the beginning, when you utter the name of God with your tongue and your heart is present with Him. Then the tongue no longer moves, but the soul and heart persevere and the meaning of that word remains in the heart.

What is more, the practice is not meant to be a penance, but on the contrary, as with all true spiritual practices, it is meant to generate inward sweetness, that is, something cheering, blissful, uplifting. Indeed, in the mature Sufi experience, there is often talk of being intoxicated, not with anything outside, but through the influence of joy that has been released and uncovered in one's own inner being.

It was probably in his late teens that Al-Ghazali studied Sufism under the guidance of a devout Sufi, and practised meditation during this period. Once, he reported to his teacher a spiritual dream. He heard a voice calling his name: 'Abu Hamid'. At first, he says, he thought it was Satan addressing him, but the voice continued 'Not so, it is your Lord Who is everywhere present with you. O Abu Hamid, abandon your formal rules, and seek the company of those whom I have appointed to be My friends on the earth, who have renounced both heaven and earth for love of Me...' The voice then told the young man that what separated him from this destiny was his pre-occupation with the love of the world.

All this shows that within the human heart there is often a pull towards the spiritual, but that it generally meets with resistance and is

suppressed due to our worldly attachments. It seems Al-Ghazali became increasingly absorbed in advancing his career, and did not follow the inner voice. Then, at the height of his fame, this inner prompting to spirituality became more persistent. It warned him of the transiency of life, and the hollowness, from the spiritual point of view, of his academic knowledge, fame and eloquence. He sickened and lost the power of speech for a time. He took this as a sign that he had to effect a radical change in his life. He sorted out his family affairs, gave away much of his wealth, and spread the word that he was going to do the pilgrimage to Mecca. He kept his real intentions secret: to leave Baghdad once and for all and to adopt the life of a wandering ascetic so that he could practise meditation and prayer more intensely in solitude, as a totally unknown person. It was time to devote himself to the quest for God-realization before it was too late. During the ensuing two or three years of travel and seclusion, he wrote *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

So far, the references in this article to the being whom we call God are put in personal terms: ‘God is watching me’, and so on, and ‘God’ as conversing with man in a dream—which some may feel are naive. But, what, really, does Al-Ghazali teach about the supreme spiritual force? God is the ultimate Light. He is the only reality. He is the source of all beauty and attraction. He is present in the being of man, awaiting realization.

To illustrate our relationship to the ultimate Light, Al-Ghazali gives an illustration. You are sitting in your room. The moonlight has cast its reflection in a mirror. The light is then reflected on a wall, and then the floor catches the light of that secondary reflection. What is the source of the light on the floor? Trace it back, and you come to the sun itself. Similarly, all the light in our experience, physical, mental and spiritual, the light of sunshine and the inner light of consciousness in man, derive from the ultimate light of God.

We may say: This is not so. First came the sun. Out of it was formed the earth, then the plants, living creatures, and then man. And man’s intelligence has evolved under the physical light of the sun. But Al-Ghazali, and others of illumined understanding, know that it is the other way round. First there was the infinite, immortal spiritual light, the ever-

illumined pure being of the Divine. Then, mysteriously, phenomenal forms manifested within that light, and depend on it for their appearance and apparent reality.

Al-Ghazali goes so far as to say that the only thing worthy of being called light is that original light of God, the light of ultimate reality. All other lights are borrowed, and, he says, we should call them light only metaphorically, always tracing their existence back to the original Light behind them. In this phenomenal world of appearances, this light manifests as the divine intelligence that permeates all life.

Al-Ghazali, on one side of his nature, is the ascetic who has withdrawn from the world. For him, the world is like a vestibule, not a permanent base for any of us. The time spent in the world is like the time a traveller might spend sitting under the shade of a tree, before he resumes his journey. Man’s real life is the spiritual life he discovers within his own being, and he says: ‘Know that all the exalted spiritual states spoken by the Sufis are in fact treasured in your own heart.’ He quotes the saying: ‘The pious say: “Open your eyes that you may see; but I say, close your eyes that you may see.”’

Yet his teaching went far beyond prescriptions for a pious and ascetic way of life. For with equal emphasis, he teaches that the world is an emanation of God, and bears the marks of the divine intelligence in every manifestation. He speaks with wonder and astonishment at the ingenuity that lies behind such familiar things as the human hand, the human mouth, not to mention the human body as a whole. He notes with great delicacy and love the forms of nature—the flowers, trees, grass, sky; he admires the way the sky has been fashioned to appear in a colour pleasing to the eyes of men, instead of being filled with eye-dazzling and hurtful lights. He notes the wisdom of the gnat, who knows just how to get its food by its swift and faultless raid on such a tiny thing as the pore of the skin. He feels the bee rivals any human architect with its hexagonal cell. He says, imagine a robe beautifully woven and fashioned appropriately to the embroidery and the trimming. If there is anyone who imagines it is the work of something inanimate, without skill or capacity, that person must be devoid of reasoning power and a fool. Such is the world in relation to its Maker.

Yet for all the beauty we find in the world, we cannot stay here, nor

can we avoid its strange and often painful transformations. He quotes the words of the Prophet:

However you may live, you will die; however great your love, you will be separated from the objects of your love; whatever you do, you will reap what you have sown.

The one means to overcome human anxieties, to avoid disappointments, and to find lasting, self-sufficient joy, is to develop one's mind along spiritual lines.

True happiness and everything else that is worthwhile, which remains with you when your ship is wrecked, consists in two things, one of which is peace of mind, with the heart's freedom from all save God, and the other is the filling of the heart thus freed with the knowledge of God Most Glorious, for it was to this end that all things were created.

This in turn is related to what man truly is in his essence, as opposed to what he appears to be as a participator in the life of the world. 'He who knows himself knows his Lord.'

In man there is a divine element which has an affinity with the ultimate light. It is found in the human intelligence once the mind has weaned itself from its longing for worldly pleasure and power, and even from the desire to enjoy Paradise after death. The Sufi is called *ibn 'l waqt*, the son of the present moment. He is concerned with the revelation of Reality, the living presence of God, as it is here and now.

Now for Al-Ghazali, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with human intelligence. It is a reflection of the divine intelligence, part and parcel of the universal mind. What mars our intelligence is the influence of passion and imagination. These lead us astray and fill our mind with vain hopes and the kind of knowledge that keeps us tied to the world.

Typically, Al-Ghazali refers to a legend about King David, the Psalmist, to indicate the choice which always lies before us. This tells how David's singing entranced all hearers, drawing crowds that were so spellbound that many died in the rapture of hearing his melodies. Then the Lord grew concerned that some were listening to David superficially. They were charmed by the melody but were not absorbing the spiritual meaning of David's words. So the Lord invited Iblis (the Devil) to do his worst. The Devil fashioned a mandolin and a flute, and sat opposite

David, playing his own tunes at the same time that David sang. It was soon evident that those who didn't appreciate David's meaning were lured by the music of the opposition.

The interpretation is that the mind of man is always subject to competing attractions. Even when it comes within range of the spiritual Truth, represented by David, there are always other voices close at hand to confuse the issue, and divert him from the true course. But man does have the intelligence to choose the right course. In the higher phases of the human intelligence is the divine intelligence. This is unveiled through the purification of the mind. Spiritual practices and ethical living help this unveiling.

Al-Ghazali gives much guidance on how man may extricate himself from such mental tendencies as envy and slander. He says that whenever we look on anyone as worse than we are, it is a form of pride, whereas its opposite, humility, is a prime spiritual virtue. He tells a story about the Sufi knower of Truth, Bayazid. Someone told Bayazid that he had been in his company for twenty years, yet had not known any of the experiences referred to in Bayazid's discourses. Bayazid said: 'Your self constitutes the veil. It needs humbling.' The man asked what he should do. Bayazid said: 'I can suggest the medicine but you will not take it.' 'I will....' said the man. 'Go to the market, shave your head, wear just a loin cloth, and take some nuts with you. Give one nut to every child who throws dust at you, and then come back.' The man protested: 'Impossible!' Bayazid replied: 'There is no other remedy.'

Al-Ghazali quotes a definition of trust, given by the great earlier Sufi, Dhu 'l Nun: Trust is 'the casting of the soul into self-surrender, and the withdrawal of it from self-assertion.' He has much to teach about prayer, which, for him, was inner communion akin to meditation. He thought true prayer was impossible if one's eye was on the clock, so to say. What was needed was humility, intention, presence of the heart and single-minded devotion, and he goes into all these things with helpful comments and examples. One of his many prayers is:

O Lord, give light unto my heart and my tongue and my hearing and my sight, and set light behind me and before me and above me. Lord, give me light.

As for the great Moslem practice of the ritual prayer, performed five times a day, he writes:

The five times of prayer are like a river of fresh water flowing beside the door of each one of you, into which he plunges five times each day, and what do you suppose that leaves of his defilement?

In other words, such regular communion, sincerely done, purifies and protects the mind.

We have mentioned the word ‘veil’. This is a fundamental metaphor used in Sufism, derived from a verse in the Koran. Divine knowledge is present in our heart, but veiled. We see and believe in the reality and durability of the phenomenal world of appearances, because the true nature of the divine Reality is veiled from our understanding. It is said there are 70,000 veils within man that have to be lifted. It sounds a lot, but if you work it out, 70,000 hours pass in about nine years, and we all know what strange, inappropriate, delusive and silly thoughts flash through our minds in a single hour!

But returning to the wider picture, there is a helpful reference to these veils in *Meditation—Its Theory and Practice*. The gist of Dr Shastri’s comments is, first, the veils are securely in place. Then man receives the teaching: There is only one God, He is One. This strikes away a third of the veils. Then he comes into more intimate relations with God and speaks to Him in familiar terms as ‘Thou’. This removes a third more of the veils.

Some religious thought may not go further than this. But in Adhyatma Yoga, and in the highest insights of the Sufis, the last third of the veils is lifted when that God, whom man first worshipped as exterior to himself, whom he came to know more intimately and vividly as ‘Thou’, turns out to be ‘I’, the true Self. In Dr Shastri’s words:

There was an Indian saint who daily used to offer flowers to God, but the time came when he put flowers on his own head, offering them to himself, as he said over and over again: ‘*Shivoham Shivoham*’—‘I am God! I am God!’

As a last brief point, let us indicate some of the insights we may hope to get into Reality, insights into the true nature of our own Self, as we proceed to remove these veils, through the life of spiritual training and

discipline. Al-Ghazali tells us: ‘Some saints would not repeat the Name of the Lord. When asked the reason for it, they would say: “We call a person by name who is behind the veil. We do not repeat the name of him who is constantly by our side, in front of us and is seated unveiled before us.”’

He makes the same point in a slightly different way in the light of the spiritual emotion called ‘yearning’ or cherishing a deep desire for union with the Divine. In spiritual life no one gets anything that they do not really want, and a Sufi practice is to cultivate the sentiment of yearning or longing for the light of illumination. In Yoga this is called the desire for liberation, and it only acts as a propelling force if it is not adulterated with ulterior motives and considerations. Yet such yearning is not forever; the seeker will become a finder, a realizer. Therefore Al-Ghazali gives another story:

Somebody asked a saint: ‘Are you a yearner (mushtaq)?’ He replied: ‘Yearning is for a thing that is absent. But when the hidden thing is present before your eyes, where then is there an occasion to cherish a desire for seeing that thing?’

Al-Ghazali does not speak in the terminology of the Indian Vedanta teachers, who have a clear-cut doctrine of the complete identity of the innermost Self with God. In his published works, he does not go as far as Swami Rama Tirtha, who said: ‘Do not pray for light. Affirm “I am Light”’. But this realization is implicit in the supreme and unveiled vision that is the goal of Sufism. In Al-Ghazali’s words: ‘Duality vanishes and is transformed into the One Reality.’ Then the aspirant knows with certainty the truth indicated in the saying:

All talk, turmoil and motion are outside the veil.
Within the veil are silence, calm and rest.

A.H.C.

I AM NOT A BOTANIST

I am not a botanist in a forest. I am a housewife who arranges the freshly cut flowers in a vase of a suitable colour in her drawing-room. Not only this. I am a humble devotee who has collected the blossoms herself, early at dawn, from the dale and the glen, from the pond and the mountain slopes, and washed them carefully. My object is not the decoration of my drawing-room but to make an offering of these tiny beauties of nature to the Lord, their creator. To me they reflect His charms, His beauty, His harmony and unity.

As a river runs hundreds of miles through hills, plains and towns to meet the foaming sea, so my loving heart, too, goes through the experiences of life, woes and joys, the high mountain peaks of Shankara's philosophy and the flowery dale of Plato and Rudolph Eucken, to be merged, finally, in beauty absolute.

My friends are my blossoms, which I have gathered in the Land of the Rising Sun, in the Flowery Kingdom, in the high range of the Mahatmas, not to rule them, not to love them for my benefit, but to offer them to Him, who is the honey of existence, Truth eternal.

I have enjoyed the sight of the cherry blossom falling on the streams on Mount Fuji and carried in the waters to the sea—the finite merged in the Infinite.

The Red Admiral and the Painted Lady are butterflies I love to see flitting from blossom to blossom. I have no desire to chase or capture them. In the event of a drizzle I throw my turban on the blossoming bush to protect the butterflies. May their honeymoon continue at least one summer afternoon.

I empty my meagre purse before the fowler and say: 'Pray take this and enjoy your meal. Spare the little songsters of nature. Let them bestow love on their eggs in the nest. To love selflessly is the purpose of life.'

I am not a botanist, nor a zoologist. Step by step He has led my love of nature, form, harmony and philosophy to Himself. This life of mine, though imperfect and insignificant, I offer at the altar of truth with the song: 'Incline our souls unto Thee, O Savitri.'

H.P.S.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

The Wednesday evening talks at Shanti Sadan during the Summer term formed a further series on meditation. Each was based on a section from Dr Shastri's *Meditation - Its Theory and Practice*, one of Shanti Sadan's most popular publications which gives detailed guidance as well as a profound explanation of the principles of Meditation. Each talk also included a guided meditation session, and two sets of meditation practices were used during the term. The series began with *What Meditation Is*, continued with presentations including *Meditation and Life*, *Meditation, Beauty and Truth* and *Meditation and Higher Creativity*, and the course concluded with a presentation called *Meditation on Self*.

The Friday talks were also a planned series, this one based on spiritual texts on the principles and practice of the non-dual teachings. The series started with *The Power Behind the Mind*, based on the book of that title by Marjorie Waterhouse, who describes with matchless insight the opportunities for inner growth presented by everyday life when infused with conscious spiritual endeavour. There were also talks on *Yoga and the Supreme Bliss*, reflecting on the poetry of Swami Rama Tirtha, *Light from the Bhagavad Gita*, and *Triumph of a Spiritual Hero*, based on teachings of Swami Mangalnathji, one of the most revered of the teachers in the Himalayan region at the beginning of the last century.

The Summer afternoon course took place on Saturday 5 June in central London on the theme *Inner Peace and Light through Yoga and Meditation*. The talks considered the place and power of faith in our spiritual nature, ways to unfold higher love and wisdom, and the course culminated in a talk on Letting in the Light of Truth. The talks were received with concentrated attention, and the two meditation periods during the day passed in an atmosphere of deep peace and enquiry.

During the Summer a new Shanti Sadan publication appeared, *The Spiritual Awakening of Science*, containing lectures previously published in this journal by the former Warden of Shanti Sadan, Dr A M Halliday, together with further material so that the book covers key developments in the history of science from its origins in ancient Greece to the breakthroughs of the nineteenth century. The book highlights the spiritual qualities demonstrated by the eminent scientists, such as the renowned capacity for one-pointed concentration of Sir Isaac Newton, and the deep spiritual convictions held by him and other great figures in the history of science including Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell.