

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

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### ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

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### EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN TERM 2011

#### Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

There will be guided meditation sessions every Tuesday evening from 4 October to 29 November. There will be a series of talks on the theory and practice of the spiritual Yoga every Thursday evening at 8pm from 6 October to 1 December.

#### Autumn 2011 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 30 October, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2.

## SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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## Getting Into Meditation

HERE ARE two verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* which are meant to set us in the right direction for progressive meditation:

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

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

These words might have come straight out of a modern self-improvement text book, for they appear to emphasize the self-reliance and skill improvement that are also recommended to those wanting to become successful in business. However, success in the yogic sense is quite different to the modern ideas of worldly success. For instance, qualities like humility and compassion are key to success in Yoga whereas the opposite qualities, like self-assertion and ruthlessness, are

considered by some to be necessary for commercial prosperity.

Yet there is some common ground for both types of success. This is the ability to concentrate and to be able to exercise a degree of control over the mind. They also both require perseverance and will-power rather than an attitude of defeatism when difficulties arise. The main difference is that one leads to a knowledge of the true Self, resulting in a life of peace, serenity and contentment, while the other leads to an expansion of the limited ego self, which distracts the individual from identifying the real Self.

Those who ruthlessly pursue worldly success will only experience brief flashes of contentment in their life, usually on the attainment of a worldly desire, when their mind enters a temporary state of stillness similar to that achieved in meditation. For those following the path of Yoga, the main aim is a state where peace, contentment and happiness abide for ever through knowledge of, and identification with, the real Self. This does not mean that the yogi will not be successful in the worldly sense. Those with a more relaxed attitude towards life are often successful in the world without trying. But this is not the main consideration.

To start on the path, there is no need for any great changes to our normal life, except for the practice of meditation each day, along with a little reflection during the day to train the mind in behaving as we want it to. The guiding principle in this respect is called *dharma*, or right living. This means learning to do only those things in life which we judge to be right and proper under the guidance of our own conscience. As soon as we start to live in this way, we gain an immediate improvement in the level of peace experienced in our lives. The practice of *dharma* steadies the mind, which helps to improve our concentration, which in turn helps us when we come to meditate.

Through the practices, we are expected to prove (or otherwise) to ourselves that the basic premise of Adhyatma Yoga, called non-dualism, is true. Non-dualism means that all of existence comes from one source and is never truly separate from it except in appearance only. The implication of this is that everything in existence came from God and, although the world has a diverse appearance, it is all nothing but God when we truly recognize it.

The route to this recognition is through the identification of our real Self, the reality in our own being. This is because the reality in our own being is identical with the reality in the rest of creation, namely God. Through error we superimpose appearance on the underlying reality as a person superimposes the appearance of a snake on a rope. In the same way we superimpose the ego-self onto the real Self, and the methods of this Yoga are designed to remove this illusion rather than create some new idea about ourselves.

If we inflate the ego-self through wrong behaviour, we hide the real Self under more and more layers of illusion, while if we adopt the yogic practices, we slowly deflate the ego-self, gradually revealing the real Self hidden behind it.

## Practices

When we come to meditate, we need to keep the spine and neck erect and the chin held in slightly. If possible, sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the floor is best, otherwise sit upright on a firm chair with the feet flat on the floor for stability. Humility and compassion are two key attributes for the would-be yogi to develop, and our starting and finishing practices give a practical introduction to them respectively.

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

This first practice puts us into the right frame of mind for absorbing the subsequent meditation practices or for listening to spiritual teachings in the right way.

2. *Focus your attention on the navel. Take a deep breath in relaxation. As you breathe in, imagine that you are drawing the breath up from the navel so that you end the in-breath by thinking of the space between the eyebrows. The out-breath should be released normally. Take 21 breaths in this way.*

This helps to calm the mind and prepare it for deeper meditation. It does this through an exercise in concentration by combining the effort of centring the mind with that of a deep breathing practice.

3. *Visualize any sunrise you may have seen. Imagine the sun is rising higher and higher over the mountains, over the trees, over the plains.* Now that the mind is centred and relaxed, we can try the third practice, which is a visualization practice on light. Describing the practice, Dr Shastri adds: ‘There is a significant correspondence between the physical source of light and the inner source of light. There are references to this fact in all religious classics.’

Some imagine that when they close their eyes to meditate, all they will see is blackness, but this is not the case. What actually happens is a bit like when you travel by underground and look out of the window as the train sets off. Your mind goes out to the scenes of the people on the well-lit platform until you enter the tunnel when you find yourself staring at the black walls of the tunnel. For a split second or two, there is a sense that everything has gone black, until your mind refocuses on the inside of the carriage where there is an internal light. In the same way, we may initially struggle with an internal sense of darkness when we first shut our eyes to do this visualization practice, but eventually, as we persevere with it, an internal picture is formed which includes a brightly lit scene and an internal sun illuminating it all. This internal scene is created under the light of consciousness, which is the essential nature of man’s innermost Self.

Don’t be concerned if the picture you create isn’t perfect—this will improve over time with repeated practice, as your ability to concentrate improves..

#### 4. *Meditation on a Text*

OM. IN ME THERE IS A LIGHT WHICH LIGHTS  
THE WHOLE WORLD. IT IS RADIATING NOW,  
PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING. OM.

The text expands the theme of light. It contains a hidden message about the nature of the real Self. It is useful sometimes to spend a little time during the day thinking through its philosophical implications, which may be grasped from other articles in this journal.

Note any questions or doubts. Try to resolve them in your own mind first, and then if you can’t resolve them, approach a traditional yoga

centre, which may be able to give guidance. It is important not to do the analysis and reasoning about the texts during the meditation period, for at this time the mind needs to be stilled so that the higher faculties of the mind are engaged and an intuitive understanding of the meaning takes over. The ideal state of mind when we meditate is given in verse 19 of chapter 6 of the *Bhagavad Gita*: ‘As a lamp in a sheltered spot does not flicker, this has been thought of as a simile for the yogi of subdued thought, practising Yoga in the self.’

Here are a couple of hints before we start:

Firstly, repeat the text internally a few times at the start, but then don’t just keep repeating it over, as this keeps the mind active. Try to gather up the central meaning of the text as a feeling or as a few key words and try to retain this.

Secondly, don’t be concerned or irritated if your mind wanders off. Just return it gently to the text as soon as you notice it wandering.

#### 5 *Close the meditation period by extending our thoughts of peace and goodwill to all beings, without exception.*

In daily life, practise the yogic principle called *ahimsa*, which means harmlessness in thought, word and deed. It is a manifestation of compassion towards our fellow-men based on a sense of identity with them through the principle of non-dualism. It is an indispensable practice in this Yoga for those wanting to train the mind.

Our meditation will develop if we perform the practice each day, allowing an unrushed half an hour for our session. This would include some seven minutes on the visualization, and ten devoted to the text. The morning is the ideal time, before the mind is buzzing with the business of the day, but whichever time is chosen, let it be regularized. This will bring order and harmony to our activities, and create a sense of anticipation as the time approaches. If our home life permits, keep a corner of our room for the practice, ensuring it is clean and tidy, and perhaps setting up a simple altar, with a lit candle, and other spiritual symbols, to mark the place as sacred to us.

If the practices are sustained daily for at least 30 days, patiently persevering whether we feel our performance is strong or weak, we will

be aware of a gradual change in the quality of our life and our attitude towards our fellow man. There will be a growing sense that our life is moving towards an ideal state which we have always felt should be ours, but which may have eluded our grasp in the past.

The condition of *dharma* or right living will become the rock on which the other practices will build. They will lead our mind on a journey of true self-discovery, culminating in a direct experience of our identity with the real Self, which is the fundamental reality underpinning the whole of creation, namely God. This is called the state of enlightenment, wherein peace, contentment and happiness are never again lost.

S.B.

### CREATE A PALACE WITHIN

Man has to create for himself a palace of bliss and freedom out of the material called his inner or psychological self (*antahkarana*). He is a creator. Man is creating something all the time, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. If he does not create the yogic wealth, he creates fetters for himself; but he is never idle.

There is a verse in the *Mahabharata* which says: 'He is fixed in the practice of Yoga who employs his mind in meditation on the Absolute, practising equilibrium, truthfulness, good conduct and simplicity.' It is by means of the cultivation of these virtues that the yogi becomes an expert creator of the palace of freedom and bliss in his soul.

Imagine a swiftly flowing stream washing the boundary of a village. The people believe that they can do nothing to stop the ravages of the stream when it is in flood. They pay toll in lives and destruction of property, calmly. A youth imagines that the stream can be controlled and succeeds in doing so by the application of engineering. Now the stream gives them electric power, helps the irrigation and adds to the beauty of the village in many ways. Such is the use of desire and will. When the inner life is controlled by knowledge and meditation, it becomes a friend of man and helps in the creation of the palace of bliss and freedom, called *jnanam* (spiritual knowledge).

*From Hari Prasad Shastri's commentary on Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6*

## The Eternal Wisdom

*Continuing Hari Prasad Shastri's depiction of life in Upanishadic times in ancient India, and the teachings of the great sages.*

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KING JANAKA rules over the neighbouring kingdom of Mithila, which he has inherited from his illustrious father. This is the age of enlightened reason. The consciousness of the human race has not been degraded to the level of the lower animals. Man is still man in his form, his character, his qualities and his ideal, which is to fulfil the divine purpose, the spiritual evolution of human beings into a race of enlightened sages, and also to protect the members of the animal kingdom destined one day to attain human birth.

King Janaka rules to fulfil this great purpose. His exchequer contains no surplus wealth to be devoted to his own comforts and luxuries. His palace is simple. His court is composed of men of wisdom who work to serve the material, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and spiritual ends of the people. The taxes are moderate; each subject pays what he can conveniently spare after defraying his family expenses and giving hospitality and charity, this being one of his chief duties. There are no starving people in the state, because the king has forbidden his ministers and the mayors of the towns to sit down to their meals unless every individual in the kingdom has been fed. The royal kitchen is open to every hungry man if any are to be found in the city. Peace reigns in society and, as there is no want and no craving for luxury and comforts, there are no thieves and no robbers. Few courts of justice are needed, and no prisons.

Righteousness (*dharma*) is the watchword of the subjects of the king. He is strict in keeping his marriage vows, and the sex life of the race is well regulated and is under proper discipline. People are taught from their childhood not to live for mere pleasure and not to look upon anyone as their subordinate. The health of the people is excellent. There are homes for the aged and hospitals for cattle, pets and other domestic animals. Education is free and the professors are the holy brahmins who teach out of their love for the people. Students receive their board and lodging free, there is no fee for tuition, and the king himself is the head

of the department of education. Every year he visits the prominent educational institutions and encourages the brahmin professors and their pupils by holding contests in learning. Contests in logic and poetry are common events.

And yet King Janaka has not yet attained spiritual enlightenment. He desires a spiritual Teacher, because he knows that without such a traditional Guru there is no spiritual illumination. He has sent word to all the monasteries and retreats that he would share half his kingdom with that holy man who could lead him in the shortest possible time to spiritual enlightenment. This most compassionate, serene, wise and self-controlled sovereign is determined to have the highest fruition of life, the active and dynamic at-oneness with the universal spirit.

Many holy and learned brahmins have tried to fulfil this spiritual ambition of the great king, but without success. King Janaka is not yet old, though he knows the body may terminate any day. He knows old age is inevitable, if he lives long, and that life is composed of days, hours and minutes.

One night, while in his royal apartment, King Janaka prayed through the night for a Guru. In the morning he gave away in charity the whole of his private allowance; he also worshipped Shri Rama in his private chapel. The following day a message was brought to the king that a most holy sage of strange appearance was staying in a garden outside the city, who had claimed that he could lead the king to enlightenment in the shortest possible time. King Janaka therefore despatched his ministers to bring the mahatma, with great reverence.

They found a brahmin with a badly misshapen body meditating under a tree in great peace. The ministers offered salutations to him and said: 'Sir, the King of Mithila invites you to his court. Royal elephants and palanquins are in attendance. O holy sage, be good enough to come.' The sage, whose name was Ashtavakra (that is, one who has eight bends in his body), replied in tones that were soft, low and affectionate: 'Sirs, give my blessings to your royal master. I require nothing in His Majesty's court, therefore I do not think it needful to go to him. But should the king want my help in attaining enlightenment, then let him come to me.'

The ministers returned and delivered the reply of the saint to their

king. 'How true, true indeed!', exclaimed the king. 'The sage has already taught me a great lesson. I have no authority over the mahatma, and since I desire enlightenment, I will go to him. I will walk all the way to the garden where the revered holy man is staying.'

Reverence is the key to the door of secrets, whether human or divine. Unless we approach nature with reverence it does not yield to us its real secrets. We can analyse the chemical elements of a piece of stone; we can determine its centrifugal and centripetal forces; we can count the number of the atoms. Yet there is something more in each and every atom which cannot be revealed to us by mere scientific analysis. Intellectual quest, accompanied by reverence, leads us to the secrets of nature and its laws. But the spiritual secret needs something more than this, and it is the unconditional self-surrender of the enquiring entity. By seeking identity with the deeper principle involved in a phenomenon, we are able to know the real secret of being.

King Janaka set out on foot, attended by his queen and his secular teacher. The day was hot, yet the king pressed on and on, eager to meet the holy sage. When he arrived at the garden, he removed his crown, his shoes and royal robes. Holding the gifts which were appropriate to a royal personage, he proceeded slowly to the hut in which the holy rishi dwelt.

The naked eye cannot see the real glory of any object. The heaven with all its beauty and profundity is only visible through a telescope. It is only through a microscope that we can see the real beauty of an icicle, a drop of water or the wing of a butterfly. Indeed, it is but an insignificant fragment of an object that we see with our eyes. Similarly, the Guru is perceived through the eye of faith, coupled with self-submission. Just as there is light hidden in every atom, a tree in a seed, a universe in the being of man, so the Lord Himself is hidden in the being of the Guru; but the naked eye cannot see Him. It is only when the physical body, the mind and the possessions are sacrificed at the feet of the Guru, that God speaks through him. Nowhere else is the sight and the voice of the Lord manifest except in the Guru, whose heart has been lit by the torch of truth, handed down traditionally through the lineage of Teachers (*Guru-parampara*).

King Janaka saw a man who was of unprepossessing appearance, yet

whose forehead and eyes were beaming with the light of truth. The king and his queen quietly offered their gifts and, prostrating themselves at his feet, expressed their adoration. The *shruti* (scripture) says: 'In order to have a direct and intuitive perception of That, one must go to the Guru.'

Shri Ashtavakra blessed the royal couple by lifting his hand. 'I have come, Sir, to learn the holy truth of the Self,' said the monarch, now a disciple. 'What fee are you willing to offer me, my son? Remember, nothing is gained free.' 'Half of my kingdom, my lord,' answered the king. 'Your kingdom? Why do you call it your own? Who ruled it before you, and who before him? It is not yours. You have not created it, you cannot control it. O Janaka! How dare you offer to me what does not belong to you?'

'Then, my master, I offer you my body. I will serve you and be your sandal-bearer.' 'Is your body yours, O Janaka? Did you create it? Can you protect it from disease and old age?' The king reflected for a while and then said: 'My lord, I know now that you have enlightened me considerably. I offer my mind to you.' 'That is right, my son. Henceforth do not think a single thought for yourself, for your body or for your kingdom. You have given me your mind, it is no longer yours.'

King Janaka now understood this secret. He found that the Self is the Mind of the mind, that the mind is a veil, a barrier, and that if the mind is relinquished, what remains is the light of the Self. The king was now a realized man. He knew he was the substratum of all phenomena. The Self (*Atman*) is That which cannot be negated. True are the words of *shruti*: 'Whom the mind cannot know, but by whose power the mind knows.' That is the infinite Self.

The king now realized that from the highest point of view both the monastic life and the family life are one and the same. His own individuality, under the holy knowledge of the subjective truth, slowly evaporated like the water of a pond under the summer sun. What now remained, as the essence of his being, was the infinite existence, consciousness and bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). King Janaka was now a perfect man.

Prostrating himself with his head at the feet of his holy Guru, the king said again and again: 'Let me remain with you to serve you and to

listen to your nectar-like speech. You have made me a king of the whole universe. Death has proved to be an illusion, and birth equally an illusion. My desires are dead, my ambitions have taken wings. I feel myself to be the Self of the twinkling stars, of the blades of grass, of the beautiful winged creatures that warble and fly. Each and everyone is divine! O holy Guru, dispose of my kingdom as you will.'

The maharishi replied: 'Your destiny (*karma*) still warrants your rulership over this kingdom. A king must be a great-souled one (*mahatma*) so that he may convert his kingdom into a cradle for future mahatmas. Janaka, go and rule as my agent. Promote the cause of learning and benevolence. Teach your people how to love truth and beauty impersonally and to enjoy the bliss of the absorption of the mind in the highest.' The king arose, and again saluting the mahatma, he returned with his queen to his palace.

H.P.S.

## TEACHINGS OF SHRI DADA

'What should man do to refresh his memory of his forgotten nature and identity with the supreme Brahman (the Absolute)? The answer is easy. A beautiful princess is looking at her reflection in a mirror held before her but, owing to some flaw, the mirror distorts her features in many ungainly ways: her reflection seems to be greatly aged, and wrinkled lines disfigure the beauty of her forehead. If she is sensible, the princess will have nothing to do with the mirror and similarly, my children, you should have nothing to do with your mind, which is what makes the blissful Atman appear as suffering. Cease to feel that the mind is part of you and look upon it as a detail of nature, like a speck of cloud marring the transparent serenity of the heavens. It is our sense of identification with the mind, rather than the mind itself, which causes suffering.'

From *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*

# One Self in All

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It (the supreme Reality) is to be known through the mind. There is no duality whatsoever. He who sees as though there were difference, goes from death to death. *Katha Upanishad*

Where there is duality there is fear. *Taittiriya Upanishad*

In the beginning all this was being alone, one only without a second. Some say it was all non-being. But how can being arise out of non-being? *Chandogya Upanishad*

Know Atman (the Self) to be one, ever the same, changeless. How canst thou say: 'I am the meditator and this is the object of meditation'? How can perfection be divided? *Avadhut Gita*

There is but one reality.

THE IDEA that there is one self in all seems a strange and even an impractical one. Consider the readers of this journal. Are we one self, or many? Surely we are different individuals, living different lives and with very different matters preoccupying our minds. Whether we lean on the evidence of our senses, or try to reason it out, the idea of one self hardly makes sense.

Before we dismiss this doctrine as unreasonable, there are certain lines of enquiry that might help to lessen our resistance to it. One is to examine what is meant by self. This calls for reflection on the nature of our personal experience. Alongside the stream of thoughts, there is a level of awareness that stays constant, to which the many kinds of mental activity and movement appear objectively. This changeless principle is not composite, like the mind. It cannot be grasped by thought, any more than the eye can see itself. But experience cannot do without it. The Scriptures supplement this 'clue' to self-knowledge by declaring its infinitude and absolute nature, and the fact that it can be realized as our true being through following a path of self-training and transformation.

Another way of approach, which works in partnership with the first, is to investigate the nature of the mind and the way it handles

experience. This involves the recognition that there is a well-established course of inner development towards what might be called a more advanced state of mind, which allows us to see more deeply than the level that is apparent to our common sense, and leads to spiritual enlightenment.

On a more mundane level, it is of course possible to point out how modern science, with its discoveries and intelligent speculations, is tending to undermine our conviction of separateness. For example, if our sense of sight were to be replaced by the intricate technology of an electron microscope, and penetrate to the atomic level, the familiar qualities which divide one thing from another would be lost to view, and matter at this level would be more easily appreciated as an evolute of electro-magnetic energy in a particular form.

Again, if we consider what is involved with the Big Bang theory of manifestation, we are told of a mysterious condition where there was no time, no space, no forms, no duality as we know it. Yet something existed as an unimaginably small, dense, extremely hot mass that held within itself the potential to manifest the universe. So in this sense, all the objects of the world are like sparks from the same fire, having the same origin in that mysterious entity that was in some sense in existence before the manifestation of the universe.

Such thoughts, though interesting, are not satisfying, because they do not change our experience. More relevant is the idea that if we transform our mind, there will be the possibility of a new way of experiencing life, ourselves and the world, and this may enable us to see more deeply and more truly. This is actually the case, and there is truth in the lines of William Blake:

When the doors of perception are cleansed,  
All things will appear as they are—infinite.

The implication is that the same divine thread of pure being runs through all phenomena, and that 'There is but one reality'.

In the book, *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*, the sage, Shri Dada, was challenged by a young man, who had developed a disdain for the old traditional ways, and told Shri Dada that prayer and suchlike practices were nonsense. Shri Dada engaged his attention with

some teachings, referring to what he called 'the universal force' which holds the cosmos together. At first, the man found this puzzling. But he also found himself responding to the way the holy man argued that nature, which functions according to laws, implies a subtle intelligence underlying it, what he called the Cosmic or Universal Mind.

Then, more significantly, from the practical point of view, Shri Dada shifted the focus to the human mind itself and its various states. 'My son', he said, 'the human mind in each stage of its development can only perceive so much and no more.' At first the mind sees only matter, but this can change.

Lift up your mind by prayer, faith, devotion, loving service of your fellow-men and study. To see the picture as a whole and not only a small blurred part of it, my son, expand your mind. Throw away the burdensome load of conceit, egotism and love of power and fame. Then your lightened mind will rise higher in the spiritual atmosphere. Change your mind through an attitude of reverence to Him in inner silence, created by prayer; and I assure you, you will see more, much more.

There is a call for piety here, which may not be to our modern taste, but it is not piety for its own sake. Spiritual practices have a definite purpose and goal: to transform the inner world of the mind in order to 'see more'.

This development is a gradual and ongoing process, and there are temptations to mistake our partial and growing insight with the final revelation, and thus get stuck on the way. But the serious student knows his research must be thorough and lead to the ultimate result, enlightenment.

We might suggest that, in a sense, man is like a passenger in a train which has been the victim of a cleaners' strike. The windows have not been cleaned for some weeks and, though travelling through a scenic landscape, we do not see much of it and the day looks dull. But once we start to remove a little of the staining and make a small aperture, the scene becomes clearer and brighter. Carry on, and the aperture becomes a porthole. From our position, we can see through it quite well, and we may be tempted to stop cleaning. But as soon as we shift our position or stand up, the view is lost. The only way to achieve an unobstructed

picture is to clean the whole pane, corner to corner, top to bottom, and, if possible, inside and outside. Then we will be able to say: 'What a difference!'

It is a similar situation with the mind and its spiritual development. Our hidden capacity for an illumined understanding is a fact. 'The supreme Reality is to be known through the mind.' Many make a start on the inner development and gain a degree of insight, like the forming of that aperture or even the porthole. But to be established in spiritual wisdom is quite a different matter. This requires a willingness to clear our inner vision of all obstacles, and a genuine desire for wholeness of understanding. When this great understanding is gained, the expression 'What a difference!' understates the revelation. In fact, 'What a difference!' is inappropriate. For 'There is no duality whatsoever.' 'There is but one reality.'

Our first task is to learn how the mind, which is rooted in multiplicity, can come to appreciate the profound spiritual unity in any meaningful sense. Here, the *Bhagavad Gita* comes to our aid in its analysis of human knowledge.

There is a phase of the human mind which is dominated by a kind of darkness, rendering it stubborn, narrow, unable to put itself in the place of others, and apathetic towards any exertion that does not serve its immediate interests. The mind in this condition is called *tamasic*, a word which literally means dark or dull. It is not without knowledge or higher potentialities, and can be transformed into a superior mode of operation. But, at present, the nature and range of this knowledge is very limited.

Ranked more highly in the matter of inner development is the sort of mind possessed by those who are bursting with energy, which is constantly bubbling up in the form of desire, anger, passion and ambition. This kind of mind is not interested in stillness. Such a condition is meaningless to it. And it shuns the laziness of *tamas*. It is always on the go, up and doing, can't wait, gets restless in queues, and wants to force things through. It likes to be in charge in order to get its own way, and cares little for the views of others. The word used generally to characterize this phase of the human mind, our own mind at times, to be sure, is *rajasic*.

From the point of view of philosophy or metaphysics, the *rajasic* mind is not interested in unity or oneness. The last thing it wants to hear is that we are all one! It delights in differences and distinctions, in taking sides and competition, and the main distinction is reserved for its glorified image of itself.

In relation to the widespread influence of *rajasic* and *tamasic* minds in the world at any given time—of which we hardly need proof—there are some lines from the great spiritual classic, the *Yoga Vasishtha*:

O Rama-ji, know this world to be an unremitting illusion, upheld by men of passionate or dull natures: it is they who support this unreal fabric, as pillars bear up a building.

Neither the *tamasic* nor the *rajasic* mind sees the world as an illusion, or an ‘unreal fabric’. At this stage, it is all too real, although it may be the case that, as our life moves forward, doubts will set in. The brevity and dreamlike character of human life is indicated in a verse by the Urdu poet, Ibrahim Zauq:

Even if I live a thousand years, at the hour of death  
My span of life will seem but one spring morning.

In considering the mind so far, we are still in the circle of limitations. We have not yet reached that phase of the mind which can ‘see more’. The window pane has not yet been cleaned to enable us to get a clear view. The ‘doors of perception’ are still smudgy. We still feel hemmed in by limitations and by the sense that something vital and fulfilling is missing from our life.

Let us return to Shri Dada when he said, ‘then your lightened mind will rise higher in the spiritual atmosphere’. It may seem that Shri Dada’s prescription for making the mind light—suggesting challenging things like inner silence, prayer, reduction of egoity, detachment from the world, and so on—will have the opposite effect, and make the mind heavy and joyless, and turn us into miseries and killjoys. In reality, the spiritual outlook expands and liberates our understanding far above the heaviness of *tamas* and the continual stress and tension of *rajas*.

This ‘lightened mind’ that can rise higher in the spiritual atmosphere, is called a *sattvic* mind. The word *sattva* indicates many things. They

include the faith, hope and charity praised by St Paul; unselfish love; a spirit of service and benevolence; and, inwardly, a state of order, harmony and peace. This way of life, coupled with spiritual enquiry, produces great clarity in the mind. We find we do have the capacity to draw ever deeper meaning from the spiritual sayings and texts. For ‘through the mind the supreme Reality is to be known’. Not ‘by’ the mind working as an active agent, but ‘through’ the mind, functioning as a channel for the higher spiritual power that is within us—a clear window through which the light of the holy knowledge can be experienced as the ‘being of our being’.

From this it is evident that our spiritual practices are not just undertaken to get occasional relief from stress in order to help us relax. Their initial aim is to establish the ascendancy of *sattva* in our developing mind. And this lightening of the mind—this growing presence of harmony, peace and order—leads to a new way of experiencing life, ourselves and the world. Our knowledge will change, not just in content but in quality and penetrative power. The knowledge generated in the *rajasic* mind sees and feeds on differences and divisions. The knowledge that is awakened in the *sattvic* mind is quite different. To quote the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Know that knowledge to be *sattvic* which inclines one to perceive the one imperishable Reality in all beings, undivided in the divided objects.

*Sattva* prepares the mind for the realization that there is one Self in all, and there is no duality whatsoever.

One of the highest functions of the mind is to see unity in variety. This does not mean to see with our physical sight. It refers to our ability to comprehend through the higher power of spiritual intuition. And this potentiality stirs in the mind that is dominated by the calm and clarity of *sattva*.

In its rudimentary form, this unitive outlook is not the monopoly of those living a dedicated spiritual life. Its traces are present in every surge of fellow-feeling, every impulse to charity, and every effort to pacify and reconcile warring factions. The wish to harmonize, to relieve and gladden others, the belief that what unites is more important than

what divides, are tending towards the conviction that there is one Self in all.

This whole orientation is an outer expression of something far more profound and definite that underlies it. This is the affirmation that there really is only one Self in all, and that the divisions we see around us and within ourselves hold true only on the level of appearances and do not exist in the absolute reality. The ultimate spiritual advice is: 'Discover the nature of your own Self, and you will know that there is only one Self in all.' From this standpoint, the tensions of life are transcended. In the words of Swami Rama Tirtha:

No personality, no individuality, no responsibility anywhere. One and the same Self is the only one Self in each and all, and that am I.

If this unity reigns supreme as the true nature of experience, why do we find ourselves the victims of the complicated cares of the world? Why has this massive structure of multiplicity formed itself around us, and absorbed our mind in its processes, so that our day to day existence is steeped in duality, and 'where there is duality there is fear'? Let us return to the scriptural statement:

In the beginning all this was being alone, one only without a second. Some say it was all non-being. But how can being arise out of non-being?

It is not only science that is enthralled by the question of the origin of this universe of multiplicity. The enquirers of Vedic times in India were also dedicated to the quest to discover the starting point of all experience. But they posed further questions: Has anything really changed? Has the One really lost its oneness, or does this unity still prevail at the highest level of experience and perception?

In this context let us quote from the Creation Hymn of the *Rig Veda*, which probably pre-dates even the oldest of the Upanishads.

There was then neither what is nor what is not.  
There was no sky nor the heaven beyond.  
What covered? Where was it and in whose shelter?  
Was there water, the deep abyss?  
There was no death, hence there was nothing immortal.  
There was no distinction between night and day.

That One breathed by itself without breath:  
Since then there has been nothing other than it.

Pure being is the nature of ultimate reality, and it is the same pure being that man finds in himself, as his true 'I', when the hindrances to spiritual understanding have been eliminated. These hindrances turn out to be all the ideas which cling to the 'I', and which seem to confirm its mortality as no more than a body and mind. But the spiritual way is, in the phrase of St Paul, 'to put on immortality'. It is not really a 'putting on', for our spirit is immortal. But it is learning to sift away all the notions that cover and confuse the pure self-knowledge, and to realize what we truly are, as pure being.

Science is struggling to know the process of creation and is ingeniously trying to simulate the conditions that obtained in the instants after the so-called Big Bang. But the question, 'What banged?' is not one that is easily answered. As the final lines of the Creation Hymn point out:

Who then knows, who has declared  
From whence was born this creation?  
The Gods came later.  
Who then knows whence it arose?  
He from whom this creation arose,  
Whether he made it or did not make it,  
Only the highest seer in the highest heaven knows.  
Or perhaps he does not know.

The supreme gift of the spiritual Yoga is that it teaches us how to contemplate our own existence, which means our own innermost and ultimate Self, without the clothing of false notions. This power of contemplation will penetrate to a level of our being that is deeper than the creation we are familiar with—the world created and sustained in our own mind. When we awaken to this ground of our being, which transcends the processes of thought, we realize the fullness of consciousness and that there is no duality whatsoever. In the words of the Avadhut, quoted earlier: 'Know Atman (the Self) to be one, ever the same, changeless. How canst thou say: "I am the meditator, and this is the object of meditation"? How can perfection be divided?'

The perfection of pure being has never been divided. This is the truth of non-duality. Transcending our human powers of expression, it can only be hinted at in such lines as:

There was (then) no distinction between night and day.  
That One breathed by itself without breath:  
Since then there has been nothing other than it.

While our eyes see only the material world, we are convinced that reality consists of millions of different things, all of which are given particular names and have separate identities. This is the realm that the Vedanta philosophy calls ‘name and form’, basically, what the eye sees and the ear hears. But never think this is the whole of reality. There is a deeper reality that, in the phrase of the Bible, ‘eye hath not seen nor ear heard’. That reality is spiritual and it is our true nature, just as it is the true being of the universe. This is the pure being referred to in the Upanishads, which has never, in reality, lost its purity or become fragmented into multiplicity.

So we may return to the questions: ‘Has anything really changed? Has the One really lost its oneness? Or does this unity prevail at the highest level of experience and perception?’

The answer is that the modification of the Absolute into name and form, including the human mind, is apparent and not real. The world is ‘caused’ by the one pure Being, in the same way that a snake is ‘caused’ by a rope in which it is imagined. As long as we see the snake, we need to be ‘educated’ out of our error. And as long as we are convinced of the reality of empirical experience, we need the help of spiritual education in order to ‘see more’. But at no time did the rope really become a snake, and, similarly, at no time has the Absolute really been anything other than ‘one only, without a second’, and this is the true Self of man. Self-realization reveals that there has never been any duality, nor is there any possibility of it being other than the Self of all.

The following sentence may serve as a text for meditation that will keep the highest truth in the forefront of our mind:

OM. One and the same Self is the only one Self in each and all and that am I. OM

**B.D.**

## Energy —Vital and Mental

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ACCORDING to the view of Hatha Yoga, energy, either vital or mental, is not created in the human body. It is an element of *Prakriti* [the primordial ‘matter’ of creation] pervading the atmosphere. Man receives this energy and discharges it. By food of a natural type, the tissues of the body are repaired and rendered fit to receive the vital energy. We transmute it into different forms in the state of activity and discharge it. As natural objects are made into finished products by human skill and endeavour, so the vital and mental energy is turned into works of art, beauty and utility by the skill of man.

It is an error to believe that you must eat quantities of food in order to have a fund of vital energy. A physically slight person, whose diet may be simple and spare, may have much more vital and creative energy than one who feeds well.

The mental energy is expressed as thought, emotion, will, imagination and memory. It is not created in the brain but is received from the region of *Hiranyagarbha*, the mind and vitality in its macrocosmic or universal aspect. No one need be dull. Every man, under the Yoga discipline, can quicken his mental energy. Through practising the Yoga methods of meditation and goodwill, and by other spiritual means, one receives more of the psychic energy from the subtle region of *Hiranyagarbha* than those who live a life of passion, sense-delights or sloth, alternating with valueless excitement.

Vital and mental relaxation, voluntarily undertaken, is an important factor in health and peace. It does not mean absolute inactivity. It is the resting of the nerves and the mind in God, either through devotion, study or meditation. Peace and general tranquillity are excellent means to quicken the vital and mental energy. Universal goodwill, peace and non-violence are the highest aids to a good life.

When the mind is restless, occupied with petty political events, and subject to fear, it is rendered unfit to receive the inner vitality. The state of infatuation and fixation of the mind either in ambition or sex-love incapacitates it for peace and devotion. Ideal love is a tranquil state based on universal good and appreciation of beauty.

Both Zeno, the Stoic philosopher, and Lao Tzu are followers of nature; both aim at inner peace and outer repose; both worship wisdom. But in the system of the spiritual Yoga, neither nature nor society is a substitute for the highest Reality. It is God, the inner Reality, in which both nature and society subsist. He is truth, the only object of real love and inner pursuit.

When man has discharged his energy excessively, he seeks rest, which means inner relaxation. Rest for the sake of rest is valueless, nay, harmful. Even rest must be creative of the state of meditation and beauty. Rest does not mean doing nothing useful and going to football matches or a senseless repose at the seaside. Rest is relaxation of the nerves and the mind in contemplation of truth and beauty. There is no real rest for the mind in the region of the senses, which is usually in a state of turmoil, sometimes imperceptible. As a bird in a cage is never happy or restful, though it may sing—its home is the infinite blue and enjoyment of nature—so the human soul, in a state of desire and aversion, in fear of loss and tied to hope, is never at rest and is cut off from the great solace of rest and peace in God within.

When the soul is lifted to the airy region of devotion and meditation, then it is in its element. This is the object of our daily spiritual practices: contact with the eternal region of truth and beauty. What must I wish, what desire? Not wealth, not fame, not the narrow love of form, but *shanti* (spiritual peace) and the creation of beauty and truth within, and the good of all without. There is rest in the pursuit of a high spiritual ideal, in the study of the *Bhagavad Gita* and in the service of truth.

Contemplation of God within as the Self sets the mind and soul free to soar in the infinite blue of *shanti*. In such a life of the spirit, truth is externalized as beauty of conduct, as art which uplifts the mind, and poetry, which is the food of the soul. 'Lift up the self by the self' says the *Gita*. The most potent force at the disposal of man is his mind. It can bind and also free him from all limitations.

Aristotle advises us to think of the general in the particular. This is the way the mind can contact infinity in the finite and yield its real power. A proper understanding of the picture of the world as a whole and also of one's Self as the Absolute, is essential to the liberation of

the individualized consciousness. This is the goal of life. Let there be no misunderstanding about this matter.

The Absolute, Brahman, when considered in relation to the world, which is neither a dream nor a void, is the centre of all power and knowledge. It is not an empty, attributeless abstraction; in it the world, the mind and the vitality abide as *Maya* (the divine power that creates appearances). It is the source of creation, a most compassionate guide of the evolution of life.

The highest purpose is to control the mind, purify it and lead it to concentration on truth and virtue, and meditation on the Lord as one's true Self. This meditation, given by a loving and traditional teacher and done in deep devotion, reveals the truth of the oneness of the individual and the cosmic—God.

**H.P.Shastri**

## **A PRAYER**

Teach us to forgive all fancied wrongs,  
for, in reality, no outside entity  
can either harm or profit us.

Teach us not to harm ourselves  
through our own ignorance,  
and enlighten our hearts  
with the supreme spiritual truth.

May the clouds of nescience roll away,  
away from the surface of the earth!  
May those who are deluded  
realize that all is One,  
that all the nations of the earth  
are beads strung on the same thread  
of Consciousness.

**H.P.S.**

## Light Above the Cloud of Unknowing

*The Cloud of Unknowing* is a classical text from the Christian mystical tradition. The narrator, addressing his pupil, suggests that there are four stages in the spiritual path, which he calls ordinary, special, solitary and perfect. By ordinary he means a life in the world lived according to ethical principles. Special means those who have entered a spiritual community or vocation. A solitary is one of those few within such a community who dedicate themselves entirely to the inner spiritual enquiry. Perfection is the culmination of the solitary life, conceived as the bliss of union with God. Evidently the author considers his pupil to have reached the stage of a solitary, and he assumes that the pupil wishes to know what is necessary for him to proceed towards perfection. This is the main subject of the book. He says:

Your whole life now must be one of longing, if you are to achieve perfection. And this longing must be in the depths of your will, put there by God, with your consent. But a word of warning: He is a jealous lover...He does not ask for help, He asks for you. His will is that you should look to Him, and let Him have His way... If you are willing to do this, you need only to lay hold upon God humbly, and He will soon help you. God is ready and is waiting for you. But what am I to do, you say, and how am I to lay hold?

The value of this book is how fully and practically it answers this question. The narrator says that in this loving, longing reaching out to God, the pupil will find what he calls 'a cloud of unknowing' between himself and God. That is, he will be aware of not being able to fully understand what God is. The teacher says that this should not alarm or discourage the pupil. This unknowing is inevitable because God cannot be known by the intellect, which is a finite instrument. Therefore the seeker has to enter consciously and willingly into an unknowing, what St John of the Cross called a dark night.

The author then says with particular emphasis and directness that God cannot be known by our intellect, but that He can be known by love. Students of the upanishadic tradition will be reminded of the teaching that words and the mind fall back from the supreme truth, but

that by complete devotion, God can be known and entered into.

Throughout the rest of the book the author returns to the need for this constant preoccupation with this cloud of unknowing, wherein one accepts that God cannot be known by the mind but may be united with in love. He evidently considers this the essential, central secret heart of the life dedicated to contemplation and spiritual union, and the book is largely an expansion and commentary on how to go about this and overcome the obstacles to it.

We know little about the author of this book. A few other writings are assumed to be by him based on similarity of style. He lived in England, probably in central England, during the fourteenth century. He is a member of the church and almost certainly a priest. One can imagine him as a monk, perhaps an experienced spiritual director of novices; although some scholars favour the idea that he ministered to a parish. It is clear that he is a learned man, in the true sense that he has evidently studied great spiritual texts very carefully and thought about them deeply. But he writes very much from his own experience, without scholarly apparatus: his writing is free of any desire to display either erudition or originality for their own sakes. He expresses no concern with any tension between faith and reason, nor is there any reference to other religious traditions. Such matters evidently never presented themselves to him and he is not a man to concern himself with anything other than the important matters that do in fact present themselves to us. He is concerned only with the practical task of coming closer to God.

He was not of course aware of the teachings of Advaita Vedanta, which teach explicitly that the final reality is indivisible wholeness; beyond any divisions and separations there is a greater whole that encompasses them. The implication is that we ourselves are part of this wholeness, and that when fully realized, our true Self is known to be identical with the Universal Self, or God. Advaita teaches that simple logic implies a unity beyond diversity, and that the testimony of the Upanishads and other enlightened authorities confirms this transcendental unity of the individual and the Absolute.

In contrast, some Christian and other religious traditions have looked with reservation on the claim that the individual soul can in any sense be perfectly identified with God. And it is true that this claim may be

disastrously misunderstood without the clear and subtle philosophy of Advaita which distinguishes between absolute truth and the level of separation and individuality. When it is said that the Self is God, it certainly does not mean that the mind or ego is God. It means that the mind or ego is not the true Self.

Thus in the writings of even the finest Christian mystics, such as St John of the Cross and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an ambiguity appears whenever the presentation seems to be leading towards the conclusion that a soul perfectly divested of individuality and wholly 'oned' with God, is in fact nothing other than God. This may be to avoid being misunderstood or arousing the animosity of the orthodox. Whatever the reason, there is not the explicit statement—which clarifies so much theory and practice—that the goal of spiritual enquiry is freedom from all appearance, and identity with Divine reality, although there are times when the teachings do seem to be pointing to that conclusion. The author of *The Cloud* writes of the fourth stage, of perfection, that like the others, it begins in this life, but unlike them, it goes on forever in the bliss of infinity. Elsewhere he says that at times the contemplative ceases to labour, and God, as it were, acts within him. He says that 'at such a time, a spiritual light pierces the cloud of unknowing and shows some of God's secrets, of which it is not possible to speak.'

There is very much we can learn and simply enjoy from the writings of this author, who is unconcerned with technicalities, and interested solely in deeper direct experience of the presence of God. He knows that the treasure lies nowhere outside, but entirely within the human soul; and that the obstacles to be overcome are in the would-be contemplative's own mind and emotions. Here is the fundamental idea in his own words, from Chapter 3:

When you first begin, you find only darkness and, as it were, a cloud of unknowing. You do not know what this means except that in your will you feel a simple steadfast intention reaching out towards God. Do as you will, this darkness and this cloud remain between you and God, and stop you both from seeing Him in the clear light of rational understanding and from experiencing his loving sweetness in your affection.

This may be reassuring to many of us who have sought to approach the truth within ourselves and found that we cannot know and cannot feel what we aspire to know and feel, and have been discouraged. But properly understood, this not knowing and not feeling may be a door, not a barrier, if we can learn the lesson that the Lord is beyond the reach of the mind. He goes on:

Reconcile yourself to wait in this darkness as long as is necessary, but still go on longing after Him whom you love. For if you are to feel Him or to see Him in this life, it must always be in this cloud, in this darkness. And if you will work hard at what I tell you, I believe that through God's mercy you will achieve this very thing.

God cannot be known with the mind. If God is to be approached, the usual way of knowing, through the mind and senses, has to be abandoned. If one goes into this, one finds that with it comes humility, submission and a sensitive alertness. This may seem a hard teaching, yet some may also find consolation that their own experience is being acknowledged.

Then comes the positive side. 'But only to our intellect is He incomprehensible: not to our love.'

All rational beings possess two faculties, the power of knowing and the power of loving. To the first, to the intellect, God who made them is forever unknowable, but to the second, to love, He is completely knowable. So much so, that one loving soul by itself, through its love, may know for itself Him who is incomparably more than sufficient to fill all souls that exist...To know it for oneself is endless bliss; its contrary is endless pain.

How then is the enquirer to proceed? One of the first requirements is to make the best use of time. Without trace of pedantry, the author makes valuable philosophical and psychological observations about time. He says:

Be very careful how you spend time. There is nothing more precious. In the twinkling of an eye heaven may be won or lost. God shows that time is precious, for he never gives two moments of time side by side, but always in succession... And man's natural impulses occur one at a time.

Unite yourself to Him by love and trust and by that union you will be joined both to him... and with all in heaven and earth who by their love take proper account of every moment.

So pay great attention to this marvellous work of grace within your soul. It is always a sudden impulse and comes without warning, springing up to God like some spark from the fire. An incredible number of such impulses arise in one brief hour in the soul who has a will to this work.

This gives some idea of what the author considers to be the essential inner work to be done by one who wishes to come closer to the divine truth within. It also indicates how active and fully occupying it is for one who decided to give hours each day, and eventually all his life, to this work of contemplation, although to worldly eyes it may seem to be a passive and withdrawn existence.

The 'unknowing' of which our author speaks is not a condition of mental sloth; it is a turning towards the higher reality, recognizing that it lies beyond the scope of the mind and senses, and consciously accepting this, with all reverence and alertness. One might describe this as a child-like state, although it is very far from a childish one.

What the author means by 'unknowing' (which is a kind of intense knowing) is further illumined by contrast with another part of his teaching. Between the soul and God, he says, is a cloud of unknowing. What is necessary is to create another cloud, between ourselves and all created things, and this cloud is to be a cloud of forgetting. He writes:

If ever you are to come to this cloud and live and work in it, then just as this cloud of unknowing is, at it were, above you, between you and God, so you must also put a cloud of forgetting beneath you and all creation. We are apt to think that we are very far from God because of the cloud of unknowing between us and him, but surely it would be more correct to say that we are much farther from him if there is no cloud of forgetting between us and the whole created world.

He goes on to say that it is not just particular things that should be left under this cloud of forgetting, but everything. The point is that whenever the mind is occupied with an object, that object has come between us and God.

Unlike some modern philosophers, the author does not doubt that our minds can give us useful knowledge of worldly things. He has evidently reflected on this and concluded that the world and our minds are both created by the Lord, and our minds are designed to understand and use objects and ideas. But there is a hidden danger in this capacity. Because our minds are so effective at perceiving and conceiving the wonderful world around us, we come to rely on and trust them and forget that their competence does not extend to the infinite reality. Trying to know God with the mind is the source of most of the obstructions encountered by seekers on the way. He says:

For the love of God be careful, and do not attempt to achieve this experience intellectually. I tell you truly it cannot come this way. So leave it alone.... Through the grace of God we can know fully about all other matters, and think about them, yet of God himself no man can think. Therefore I will leave on one side everything I can think, and choose for my love that thing which I cannot think. Why? Because He may well be loved, but not thought. By love He can be caught and held, but by thinking never.

It will be clear that the author is speaking of love in a special way. The usual worldly understanding of love is inseparable from a happiness in the beauty and other qualities of what we love and a pleasure in the sweet feelings they arouse in us. We have already seen that this is not the author's view of love of God.

If we may say so reverently, when we are engaged in this work, it profits little or nothing to think even of God's kindness and worth, or of the joys of Heaven. In this particular matter it will not help at all. For though it is good to think about the kindness of God, and to love and praise Him for it, it is far better to think about Him as He is, and to love and praise Him for Himself.

The author has a most insightful understanding of the difficulties that arise in the spiritual life, from within our own minds. Those with some experience of inner enquiry and life in a spiritual community know that without intensity our spiritual life will lapse into conventionalism. It is also essential to preserve a sober balance, inwardly and outwardly. This combination of intensity and balance is a quality of the spiritually

mature, and is best learned from their example and influence.

The author strongly advises his reader not to practise unnatural, exaggerated emotionalism in his relations with God.

For the love of God be careful in this matter, and do not overstrain yourself emotionally or beyond your strength. Work with eager enjoyment rather than with brute force. The more eager your work, the more humble and spiritual it becomes; the more crude, the more material and animal. Surely such violent strainings are inseparable from a materialistic and physical outlook and are dry for lack of the dew of grace.

We mentioned that the author is most perceptive about the difficulties on the way, often making one feel as if in the presence of a reassuring friend. He is also practical and offers real solutions to difficulties; these solutions are fresh and obviously based on personal experience. In regard to emotionalism distorted by misunderstanding or hidden materialism, the author offers a particular corrective. He introduces it gently, asking that it be considered and not hastily misjudged. He suggests that the pupil might adopt a certain attitude in his relation to God, which is, in a sense to try to hide his feelings of love for God from God. One really cannot improve or abbreviate the author's own expression:

If I may use a funny example, I would suggest that you do all you can to cloak your great and ungoverned spiritual urge, as though you were altogether unwilling that God should know how glad you would be to see Him, to have Him, to feel Him. Perhaps you think I am speaking childishly or playfully. Yet I believe that whoever had the grace to put what I say into practice would have a lovely game spiritually with Him, just as an earthly father does with his child, hugging and kissing him.

Some experience of both human and spiritual emotionalism may lead one to appreciate the wisdom and creativity of this suggestion. The author goes on:

One reason is this: by such a 'hidden demonstration', I want to get you away from the violence of emotional reaction, into the purity and depth

of spiritual experience, and so ultimately to help you to tie that spiritual knot of burning love between you and God, in spiritual oneness and harmony of will.

We see here a true spiritual teacher at work. He is trying by every means to lead the pupil to find that essential balance of intensity and sobriety, and another critical balance for the spiritual aspirant—which is a willingness to learn completely new things from the teacher on the one hand and growing self-reliance on the other. About this love of God, he goes on:

At the same time, however, I tell you not to hide it completely. That would be the advice of a fool to tell you to do what in any case cannot be done! Yet still I tell you to do what you can to hide it! Why do I say this? Because I want you to plunge it deep down into your spirit, far removed from any material admixture which would make it less spiritual, and that much farther from God.

Perhaps we should say that the practices given here are not entirely similar to those presented by the teachers of the Yoga of Self-Knowledge, which explain clearly how there cannot be more than one reality, so the reality in each is the reality in all, the universal reality. The task is to come into direct contact with that reality by stilling and purifying the mind of all that obscures the universal consciousness. The theory and practice of Yoga works to that aim directly. Still, the Christian and yogic methods in their different ways both seek to purify the mind and overcome egoism, and it is the resistance of the lower mind to this purification that gives rise to most of the difficulties of the path.

Early in *The Cloud of Unknowing* the author writes about humility. Humility, he says, is of two kinds, which he calls imperfect and perfect. The kind of humility that is produced by reflecting on one's sins and shortcomings, the method generally taught by Christians at the time, he calls imperfect humility. The other means, he says, is to dwell not on one's failings, but on the nature of God, whose greatness and glory exceed all imagining. This method closely resembles the yogic practice of affirming the highest truth. The author says that sometimes one might become so absorbed in the nature of God as to forget one's individual

self completely. This is perfect humility. He suggests that Mary Magdalene is an example of this ideal. He clearly sees this affirmation of God's greatness leading to perfect humility as uniquely powerful. He writes:

The secret love of a purified soul, continually pressing into this dark cloud of unknowing between you and God, truly and perfectly contains within itself that perfect humility, seeking as it does nothing less than God.

He asks, would the Magdalene have come down from her longing to brood and sorrow over her past? He replies:

Of course she did not! Because God let her know that she could never succeed in that way. Therefore she pinned her longing desire to this cloud of unknowing, and learned to love what she will never understand with her mind or delight in with her emotions. And I think that for the most part she is so engrossed in loving his Godhead that she gives little thought to anything else, physical or spiritual, even to his beauty and loveliness.

These reflections lead into a consideration of the story of Mary and Martha. According to the Gospel of Luke, Christ was invited into the home of a woman called Martha. She had a sister called Mary, who simply sat at the Lord's feet and listened to him. Martha was busy preparing hospitality, and said to Christ, 'Do you not mind that my sister is leaving all the work to me? Please tell her to help me.' Christ replied, 'Martha, Martha, you are concerned with many things. But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, and it cannot be taken away from her.'

For the author of *The Cloud*, Mary and Martha are representatives of two religious types, which he calls the actives and the contemplatives. He says that the active and contemplative lives both have two stages, and that the higher stage of the active life is the lower stage of the contemplative. The active life is concerned with good works, the contemplative with loving God exclusively. He is definite that the active life is good only so far as it prepares for the life devoted to love and knowledge of God; it cannot lead to the goal itself. Thus he concludes that Mary has chosen the better part in life, and it cannot be taken from her.

His view is that those who pursue active good works will always accuse the contemplatives of being impractical and wasting time, without having any understanding of what they are really doing and its benefits. And he is counselling against the view that one can only dedicate oneself to inner enquiry when everything else is sorted out and secure. He is definite that if the will to approach God is sincere enough, then will come what is needed, or the strength to do without it if necessary.

After this passage on the contemplative life the author goes on to write at length about how those who have pursued the contemplative life to its consummation will in truth be the most charitable of people, truly well-disposed to any apparent foes, and most rapid and willing in responding to others' legitimate needs.

We mentioned earlier two kinds of unknowing. The first is the cloud of unknowing in relation to God, which is truly a new degree of alertness and consciousness of what lies beyond the mind. The other is the cloud of forgetting, the putting aside of what has previously been accepted as most obviously real and significant, the world of apparent created things. The author says that this cloud of forgetting is to be sustained in particular to those thoughts and memories that come into the mind reminding us of past failings and imperfections, trying to perpetuate and re-establish themselves. He acknowledges that this forgetting is difficult and hard work, but, he assures us, it is possible. Here he offers one of his characteristically fresh and practical suggestions. He says to the pupil that, in this, he might profitably try what he calls a sort of 'trick'. He writes:

If it is really hard work, you can use every 'trick', scheme and spiritual stratagem you can find to put them away. These arts are better learned from God by experience than from any human teacher. Yet I can show you something of these spiritual arts. Try this: Do everything you can to act as if they [the past thoughts and memories] were not pushing in so strongly between you and God. Try to look, as it were, over their shoulders, seeking something else, which is God. If you do so, I believe that you will soon find your work much easier. I believe that this stratagem will be found to be nothing else than a longing and desire for God.

There is a passage that further illumines what the author means by unknowing. He writes:

If you take the trouble to test it, you will find that when all other things and activities, even your own, are forgotten, there still remains between you and God the stark awareness of your own existence. And this awareness too must go, before you experience contemplation in its perfection.

This again may strike a note of familiarity for those who have made some experiments in meditation and contemplation. The author writes of this stage with great insight.

Were the soul not strengthened by its good endeavours, it would be unable to stand the discomfort that the awareness of its own existence brings, for as often as in his purity of heart he would know the true awareness of God, he feels that he may not, because he finds his awareness bound and filled with himself...

Yet in all this he does not want to cease existing, that would be madness. Though he longs to be free of the awareness of existing, he wants very much to go on in existence, and he gives God heartfelt thanks for this precious gift.

Again, it may be deeply comforting to find someone writing with such directness on things which often feel as if they must be lonely experiences because of their subtlety and interiority.

How then is one to pass beyond this continued awareness of limited individuality? It should be said again that the teachings of Advaita Vedanta provide particular help in this, as they directly address the fact that psychological experience is comprised of pure consciousness and the mental structures it illumines, and that our task is to distinguish between them. When this is understood, one's fundamental identity with the transcendental can be directly affirmed. Still, students of Yoga will recognize that this becoming free of the sense of being a limited mind, is not something that can ever be engineered by the mind, and the very attempt to do so is to perpetuate the difficulty. It can only be affected by the power or reality beyond the mind, what in Christian terms is called the grace of God, and the humility and reverence implied by this term.

As we saw, the author of *The Cloud*, like the yogis, believes that the way to purity is not dwelling on our limitations, but, as it were, stepping over them, with a longing, loving concentration on the Lord. He makes another practical suggestion with similarities to yogic methods. He says that at a certain stage in meditation, it is best simply to sum up all the teaching into a single word, preferably a very short one, like 'God'. At this point such thinking can help no further; it is better to focus just on that short, single word. He says, think of the times when people suddenly cry out words like, 'help!' or 'fire!' Think of how much significance is packed into those monosyllables, and how counter-productive it would be to spin it out in many words. In a similar way, he says, call on the name of God. Students of eastern mystical schools will recognize how the author's experience has led him to something resembling the practice of repeating a mantram.

In one passage the author says to the pupil that others 'might tell you to withdraw all your powers and thought within yourself and worship God there, and he would be saying what was absolutely right and true. I do not care to do so, because of my fear of a wrong and physical interpretation of what is said. But what I will say is this: See that in no sense you withdraw into yourself. And, briefly, I do not want you to be outside yourself either! "Well", you will say, "where am I to be? Nowhere, according to you!" Yes, that is where I want you. When you are nowhere physically, you are everywhere spiritually.'

Here we find the author again as the most energetic, kindly teacher, willing his pupil to become a true learner, and truly independent, and to find those essential balances that keep us healthy and growing on the spiritual path. He says:

Let go of everything and everywhere in exchange for nowhere and nothing... One can feel this nothing more easily than see it, for it is completely dark to those who have only just begun to look at it. Yet, to speak more accurately, it is overwhelming spiritual light that blinds the soul that is experiencing it... Who is it then who is calling it nothing? Our outer self to be sure, not our inner. Our inner self calls it All, for through it he is learning the secret of all things...

**P.H.**

## How to Talk to the People

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SOCRATES was a saintly soul in his practical life, which makes the nearest approach to that of Jesus of Nazareth. In theoretical wisdom he was conversant with the philosophy of the day. He devoted his life to the practice of purity and tried to serve the people by teaching them how to live a spiritual life. He was sure of the immortality of the soul and he attached the greatest value to the life of restraint and tranquillity. The way in which he met his death is most admirable. He was offered the opportunity to escape from prison and live at least a few years of peace and service, but he refused the offer and died a real hero.

On the other hand, Jesus was neither a philosopher nor a man of learning. He did not have the advantages of education, yet his name is worshipped all over the world today. He is the real founder of the institutions of charity in the West. Wilberforce was his disciple, Howard was his follower, and St Damian sacrificed his life to the lepers in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Let us try to discover the reason for the success of Jesus and the failure of Socrates.

When Socrates talked to the people, as shown in the Dialogues given to the world by his immortal pupil, Plato, he exposed to his listeners their ignorance. He seemed to say to them: 'You are ignorant, you know nothing'. He made use of the intellect to convince people of the metaphysical truth he loved. He was an example in self-sacrifice and purity of life, but it is doubtful whether he loved the people. His dialogues and his contacts with the people betray a kind of coldness.

When the Lord of Galilee talked to the people, he did not indulge in intellectual gymnastics. He told them that they were sons of God and that the Kingdom of Heaven was within each and every one of his hearers. He demonstrated that each and every man was a temple of love and truth. Besides, though Socrates gave out the spiritual truth, he did not teach in clear terms the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

The debt we owe to Socrates, and particularly to Aristotle, is immense; but Aristotle teaches us only the grandeur of the practical life, of the scientific world, and the improvement of social life. He has not

spoken clearly about man's relationship to God. His teachings are clothed in a very thick intellectual garb. If you read Aristotle's essay on the nature of happiness, you will hardly find it interesting or even elevating, but the letters of St Paul, a follower of Jesus, are most eloquent and of unsurpassed rhetorical value on the subject of charity or love. The school of Socrates practically ended with him. The Academy founded by his pupil Plato soon degenerated into sophistry and impractical useless dialectics. None of his pupils was like St Augustine, who opened the eyes of the people of the world to the spiritual truth.

I am fully aware of the debt the world owes to Hippocrates, Eratosthenes, Euclid and the Neo-Platonists, but the practical outcome of these schools does not take us very far in the realm of goodness and the higher life.

Now comes the question, how to talk Vedanta to the people? Shri Swami Rama Tirtha has said on this point: 'On the heart of the people is written the word "pull", but you misread it as "push". First impress the heart of your listeners with love; then give them arguments.' Sincerity, that is, a complete absence of pretence, and a spirit of democracy, must characterize any speech. Let us be careful not to impress the people with such ideas as: 'You do not know, I know.'

The Saint Universal, Shri Dada of Aligarh, used few words in his communication of truth, but each word was like a pure pearl of love, and steeped in the brilliance of selflessness and benevolence. When he talked to the people, they used to say: 'Sweetness and love come in streams from the lips of our Dada Bhagwan.' The Gita has become so popular in India because it is expressed in highly poetical language of love, and its purport is universal good.

You may have noticed that there is also real poetry in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Who can forget His great utterance: 'Consider the lilies of the field...'? Plato is lacking in these heart-charming ways of expression. Aristotle's rhetoric is too final.

Immanuel Kant defines cognition as a judgement. We must be careful that our judgement is expressed in terms universal and is not narrow and dogmatic. While speaking of judgement, Kant says: 'Universality of expression is much more appealing than dogmatism.'

Shri Dada never used expediency, as he was selfless to the core. He knew that truth, justice, directness and frankness are the surest means to carry conviction. He never made a compromise with the holy truth.

In the days of his preaching as a wandering pundit, the writer avoided fame, recognition and money. He lived on the barest necessities of life. In order to avoid recognition, he stayed in a garden out of the city, went to meetings to which he was invited, delivered his address in the form of a message from the Saint Universal and left the place at once, to return to obscurity. He never participated in the processions of welcome; and now at the dusk of his life, he is proud of those moments and not of the days when crowned heads called him their Guru.

There is no greater pleasure than to suffer for the sake of truth, devotion to God and for the good of others.

**H.P. Shastri**

### SONG OF BIRDS

The sweet songs of the thrush,  
The warbling notes of the robin,  
Ditties sharp and clear of the blackbird,  
Said to me:  
'Do not dream idly.  
Man is under the shadows  
Of darkness and illusion.  
He dreams of hate, power, sex infatuation.  
Go, tell him of the One,  
The basis of multiplicity.  
Teach him to love and reflect  
On the true and the transcendent.'

**H.P.S.**

## From Shadow to Substance

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THE POET and writer, Israel Zangwill, published a volume of poems which he called 'Blind Children'. In the title poem of this book, he depicts blind boys and girls at playtime, playing delightedly on the college lawns, unmindful of any limitation to their means of knowledge. After all, they have their other senses. They can smell the grass and the flowers, hear what the poet calls their playmates' glad symphony, feel the 'cool touch of western wind, sunshine's divine caress'. How should they know or feel, he asks, that they are in darkness? Then he goes on:

But, O the miracle!  
If a Redeemer came,  
Laid finger on their eyes—  
One touch, and what a world,  
New-born in loveliness.

Finally, he reflects on the world experience most people enjoy, the world revealed to all five of our senses. Is it not the case, he ponders, that this experience, too, might be less than the whole of reality? And if there were a similar divine touch, laid on our being, then:

One touch, and what a strange  
Glory might burst on us,  
What a hid universe!

The missing sense in our case is not a physical faculty, but the spiritual sense, which leads man to the revelation of the nature of the absolute and perfect Reality behind the appearances. It is not really missing, but latent and unrevealed in most people. As for the world as we know it, several thinkers, from Plato to the exponents of the Vedanta philosophy, have compared it to a realm of shadows.

With shadows, we are never quite sure what they represent, for their appearance tells us very little about what is really there. Sometimes shadows are beautiful. If you sit in a wood in the summer sunlight, where the quivering leaves cause rippling shadows on the ground in front of you, you might have the pleasing fantasy that you were in a fairyland. Even so, those trembling patches of shadow are nothing

compared with the green, glossy, life-filled leaves of the trees, or the birds that flit among the branches. So, too, however beautiful the life revealed by our senses may be in the realm of nature, or music or art, the spiritual doctrine is that there is a higher experience, infinitely superior to the known paths of the world. And the source of our experience, even now, is divine. There is a meditation text which crystallizes this idea:

OM. THE WORLD AND THE HUMAN MIND ARE SHADOWS OF THE LORD. I AM THE REALITY, TRUTH-CONSCIOUSNESS-BLISS. OM

The first part of this meditation text employs the word 'shadow' as a metaphor, and if the whole text is contemplated, it points to the reality as man's true Self.

Such revelations are found, with greater or less frequency, in all the acknowledged scriptures of mankind. They seem to be lofty speculations, whereby the human mind stretches itself in hope of an ideal world presently beyond reach. But actually it is the other way around. These statements of the intrinsic divinity of man are made by those who have direct experience of this truth, and are like rope ladders lowered to us from the sublime region, whereby we may rise to the heights of inner illumination. There is a definite method to fit the mind for this ascent from the realm of shadows to that of substance. In the words of an Upanishad, there is a path by which we may lead our mind from darkness to light, from error and uncertainty to truth, and from death to the realization of conscious immortality.

In the Indian tradition, the process which effects this inner transformation is called the spiritual Yoga; in other traditions it may have different names. We are used to Yoga as a physically-based system that manipulates the body in order to exercise it and also to gain certain favourable psychological effects. If Yoga is properly taught, these effects are linked to the deeper, spiritual side of our nature. They can give us a measure of peace, and can strengthen our nerves so that we are more resilient to the ups and downs of life.

But the higher and true Yoga goes far beyond this. Here our artistry and technique are applied to the conversion of the random and unregulated mental activity into a higher process, which is purposeful,

focused and designed to release wisdom and satisfaction from the depths of our own being.

The release of this happiness within us—not its creation, but its release—begins with an understanding of the laws of the mind and its hidden potentialities. The crucial law is that when our mind is stilled, purified of negative emotions, and rightly informed about the spiritual purpose of life and the nature of the Self, a higher phase of the psychological life will become operative. We will find ourselves capable of a subtler, more directed and more refined way of thinking, feeling and willing. The inner transformation is brought about by following a carefully conceived path involving meditation, devotion to truth, self-discipline, universal goodwill, and other aids to spiritual understanding that have been taught by the Masters of the path.

The progressive changes to our inner life cannot be guessed at or anticipated on the analogy of the powers that are usually manifest in the mind—reason, imagination, memory, will, and so on. The spiritual development, and the openings it leads to, can only be worked for and experienced when the mind is duly prepared. But we can aid that preparation, and accelerate it, by reading and thinking about what the sages and mystics have indicated to us about spiritual growth, and thus can catch something of the flavour of the genuine experience of spiritual insight. In the classical text, *Yoga Vasishtha*, we find the following statement:

Through the instructions of the teachers, the mind comes to perceive by its own cogitations the presence of God within itself; and it sees the universe spread out before it like the bright rays of the moon. The divine Spirit is imperishable, and after it is once known to the human soul, not even a grain of error can remain.

How do we begin to effect our emergence from the shadow world of conventional values to the radiance of the spiritual vision, to what the poet Zangwill called the 'hid universe' of divine glory? It starts as an approach to the inner light through faith. This means faith in our self, our divine nature and our higher potentialities. There is so much difference between a packet of seeds and a bed of flowers. Yet the gardener knows the nature of the seeds and the potential in them.

Gardening has been used as an analogy of man's spiritual development. In Goethe's great drama, *Faust*, there is a dialogue between God and the devil, about who will win the soul of this man Faust, who is full of inner restlessness and vague aspiration. And the Lord says:

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

The student of Yoga must have the faith of a gardener, because a great development awaits him that is beyond the scope of his imagination.

At the same time we make our experiments in the field of controlled and directed thought. If we do meditation, we are already arousing a sense of authority over our internal world. And as we expose ourselves to spiritual teachings, we will develop a keen sense of the value of time and attention, and will wish to make the best use of these precious, but limited, commodities.

Unlike some properties, the body does not have a 999-year lease, and life passes more rapidly than we realize. As a traditional verse has it, our life is seeping away like water through a cracked jug, and soon there may be no time left to improve our spiritual condition. Therefore the more time we can devote to exposing our mind to the best and most peace-giving associations, the surer will be our spiritual progress.

This way of life leads to the realization that the spiritual is our true nature and not simply an extension of our mind, as in the case of our empirical studies. We find that our true substance and reality is the inner and limitless spiritual light.

Let us briefly consider the nature of the Spirit in man, his true Self. As well as the well-known formula, existence-consciousness-bliss, the Vedanta teachers give us two words to indicate how it may be sought and discovered subjectively, as that which is essential, or substantial, in our own nature: *sakshi* or 'witness consciousness', and *adhishthana*, substratum, or ground of being

By witness consciousness is meant the inner awareness to which our thoughts appear. We know that we think, and that one thought follows another. Through careful introspection, we can monitor the rapid shifts

of feeling. Here is a light-hearted example from modern literature of a man tracing the subtle shifts in his own feelings:

Feeling a tremendous rakehell, and not liking myself much for it, and feeling rather a good chap for not liking myself much for it, and not liking myself at all for feeling rather a good chap.

This is a fast-moving sequence of feelings which replace each other, but something *outside the series* knows the sequence. The same is true of all mental presentations. Something outside the flow of thoughts, set back from it, so to say, knows the flow. Generally our attention is lost in the flow. But there is a witness, a constant and internal observer, which never appears as a thought, yet is intrinsic to all our mental activities, which would not be possible without it. Its nature is not just conscious, but pure unchanging consciousness. And this light of unchanging awareness stands in contrast to the transient, flickering, shadow-like thoughts that it illumines. It stays unaltered, untouched and neutral, whatever thoughts visit us and whatever feelings stir us. The light of Consciousness shines on as our true infinite Being. It is independent of the mind, and its 'light' reveals the mind. Spiritual life unfolds itself before this witness consciousness and in the end dissolves into it, for it is our true I.

The word *adhishthana* means substratum, or ground of being. Perhaps we can loosely compare this inner ground of pure Consciousness to the bright screen of our laptop computer. If we use such a device regularly, we take the background screen for granted, and do not feel consciously thankful for its presence. What a mixture of items the screen has to support! There are emails expressing love, anger or other matters great and small; there is the Pandora's box of internet services and allurements; we may surrender to the spell of movies or games; and, if we are writers, we will play with the typographical refinements that are available through word processing. But whatever happens on the screen (power supply permitting), it stays bright and constant, the support and illuminator of the appearances. Things happen *on* the screen, but they don't happen *to* the screen. This is because it exists in a dimension that is untouched by the pictures, and is completely free from their impress.

This parallels, in a certain sense, the free spiritual Self of man, the power behind the mind, and the true substance of our being. The ground of being, itself invisible and transcendent, ever still in its infinitude, supports the multi-coloured world, and without it there would be no world.

This inner spiritual realm and the possibility of man's enlightenment, receives little or no attention in our educational system. Few care to acknowledge its existence. But to those who have tasted its essence, it is real enough, and so we study their wisdom. Here are some more pointers, drawn from three different traditions (the Upanishads, the *Masnavi* of Rumi, and the Bible):

When the mind does not become lost, nor is it scattered, when it is motionless and does not appear in the form of objects, then it becomes the Absolute (Brahman).

The (Divine) Sun has veiled Himself in man: apprehend (this mystery), and God knows best what is right.

Be still and know that I am God.

These sayings denote that there is something more to human life than the life of society and outer struggle and achievement. There is also an inner achievement that is beckoning us. It is to discover what we are, in the deepest sense. What we need is a way to train our mind that we may be able to lift it above the normal concerns, whenever we want to, and experience the peace, joy and wisdom of our spiritual Self, the divine Sun that seems to be veiled within us.

The founder of one of the great Christian denominations in England was John Wesley. Once, he was once walking with a follower in a country lane. The man was complaining of his many troubles. They noticed a cow. It was peering at them over a stone wall. The preacher said: 'Do you know why that cow is looking over the wall? Because it can't see through it. And that is what you must do with your troubles: look over and above them.'

We may object that this is easier said than done. Isn't it like our well-meaning friends, who say to us 'Don't worry', more because they are tired of hearing our complaints than out of a genuine desire to help?

On the other hand, if we hear this 'Don't worry' call from someone who really knows and cares for us, it can make a difference. If we are told 'All is well' from someone who sees our reality and not just our personality, who knows the substance behind the shadows, then it can awaken us to a higher perspective.

The scriptures of the world have their own kind of 'don't worry' statements, and their ultimate appeal is to the fact that our deeper spiritual nature transcends the world and its worries. The 'Don't worry' of the scriptures and the sages is really telling us 'Wake up to the reality of your being and take your stand on that.' In the *Bhagavad Gita*, this is expressed in the phrase of Krishna, 'Grieve not!' The context is the teaching that man's true Self is immortal, and that happenings take place on the material plane, but these happenings never mar the eternal glory and perfect peace of our spiritual nature.

In another Gita, called the *Avadhut Gita*, the instruction is brief and direct: 'Cry not, O mind, all is Brahman.' This means that the true substance in both man and the universe is the supreme spiritual Reality, called Brahman, and it is absolute. The divine sun has veiled itself in man, and man is here to remove that veil.

If we try to manage our life without the benefit of any spiritual understanding, it is hard to ensure that all is well and will be well. This is because we dwell in what the Koran calls this 'perishable abode', and, as bodies and minds, we cannot transcend the uncertainties of the human situation. As an ancient writer has put it: 'You have yielded yourself to the sway of fortune, and you must be content with the conditions of your mistress.'

But we can do better than that, if we have some contact or trust in the spiritual dimension. When this is the case, a special and effective help becomes available to us. In Yoga the spiritual element is not some faculty that comes or goes, or even some grace that greets us from above or outside. Our higher Self is the Spirit, the infinite Spirit, and all grace and help ultimately has its source within our own being.

The nature of this Spirit is grace itself, that is, sublime help in the form of peace, relief, bliss, wisdom. This grace streams through our inner being when the inner obstructions that stop the flow are removed. One example of the grace that emanates from our higher Self, our

Atman, is found in Hari Prasad Shastri's short book, *A Path to God Realization*. He writes:

Life has proved to me that at times the mind becomes helpless and confused, and cannot then be relied upon. The mind says: 'All is over', but at such moments a light superior to the mind flashes within and guides my thoughts out of hopelessness to quite unanticipated regions. In the twinkling of an eye, all sorrow vanishes, problems are solved, the knot of fate is untied. Where does this inspiration come from? The superior power is the light of Atman, the spirit of man, flashing through the psychic medium called the heart.

All such reassurance has its source in the divine presence within our being, and this spiritual grace is open to everyone. But in order to welcome it, we need to give this spiritual dimension supreme value in our way of thinking, and cherish a longing for a way of life based on peace and wisdom.

The saving effects of this grace may come upon us quite suddenly. A simple and homely example comes from a woman who was in deep depression and felt she had reached rock bottom and didn't know what to do. The account goes:

She said it was as if the voice of God came to her—although she did not hear anything, it was just a sudden and unmistakable conviction—saying: 'Look, everything is all right. You must never forget this—that everything is all right.' This was not a specific message in so many words but it was as real to her as if she had been given a command.

All we have to do, so to say, is, like that cow, to lift our head above the stone wall. This means the ability to put on one side our particular problems, at least for the time being, and stop being identified with these troubles. In any case, our problems are often not as dire as we sometimes imagine. There is a shrewd saying of the psychologist, Alfred Adler, which helped to cool and lighten the emotions of vexed patients. 'All that you feel is very natural, but perhaps you need not feel it quite so much!'

This ability to do something positive about our inner state is at the heart of Yoga practice. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, we hear: 'No one becomes a Yogi who has not renounced thoughts.' It does not mean all

thoughts, but it does demand a willingness, sometimes, to step in and get the mind to change direction: to stop this perverse tendency of the mind to think on and on about something that clearly makes it miserable and has no final conclusion. Through Yoga, our inner alertness is sharpened and our will is strengthened, so that, internally, we can turn our thoughts to better things.

Then, one more help. In the spiritual literature, the term shadow is not always used in negative contrast to substance. Sometimes it has a very positive meaning. Particularly in Rumi's great spiritual classic, the *Masnavi*, we find the word 'shadow' used as a metaphor for the protective help and the benign and saving influence of the spiritual teacher, or the spiritual community, or the Lord himself. For instance, it is said that nothing will soften and dissolve the strong passions that shake the human heart, more easily and effectively than the company of those set on a higher way of life. This is because we absorb, like a sponge, the qualities of those whose company we keep.

As regards the spiritual teacher, called in Sufism, the Pir, Rumi writes: 'Fool, if his shadow (protection) be not over you', and again: 'Nothing in the world will break (mortify) this passion like the shadow (protection) of fellow-travellers.' Finally, he brings together the metaphor of the shadow that helps, and that which misleads:

(But) when the shadow of God is his nurse, it delivers him from (every) phantom and shadow.

The shadow of God is that servant of God who is dead to this world and living through God.

Can we hope to make serious spiritual progress while living in the world? Most of us are fortunate in the degree of freedom we enjoy: freedom of movement, freedom of thought, freedom of choice in so many ways, to do what we like with our inner life. If we like, we can become a helper of man, and a helper of our self. If we choose, we can run to the rhythm of the world, and see where it leads us. Rumi says sometimes our running with the world is like that of a silly hunter, who sees the shadow of a bird moving across the ground, and fires his arrows at the shadow. In the end he will just get tired, and go home empty-handed. But the contrast is:

(But) when the shadow of God is his nurse, it delivers him from (every) phantom and shadow.

Yoga means remembering that God is our higher Self. He is the King of the personality, the inner ruler of the mind. We are more than the mind, and we can arrange our life so that we think what we want to think, and feel what we want to feel. Thinking and feeling have a special potentiality for unfoldment into spiritual life. This spiritual unfoldment, called living with purpose, will lead us away from the shadowy uncertainties of this perishable abode, into identification with the supreme substance, massed consciousness and bliss, the Absolute, infinite and immortal nature of our true Self.

Here is a final meditation that reminds us of our reality, our capacity and our goal.

OM. THE KING WHO RULES THE MOTIONS  
OF YOUR MIND AND DISPENSES PEACE,  
IS YOUR OWN SELF, THE SUREST REFUGE. OM

A.H.C.

#### STANZAS OF SWAMI NIRBHAYANANDAJI

Enjoy the panorama of the world, but first dissipate the inner darkness. You are the lover and the Beloved.

Awaken the light of pure consciousness in your being, and do not play the spy. Let your mind rest in contemplation of the ever-shining light in your soul.

Search for the meeting-place of your fellow devotees. In their company your sorrows will be over and your heart will know peace.

*From Shanti Shatak (One Hundred Stanzas on Peace)*

#### SHANTI SADAN NEWS

During the Summer term a further series of meditation sessions was held on Tuesday evenings at Shanti Sadan. At each of them, some explanation of the principles on which meditation is based was given and then the majority of the time was devoted to the practices themselves. During the term three sets of practices were given, each for three weeks. They included a preparatory breathing or centring practice, a visualization, and a meditation on a text. In the traditional way, each session began with an inner salutation, and closed with an offering of unconditional goodwill to all living beings.

It was mentioned in the last issue that during the Easter break the Tuesday evenings would continue to be meditation sessions open to all, so that some who had attended sessions during the term could continue to join in the group meditations together, and new enquirers would also be able to come. This innovation was conducted in the traditional spirit and provided all those who participated with a valuable spiritual opportunity, and it is hoped to continue on Tuesday evenings during the coming longer Summer break.

The talks on Thursday evenings were a series on *The Inner Way: A New Response to Life*. These too were highly practical with the emphasis on how the timeless teachings on the higher Self within all, and how these teachings can help us to respond positively to the challenges of life. The themes included creative living, overcoming anxiety, and spiritual love, a subject that attracted particular interest. A talk on *Life without Barriers* described the life and teachings of Swami Rama Tirtha, whose unique expression of spiritual liberation in life is found in *Scientist and Mahatma*, published by Shanti Sadan. The series concluded with a talk on *The Flowering of Human Consciousness*.

The Spring afternoon course took place on Sunday 12 June under the title *Fulfilment through Self-Knowledge*. There were two meditation sessions which included an extended breathing practice and meditation on a traditional text. The first talk provided a grounding in the principles of the Yoga and its goal. The second talk considered the spiritual understanding of beauty and how an appreciation of it can help us on the inner path. The last talk of the afternoon was on *Enlightenment - the Crown of Life*, and was received with concentrated attention.