

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

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SHANTI SADAN, 29 CHEPSTOW VILLAS, LONDON W11 3DR

to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN TERM 2012

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from 2 October to 29 November 2012. The Tuesday evenings will be guided meditation sessions. On Thursday evenings there will be a series of discourses on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

AUTUMN 2012 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 4 November, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Please see the inside back cover for details.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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ROLE MODELS

We learn through education, experience and example. Learning does not end with diplomas, but can be expanded and deepened all through life. During this development, we adopt different role models, outgrowing early fixations in favour of more substantial and fulfilling choices. Many young people, adrift in society, complain that there is no one they know whom they admire and wish to emulate; and the discovery of such a friend, if he or she has wisdom and stability of character, often sets their life in a higher direction.

This thirst for a role model is not just a social phenomenon. There is something central and profound in human nature which seeks communion with someone higher than ourselves. By 'higher' is meant someone we think has reached a position of fulfilment and completeness, whose potentialities have been realized whereas our own remain dormant. By linking ourselves to that person or influence, we feel that our higher possibilities will manifest, and fulfilment will be ours, too.

As we develop, our role model changes. We may at first be drawn to someone whose smooth life-style brings maximum gain with minimal effort, but on deeper reflection draw our inspiration from those who show selflessness and true dedication. Our model need not be someone who is still alive; many still draw inspiration from the example of figures like Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Mahatma Gandhi.

But we set our standards high, demanding perfection. When little flaws of character emerge in our role model, we grow disillusioned. In fact, through this craning upwards to admire and commune with someone higher than ourselves, we are reaching for the Infinite. This is because our innermost spiritual nature is infinite and perfect, and only perfection will satisfy perfection.

The greatest examples are those spiritually awakened beings, the saints, sages and incarnations, whose mental and physical instruments are fully in tune with the Infinite. It has been said that the hearts of such people are 'as a running river—apparently confined by its banks but really connected with the infinite silvery ocean'.

Such spiritually illumined ones point not to themselves, but to the realm of transcendence. They actually point to something present, though hidden, within our own being, the divine spark concealed in 'the inmost chamber of our intellect'. This is the spiritual light, ever pure, blissful and infinite.

The ultimate perfection, reflected in our role model, is to be found in our own nature. The worldly talents we admire may be beyond our reach, for such gifts depend on special training and circumstances to bring them to maturity. But our spiritual development can proceed from where we are standing (or sitting) right now, because the divine is already within us, and revealed in mental quietude and a life of inner communion with that deeper Reality.

Know the Truth

A slightly shortened version of a lecture given by Hari Prasad Shastri on October 28th 1955

ONE OF THE wisest sayings of Jesus of Nazareth is: 'Know ye the Truth and the Truth will make you free.' Man feels that he is in bondage. There are psychological bonds. There are time-spatial bonds. There are bonds self-imposed by wrong habits and by wrong imagination. There is no happiness in bondage. How can the bondage end? 'Know ye the Truth.'

What is Truth? This is a question which has puzzled the philosophers of the world. Let me give an axiomatic reply to which no one can take exception. The Truth is the one who asks the question: 'What is Truth?' Truth is that element in, above, below and transcending nature, which abides in the three-fold division of time unchanged. That is the definition of Truth given in the *Nyaya Shastra* (the ancient Indian teaching on logic), which I think is better than any either given by Hume, or by any Greek or German philosopher. 'I', 'I', 'I! This 'I' is Truth. The mind is not Truth, conception and perception are not Truth, because they change with the changes in time, but the 'I' is Truth. 'Know ye the Truth' means 'Know what is this I'.

To know means to know the nature of an object. It is to know that without which that object cannot be conceived of; and that is called the truth of the object. What is the truth of 'I'? That is the question. Man tries to find joy and happiness in this time-spatial world, but he is sure to feel disappointment at each and every step unless he kindles the flame of Truth within him.

Shri Shankara has said: 'In the world of experience there is not even the shadow of happiness.' We have a semblance of happiness, but no true and enduring happiness in the world at all. Then where is happiness? 'Know ye the Truth and the Truth will make you free.' Freedom is a concomitant of happiness. There is no happiness without freedom, and there is no freedom without happiness, and this is the result of knowing Truth. And what is Truth? 'I', 'I', 'I'. 'Know ye the Truth' means know the nature of 'I'. What is 'I'? Is it the body? Is it

time and space? Is it the law of cause and effect? What is Truth? Is it the mind?

Now here the European philosophy comes to a halt. Some time ago, I read a statement by an Indian philosopher who said that Indian philosophy begins where the European philosophy ends. Where does the European philosophy end? With the mind. And the beginning of the Indian philosophy is the region beyond the mind. The region beyond the mind is 'I', 'I'. Do you not every day say: 'My mind is tired. My mind is peaceful. My mind is agitated.' Who is saying 'my mind'? It is 'I'. To know its nature, to realize its perfect nature, free from all delusions and errors, is to know Truth, and to know Truth is to be free forever, and to land in the realm of eternal light and bliss. Otherwise we live only in the realm of shadows. All you see in the world, all you perceive and conceive, all you can imagine, is in the realm of the fast receding shadows of the clouds of ignorance which cover the firmament of the human 'I' or human spirit.

Our chief aim is to realize Truth. Now I ask you to have a little practice. Close your eyes, be still, be relaxed; withdraw your mind and just meditate on 'I', 'I', 'I'. Just meditate on 'I' and this is the highest meditation of Truth, the highest meditation on God that can set the soul free from error and from delusion.

This is the bedrock statement—the first principle of the whole Oriental philosophy, particularly the philosophy of Yoga.

Now I come down into the lower region in order to point out the means and ways which can help us in the life of knowledge, the realization of Truth, freedom and inner light. The highest force at the disposal of man is neither the military force, nor the force of duty, nor worship, nor wealth. It is his mind. By a subdued and balanced mind, man can create peace and light within, and peace and beauty without. In the inner realm we want peace and light. In deep sleep there is peace. Perhaps the state of death also can be called a state of peace, but there is no light there, and light means exuberance of Consciousness, Chit.

Mind is the only creative force in the world. Whatever creativity you find in the realm of letters or in scientific observation, it cannot be divorced from mind. It is the rays of the balanced, subdued and concentrated mind that create anything which you see anywhere.

There are two minds: the individual mind and the cosmic mind, which is called *hiranyagarbha* in the Upanishads. The cosmic mind helps the individual mind when the individual mind establishes a channel with the cosmic mind. The cosmic mind is like a glacier, and the individual minds are like the small streams that flow from the glacier. If by concentration and discipline, the mind can remember that its main source is the glacier, or the cosmic mind of God, then the mind can create peace and light within, and peace and prosperity without. If not, fatigue, restlessness, sleeplessness and so many other symptoms which are associated with an unbalanced mind, are the only achievement of man and nothing else.

Now I want to expose a principle of consciousness which is hinted at by William James, but which is fully developed by Patanjali in the first part of his *Yoga Sutras*. The mind is like a river: it has its banks and its midstream. William James calls it 'marginal consciousness' and 'central consciousness'. When your mind is not concentrated and is wavering and subject to desires, then it functions only in the marginal consciousness.

Let us take an example. You are standing in a field. You see a form in the distance. You are not interested in the object, because at present it affects only your marginal consciousness. You wait, and the object comes nearer, and then you begin to think, 'Oh, well it's a man.' Then you begin to become interested in it. When the figure comes closer to you, you find it is your own brother whom you have not seen for seven years. He had gone to fight and now he has returned and you see him. What happens now? You are concentrated and interested, and you feel glimpses of joy and peace at having met your brother.

What has really happened when you recognized the form to be a man, and then your brother? Your mind is concentrated on the central consciousness and not on the marginal consciousness. You have to lift the mind from the marginal consciousness and to focus it on the central consciousness. By doing so you create within you peace and light, and you create by the sweetness of your behaviour, kindness and love outside.

What is the moral of this story? Let us concentrate on the central consciousness, and then we will be able to understand the nature of 'I',

‘I’, ‘I’. How many people use the word God. How many people heard the sermons of Jesus of Nazareth; but how few people really understood Him! And those who understood Him were fishermen of Galilee, except for one or two, all illiterate people. But they became rulers of the mind of the world. At their appearance the whole Greek philosophy shivered and vanished into thin air like the dark clouds passing under a great storm into nothing. Why? What was the object? Because they brought Jesus, not into their marginal consciousness, but into their central consciousness.

One thing more. Central consciousness is associated with man’s ‘I’ and identity. If you can concentrate on identity consciousness, then you can become a Goethe; you can become an Aristotle; you can become a Plato. Then you can become a Dante, what to say of a Shakespeare, whose genius, though very great and stupendous, was only the genius of a humanist, not the genius of a great philosopher like Plato, or Dante, or Goethe.

Now in order to achieve this, two things are necessary. One is that you make your mind balanced. How? Don’t run after each and every desire. Have very few desires. Have one great master passion. If you have one great master passion, then all the little desires cease to mean anything at all. It is only then that you can concentrate, and that you can create something which is worthwhile—when you have a master passion. And that master passion is called devotion to the cosmic ‘I’ of which your ‘I’ is a little reflection.

Now I tell you of an experiment which you can try whenever you like. Draw an imaginary line of light from this point [the navel] and ending at the spot between the eyebrows. Draw an imaginary line and concentrate on that line as much as you can while walking, reading, going, whenever you are not doing something that demands your full attention. Concentrate your mind on this central line, and you will find that your concentration becomes creative, and you will begin to have glimpses of peace. Then you can very easily control your mind. Instead of riding a wild horse, that is, of being subject to a mind full of desires, you will have one great desire, and that desire is: ‘I must know Truth.’ Shri Shankara says: Giving up all little desires, meditate on ‘What am I?’ ‘What am I?’ ‘What am I?’ If you know ‘I’, you know God. A Persian

proverb says: ‘The enquiry into Self is the enquiry into God, and the acquisition of the knowledge of Self is the knowledge of God.’

By following these practices, if you study the spiritual philosophy with greater care and every day, and if you meditate in the morning as you are being told now, and as you can read in our book of *Meditation*, you will find that your attention will become concentration. The mind becomes creative when it is concentrated, not when its thoughts flit from one object to another. Creativity in art, science, literature, philosophy, or in any other department which is good, is the result of concentration. Therefore concentrate on ‘I’; concentrate on God. Let ultimate Truth, by study, by reflection, and in peace, grow from the marginal to the central consciousness, and this is called devotion to God. Infinite and eternal knowledge comes to you when you focus your heart and your soul on devotion.

You become what you give devotion to. Let your aim be ‘shanti’—creative inner peace. By the word ‘peace’ I mean that state of the mind in which the soul can manifest what is best in it. And what is best in the soul? Infinitude in light, in existence, in blissfulness, Shiva, or Brahman: and that we call peace. Our peace is not the peace of Mr Doing Nothing. That is not peace at all. Peace must be creative. And what should peace create? What is best in our soul; and what is best in our soul is that ‘God is in us and is with us’—a great saying of the founder of the Methodist Church.

This is the way, my friends. It may take long or it may come true very soon, but there is nothing to be worried about. If it takes long, continue it and go on with it. Beauty and virtue in egolessness are the great guides of life. As long as the ego is assertive, you can neither be a devotee nor a creator of anything at all.

Now I am going to talk about a few more practical things which may help you in the continuity of restfulness of the mind, as a prelude to peace, or shanti—the state in which the soul will manifest what is best in it, that is, Divinity or God-head itself.

There was a man who had only one room. He had a cow. It was at one time in India considered a great merit to have a cow, to serve a cow. Why? Because a cow, as Mahatma Gandhi has said, is a poem in compassion. The cow is a link between man and the lower animals, and

the devotion to the cow was the devotion to God in all the lower animals.

Well, this man had only one room, and when he sat for meditation, the cow disturbed his attention by moving to and fro. He did not want to show his anger, because it is the height of stupidity to show anger either to anybody or even to an animal. As soon as you begin to show anger many of the vital functions of your body are suspended. Among them is the digestive system, the heart is unbalanced, the flow of the blood in the arteries, capillaries and veins is also disturbed. So he did not want to be angry with the cow. He said, 'Now, what can I do so that the cow may be restful?'

He went to a friend and laid his problem before him. The friend said: 'It's very easy! Have plenty of green grass and put it before the cow, and before it is finished add a few more handfuls; and the cow will stand and chew and will then rest and redigest what it has eaten.' And it proved to be very true indeed! The cow became restful and the man was able to meditate very carefully without any difficulty.

The mind is the cow. You want to concentrate in order to create light, peace and bliss within. If you meditate and concentrate for any worldly purpose, you are prostituting the great yogic practice and the result will be disappointment. I remember the line of Sophocles: 'If Zeus wants you to ask for a boon, be careful what you ask for!' Because Zeus can grant anything in the world, and if you ask for a boon, ask for immortality; ask for learning; ask for light; ask for eternal freedom; not like the ordinary souls who are crazy for the things of the world only. They forget that Columbus, the discoverer of the New World, was buried in his chains. His chains were not taken off him, though he was buried by the order of Queen Isabella, because his whole life was devoted to personal gain, to worldly gain.

Therefore apply the spiritual means in order to have the spiritual gain. If your mind is switched to the spiritual gain, to inner peace and concentration, to pouring your devotion like a Niagara from your heart into the great God Who is within and without, Who is likened to light, Who is Sat-Chit-Ananda (existence-consciousness-bliss absolute), what else do you want in life? Whether you live poor or you live rich, it does not matter at all, because freedom and peace are neither in poverty nor

in riches, but they are in a mind concentrated on the central consciousness in the idea of God.

Therefore give to your mind the holy name of God, the holy concept of Yoga, or a few verses of the *Ramayana* or some other great spiritual classic to ponder upon, and your mind will take delight in them. Remember, the real food of our mind is subjective and not objective. Do not misread the word 'subjective' and call it objective. Objectivity is merely a shadowy phase of the infinitude of subjectivity which is 'Chit', Consciousness Infinite in man. And in this way the mind will be silent and you will be able to devote it to God in meditation, in knowledge, in practice, in samadhi.

I quote a verse of Bhartrihari, a poet who was once a great king and then became a monk, because he was disgusted with the world and fell in love with the inner peace and enlightenment. He writes: 'Those people who have no spiritual learning, who do not perform penance (by calmly enduring the trials of life), who do not give charity and have no patience, these people live in the world as beasts, though their form is human.'

May God bless you, my friends! And may the holy Truth which I have tried to convey to you sink into your heart; and may you live in the light of this Truth.

Hari Prasad Shastri

There was a man who was always annoyed at the speech of one of his companions. Once, another friend remarked: 'Your companion speaks according to the light he has. He does not mean to annoy you, nor do you feel happy when you snap at him.'

The man became tolerant. Then he was undisturbed. In fortydays he was amused over the remarks of his companion.

H.P.S.

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

THERE IS an old saying that God visits us once a day, and occasionally we might be in to receive such a guest. But often there is a sudden quiet, a moment of silence, perhaps at a dinner table, and people say something like: 'An angel is passing'. We may also experience such a feeling in a religious building or place. It is hard to describe accurately; perhaps it is a sacred hush. Silence is indeed golden as it central to meditation, both inner and outer silence. In silence, then, let us prepare for meditation by making an interior bow to the divine presence, the supreme spiritual power that pervades the inner and outer worlds.

We follow this (at these meetings) by chanting the sacred word OM for 27 times. The sound OM is used as a mantram in many lands, and it is close to the utterance 'Amen'. Its meaning is profound, symbolizing the Absolute both as present in this world of appearances and infinitely transcending it. Swami Rama Tirtha points out that, as a sound, OM, pronounced A-U-M, begins at the back of the throat and finishes at the front with the lips, so there is a sense in which it encompasses all sounds, as it includes the entire sound-making mechanism of the human voice. As we chant, we may compare the sound to that made on a cello as the bow is drawn across the strings, when the whole instrument vibrates. Similarly, while pronouncing OM, try to feel the vibrations through the entire body.

Conscious direction of the mental stream towards a spiritual goal is the key purpose of meditation, and conscious breathing helps us to still and focus the mind. The first practice is:

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

The next practice is to reject thoughts as they arise and appear in our consciousness. As Dr Shastri writes:

As you sit quiet, the seeds of thought, sown by you, and which have passed into the unconscious, begin to appear in the mind, according to

the law of association. When they appear reject them by this method. When the first thought comes before you, say 'It is illusory'. When the next thought comes, perhaps a remembrance of something you have seen, say, 'It is illusory'. After about ten minutes you will begin to think consciously. If this practice is done for 21 days, you will notice a great change, and your thinking will become constructive.

Before we do the practice, let us consider two points. Firstly, what is the law of association? Although it is a very individual thing, thoughts tend to take the shape of a 'train of thought', as one association leads to another perhaps similar or linked idea. What type of linking depends on our mental store and what we have been soaking our mind in, and also how we choose to direct our thoughts. It is a useful practice to stop a train of thought at a given point and then track the thoughts back. In this meditation, we are preventing the train from leaving the station, and having stopped it, we include the station in our dismissal 'It is illusory'.

How does this practice make our thinking constructive? It is our thought that leads to our action, and as we strengthen our awareness of our thought processes, our actions become less impulsive and instinctive, and we act with more consideration and a clearer sense of purpose.

The next practice is meditation on the text:

OM O MY MIND, FIND REST IN THE MOST BLESSED PEACE WHICH IS ALWAYS WITHIN THEE, AND FOLLOW NOT AFTER THAT WHICH IS TRANSIENT. OM

When we say 'O my mind', we are treating the mind as an object, something we are witnessing. This is where the second practice, rejecting thoughts, is helpful, for in this, too, we are witnessing our thought processes, instead of being completely identified with them. Then we are asserting that there is within this mind a blessed peace. In ordinary life, after a period of great effort and intense living, there comes a moment when it is over and we relax mentally and physiologically. This gives us a sense of real peace and happiness, at least for a while. But the peace spoken of here is blessed and always there within us, though unnoticed when our attention is held by the play of appearances. Ultimate Truth is not to be found in the world, which is 'the ever moving

thing', *jagat* in Sanskrit, but within ourselves, in inner stillness. The Sufis say: 'God is nearer to thee than the jugular vein.' This meditation is therefore educative, and if we do it properly, the mind will receive a measure of the true spiritual peace.

The second point made in this text is 'follow not after that which is transient'. *Sansara*, the world, is transient, and all is passing, but we need the spiritual counterpoint of the first half of the text, which reminds us that the changeless, peaceful, blissful (blessed) principle is to be discovered within as our true Self. Meditation on a text such as this is therefore most constructive as it opens the way to real peace.

Having dwelt on our text for seven or ten minutes, we end our meditation session by conceiving thoughts of goodwill, in a spirit of inner unity with all living beings, based on the spiritual insight of one Self in all.

A.N.

Under the Kadamba tree,
In the cool shadow of the branches,
The Divine Child* plays His flute.
The sweet enrapturing tunes.
Charm the trees, hills and birds;
The Yamuna† stops her flow,
The wind dies down, nature is quiet.
The Lord, reflected in thine intellect,
Plays the song of peace and love.
Listen to it, O mind, and be absorbed.

H.P.S.

* A traditional image of Shri Krishna.

† The sacred river Jumna.

Direct Experience of Reality

LET US approach the theme of direct experience of reality in the light of one of the great statements of spiritual Truth found in the Upanishads: *vijnanam anandam brahman*, Consciousness Bliss Brahman, the supreme goal. That is to say: The absolute reality (Brahman) is consciousness (*vijnanam*) and bliss (*anandam*) and that is our true nature. (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 3.9.28.)

There are many reasons why people become interested in Yoga: the prospect of calmness, stability, power, health, finding deeper meaning in life, and so on. But the real value of the higher Yoga is its promise of spiritual illumination, which is the ultimate goal of existence. And this illumination confers on us lasting fulfilment, by awakening us to the infinite nature of our consciousness.

This is not to say that there is no happiness to be found in the world. We may be very fortunate and feel quite fulfilled in our life. This may be through our work, our knowledge, through some achievement, through a relationship, a happy family life, or through an absorbing hobby. But somehow the mind grows thirsty again for something more, something else. This happens when we find ourselves reflecting, thinking about our life. Then a kind of restlessness returns, and we realize that the activities of life may give us relief and satisfaction for a time, but not true fulfilment.

It is true that 'hope springs eternal', and every new venture we are drawn to seems to hold great promise. When we apply for an exciting new job, we don't think in advance: 'How long will my happiness last in this position.' If we go for a certain prize, the prospect of winning it seems to gleam with lasting bliss. Even the conqueror imagines his conquests will bring enduring joy.

Therefore, we tend to magnify the pluses, and ignore or underplay potential flaws. This hopeful attitude gives us the incentive to be active, to do things. On the other hand, if we did have a vivid sense of the transiency of life and the short-lived and passing nature of the happiness we get from worldly success, who would be inspired to achieve anything?

The world process itself, and our growth of spiritual understanding, involves making experiments with life, and seeing for ourselves how far they take us.

In the Islamic tradition, this hope and belief that there is fulfilment awaiting us in the world, is called God's eye-bandaging. It is as if the divine destiny has put a veil over our intelligence, so that we expect from the world more than it can actually give us.

So we have to take part in life in order to learn wisdom. We find ourselves, as it were, revolving on the wheel of the world, the wheel of *sansara*, at least for the time being. It is not a random process, but divinely supervised, being an expression of the divine power of illusion, which the *Bhagavad Gita* calls the *Maya* of the Lord. And the first phase of our higher evolution is to learn to live in peace and harmony. As an Indian verse by Tulsidas expresses it:

In this changing world, O Tulsī,
We are travellers in the same boat;
Let us treat each other with love!

But it is wrong to think that we are destined to revolve on this wheel for ever. Our higher destiny is to free ourselves from all delusion and live in the bliss of direct experience of reality.

In a sense, as soon as we have recognized the transient nature of an experience, we are ready to transcend it. We are already loosening the eye-bandaging, that is, seeing more clearly, when we recognize: 'all is passing, passing, passing'. Once we realize this, we are beginning to detach our conscious awareness from complete identification with the situation. This detachment lessens the pain of life, because our expectations are becoming more clear-sighted and realistic, not blindly delusive.

Once we realize the transient nature of experience, we may then start to ask ourselves: 'Is it all real, or is it in some sense illusory?' This questioning attitude to life is conveyed, somewhat pessimistically, in the lines from T S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, where life's thrills and awards flash across the mind like images in a dream:

All things are unreal,
Unreal or disappointing:
The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat,
The prizes given at the children's party,
The prize awarded for the English Essay,
The scholar's degree, the statesman's decoration.
All things become less real, man passes
From unreality to unreality.

Pessimism is not the answer, and anyway, we may have wonderful memories and associations. Still, there is surely something dream-like about the events and changes in life.

But what about when we turn to ourselves? How real is this person—this 'me'—who is the experiencer of life? Where is the reality in me? Our thoughts seem real enough while we are thinking them, but they quickly disappear. What were we thinking five minutes ago? Even if we can remember, such a memory is likely to be vague and probably inaccurate. The transiency of our mental life is all too obvious. Yet, paradoxically, we seem to have a strong sense of identity with this ever-changing mind.

In the short term, our body seems more permanent than the passing thoughts and moods, just as a hotel is more permanent than the guests who come and go. The body looks much the same from day to day. But let a few months pass, and its changing nature proclaims itself, whether we are growing up or growing old.

Let us take an example from Western art. Here [overleaf] are some of Rembrandt's many portraits of himself. He painted about fifty self-portraits in oil, from his twenties until the end of his life, some forty years later. We may say: 'How vain – to paint yourself so often.' But there is another way of looking at it. In this great range of self-portraits, of which these are a sample, the artist shows a capacity to stand back and view his own body, and particularly his face, objectively, like an impersonal bystander, a kind of witness or knower. Some of the pictures suggest a mood or an attitude of mind; but again, this is witnessed, that is, known, by the artist.



This ‘stepping back’ or ‘witnessing’ reminds us of an important yogic principle. It is that this transient and mortal life of body and mind, is witnessed or known by a deeper principle within us, and this is what we need to enquire into if we want reality, and not appearance or illusion. For reality is the subtle, continuous awareness—the sense of unbroken identity—which accompanies and knows from within the changing mental states of the mind and personality.

On our spiritual path to self-knowledge, it is essential for us to learn to withdraw our sense of identification from body and mind, and affirm our true nature. How do we do this? Here is a meditation which can help us to establish this deeper base of spiritual consciousness within ourselves. Pause, take a few deep breaths, allow the mind to calm down, and affirm:

OM I WITHDRAW MY CONSCIOUSNESS FROM THE SENSES AND THE MIND, AND REST IN THE PEACE AND BLISS OF MY TRUE NATURE. OM

What is passing and what is eternal? The passing is anything we are aware of, whether it is the objects of the world or the forms taken by our thoughts. The eternal is our conscious awareness. And this conscious awareness is not a product of thought. It is independent, unchanging, ever still, ever aware, present even when there is no thought, as in deep sleep. And it is eternal. When its nature has been fully revealed, it is the highest bliss, the supreme value. Pure Consciousness supports and illumines everything and is eternal. *Vijnanam Anandam Brahman*—Brahman is consciousness and bliss.

There is a verse in the first chapter of the classic *Panchadashi*:

Through the many months, years, ages and world cycles, past and future, consciousness is the same and self-revealed.

This consciousness is our reality. It is our Self. And it is worth investigating, because only true self-knowledge—knowledge of our spiritual Self—leads to ultimate bliss and fulfilment.

Panchadashi continues:

This ever-abiding consciousness is the Self. It is the highest bliss, since it is the object of the greatest love. For love of the Self is seen in the universal feeling: ‘May I not cease to exist, may I continue to exist forever.’

It is this identification of pure consciousness with the highest bliss, or beauty, that makes our quest for direct experience of reality our supreme aspiration and achievement. It is the path that frees us from all delusion.

We know that scientists have recently detected the sub-atomic particle known as the Higgs Boson, which, they believe, greatly aids our understanding of the universe. Before the news of the discovery was confirmed, one scientist suggested that it would be just as interesting if they failed to detect the particle, because it would indicate the range of their ignorance, and be an incentive to further research and exploration.

But it is difficult to see how an incomplete and unending quest of this kind can satisfy or fulfil anyone. On the other hand, consider the certainty and the promise of completeness implied in this yogic prayer:

O Govinda (God), you create Beauty, you instill Truth.
Beauty and your presence are inseparable.
Truth and your consciousness are equally inseparable.
When we incline our hearts to Truth,
the inner meaning of life,
which defies philosophers and baffles artists,
is revealed in our being in the form of great Beauty and Light.
O Govinda, enable us to incline our lives to virtue.
Make us lovers of your Truth, O Govinda.

The ultimate knowledge we need—the knowledge that satisfies for ever—is the knowledge that is revealed in our own being, and not in anything that belongs to the material world. There is only one consciousness, and this is the divine consciousness, which is the pure principle of awareness in us.

Now when we try to discern this principle of consciousness in ourselves, we have no difficulty in knowing that we are conscious; but what is hidden is the divine and blissful nature of that consciousness. Psychologically speaking, consciousness seems to be just a feature of our mind. We say: I hear, I see, I think, I feel, I speak, I remember, and so on. Obviously consciousness has to be there for these functions to manifest. But is there a deeper dimension to consciousness than this?

Consciousness is the fundamental principle that makes experience possible, and, being infinite, is not dependent on any faculty. It is the highest bliss, since it is the object of the greatest love. Consciousness seems to be caught up in the mental functions, but in fact it is completely free, and this consciousness is the one Self in all.

The role of consciousness in our spiritual and psychological being is sometimes indicated by the example of the reflection of the sun on water. Here is a picture of the sun's reflection on innumerable sea waves. We can imagine that a child not familiar with the sea might think that the shining belongs to the waves; that each wave carries its own light. In fact, once you get this sort of reflection on water, you cannot separate the reflection and the water it is reflected in. It all seems to be one thing. This is like the relationship between consciousness and the mind, where two entirely different principles, the unchanging light of consciousness and the ever changing material of thought, appear to

coalesce as one thing, when consciousness is reflected in the mind.



But consciousness is really immortal, infinite and transcendent. It is not imprisoned in the mind, nor does it move with the thoughts. Like the sun above, consciousness is ever free and independent. But its reflection, as it were, is received by the mind and lights up the mind. From this source of reflected consciousness spring all those functions and faculties indicated by such expressions as: I hear, I see, I think, I feel, I speak, I know, and so on.

Even this sense of 'I' has its ultimate source in the supreme consciousness, the light that ever transcends the mind. We depend on light reflected from that original source that is the absolute consciousness. In terms of the sea metaphor, it is the one sun reflected in all the waves.

Why do we not recognize the divine source of the light of our being? Because, ultimately, we *are* that divine source, and, like the eye trying to see itself, our consciousness can never be objectified. From the highest standpoint, our divine nature as Consciousness Bliss Brahman has never been veiled. But on this apparent wheel of sansara, our inner understanding appears veiled, hidden by what the Sufis call God's eye-bandaging, and what Vedanta calls the Lord's power of illusion, Maya.

And this delusion makes us think that there is no more to our Self than our separate individuality, as if the sun were reduced to its reflection in the wave.

We are not the reflection of consciousness. We are in reality the infinite consciousness itself, immortal, all-pervasive and bliss. Our spiritual awakening is when the reflected consciousness in the mind knows itself as the absolute Consciousness—Brahman. The truth is: ‘I am Brahman’— *Aham brahm-asmī*.

If we look at the shining waves, it is difficult to know the real shape of what they are reflecting. It is only when the water becomes calm and still that we may get a truer impression of the source of light. When the water is calm and still, the reflection takes on new meaning. Similarly, our spiritual approach is through calming the mind and being inwardly attentive.

The idea to be grasped is: ‘I am not the mind. I am the revealer and illuminator of the thoughts. I am their witness, their seer. I am the one witness of the entire illusory stream of appearances, inner and outer.’

The ultimate awakening from our sense of identification with the mental consciousness, the reflected consciousness, to the supreme reality, is a matter of grace. This grace springs from the reality itself. It is the grace which is released from one’s own being as a result of self-purification and perseverance in our one-pointed quest for liberation.

There is a story from the Zen tradition which indicates this spiritual awakening. It was evening, and the nun was carrying her water bucket, and in the water was reflected the moon. Like her spiritual practice, the water bucket had been in her use for years. As she walked, the bamboo supports around the bucket, well worn, finally snapped and the bottom fell out. At that moment a new understanding dawned, and she wrote the poem:

In this way and that I tried to save the old bucket,
Since the bamboo strap was weakening and about to break
Until at last the bottom fell out.
No more water in the pail.
No more moon in the water.

The water signifies the mind. The reflection of the moon in the water denotes the reflection of the divine consciousness in the mind. The falling away of the bottom of the pail and the loss of the water is the moment when the mental consciousness and false identification is transcended. The mind has dissolved in its divine source. What remains is the realization and identification with Consciousness-Bliss-Brahman. That divine source of all is no longer hidden and we know that this is what we are and have always been in truth.

OM I am the sun that never sets. I am immortal, all-pervasive
and bliss. OM

B.D.

I AM THE SELF OF ALL

One summer morning,
When the soft breezes are playing with the green leaves
And tossing the branches to and fro,
When the lark is singing high in the blue
And butterflies pursuing each other in joy,
I will open my heart to Thee, O Love,
O Self of the universe.
One evening, when the sun declines
And the shadows grow longer and longer,
When the birds return to their nests
And the bees sleep in the lotuses,
When the nightingale pours out its heart to the rose,
I will sit on the bank of the holy river,
I will contemplate Thee as the essence of all.
When the stars twinkle in the sky
And the temple gongs proclaim the hour of worship,
I will merge my soul in Thee, O Lord, forever.

H.P.S.

NATURE

THE STATE of the world extending in time and space, growing, changing, evolving, untouched by the hand of man, is called nature. A study of the *Rig Veda* reveals that there were fairly large cities at that time containing houses, shops and stores over which petty kings ruled, subject to the laws of Brahmin sages. But the flower of the Veda, the highest and most beautiful product of the human mind, called philosophy, was discovered in the form of the immutable Truth by the sages who lived the purest lives in the forests. The Sanskrit word for forest is *aranya* and the Upanishads, that is, the collection of the philosophical reflections of the sages, is called *Aranyaka*, the forest born. One of the Upanishads is called *Brihadaranyaka*, meaning the classic of the great forest.

Art, which is the result of the human brain and hands applied to the material of nature, is useful only in so far as it contributes to the easy and safe running of daily life. Living in a house, protected from extreme heat and cold, is necessary because man can, by taking shelter in a house, apply his thought to the creation of beauty in the external world and the discovery of the immutable Truth in the internal world. But when art becomes an ideal for its own sake or for the sake of a life of pleasure and luxury, it defeats the higher purpose of life.

Life is struggle and creation, not apathy or lethargy. When man cuts himself off from nature and devotes his time and energy only to utilitarian art or preservation of life, then the higher springs of inspiration, love of Truth, appreciation of beauty, begin to dry up in his being and give rise to ugliness all round.

Nothing is more natural to man than to think. He who knows how to think to a great and abiding purpose, he knows the secret of life. Nature offers an abundance of material to think about. Nature is a mirror of the immanence of the all-pervasive Spirit. It is also the cave in the deeper contents of which dwells the gem of Truth. Life devoted to cities, cooked food and dancing, vulgar music, silly society and thinking in terms of love and hate dulls the edge of appreciation of what is noble, beautiful and sublime. It is in loving proximity and observation of nature that we find food for our spirit.

The poetry of the East has its ideals which are radically different from those prevalent in the West. The classic of Shri Valmiki, *The Ramayana*, which is of incomparable beauty and upliftment, is a revelation of the infinite Truth and beauty, coupled with the practice of virtue in our daily life. Though the Maha-Kavi (supreme poet) describes wars and intrigues, he does so with a view to expose their harmfulness. He does not exalt them.

The real India is the India of the forests. The great poetical luminary in the sky of Indian aesthetics and rhetoric is Kalidasa. He is a nature poet; his great drama *Shakuntala* begins in the midst of a forest and reveals the beauties of nature throughout. Consider, for instance, the following:

Rishi Kashyapa is returning from a pilgrimage and his disciple, who is expecting his Teacher, rises early in the morning and tries to find the correct time. He comes out of the thatched hut called the hermitage, looks up at the sky in which the twinkling gems are disappearing one by one. He says: 'The moon has just disappeared and the same water-lily ceases to give delight to my eyes. Indeed, it is hard for a woman to bear the pain caused by the absence of her favourite friend. The moon, the source of healing power of the herbs, has now disappeared. The sun, the enlightener of the world, is appearing on the other side. We men pass our time living our life between the rising and setting of these luminaries.'

It may be noticed that this child of nature, the disciple of Rishi Kashyapa, studies nature and draws morals, which guide his life, from the working of nature. To him God is revealed in nature. How beautiful is the address of the holy sage Kashyapa, to the trees of the forest, when dear Shakuntala, the highest, the holiest, the most beautiful in nature, as Goethe calls her, is leaving the hermitage to rejoin her husband, King Dushanta. Nature is alive, every tree responds to our affection. He says:

Ye neighbouring trees, growing in the hermitage, today your friend Shakuntala leaves you to discharge her duty of meeting her husband. She never drank water in the morning without first offering it to you. She is fond of ornaments, but she never deprived you of your leaves and blossoms for beautifying herself—you, who made it a festival when

you first blossomed. Give your assent and your blessings to Shakuntala, the dearest friend of yours.

The great Kalidasa most efficiently describes the response of nature in the following verses:

The sweet note of the cuckoo issues from the trees, which indicate that the trees, her dear friends and companions in the forest, have assented, though unwillingly, to the future happiness of their friend.

Now as the little child of nature, Shakuntala, innocent as a lily, pure as jasmine, delicate as a lotus, leaves the hermitage in the company of two disciples, the holy Rishi, her foster father, gives his blessings in the following verse:

May the path of dear Shakuntala lie through the halting places in the neighbourhood of clear lakes and rolling lawns, with lotus creepers floating in them. May the heat of the sun on her journey be reduced by the shady trees, and the dust of the way be soft like the pollen of the lotuses. May the slow, cooling breezes waft over her and may all auspiciousness attend her.

In order to understand the true import of the Upanishadic philosophy, the sages recommend a life of contemplation in the midst of nature. Many of the ills to which man is subject, whether social, hygienic or clinical, can be reduced by occasional excursions to the regions of nature. Contemplation, communion with nature, free ringing laughter amidst pines and firs, are a surer remedy for neurosis than the methods of a psychiatrist or the bitter potion of the chemist.

Hari Prasad Shastri

Yogic Doctrine and Plotinus

IN THIS ARTICLE, we shall take a few thoughts from the writings of the great Western mystic, Plotinus, and note some parallels with and differences from yogic teaching. We shall begin with a few biographical details to get Plotinus into our sights.

He was born about AD 203 in Egypt, and died in southern Italy in 270. He came to Alexandria at the age of 28 in search of a philosophical teacher. He found one in the mysterious Ammonius Saccas, the sack-carrier or porter. He stayed with him 11 years. At the age of 39 he joined the expedition of Emperor Gordian against the Persians, because he wanted to study the Indian wisdom in India. In the event, Gordian's army was beaten and Plotinus barely escaped with his life. He then went to Rome and founded and opened a Greek-speaking philosophic academy. He found disciples and followers easily. It is said that when he spoke his luminous soul expressed itself in his countenance, and that he spoke with enthusiasm but without any trace of oratorical showmanship. His lectures were like a conversation among friends.

He lived for 26 years in Rome. Some of his pupils were rich and influential and offered him various nice country estates to live in. Eventually he made the acquaintance of the Emperor Gallienus and his wife, Salonina, and they persuaded him to preside over a model philosophic colony, to be opened in Campania with the charming name of Platonopolis. The plan fell through—but Plotinus had many people to look after. His rich patrons had the habit of bringing him their sons and daughters to look after when they felt themselves to be at the point of death, so that his house was filled with boys and girls. He was much in demand as a peace-maker, as he appears to have been successful in calming down many disputes, without himself incurring the enmity of either party. However, he could hardly be called a Guru in the modern sense, and he refused even to have his portrait painted.

After the age of 65, his external circumstances changed greatly for the worse. The Emperor Gallienus was assassinated, and with the emergence of a new party, many of his rich patrons left Rome. But the worst point was that after many years of leprosy, the disease began to

take a serious and mortal form. He lost his voice, he lost his eye-sight; his hands and feet were eaten away by the disease. He was taken to a place in the country and left isolated. His meals were left for him, but only the doctor visited him. In this way he lived on for two years.

According to his pupil and biographer Porphyry, Plotinus's written teaching was essentially the same as that of his teacher, Ammonius Saccas. Plotinus had, in fact, promised, in company with a fellow-pupil, never to write it down, but the other man broke his promise and after a long time, at the age of 49, he finally consented to write down his doctrine.

His writings were collected and edited after his death by his pupil Porphyry, who arranged them in six books of nine chapters each. The name 'enneads' means 'groups of nine' and these books are known as *The Enneads of Plotinus*. They are grouped, broadly arranged to topics, but they do not constitute systematic treatises. Like the teachings of many spiritual teachers of merit, they often took the form of short expositions of the whole doctrine from a particular point of view. When papers of this kind are composed gradually down the years and then grouped together in topics after the death of the author, they are naturally found to contain repetitions. Plotinus was also typical of the spiritual teacher in his distaste for revision. He was more interested in completing the next topic than in seeing that everything was in perfect order, ship-shape and ready to go down to posterity.

We are not here concerned with the history and influence of Plotinus's teaching, great as it was, both in the Christian and Islamic worlds. Perhaps, however, a few words could be said about the milieu in which it arose, as it was itself partly conditioned by historical circumstances and did not spring up from nowhere, like Minerva emerging fully-armed from the head of Jupiter.

At the back of all the wisdom of classical antiquity lay the teachings of Pythagoras and the Orphic mysteries. But in the market-place and the open academy, the spiritual teaching goes back to Socrates. Socrates lived in Athens in the age of the Sophists. Sophists were philosophers in whom individualism had run riot. Earlier philosophers had tried to grasp the meaning of this sorry scheme of things entirely through reasoning and had failed. Perceiving that reason was not the right

instrument with which to attain to final truth, the Sophists decided to use it as an instrument to make money. They taught how to use reason in debate so as to establish or disprove a thesis. The Greeks loved this and it is a persistent element in Greek philosophy. Centuries later, when the Romans had conquered Greece, the great Roman statesman Cato the elder was shocked when a Greek philosopher was called over to Rome to show his skill, which he did by first defending justice as the proper ideal in life, and then on the next day, showing that it was a useless ideal.

Socrates brought back reason to the pursuit of truth. The Sophists thought every man should discover his own truth, and that as every man's mind was different, so everybody's truth would be different. Socrates, and following him, Plato and Aristotle, sought once more for *objective* universal truth. Socrates, proceeded by what we call in yoga, *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. You call to mind all the instances of a phenomenon you have experienced, and then you note what is invariably present, and what is not invariably present. Through noticing what is invariably present and allows no exceptions, you establish a universal law. This is the basis of all science and of all objective knowledge.

As is well known, Plato rejected the world of sense-objects as the domain of opinion. He established a world of eternal ideas worked out by reason, which supplied the models of which the changing objects of the world were but imperfect ideas. Through a particular phase of the use of reason, called dialectic, man mounts to this realm of ideas where alone he has real objective knowledge that holds good everywhere for everybody, not coloured by subjective individual fancies. Guided by reason and universal laws, man is no longer a creature of subjective whims. He can discover what is good in itself, good objectively, and can set himself the good as an ideal to work for. He can shape his own character freely, and independently pursue the eternal verities— truth, goodness and beauty—to the contempt of the passing momentary interests and sense satisfactions.

This was the great heritage that Plotinus received from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They taught the calm pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty through reason. They taught idealism in the higher sense of the

formation and pursuit of ideals, eternal values in the pursuit of which man rises above the petty tyranny of the present moment, and participates in the realm of eternity even here on earth.

In one respect, however, that teaching differed markedly from that of Plotinus. All three taught that man's first duty was to the state. The point to remember here is that the state that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had in mind was a city state, small in size and where each individual actively participated in public life. But with the formation of Alexander's Empire and then the Roman Empire, the independent city state disappeared. The philosophers who followed Plato and Aristotle dropped the political part of their message. The cultivated Greek or Roman of the new era, felt a kind of helplessness and malaise, rather like that of the cultivated Indian in the latter period of the British Empire.

The two great philosophical movements of the period, Epicureanism and Stoicism, reflect this. The individual is no longer represented as striving towards the good through active participation in political life. He pursues his ideal of happiness strictly through individual self-culture, though of course in company with people of similar bent. The Epicureans were atheistic and had the typical cast of mind we should today call scientific. They had little to offer Plotinus. But the Stoics, going back to Heraclitus, offered a world-view which was part of the atmosphere in which he breathed. Their God was the Logos or Divine Reason, from which the world proceeded, in which it consisted, and to which it returned. They believed in all the many different gods that were worshipped during the Roman Empire, regarding them as aspects or manifestations of the one great God, the Logos. Their moral philosophy, the most important and lasting part of their teaching, was a kind of pessimism. We cannot control the outer circumstances and must school ourselves to live with this fact. What we can control, to a certain degree, is our own reactions to them. Our goal in life should be tranquillity and happiness, not joy. The source of happiness is self-mastery. It is useless to pursue externals. Nothing lasts. The body withers and what was once enjoyable becomes a curse in the end. But in self-mastery, which involves rising above conceit and pride, there is a true satisfaction, or at any rate as much satisfaction as we poor humans can hope to get.

It is at this point that we turn to Plotinus who stepped in, so to speak, with something higher to offer. This 'something higher' consists essentially in superseding reason with contemplation. He claimed only to be re-iterating the wisdom of Plato, but he lived 500 years later than Plato, and in a very different world and in a different social, political and religious climate. This wisdom of Plato comes through, but with something subtracted and something added.

The same is true of Shankaracharya as an interpreter of the Upanishads. He lived, in fact, a good 1000 years after the last of classical Upanishads, bar one exception, was composed. The essential message is restated, but restated, if you like, in a new key, providing a statement that is one sense classical and timeless, but in another sense partly conditioned by the age in which he lived.

In the case of Plotinus, there is another factor in his teaching that has not yet been successfully evaluated by scholars. Why was he so keen to go to India that he joined a military expedition when he was almost at the end of military age? In the parts of his teaching that go beyond Plato, the influence of Indian ideas, particularly Upanishadic ideas, has been traced. But no-one has been able to come up with a clear picture of what Indian teaching was known in Alexandria in Plotinus's day. The so-called mystery-religions were flourishing in the Eastern Mediterranean in Plotinus's day, but he did not find full satisfaction in these, or he would not have needed, under the guidance of Ammonius Saccas, to turn back to Plato. But one figure who had lived in Alexandria two centuries before, at the time of Christ, should be mentioned, and that is Philo. Philo venerated Plato, and he placed his faith not in sacraments but in contemplation, on which subject he wrote profusely in Greek.

Plotinus taught the supreme value of contemplation. The soul, he said, is sailing about aimlessly in the sea of sense-objects, like Ulysses in the Mediterranean. It must not heed their siren call or fall into the temptations of Circe, but must return to its Ithika, its real home, the divine element in nature and man. For this, the great instrument is contemplation, or meditation in the yogic sense of the word. Plato regarded meditation as the highest faculty in man. In fact, he went further, and said it was the true nature of man. If man for Aristotle was a reasoning animal for whom contemplation was the highest activity,

man was for Plotinus essentially a contemplating animal. All his other faculties, including action, are degraded forms of the faculty of contemplation. And when man fully actualizes his power of contemplation, he contemplates no definite object, nothing finite or limited. To practise contemplation or meditation is, for Plotinus, to enter the realm of the changeless and eternal, one's true home.

The plurality of Plato's world of ideas revealed by dialectic or the active use of reason, has ultimately to be transcended. The world of the limited and the measured, so dear to the Greeks, was not abandoned by Plato, but is abandoned by Plotinus. The sage as depicted by Plotinus rises up beyond the Platonic world of eternal but distinct ideas, into a realm in which there are no distinctions whatever and no longer any action.

This is where mysticism parts company with religion. The religious believer believes in an after-world where he hopes to experience joy. When they asked that great religious wag, the Rev. Sydney Smith, his idea of heaven, he replied, 'Eating strawberries and cream to the sound of trumpets.' The Stoics and other religious believers of Plotinus's day believed in a calm and happy after-world where they would meet with friends and discuss intellectual topics, not at all unlike the Shangri-La depicted in Richard Hilton's 'Lost Horizon'. But the sage, as depicted by Plotinus, loses all horizons in a more earnest sense. Even while still living bodily in the world, he inhabits a realm where there are no friends or fellow-citizens. When man realizes his own true nature, he finds he has executed a flight of the alone to the alone. Man has many subordinate aims and wishes. But his deepest wish, his true wish, ultimately his only wish, of which the others are misguided appearances, is for eternal peace, what the Indians call 'shanti'. The course of discipline prescribed by Plotinus had this eternal peace for its goal. And the main item in the discipline was meditation.

By meditation, as he expressly explains, Plotinus did not mean the pursuit of trains of reasoning. He did not mean dialectic in the Platonic sense. Reasoning has its preliminary and important place. It has to be seen and noted through reason that all things proceed from an undivided principle, the One. But once this has been seen, then the mind has to be made to dwell on the idea until it absorbs it and a new awareness of

one's own true nature dawns.

Plotinus says that the soul is like a piece of gold, fouled with mud. It is like a man who has fallen into a bog and is so covered with mire that you cannot recognize his true features. He has apparently lost his original beauty. But his ugliness is not natural. It is due to an extraneous factor. It is not an inexpugible part of his own true nature. The dirt can be washed off and his beauty will then again shine forth in its pristine purity.

Speaking of his own experience, Plotinus said: 'I often escape from my body and awaken to my own true nature, foreign to all else. Here I behold a marvellous beauty, indescribably vast. I am then convinced that I am extremely happy. But after this period of repose in the divine Being, I return down from reality to the world of reflections and images, and I then wonder how that descent could have happened, and how a being like the soul, which had seemed in the period of ecstasy to exist in its own right, could have descended into a body.'

Plotinus believed that the world was informed, animated and governed by a world-soul and that the individual soul was a ray of this world-soul, the *Hiranyagarbha* of Shankara, that rules over and orders the cosmos. It is because we all participate in this world-soul, because all life is at bottom one, that we feel love and friendship in varying degrees for our fellows. Love for another person is the recognition of the unity of all souls. It is not, however, a flat identity. Viewed from the standpoint of the individual soul enclosed within an individual body, it is a hidden identity that has to be realized. From the metaphysical standpoint, there is no distinction between souls. You cannot say that the world-soul is divided into so many separate individual souls, like wine poured out into a number of different jars. Nor can you say that it undergoes fragmentation into atoms which form the individual souls. And yet from the moral standpoint, the individual soul must be regarded as an individual and regarded as responsible for its actions. From the standpoint of reason we are, as usual, in a difficulty. If we say the individual souls are *parts* of the world-soul, in the sense that the limbs of an animal are parts of its body, this would safeguard the unity of the world-soul, but at the expense of individuality and responsibility of the individual souls. On the other hand if one affirms the individuality,

independence and moral responsibility of the individual soul, then the world-soul loses its unity, or rather there is no world-soul.

Plotinus solves the conundrum, just as Shankara solves any intellectual conundrums, on the plane of spiritual experience. We are separate and independent and morally responsible for our acts, as long as we feel ourselves to be separate, moral agents. But when we turn to contemplation of the One, we can realize that we are one with the world-soul and that the world-soul itself is nothing but the ultimate reality, the One. All souls will discover their own fundamental identity when they learn to contemplate the One. But for the moment, we are ignorant of our mutual identity because we look outwards onto the world of appearance and away from the principle of Unity on which our being truly depends. Thus, the problem of the multiplicity of souls is solved by an appeal to the spiritual life. At the highest point of this life, there comes a state where one can no longer speak of the plurality of souls.

If the reality is One, how does it come to appear many? To the mind, with its logical distinctions which differentiate one from two, white from black, this is an insoluble mystery. In the end, both Plotinus and Shankaracharya, give practically the same answer which is, in the words of Plotinus, 'If you have been where I have been you will know the truth of what I say.' Shankara says that in the realm of the transcendent, we employ reason as a preliminary measure for the sake of acquiring direct experience in the end.

Still, when it comes to the question how the One becomes many, both Plotinus and Shankara and his school make shrift to say *something* to describe the indescribable. What they both insist on is the fact that the non-dual principle, the One, the Reality, is in no way affected by the fact that the world emerges from it. This fact is illustrated by various worldly examples. Plotinus, or rather his followers did, speaks of emanation. Shankara, or rather his followers did, speaks of *Vivarta*. *Vivarta* is defined in a latish Vedanta work as 'A change of lower reality-grade than the material cause.' Another latish writer of Shankara's school describes a *vivarta* as an appearance on the analogy of a sense-illusion, and this comes near to Shankara's own view, though he does not use the word *vivarta*. According to this author, we can only

explain the rise of the many in the one as an appearance, arising through a defect in the perceiving and conceiving faculties of the observer. The appearance is not a second reality on top of the non-dual reality. Only the non-dual reality exists.

Both these definitions bring us close to what was said by Plotinus. Plurality is an appearance in the non-dual reality, in what Plotinus called the One, of lesser reality grade than the One. This is indeed exactly Plotinus's view. On the one hand there is the One, and that is infinite. On the other hand, in some peculiar sense of the words, there is non-being, which is certainly not a second thing over and above the One. The world of appearance is a world in which the One somehow spills over beyond itself into the realm of non-being, and the world of appearance results.

When the objects of this world of appearance emanate from the One, they cause no division in it, no loss of energy, no change. Non-being affects only the world of appearance, not the One. The world of appearance is a realm in which the One is infected by non-being in different degrees, truly what the Indians would call a realm of *Maya*. The further you go into non-being the more you encounter darkness, what the Indians call *tamas*. Therefore, says Plotinus, 'The Spirit is there no longer Spirit; it is no longer itself; it is, if one may allow oneself the boldness so to speak of it as something which is not its nature, non-spirit.' Here the Spirit becomes like an eye which turns away from light in order to see darkness and finds it cannot see at all. Thus the Spirit gives up its light and seems to abandon its own nature and repairs to that which is foreign to its nature, without bringing its own light.

All this is true, of course, only from the standpoint of the appearance. From the standpoint of the One there is no change, no non-being, no darkness. But from the standpoint of the appearance, in which we as enquirers are placed, the One does seem to become many, and one raises the question how and why. Naturally, no satisfactory answer can be given, but analogies taken from the world of appearance can be used to illustrate what is, after all, only an appearance. All things that exist in the realm of appearance emit some influence. They produce some effect; exerting some influence on their surroundings is part of their

make-up. And what they produce has some general similarity with themselves. Fire produces heat; snow radiates cold; odorous objects emit an odour, which radiates all around. Animate beings propagate their species. Even inanimate ones communicate what they can of their own essence to others. A river flows from its source without drying the source up.

The images used by Plotinus to explain the world-process suggest that they are based on an intuition that defies formulation in exact conceptual terms. They suggest a fountain of life or energy arising from an inexhaustible source, with jets flowing outwards from that source and weakening in intensity in proportion as they move away from that source and approach nearer to darkness and non-being.

One could speak of the world-process as an appearance of emanation from the One, in which the emanation proceeds by stages. Each lower stage draws all its power from what precedes it and communicates some smaller measure of its own power to something else. The new power is an enfeebled imitation of the superior term. The power becomes further and further diluted at each progressive stage. The One is the power of all things. But it is not itself any of the things. Plotinus stresses the continuity of the process. He says, 'All things are like one common life which extends in a straight line.' Each successive point in the line is different. But the line as a whole is continuous.

Something parallel to this is found in Shankara's theory of the elements that constitute the external world. There is a passage in his work called the *Thousand Teachings* in which he shows that he regarded the five elements, ether, air, fire, water and earth as forming a causal chain. The starting point is the pure Self, the inmost principle of Consciousness within all. From the Self, within the world, there first emanates the ether. The ether is less than the Self because it has the distinguishing property of sound, whereas the Self has no distinguishing properties and is infinite. From the ether emanates air, which has the two distinguishing properties of sound and touch. When it assumes the form of wind, you can hear it rustling in the trees and feel it on the cheek, but you cannot see it, taste it or smell it. It is thus less than the ether, because it has more distinguishing properties. Wherever you have air, you have the Self and you have the ether, as air proceeds from them.

And yet it is less than them, as they are parts of reality where nothing is felt by way of touch, and here the ether and one Self are present, but air is not. Fire emanates from air. It has the properties of light or visibility, touch and sound. Thus you can hear it crackling, you can feel it if you get too near it, and you can see it. It is thus less than air, though it emanates from it. For air is always present wherever fire is—which accounts for the fact you can hear and feel fire, since sound and touch belong to it. But there are parts of the world constituted by the ether and the wind alone where nothing can be seen, so these are more pervasive than, and greater than, fire. And the Self, with no empirical qualities to limit it, is the greatest Being of all.

Well, the theory goes on to explain how water and earth are grosser and less pervasive than the Self, ether, wind and fire and how they emanate from them. Shankara's theory of the emanation of the elements is no doubt not one of his most exciting bits. But it does illustrate to what an extraordinary degree his teachings answer to those of Plotinus.

Let us look back at one or two of the other parts from Plotinus's teaching that we have considered, and see a little more closely how they correspond with the yogic teachings of Shankara. We began by saying that what distinguished Plotinus from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was his emphasis on contemplation. Of course, if you go solely by words, Aristotle insisted on contemplation as the highest activity of man and Plotinus commended him for it. Still he did not himself really accord in practice the same importance to contemplation as Plotinus did. Shankara is more reminiscent of Plotinus on this point. Plotinus said on his death-bed, 'I try to equate the divine in me with the divine in the universe.'

For Shankara, practical realization of one's identity with the supreme Self does not normally arise without the three-fold discipline of hearing, cogitating over and practising sustained meditation on the highest texts of the Upanishads. The Self, he taught, is already self-evident and reflected as Consciousness in the mind. But it is overlaid and hidden by deposits arising from our self-interested thoughts and actions. Hence the *Katha Upanishad* says, it is hard to perceive and 'hidden in the cave'. The discipline recommended by this Upanishad is, literally, *adhyatma-yoga*; that spiritual discipline, whereby one withdraws the mind from sense-objects and concentrates it on the Self. The lower faculties of the

mind must be restrained until gradually, a concrete sense of one's identity with the supreme Self is attained.

In his commentary on the fourth sutra of the first book of the *Brahma Sutras*, Shankara explains what he means by Adhyatma Yoga. The first stage of the discipline is to give up activity of the senses and remain in contemplation, identified with the mind. Then one should learn to abandon one's sense of identity with the individual mind and rest in a sense of identity with the collective mind (*Hiranyagarbha*), from which all comes forth. Finally, one should pass beyond identification with *Hiranyagarbha* to identification with the Self in its form as pure inactivity and peace. When the mind is at rest, when it is held in check and has no false fantasies, then it in some sense 'knows' the Supreme Self, though not as an object.

The sage, called enlightened or liberated in life, is aware of the presence of the Supreme Self within him, in the heart centre. It is not that the mind knows the Self as an object. But when the mind is held in complete check, the Supreme Self manifests as the Consciousness that illumines it and manifests in its pure form.

This, I think, agrees closely with Plotinus's teaching that contemplation is the true *nature* of man. Stripped of the body and mind, extraneous factors that do not belong to his true Self, man *is* the light of consciousness. And this light of consciousness is present illumining his whole mental life. As Plotinus suggests, all mental activities, other than bathing in this light in its pure form, are simply a degradation and distortion of this light, though some of them, such as metaphysical reasoning, may be useful, as necessary preparatory measures for becoming aware of this light.

Another point made by Plotinus that will be familiar to students of Vedanta is that the finite state of the soul is not its natural state. That is why it can be dissolved through *knowledge*. *Bhakti* or devotion has an important place in Shankara's scheme. But it is as an aid to spiritual knowledge. Neither Shankara nor Plotinus taught salvation as their message. They did not teach, as the main part of their doctrine, that if one worships God he will take you to heaven after death where your worries will be over. What both taught was that the finite, individualized state of the soul is not its true nature, and that it realizes

its true nature as infinite consciousness and peace primarily through meditation. Meditation in its higher stages implies the stilling of the motion of the mind. It was interesting to see how both thought that the first stage of success in this endeavour brought a sense of one's identity with the cosmic mind, called the world soul by one and *Hiranyagarbha* by the other.

But beyond this there is a further stage where all subject-object consciousness is said to be lost, and this last stage is described by Shankara as a stage of bliss and by Plotinus as a state of well-being, which he himself had enjoyed. In his biography of Plotinus, his pupil Porphyry, said that Plotinus only attained this state four times, whereas in the passage quoted earlier, Plotinus himself said that he enjoyed it often. In his remarkable work on the great philosophers, the modern philosopher Karl Jaspers has suggested that Plotinus may have been much more continuously awake from the slumber of everyday consciousness associated with the body than his pupil Porphyry realized. If so, that would bring him much more closely into line with Shankara's conception of the holy man, who was not dependent on temporary states of extreme mental concentration for his awareness of the Supreme Self, but enjoyed it continually.

A.J.A.

A POEM OF BULLASHAH

Silencing the din of thy wandering thoughts,
Be still and learn what thou art!
Give up worldly desires;
This is what thy Guru has taught thee.
Bind thy wayward longings with the cord of detachment;
Know thy real Self.
Says Bullashah: Only thus shall thou attain peace.

Translated by H.P.S.

The Eternal Wisdom

Continuing Hari Prasad Shastri's imaginative portrayal of the life and teachings of the sages of ancient India.

IF ONE can express it so, the supreme Consciousness imposes upon itself one of its own potentialities. This, when extended—if, again, one can postulate an inner and outer at all in respect of Consciousness—becomes the basis of time, space and causation, and into every particle of it the supreme Consciousness pours its own radiance.

As a child, poised on a swing, presses himself forward by his own force and then returns to the original starting point, so the light, poured at first into the apparently separate particles of the self-conditioning potentiality, realizes itself again as the original Consciousness. From multiplicity it again assumes unity, and from unity, transcendence infinite. This is the process of the creation, preservation and withdrawal of the universe, described by the holy sage Vyasa as the *lila* or sport of the Lord, that is, the infinite Consciousness, self-conscious in all its potentialities.

The purpose of thought is to realize the light of Consciousness in the thought, through expansion. The purpose of education is to deepen, to the highest intensity, pure self-consciousness. Are there failures or defeats? Yes, for those who are uncritical and unreflective, who fail to understand the significance of history. They may think of fear and defeat, with reference to the process of self-realization in Consciousness, in self-projected matter. But to the wise, every defeat has in it the elements of greater and yet greater triumph. The divine thought projected the universe with the purpose of realizing itself in and through matter, and it will suffer no defeat.

Shri Yajnavalkya sat motionless. In his pure and realized Consciousness, from the finite to infinitude, he saw thousands of solar systems appearing and disappearing like coconuts dropping into the river Ganges, floating, submerging or reappearing in the water. Matter is ruled by laws; these laws are the thoughts of the conditioned Self-consciousness. When the goal is realized, the individual witnesses the course of the history of the innumerable worlds like a golden eagle

soaring in heaven, witnessing cities, mountains, dales, valleys and caves.

A holy sage is beyond the realm of duty. He is the law of laws, he is the life of the cosmos. He thinks of the spiritual units (*jivas*) who have not yet adopted the path of Self-realization and by way of sport (*lila*) tries to help them. Such was the attitude of the rishi Yajnavalkya towards the world.

* * *

After a while, the sage's wife, Katyayani, hurriedly entered the room and said: 'Blessed one, the calf Giridhara, the little white darling, who frisks and jumps to amuse us, has been bitten by a snake; the snake has gone. Bhagadatta does not know what to do.'

The sage loves all life in any form. The little calf is dear to him. Shri Yajnavalkya went outside with Katyayani, tranquil, collected and serene, like the autumnal sun rising out of the Himalayan ranges, piercing through the dark clouds and dispelling the mists in the valleys. He saw in the courtyard the little snow-white calf Giridhara, only a few weeks old, lying on a bed of straw; its mother, Ganga, was licking it with affection.

He put his hand on the neck of the calf with great tenderness, as if he were stroking his own child. He recited a holy formula (mantram) from the Veda and stood watching, with his love-filled eyes on the little one. In a short while the calf stirred, got up and began to lick the hand of the holy sage, who said to Katyayani: 'O tranquil lady, give it some milk in which saffron has been dissolved. Keep it covered today with my white blanket.'

So saying, the compassionate yogi-*raja* retraced his steps, softly chanting from the Upanishad:

On a tree are seated two birds.
One in calm detachment, on a high branch,
Witnesses its surroundings,
While its companion, on a lower branch,
Suffers and enjoys.
When dissatisfied, it looks up
And finds it is a reflection of the tranquil bird.

To be continued

From Inner Harmony to Illumination

LIFE IS a journey which leads within. The ordinary course of life, as we age, leads us to become more reflective and thoughtful. Those who are committed to the spiritual path, yogis, travel the path with a conscious destination. Knowing through the scriptures, by example and by reason that there is a state called illumination or enlightenment or salvation, and that he himself is in darkness, he sets out on the path to wisdom. Immediately he is faced with a bewildering array of prescriptions. William Blake says: 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.' Jesus says: 'Narrow is the way and strait is gate which leads to life and few there be that find it.' The Buddha taught the Middle Way between self-mortification and sensual self-indulgence.

As to ideas about what Ultimate Reality or Brahman or God is, we find a cacophony of contradictory voices. It appears impossible to reconcile all the competing views. A thousand years ago, people would have hardly been aware of different ways of thinking, because they were isolated from one another by geography. But now the contradictions are glaring.

Dr Shastri taught that God is indefinable but not unknowable. On reflection we can see that everything which makes life worth living—truth, love, beauty, wisdom—is indefinable. Thousands queue to see Leonardo's little picture the Mona Lisa in the Louvre. There is an enigma about it, a *je ne sais quoi*. If it wasn't for that, it would not hold the attention of generations. Man does not live by bread alone, and what he really lives by cannot be defined. In the Adhyatma Yoga teaching, self is another such indefinable. Everyone has their own mystery and we should respect it. As an aside, this Yoga consists in learning not to limit or define oneself.

If people dispute some matter of fact, then there is the law or science to settle the matter. Or our eyes and ears will do the job. Galileo saw through his telescope that several moons revolved around Jupiter. It was thought that the earth was the only body around which any heavenly bodies revolved. So his observation

suggested this was not true. And so it might be that the earth revolved around the sun. Some churchmen refused to look through his telescope, but as it was a matter of fact, the Church only made itself look foolish in the end by clinging to a wrong view.

However, when people are disputing about something indefinable, the case is hopeless. Some people love arguing as others like boxing. But even if they win the argument though skilful reasoning and the lightning play of their intellect, nothing will ever be settled. Their devastating argument would only be another definition of the indefinable.

Is the case for the pilgrim to illumination hopeless? Not at all, because as well as being the definable self with a name, a gender, an age, and so on, we are that indefinable self as well. Emerson wrote, 'God hides in transparency'. The mysterious spirit, which cannot be touched, heard, seen, thought about, which cannot be made an object—we are that.

How then shall we know it? We need spiritual knowledge, we need the teachings and we need to make them so much part of ourselves that they come alive. Dr Shastri taught that the knowledge he came to impart was a living thing. We know how living things hate to be caged or imprisoned. So it is. The invisible and indefinable spirit will not be contained or exhausted by any religion, philosophy or system of thought. Shanti Sadan follows the Advaita Vedanta, the tradition of wisdom which is traced back to Shri Shankara in the eighth century AD and beyond him to the teachers of the Upanishads. It is an extensive system and a scholar could spend a lifetime exploring it. But it describes itself as a thorn which is picked up to remove another thorn which is stuck in one's foot. When the thorn, which is ignorance of the true self, is removed, both it and the system of thought can be discarded.

What remains after that? What remains is what cannot be negated or defined. *Satyam jnanam anantam*—Truth-Knowledge-Bliss. What has to be removed? The belief in the reality of a private and separate self—a defined self.

On the path we have to discard many feelings, many actions, many thoughts which spring from and reinforce this notion of a

private separate self, and adopt fresh ones until we arrive at those which are becoming to the full stature of our humanity.

We are universalists and take out teachings from everywhere. There are so many examples of people behaving in a way which inspires the best in us.

Near Hemel Hemstead, there is Buddhist monastery called Amaravati. The monks follow the teaching of Ajahn Chah. He was a great and enlightened monk who taught the noble eightfold path of the Buddha.

The Abbot of Amaravati had sat at his feet and he remarked that Ajahn Chah was imperturbable. People felt that even if a bomb went off next to him would not be disturbed. But he did not conform to expectations, he did not react predictably to events. This did not mean that he was rude or wilful, because one of a monk's 227 vows is to maintain good manners. His knowledge of *Dhamma*, the Buddha's teaching, was a living thing and living things are not predictable.

It came to pass that Ajahn Chah had a stroke and was unable to do anything but lie in a bed. He could not teach, write or work. But as the Abbot remarked, he silently taught that all is impermanent, that life is suffering and that there is no private self. He lay on his bed for more than ten years. The monks competed with one another to take care of him. And in all those years of lying in bed, he never had a bed sore. Any doctor or nurse will tell you how remarkable that is. It is an example of selfless care and love for everyone who cares to appreciate it.

We are universalists, and aim to see that which is good in all, including ourselves. If there were no good in us, we would see no good outside either. If there is harmony within us, we will see the same in the outer world.

The title of this talk is 'From inner harmony to illumination.' And the truth is that it is a short step from one to the other. Establishing inner harmony is the challenging part. It is the work of Yoga. The tools of this work are spiritual knowledge, practice of the same by meditation, by devotion, by study, by detachment, by the authority of the self, by the Yoga. These are not separate tools. Eventually the

knowledge springs to life and becomes a living knowledge which is able to maintain inner harmony or re-establish it quickly under all circumstances.

In the Gospels we read of a man possessed of a demon who lived in the wilderness near the tombs. He could not be bound by chains or ropes as he had the strength of the insane. Jesus asked him his name and he replied, 'My name is Legion for we are many.' He stated the whole problem of humanity. Inner division and lack of integrity. Being one person one minute and another person with contradictory values the next. And not noticing the contradiction. Saying one thing and doing another. Trying to manipulate events in one's private favour. Being dishonest about what one actually feels. Perhaps we have a fine moral conscience when it comes to supporting good causes, but when it comes to shoplifting we have no conscience at all. What is the cure? In every way, without fanaticism, we have to organize our lives around the imperative of self-realization. To make time and space for our practices and reflections, to acquaint ourselves with our indefinable essence.

The point is, it can be done. If you read the story of Shri Dada, Dr Shastri's guru, you will see a man who treated everyone with the same care and consideration. It is a strange fact that although the Advaita Vedanta teaches that we are all one at the deepest level of our being, that there are no differences whatsoever; nonetheless, the home of this teaching, India, is perhaps the most caste-ridden society in the world. Yet in Shri Dada's Sangha, no distinctions of caste or gender were recognized. The Brahmins had to sit with the untouchables. This was remarkable one hundred and twenty years ago.

On one occasion when he was living in Chandausi, Shri Dada was administering an initiation to two women who had given long proof of their sincerity. But word had escaped and local priests and pundits stirred up a mob to stop the ceremony. They broke down the door of the house and burst in, but Shri Dada, who was also imperturbable, defused the situation with his wisdom and love.

'As the doors burst open and the mob surged in, Shri Dada, lifting his hand in blessing and singing Om! Om! Om!, offered himself as a

target to its fury. At once the deeply stirred emotions of hate and anger began to melt in the warm peace radiating from the holy man.’

This powerful spiritual wisdom is available to each and every one of us, as it belongs to our true self. We only need to tread the path. Whatever spiritual path you tread, tread it with caution, tread it with daring. All true paths lead to the Lord at the last. It is our privilege to offer you the path of Yoga, however inadequately, as we have been given it by Dr Shastri, as he was given it by Shri Dada, as he by his teacher and the rishis and jnanis of old.

A.S-B.

A TRADITIONAL STORY

An ascetic who possessed a blanket and nothing else, lived in a wood doing his meditation. A policeman one day hid his blanket, in his absence, by way of a joke.

The ascetic reported his loss at the police station. ‘I have lost my umbrella, my carpet, my quilt, my shawl, my pillow.’

The policeman who had played the trick was at the station. He laughed and, producing the hidden blanket, said: ‘This is all you had. Why do you make a false report? You never had the articles you mention.’

The ascetic spread the blanket on the ground and said: ‘Look, this is my carpet.’ He rolled it and supported his head on it and said: ‘This is my pillow.’ He covered himself with it and said: ‘Look at my quilt.’

The moral is that one Divine Being, as infinite consciousness, is the father, the son, the friend, the enemy, the illness, the sky, the sun....

H.P.S.

The Fifth Chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*

THIS BRIEF chapter indicates the path to Self-realization in a most engaging way. When it was written, probably more than two centuries before Christ, renouncing home to become an itinerant monk, or *sannyasi*, was a frequent course adopted by spiritual seekers. The question the chapter opens with is: ‘Is such withdrawal from life more helpful to spiritual practice than practising the spiritual Yoga in the context of daily affairs, with their disturbances and distractions?’

We carry our mind, with its likes and dislikes, wherever we go, and a change of environment is not necessarily a change of heart. Krishna’s teaching is that calmness of mind is paramount in any situation. This can be cultivated as effectively in the home as in a forest retreat. The hour by hour challenges of the home situation is one of the best schools for taming and purifying our reactions. If we can learn patience, considerateness and equanimity, we develop inner resources which are not less valuable than those which unfold in solitude. ‘Instead of loving mankind’, said a former Communist, ‘I decided it was more important to try to like those I lived with.’

In the Gita, Yoga itself is spoken of as a key stage on the path to illumination, a stage reached when we have ‘attained to Yoga’. What does this mean? Ordinarily, our minds are intensely active, extrovertive and disinclined to self-examination. It seems impossible to quieten the thoughts and still the mind, and there seems to be no point in doing so. The word ‘Yoga’ usually means the range of internal practices we do, like meditation, for tranquillizing our mental functions and giving them a single object of spiritual power and symbolism on which to concentrate. This symbol will eventually come alive within us and absorb our attention through its beauty and attraction. Our object of meditation, be it a holy word, text or image, is a pointer to the supreme value of our deeper spiritual nature. But until we are at home with this kind of focused attention, and do it with love and zeal, our mind remains restless—doing one thing and wanting another. However, when the inner fusion results from

intense, self-forgetting concentration, the mind may be said to have 'attained to Yoga'. From now on, it is at home with stillness, and naturally resorts to stillness for higher nourishment, expansion and spiritual self-knowledge.

Another phase of Yoga is that of self-control and the need to be a master, not a slave, of the life of the senses. Sense experience is recognized as delightful in many ways, and the Gita view of the universe is that it is a manifestation of the Divine, and is 'filled with the grandeur of God'. But the delight of a spiritual understanding beggars that of sense-experience, and humanity is destined to graduate from joy to higher joy, until man's spirit finds its identity with the bliss of Atman (the true Self), which is the same as the bliss of the Absolute (Brahman). The contrast between our daily encounters with joy, and the supreme satisfaction that awaits us once we have 'attained to Yoga', is suggested by the sage, Shri Dada of Aligarh, when he told his disciples:

What you call joys, my children, are adulterated with excitement, thrills, emotion, efforts and anxieties; but the bliss of Atman, of which these joys are distorted and imperfect experiences, is eternal, permanent and free from modifications, untouched by anxiety and want, carrying in it no seeds of pain.

From this perspective, it becomes reasonable and realistic to try to keep our sense life within boundaries, and this is the wisdom behind the following verse in this chapter:

For those delights which are born of the contacts of the senses with their objects are only generators of pain, having a beginning and an end. A wise man does not rejoice in them.

In his commentary, Shri Shankara compares our fixation with the promised joys of sense-experience to the hope and thrill a desert traveller experiences when he sees a mirage, a place of richness and fertility which promises to satisfy all needs. And with sense experience, our needs *are* satisfied, up to a point. But the period of joy through contact is limited and must come to an end. It is then that the experience proves transient and, if we are reflective, it can seem to be as illusory as a mirage. Few would argue with Shankara's

analysis when he writes: 'The contact of a sense with its object marks the beginning of a pleasure, and their separation its end. Delights are temporary, occurring in the moment of interval between the origin and the end.'

The spiritual endeavour to go against this tide of natural inclination is heroic, yet possible, because the mind has the potentiality to 'attain to Yoga'. The next verse makes it clear that desire, and its converse, anger (which is a kind of frustrated desire), will continue to visit us as long as we are living in a human body. But blessed is the person who is not ruled by these tremors, who can stand back from them, and give them only so much acquiescence as wisdom permits. Hence our verse is both a warning and a comfort:

He that is able, while still here, to withstand, before liberation from the body, the impulse of desire and anger, he is a Yogi, he is a happy man.

Happiness, bliss and joy, serene and undemonstrative, is implicit in the state of spiritual understanding. 'These things I speak in the world,' said Christ, 'that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.' [John 17:13]. Chapter 5 of the Gita is eloquent with the promise of the joy that ensues on the spiritual quest.

With the mind unattached to external objects, he finds the joy that is in the Self; engaged in the contemplation of Brahman, he attains the endless joy. That Yogi who has his joy within and his pastime within, and his light within only, attains Brahman's bliss, himself becoming Brahman.

Such verses draw our attention to a phase of our inner life which is ever present, but which is hidden as long as the world monopolises our interest. When we can resist the hypnotic absorption in outer schemes and inner dreams, our consciousness is freed from limitations and reverts, so to say, to its true nature. We 'become what we really are'—infinite.

In verse 17, the Gita speaks of the supreme Reality as 'That'. It is an indicator of the transcendence of Brahman, and that it is beyond the sphere of language and the word-using mind. We can only refer to it, if at all, as 'That'. And yet, 'That' is our own reality, the very

substratum of our being. It seems to be remote but is nearer than the nearest. By attaining to Yoga, 'That' is realized as 'I' in its purest, inmost sense:

With their consciousness [i.e. their *buddhi* or higher intellect] in That, their Self being That, intent on That, with That for their supreme goal, they go never again to return, their sins shaken off by means of wisdom.

They will not have to undergo reincarnation in order to learn life's lessons yet again; they are liberated.

The chapter also considers the case of one liberated-in-life, who performs life's normal functions, and 'who lives happily in the negated city' (the body). We remember that the illumined sages have 'their consciousness in That, their Self being That'. Therefore the sense of 'I' is no longer tied to the body or the mind: it is infinite. Whatever appears to take place in this world of relativity, the enlightened one knows: 'I do nothing at all' (verses 8-9). However, enquirers like ourselves, who are learning the Yoga, are encouraged to prepare for this insight by looking on our body and mind as instruments that we use, rather than the measure of what we are. We offer what we are and do to the Supreme Power, and this relieves us of many an anxious thought, thus purifying the mind.

By the body, by the mind, by the intellect, by mere senses also, Yogis perform action for the purification of the self.

Self here means the personality in general, not the higher Self, which needs no purification.

It can seem a lonely quest, but in fact we walk with a friend who, unlike most of our companions in the world, loves us for our own sake, and, in the phrase of Hari Prasad Shastri, 'wants us to be what He is'. This is a key phase of the Gita teachings, which allows our approach to the Supreme to be both personal and impersonal. The chapter ends:

On knowing Me, the Lord of all sacrifices and austerities, the great Lord of all the worlds, the Friend of all beings, he goes to peace.

A.H.C.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

Throughout the summer break the Tuesday evening meditation sessions continued at Shanti Sadan. Each of the meetings constituted an introduction to meditation, and at the same time, sets of practices were each given for a period of four weeks to provide continuity for those attending regularly. The meetings have been heartening and helpful occasions for visitors and members of Shanti Sadan alike and have become an established part of the life of the centre. In a few cases visitors travelled some distance to attend; and for those who could not come, the practices have been made available on the Internet. Those who try the practices and wish to contact Shanti Sadan with questions or observations about them, are always welcome to do so.

On the Internet, the archive of previous issues of Self-Knowledge available on-line to current subscribers has been extended and now includes all those published since January 2010. And there has been introduced a new option to subscribe to Self-Knowledge exclusively on-line, at a reduced cost. Any readers who would like to change an existing postal subscription for an extended on-line one, are welcome to contact us by email and it will be arranged. The printed edition will of course continue to remain available unchanged. Anyone wishing to arrange for Self-Knowledge to be sent to someone else, will also find a new facility for doing this on-line.

As Self-Knowledge goes to press, preparations are being completed for the Autumn term. The Thursday evening talks at the centre will be a series focusing on classical texts from the non-dual and other traditions, and details of the afternoon course are below.

Autumn 2012 Special Course Sunday 4 November 2012 2-5pm

Intensifying The Inner Light

Talk 1 *Pointers to the Inner Light*

First Meditation Practice

Talk 2 *Awakening the Higher Consciousness*

Second Meditation Practice

Talk 3 *Being at One with the Light*