

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

Annual subscriptions in 2012 cost £10.00 to all destinations, payable to:

SHANTI SADAN, 29 CHEPSTOW VILLAS, LONDON W11 3DR

to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

© SHANTI SADAN LONDON 2012

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 SPRING TERM 2012

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from Tuesday 1 May until Thursday 28 June 2012.

SUMMER 2012 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 10 June, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

VOL. 63 NO. 2 SPRING 2012

CONTENTS	Page
Suffering and Bliss	49
Swami Satchitanandaji on Jivan Mukti	52
Easter	56
Attentive Silence	58
Thirty-Three Years	67
The Living Heart of the Upanishads	69
The Eternal Wisdom <i>continued</i>	79
Meditation Practice Session	82
The Kena Upanishad	85
Stories in Praise of Emptiness	96

SUFFERING AND BLISS

In the Christian life, the approach to Easter marks a time of quiet reflection on the sufferings of Jesus Christ, followed by relief and rejoicing at his resurrection. Out of this seminal event in human history has grown the idea, among many devout believers, that suffering is somehow spiritually beneficial, and therefore to be welcomed. Our modern sensibilities recoil from such an idea, but it frequently occurs in Christian writings and remains influential. For example, the authoress and Carmelite nun, Ruth Burrows, comments, with self-criticism of her early life at the convent: '[A Carmelite] should want suffering and be good at bearing it. I shunned it.' (*The Times* 21.1.12)

The idea that one should 'want suffering' and the reasons for this are complex and differ among individuals. The experience of suffering can

strengthen character and stir inner resources that would otherwise remain latent. Suffering may also give rise to a deeper sense of being at one with Christ, who knew all sufferings, as well as fostering empathy with those who are similarly oppressed. We may be nagged by a sense of guilt, which suffering, as a kind of penance, may be felt to mitigate, affording a deeper relief, as when a debt is paid. Again, there are sayings of Christ which seem to commend suffering. ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.’ ‘Let a man take up his cross and follow me.’ And he warned the disciples of coming persecutions and hardships, if they held to his teachings.

But suffering can never be an end in itself—human nature repudiates such a notion. If discomfort, unease and misery are to be endured, there is always the underlying hope of a better and blissful state as the eventual outcome. *Blessed* are those mourn—they shall be *comforted*. Otherwise, the whole process of living and evolving makes no sense.

Man’s natural orientation is towards happiness; this is an idea that is proclaimed without apology in the Indian religious traditions, from the accounts of the childhood pranks of the Lord as Krishna, to the joyous chanting of the maha-mantram ‘Hare Rama’, to the philosophy expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Upanishads. The philosopher Sureshvara begins his great work, the *Naishkarmya Siddhi**, with the assertion: ‘Because all living beings from the Creator to a clump of grass naturally desire to avoid every kind of pain, it is equally natural and inevitable that they should take active steps to suppress it.’

As human beings, endowed with perishable bodies and sensitive minds, sufferings are bound to visit us in the course of life, perhaps every day, so that we need not seek them unbidden. What matters is our response. And this is surely at the heart of Christ’s teaching. An equi-minded response, free from hatred or despair, brings out the higher powers of the soul. Yet such a response needs to be applied to life’s changes generally. Spiritual training means not becoming elated in times of good news, pleasure and success, quite as much as staying calm in adversity.

* Published as *Realization of the Absolute* by Shanti Sadan.

This is not a question of developing an unflappable mental pose, but of learning to take our stand in the deeper and wiser level of our own being, just as a man standing in a trench will not be dislodged by a fierce wind. The core of man’s being, his ultimate Self, transcends sorrow as well as worldly joy, because it transcends his mortal nature.

The Vedanta teaching is that it is ‘the Self unknown’ (in the phrase of Sureshvara) that is at the root of all sufferings, and ‘the Self realized’ will dispel them in a flash. As he writes: ‘Hence it is ignorance of the Self which is ultimately the cause of every evil, and which also, on the negative side, denies us that waveless and unconditional bliss which is the very nature of the Self.’

A POEM BY SWAMI SATCHITANANDAJI

Since I was united with my real Self, my joy is beyond
description.

The world of dreams has gone—I alone exist.

He whom they call God, I have seen in my own Self.

I am one, there is no duality; in fact there is neither Self
nor God.

He, to meet whom they visit Mecca and Kashi, I see
everywhere—there is no veil.

The ego is the veil between God and the soul, the mountain
is hidden by a straw.

Since my Guru showed his grace to me, the secret has
been revealed.

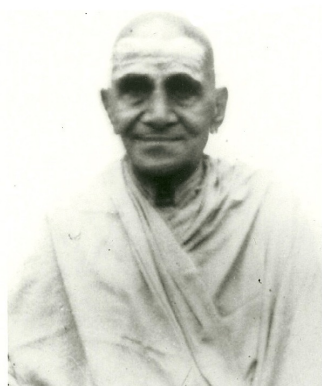
Illusion is dispelled, no doubts remain;

I have negated name and form, and what remains is
Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, and nothing else.

Swami Satchitanandaji on Jivan Mukti

by Hari Prasad Shastri

Note: Adhyatma Yoga teaches that the truth of the identity of the individual soul with the supreme Reality or God is realizable by man in this very life. One so enlightened is called a *jnani* or 'knower of Truth' and is said to have attained *jivan mukti*, 'liberation in life', that is, permanent emancipation of the soul from all suffering and limitations. The following article contains a description of this transcendental state, given personally to the writer by a modern Mahatma who had himself realized it. Swami Satchitanandaji left his physical body in 1949. A short biography of the saint was published in 'Self-Knowledge' in Winter 1950.



AT THE END of July 1911, the great sage Swami Satchitanandaji, whom I had learnt to love with fervour and intensity, visited Rishikesh. I had been informed of his intended visit, and went there a few days ahead. I stayed at the Svarga Ashram, adjoining Lakshmanjhula, and spent my days partly in private devotion, study and meditation, and partly in the company of the Mahatmas who lived in huts overlooking the slow-moving, divine stream the Ganges. These were indeed happy days.

After some search I found Swami Satchitanandaji's cave, on the banks of the holy river. With the panting heart of a lover; with the devotion of a moth for the flame; with a desire to sacrifice my body and mind at the holy feet of the saint, I came to the cave, bringing with me a jar of fresh milk.

After I had been there about half an hour, Shri Swamiji arrived and said with a smile: 'Hariji, I am glad you have come.' My tears fell, and I could say nothing. We went to the kitchen of the Svarga Ashram and

partook of a simple meal, which was offered to every ascetic who applied for it. I took my meal in the brahmachari kitchen.

We crossed the Lakshmanjhula bridge, exchanging greetings with the pilgrims and sadhus, and entered the Brahmapuri forest. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, a brilliant sun was shining and the cool breezes were kissing the surface of the Ganges and conferring ear-rings of tiny crests on the undulating wavelets. The holy atmosphere of the place tranquillized my mind and senses.

A few ordinary questions to ask the holy man had crossed my mind that morning. 'Does the *jnani* control his body and keep it in a state of perpetual youth and health?', I asked. I had heard a brahmachari expounding the following thesis the previous evening: 'The *jnani* is at one with Ishvara [the Lord as creator and sustainer of the universe] and also with Brahman [the impersonal, attributeless Absolute]. As Ishwara, he has all the powers and spiritual perfections at his disposal. He can stop the earth in its course; he can create palaces to live in; he can keep his body young for thousands of years.'

Shri Swamiji led me into a solitary valley filled with small pine trees. The wind sang as it rustled through their ever-green branches, and the notes of the Ganges filled the air. 'Hariji, look into this great pit, and tell me what you see.' 'Bones, human bones, Maharaj.' 'Hariji' said the Swami, 'once there was a colony here of yogis who mixed Hatha Yoga with Raja Yoga and called themselves *jivan muktas*. They preached that *jnana* (spiritual knowledge) gives all the powers over the world and the body. If a *jnani* were subject to disease, old age or failure of the natural faculties, he was considered to be still a novice, and not a *jivan mukta*.

'The Sadhus, due to some Hatha Yoga practices, kept their bodies in good condition; they claimed all the siddhis (powers over nature). Many rich, ageing men, many wealthy widows, many neurotic, luxury-ridden young women, visited this colony. The Sadhus conferred renewed energy on the old men, and to the others they gave what they wanted. Many Maharajas became their disciples. Their cows had velvet blankets, and their horns were decorated with gold plate. They lived on honey, milk and almonds, served on silver dishes.

'One evening as these Sadhus were sitting in their central pavilion

with some of their disciples, they announced that they had conquered death. “We are not only Brahman, but also Ishwara,” they said. A dark cloud rose above the mountain; a gale blew hard and uprooted trees, many of which fell on the heads of the Sadhus. “We will punish Nature for this insult to our holy bodies”, they cried. The thunder crashed with very great force, and all of them were killed in less than a second. Some of the Rishis and Brahmacharis gave their bodies burial in this pit, which you see before you. Hariji, these were the Ishwaras, as they called themselves.’

We sat down in a green spot. Shri Swamiji spoke in a sweet voice: ‘Hariji, suppose you see a dream and you know that it is a dream. Suppose your dream-body catches a heavy cold, or grows prematurely old. Will you bestir yourself to rectify these conditions? No, because you know that the body is unreal. Such is this sansara (the world). If you scheme to perpetuate your youth, or attempt to acquire wealth, luxury or sovereignty, then, Hariji, it is clear that you have not realized the unreality of the world and your own body. Are we worshippers of Atman (the real Self) or worshippers of *avidya* (ignorance)? Those pseudo-sadhus and jnanis who talk of a perpetually healthy body, and a life of luxury, wealth and fame, are votaries of avidya, not of Brahman.

‘Hariji, come what may, our *prarabdha karma* rules our body. Your duty is to make your *vrittis* (thoughts) *brahmakara* (of the nature of Brahman), and not of your body. If the world is unreal, then how can the body be looked upon as real? An uninstructed student of Vedanta may say: ‘My body will not fall without my orders.’ Hariji! This is gross ignorance. Equanimity is the characteristic of a jnani. Adjust your mind to the holy Truth. These vain hopes do not become the disciples of a true Guru.

‘Hariji, I have heard that Shri Swami Krishnanandaji, our Paramguru, left his body on the banks of the river Godavari. Rama, Krishna, Vyasa, Bhrgu, Vidyaranya, and other great sages have passed out of their bodies. He knows nothing of *jnana*, who is engrossed in seeking the welfare of his own body. To conquer suffering by equanimity, to keep the *vritti* high on ‘I am Brahman. I am Brahman’; to be compassionate to the world, and to teach men the holy Adhyatma

Yoga, that is enough, Hariji, that is enough.

‘Speaking from the relative point of view, Ishwara rules the world through his fixed decrees, called ‘natural laws’. If, in the course of the operation of these natural laws your body becomes old, how dare you interfere with the cosmic law, by setting your will against it? Hariji, unless we have surrendered our will to Guru and Govinda (God) and rubbed away all desires for well-being, wealth, comfort and pleasure, we are not fit to be true disciples.

‘Do not for a moment think of conquering physical death. All claims other than ‘I am Brahman’ are like the shadows of tall trees on a green sward. The best use to make of your mental energy is to control and educate the mind, to increase your devotion and to remove the obstacles to the full manifestation of Atman as Sat-Chit-Ananda (existence-consciousness-bliss absolute).’

An old yogi appeared on the scene. He brought a few fruits and a jug of milk. Swamiji accepted his gifts and blessed him. The evening was advancing; we slowly walked back to the Svarga Ashram. I saw Swamiji to his cave and then went to the library where a few brahmacharis were discussing some verses from the great classic, *Swaraja-Siddhi*. I listened to them.

* * *

A PRAYER

In this vast organization of the universe, which is animated and controlled by the one all-pervading Reality, I am a vital spring, united with the whole.
O Truth-Consciousness and Bliss, O my real Self, grant that I may live in loving co-operation with the whole, and promote the moral, spiritual and material interests of all.
Turn my mind inward to the region of peace and let me find real beauty in the practice of virtue, and real joy in the contemplation of Your knowledge.
May my life be devoted to this supreme purpose.

H.P.S.

Easter

Thoughts offered by the Warden of Shanti Sadan at an Easter celebration in 2007

EASTER is the most important festival in the Christian calendar. It symbolizes the consummation of the spiritual life: resurrection into the life of conscious immortality. Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection and the life'. (John 11:25) He was pointing to the true way and the true life. This manifests as soon as the false self of man, centred on his separative egoity, is surrendered at the altar of the supreme Truth.

The crucifixion of Jesus has many levels of meaning. This is apparent even in the references Jesus himself made to his coming fate during his ministry. 'Take up your cross and follow Me' refers to the life of self-effacement demanded of the one who seeks the realization of the kingdom of heaven within. Through his sufferings, Jesus demonstrated the ultimate fellow-feeling for all who suffer. All those who are oppressed by the burdens of life can draw comfort by thinking on Jesus, who lived in the utmost simplicity and who suffered all in his supreme sacrifice for the good of humanity.

But it is a mistake to think that Jesus commended suffering for its own sake. This is not the way of the knowers of Truth. Jesus constantly spoke of the joy, peace and light of the Spirit, and his mission was to relieve suffering in any form. 'Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.' He himself was a secret fountain of inner joy, a fact that he disclosed to his disciples when he said: 'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.' (John 15:11).

Man's very nature is bliss not suffering, and he naturally seeks what is joy-giving and is fundamentally averse to pain. It is through cultivating equanimity amid both the joys and pains of life that we fit our minds for the revelation of the constant joy of the Spirit.

The consummation of the Christian life is the same as the life of the seeker of liberation in the eastern traditions: the dissolving of the limited ego and the revelation of the true Self on which it is based and whose glory it usurps. In the words of Swami Rama Tirtha:

Why suffer from thirst?

The bottle of the Self is full of the wine of bliss.

Break the seal of egoity and drink the wine.

Not only in his crucifixion, but in his whole life, Jesus lived this teaching. He gave those he met the rare opportunity to awaken from the illusory fetters set up by the unenlightened understanding. Our spiritual life takes on real meaning when we recognize that the ego, and the self-will that springs from it, is a false friend and, in fact, a robber. For it is depriving us of freedom and joy. Our highest welfare is to withdraw our support from this pretender. This path of ego-transcendence is the way to the shadowless joy, free from all anxiety, tension and fear of loss. For it is the means that will unveil the real Self beyond all apparent limitations and reveal to us the true meaning of Jesus's statement: 'I and my Father are one.'

Even now this spiritual Truth is not distant from any of us. This is the liberating message that St Paul wished to impress on the devotees in Rome when he wrote to them 'now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we (first) believed.' (Romans 13:11)

* * *

The Universal Christianity

Extracts from lectures by Hari Prasad Shastri

The Christian prayer, 'Our Father which art in Heaven', if properly understood, is a very significant and profound spiritual formula and a very good text for meditation.

Make a symbol of one of the great Avatars or saints—Krishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ, St Francis—and dwell on it. It is good to take Krishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ to meditate on, but best of all is it to take the Infinite Brahman in all its infinite fullness and perfection, ever remembering that the Avatars were rays of Him who is the Whole.

Attentive Silence

WHAT IS attentive silence? It is not exactly meditation, nor does it mean being obliged to live in a quiet place away from traffic and people. Regard it as an attitude or state of mind. Why is it so prized? Is it a gift of nature or can it be achieved, and if so, how?

Attentive silence has its origin in a recognition that there is something of great import hidden deep within us, and of our need, not only to come into contact with it, but to be satisfied and spiritually fed by this deeper principle of divine life.

One may have all the advantages of life, and yet know that part of one's person is being starved. The reason for this sense of want has its root in our make-up as human beings. We are not just the body and the mind, but underlying and supporting both is our spiritual nature, the spirit or true Self. Unless this phase of our life is acknowledged and adequately fed, we will be strangers to real peace, lasting satisfaction and a sense of our inner unity. Spirit is fundamental; all else is transient.

In Indian traditional art, the Lord Vishnu is usually depicted as reclining on an open lotus flower. This symbolizes how the Lord, while maintaining the world, ever rests in Infinity, and that the whole of creation rests in the Infinite, in a state of oneness or unity. To become aware of this within one's own mind is the aim of the yogi. The goal is to be totally absorbed and one with this knowledge.

What are the first steps in attaining a state of mind in which the interior promptings of the spirit can be heard—not just heard, but listened to with openness of mind? It is to develop a quiet space within the mind, to which one can retreat and pay attention to what the spirit within is telling us. By this is meant, not necessarily a voice, but an influence of peace, purity and power, which, above all, is urging us, as it were, to be one with itself.

In the Old Testament we are told the story of the little boy who waited on the High Priest, Eli. In the silence of the night, lying quietly asleep on his bed, he heard his name called: 'Samuel'. Rousing himself rather sleepily, he went to Eli's room and said, 'Here I am, for you

called me.' Eli, probably also awaked from sleep, muttered, 'No, go back to bed. I didn't call you.' So back goes the child and lies down again, and no sooner is he drifting off to sleep when he hears his name called again: 'Samuel'. Once more he approaches Eli and gets the same response. 'No boy, you're dreaming. Get back to bed.' And then the whole thing happens a third time. The child, by now thoroughly awake, and perhaps rather tearful, insists 'Here am I, for you did call me.' Eli then realized that it must be the Lord calling the child. 'Go', he told the boy, and lie down again; and if by chance you hear your name called again, say: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'

Samuel must already have been a quiet, attentive child, willing to carry out what he was asked to do. He had been given to the Temple by his mother while he was still very young, and the High Priest, Eli, was training him towards his great work in the future, so he is to say: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth', not thinking 'What a good boy am I, that the Lord is wanting to speak to me', or 'Well, it depends on what is asked', or 'If I can manage it'. 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth', is very different from 'I can hear you'. 'Thy servant' denotes a proper frame of mind to hear what is being said, not only to hear, but to listen and attend. The Lord did not call him during the day, when he was occupied or at his studies, nor even at the usual time for prayer. The call came when he was utterly quiet, relaxed and withdrawn from the world, and when he could listen with his whole being.

We hear with the ears. That is a preliminary. But how often is it a matter of 'in one ear and out of the other'? Real listening is done with the whole being. If we are music-lovers, when we go to a concert, much more is involved than simply having a 'night out'. We make an effort to arrive in good time. We sit quietly and expectantly. We go because it is music we know and love, or want to know even better, so we go a little prepared, putting the critical mind to one side. We sit with thoughts collected and focused. We have gone through a little ritual to prepare ourselves for this—this opening of the whole being to the sound, ready to be flooded with sound, and not just the sound, but to absorb what the music is saying.

There is a great difference between hearing and listening. And in spiritual matters, too, a little ritual of preparation is helpful and

necessary, to put oneself into a suitable frame of mind. If we want to 'listen' to the spirit, that is, to be sensitive to its presence at the root of the mind, preparation is needed. In fact, the yogi aims for an habitual preparation. For example, he carries out a practice of deep breathing and the repetition of a name of God, OM, regularly at certain times, and then tries to carry it into the day as much as he can. This is something that can come to our aid in emergencies also, because it can be relied on. The practice of deep, slow breathing accompanied by the repetition of OM, is an anchor for the swaying mind, and helps to produce a quiet interior space to which one can retreat.

Attentive silence is communing with God. In the *Masnavi* of Rumi, it says: 'Consider what God has chanted into the ear of the earth, so that it became regardful and has ever since remained silent.' If we can become inwardly silent, we may become regardful and capable of hearing what God is 'chanting' into our ear, that is, how we should best compose our mind so that the divine presence is reflected in the mind with clarity.

A master of the spiritual life, Père Grou, says that five things are necessary for this attentive silence, and if any one of them is lacking, our efforts will be wasted, for we ourselves will be blocking the way. They are: Attention, Reverence, Love, Confidence and Perseverance.

Attention

We pay attention to what we truly love and are really interested in. If there is no overriding aim in life to claim the focus of our love and interest, one's time and opportunities are often wasted. Each of us can learn how to nurture something of lasting value and support, conducive to our inner growth. Attention can be developed by creating a 'master sentiment', that is, by developing an overriding aim in life, so that other interests are happily subordinated to it. The highest aim, which can carry us through life, and which grows more sustaining, expanding and fulfilling with practice and age, is the spiritual quest for illumination. It can form a background to the whole of life, and enrich everything one does. If the spiritual purpose is put in the forefront, other things fall into place and help it. It was said of St Teresa of Avila, that the very pots and pans in the kitchen turned their handles towards her when it

was her turn to cook. But if an inner sense of purpose is lacking, obstructions of every kind crop up to destroy our quiet and waste our life.

It is not necessary to coerce the mind in a particular direction, for it will only kick like a frightened horse. Lure it gradually into the spiritual path. There are many ways we can learn and grow. 'Do you desire to learn from the ignorant?', asks Swami Nirbhayanandaji. 'If so, do not follow his ways or behaviour.' Do not say 'Yes' to everything the world suggests.

A taste for the divine can be acquired like any other higher taste, and in the end it turns out to be the true object of all our desiring, the real beloved behind all the transient masks. Such a taste is acquired through turning inwards, through contemplating beauty, through gaining knowledge by reading and listening to spiritual teachings, through exercising compassion. Beauty is the outer form of Truth, said Hari Prasad Shastri, and to pursue beauty of conduct is to pursue its highest form. The recognition of beauty in any form has an uplifting effect on the mind, if it is viewed, not as an end in itself, but as a reflection of the divine in the world around us. The principle is summed up by St Paul, when he wrote:

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

A man becomes what he dwells on with his mind.

Reverence

Worship, it has been said, is a great relief to the mind. Why? It relieves the mind of its self-centredness and draws it up and out of itself. There is a natural tendency in humans to worship. We want to look up to someone or something, and to identify with that which is greater than ourselves. Some worship public figures or celebrities, but this innate, and sometimes naive, propensity in man is a fragmentary expression of a capacity which, at its source, is deep, pure and liberating. Worship needs, therefore, to be rightly directed.

The *Katha Upanishad*, speaking of Brahman, or God, says that

This whole universe comes out of Him and vibrates within Him. From fear of Him the fire burns; from fear of Him shines the sun; from fear of Him do Indra [the chief of the gods], the wind and Death itself proceed with their respective functions.

Spiritual reverence means remembering that God is always present as the origin, the support and the very reason for our existence. Worship is the prelude to the deeper communion. Only after this adoration can we entreat to be drawn into His orbit, as it were, and transformed into His nature, which is the losing of all separateness. These stages of approach are implicit in the Lord's Prayer. First adoration is expressed in the words 'Hallowed be Thy name'. Then follows the entreaty to become what He would have us be, in the profound utterance 'Thy will be done', and finally, in the section beginning 'Thine is the Kingdom', comes acknowledgement of the loss of all self-centredness for the individual.

Worship is as essential for our spiritual health as fresh food is for the body. Reverence for even the simplest act can transform it, if it is done as an offering to the God within us. The Japanese Zen Teachers have perfected this in their attitude towards flower arrangement. In the art of arranging flowers, the pupils start with a ritual obeisance, not only to their teacher, but also to their tools and to the plants themselves. This ritual is to establish that one is trying to evoke the spirit within the plant, and that due care and reverence towards that living thing will bring an understanding of its nature and contribute to the final result. The training is to proceed with a subdued and collected mind by carefully unwrapping the paper around the flowers, and to follow this with a quiet and thoughtful use of the tools necessary for cutting, bending and so on. All this has to progress in harmony and, most important, without eagerness for the results. For the aim is not to show off one's personal skill, but to bring out the true form and beauty hidden in the flowers. The whole procedure is an exercise in reverence and self-mastery.

Love

This does not mean just feelings, but a determination to do one's work and to hold one's relationships as a trust from God. If this is done without indulging one's feelings, without longing for the return of love and protection, then our love is made all the stronger and purer. Did not the Lord, in his incarnation as Christ, say, 'Love one another as I have loved you'? Such love has no narrowness; being without reservation or expecting anything in return, it is selfless.

It is like a good mother's love for her child. She can't help but love it. There are no qualifications in her love. It does not depend on returns or rewards in any form, whether or not the child is beautiful or successful or affectionate. She may not approve of what the child does, and, if she is wise, will seek to correct it. But the love is always there.

Yet the natural instinct to love, exemplified by the mother, is not without limitations. No one could call a mother's love impartial or without preference. She may be all things to her own child but very different to another, as many a stepchild has reason to know. When the Lord said, 'Love others as I have loved you', he meant that love should be lifted from the natural to the supernatural level. This kind of love is not limited to one person. It ever widens its scope, and is ultimately universalized to cover all. This is real love. Yogis sometimes use the word 'compassion', for compassion neutralizes any feelings of attachment which might linger in what is often imagined to be love.

This expanded outlook is not necessarily a matter of heroics. Rather, it is ordinary life lived in as selfless a manner as one can muster, and not allowing our instinctive preferences to get in the way, for Yoga, it has been said, is the 'death of preferences'. In the words of St Teresa, 'The Lord does not look at the magnitude of anything that we do, but at the love with which we do it.'

Confidence

This means faith and trust in the teacher and the teachings, faith that what we are told is true and that we can trust our life to it. It is not blind faith, but knowledge based on putting that faith into practice and finding that it supports one.

Our life of action in the world is not just an individual affair; its

background is the cosmic order, sustained by the Lord. However small our part in the great play, it has its hallowed place and its connection with the whole world process. Therefore, the spirit of faith and of our connection with the greater Life can and should inform our actions. Doesn't the Lord say in the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'I have nothing whatsoever to achieve in the three worlds, yet I engage in action, for, should I never engage in action, unwearied, men would in all matters follow My path [and also become indifferent to action]. These worlds would be ruined if I did not engage in action.'

So by carrying out our own small duties in everyday life faithfully, we are identifying with God and His work in sustaining the world process. We put our trust in this and ask for His help when things get difficult. We trust, and ask in faith 'nothing wavering'. Those who waver receive nothing and give nothing. In the words of Swami Rama Tirtha: 'Trust your life to the Truth.' Whatever comes, know that it is for one's inner growth.

Perseverance

Father Grou writes: 'God has promised to open the door to one who knocks, but doesn't promise not to keep him waiting, for a variety of reasons.' One of the first qualities that a teacher looks for in a pupil and tests him for is perseverance. Spiritual gifts are not to be had for the asking. They have to be earned, to show that the enquirer is serious in intent.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition there is the story of Mila Repa, a young aspirant who was very sorely tried by his teacher. This teacher realized what great material the boy was, and how hard he needed to be trained. Having been accepted by this teacher, he was told to go and build him a circular house, using local stone and mud, and that when this was completed, he would receive spiritual instruction. When the house was half made, along came the teacher and told him to pull it down, put all the stones back where he found them and start on a crescent-shaped house in another locality. Being of a cheerful and obedient nature, and anxious for the promised spiritual instruction, Mila Repa did as he was told. But when the crescent-shaped house was half built, the teacher again came and changed the instructions. Now the

requirement was to build a triangular house. 'Whoever wants to live in a triangular house?', thought Mila Repa to himself. But with the thought of the spiritual purpose foremost in his mind, and with firm confidence in his teacher, he set about his task. This venture, too, suffered the same fate. Yet another, more elaborate, structure was demanded.

Beginning to lose hope of ever receiving the coveted spiritual instruction, sore and injured in body as well as mind, Mila Repa despaired of pleasing his teacher, and considered taking his own life. He hadn't lost confidence in his teacher's ability to give him the Truth, but was at a complete loss to know how to please him.

Now the teacher's wife was a very motherly character and tried to help him, mistakenly as it turned out. She told him of a former pupil who had become a good teacher in his own right and gave him help in approaching this man. He in his turn was pleased with the boy and gave him suitable instruction, but in spite of all the instruction received, the boy wasn't developing spiritually. There wasn't any progress.

Discovering that Mila Repa was already affiliated to a true master, his own, he exclaimed: 'Ah! We have been engaged in profitless work,' and told the boy to go back. Returning to his real teacher, Mila Repa became distraught with shame and sorrow, and felt, he said, that his heart would burst within him. But through the compassion of his teacher the whole situation was remedied, and Mila Repa was at last given the coveted instruction. He had proved that he would undergo any test in order to follow the true path. He became a God-realized sage, and is held up as a most saintly figure and the finest example of perseverance to all aspiring Tibetan yogis.

He was also a wonderful poet and would teach, as occasion offered, through songs about the truth he was living. He was a most humanly lovable character and lived to the venerable age of 84. He is often depicted holding his hand to one ear, listening attentively for the Truth, with a big smile on his face.

Here is part of a poem called The Horse of the Mind, which he sang to some travellers on horseback who deplored his emaciated figure and tried to persuade him to leave the spiritual path.

Within the temple of the Bodhi Hill, my body;
 Within my breast wherein the altar is,
 Within the chamber topmost and triangular within my
 heart,
 The horse of mind, moving like the wind, prances about.
 What lasso must be used to catch this horse
 And to what post must it be tied when caught?
 What food is to be given it when hungry?
 What drink is to be given it when thirsty?
 In what enclosure is it kept when cold?
 To catch the horse, use, as a lasso, singleness of purpose.
 It must be tied, when caught, to the post of meditation;
 It must be fed, when hungry, on the guru's teachings.
 It must be given to drink, when thirsty, of the stream of Consciousness;
 It must be kept, when cold, in the enclosure of the voidness.
 For saddle, use the will; for bridle, intellect;
 Attach to it, as girths and cruppers, fixedness immovable.
 Around it pass, as head stall and as nose band, the vital airs.
 This horse courses along the widespread plain of happiness;
 Its goal is the attainment of the state of all the conquerors.
 Its hind part leaves behind attachment to the worldly life;
 Its front part goes on to the safe place of deliverance.
 Judge if this be like your own conception of felicity.
 Worldly happiness I covet not.

M.F.M.

THIRTY-THREE YEARS

What do the lives of Alexander the Great, Jesus of Nazareth and Swami Rama Tirtha have in common? Each spanned thirty-three years more or less—but what a difference in the quality of what they achieved during that time!

Alexander's goal was self-glory through universal empire, and he pursued it one-pointedly. His brilliance was not confined to military science. He founded cities which he wanted to be centres of civilization. But he called them all 'Alexandria', and his main motivation was self-aggrandisement. He could be cruel, humourless, hyper-sensitive to anything that pricked his ego, and ruthless in retribution. His life was hardly touched by the higher values of human-heartedness; his worship—he believed in the Greek gods like Zeus and Apollo—was to invoke those forces to support his ambitions. He died wretchedly of a fever, probably linked with his heavy drinking, before his thirty-third birthday. His far-flung empire immediately became a prey to competing interests, as (it has been said) zoo animals compete for the best morsels at feeding time.

The life of Jesus radiated the highest and most wholesome human and spiritual values, and set the ideal for much of mankind thereafter. He was prompted by compassion, invoking forgiveness even on his persecutors, 'for they know not what they do'. His whole being was rooted in devotion to the supreme Power, whom he called his Father. He founded no outer temple or city, and was more concerned with the feelings that stirred the human heart, and how these may be purified and liberated. He laid down patterns of forgiveness and caring, and his selfless love extended to women and children, to whom he showed the greatest considerateness. Unlike Alexander, he saw the hollowness of worldly eminence, and urged men to sink their urge for personal significance in the consciousness that all power and glory has its source in the spiritual reality behind appearances.

Swami Rama Tirtha lived from 1873 to 1906, when his, by then, frail body, was swept away during his daily bath in a fast flowing river. His story is told in *Scientist and Mahatma*. Like Alexander, he was one-pointed in his aim, which in his case was the sovereignty of self-

realization, an expansion of consciousness so complete that ‘The rulers of the world are pawns on my chessboard.’ Moreover, it is a sovereignty to which every man and woman had equal claim. As it is said, ‘Two kings cannot share the same kingdom; a dozen holy men can sit happily on the same prayer carpet.’ He founded no society, nor did he set himself up as a guru. Alexander wished to be regarded as a god, a son of Zeus. Rama Tirtha escaped this error of deifying a physical body, gave honour to Truth, to the *Gita*, and to the one Reality he discerned as the true Self in all. His audiences were not ‘other’ but ‘My divine Self in the form of ladies and gentlemen’. In his collected works, called *In Woods of God-Realization*, every page gives testimony that this supreme goal of life is within the reach of all sincere applicants.

As an invader who traumatized ancient India, Alexander became the subject of many legends, and has his place in the lines of some spiritual poets as an example *not* to be emulated. A more interesting, though less conventional ‘type’ that emerges in some stories is that of the fearless sage who cares not at all for the Emperor’s threats and fulminations, having transcended the body-consciousness and the fear that goes with it. In one of Rama Tirtha’s poems, Alexander, in his pomp and armour, is mocked by such a sage, who proclaims his identity with the supreme spiritual power and bliss that upholds the whole world process, so that:

The lustre of your golden crown depends on me...
Whatever has pleased you has been a gift from me.

After an outraged reaction, Alexander, who was extremely intelligent, though not wise, is moved by the holy man’s words, and:

The Emperor’s sword slipped down from his hand,
He succumbed before the glance of the holy man.

If anything like this did happen to the Emperor while he was in India, then his journey there, and his thirty-three of life, would not have been in vain.

A.H.C.

The Living Heart of the Upanishads

By knowing the self-shining One, all the limitations of ignorance end forever. With the cessation of all sufferings, there is release from birth and death.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad

WE ASSOCIATE the Upanishads with the spirituality of ancient India, yet they remain sources of guidance and insight for anyone in quest of spiritual light. This is because their message transcends time and place and the boundaries of any particular religion. They appeal not to man’s need to believe, but to his urge to know—the power of enquiry present in every human mind. And they open a way to a deeper understanding, so that we do finally know what we came into the world to know: the ultimate Truth about the nature of experience. We know this through knowing the nature of our own true Self.

The living heart of the Upanishads is therefore not different from the heart that beats within our own breast. The Upanishads teach us about ourselves, as spiritual beings. The word ‘heart’ is used as a metaphor and a pointer to the subtle, inmost essence of our own being, in other words, our true Self. It is that place of inner retreat, which will, when opened up, reveal that the spiritual light and power is within and without, and that it is our real nature.

In one of his writings the Indian philosopher Shri Shankara tells the story of a little boy, a prince, who was one day discarded by his parents, and placed in the hands of foster parents who were very poor and used to catch birds in order to make a living. It was not long before the boy felt he belonged to them, and was one of them, and forgot completely his royal nature, and followed the duties and profession of a bird-catcher.

Some time later, a court official happened to be journeying through the area, and recognized the boy as the king’s son. He took him aside for a talk, gently reminded him of some of the details of his early environments, and said: ‘You do not belong here. Give up this false idea that you are a fowler. You are heir to the throne of this whole

kingdom. You are a prince. Be what you are, and come back with me to your true home.'

Shri Shankara tells this story in order to shed light on the inner meaning of a particular verse from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

As a spider moves along the thread which it produces out of itself, and as from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from the [supreme] Self emanate all organs, all worlds, all gods and all beings. Its secret name is the Truth of truth. The vital force (the life principle) is truth, and It is the Truth of that. (II.i.20)

The teaching is that man, in his true nature, his true Self, is ever at one with the divine, just as sparks are one with the fire. The Divine is, as it were, the great Self of all—the Self of the entire universe. It has produced the multiplicity of creatures as a kind of illusory projection or emanation from itself. Therefore we are not really separate from the Divine, and never have been. But like the prince, we have forgotten our true nature, and need to be awakened to it. When this happens, all error falls away, and we know that the spiritual centre of our being is one with the supreme.

This spiritual information is designed to revive our knowledge of our true nature. It is the main message and purpose of the Upanishads. Their value is to awaken us to our fundamental nature as divine peace and infinite wisdom, and liberate us from the sense that we are anything other than the Absolute Reality, which is the basis of the world of appearances and of our individual being. It is to arouse in us the knowledge: 'My Self is the Self of all.' Grief and ignorance are cancelled forever. In the words of the *Isha Upanishad*:

When to the man of realization all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness?

This Upanishad uses the term oneness, or unity (*ekatvam*) to indicate the awakened understanding. But something deeper than unity is meant, for unity is usually unity of different things, which still remain different things, though bonded together. The realization taught in the Upanishads involves awakening to one's identity with the Self of

all *as the only reality*. So to indicate this depth and purity of understanding, another term is used: non-duality, Advaita. Advaita, non-duality, replaces all differences, including differences between things, between me and what I see, between me and God, and so on.

At the level of sense-experience and mental response, differences remain: red is different from green, hot from cold, the song of the robin is different from the boom of thunder. But over and above sense-perception and reason, the mind of man has the potentiality for higher knowledge, for kindling the inner light of wisdom in one's own being. And when this special function of the mind is fully awakened, non-duality is realized as the real fact behind the shifting pictures of the world. Then, the spiritual knowledge is known to be the real knowledge, eternal, certain, ever-present, ever-revealed as the All. The differences transmitted to the mind through the senses are now seen as illusory appearances, totally dependent on the divine power that underlies them.

It is from this standpoint of higher knowledge that differences are transcended in an experience which is by nature infinite bliss and fulfilment. As the *Chandogya Upanishad* expresses it:

The Infinite is that where one does not see anything else, does not hear anything else, and does not understand anything else....That which indeed is infinite is immortal...It is established in its own glory, or not even in its own glory.

Far from being a void or a negation of consciousness, this awakened understanding is a completeness and fulfilment, and is indicated in such terms as perfection (*purna*), bliss (*ananda*), and so on.

Returning to this world of differences, which seems real enough until we are spiritually alight, we can say that the Upanishads form part of the holy scriptures of India. They are incorporated in that great body of religious instruction called the Vedas. But they mark a break from the Vedic preoccupation with rituals and hymns, that is, with spirituality in its outer expressive forms. Instead, they represent a turning within, a probing of the true nature of the person himself or herself, a diving deep into one's own heart.

And in this focused internal silence, the Seers of the Upanishads experienced a breakthrough in understanding which took them beyond the operations of the intellect, beyond the barriers and unrest of the mental life, and into identification with the spiritual source. They awakened to the fact that the true Self of man is not different in essence from the supreme power that has manifested out of itself the entire world of appearances.

We remember that the boy prince didn't have to *become* a prince. But he had to be roused to the realization that he was already a prince, and free. And the Upanishads shed light on the fact that we are already divine in essence, in our spiritual nature, but we need, each of us, to probe this mystery, and, by diving deep within, achieve the same awakened understanding that our predecessors did in those earlier times. A verse from the *Katha Upanishad* calls out to us:

Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a razor's edge, which when sharpened, is difficult to tread on.

The Upanishads—and this applies to the higher teachings of any scripture—bring to our attention something that we cannot discover or realize through the ordinary workings of the mind, no matter how clever we are. The mind may come up with many theories, beliefs, and speculations, for example, the belief that there must be a God; that man has a soul; that life must have a purpose; that there is a reality behind appearances; that humanity is one family; that the world is dream-like, and may actually be a dream, and so on. People have argued, and go on arguing, about these matters for a very long time. But the certainty of Truth must come from a power higher than man's changing speculations. The experience that satisfies for ever, that crosses out all doubts, and from which there is no fall or forgetting, is transmitted through divine revelation, mediated through the Scriptures, and the illumined teachers.

For example, an intelligent enquirer may be able to work out through reasoning that his fundamental nature is something different and more subtle than the body, senses, mind, intellect, ego, and so on.

But when he then asks: 'Well, what am I, if I am not these things?', ordinary experience will not provide the answer. As the *Ashtavakra Gita* tells us:

O Wise One! You may take delight in action or in contemplation, but your mind will still yearn for That which is beyond all objects and in which all desires are extinguished.

It is the purpose of the Upanishads, transmitted through the vital realization of a spiritually awakened teacher, to establish us in that experience 'which is beyond all objects and in which all desires are extinguished'. For the Upanishads tell us clearly, when our inner ears have been freed from confused and biased thinking, 'This Self is the Absolute. It is the All.'

In the Upanishads, the one who wants this knowledge goes to a teacher. He or she asks questions in a spirit of reverence, self-control, love and trust. The teacher gives advice on how to meditate, to think creatively, and live in such a way that we can make a spiritual advance, leading to the ultimate breakthrough of self-realization.

As with all great endeavours, there is a certain time in our spiritual evolution when we become ready to take up the path to liberation. We are ready when we are sure that no other course of life leads to lasting happiness. A verse from the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* declares:

When a man is able to roll up the sky like a piece of leather, only then will there be an end of suffering, without knowing the spiritual Truth.

So we need to examine carefully the goals that the world tempts us with, and if we find them mediocre and inadequate, it suggests that we have outgrown such things, and are ready for the higher path. Here is another verse (from the *Mundaka Upanishad*), slightly paraphrased, on this point:

Having examined these worlds, and finding them all finite and unable to confer lasting fulfilment, let him find a teacher, a knower of the Absolute, make a suitable offering and ask for teachings.

‘Tell me what you know’, the pupil is asked, ‘and I will tell you what is beyond it!’

So if our intuitive feeling is that there is something more to life, something that we really want; if we have a sense of the infinite and the universal, then we will find light, insight and delight from absorbing our minds in what the Upanishads tell us about the nature of reality.

As well as metaphysical teachings, we find in the Upanishads profound instructions about spiritual practice. Generally, the method involves turning within ourselves, and seeking for truth in the serenity of our soul. How to make ourselves serene? Meditation is one way. Meditation seems at first to be a narrowing down of our experience from the width, variety and thrill of the outer life, to a kind of internal darkness. But in that apparent darkness is revealed the supreme light, and in that narrowing of our attention is discovered what the Upanishads call ‘the space within the heart’. In this context, the human body is called the City of God, or rather, the City of Brahman, the Absolute, because man discovers spiritual reality in his own being.

Let us look at a teaching that makes use of concentration on the heart centre, with the ultimate aim of leading us beyond body-consciousness. It comes in the *Chandogya Upanishad*:

Within this City of Brahman (the body) there is this small lotus-like dwelling (the ‘lotus of the heart’, the heart centre). Within it is a small space. That which exists in that space is to be known. That indeed has to be enquired into for realization.

Should they ask him what is it that exists in this small space within the heart, he should reply: ‘The space within the heart is as vast as this space that is outside. Within it indeed are included both heaven and earth, as also both fire and air, both sun and moon, lightning and stars. Whatever one has, and whatever one lacks, is included here—in the space within the heart.

In other words, in this apparently insignificant, quiet, hidden phase of our nature, we shall discover the universal wisdom and know ourselves to be the All.

Let us pause and rest our attention on the heart centre, remembering the words:

The space within the heart is as vast as this space that is outside.
Within it indeed are included both heaven and earth.

Meditation and withdrawal is one of the procedures we follow in order to bring our mind into attunement with the deeper spiritual truth. Equally important is for us to allow the teachings to sink in, so that we remember them and find ourselves brooding about them, voluntarily, willingly and with deep and burning interest. In the Upanishads, we find that sometimes the student of higher wisdom is sent away in order to take time to think over what has been taught. Then, if he desires further teaching, the student returns to the teacher and asks in the right spirit for more instructions, as a blind man seeks sight.

The way we can get the most benefit from these teachings is to apply them to ourselves, personally. They are the voice, so to say, of our own deeper Self, urging our mind that it is time for us to arise and awake. So we listen with an open mind in this spirit, and afterwards think deeply about any aspects of spiritual truth we hear about, and can remember.

We need also to guard against immediately diluting our reception of truth by allowing some distraction or conversation to sweep aside the memory of the teachings, which all too easily happens. Look on the doctrine of the higher Self, and the way to its realization, as vital information that really matters. This feeling of spiritual urgency makes all the difference.

A pupil comes to a teacher and says:

My knowledge is only intellectual knowledge, and I still experience suffering. I have heard that a knower of Self goes beyond sorrow. I am full of sorrow. O venerable Sir, take me beyond sorrow.

And he is given teachings, and told to take them deeper in personal reflection and meditation. Then the mind will gain light from the depths of our own being. This is the process.

Always the idea is that these teachings will open a way within us and lead us ultimately to the realization of non-duality through self-knowledge. This is another distinctive feature of the philosophy of the Upanishads: it is meant to have a fruit, a result. Otherwise, it has no value. There is no interest in speculation as an intellectual pastime. Consciousness has to be freed from its apparent limitations, and the way to freedom is to discover what lies at the centre of our own being. 'This has to be enquired into for realization.'

The Upanishads form the basis for both a practical philosophy and an experimental religion. They address the great philosophical questions, but resolve these through prompting an inner awakening, and not by prescribing an intellectual point of view. As an experimental religion, the upanishadic insights can be confirmed in one's own experience, if the way of life they prescribe is followed. They teach reverence for the supreme Power, called Brahman, the Absolute, and stimulate a desire for union with it, and the practical means to effect this union.

In the text called the *Brahma Sutras*, there is the statement:

The Upanishads teach Brahman (the Absolute) as the Self, and cause it to be known as such.

But they can only 'cause' our spiritual awakening if we do our part, just as the sun will only cause a fruit tree to grow and flourish if we look after the tree, keep it suitably nourished and protected from pests, fungi and other parasitical growths. But once the fruit of self-realization has been fulfilled, the Upanishads have served their purpose.

Implicit in the Upanishadic teaching is their own self-effacement in the higher experience of non-duality. 'Know the Self and give up all vain talk.' There is no exaltation of 'the Word', that is, the scriptural Word, for its own sake. For the progression is from the indirect knowledge that we first grasp and assimilate through the words of the scripture, to direct experience of reality: from *Shruti* to *anubhuti*.

When a satellite is to be propelled into space, it needs what is called a launch vehicle, usually a powerful rocket, to lift it out of the earth's atmosphere and gravitational field and set it on its way. But once the

satellite is lifted to a certain point, it can be freed from contact with the launch vehicle. The launch vehicle has served its purpose and falls away. In a similar way, the holy scriptures are essential to lead man to a realization of the highest Truth. But once that realization has come, the scriptures and teachings have served their sacred purpose. The direct knowledge of Truth, *anubhuti*, is independent of scriptural support. This point—that the scriptures are first necessary and later transcended—is something that each of us is destined to prove in our own experience.

We find a similar teaching given by the Sufi master, Jalaluddin Rumi:

The Religious Law is like a candle showing the way. Unless you gain possession of the candle, there is no wayfaring; and when you have come on to the way, your wayfaring is the Path; and when you have reached the journey's end, that is the Truth....

Or the Law may be compared to learning the science of medicine, and the Path to regulating one's diet and taking remedies, and the Truth to gaining health everlasting and becoming independent of them both... For it is unseemly to demand a guide after arrival at the goal, and blameworthy to discard the guide before arrival at the goal.

This spiritual knowledge is unique because it reveals a dimension of our own being, our 'living heart', so to say, that is not only greater than our individual human character. It turns out to be the absolute consciousness beyond all relativity and duality. The Upanishads tell us that one who has realized ultimate Truth becomes that Truth, becomes the reality behind appearances, becomes Brahman, the Absolute.

He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. (*Mundaka Upanishad*)

It is not literally a becoming, in the sense of a change in our essential nature. Our essential nature has ever been Brahman. The becoming means the realization of our essential identity as Brahman, the direct experience: 'I am That'. This is the only way the supreme

Truth can be known; not as an object, not as something else, but through awakening to the fact of our eternal identity with it.

The true Self of man was never anything other than the Absolute, the Whole, the All. But, like the boy prince in the story, there seems to be a forgetfulness, a mind-made eclipse, that hides our eternal spiritual sovereignty. This apparent veiling does not change the fact that the Absolute is the true 'I' and is realizable as such to those who follow the spiritual path. As the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* assures us:

And, to this day, whoever knows it as 'I am Brahman' becomes all this universe.

The meaning is that he realizes that he was never anything different from the pure, absolute being and consciousness in which the universe appears as a mirage in the desert. This is the way to end the limitations of ignorance and have the spiritual health everlasting that is the normal and unalterable nature of our true Self.

Here are two verses from the *Ashtavakra Gita*, which are based on the wisdom of the Upanishads:

Why should one who knows his Self to be That in which universes rise and fall like waves in the sea, run hither and thither like a suffering creature?

Have faith, O Darling, be not deluded! Thou art the Lord of the Universe; thou art Knowledge itself; thou transcendest Nature; verily thou art the Self.

B.D.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

King Janaka's invitation to Shri Yajnavalkya

IT WAS A hot day. The spiritual community had gathered under the tall deodar trees, through which gentle breezes were rustling, singing a peaceful tune. Clouds were floating in the blue sky, white, pink and dark, of many fantastic shapes and hues. The assembly fell silent. When they heard the steps of the Guru, all stood in reverence with joined palms and heads bent low.

The yogi-rajā occupied the seat prepared for him. Behind him stood two youthful figures, both women in the prime of life, one holding a fan and the other an earthen bowl filled with pure spring water, also another bowl which was a cover for the water vessel. The rishi gave a signal and all sat down. He said:

Let us meditate, not on anything external or even internal, but on a spiritual fact, undeniable and above all negation. Close your eyes and sit firm, focus your withdrawn mind on the following text:

OM. He whom the mind cannot make its object, but by whose power the mind is vitalized—that infinite, eternal, imperishable all-bliss principle am I. OM.

The sutra was then repeated by the disciple Brahmadatta and they all went into meditation. Time and space were forgotten, the law of cause and effect was left behind, all material values were transcended. One great stream of consciousness, in the form of 'I', alone remained. As the disciples focused their minds on this great principle, they felt an inner tranquillity and peace which no sense contact could ever offer. The breezes blew through their hair, the edges of their scarves fluttered in the wind. Thus they sat silent. The yogi-rajā remained like a statue. Though their personalities at this time seemed to be static, yet their minds were absorbed in the cosmic mind of God (*Hiranyagarbha*), and

from that great source of beauty, truth and bliss, the consciousness of the disciples began to seek a realization of its nature, existence, consciousness and bliss (sat-chit-ananda) on the invisible and imperishable plane.

After an hour of this meditation, the maharishi slowly chanted OM. Then he sang:

He was before all, Hiranyagarbha,
The ruler of the cosmic mind.
He was the sole Master of all.
He upheld the earth and the sky.
Let us live, offering our minds and senses to Him.
He who gives vitality to the inner organ,
Strength to the physical body,
He who is worshipped by nature,
On Him we meditate.
Let all the world be united by the golden bond of love
With that august, immutable principle.

The sweet and sonorous voice of the yogi-rajā grew richer and richer till the whole valley echoed the song which he sang in his ecstasy (samadhi). He was not singing, the song was being sung through him. He was in a motionless state, which can be called neither creative nor passive, neither dynamic nor static—the state in which all the primeval seeds of creation are sown, the storehouse of inspiration.

He opened his eyes and looked as if he had suddenly dropped from the highest heaven into the plane of relativity to enrich it, to beautify and vitalize it. Again there was silence. The disciple Brahmādatta stood up, approached the mahatma, touched his feet and said: ‘Holy one, two ministers from King Janaka have arrived and are waiting for an interview.’ ‘Usher them in, my son’, said Shri Yajñavalkya.

Two warriors had come, clad in court uniform, dazzling on account of the splendour of the gems and jewels which adorned them. Having laid aside their swords and removed their shoes and head-dresses, they entered the assembly with deep bows, bearing golden plates filled with fruit and other gifts. Standing before the yogi-rajā, they said: ‘Your Holiness, your servant and son, King Janaka, has sent his own chariot

with the request that you will be kind enough to grace his palace with your presence.’ The sage asked Brahmādatta to give the hospitality of the ashram to the royal ministers, and said: ‘Dear ones, rest in this hermitage tonight and partake of our hospitality. Tomorrow, after the morning devotion, I will give you a reply to be tendered to His Majesty.’ He asked them whether they had had a comfortable journey and if they required anything special to complete their felicity in the ashram. The ministers, in the company of two disciples of the sage, then bowed down reverently and left the assembly.

As they departed, one of the visitors said to his companion: ‘Look, Shrimana, how peaceful is the atmosphere of this hermitage. The birds are so tame that they like to come and take grain out of your hands, the half-eaten seeds are lying there on the ground! I also see many earthen pots filled with water hanging on the branches of the trees, to allay the thirst of these winged creatures. The deer, too, bound fearlessly before us. Everyone seems to be so satisfied and peaceful here; there is such a spirit of co-operation and mutual aid, and no-one seems overworked. This place is far better than our rich residences in the streets of the capital.’

The other minister agreed and remarked that he thought himself very fortunate in being able to visit this holy place. He said: ‘Our Sovereign is a righteous ruler; justice prevails everywhere in his empire. Still, why is the country not divided up into small hermitages like this one? Here is fresh air, home-grown fruit, fellowship with the deer and the birds, and nature to delight our hearts. Those who dwell here follow truth. They help on both the visible and invisible planes. Blessed indeed is the life of these hermits.’

The ministers were taken to a thatched cottage, simply furnished with mats and water vessels. Rosaries and devotional manuscripts were placed on the wooden shelf. All was spotlessly clean. Here the brahmacharis took leave of their guests after inviting them to the communal meal in the kitchen of the hermitage.

To be continued

H.P.S.

MEDITATION PRACTICE SESSION

with comments by Hari Prasad Shastri

These traditional meditation practices have been performed by students of Yoga since ancient times. They are inexhaustible in their depth and power to expand the consciousness. Their value will reveal itself if meditation is practised daily with interest, perseverance and faith in the deeper spiritual reality within us awaiting discovery.

Sit comfortably with the spine and neck erect and the chin held in. If possible, sit cross-legged on a cushion on the floor, or else on a firm chair.

Traditionally, rhythm plays an important part in meditation. The best time for meditation is shortly after rising in the morning or just prior to retiring at night.

If the mind is allowed free scope during the day, it will be more difficult to control at the set meditation period. The spiritual teachers therefore recommend that we bring the mind back to one of the practices, whenever we have a quiet few moments during the day.

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

2. Breathing Practice with OM

Sit in relaxation, in the meditation posture. On the in-breath, draw the breath from the navel to the spot between the eyebrows. As you breath in, hear the 'O' of OM, as you breathe out, hear the 'M'. Do this practice for 5 minutes.

3. In relaxation, dismiss thoughts as they arise

In relaxation, continue to breathe consciously and a little more deeply than usual. With each breath go into relaxation. When relaxation is obtained, then wait. You will have some desire, some thought. If you can dismiss the thought and the desire, you are a true human being. One way of dismissing the thoughts is to say, 'It is an illusion. I do not want it.'

If you are successful in negating five thoughts in this way, you invite the great stream of peace and fortitude into your mind. This is the real yogic secret. Yoga is the ability to suspend and dismiss thoughts and desires. If you slowly do it in this way for five or ten minutes every day, then the vacuum you create will be filled with the spiritual light. In this way, as your thoughts evaporate, you acquire a sense of peace.

4. Meditation on a text

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

This kind of meditation may be called educational, for it educates the mind spiritually, and, if done properly, the mind will receive a measure of the true spiritual peace. In this way, tranquillity and righteousness become a part of the empirical nature.

When the meditation has been held in the mind for some time, it passes into the emotions, and it is here that the real seeds of meditation are sown....Though the mind may stray, if one returns to the initial subject very soon, the meditation is not spoilt.

(For further guidance, see *Meditation – Its Theory and Practice*, p 45.)

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

The Kena Upanishad

The Power Behind the Mind

THE KENA UPANISHAD in a striking and challenging way throws light on the knowledge of spiritual truth. Study and reflection on it can help us in our search for inner illumination.

How can it help us? In the non-dual tradition, the Upanishads and comparable texts have a particular purpose. Put simply, it is to tell us things that we cannot find out from any other source. Three main ways of gaining knowledge are recognized. They are the senses, reason (inference and so on), and spiritual texts (what might be called 'Scripture' or 'the Vedas', but we do not want to imply that Truth is exclusive to any one particular religion).

Our senses tell us about the world. If we need to know facts about the world around us, it is the senses that should be consulted; they are the competent authority here. Reason tells us the relations and implications between facts. Sense data and reason together are the way we gain knowledge of the empirical world. Science uses these tools in a very disciplined and precise way, which is why it is so effective in understanding the physical world around us.

But there are some things that the senses and mind cannot tell us about. Their competence fails as regards what lies beyond the mind and senses. The mind and senses are part of the world, they are details within the whole, so evidently they are not able to know the whole of reality over and above the very limited range of experience that is available to the mind and senses.

According to the traditional teachings, this is precisely the place where texts such as the Upanishads are the right authority. They are the recorded utterances of those who have realized the one Self at the heart of all in direct experience, the reality behind and beyond the mind and senses. There the senses and mind do not operate; it is not knowledge by knowing but knowledge by being.

Certain highly significant philosophical questions present themselves to thoughtful people. Is there an abiding reality beyond

what the senses and mind present to us? What is the relation between that reality and how we experience the world? Most important, is there a way of going beyond what the mind and senses tell us, in order to discover the truth for ourselves? Experience teaches us that there is no lasting happiness and security in the changing world, so this question is much more than just academic.

The Upanishads give us answers to these questions. They say, yes, there is an abiding reality and a traditional path to its realization in direct experience. And the Upanishad gives directions concerning the practicalities of the path. This is why texts like the Kena Upanishad are relevant and interesting to us.

Before we go any further it would help to clarify an item vocabulary, the meaning of the Sanskrit word *Brahman*. This word is often translated as God, which is certainly not wrong. However Brahman refers to the absolute, transcendental aspect of God or the ultimate reality. As such Brahman indicates something beyond the creative and worshipped qualities which are usually associated with the word God. Brahman can be defined in purely logical terms. However, the term 'the Absolute', which is sometimes used as an alternative translation for Brahman, is not entirely satisfactory either, because the Absolute sounds too abstract and distant from us. Brahman is the ground of being, in which we live, move and have our being, and yet it is also transcendent of all change and limitation. The Kena Upanishad, indeed all the Upanishads, are concerned with knowledge of Brahman, the highest truth, a knowledge that is often contrasted with the knowledge of worldly phenomena. In the past, aspects of nature were conceived as the action of 'gods' with a small 'g'. Even when such conceptions were common, the word Brahman has always been used to mean the supreme God, the ultimate reality, not these lesser principles.

The Kena Upanishad begins with a question:

What is the power that enables the mind to know, life to live, the eye to see?

The answer comes:

It is the mind of the mind, the life of life, the eye of the eye.

That might not sound like a very helpful answer until we realize that what is being indicated by the mind of the mind, the life of life, the eye of the eye, are not three separate things. It is saying that there is one principle supporting and enabling the mind, life and senses. So what is this principle? We might approach it this way. First let us think of many different instances of life; the life of thousands or millions of people, people alive today, or during the last century, or thousands of years ago. Also the life of other creatures, birds, fish, mammals, those alive now and also those who lived hundreds or millions of years ago. Among all those instances of life, so numerous and so diverse, there is something in common. So we try to stretch our understanding towards that, which is common to all these.

And so with the mind. First let us consider how varied are the states experienced by each of our minds. Thinking, imagining, all the range of emotions, occur in each mind. Yet something is common to them all, something is aware of them all. Behind the activity of millions or billions of minds, alive now or in the distant past, there is something common to them all. Equally all the senses of all creatures are animated by a principle that is common to them all.

So according to the Upanishad, behind all minds, all life, all sensory experience there is one principle: the mind of all minds, the seeing of all eyes, the life of life. It is one and universal. This principle is the source of all being, consciousness and experience.

We should emphasize that this is not a definition of the highest reality, which cannot be defined. The highest truths in all fields cannot be fully expressed and defined; even the best maps are of a different order from the places they describe.

In this connection, the Kena Upanishad gives us another teaching strongly. It is that the highest reality is something different from everything we can perceive or conceive with our usual way of thinking and seeing. It is absolutely different. We are advised that if we wish to seek to realize this truth directly, one of the things we need is a willingness to be open to completely new ways of perceiving and understanding.

People with clever minds used to getting effective results in the world may have particular difficulty absorbing this teaching. But when

it comes to the higher reality itself, we have to understand that here the objective, and the means thereto, are quite unlike worldly matters. Some traditions emphasize that we need the quality of humility.

Two well-known verses from the Kena Upanishad say:

That which is unapproachable by the mind but which gives the mind the ability to think, know that to be Brahman, and not what people here worship. [1.6.]

That which is not seen with the eye but by which one sees the activities of the eye, know that to be Brahman, and not what people here worship. [1.7]

We tend to think of God as the ultimate cause and substance of all. In a sense God is that. But we need to remember that the highest reality is beyond all cause and relation. Much of the debate between those who say there must be a God to explain the world and those who say science explains everything and proves there is no God, is confused and futile. God is the total reality beyond cause, effect, and all distinctions. And yet, from the point of view of the phenomenal world, everything depends on the supreme reality in which it inheres. This reality, which transcends all distinctions and relations, including creation and sustenance, and yet on which the world of forms depends, is exactly what is indicated by the word Brahman.

What we have said about God in this sense not being a cause or creator should not be understood as implying any disrespect. On the contrary, it is to imply that our respect, our reverence and understanding, can never be adequate. It is to acknowledge, not a limitation on God, but the limits of our own minds. We can only think in terms of substance and energy and causes, but the limitations of our minds do not apply to the infinite. The Kena Upanishad says:

It is beyond the reach of the eye, speech and the mind. We cannot have it as an object of knowledge. There is no means to instruct another about it. It is different from the known and beyond the unknown. Our source of knowledge is the ancient teachers who have explained it to us.

Here some important teachings are expressed directly. Brahman is

said to be beyond the reach of the eye, speech and mind because it is infinite and it is not mediated by any instruments of cognition. Let us consider how when the eye sees something, several factors are involved. There is the eye and the associated elements of the brain and nervous system, which are complex biological mechanisms. They present an image to consciousness. Before they do so, light waves reflected by the surface of the object must stimulate the receptors in the eye. So what we see is an image, formulated by complex sensory and neurological processes, stimulated by light waves, affected by the surface of an object. Because our experiences always take something like this form, we have to forcibly remind ourselves how different this is from reality itself. God is not an image, or a process, or an organism, or an energy wave or a surface; the least we can tentatively suggest is that God is that in which all these arise. So the eye cannot approach the highest reality in itself, and the same applies to speech and mind.

We have to really exercise our intelligence and imagination, and perhaps most of all, our humility, to understand how different is the kind of knowledge of objects, that serves us so well in daily life, and the kind of knowledge we seek if we are aspiring to unmediated realization of the Absolute. In fact, even to begin to realize how difficult it is to understand this difference is a big step, especially if we are used to relying on our brain-power to get effective results. This is one of the reasons why the Kena Upanishad tells us so often, in different ways, sometimes rather perplexing, that knowledge of the Absolute is so different from ordinary ways of knowing. As we see, the Upanishad even says that because this cannot be an object for the mind or senses, there is no way to explain it to another.

Have we reached an impasse then? The Upanishad gives an important indication here. It says that what is sought is different from the known and also that it is beyond the unknown. This is highly significant—what we seek is beyond the unknown.

We usually think of all possible knowledge as divisible into two categories, all the things we do know, and all the things we do not yet know, that is, the known and the unknown. The region of the unknown would appear to be vast and separated from us by insuperable difficulties and the limitations of our minds, leaving us with the sense

that there will always be much that is unknown to us including perhaps the answers to all the most significant questions.

But the Upanishad is saying that what we seek is not within the known *or* the unknown. It is, according to the Upanishad, *above*, or *beyond*, the unknown. What else is there apart from all that is known and not known? It is that which is aware of both knowledge and ignorance; the inner light that reveals both light and darkness. It is in this direction that the higher knowledge is to be sought. And so the sting is removed from that alarming statement that it is impossible to instruct another concerning it. It is not to be sought in otherness, it is to be sought within the Self, or rather, as the Self, of each and all.

This is reasonable enough, but reason cannot tell us whether it is true or not. To take our stand on this idea, to stake our ultimate well-being on it, we need a reliable authority. And happily there is one. The Upanishad says this teaching comes from the ancient sages, not mere reason. Ancient here does not so much mean very old, but timeless. The sages are those who have transcended the individual perspective, who have no personal interests left to distort their vision, who are at one with reality.

So the Upanishad has given us some important teachings. First, assurance that there is a higher truth; it is there to be found. Second, that in order to approach it, we need to be willing to learn in completely new ways and not to rely on the methods and standards that have served us well in the empirical realm. And thirdly, that the higher truth is not to be sought among facts, either those we know or do not yet know. It is to be sought in the Self, our own true Self, the Self of all.

Then the Upanishad goes on to provide further guidance. What comes now concerns the way the teachings are received by those who hear. The presentation is terse and requires considerable explication, but Shri Shankara and other great teachers have provided what is needed, and the Upanishad here lays the foundation for much of the practical inner training that is required in order to realize the teachings in direct experience.

Part two of the Kena Upanishad is in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and a pupil. The pupil has apparently been receiving teachings along the lines we have been seeing above. Now the teacher

has more to impress on the pupil. He says:

If you think you have known Brahman well enough, then you have known only very little. Therefore Brahman is still to be deliberated on by you.

Evidently the teacher is concerned that the pupil will think that a theoretical understanding is enough and will not appreciate that much more remains to be done. There needs to be a complete transformation of the pupil's outlook and mode of life. One can imagine that this would be quite a hard lesson for the pupil. After all, he has been listening to the teacher, apparently in the right spirit of respect, and has done all he can to understand and indicate to the teacher that he has received what the teacher is trying to impart. Now the teacher is saying, if you think you understand well, in fact you have understood very little.

Shri Shankara points out that in this way the pupil is given a shaking, after which he goes away and does some serious reflection and meditation. Then he returns and offers a further response, which actually forms the last line of this verse. He says:

I think Brahman is known.

Then, apparently, the teacher prompts the pupil to explain himself further, and his reply is the next verse:

I do not think I know Brahman well enough. I consider, not that I do not know; I know and I do not know as well.

Actually, this is just the first half of the next verse. Shri Shankara in his commentary takes it that the teacher then challenges the pupil, putting to him the obvious objection that the pupil is simply contradicting himself by saying that he knows and yet that he does not know. To this the pupil responds:

He among us who understands that utterance 'Not that I do not know, I know and I do not know', he knows that [Brahman].

It would seem the pupil is on the right lines. He says that he knows, that is, he has listened carefully to the teacher whom he trusts; at the same

time he also says that he does not know, that is, he does not know well enough. He has not yet attained to direct knowledge and must persevere. Shri Shankara says that the teacher has given him a shaking in order to see how firm his convictions are by putting it to the pupil that he is contradicting himself, but the pupil responds by boldly affirming that the right way of understanding is to realize that one knows and yet does not know.

Shri Shankara seems to think that this is a good pupil. He says the pupil is speaking 'with the strength derived from the traditional knowledge as imparted by the teacher'. Taking this strength as his foundation, the pupil has thought it all through thoroughly for himself and taken his stand on the conclusion and has thus added his own inference and realization. He demonstrates this by restating the teachings clearly in his own way.

So in its way the Upanishad makes clear that what is important is not just the teachings, but the way the seeker responds to them, and the relation with the teacher, who has to assume the roles of a compassionate guide or a challenging trainer at different times according to the need. Much of the actual life and training within a traditional spiritual centre is on these lines, which are very far from just intellectual discussion.

At this point the dialogue between pupil and teacher is dropped and the Upanishad restates the essential idea, once again emphasizing that here knowledge and knowing are quite different to ordinary knowledge. The Upanishad says:

It is known to him to whom it is unknown; he does not know to whom it is known.

It is unknown to those who know well, and known to those who do not know.

The key point here is that Brahman cannot be known as an object having tangible qualities of any kind. So those who 'know' Brahman in the sense of having an idea about That, do not really know. At the same time, really knowing Brahman means direct realization, in which there is no 'knowing' in the form of mental processes.

Shri Shankara says that when the Upanishad refers here to those

who know or think they know Brahman (and therefore do not really know it), the Upanishad is referring to those who have a theoretical or partial knowledge only. It is not referring to those who have not thought about such matters at all and have received no relevant teaching and have no idea whatsoever about Brahman. So now the question comes: 'What is the difference between those who do not know at all in this sense, and those referred to when it says 'it is known to him to whom it is unknown'? Or to put it more directly, 'What is the difference between ordinary people and the enlightened knowers of Truth?'

The next verse of the Upanishad says;

It is really known when it is known with [that is, as the Self of] each state of consciousness, because thereby one gets immortality.

In explaining this, Shri Shankara first reminds us that the Self encompasses all ideas as its objects, in the way that all waves are encompassed by the ocean. With a depth of insight rarely manifested by academic philosophy and psychology, he points out that it is through objects that we come to know the Self. That is, it is by having experience of things that we are made aware of ourselves as experiencing beings, and go on to infer that there is a conscious subject of these experiences. Shankara says that there is no other door to awareness of the Self. So Shri Shankara is saying that the experiences we have in this phenomenal world are an essential stage in our conscious development.

Then, through enquiry and spiritual guidance we learn and confirm more about this Self. We understand that it is pure in essence, unchanging, not subject to growth and decay; it is unconditioned and the same in all beings. Ultimately it is realized in its true nature as the reality in all, as Brahman.

We remember that the higher truth cannot be known as an object, that is, as a power or principle or any tangible thing. This is what the Upanishad means when it says that Truth is not known to those who know; that is, those who know it as an object, do not really know it. As the verse says, Brahman is known truly when it is known as the Self in all states of consciousness. This Self is not affected by death, and so it

is by knowing this that one attains immortality.

Perhaps we could summarize the key points here. At one stage, while we are children or entirely absorbed in worldly affairs, we have not thought or enquired at all into such questions and in this sense we do not know the higher truth, or Brahman. Then we begin our enquiries and receive guidance from the classical texts and traditional teachings. At this point we gain some idea of Truth, of Brahman, but this understanding is necessarily incomplete, and we inevitably think of the higher truth as an object with tangible qualities like power and substance. But these qualities are limitations that do not apply to Brahman, so this kind of knowing is incomplete and faulty, or, as the Upanishad puts it, this knowing is also unknowing. Then through deeper enquiry, through practice of the spiritual disciplines, and by the grace of the holy spirit and the teachers, there is attained a direct realization of Brahman as the Self of all beings. Here there is no knowing in the ordinary sense of knowing objects with mental activity.

It is not so difficult to spell this out in principle, but to appreciate its full significance requires much reflection and meditation. As we do, we begin to understand the real meaning of humility, and the need to take refuge in and rely on the Lord.

At the end of the Upanishad there is another story. Earlier we thought about the word Brahman and how its meaning both resembles and differs from the usual understanding of the English word God or gods. In this story this difference is particularly clear because it is a story about an encounter between Brahman and three gods, the god of fire, the god of the wind, and the king of the gods, Indra. We have to approach this story as mythological and allegorical, but as we know, myths and allegories can teach important lessons. Shri Shankara says that the purpose of this story is to meet some of the ways in which the earlier teachings could be misunderstood.

As the story opens the gods are celebrating and elated. There has been a great battle between the forces of truth and the forces of error. The battle has been won by truth, that is, by Brahman. But the gods think that it was they who gained the victory. Brahman realizes this and sets out to put them right. He appears to them, but in a form that they could not recognize or understand.

Let us quote a verse from the Upanishad itself to give an idea of the style in which this is told.

The gods thought 'Ours indeed is this victory, ours indeed is this glory.' Brahman knew this pretention of theirs. To them He did appear. They could not make out about that thing, as to what this venerable being might be.

That is the terseness with which the story is sketched. Shri Shankara fills in the gaps saying that Brahman realized that the gods were under the illusion that it was their power that had overcome error, when in fact error is overcome ultimately by the Brahman itself, the supreme reality at the heart of all. Brahman wanted to free the gods of this delusion and so out of compassion he appeared before them as a mighty being.

The gods did not recognize or understand this mighty being. So they decided among themselves that the god of Fire should approach and find out who it is. But when Fire approached, that being said to fire, 'Who are you and what can you do?' Fire replied, 'I am fire, and I can consume anything.' The Lord put a straw in front of Fire and said 'Burn it up!' The Upanishad says that Fire approached the straw full of enthusiasm, but could not consume it. Fire went back to the gods and said 'I have not been able to understand what this mighty being is'.

Next the Lord was approached by the god of the Wind, who had a similar experience. Finally, the King of the gods, Indra, approached Brahman. This time the Lord simply disappeared. Shri Shankara comments that Indra was not so much as granted an interview in order to completely eradicate his pride.

The Upanishad says that then Indra approached the most beautiful goddess. Fortunately, Shri Shankara fills in the gaps for us. He says that when the Lord disappeared Indra did not just turn back as the others had. Rather he was moved to contemplate anew the nature of this mighty being. In this way a true devotion to that truth had arisen within Indra and thus knowledge had appeared to him, in the empty space where Brahman had disappeared. It was knowledge who appeared in the form of the most charming goddess. Thinking that this beauty is always associated with God, the highest truth, Indra asked her, 'Who

was that mighty being?' And she told him, 'It was Brahman. It was Brahman who gained the victory that elated you.' And thus Indra, the king of the gods, learned that power and truth belong to Brahman, the supreme Self, alone.

And so here we have another answer, hopefully a memorable one, to the question with which the Upanishad began: 'Whose power enables the mind to know, life to live, the eye to see?' The answer given by the Upanishad is that thought and life and experience spring from one source, which is the light of light, the life of life, the consciousness within all.

It is here that the enquiry into truth is to be made, at the heart of our own being. And that is wonderful, because here is the one point where there is no difference between the seeker and the sought, the knower and the known. The traditional Yoga provides the practical means of making this enquiry. It involves initially purifying and preparing the mind, and then making the spiritual enquiries ourselves through meditation and contemplation, and exposing ourselves to the sort of training received by the pupil from his teacher in the dialogue we heard about earlier.

With some reflection we can understand that our deeper Self does not consist in our possessions, and that it is not our individual body. And the teachings go on to tell us that our self is something deeper than the mind also. This is not a negative message. Our bodies and minds are wonderful instruments and the teachings show us how to use them as well and creatively as possible. And then, the good news is that our true Self is something more than this. More than the body, more than mind, more than time, space and all creation, more even than god if god is conceived as the sum of all material forces.

These things make sense the more we are able to see things from the spiritual perspective. So let us meditate for a short while on a text:

OM. In me there is a light that lights the whole world.
It is radiating now, peace and understanding OM.

P.H.

STORIES IN PRAISE OF EMPTINESS

One of the legendary Chinese sage-poets, Han Shan, is said to have carried a scroll on which was written—nothing at all. Empty of thoughts of the world, and free from the prison of thinking about himself, his mind was filled with the light which has its source in the true Self. A similar teaching is found in all spiritual traditions, from Christ's injunction to 'take no thought for the morrow', to the Taoist saying: 'Emptiness does not fail to illumine, and illumination does not fail to empty.'

In his *Masnawi*, Rumi tells of a Sufi who found a food wallet—that was empty. He danced for joy. Soon, other Sufis caught on, and danced with him. A bemused onlooker asked, disparagingly: 'What's the matter? Only a food-wallet hung on a nail, and it is empty of bread!' But for the dancing Sufis, the emptiness was a reminder of that self-forgetfulness where the inner 'vacuum' is instantaneously filled with the divine consciousness. In the words of Shri Dada: 'Know that happiness depends on two factors—forgetfulness of narrow egoity, and illumination of the vacuity in the mind caused thereby!'

Dr Shastri used to relate a well-known Zen story often enough to suggest that its message needs to be learnt and re-learnt, as our self-knowledge deepens.

There was in Japan a Zen monk who was an adept in meditation. Among the men from all walks of life who were attracted by his reputation as a teacher, was a well-known Professor of the Imperial University of Tokyo. The Professor went to see the monk, who offered him the customary green tea. Placing a cup before the distinguished visitor, he poured tea into it until it became full. He continued to pour, and the cup overflowed. Seeing the tea spilling over the table and on to the floor-mats, the startled Professor asked for an explanation. The Zen monk said: 'I can fill what is empty, but not that which is already full. You have come to me with your mind full of ideas of *meum* and *tuum*, ambitions and desires. If you seek my instruction, empty your mind, forget all you have learnt, and rid yourself of all harmful and useless matter; then return and I will teach you.'

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

Self-Knowledge goes to press during the last weeks of the Spring term. A further series of guided meditation practices has been given on Tuesday evenings and once again it has proved popular. The structure of the practices has been maintained, to include a preparatory exercise, a visualization, and a meditation on a spiritual text. For some weeks the visualization has been replaced by an exercise in consciously dismissing thoughts, in order to promote inner peace and light. In all cases the sessions have begun with an expression of reverence to the higher Truth, and closed with conscious thoughts of goodwill to all without exception.

In light of the particular interest in practical meditation currently evident, some practices have also been introduced into the presentations on Thursday evenings. Arrangements in the room have been adjusted to reflect the fact that listening to the traditional teachings is not merely an academic exercise, and a short meditation and other practices have been included. Yet, these meetings still contain talks on the philosophy and principles underlying Adhyatma Yoga, gaining an understanding of which is an important stage of the inner enquiry. The talks have been on practical themes, including *Creating Inner Harmony*, *Fellow Feeling and Inner Peace* and *The Jewel of Bliss*. The series concludes with a talk on *Using the Mind to Transcend the Mind*.

The Spring afternoon course on Sunday 4 March was on the theme of *Adhyatma Yoga - A Direct Way to Self-Discovery*. The first talk was on the practical issue of *Finding the Way to Inner Freedom*. It was followed by *The Light Beyond Thoughts* which considered the Advaita teaching on Self and not-Self. The course culminated with a talk on *Discovering the Bright Pearl Within*, from which perspective all the philosophical and practical difficulties presented by the vision of duality are resolved.

Summer Afternoon Course Sunday 10 June 2012

Finding Real Freedom

Talk 1: *Your Mind is Your Treasure*

First Meditation Practice

Talk 2: *Through Inner Harmony to Illumination*

Second Meditation Practice

Talk 3: *Realizing the Infinite Peace*