

**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 SPRING TERM 2011

#### Weekday evening talks at Shanti Sadan

Lectures will be given every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from Tuesday 1 February until Thursday 31 March 2011.

#### Spring 2011 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 6 March, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2.

## SELF-KNOWLEDGE

VOL. 62 NO. 1 WINTER 2011

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CONTENTS	Page
<b>A Great Spiritual Practice</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Self Concealed, Self Revealed</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Eternal Wisdom</b> <i>continued</i>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Open Secret of the Upanishads</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Inward Gaze of Princess Mirabai</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>The Devotion Habit</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>A Matter of Fact</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>The Planes of the Mind are Three</b>	<b>48</b>

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### A GREAT SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

In a recent guided meditation session, the participants were invited to do the following practice. It led on from a breathing exercise to pacify the mind:

Give free scope to your mind to think, but whatever idea the mind brings before you, say: 'It is an illusion. I do not want it.' As you sit quiet, the seeds of thought, sown by you, and which have passed into the unconscious, begin to appear in your mind, according to the law of association. When they appear, reject them by this method.

It may seem wrong to dismiss thoughts as illusory, when civilization is surely the result of stirrings that first began in the realm of thought. Yet thought itself is short-lived and transient, so that its 'reality' is questionable. Let us consult our own experience.

When we attempt meditation, we shut out the sense world and enter

a realm that is purely mental, in which the seeds of thoughts sown in the past begin to appear in the mind. Yet the past has passed; it is no more; so, in a sense, we are engaged with imaginary phenomena. If our thoughts are concerns about the future, they are speculations, and it is unlikely that the future will be precisely as we have imagined it. The Sufi master, Rumi, has observed: ‘Thought is of the past and the future. When you are freed from these two, the difficulty is solved.’

What about the thought of someone we love? Can we dismiss that as an illusion? Let us consider the opposite situation, when someone has the thought of *me*, seeing me in their mind’s eye, perhaps even engaging in an imaginary conversation with me. Is that mental image really me? How much of ‘me’ do they really know, that they could form an image that perfectly accords with the real me? It is clear that we are dealing with images that have a questionable reality status.

Is it right to dismiss emotionally-charged thoughts as illusions? If we have decided to devote the next ten minutes to a spiritual practice, keeping our mind in a particular mode, it is an illusion to believe that we should dutifully give our attention to any thoughts which spring up as distractions *at that designated time*. The great civilizers of mankind achieved their ends precisely through this capacity to turn aside distractions, and focus on their chosen theme. If it helps, one can say to such thoughts: ‘Not now. Later. I will give you full attention afterwards’, much in the way we arrange our outer affairs.

What about the persistent worry or rooted sorrow, the anxiety about an imminent dreaded event? Can these be put aside with the words: ‘It is an illusion. I do not want it’, as we might do with mental trivia? For this we need a source of inner strength and wisdom, the ability to stand on a deeper level of our own being. If we cherish spiritual values and saturate our mind in high spiritual teachings, we shall find that our mind will form an inward extension to its range, whereby its roots extend inwardly to find union with the divine source of our being. It is then that light from our own higher nature, which is one with the supreme Power, will greatly mitigate the influence of worry and anxiety, and in the end, free us from it completely.

*The practices referred to are given in full in Hari Prasad Shastri’s ‘Meditation – Its Theory and Practice’, pp 43-44.*

## Self Concealed, Self Revealed

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ADHYATMA YOGA is concerned with self-knowledge at a level far deeper than that of personality. *Persona* was originally the word for an actor’s mask, something that is exterior to the face yet which hides it and presents a different face that is quite other than the original. Although man’s personality is infinitely more subtle than a face-mask, there is a sense in which it, too, is essentially exterior to the true Self, conceals the real nature of that Self, and sets up a substitute in its place. ‘Personality’ can be explained as the picture we hold of our self in our mind’s eye, and try to project to those we meet. As individuals, this picture is not always clear to ourselves, for it is many-layered and hard to pin down. Our description of our self depends on our environment and situation. At a job interview, the *persona* we present will be different from that projected at a social gathering, and different again from the one we manifest at work or in the home.

This changing of masks for different occasions is not usually done deliberately, except in the case of a confidence trickster or an actor. It is something that we have learnt to do automatically while growing up, in order to be acceptable to our peers in each of the different circumstances of life. In time, though, we begin to suspect that there is an inner core to our being on which all these different masks are based, but we erroneously think that the inner core must be a combination or a synthesis of them all.

The yogic teachings tell us that this is a wrong assumption, and that our self-image is made up of two aspects, one real and the other imaginary. The first is the underlying, but unrecognized, real Self, and the second is the personality that expresses our ego self, and which is a combination of all the masks we project. This personality or ego self is superimposed on the real Self, somewhat in the way that a movie is projected on a screen. Through the yogic practices for training the mind, combined with the practice of meditation, we are led on an inner journey to search out the real Self that is concealed behind that ego-personality which we mistakenly believe to be our self.

These ideas are not a new-age invention, but are described in some of the oldest recorded documents known to man, the Vedas and the Upanishads, which are thousands of years old. Despite their antiquity, their philosophical teachings and the methods for uncovering the nature of the real Self are subtle and not easily applied without the help of a competent teacher. This means that their efficacy has remained hidden, so much so, that when they are heard for the first time, the techniques appear to be novel and contemporary and hence slightly suspect. In fact they have been analyzed in great depth, and the techniques have been carried out successfully and safely by students of this Yoga down the ages under correct guidance. This means that within yogic circles, the techniques are well understood, well established and completely safe. However, their subtlety means that they are not easily implemented without the guidance of someone who has themselves reached the end point to which they lead.

Some may be surprised that there is an end point to the practices, because we are sometimes left with the impression that Yoga requires a lifetime commitment. This is not true, and we are all capable of reaching the goal in this lifetime if we make the right effort, follow the guidance of a true teacher and we do not let negative thoughts about our progress hold us back.

But what is this end point and how do we go about reaching it? The end point is for us to have a direct knowledge of the nature of our real Self, a knowledge as certain as our current knowledge of our own existence and consciousness as limited individuals. Neither our existence nor consciousness need any proof; they are a matter of direct experience, and a full knowledge of our own true nature also has to have the clarity of direct experience. At this time, the concealed Self becomes the revealed Self.

Through a study of the yogic philosophy, we can build an intellectual concept about the nature of the Self based on reasoning and logic, and this helps us to stay focused on the aim of the practices and prevents us from forming false ideas about our true nature. So, if we can spend a few minutes each day studying the teachings and give some time to contemplation on what we have read, an intellectual idea of the nature

of the Self will begin to form in our mind. Any doubts about the teachings should be condensed into the form of questions that we can put to those teaching us. Study like this helps us in the following ways:

1. It helps us to gently train the mind to obey our will, so giving us control over it.
2. It aids the purification of the mind by keeping it focused, rather than allowing it to daydream.
3. Through logical analysis, reasoning, and by encouraging us to question the consistency of what we study, it stops us forming wrong notions about the real Self,

Such study enables us to develop a more and more refined idea of the nature of the real Self, through systematically discarding misconceptions we may have about it. In the yogic literature the Sanskrit phrase '*Neti, neti*', 'not this, not this', is regarded as one of the highest practical teachings on the nature of the Self, for its aim is to negate all such false ideas. Eventually we reach a point where intellectual reasoning cannot take us further in the analysis of our own being, because the intellect finds itself trying to turn the subject, our real Self, into an object which it can perceive as separate from itself. This is like our eyes trying to view themselves directly without the aid of a mirror or a camera. When we reach this point in our intellectual study, we realize that the view we have of ourselves, although intellectually correct in one sense, leaves us feeling that there is still something missing, and that the saying '*Neti, neti*', 'not this, not this', still applies, even though our conception of self has attained a degree of refinement and penetration.

All is not lost, however, and it is the meditation practices of Yoga that come to our rescue, so to speak. It is important for us to do them on a daily basis, for they open up that faculty of the mind called intuition, and it is intuition that will eventually reveal the real Self to us in its full glory.

Intuition may seem to be a questionable faculty, easily confused with imagination and sometimes a justification for pursuing of our own

desires. But true intuition is pure and impersonal, and is indeed a latent faculty in the mind of man. It is intuition that brings about all the great discoveries in life, although we may fail to acknowledge the fact. In the well known example, Archimedes had spent many years trying logically to work out how to measure the volumes of irregularly shaped objects, but the method came to him in a flash of inspiration while getting into his bath one day. Some of the water displaced by his body overflowed and in an instant he realized that the total amount of water he had displaced was equal to the volume of his body below the water line. And he exclaimed: 'Eureka', 'I have it!' All his false notions were discarded in that instant when he realized directly that he now had the right technique. This did not mean that all his previous ideas on measuring volumes were a waste of time, for they had helped him to clear the way to the right method which came in a flash of intuition.

It is the same with the realization of the real Self. The study carried out logically into the nature of the Self, and the intellectual model derived from it, play their part in steering us towards a direct intuitive realization of our true nature, but this occurs only when the mind is brought to stillness through the meditation practices. This experience is described in the yogic literature in such terms as Self-realization, Enlightenment, Samadhi, Nirvana, God-consciousness, God-realization. They are synonymous, and similar expressions are used, pointing to the same illumination, by the saints and mystics of all religious traditions. The one who reaches this exalted state never loses it, and the practices are of no further use to him or her, although a Self-realized person may continue to do the practices as an example to other would-be yogis.

It might seem unbelievable or even blasphemous to say that Self-realization and God-realization are synonymous terms in this Yoga, but there is a simple and logical explanation. The traditional teachings explain that God is the reality behind all things in creation. He is like the canvas on which the picture is painted, for without the canvas the picture could not exist; and so He is the support and essence of all things in creation. If we consider the alternative view and assume that something does exist that is independent of God, we are at a loss to explain where it came from. Was it from some other God? If so, then

our God is not really God at all. In simple terms, we are driven to the conclusion that in the beginning God alone existed and everything we see or conceive was projected from Him. Do we not, in fact, do something similar each night when we dream? So, when the apparent world came into being it could only have come from the one true God. That is, He projected everything from Himself and so He is in every part of His creation—the physical, the mental and the supra-mental parts. This is the non-dual (*Advaita*) view of creation on which this Yoga is built.

The conclusion is that nothing but God exists, although, through some veiling power, we are unable to see God in the world or the universe around us until we reach the end point of this Yoga.

We may feel that this approach is unscientific, but a scientific analysis of the nature of the world also shows that it is insubstantial, indeterminate and not what it appears to be. These facts were clearly demonstrated in a UK science programme called *Horizon*, when a speaker posed the whimsical question 'How long is a piece of string?' in order to explore the science of measurement and introduce the viewer to the basic concepts of quantum mechanics, one of the main areas of research in modern physics today. We know that a piece of string can be cut to any length, so the question is about indeterminism. Even if we start with a given length of string, we find that different lengths can be measured depending on whether the string is lying loose on a flat surface or held taut between two clamps.

At the atomic level the question becomes progressively more indeterminate. To a first approximation we know that atoms are made up of particles with lots of free space between them, and so finding the most distant point on the atoms at the two ends of the string would be extremely difficult. From looking at atoms, the programme moved on to the quantum level of matter, and a demonstration was given to show that the particles inside the atoms are nothing but waves of energy, and like any other wave they spread out, so that it is possible for them to pass through more than one place at any instant in time, making exact measurement impossible.

So this is the modern physics view of the world: that it is made up of

waves of energy which can be in more than one place at any one time. This is the strange view of the physical world about us, and it has a resonance with the yogic concept that the world is not strictly real. What science fails to address, however, is the ultimate nature of the observer of the scientific experiments and proofs on which they are built, and it has nothing definite to say about the nature of consciousness.

The yogic view is that Existence Absolute and Consciousness Absolute are the fundamental aspects of God, expressed in terms that the limited human mind can approach. As part of God's creation, we are also nothing but His projection, and it is a tiny ray of His Consciousness which gives rise to each and everyone's individual consciousness. Through the Lord's veiling power, we project the ego-self on the real Self and forget our true identity with Him.

Study of the yogic teachings helps us to re-build an intellectual view of our true nature, our innermost Self, and meditation brings the mind to stillness. It is in tranquillity of mind that man's faculty of spiritual intuition becomes operative, and this leads to the realization of the nature of the real Self as ultimate reality.

This knowledge is as certain as the direct experience we currently have of our own consciousness and existence; indeed, it *is* our existence-consciousness in its fully revealed nature. When this occurs, we have reached the end point of this Yoga and the real Self is found to be not other than God.

Such spiritual information, if studied and pondered, will prove the greatest possible help when we approach such meditation texts as:

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

We shall find that this is not just a matter of faith, but has the support of enlightened reasoning, and is meant to be verified in our own personal experience.

**S.B.**

## The Eternal Wisdom

*Continuing Hari Prasad Shastri's portrayal of the life and teachings of the Upanishadic sage, Yajnavalkya.*

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IN THE valley of Shiva-Vana the sun has not yet risen above the snow-clad peaks and a glorious dawn is breaking. Birds are singing as they wheel above the plain. The sage Yajnavalkya is returning from the river after his bathe. He is carrying his staff and water-bowl; a few bark leaves, his manuscripts, are under his arm. Walking slowly on wooden sandals, he avoids treading on any crawling denizens of the earth lest he deprive them of the life which they love as a gift of the omniscient Lord, knowing that they too are candidates for the state of illumination. The rishi is thinking:

'In the blades of grass, in these hills of mine, in this sun and on this earth, behind the veil of appearances is the immutable reality which I see, so to say, face to face. There is no room for suffering, there is no cause for anxiety, there is no delusion for the one who sees unity in all this diversity. This unity is the only solution to the problems of conflict and diversity. I bless all.

'He is hidden and yet He is apparent. He is hidden, as the real being of the sun is hidden behind the brilliance of its own dazzling light; and yet He is most obvious as being. Being is not a quality or appearance; it is the reality divested of all that is allocated to it by the human mind.'

As he walks on, Shri Yajnavalkya sees a snake, hardly a few hours old, stuck in mud. The compassionate sage pauses and gently extricates the little being. Setting it on the grass, he says: 'Live, love and grow in the feeling of unity. May tomorrow bring you the rudiments of the great life which awaits us all. You also are a candidate for enlightenment.'

He resumes his walk slowly through a wood, where the birds are raising a chorus, sweet and harmonious, in adoration of Him who has planted a ray of His being in their breasts.

He comes to the sacrificial pavilion where his students are waiting in complete silence. As the holy Teacher arrives, they all stand and say in unison:

Salutations to Him who is the bliss of Brahman,  
A giver of delight supreme! He who is One,  
Who is the objectification of spiritual knowledge;  
Who is free from the pairs of opposites;  
Who is devoid of all attributes;  
Who is realizable through the spiritual utterances  
Such as 'Tat tvam asi' 'That thou art',  
To that holy Guru we offer salutations!

The Guru then gives them his benediction, saying: 'May the real meaning of the Vedic texts, such as "Tat tvam asi" be revealed to you, my children.' He takes his seat, the students following him, and after a short meditation the maharishi says:

'My children, your devotion and your service to me are so great that I wish I could requite them adequately. Listen! "Two fair-winged birds, close friends, are perched on the same tree. One of them tastes the berries, the other gazes on without eating." (*Mundaka Upanishad*)

'Take the tree to be the body, or the world, stretched out as time, space and causation. There are two self-conscious entities in it; one, though self-conscious, is not yet fully awakened; and the other one, whose consciousness is never marred by any limitation, is like the blazing sun in which there is no room for any dark spots.

'You will ask: "Why speak of two birds? Is not one enough?" A very legitimate question indeed! And I affirm that in reality there is neither unity nor duality in consciousness. But, so long as we view it from the empirical point of view, do we not divide it into categories, although the being underlying them is one and the same?'

'Now notice this difference: the bird that eats the berries, that is, the one who extracts joys from the sense-objects, is bound, because the object of its love is ever-changing, like a bird on the wing. This, in itself, is not an ideal state. There lurks the canker of dissatisfaction and ultimate disgust in the enjoyment of the sense-objects. They are meant only as stepping-stones to the higher unity, in which all the conflicts of duality, of mind and matter, of shadow and substance, are resolved once and for ever. The bird that is self-maintained is the divine Self of each and every limited self. It does not eat the berries, because it is

deeply rooted in the introspective meditation of its own integral nature, which, being massed-bliss leaves no room for any activity other than perception and conception. It is to this state that the limited consciousness has to raise itself.

'Note the word "fair-winged". Both the birds are said to have beautiful plumage; that is to say, the one that is eating the berries, enjoying and suffering, has the capacity to rise above this state and to touch the horizon of the infinite consciousness. The word "fair-winged", applied to the universal consciousness of Ishvara (the Lord), means the community of essence between the two (the Lord and the individual soul). Like attracts like; so the individual consciousness or self, being "fair-winged", that is, filled with the highest and loftiest aspirations, has a correspondence with its higher Self, in the form of compassion. My children, one day the sage Shri Vyasa will express the same meaning in the words: 'And He, by his innate quality of compassion, dispels the darkness of ignorance.' Holy Vyasa is preparing to write a great contribution to the highest ontological version of my metaphysics, to be called *Shrimad Bhagavatam*.

'My children, the world revolves in a circle of time. The general level of consciousness in individuals is not always the same; and when consciousness is once again beset with the thick veil of ignorance, then, my children, holy Vyasa, the 'Arranger' of the Veda, will give them the essence of my philosophy in his great verses.

'Let me tell you a secret. What is the highest element in man's personality? It is his aspiration, sometimes overt and sometimes covert, for the realization of the highest bliss. Yet man has to teach himself that real satisfaction or bliss is not anything finite. Then let him look up to that other divine bird, that is, meditate on Him with unifying devotion as the substratum of his intellect, and he will then realize that the ever-blissful One on whom he had been meditating, was his real Self. The other bird, the limited self, was merely a shadow of his higher Self.'

As the mahamuni (great sage) closed his address, the disciples offered him three salutations. Some of them brought a few berries, some fuel-sticks, some bark to serve as his paper, and a youthful female figure bowed her head low at the feet of the divine Teacher.

# The Open Secret of the Upanishads

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‘I am lighting a lamp to dispel the dark illusion that covers the heart of humanity.’

THESE WORDS, attributed to the ancient seer, Vyasa, apply equally well to the purpose and work of Shri Shankara. The main point of Shankara’s teaching on self-knowledge is to awaken us to the realization that our innermost self is the sole reality of the universe, and that any other conception of self is based on an illusion at the core of our experience— an illusion that will be dispelled when we light the lamp of spiritual wisdom in our heart.

This philosophy explains that our present experience of the world, feeling ourselves to be separate and vulnerable, identified with a limited organ of experience, the mind, is a kind of error, a mistake. The reality is not this bittersweet experience yielded by the mind and the senses, nor is it the multiplicity of things we see within and around us, like the multiplicity of waves we find on the surface of the sea. The reality is something entirely superior, pure, peaceful, fulfilled, and described in the Upanishads as ‘one only without a second’ and one with our own essential Self, just as the reality of the waves is only water.

This is the secret doctrine (*rahasya*) hidden in the heart of the Upanishads, called Advaita or non-duality. It is also the main message of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where this great realization is approached in various ways through the purification of the mind. At every step, Shankara shows that this is meant to be a practical philosophy, a practical path of re-educating our intellect, emotions and will. It is not a philosophy in the speculative sense, but a seeing of things as they really are, without the illusions that are created and upheld by our imagination.

Its practical side is called Yoga, a range of practices and a way of life that is intended to lead our understanding to a state in which we may have what is called ‘direct experience of reality’; or, in the words

of an ancient prayer, that we may be led from ‘darkness to light, from error to Truth, from death to immortality.’ This prayer is to be taken as a statement of practical purpose, the very purpose of our life in this world as intelligent conscious beings. It is fulfilled through seeing through the mystery of our own consciousness and being, and this is the real field of Shankara’s philosophy, which is transmitted and unfolded in the course of his comments on the ancient revealed texts.

Let us consider the question: ‘What am I?’ In the collection of Shankara’s writings called *The Thousand Teachings*, we find, again and again, an answer to this question presented in direct and uncompromising terms. For example:

I am the Lord, ever one and the same in all beings, beyond the destructible and indestructible principles, hence the supreme Spirit. Although I am the supreme Self and one without a second, I am mistakenly supposed to be other than this on account of nescience.

I am the Self, entirely pure, without a veil, unaffected by nescience or its false suggestions or by actions and their results. Though (apparently) clothed in the powers of sight, hearing, etc., I am one without a second, eternally fixed in my own true nature, motionless like the ether of the sky.

I am the Self, the supreme Absolute, pure consciousness am I, ever without a second, other than name, form and action, ever liberated by nature.  
(10.8-9 and 11.7)

Man’s progress in spirituality is reflected in his evolving conception of the supreme being and his relationship with it. At first this supreme principle is thought of as the great Lord of the worlds, obviously separate from the being of man, and worshipped as He or That. Then, on deepening acquaintance, so to say, the pronoun changes, and God is addressed as You, or Thou, as found in the religious literature of all traditions. But the final stage is to recognize that that point of light and consciousness in our own being, when distinguished from all that is changeable in us, in other words, our I, is the same divine principle that we formerly worshipped as other.

This doctrine, which is a veiled secret in some traditions, which is generally spoken of in guarded terms by the mystics of Christianity and Islam, is the starting point of Shri Shankara's philosophy. It is not only presented openly, but shown to be based on understandable human experience. Shri Shankara does not just affirm the Truth. He reasons in its favour. And through reasoning, he shows how any other view of human nature must collapse under the weight of the contradictions implicit in that view, or must fall short because it does not account for the whole of human experience.

At first sight, nothing could sound more unreasonable than to affirm that the true Self of man is identical with God. It should be noted that this is not speaking of a special type of man, but of man's nature in general. This truth is, so to say, the pearl that is hidden in the oyster shell of our personality. What is the source of our knowledge of this Truth? For this we have to go back to the Upanishads. Here we find there are certain very short statements, which proclaim this identity, and then we find countless other verses in which this identity is stated or implied in more expanded terms.

One of these key utterances is found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, namely: 'I am Brahman', *Aham Brahmasmi* in Sanskrit. Brahman here means the Absolute, the Ultimate Spirit, the All, God in the highest sense. We are considering a text which goes back centuries before Christ, and almost certainly pre-dates the Buddha and the philosophical flowering in ancient Greece. The passage that contains this utterance is too profound to be readily understood and still retains its aura of sublimity; few statements, if any, can be so direct in their utterance of the highest Truth.

This (self) was indeed Brahman in the beginning. It knew only itself as 'I am Brahman'. Therefore It became all. And whoever among the gods knew It, also became That. And the same with sages and men....To this day, whoever in like manner knows It as 'I am Brahman' becomes all this (universe). Even the gods cannot prevail against him, for he becomes their self. While he who worships another god, thinking 'He is one, I am another', does not know. (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10*)

Brahman itself, being the Absolute, is beyond the range of human thought, and can only be apprehended through the awakening of a higher faculty of self-knowledge which comes to light in a condition of inner stillness, brought about through the dedicated pursuit and practice of the spiritual life. It is That 'from which the universe came forth, in which it abides, and into which it is finally dissolved'. The universe is held to be an appearance of Brahman, not ultimately real in itself. Though Brahman is undetected by the human senses, if it were not present as the underlying Reality, nothing would exist. There is nothing outside Brahman, the Infinite, and it has no internal divisions or parts. The Upanishads speak of it as 'That', and all conceptions of God are tentative means to approach the reality of Brahman, yet while these remain conceptions, however sublime or subtle, they can never embrace the ultimate source of being, Brahman. Hence the Upanishads warn the enquirer that Brahman is 'not this, not this'—*neti, neti*. Yet, far from being an emptiness or a negation, Brahman is the source of all our experience, empirical and spiritual, and is 'greater than the great'.

Then we return to the question, what is this 'I' in man and what right has he to equate it with the infinite, nameless, sublime principle indicated—not described, but indicated—through the language of the Upanishads? First, we ourselves are encouraged to probe the nature of the 'I', through learning to expand our powers of reflection and introvertive penetration. This we can only do through a training in tranquillity and inward alertness. When we make this investigation, we encounter what might be called the mystery of consciousness.

Normally we think of consciousness as a kind of quality associated with our physical and mental functions. When we are seeing, consciousness is obviously involved in helping us to see, in making the visual experience possible; when we are hearing, or listening, again, consciousness is necessary to uphold these functions. It is the same with speech, and all our other faculties.

Even as we go deeper within ourselves, away from the sense life, into our inner world of thoughts and feelings, consciousness seems to play an essential part in the experience. It is always there, but somehow not noteworthy in itself. It only seems meaningful when manifest

through certain recognisable functions.

But there is a deeper light to be shed on this ingredient of our experience. In one of those short ‘great’ sentences referred to earlier, we find the statement: ‘Consciousness is Brahman’—*Prajnanam Brahman*. This in turn gives us a clue to the meaning of that other great utterance we encounter: ‘I am Brahman’. Because, if we ask, naively, where God is in man, the answer is: God is the very consciousness in man. In other words, it is consciousness which in the end will show man that he is more than man, and that his true nature is the infinite godhead.

For the illumined sages, this fact is a self-evident truth based on their direct experience of reality. But through enquiry, through carefully examining our own internal experience we can, up to a certain point, work this out for ourselves.

It was noted before that when we are seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling, and so on, consciousness is obviously involved in helping to make this way of functioning possible. And yet we never actually *see* consciousness at work, we never *hear* its presence, and we never *think* ‘consciousness’ as a thought. What, then, is the nature of the innermost consciousness of man?

Let us consider a particular aspect of our internal experience. Evidently, as human beings, we are aware of our thoughts. There is a sense in which our thoughts are seen by us, or by a principle of awareness within us. We may not be conscious of this awareness all the time. It may spring on us, for instance, in moments of embarrassment, when we become uncomfortably conscious of our own thoughts; or when we are unable to sleep because we can’t stop worrying about something; or as an awareness of distractions when we are trying to meditate. But whether we remain consciously aware of our thoughts or not, from the point of view of this introvertive enquiry, thoughts are part of what is seen. And since we only deduce that we have a mind from the evidence of thoughts and thinking, we can extend this by saying that the mind and its thoughts are part of the seen. They are not the Seer.

If we pursue this line of enquiry, we will come to realize that the

mind and its thoughts are very different in nature from the principle of awareness or consciousness that witnesses them. For one thing, the thoughts are always moving and changing. They belong to a realm that is by nature perishable. Our thoughts share the same perishable nature as the material world that is usually their content.

But does this perishability apply to the conscious Seer of the thoughts? We cannot say so, because the Seer never actually appears as a thought. Does the Seer of the thoughts ever change? We cannot say so, because the Seer is never in an observable position where we can say: ‘O yes, it has changed.’ The Seer can never be the seen, and its awareness remains unalterable and unfailing.

The truth is that this ultimate Seer in man, this principle of awareness in us, is not only constant throughout our lifetime, but remains the same, untainted, unmoved, free, deathless, throughout all time. There is a point in man’s being that transcends mind and matter, and that point is to be found in and as his consciousness.

This reasoning proves that our innermost consciousness is radically different in kind from anything else. For it is a changeless and subjective principle that can never be pointed to as a changing object.

Speaking poetically, if this consciousness were endowed with speech, it might well echo the words of Christ, and say: ‘My kingdom is not of this world’; or, indeed, ‘My kingdom is not of this *mind*, which is finite in its operations and changes every moment.’

There is in man the transcendent consciousness, and there is the rest of his make-up, which includes everything he is aware of. When the Upanishads use the expression quoted earlier, ‘*Neti neti*, not this, not this’, they are speaking of the rest, that is, of all the objective elements in our experience. Whether we regard these as mental or material, all these phenomena, all these appearances, belong to the known, the seen, what can be talked about, what can be categorized, what we can make theories about. But the words ‘*Neti, neti*’, never refer to the Seer, the Consciousness itself, because *Prajnanam Brahman*—Consciousness is Brahman.

From this simple fact of our inner experience—the fact that there is an all-seeing consciousness which never changes, and that there is a

seen world of mind and matter that is always in a state of flux—Shri Shankara draws the most penetrating conclusion about the whole of our experience in this world. Basically, he says, it cannot be accepted as real, or, if it is accepted as real, it is due to a mistake, an error that appears to work outwards from the very root of experience, but which has no logical validity, nor any validity from the standpoint of the supreme realization. This is because our experience is based on an apparent mingling of this innermost conscious light of awareness, which is constant and unalterable, with the ever-changing phenomena of the mind and its thoughts and faculties. The two principles are so different, like light and darkness.

The conscious element in man is light, unalterable light, since it is the revealer of everything else in experience. Whereas the mind, with its continuous alteration, is compared to darkness. It gains its animation and apparent light and life from the presence of that ultimate light of the innermost consciousness, the true I, which both reveals thought and makes it possible. But is this play of consciousness, mind and matter really possible and, if so, how?

The supreme light of Consciousness, the light of 'I', can have nothing in common with the realm of change, the realm of phenomena. Light cannot mix or fuse with darkness; you cannot make a structure of fire and snow. What is 'I', Consciousness, cannot go into partnership with anything material to bring about a world experience. What is 'I', Consciousness, as the ever-fixed subject, our immediate awareness, cannot step down and become part of the seen phenomena, part of the mind. It is a logical impossibility.

The mind is, as it were, a 'you', that is, something set apart from the true 'I'. It is, we could say, a 'you over there', compared with the inner light of awareness, that is the true 'I' or *aham* which is always our immediate experience. And yet this impossible mixing of subject and object, of self and not-self, of consciousness and the non-conscious, of eternal unchanging reality and the ever-changing appearances, of the true 'I' and the 'you', the mind; this apparent fusion of incompatibles is the root 'cause' of all our experience in the world, all our experience as apparently limited human beings, who say: 'I am, I think, I feel, I am

alive.'

This mingling of consciousness and mind, of subject and object, of Self and not-Self, of the unchangeable and the transient, can only occur as a result of an error, of wrong knowledge, of something not being understood, of something essential about our nature not being realized. This error is what is described in the philosophy of Vedanta as false superimposition. It is at the very core of our experience, and is what the Upanishads call 'the knot of the heart'. The error can only be dispelled through self-knowledge in the deepest sense. That knowledge, indicated in the Upanishad, is summed up in the statement: 'I am Brahman', '*Aham Brahmasmi*'.

It was said earlier that man, up to a certain point, can work this out for himself. Man's knowledge and discernment can reach very deeply when it comes to knowing what he is *not*, to knowing what his true 'I' cannot be identified with because it is an object of the I's awareness. But then we reach a point where our powers of reasoning and discrimination, unaided, will collapse and fail to make the final penetration into the true nature of the 'I'. We will need help if this mystery is to be solved.

The revealed scriptures of the Upanishads, mediated by the spiritual teacher, have as their sole aim the transmission of the highest truth—That which transcends reason and even transcends our highest speculations. The Upanishad awakens man to his true nature by reminding him: 'Thou art Brahman, That Thou Art. There is no other reality and reality is one without a second.' This supreme knowledge, this lamp of transcendent wisdom, is the light that dispels the dark illusion that covers the heart of humanity. For the fact is:

Thou art that Brahman, free from all change, the same within and without, bliss absolute.

*Avadhut Gita*

**B.D.**

# The Inward Gaze

## *The Poetry of Princess Mirabai*

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LET US imagine for a few moments that we are in India. We are in the city of Hardwar, where the Ganges first emerges from the Himalayas and flows out into the plains of northern India. The city is full of men and women who have come to bathe in the holy river, and to benefit from the guidance and *darshana* or contact with the many religious teachers who live here.

It is early in March, and in the mountains the winter snows have started to melt. The wide river rushes past the temples and bathing ghats lining its banks at what seems to be the speed of an express train. Dusk is coming on. On either side of the swirling waters are wide paved embankments, and some yards ahead we see a crowd gathering. As we join them we find that they are collected around two men who appear to be itinerant musicians; and now the taller of these cries out that they are about to sing a *pada*, a song—not just any song, he emphasizes, but one of the wonderful songs of the Princess Mira or Mirabai, full of her love for the Lord Krishna, or Gopal. A thrill of expectation runs through the crowd as they press closer. The musicians close their eyes, as if entering an inner world, and suddenly launch into the haunting, passionate words of the song:

Nothing is really mine except Gopal.  
O my relatives, I have searched the world  
And found nothing worthy of love!  
Hence I am a stranger amidst my kinsfolk  
And an exile from their company,  
Since I seek that of holy men;  
It is but there that I feel happy,  
In the world I only weep!  
I planted the creeper of love  
And silently watered it with my tears,  
Now it has grown and overspread my dwelling!  
You offered me a cup of poison

Which I drank with joy!  
Mira is absorbed in contemplation of Gopal,  
God is with her, and all is well!

In these words is the story of Princess Mirabai, one of the best loved of India's poets. And this is the way in which her poems have been passed down in the popular culture of northern India for nearly four centuries, by word-of-mouth, popular song and oral tradition. It is only in relatively recent times that they have been collected and written down.

Indians have never given much importance to the details of history or the biographies of their great men and women, and this has made it almost impossible to find reliable, authentic accounts of the lives of her saints, mystics and poets. As a rule, there remain only stories which have been woven around these figures in the popular imagination, and these concentrate much more on the essential meaning of their lives than on the mundane details.

Mira is no exception to this. All that has come down to the present is the semi-historical anecdotes which emphasize her unbreakable devotion to the spiritual truth, visualized in the form of the Lord Krishna as he appeared in Vrindavan, and her wonderful escapes from the fierce persecution she endured as a result of this from her royal relatives.

Probably a good many of the songs which go under her name today were not made by her but by later poets, who found their inspiration and model in the songs she had sung and simply added spontaneously to the living tradition. It is the same with many of the great poets of India—with Kabir and Surdas and many others: the original vision, which is always a religious one, is so vivid and intense, the forms of expression so exact and pure, that others have felt it natural to write in the same vein; so that what we have now is not so much the work of an individual poet, but of a living tradition of poetry which has its root and origin in the intense original vision of the founder-poet.

Nowadays scholars are busy trying to sort out the original body of Mira's poems from the later additions. They do not find it easy, for sometimes the later poems achieve a level of inspiration which seems to bring them very close to the original source. Nor does it really

matter; what matters is the beauty, the vitality, and above all the truth to spiritual experience of the living tradition, and the insight it brings to the hearts of those who come into contact with it. In the following poem, for example, Mira offers herself completely and without reserve to the spiritual life, which in all of her work is given symbolic form as the Lord Krishna:

O Krishna, offering myself completely in sacrifice,  
I beg of You to come to my street.  
Without Thy sight I feel no ease  
And can only gaze down Thy path...  
Be compassionate and grant me Thy sight,  
Overlooking all my faults.  
O Murari, Thou art supremely compassionate  
To those who take refuge at Thy feet.  
Save me from the ocean of transmigration.  
Mira is the slave of Thy feet.  
She offers herself in sacrifice again and again.

As we see, songs like this are deeply spiritual and profoundly felt. And they are much more profound than appears at first. We have to understand—and in general, people in India *do* understand—that ‘Mira’ in the poem is our own individual, day-to-day self; the ordinary selfish self which we all know only too well, and which is interested first and foremost in its own preservation and well-being. Only by sacrificing this self, that is, by transferring our identity away from it, can we persuade Krishna ‘to come into our street’—that is to say, can we come into contact with our own deeper and truer Self, which is the ultimate source of happiness and beauty.

Without this profound change in inward identity, in what we understand ourselves to be, we suffer endlessly in what Mira calls ‘the ocean of transmigration’; we are subject to endlessly repeated rebirths and the sufferings and ignorance which come with them. It is this change in the way in which we think of ourselves at a deep level, this ‘inward gaze’ so that we find and identify with the Krishna (or the Christ, or the Buddha) which is our own real and deepest nature, which is the real purpose of the spiritual life in all traditions.

Let us now turn to the traditions concerning the life of Princess Mirabai. Who exactly was she? Was she truly a princess? What kind of a life did she lead?

Although, as already explained, not very much is known about her life, it is certain that she was indeed a princess. She was born into one of the great and famous Rajput families of Rajasthan, in north-western India. This was about the year 1498. On the Rajput rulers had fallen the task of defending Hindu India from the invading Muslim armies pouring in from the direction of Afghanistan, and Mira’s own father was heavily engaged in the fighting. As her mother died when she was still young, Mira was sent to live with her grandfather, the ruler of the fortress-city of Merta which he had captured years earlier from the Muslims. She grew up here in the company of her cousin Jaymal, who later became famous as one of the heroes of the Rajputs.

In 1516, when she was 17 or 18 years old, an important dynastic marriage was arranged for Princess Mira. She was married to Prince Bhoja Raj. He was the eldest son of the great warrior Rana Sanga, the acknowledged leader of the Rajputs against the Muslim armies, and the ruler of the Kingdom of Mewar, with its mighty and famous fortress at Chittaur. We can imagine the magnificent display and splendour which must have attended this important dynastic marriage, linking together two of the greatest Rajput ruling families. Thus at an early age Mira found herself right at the centre of the power politics of the day, which would determine the fate of India.

However, it seems that even at this early age Mira was already strongly inclined towards a life of devotion and inward development. The early sixteenth century was a time when there swept across India a tremendous wave of devotion to Krishna, centred on the town of Vrindavan on the Jamna river and inspired by such great religious figures as Shri Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya, and by poets such as Surdas. There is a tradition that even before her mother died Mira had begged for and been given an image of Krishna that had been in the possession of a holy man, and that she became so attached to this image that her mother jokingly remarked that one day Krishna would be her bridegroom. Mira’s paternal grandfather, the ruler of Merta, was a

devout worshipper of Vishnu and it is possible that her devotion to Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, was encouraged during her girlhood in his palace. At that time an education in Sanskrit, as well as training in devotional music and dancing, would not have been out of place for a Rajput princess, and there is some evidence that Mira was taught the Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads by a teacher who at the time of her marriage went with her to her new home.

Another interesting tradition is that at her new home her husband's grandmother, the Queen Mother, who perhaps still led the women's side of the court at Chittaur, was a devotee of the poet Raidas, a man of low caste who was a famous religious teacher belonging to the great Sant tradition of northern India. It has been suggested that this may account for the fact that many of Mira's poems are coloured by the imagery and terminology of the Sant school; and also that it may be the fact that she continued to receive sadhus of this school at the palace after the Queen Mother's death which led to her increasing unpopularity among, and persecution by, the ruling family into which she had married.

Be that as it may, before long the young Princess Mira's situation at the court of Mewar became a deeply unhappy one; some of her poems contain references to this time. Within a few years of her marriage, her husband, Bhoja Raj, died. No children had been born and Mira, still in her twenties, was already a widow. When Bhoja Raj's father also died in 1528, and the kingdom passed to her husband's younger brothers, first to Ratna Singh and after his early death to Vikramajita, her position became increasingly desperate. Vikramajita was no more than fifteen when he came to the throne of Mewar in 1531, and records show that his character was turbulent and even vicious.

Mira became isolated at the court. It was thought that the life she led, and in particular her wish to associate with itinerant religious teachers, perhaps men of low caste, and to dance in devotion before the image of Krishna in the temples of the town, was unworthy of the great family into which she had married. She came to be looked upon as an embarrassment, almost a criminal. At one point she was locked up, with a guard placed over her. But no persuasion or persecution succeeded in

turning her away from her devotion to Krishna, and in the end it seems that efforts were made to end her life. One involved a snake, sent to Mira in a bunch of flowers. An attempt to poison her is widely accepted as probable—apparently she swallowed the poison but it somehow failed to take effect. If we look again at the poem cited earlier we can get some idea of what she must have gone through at this time: its words have much more meaning for us now.

Nothing is really mine except Gopal.  
O my relatives, I have searched the world  
And found nothing worthy of love!  
Hence I am a stranger amidst my kinsfolk  
And an exile from their company  
Since I seek that of holy men;  
It is but there that I feel happy,  
In the world I only weep!  
I planted the creeper of love  
And silently watered it with my tears,  
Now it has grown and overspread my dwelling!  
You offered me a cup of poison  
Which I drank with joy!  
Mira is absorbed in contemplation of Gopal,  
God is with her, and all is well!

From this it is evident that Mira must have passed through great suffering at this time, and that she consistently sacrificed her individual interests in order to maintain her devotion and identify with her true or inner Self, experienced under the form of the Lord Krishna or Mohan or Giridhara, as she often affectionately calls him. Here is another song, in which she makes her attitude clear:

Once they are fixed upon the Lord  
My thirsty eyes do not waver.  
They drink in every atom of His body,  
Ranging with anxious longing from head to toe.  
I was standing at the door of my house when Mohan passed.  
He was smiling gently,  
His face radiant as the moon.

My relatives reproach me and crack bitter jests,  
But my wayward eyes brook no obstruction...  
Says Mira: 'Without my Master, Giridhara,  
I cannot exist for a second.'

In the end, Mira was able to abandon the palace at Chittaur. What we know about the rest of her life is extremely slight and vague. It is said that at first she went back to Merta, the city of her childhood. Somewhat later she travelled to Vrindavan, at that time the luminous centre of the worship of Krishna. There are still traditions in the town relating to her stay there. One story, which may be apocryphal but is nevertheless interesting, concerns her meeting with Jiva Goswami, the great scholar and disciple of Shri Chaitanya. It is said that at first he refused to see her, on the grounds that she was a woman. Mira's retort was that she was amused to find this attitude in such a blessed place as Vrindavan, where all true lovers of Shri Krishna, male or female alike, would think of themselves as Gopis, the cowherd women described so vividly in the *Bhagavata Purana*, who dedicated everything to their Divine Lover, Krishna. According to the story, this made Jiva Goswami realize how wrong he was and the meeting between them took place.

Finally, it is said that Mira left Vrindavan in order to spend the remainder of her life in Dwaraka, the city on the west coast of India which had once been governed by Krishna. Although the existing traditions about Mira's later life are so fragmentary and unreliable, they are supported by the fact that her songs survive in three different languages of northern India: in Rajasthani, that of the state in which her earlier years were spent; in Braj- Hindi, the dialect of the region around Vrindavan; and in Gujarati, where the city of Dwaraka is situated.

It is difficult to pigeonhole Mira as belonging to one particular school of Hindu religious thought and practice. Scholars have concluded that at times her poetry shows that she must have been linked in some way with the Sant tradition of northern India. Broadly speaking, the Sants are *nirguna bhaktas*, worshippers of ultimate Reality, or *Brahman*, in its pure or unconditioned state, devoid of all *gunas* or 'qualities' and hence beyond description. They tend to look

upon temple ritual and devotion to images as of secondary value or even mistaken, and prefer to concentrate on devotion to and service of the guru. The following poem by Mira [displayed in italics and interspersed with comments] reflects attitudes usually associated with the Sants:

*I have turned my back on this palace once and for all.*

This of course refers to the great palace at Chittaur and the aristocratic life which she abandoned there. But it also has a secondary and deeper meaning, for the 'palace' is the world, which Mira has renounced in order to give herself to the real purpose of existence, the discovery of the inner life of the spirit. The poem continues:

*My good deeds in former births have come to fruition.*

*I have no use even for great lakes;*

*Who would linger over small ponds and reservoirs?*

These lines echo a celebrated poem of Kabir, perhaps the greatest of the Sant poet-saints, who lived a century or more before Mira. Kabir's short poem visualizes the soul as a swan which has soared upwards out of the ordinary, everyday world and into the region of the Spirit, symbolized as the famous lake Manasarovara high up in the Himalayas and at the foot of Mount Kailash:

The swan has taken its flight

To the lake beyond the mountains;

Why should it search for the pools

Or the ditches any more?

Thy Lord dwells within thee,

Why need thine outward eyes be open?

Mira continues with lines referring to the two sacred rivers of northern India which could well have been written by Kabir himself:

*I care neither for Ganges nor Jamna,*

*I am making my way to the sea.*

*I do not need worldly associations,*

*I have access to the true masters.*

But if in lines like these Mira is close to the ideals and imagery of the Sants, there are many other poems which clearly form part of the great wave of devotion to God in the form of the Lord Krishna which swept across India during her lifetime. In these, our inner, spiritual nature is imagined as the charming figure of Krishna, with whom the devotee is deeply in love. In this way the human emotions, instead of being allowed to run wild in the world, are harnessed and directed towards the spiritual life and union with our true Self. Mira's emotions were powerful and her devotion to Krishna was no gentle and consoling affair. It was passionate and total, demanding the sacrifice of everything else. In one of her poems she cries:

O my companion, the sight of Krishna is like a dagger.  
 I have lost body-consciousness  
 And am reduced to a ruinous state.  
 My body is pervaded by pain,  
 My heart in a state of intoxication.  
 Three or four companions are with me,  
 All in a state of madness.  
 The partridge longs only for the moon,  
 The moth is burnt by the lamp,  
 The fish dies without water.  
 This is the love that is precious.  
 If I do not see Him, how can I live?  
 My heart finds peace nowhere.  
 Oh, go to Krishna  
 And tell Him that Mira is His.

In conclusion, let us briefly turn to the question of what Princess Mira has to teach us today. First of all, she shows us that the spiritual life cannot be effectively pursued without sacrifice of the interests of the lower, individual self. Perhaps this has to start in a gradual way; but as we see in her life, the greater and more determined the sacrifice is, and no matter what the difficulties which are presented, the greater will be the result.

Secondly, she shows in her worship of Krishna that the forms of religion are essentially symbolic and must be understood in this sense.

The fact that they might appear unlikely to the rational mind has no importance whatever. They operate in a different fashion, working through the imagination, and can be used with great effect to channel our emotional energies towards the realization of our true inner nature.

Thirdly, she shows that the paths of knowledge and of devotion can be, and perhaps must be, pursued in tandem; that they are complementary and in no way exclusive of one another. Mira was able to bring together the *nirguna bhakti* of the Sant tradition, based essentially upon knowledge and the tradition of the Upanishads, with the passionate and vital *saguna bhakti*, in the form of the worship of Krishna which was so prevalent and vitally alive in the India of her day.

And lastly, like many other of the great religious figures of India, Mira demonstrates in a striking manner the intimate relationship which exists between the spiritual life and the arts. Her songs and poetry were entirely dependent upon her intensely maintained spiritual life, and draw all their energy, meaning and beauty from this. And, in their turn, her songs and poetry helped to energize and maintain her own spiritual life, and to inspire countless others in India to embark upon the great journey of self-discovery which is the true and only really meaningful purpose of life. Here is a last, short poem, translated by Hari Prasad Shastri, in which Mira sums up her attitude:

The heart of Mira is entangled in the beauty of the feet of her Guru;  
 Nothing else causes her delight!  
 He enabled her to be happy in the drama of the world;  
 The knowledge he gave her dried up the ocean of being  
 and becoming.  
 Mira says: 'My whole world is Shri Krishna.  
 Now that my gaze is turned inward, I see it clearly.'

S.C.

# The Devotion Habit

A lecture on *Bhakti Yoga*, the Yoga of Devotion,  
given by Hari Prasad Shastri on 6th November, 1943.

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RISHI SHANDILYA, who is a great authority on devotion, has said that it should become our habit. Not that we have to force a stream of love of the Supreme Deity from our hearts to Him, but it should become as natural to us as breathing. The purpose of our daily devotions is to produce in us that psychological material which transforms our life completely. Our intellect draws its inspiration not from the region of time and space but from the spiritual region directly. Our emotions are in touch with those fringes of the spiritual region in which abide the holy Saints of God, and like the thoroughbred horses, they obey the pure impulses that come from that region, when our general behaviour is in consonance with the highest moral dictates of the Creator and Governor of the Universe.

There is no such thing as a one-sided life. What affects our thought, simultaneously affects our feelings and also our actions, and what affects our actions also affects our thought and emotion. If a man takes alcohol which affects the brain centres of his body, his thought is also muddled, his emotion is uncontrolled and his will is weakened. Unless devotion becomes our habit, we cannot say that we are true devotees.

99.9% of our life is the result of our habits. We act automatically in 999 instances out of 1,000 and in whatever we have to do by force of will, we are not always sure of its propriety or even its genuineness. Our habits are our behaviour and unless morality also becomes our habit, our behaviour can never be correct. Those people who have the habit of speaking the truth, they are the true lovers of truth, and not those who speak the truth when they find it expedient to do so. The rule holds true in each and every case, and we must know it well that we have to form the habit of devotion.

People acquire habits which are injurious more easily than habits which are useful. The smoking habit, the habit of reading the newspaper in the morning, the habit of twisting our fingers, of being in the company of somebody or other—look at these habits, we have become

slaves to them. It is therefore essential that devotion to God becomes our habit. How to form the habit of devotion is what is now being treated on the basis of pure psychology. By the word devotion, we mean constant, ever increasing flow of the most vital part of our inner life, that is, love, towards the Creator of the universe as our Self, for no other reason but that we cannot do otherwise.

Devotion means, in the ultimate analysis, a knowledge of God abiding in our intellect. It is not through the intellect alone that we always obtain knowledge; it is also obtained emotionally, for there is a certain type of knowledge which is concealed to the functions of the intellect and is available only through emotions. Unless you love a person, you can never know a person. For instance, to know the beauties of the character of the Chinese people, first you have to love them and then you will know about them and the knowledge will increase love, and love will increase the thirst for knowledge, and so it goes on. When people begin to hate any race, they do so blindly; they are led by prejudice.

The Lord of the Universe is in the heart of man. He is partly revealed and partly concealed. He is revealed as existence, as consciousness, but He is concealed as supreme bliss. A knowledge of the Lord as the basis of our personality will reveal to us the infinite joy and freedom which nothing else in the world can give, and this is the purpose of *upasana* or devotion. Take the case of the saintly philosopher, Spinoza. His devotion was not of that type as the devotion of Christ, but it was devotion of a very high order, because he has merited the epithet of ‘God-intoxicated philosopher’. Knowledge will come through devotion, and devotion will inspire us with a quest for greater and more complete knowledge of the Lord.

Long ago I had a friend. Often in the evening he said to me: ‘I do not think any smoker will miss the absence of his tobacco so much as I miss the absence of my devotion or *sandhya* (evening worship).’ When it was six or six-thirty, it was impossible to control him; he had to go and perform his ablutions and go into his devotion in order to commune with his Maker. Why? It had become his habit. When we say that a certain thing is indispensable for us, what we really mean is that it has become an overpowering habit with us. The craving for alcohol, opium or

tobacco, is the craving which points to the importance of habit.

How to form the devotion habit? Make your mind your ally, not your enemy. How does the mind become our enemy? It is said by the Lord in the *Bhagavad Gita* that a mind that is not controlled is the greatest enemy of man, and a mind that is controlled is the greatest friend of man. 'O Arjuna, those people have conquered the whole world whose mind is entirely under control.' So make your mind an ally, rather than an enemy. The mind will become your ally if you control it by devoting it to good actions, a great spring of which is devotion to God. Goodness without God is pseudo, imperfect and precarious goodness.

I may say in passing that the most miserable human being is that man who is all indecisiveness. A person who has neither the habit nor the capacity to form a decision is the most miserable of men, for whom every work is the subject of nervous volitional expression. Their volitional expression is like the pendulum of a clock, and such persons can never be happy. There is an old rule that if you put behind you a person or a thing or a place, look ahead and do not turn back unless you find it essential.

The prayer habit is called in the Indian language *santacharya*. When you want to become a devotee, the meaning is that you want to lead the life of a *Sant* or a Saint of God. The meaning is leaving off the old habits and adopting the new habit; turning your back on the sense objects and, instead of begging at the doors of the ears or lips for pleasure, try to obtain pleasure from the place where alone it exists, that is, in the deeper layers of one's own self.

The first rule is make your decision that you want to have the prayer habit. Make your decision as strongly as you can and renew it every day, even several times a day. Each time that you renew your decision, without breaking it, it will strengthen your character. You strengthen the ties of your character by saying: 'To Thee I belong, from Thee I have come, Thou alone art wholly mine,' again and again in the day. In India, when they want to perform anything holy they make what is called *sankalpa*, which means a determined decision. It is good to adopt some such method, having a *sankalpa* every day, because each day you renew your vow to keep to the lines of devotion and to be a perfect man intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and if possible, physically, and

to keep an eye on the fact that you carry out your decision.

Never admit an exception to occur until the new habit is securely rooted in your mind. Having made up your mind to devote a certain amount of your time every day to your devotion and spiritual practices, some day something will say 'Not today'. It is wrong, a very dangerous and harmful habit. Admit of no exception. 'Either I will allow my body to perish or I will be successful in my spiritual resolve.' Make the habit of good resolution. The best resolution is to commune with the Lord every day for at least so much time and at such and such a time. Shri Dada used to say that if you find any bad-tempered people in your neighbourhood, make up your mind that you will bear with them for six months or a year, under any circumstances, and that you will try to be sweet and kind to them with a view to effecting a change in their heart. Seize the first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make. Devotion does not mean only communion with God. Devotion means not to be avaricious, not to hate, not to be angry, not to be acquisitive, not to be prejudiced against any race or creed of God, not to apply over-emphasis to anything in life. The combination of all these things is called devotion. Devotion is not only offered by the mind. Devotion is offered by the eyes, ears, taste and nose. Your devotion is not perfect unless, in your heart, compassion wells up more and more every day and the tenderness of your heart becomes greater every day.

Under no circumstances let your emotion get the better of you and make you do things which are not in conformity with the devotional or yogic life. This is the way you get strength, spiritual strength. Continue your habit. If you discontinue it once, you slide downward ten paces, remember, and if you do so a second time, fifty paces. We have abolished the old arithmetic and I ask you to write on its tomb the new arithmetic: that a man plus God is equal to infinity and not equal to two. It is incumbent on every right thinking person who wishes to acquire the habit of devotion to continue in the habit, or he will fail. In spiritual life there is either progress or there is retrogression; nothing is stationary. As soon as you pause you begin to go down, Suppose today you have 50% of your life spiritualized—that is your mind is under control, your emotions are refined and made delicate, and you can use them as much and whenever you like for the good of mankind and for your own

spiritual upliftment. If you stop doing so, tomorrow you will have 48%, the day after tomorrow 40%, then you will have 10% until you are completely bestialized. Therefore the psychological rule is that in spiritual life we have always to rise upward more and more.

There is a call of the Infinite always coming into the soul of man. Like a dove that is being called by its mate from a distance, which rushes towards it, braving storm and all kinds of impediments, trying to overcome them, so must the soul of man form the habit of devotion to God by overcoming each and every obstacle.

There are many joys in life. Some people say smoking is a great joy, or gambling, but there is one joy of which you can be absolutely certain: conquest of the obstacles to spiritual achievement. If you have once controlled your anger in the face of provocation, if you have once bridled the horse of your passion and not allowed it to run amok, if you have once dedicated a part of your day to the contemplation of the Lord, that joy is equal to no joy in the world of time and space. Why? Because that joy strengthens your nervous system, adds to the fabric of your psychological system, and brings your soul closer and closer to union with the supreme Deity, who is your own Self. These are the psychological laws of the formation of the devotion habit.

Now let me sound a warning. You know the name of Charles Darwin, the man who brought to light the thought of biological evolution or change of species through a gradual process. Let us learn a lesson from his life. He has left behind an autobiography which, like the autobiography of John Stuart Mill, is a document of great help to seekers after Truth. He says: 'When I was thirty years old, I enjoyed paintings, I used to read Shakespeare with great delight, and I enjoyed music also.' When he became fifty and gave himself up entirely to scientific training, these joys became very dim. At the age of seventy, he writes: 'Now I feel sick of the word "poetry", I want to throw away Shakespeare if it is put into my hands; music has no appeal to me at all.' You might say it was good. But these are his own words: 'If I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week with interest. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness and possibly injurious to the intellect and to the moral character, all enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.'

A man who is dead to music, poetry, to the play and interplay and harmony of colours and lines, symmetry and so forth, loses not only great joys, as Charles Darwin says, but he weakens his moral fabric and loses the plasticity of his intellect.

What do we learn from this? Let us transpose the values from the emotional plane to the spiritual plane, let us transpose these seedlings from the nursery into the open air where they can imbibe pure air and sunshine. The greatest poetry is the building of our emotions into the contemplation of the Lord. The ordinary joys of poetry are like the sparks which come from the flint of our mind only momentarily; they come and go and very often they leave us where they find us. But there is a poetry which changes the whole course of our life and enriches our mind, which puts us on the way to the transformation of our character, behaviour, psychological life, into that of a Saint. That is the poetry expressed by the devotees of God and knowers of Truth.

One who is a lover lives in a world all his own. As soon as you begin to love, your mind passes into a new world where the values are different from the values of this world, where the purpose of enquiry is not of the same kind, where even the laws of cause and effect are not of the same kind as the laws of cause and effect here. In this way, if you form the habit of devotion to God, giving yourself up to that devotion with all the enthusiasm you can command, and if you can apply the psychological laws which I have put before you today, you will find that your spiritual life will be enriched, and then nothing will matter in this world. A poet says: 'If a king is angry with me, what do I care; there are many kingdoms in this world to which I can go. But if my Lord is angry, what place is left for me?' 'The Lord is angry with me' means that the tap in my soul, from which gushes forth all beauty, all joy and all freedom, has been stopped. If the flow of this great vital energy has been suspended even for a little time, is life worthwhile?

Purify our hearts, O Lord of the Universe, by conferring upon us the light of Thy Wisdom, so that none may be a stranger to us in the world. May all look upon us as friends, and may we look upon each and everybody as our friend.

**H.P.S.**

## A Matter of Fact

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ONE OF the best known aphorisms of Ludwig Wittgenstein is the first proposition of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which states that the world is everything that is the case. The second proposition asserts that what is the case is the fact, and it is then further explained that the world is made up of a collection of atomic facts (that is, facts that cannot be shown to be composite of other, more fundamental facts) and is constituted by them in the same way that matter is made up of atoms. The world, or reality, according to Wittgenstein, is the totality of these facts.

The aim of the scientist could be said to be to discover the facts from which the empirical world is made up. When they have been discovered, these truths can be expressed in statements about what is or is not the case. Such statements are what Wittgenstein (along with other logicians) calls propositions, and in his earlier philosophy, he thought that such propositions, like the statement: 'Socrates is wise' or 'matter is made up of atoms', provided a picture of the facts which they stated. They represented the facts linguistically, and all language is of this nature; language tried to picture the world, portraying particular features of the world in which we live.

A proposition may be true or false, according to whether there are facts corresponding to those that it pictures. But since the facts can only be known by observation, which is not always reliable, the truth of such propositions is uncertain, and we can only trust them with varying degrees of confidence. Ideally the degree of trust should be proportional to the actual probability of their being true, but that is very much an ideal.

Wittgenstein says there are three classes of propositions, two of which are rather peculiar. A certain class of proposition, or statement, is indubitably true and certain. Unfortunately, such statements do not teach us anything about the world at all. All mathematical statements, Wittgenstein says, are of this kind. They are what philosophers call 'tautologies', which re-state something which we have already accepted

as true in slightly different words, perhaps without realizing it. The statement, 'Twice two is four', is an example of this type of proposition. It does not really tell us anything about the world. It simply depends upon the rules of mathematics which we ourselves, or at least those who came before us, have set up, and the names which they have given to the concepts in it. Provided we understand the meaning of the words, classes of this proposition, tautologies, are self-evident, certain and true.

Wittgenstein holds that there is another special class of proposition which is invariably false, because it describes something which is impossible and a contradiction in terms. It can be said, for instance, that something cannot be both red and not red at one and the same time. Logically speaking, nothing can be both 'a' and 'not a', because it is self-contradictory. So, Wittgenstein gives us an example of an indubitably true proposition: it is either raining or it is not raining. To say that it is both would be a typical example of a self-contradictory proposition, which is manifestly and certainly false.

Apart from these two special classes of propositions which are, respectively, true and certain, or false and impossible, all other propositions in the third class are only possibly true, and we have varying degrees of belief in the probability of their being correct. These include all the statements made by scientists about the nature of the world, propositions which actually try to provide a description of the facts of the matter.

Scientists try to discover the facts and express them in scientific laws, which are, in Wittgenstein's sense, statements of what is the case in regard to the world in which we live. Therefore, scientific explanations fall into that class of propositions which are possibly true, but not either certain and indubitable, or false and impossible. We have to decide on the probability of their being true by other means, and those means are empirical experience and experiment.

There is also another closely related problem well known to the logicians, that scientific verification is what is known as inductive rather than deductive. It operates by making observations and inferring a general truth from them, but this can never give certainty, because

there is always the possibility that we may in the future make an observation which falsifies that which we have so far thought to be true. A good example of this is the proposition: 'All swans are white,' which remains true until the day you come across a black swan.

Experimental observation can nonetheless bring us a newer and truer view of the world. An important example of this was the experiment of Michelson and Morley, which showed that the speed of light, as measured by an observer at any particular spot, was constant, irrespective of the speed or direction of movement of the observer through space. This led to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and its truth was verified experimentally by the observations which finally established the inadequacy of Newtonian physics. First, Einstein correctly explained a puzzling discrepancy in the rotation of the perihelion of Mercury which did not fit the Newtonian calculations, and secondly, by confirming the predicted bending of light passing near a large mass. This was verified when the Royal Society sent out two expeditions in 1919 to make measurements on a distant star viewed next to the sun during a total eclipse, and it was found that the light was bent in the way that Einstein had predicted.

This illustrates that although scientific truths are propositions of the kind Wittgenstein characterizes as possible rather than certain, there is a great deal of difference between a true proposition and a false one, and this depends on whether it is experimentally verified in experience. This is true whether you are a scientist or not. The respect we have for science is based on the reliability of the method by which it has enabled us to understand nature, and to use that understanding to control her. Western science has changed the world, not only technologically, but politically and socially, and it dominates our present day life because it provides us with this method.

The impact of science, and the nature of scientific truth, can be illustrated from the history of its first arrival in China in the seventeenth century. At the end of the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries had established a presence at the Court of the last Ming Emperor. By the time that the Dynasty fell, and was succeeded by the Manchus, a gentle, scholarly German Jesuit, Father Adam Schale, had

already been appointed Court Astronomer and given the rank of Mandarin, because he was very learned and had been able to demonstrate this clearly to the Chinese by accurately predicting an eclipse.

The Manchu Dynasty began with a regency, since the new Emperor, Shun-Chi, was under age; he eventually assumed power at the early age of thirteen. He was a strong character, who, despite his young age, completely reformed the degenerate habits of the court life, surrounding himself with scholars and learned men, and holding long discussions with them. He was greatly influenced by the Dalai Lama, who came to visit him in Peking two years after his accession. He was already a devout Buddhist, and this confirmed him in his faith, although he was invariably tolerant and interested in hearing about other faiths. And this is well illustrated by the fact that Father Schale, the Jesuit, developed a unique relationship with this new young Emperor, Shun-Chi, during the latter's youth. He was of course very skilful in astronomy and mathematics, and these were very important to the Chinese, who determined the auspicious and inauspicious days for doing anything, particularly for the Emperor, by reference to the position of the stars. Eloise Hibbert's book on Kang-Tse contains a remarkable account of the friendship between Emperor and Jesuit:

It was a real friendship, if a strange one. Shun-Chi, breaking every established precedent, would leave the palace whenever he could, and spend whole days in the house of the Jesuit priest visiting the church, the garden, the library and the sacristy like any other guest. He sat in so many different chairs that the Father was eventually obliged to remonstrate with him, as it was the custom that no should ever sit in a chair that had once been used by the Emperor. Shun-Chi laughed and told his friend to pay no attention to any such custom as that, and as proof of his affection he took of his own fur-lined vest one day and wrapped it about the old man, saying that the latter was insufficiently clad for the bitter weather. For hours at a time the Emperor and Father Schale would talk together of the strange lands across the sea, and the curious habits and customs which existed in those lands. 'Ma-Fa' was the name which Shun-Chi gave to the Jesuit, a term which in the

Manchu language signified 'Venerable Father'. Once more under the new Emperor Father Schale was appointed Royal Astronomer, and this time he was made a Mandarin of the First Class. His influence with the Emperor was so great that Shun-Chi would listen to him when he was heedless of the words of anyone else. He believed in the integrity of the missionary, and once said to his courtiers: 'Ma-Fa is a man without equal. Other Mandarins serve me only for their own advancement in life, and they never cease to demand favours. Ma-Fa never requests anything for himself. He is content with having my good will; that is what I call being served with love and devotion.'

Hardly surprisingly, the Chinese astronomers of the Court were jealous and resentful of Father Schale's influence. Shun-Chi died young of small-pox or abdicated secretly to become an unknown Buddhist monk. He was succeeded by the young Kang-Tse, who again was under age. The Chinese astronomers and others accused the Jesuits of teaching bad astronomy, understanding nothing, and of plotting to prepare the invasion of China by the Portuguese. The four Regents then in charge had the four Jesuit priests residing in Peking arrested and imprisoned. They were treated there with great cruelty, and charged with three things: conspiring against the state, teaching a pernicious doctrine and advocating European astronomy which was incorrect. In the event, it became difficult to prove either of the first two charges under investigation for lack of evidence, and the trial centred more and more on the question of their competence in mathematics and astronomy.

As the eldest and most respected of the Jesuits, Father Adam Schale was accused of having chosen an inauspicious day for the burial of the infant son of the Emperor Shun-Chi, and of his favourite wife, Tung Kue Feh, as a result of which the deaths of the Emperor and his concubine had followed shortly after that of the child. This was a capital offence in the eyes of the Chinese, and Father Schale was condemned to the 'death of a thousand cuts' while his three companions were banished to Tartary for life.

The Jesuit Fathers possessed a firm belief in the reality of miracles, and they prayed for Divine intervention at that point, as they waited for

the sentence to be carried out, and it was precisely at this time that an earthquake occurred which destroyed a large part of the city of Peking.

The first earthquake took place when a great assembly of Mandarins had been convened to confirm the death sentence passed on Father Schale. The Regents dared not proceed with the execution without the consent of Buchita, the powerful Emperor's Dowager, therefore both she and the young Emperor [Kang-Tse] had been requested to attend the assembly. Buchita had the death warrant in her hand, when the walls of the palace shook and the earth rumbled beneath her feet. All the company ran into the courtyard of the palace and waited in terror for what might come. When fifteen minutes later a second shock occurred, Buchita cried in a loud voice: 'A pardon for all prisoners.' In the city the people were panic-stricken: they fled from their homes to live in tents in the fields. It was said openly on every side that the God of the Christians had spoken: He was showing His displeasure at the treatment of Father Schale.

However, once the earthquake was over, the pardon was proclaimed as applying only to those prisoners not convicted of serious crimes, and Father Schale remained under sentence of death. During the month that followed the earthquake, a number of events interpreted as ill omens occurred: a comet appeared in the sky, an event which was usually explained as predicting a change of Dynasty; a great, white bird as large as a sheep was seen on the roof of the palace; and the apartments of the Empress Dowager burnt to the ground. This final disaster procured the release of Father Schale. He was allowed to return to his home, where he remained in a state of semi-imprisonment until he died in the following year.

The trial left the question of the right system of astronomical calculation unresolved. It was noted by many people that the Jesuits had invariably proved to be right when it came to the matter of astronomical prediction, whereas the Chinese astronomer, who was a protégé of the Regents, had shown his incompetence over and over again.

You have to have some sympathy with him; he had a problem. The Chinese divided their year into long months of thirty days, and short

months of twenty-nine days. Every year had several uncounted days left over, and when these were added together every five years they made an extra month which was then added to the calendar. It was largely these uncounted days and the way of doing things, which were the reason why the Chinese method of reckoning was so incorrect. Sometimes an eclipse of the sun was predicted too soon, sometimes too late; sometimes one arrived unexpectedly.

The fact that Father Schale could correctly predict the eclipse of the sun soon after his arrival in Peking, was the reason why he had originally been appointed Royal Astronomer, and why the Jesuits had had such success in the Chinese Court. The new Emperor, Kang-Tse, who had not approved of the Regents' actions, arranged for a test of the relative validity of the two systems of calculation. But he first went secretly to one of the Jesuits, and asked him whether there was a method by which they could know which was the true and which was the false method. Father Schale's successor was a young Belgian mathematician, also a Jesuit, and he replied that nothing could be simpler. He said, let the Mandarins give to the other astronomer a stick of wood of any form or height that he preferred; let them give a second one to his assistant, and a third one to the Jesuits. And then on a day that the Emperor would designate, the three sticks should be fixed perpendicularly in the ground, and each of them would endeavour to determine the exact position of the shadow of the sun at the noon hour. The one who made no mistakes in his calculations could be said to have the true system of mathematics.

The test was held, and the Chinese astronomer was unable to predict the exact position of the shadow, even though it was repeated three times on different occasions, whereas the Jesuit Father invariably succeeded, and as a result the Chinese astronomer was arrested and the Jesuit Father was made the Director of the Imperial Observatory in his place.

This story illustrates several things—firstly, the method of experimental verification on which scientific truth depends, and the independence of the facts which it aims to determine. It is an attempt to determine what the facts are which make up the world, and to

understand the general laws which govern what happens, as in the movements of the heavenly bodies.

The story also raises the question of miracles. Nowadays, we would explain the earthquake as a natural phenomenon, due to the movement or slippage of the edges of the tectonic plates. We now know very well how continental drift occurs and the way in which these tectonic plates move. Nowadays, we would explain the earthquake as a natural phenomenon due to this cause, and the idea that it could be a miracle would be totally unacceptable to the modern, scientific attitude. If it is a natural phenomenon, explained by natural causes, then it cannot also be due to Divine intervention: this is self-contradictory, and it falls within the class of propositions characterized by Wittgenstein as self-evidently false and logically impossible. Either the earthquake can be completely explained by the operation of the pre-existing laws of nature, or it is an unprecedented event brought about by Divine intervention in response to the Jesuit's prayer or help; it cannot be both at the same time.

This raises the question of what we mean by a miracle. One might ask why God does not produce some miracles in modern times, in order to provide evidence of the spiritual truth and turn mankind towards it again. The reason why miracles seem no longer to happen is because to describe something as a miracle is an expression of the attitude we take to an event, rather than the event itself. If things appear to us sufficiently unusual and improbable, so that we feel with reason that they cannot be explained by the ordinary course of nature and may indeed defy the laws of nature itself, we may be tempted to invoke a miraculous cause. But nowadays, we have great faith in the ability of science to explain things, and we equally find that what common-sense regards as impossible is continually being defied by events and the achievements of the scientists.

For example, who would have believed in the ability of aircraft to take off vertically? When we go to see the performance of an illusionist, we expect to be shown things which are impossible, like sawing ladies in half and then putting them together again, or spiriting something in and out of an empty box to which there is no apparent

access. In these cases we do not invoke miracles. Instead we puzzle over the way in which these feats are achieved, and we ask ourselves: ‘What’s the trick?’ implying that we have been fooled. We do not think that they are done by contradicting the laws of nature, but rather by the power achieved by understanding how these laws really work, and by the misleading influence of our everyday expectations of how they work. In this sense, science has made us so familiar and blasé with its ability to achieve apparently impossible feats, that we are hardly surprised by anything. What science reveals to us about the world has already left common-sense far behind. Perhaps this change of attitude is well expressed by the saying of John Locke: ‘When a man tells me that God spoke to him in a dream, all I know is that he dreamt that God spoke to him.’

The question often asked about miracles: ‘Did it really happen?’ is not really adequately answered by a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and in any case an evidentiary miracle is of little evidence of anything except itself, which, of course, is never the point.

Scientific truths are neither absolutely certain nor self-evidently false, but the fact that they are uncertain does not mean that any of the ideas put forward are equally true. None of us would want to drive over a bridge built by someone who lacked knowledge of modern engineering techniques. It would be like the faulty astronomical calculations the Chinese used to predict the position of the sun.

It sounds straightforward to assert that all one has to do is to find out the facts. But in science there is often an ambiguity about the facts which does not seem to be simply due to ignorance, but is embedded in the very nature of experience. There are well known examples which puzzle the investigator and seem impossible to explain in terms of common-sense. One is the nature of light, which seems at times to behave as if it was made up of discreet packets, or photons, as Newton originally suggested, and at other times like waves in a continuous medium. It thus shows totally contradictory and irreconcilable properties. Another is the nature of time and place, which seem to lose all their ordinary meaning in the Einsteinian universe, so that the idea of simultaneity of two events in separate places is no longer

meaningful. Another is the idea of matter, or substance, which seems to have altogether disappeared from the modern world of the physicist. These paradoxes are like great riddles which nature poses to the scientist in the course of his investigations, and which seem to echo the great dictum of the Advaita Vedanta, which proclaims that the nature of the empirical world turns out in the end to be indeterminable when it is considered objectively as being distinct from the underlying Reality, the Absolute.

The Einsteinian Theory of Relativity has brought the observer back into the world of science, which has hitherto attempted to concentrate on the objective facts and ignore the investigator. But, if Advaita Vedanta is right, we need to include the investigator too in our enquiry, and this is something which some of the greatest of modern scientists have realized. Let me draw your attention to a passage from a little book by one of the greatest of modern physicists, Erwin Schroedinger. He is discussing the problem of the fact of our existence: of where we are and what we experience.

For philosophy then the real difficulty lies in the spatial and temporal multiplicity of observing and thinking individuals. If all events took place in one consciousness the whole situation would be extremely simple. There would then be something given: a simple datum, and this however otherwise constituted could scarcely present us with a difficulty of such magnitude as the one that we have on our hands.

(One of the problems he has been dealing with is the problem of explaining how we can share thoughts and feel that we intimately share in the consciousness of another person.)

I do not think this difficulty can be logically resolved by consistent thought within our intellects, but it is quite easy to express the solution in words. Thus, the plurality that we perceive is only an appearance—it is not real. Vedantic philosophy, in which this is a fundamental dogma, has sought to clarify it by a number of analogies. One of the most attractive being the many-faceted crystal which, while showing hundreds of little pictures of what is in reality a single existent object, does not really multiply that object. We intellectuals of today are not

accustomed to admit a pictorial analogy as a philosophical insight. We insist on logical deduction. But as against this it may perhaps be possible for logical thinking to disclose at least this much: that to grasp the basis through logical thought may in all probability be impossible, since logical thought itself is a part of phenomena and wholly involved in them. And we may ask ourselves whether in that case we are obliged to deny ourselves the use of an allegoric picture of the situation, merely on the grounds that its fitness cannot be strictly proved? In a considerable number of cases logical thinking brings us up to a certain point and then leaves us in the lurch. Faced with an area not directly accessible to these lines of thought, but one into which they seem to lead, we may manage to fill it in in such a way that the lines do not simply peter out, but converge on some central point in that area. This may amount to an extremely valuable rounding out of our picture of the world, and its worth is not to be judged by those standards of rigorous, unequivocal, inescapability from which we started out. There are hundreds of cases in which science uses this procedure and it has long been recognized as justified....

The next piece is almost in the form of a meditation, which Schroedinger begins by asking the reader to imagine being seated on a bench beside a path in high mountain country, overlooking a valley, with the climbing, wooded hills gradually giving way to treeless pasture, overlooked by 'the mighty, glacier tipped peak, its smooth snow fields and hard edged rock faces, touched at this moment with soft rose colour by the late rays of the departing sun...'

According to our usual way of looking at it, everything that you are seeing has, apart from small changes, been there for thousands of years before you. After a while, not long, you will no longer exist, and the woods, and rocks and sky will continue, unchanged for thousand of years after you. What is it that has called you so suddenly out of nothingness, to enjoy for a brief while a spectacle which remains quite indifferent to you? The conditions for your existence are almost as old as the rocks. For thousands of years men have striven, and suffered, and begotten and women have brought forth in pain. A hundred years ago perhaps another man sat on this spot. Like you he gazed with awe and yearning in his heart at the dying light on the glaciers. Like you he was

begotten of man and born of woman. He felt pain and brief joy, as you do. Was he someone else? Was it not you yourself? What is this 'self' of yours? What was the necessary condition for making the thing conceived this time into you? Just you and not someone else. What clearly intelligible, scientific meaning can this someone else really have? If she who is now your mother had cohabited with someone else, and had a son by him, and your father had done likewise, would you have come to be? Or were you living in them, and in your father's father thousands of years ago? And even if this is so, why are you not your brother? Why is your brother not you? Why are you not one of your distant cousins? What justifies you in obstinately discovering this difference—the difference between you and someone else, when objectively what is there is the same.

Looking and thinking in that manner you may suddenly come to see in a flash the profound rightness of the basic conviction in Vedanta. It is not possible that this unity of knowledge, feeling and choice, which you call your own, should have sprung into being from nothingness at a given moment not so long ago. Rather this knowledge, feeling and choice are essentially eternal, and unchangeable, and numerically one in all men. Nay, in all sensitive beings. But not in this sense that 'you' are a part, a piece of an eternal infinite being; an aspect, or modification of it as in Spinoza's Pantheism, for we should then have the same baffling question: which part? Which aspect are 'you'? What objectively differentiates it from the others? No, but inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you and all other conscious beings as such are all in all. Hence this life of yours, which you are living, is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the whole, only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in one single glance. This, as we know, is what the Brahmins express in that sacred, mystic formula, which is really yet so simple and so clear: 'Tat Twam Asi', 'This is You', or again in such words as: 'I am in the East and in the West; I am below and above; I am this whole world.'

**S.D.S.**

## THE PLANES OF THE MIND ARE THREE

ONE PLANE of our mind (*antahkarana*) looks outward through the five sense organs. Another plane of the mind looks inward: it reflects, remembers, imagines, doubts, speculates, makes plans, etc.

To an ordinary man, the mind consists only of these two planes. He imagines that this is the entire psychic life. But the mystics, the wise, the true seers, know that there is yet another plane of the mind, called *buddhi*, and it transcends the other two planes. Its functions are peace and imperishable joy, which do not depend for their origin or maintenance on any external or psychological event. This plane of *buddhi* lies dormant in a spiritually ignorant man. St Paul calls this higher life 'love', Shri Shankara calls it 'wisdom'. It is given to the yogi to live that higher life and enjoy the blessings of peace unbroken and joy everlasting; in other words, to experience true love.

Life lived on the lower planes, and that experienced on the higher plane, are not the same. As a man cannot sail up and down a river at the same time, one cannot open the inner portals of the mind and awaken the higher plane of the *buddhi* and yet remain bound to the two lower planes. Mere reflection does not give peace and bliss.

One may ask: 'What is the use of treading the higher path? Why give up the sense joys for an uncertain gain?' The answer is: 'There is no everlasting joy or true freedom in the life of the lower two planes.'

The perfection of the heavens, the beauty of spring and of the dawn, the peace of swans floating on a lotus lake kissed by the rays of the declining sun, are glimpses of a higher life. Open the windows of the higher *buddhic* plane of your mind, which commands a view of the Infinite, or yours is a mutilated life. 'Return home, O wanderer, home to your hearth', is the cry of nature to the soul.

Practise self-control, effacement of temporal interests, and turn to God subjectively in devotion, patience, renunciation and compassion. What Aristotle and Hegel failed to see, you can see. What they missed is open to you.

May none be excluded from my love!  
May forgiveness flow from me forever!  
May humility be my badge, O supreme Spirit!

H.P.S.

## SHANTI SADAN NEWS

During the Autumn term the Wednesday evening presentations formed a series called *Meditation: Awakening to Inner Freedom*. Each consisted of an introductory talk followed by a meditation session. The talks covered the essential practicalities of meditation as well as the spiritual principles on which it is based. The series began with *Preparing to Get the Most from Meditation* and culminated in *Meditation - Attainment of Spiritual Peace*. They also considered ways of making the mind a valuable friend in life, how to deepen our inner resources, the right use of imagination and will, and how to overcome the obstacles that arise to meditation.

The Friday evening lectures were a series on *Wisdom from the World's Great Mystical Traditions*. As well as talks on great modern teachers of Advaita Vedanta and Adhyatma Yoga, it included talks on *The Way of Zen*; *Insights from Kabir* on the great 15<sup>th</sup> century Indian poet saint of that name; *Light Above the Cloud of Unknowing* on the famous classic of Christian mysticism; *Kobo Daishi and the True Word*, on the Buddhist sage who brought the teachings to Japan; *The Everlasting Tao*, and *The Inward Gaze - Princess Mirabai* whose ecstatic poetry expresses a fusion of the non-dual understanding and intense devotion.

The Autumn afternoon course was on *The Ancient Yoga for Today* and offered meditation practices and talks on the direct applicability of the traditional teachings to the pressing inner and outer challenges of the modern world.

After much consideration it has been decided to adjust the dates of the weekday talks at Shanti Sadan. Starting with the new term in February 2011, they will be held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings instead of Wednesdays and Fridays as before. Readers of *Self-Knowledge* will as always be most welcome at any of the meetings they are able to attend.