

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

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN TERM 2012

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from 2 October to 29 November 2012.

AUTUMN 2012 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 4 November, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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TIME FOR PEACE

One of the challenges for anyone wishing to advance spiritually is securing time for peaceful and quiet reflection. In years gone by, the excuse of lack of time was usually a polite way of saying, 'I don't want to do it', when we knew we could if we wished. Some will recall the lines about one who was always busy:

He hadn't time to pen a note
He hadn't time to cast a vote
He hadn't time to sing a song
He hadn't time to right a wrong
He hadn't time to love or give
He hadn't time to really live
From now on he'll have time on end
He died today, my busy friend.

But now there has been a deep cultural or sociological change, as electronic communications invade our private rooms and our pockets, and we feel a duty to connect and respond that presses more urgently than any need to pause and reflect on deeper matters. The hymn 'You'll never walk alone' has taken on a new and prosaic meaning, as we spend our precious walking time receiving and expressing, oblivious of the sky above, the birdsong and the flowers peeping from the hedges.

Yet from every spiritual quarter comes the invitation to give some time and much attention to the higher life, before we have 'time on end'. We need not be like the Japanese poet, Basho, who, for a brief time was so dispirited by his worldly contacts that he locked his door on the world, only communing with the morning glory flowers that entwined his gate. But a certain amount of ruthless time-claiming, or re-claiming, is unavoidable if our aim is to climb the holy mountain within ourselves.

In sympathy with man's reluctance to make new commitments, even for his own betterment, the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of the spiritual way of life as 'like poison' to start with, but becoming like nectar, the immortal drink of the gods. 'Poison' is perhaps a strong term, as most meditators find significant help and benefit from an early stage, and soon come to feel that to miss even for a day this psychological and spiritual tonic yields the uncomfortable feeling of having deprived oneself of a rare inner support. But good habits do, at first, need to be consciously established, and this is the hard part; afterwards, they become effortless.

So our fast-track living requires not only skills in keeping up, but also in wise withdrawal and time-management. Actually, in this matter, we are all self-employed, though we may have forgotten it; no one out there has the right or authority to boss or bully us in the matter of our freedom of thought, and the time we choose to devote to the greatest art of all, the fostering of a spiritual understanding. And our efforts in this direction, though ignoring the general trend, will be fruitful, because, in the highest sense, we never walk alone.

The Concrete Spiritual Life

A lecture given by Hari Prasad Shastri

WHEN PEOPLE speak either of the spirit or of the spiritual life, they sometimes use vague terms. They leave great loopholes which they expect the audience to fill up. Many people, even those who are deep students of philosophy, do not know what is meant by the spiritual life. You know perhaps Browning's poem 'Rabbi Ben Ezra'. In that poem is given a description of a very good man, and the moral is that goodness is enough.

But this is humanism, and it is not an end in itself: it is a means to another great and infinite end. Goodness is not an end but a means to something greater: God vision. Vision is not an opinion or something seen with these eyes; it is not even that which the intellect conceives. Opinions always change, they vary, they are modified, but vision is one and eternal: it lasts forever. It is the lifting of the veil of nescience and the revelation of the fact of truth, which Socrates calls goodness.

By the word 'concrete' we do not mean that you can touch or feel it, but something very definite, in which there is no vagueness whatsoever and of which we are absolutely certain.

Now a few remarks to explain a little further what we mean by spiritual life. The first postulate is that every conscious movement is teleological: it has some purpose. If I consciously walk, I have an idea why I walk. From the spiritual point of view, even the rain and thunder and lightning, and even the great pains and sufferings which come to man, are meant for a definite purpose. To the spiritual man the moving of a leaf, a visitation by a singing bird and the gurgling notes of a river proclaim some purpose.

The second postulate is that our reasoning faculty, our intellect, has a limit. That limit is always receding. What was reasonable to Archimedes is not reasonable to Newton or Einstein. The whole universe is discovered and yet undiscovered by physics. I assure you that physics has not yet discovered one billionth part of the universe. Its knowledge of the laws of nature is very meagre and poor.

According to the conception of the concrete spiritual life, the whole

universe, discovered and undiscovered, is ruled by a conscious force. Goethe calls it God. It is a great law, the law of all laws, and it comes into being, it advances like a thought, and it will one day come to an end at the time of dissolution. Every process is governed by a spiritual law. Each and everyone of us is here with a definite physical purpose, intellectual purpose and also a spiritual purpose. The spiritual purpose is revealed to a man who has qualified himself for the revelation, just as the laws of higher mathematics are not revealed to a child but to a man who has slowly worked himself up in the knowledge of mathematics. So the spiritual purpose of the existence of each and everyone of us is revealed to us when we are qualified for it. That qualification is called the yogic discipline, and when this purpose is revealed, each and everyone knows: 'I am here for this particular purpose.'

There is a universal and an individual purpose. The universal purpose of each and every organism is something which is common to all, and that we call adoration through discovery of unity. It is adoration of the supreme law-giver of the universe, God or Ishvara. The individual purpose is the second purpose. Some are here to work out their salvation through the practice of goodness, like the great philanthropist and prison reformer, John Howard. Some are here to work out their salvation through aesthetics, poetry and nature. Some are here to discover greater and yet greater laws of nature, by which the real ends of humanity are attained, and put them into the service of man. Some are born to know the truth; some are born to propagate the truth; some are born to suffer, so that they may learn from suffering. Suffering is like the polishing of an oaken box. Each and everyone of us finally has one purpose, and it is to effect his freedom from all limitations. Death is a limitation; birth is a limitation; love is a limitation. To effect freedom from all limitations by equi-mindedness is the final individual purpose of each and everybody.

The whole of Yoga has been summed up in two words: adoration and approach. Aesthetic sensibility and metaphysical sensibility are the highest assets of the soul of man. When we consider the beauty spread eight miles below in the sea, or the peace and beauty of the stars in the heaven, or of the sunset, if our heart does not bow down low in adoration of that supreme force, we are half dead. Why is music called

the greatest of the fine arts? Because in the other arts it takes some time to discover harmony and unity, but in music you discover it at once. Discovery of one's particular mission in life we call the concrete ideal or the concrete spiritual purpose.

Question: You said that the Yoga can be summed up as adoration and approach. What is meant by approach?

Answer: Approach means to qualify ourselves by study, devotion and discipline, to imbibe the highest characteristics of Ishvara (God) and to approach Him not in the spatial sense but in the qualitative sense.

Spiritual life means to go from unearthly triumph to the vision of God. Unearthly triumph means the triumph of unity, triumph through self-surrender. These words, unity, humility and self-surrender are the spiritual values. They are not the moral values. Morality does not mean self-surrender or self-effacement. They are words of the ancient spiritual vocabulary: infinite truth, infinite bliss, God, the whole response to the eternal and abiding.

Life is challenge and response. The life of a nation, a group and of an individual is challenge and response. Nature is constantly making changes. How do you respond to them? Stalin may have had a hundred thousand divisions, but you know how in the end his head rolled in the dust. Reliance on physical force is over, its days are numbered. The meek shall inherit the earth. All those who want to live on arms, aggression and conquest will be wiped out.

Our response to the eternal is through our whole soul. This sentence will not reach into the psychology of many people. It is a most spiritual sentence. There is an element in man which psychology has not yet discovered, and that element is called transcendence. Man wants to transcend, to transcend earthly beauty, power and learning. What has Einstein been doing with paper and pencil? Transcending the world of Newton and Galileo. We want to transcend our own soul. The response to the infinite is through a controlled, refined and judiciously applied sense of transcendence.

The Self of man is divided into emotions, memory, instincts and so many other things. What ought to be the total interpretation of the Self of man? Our soul is plastic, supple, rational, instinctive, active and contemplative. Supple means that you can mould it. You can make

whatever you like of your soul. By self-control, study, self-abnegation and self-effacement, you can mould it in the flame of divine light and you can become a seer. It is active, and it is contemplative. The Yogi is one who organizes his soul. An organism means many small disconnected things put together in order to create a whole. It is the duty of man to organize his soul, his instincts, his reason, his greed, his love of earthly things, and his love of contemplation and transcendence, and to organize them into God. Each and every man himself can become God. He who seeks after God without trying to organize his soul will find it very difficult.

Why organize? Why not live like a dog? What is the supreme purpose? There is a spiritual purpose, and it is to dedicate the soul to the quest of the transcendental reality. Above the world of relativity is the world of the absolute. Hegel has said that the world of the spirit is the world without any conflict, it is the world of perfection, and this we call the world of transcendence. We are here to know the purpose of life and then to pursue that purpose with determination. The purpose is to organize our personality and dedicate the organized personality to the knowledge of the transcendental reality above all relativity. Nothing which is relative satisfies us long. We clothe ugliness and disharmony under the robe of infinity, and we begin to love it, but the varnish, the electroplating, does not last long and the soul is restless again.

The spirit, which is the essence of the universe and of matter, is comparable to the oil in the seed, the fragrance in the rose, and heat in fire. When we withdraw our mind from our world of relativity, and consciously contemplate this unity, infinity and transcendence in our being, then we have the divine light, and the meaning of truth and the meaning of spirit becomes clear to us. This is the spiritual life.

I have endeavoured to remove all vagueness from your mind and to make it clear-cut for you. This is the completion of life, otherwise life is incomplete. The incomplete life functions in the subject-object world, and it is a pendulum oscillating between a tear and a smile. There is a way out of this, and that is the complete way, the way of the dedication of the organized personality to the quest of transcendence and eternity through contemplation in our own life.

The spiritual life aims at the best and the highest. Find out what is the

best and highest. To a child toys are the best; to a youth a beautiful woman is the best; to the wise truth is the best; and to the Yogi the all-pervasive infinite consciousness is the best and highest. Who can doubt it? We want to climb over the realm of relativity and to land in the realm of the spirit. The spiritual realm is the realm of light, the force which integrates all the psychological purposes and gives them a meaning in life.

We need God-vision, not the second best of being a good man. We want the highest, and that we want to have through contemplation, the application of ratiocination to the highest which is called spiritual meditation. The science of meditation is like entering into a palace in which there are gates within gates, and each gate is more and more beautiful.

The spirit is making a challenge to our life all the time. It demands immensely great compassion, forbearance, forgiveness, radiant purity, self-forgetting zeal and the fire of pure love. These are the means by which we meet the challenge of *avidya* or ignorance. The totality of the source of this 'I do not know' is called *avidya* or nescience in the holy philosophy. The challenge of nescience is to be met by this kind of life, that is, integration, a life of loving activity and deep contemplation. Habits of charity and compassion must be cultivated every day. One of the most beautiful words in St Paul is the word 'charity'.

Spiritual fullness follows renunciation of the fleeting and the particular. If we must live in the world, then we must demand nothing for the local self but act for the Lord in detachment. To act for Him means to act for each and everybody. It means to act for Him on the aesthetic, intellectual, instinctive, physical and psychological planes.

Man's mission is infinite, total integration, and when you have known it, you can say: 'Let Thy will be done in me.' Spiritual contemplation all the time is necessary to keep the flame of the divine life in an active form. 'Perfect what you have, and what you need will then be given to you.' We must keep the flame of our love turning upwards. This we call the concrete spiritual life. It is quite different from the moral life. It is the life of those who love God and those who want to know God.

You will say: 'Why do you emphasize contemplation? Is it not just

as good to visit a hospital?’ The supreme good can come out of contemplation. One benefit is that your faculty for doing good and seeing good will be heightened, and the second is that what is created in contemplation will one day revolutionize the world.

H.P.S.

YOU AND I ARE ONE

A poem by Swami Rama Tirtha

The voice of the bubble in the river says:
‘You and I are one.
Do not think yourself different.
You and I are one.’
When the bud burst at dawn in the garden,
It whispered quickly into the ear of the rose:
‘Today my tongue has been loosened.
You and I are one.’
When the mirror was held before the face,
The reflection seemed to say, ‘Brother,
Why are you so amazed to see me?
You and I are one.’
The grain of corn said to the sheaf:
‘Quiet, this is no place to argue.
A glimpse of unity has appeared in multiplicity.
You and I are one.’
When I came into the world, I saw
That all growth proceeds from my true essence
As the strand is one with the cotton.
You and I are one.’
Why do You think I am a stranger?
Why do You hide your beautiful face?
Remove the curtain, come forward.
You and I are one.’

Translated by A.J.A.

Tribute to Gautama Buddha

*Some words given by the Warden of Shanti Sadan at a meeting
dedicated to the Buddha.*

All beings are from the very beginning Buddhas.
It is like water and ice:
Apart from water, no ice,
Outside living beings, no Buddhas.

(from Hakuin’s *Song of Meditation*)

The enlightenment of the Buddha is one of the great events in the spiritual history of mankind. It led to the formation of a new religion, based on peace, compassion and the highest wisdom: the *prajna paramita*. Its gentle influence still acts as a salve for the weary and frenetic heart of mankind, an eternal reminder of the values of tranquillity, beauty, harmlessness, mercy and, above all, spiritual insight.

It says much for the general atmosphere of tolerance at the time of Gautama’s coming that he and his followers met with no violent opposition, but co-existed peacefully with the brahmanical exponents of the Vedic religion. Indeed, the Buddha was not concerned to compete with those who followed the old traditions. He had rediscovered for himself the ancient path that leads from suffering to enlightenment, a path which had become obscured by ritualism often involving animal sacrifice, pride of caste and intellectual quarrelling about metaphysical matters divorced from serious spiritual practice.

He himself was deeply vexed by the problem of suffering that touches every life, and his spiritual quest was motivated by the noble desire to abolish all suffering. Persistently and one-pointedly, he plunged himself into self-forgetting meditation, renouncing all, and eventually finding fulfilment in enlightenment. Thereafter he taught and lived as a man of steady knowledge, formulating his teaching in the way he thought most conducive to holy living and refusing to be drawn into metaphysical arguments.

To quote from one of the early Buddhist scriptures: ‘This reality that I have reached is profound, hard to see, hard to understand, excellent,

pre-eminent, beyond the sphere of thinking, subtle and to be penetrated by the wise alone.’

This realization is the culmination of the noble eightfold path, which is based on the highest principles of dharma, on meditation and on conscious living, which the Buddha calls right mindfulness. This path will bring about the purification of the mind, leading to the awakening of insight. In this supreme wisdom, metaphysical questions and intellectual doubts melt away. The riddle of life is solved, but that solution cannot be put into words; it can only be experienced directly.

The Buddha did not philosophize about the nature of the Self because for him, the ego was illusory and the boundlessness of nirvana transcended both self and other. So, when asked: ‘What have you to say about the existence of the Self?’ the Buddha remained silent. ‘Then’, said his questioner, ‘is there no such thing as the Self?’ The Buddha maintained his silence.

This teaching reminds us of the verse in the *Ashtavakra Gita*: ‘To attempt to think of the Self, which is beyond the range of thought, is only to create a new thought. Abandoning such a thought, I abide in peace.’ ‘Neither can it be said “It is”, nor “It is not”, reflects the sage in the *Avadhut Gita*. ‘What a great mystery!’

It is clear that in its essentials the path to inner light laid down by the Buddha has parallels with that of Adhyatma Yoga, not least in its stress that man can realize his Buddha nature in this very life. The nirvana spoken of by the Buddha is surely not different from the *brahma-nirvana* taught by Shri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* when he says: ‘The sages attain Brahman’s bliss (that is, the *brahma-nirvana*), they whose sins have been destroyed and doubts removed, who are self-controlled and intent on the welfare of all beings.’

Let us salute this great light-giver, Gautama Buddha, and be inspired by the liberating truth he came to teach, that the Buddha nature is the underlying reality present right now in ourselves and in all and is to be realized in this very life.

Using the Mind to Transcend the Mind

Yoga shows us how to use our mind in a fresh and rewarding way. It is an introduction to a new way of thinking, feeling and willing—one that is progressive and expanding. It is rewarding because we discover that the secret of happiness *lies in the mind itself*.

People often say to us ‘Have a good day!’ or even ‘Have a wonderful day!’ It’s a sort of secular blessing, a kindly wish. But how to have a good day? It depends on our mind. It is not just a matter of having cheerful thoughts. These can easily turn to sorrow or anger if we meet with frustration or bad news. The real source of happiness is deep within us. We can really have a good day, every day, if we learn how draw from this deep internal well of happiness.

Hari Prasad Shastri once wrote: ‘In the depth of the life of thought and pure emotions, of inspiration and intuition, are hidden the springs of the water of immortality, peace, good behaviour, enjoyment of beauty and truth. These are open to anyone who experiments in the methods with a serene mind and love-full heart.’

In other words our highest good is to be discovered in the mind itself. We can learn to use our mind to transcend our mind, that is, transcend its limitations. Each and every one of us can awaken to the infinity, bliss, peace and immortality that dawns when we penetrate the innermost nucleus of the mind.

Now to transcend the mind, we have first to take a good look at it, to put it on the table, so to say. Every mind is potentially what the Buddhists call the buddha mind. But first we have to get a practical understanding of what the mind is doing for us and what it is doing to us; how it helps and how it hinders the divine flow of infinite life.

There was a man who used to annoy his work colleagues by his way of speaking, based on his philosophical ideas. When there were meetings and his opinion was asked, he would say: ‘My mind thinks we should do that’, or ‘My mind suggests we should take that route’, or ‘My mind doesn’t warm to that idea.’ Someone challenged him and said: ‘Why don’t you just say ‘I think we should do that’? Or ‘I don’t like that one’. What’s all this ‘my mind’ nonsense?’

He explained: ‘How do I know that I and my mind are the same? I may be more than my mind. I may be other than my mind. Just as when the kettle is boiling, I don’t say “I am boiling”, so when the mind is thinking, coming up with ideas and resistances, I don’t say: “I am thinking.” Because the mind may not be my “I”. So I like to say: “My mind believes this or that” rather than “I believe this or that”. In response, his colleagues would send the occasional message: ‘What does your mind think about....?’

The point at issue may be clarified with a quotation from *What Yoga Has to Offer*:

the mind of man is merely an instrument, say, like a pen, which should be under the individual’s complete control.

Here is the passage in context:

For the pursuit of the higher Yoga you have to understand something of your own make-up, and the traditional teachers are great psychologists. It is believed that the mind of man is merely an instrument, say, like a pen, which should be under the individual’s complete control; but most people follow their minds like slaves and consequently alternate between joy and sorrow, being entirely at the mercy of their circumstances. This is called living automatically, and to live consciously you have to realize that the real ‘I’ of man is not the mind or the body which are subject to change and decay, but something entirely different standing behind the mind, able to direct it and a witness of its vagaries. You can prove this for yourself by reflecting that, when a child, you referred to yourself as ‘I’, when young also, and in old age as well, nor has that ‘I’ changed with the changes of the body. Your ‘I’ is not less because you lose a limb or more because you acquire wealth. That ‘I’ can say ‘I won’t think of that, it depresses me’, ‘I will think of so-and-so’; in other words, you are the *subject* of your mind and can control it, like a car. If you allow the mind to control you, you are allowing the car to take charge without any directing force.

Some years ago, there was a musical called ‘Stop the world – I want to get off’ (‘and find myself a better ride’ continues the song). To

transcend our limitations and be truly free, we cannot just stop the mind and get off. The way to have a better ride is to transform the mind from the inside, and transform it along spiritual lines.

The first step is to be aware that our mind has higher phases, which reach, so to say, the blue of infinity, and which merge with the aurora borealis of spiritual splendour and glory. It also has lower phases, which have a purpose, but which are not spiritually creative, and can lead to difficulties. These lower phases can sometimes lead us to feel, to quote that song again, ‘that we live in a cage without a key’.

Some examples of higher and lower mental activity will give a clue to using the mind as a step to transcending it. There is a contrast, for example, between daydreaming, and resolute action or thought, when we are in charge without question. St Augustine has used the homely example of getting out of bed in the morning, when we often experience a vivid inner conflict. ‘Oh, it’s so cosy, warm and restful.’ ‘No!’, says our higher mind. ‘You have to get up.’ ‘But just five minutes more.’ ‘No! You’ll make yourself late.’ The higher part of the mind is will and the intelligence that sees the end. The lower part in this example, is the dream weaver. It sees only the comfort and convenience of not making efforts.

Another example of the lower and higher mental activity is when we run our thoughts over a menu: ‘Shall I have this or that? That’s probably a bit too salty, but maybe I could ask them to go easy with the salt. Now what about this?’ And then—we decide. We resolve. I will choose a mushroom and tomato flan.’

It is plain that these two phases of the mind are different, and one is superior. It is superior because it is the goal of the lower activity. The restlessness has its place: it prepares the way for a decision. It weighs up the pros and cons. But we can see that something more in the mind, a greater force, has to come in, if we are actually to do anything. This greater force of the higher mind is great indeed, because it has an authority in it and is a gateway to wisdom. Our inner Yoga hinges on these attempts to awaken the authority of our higher mind, which ultimately has its source in the unchallenged, faultless authority of our true Self.

Here is another example of how the higher part of our nature can

assert itself wisely over the lower, or the less high. Between April 1986 and August 1990, the writer, Brian Keenan, was held hostage in Lebanon. It was one of many such abductions during those years, known as the Lebanon Hostage Crisis. He was kept blindfolded and chained for long periods, along with other discomforts devised by the lower mind of man when it is given a free hand. In an interview shortly after his release, and I quote:

Mr Keenan made it clear that he felt no desire for revenge or retribution. 'I do not see that as positive or meaningful. For myself I would find that self-maiming and I do not intend maiming myself by going into a rage of anger.'

And then he gives us a memorable example:

I can only say this. Look at my hands. Hands are the most complex and perhaps the most beautiful structure. With these hands I can do many things. With this hand (he raised his left hand) I can curse, I can make it a driving force of such power that I can make a wasteland about me. With this hand (he raised his right hand) I can play music, make sculpture, do beautiful things, but above all, with this right hand, I can overcome the other hand, I can contain it, I can conquer it. This power in all of us is creative, passionate, unconquerable.

Our mental life itself becomes progressive and expanding, when we learn to take our stand on our higher nature. Are not our meditation practices comparable to that hand gesture? The thoughts bubble up, like the troublesome left hand in the illustration, but our higher will, fired by our spiritual aspiration, our will to peace and harmony, steps in like the right hand, and then we can mould and evolve the real inner beauty and richness of spiritual experience.

What is the key to transcending the mind? To know that our true Self is transcendent, it is free, infinite, unchanging, in spite of the stream of thoughts, and it is never soaked, so to say, by that stream. There is a waterfall in the Japanese garden in London's Holland Park. Amid the cascades, there is a rock, roughly central, which is not washed by the flow of waters. The point suggested by this unwetted rock is that there

is a principle in man, stable, firm, eternal, that is never stained or limited by the flow of the thoughts. Both the higher mind and the lower mind do their work under the light of this revealing power. To use Brian Keenan's image, it is the vital conscious force behind both the left and the right hands; that is, behind the wilder, uncontrolled thoughts, and also behind their would-be controller and guide, the intellect-will.

A sage has said that the mind is like a dancer, always on the move. And our true Self is the unmoving witness of the dance of every intellect. The Self sees and knows all, but from a safe distance, for it is never caught up in the thoughts. It is free of them. But that safe distance is not a long way. In fact it is no way at all. It is the distance between our 'I' and our mind, between the canvas and the picture painted on it.

Now does this mean that this transcendent Self is present in our experience right now? The answer is: Yes, because all our experience, without exception, takes place in the light of the Self.

In one of Shakespeare's plays, he refers to a picture that could be found in the markets of Elizabethan England. It was called: The Three Asses. The picture, surprisingly, showed two donkeys. The spectator had to think: 'Who is the third donkey?' It wasn't in the picture; it wasn't in the objective scene at all. There was only one possibility. He himself was the third one!

This not-very-flattering bit of Elizabethan humour in some way reflects the situation of man and his true Self. His spiritual Self, like that third principle, is the serene spectator of the whole mental world. It knows the lower and the higher mind and the tensions between them. But our Self itself is free, pure, perfect, immortal. It is nearest to us. But to grasp it with the mind, is like trying to grasp a slippery fish with soapy hands that never swims before you. We have to confess our incapacity to perform this feat of cognition, which would effect our identity with transcendence.

On the other hand, the way of wisdom is indicated in those words quoted before:

the springs of the water of immortality and peace, are open to anyone who experiments in the methods with a serene mind and love-full heart.

Self-transcendence is closely related to self-forgetfulness, and we can learn how to forget ourselves in the state of serenity and love. This is no small challenge in a society where individualism is praised and promoted. Our work often makes us more self-conscious, with its targets, self-appraisals, self-assessments, and so on. No wonder we get over-identified with the mind and ego. In the private world of our thoughts, we tend to take all things personally. Our automatic response, often well concealed, is: 'What about me, my significance, my pleasure, my convenience?' In view of this ongoing self-preoccupation, in a rather limited sense, we may wonder if we are really capable of seeing anyone else with a truly sympathetic eye, without our fears and prejudices and self-interest getting in the way. So to transcend the mind, and indeed to appreciate or value anything or anybody around us, we have to learn to get out of ourselves, so to say. Swami Rama Tirtha quotes the words of Edward Carpenter:

In the words of the *Sannyasin* of England [Edward Carpenter]: 'There is no happiness unless you have clean dropped thinking about yourself; but you must not do it by halves. While even there is the least grain of little self left, it will spoil all. I do not say it is not hard, but I know there is no other solution.'

This psychological deliverance will allow what is best and highest in us to emerge.

What is the true value of religion? To facilitate this 'hard task' of self-forgetfulness. Religion, if rightly taught, free from dogma and narrow sectarianism, awakens man to the infinite potentialities that lie latent in his own soul. It opens the mind to a range of experience that is impossible to approach through the normal workings of the lower or higher mind. The great religions of the world help us by giving us powerful symbols on which to focus our feelings. To focus the mind on a divine form, say Christ, or Krishna, or OM, makes a breach in the ego, an aperture through which the infinity within may be glimpsed.

The writer Simone Weil, who was not religious in any sectarian sense, found herself repeating again and again a certain poem that attracted her. It was the poem by George Herbert, which begins: 'Love

bade me welcome, but my soul drew back.' She repeated it because she loved its beauty, as she writes: 'fixing my attention on it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines'. Then one day, as she was reciting it to herself, she records: 'Christ himself came down and took possession of me.'

She was someone who was able to drop the little self and benefit from the experience of higher insight. One of the things she wrote in a notebook is: 'For us, what is real is what we are unable to deny and yet which escapes our grasp. All that we grasp is unreal.' It parallels the way the yogis speak about the 'I' of man, his true Self.

Here is one more example of this principle of losing oneself in something higher. In the classical art of the Far East, this principle is well understood. The old Chinese master artists contemplated a natural scene until their sense of separate individuality was forgotten. Only then were they ready to take up the brush and the paints.

The great Japanese poet, Basho, commends this path to self-transcendence:

Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one—when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there.

This self-forgetting communion with nature is reflected in the following haiku by a poetess of Japan:

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!
While meditating on this theme
Day dawned.

The great teachers say: 'If you want to transcend the mind, occasionally step back and become its witness.' We can make an inner adjustment, a very small change of stance, where we can observe our thoughts as if they belonged to someone else. There is no real distance

between our inner experience and That which transcends it. But we have to adjust our thinking if we want to glimpse the inner freedom.

The new way of thinking, feeling and willing is in the direction of universal love, of inner quest, and detachment from the worldly values. It is then that a certain higher state of the mind will be glimpsed which reflects the transcendence of the true Self. And then we will know that we are not caught in the net of our own psychological make-up, that our personality is no more than a transient shadow of our true being, and that in our fundamental nature we are free.

To summarize, first, get a sense of what our mind is. Understand that it has a lower phase of activity, when it is restless, unfocused, irresolute; and also a higher phase, where our will and intellect can step in and give real guidance to our mental life. Regard the mind as our instrument, not our true Self, which actually and eternally transcends the mind. Finally, if we create a certain harmony in our inner functioning, we can glimpse the essentially free and unattached nature of our highest Self, as the witness and revealer of our mental life.

The knowledge that unfolds from this particular truth-probe is spiritual, not intellectual. It is in the form of experience of incomparable quality, that is at one and the same time serene, blissful, and conducive to our realization of the one great, self-shining reality that underlies all experience, anywhere and at any time.

OM. I AM NOT THE BODY. I AM NOT THE MIND.
I AM THE ETERNAL, EVER-BLISSFUL SPIRIT. OM

A.H.C.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

SHRI YAJNAVALKYA was not a monk (sannyasi). He had a small household and lived with his two wives, Maitreyi and Katyayani, a life of love and wisdom. These two noble ladies kept the house, looked after the communal kitchen, and were real mothers to the disciples who shared in the life of the ashrama.

Maitreyi was intellectually inclined. She could read, and often discussed metaphysical problems with her husband. Katyayani, who was the younger of the two, was an excellent manager and was in charge of the large herd of cows which Shri Yajnavalkya possessed. She was a devotional soul and to her the great sage was more than a husband; she looked upon him rather as a god among men.

That evening, after the devotions, the yogi-rajā came into his home and, as he entered the inner apartments, both Maitreyi and Katyayani stood up and offered him a welcome. He gave his blessings to them. The three sat together in a room made of sun-baked earth and bricks and thatched with straw and leaves. Katyayani said: 'Blessed one, six new calves have been born today. I have placed them comfortably near their mothers and covered them with blankets. How sweet are these little creatures! They look so beautiful when their mothers lick them with affection. Tomorrow I will give them baths and comb their hair. Today I am preparing special liquids of jagari, mustard and butter for their mothers. I shall be glad, blessed one, to show these new families to you.'

The saint praised his wife for her tender care of the new-born calves. He said: 'My dear one, there is one life-force animating all living beings. The cows are my daughters, the calves are my grandchildren. Since I have realized the unity of all life, my mind has been at rest and I feel that every living creature is a blood relation of mine.'

Maitreyi then said: 'What manuscripts do you require for this evening, blessed one?' Shri Yajnavalkya replied: 'King Janaka has invited me to his court. Perhaps I shall have to meet in controversy the

followers of Gautama, of Kapila, of Kanada and of Charvaka [exponents of different dualist systems of philosophy].’

‘My master’, observed Maitreyi, ‘you will be able to silence these philosophers very easily! I have heard your criticisms of them, given to your students. It is certain that their doctrines are supported neither by the authority of revelation (*shruti*), nor discursive reasoning, nor by the practical test of experience. They are old-fashioned thinkers who continue their studies of the teachings discovered some thousands of years ago. Even though they know the later and final discoveries in the realm of pure metaphysics, called the doctrine of non-duality (*Advaita*), they seem to persist in their orthodoxy!’

Shri Yajnavalkya placed his hand on the head of Maitreyi and said: ‘It is so, it is so. The times are changing, but Truth is eternal. My holy Guru compassionately taught me the meaning of the great dictum of the Upanishads: “This Self is Brahman” (*ayam atma brahma*). To realize this Truth one has to be entirely single-minded. Even the least deviation from the path of renunciation (*tyaga*) and dispassion (*vairagya*) makes life discordant.

‘My dear Maitreyi, I have no duty remaining to perform in the world. The arrow of my life has hit the target. I have known the supreme Truth to be my own Self (Atman). Yet I am prompted by a spiritual feeling and it is that I should make even the physical renunciation complete, and lead the life of a wandering ascetic (*parivrajaka*). It is the same to me whether I live as a householder or as a monk. The modifications of my mind (*vruttis*) are transformed into Brahman once and forever. Yet, to fulfil the scriptural injunctions and set an example to others, I feel I must enter the monastic order (*sannyasa*).’

Maitreyi looked into the eyes of her husband, her greatest wealth, her main joy, her support in life. She said in a whisper: ‘My lord, I have only one word to say, whatever you propose, whatever labour, anguish or joy it may cost, and it is: “Be it so, blessed one.” Please consider whether my spiritual education under your tutelage is complete. I do not see any other source of instruction left.’

The holy Yajnavalkya pressed his wife’s right hand in his own and replied: ‘You have spent, my dearest, in a most devoted service to me,

your youth, your time and precious energy. How hard you have worked to keep my mind free from worldly cares. I remember the day when you came to me from the home of your saintly father, at his request, to help me in my household. Ever since, O lady of peaceful disposition, I have not seen you neglect a single duty. You have preserved silence when necessary for you to do so, and have always spoken with wisdom and restraint. O Maitreyi, how much I owe to you! I have passed the seventieth year of this incarnation. As a true brahmana I must live the rest of my life as a solitary ascetic.’

Meanwhile Katyayani had brought in a bowl of milk, cane sugar and a few handfuls of cooked rice. Seeing the saint engaged in serious conversation with Maitreyi, she bowed low, placed the bowl of milk on the right hand of her revered husband and quietly retired, saying: ‘Two cows, my lord, have not returned to the fold. I am going out with a torch with Brahadatta to trace the noble creatures. Perhaps the cow Gaumati has calved. I am taking a blanket and some hot water. Does the blessed one need any further service from me this evening?’

‘May you be happy, O my Katyayani,’ replied the sage. She left, and Maitreyi also retired. Shri Yajnavalkya sat alone and began softly to chant a prayer from the Rig Veda which, roughly translated, is as follows:

O Agni! O ever-resplendent deity!
Thou knowest all the paths.
Lead me on the holy path.
Grant, O supreme deity,
that all the subtle crookedness,
all insincerity and all evil ways
May disappear from our hearts.
Be thou my shield and my sword. OM

To be continued

Discovering the Bright Pearl Within

Why should you look for treasure abroad?
Within yourself you have the bright pearl.

Pao-Chih

These words are taken from a hymn composed by a Buddhist priest who lived in fifth century China. Each of us holds a pearl, beautiful, indestructible, peaceful, blissful, and that is our spiritual nature. But like the quest for a pearl before it is recovered from its oyster shell clinging to the sea's bed, we have to go deeper into ourselves to benefit fully from our spiritual nature. And that means, for most of us, meditation, cultivating serenity on the battlefield of life, and taking an ever deeper interest in spiritual wisdom.

Why do we not feel the life-giving influence, power and peace of our spiritual nature? It is because most people are content with what they find on the surface of life, and do not wish to dive deeper. So we have mystical poets like Kabir urging us:

The pearl is in the oyster,
And the oyster is at the bottom of the sea.
Dive deep; give up love of life!

Kabir can sound severe, because there is nothing wrong in loving life. Actually, spiritual people love life more deeply and meaningfully than those who make life serve their narrow self-interest. This is because a spiritual person sees something miraculous in the whole experience of living. But if we want to come into touch with the beauty that never fades, and the peace that never wanes, we have to dive deeper into ourselves, and approach, so to say, the divine pearl of truth at the core of our being.

Man's intellect is a wonderful, world-shaping faculty. But in the question of spiritual wisdom, calmness of heart counts for more than cleverness of mind. A man once approached the Sufi master, Jalaluddin Rumi, and said, in effect: 'Science tells us so much about man—his

nature, his temperament, and so on. Yet it sheds no light on whether there is anything in our nature that is immortal.' And Rumi said: 'If this knowledge could be yours through question and answer, it would be worth very little. There has to be a different approach.' And he went on: 'A man comes to the sea, and sees nothing but salt water, sharks and fishes. He says: "Where is this pearl they speak about? Perhaps there isn't any pearl." How should the pearl be attained by looking at the sea?...A diver is needed to discover the pearl—a diver who has skill and luck.'

'There has to be a different approach.' The approach to conscious immortality is very different to our normal advance in knowledge. It depends on learning how to still and purify that vast sea that swirls and stirs within us, our mind. We will say: 'But if I make my mind quiet, I will know less. Perhaps I will know nothing at all.' This is a mistake. A calm mind, well-informed about the spiritual doctrine of our divine nature, symbolized by the pearl, will reveal to us that pearl. We will gain a new kind of understanding that satisfies and fulfils us.

It is true that in the world of nature you have to be lucky to find a pearl. Not every stretch of sea has an oyster bed, and not every oyster develops a pearl. But in the field of spirituality, each and every one of us shares the same starting-point and the same end-point: that our fundamental nature is divine, and we are in this world to realize it. Through practising the spiritual yoga, even if we do a little, we stand to gain very much in the way of internal stability and balance, a deeper power of comprehension, and the blessing of inner peace.

On this no-lose situation, the *Bhagavad Gita* encourages us: 'Here there is no wasted effort, here there is no harm; even a little of this yoga protects us from great fear.'—that is, it adds to our sense of peace and security. The commentator on the Gita, Shankara, says that yoga is not like farming, where there is always a risk of crop failure, hence wasted effort; and it is not like medicine, which sometimes does more harm than good. The idea is, if even a little yoga can help, a little more yoga will help more!

A metaphor, like that of the bright pearl within, teaches indirectly, poetically, through suggestion. But it may not be clear what it is pointing to. We are seeking a direct way to self-discovery. So let us be

direct. The pearl, the divine principle in man, is his true Self, his 'I'. It seems to be caught up in the mind, and to operate as our ego, and this ego soon comes to take itself most seriously, which only goes to intensify our sense of individuality and, one might add, our feeling of separateness and isolation.

But this ego is no pearl! It is just a part of the mind. And its hidden support is the real Self, the infinite 'I', which transcends all boundaries and turmoil, and is not separate from anything. As the yogis put it, 'Atman is one with Paramatman'—the innermost Self of man is one with the Self of the universe, and there is only one Self. So when the mystics feel they are one with God, one with the divine, it is their deeper Self that knows itself to be infinite; and, as for the ego-self, it is transcended, and thus forgotten, in the fullness of this new understanding.

When we use the word 'I' in our meditations, it points directly to our infinite nature. But such an exalted self-realization can only be prepared for gradually and in safe, traditionally guided stages.

So the 'I' that we are trying to discover is our true Self, but it does not have any of the worldly qualities, either of our property, our clothing, our jewellery, nor of what might be termed our inner clothing of thoughts, memories, emotions, complexes. The Self, which is the light behind our thoughts, is a wonderful mystery because it allows our individuality to appear, as it were, and also allows itself to be concealed by that individuality. It is the richness and power of the real Self that is the Reality underlying our appearance. Yet in itself, the Self transcends all appearances. No wonder the intellect cannot grasp it through question and answer, but it can approach the true Self, the ground of being, through stillness and an interior attentive silence.

Now what about the mind? Sometimes in the yoga and other spiritual writings, we hear disapproving and critical things said about the mind. We may be told that its restless activity stands in the way of our realization, that it keeps us in bondage with its desires and fears, that it leads us on with false promises, and that it opposes our spiritual advance, because it wants above all to retain its power and influence over us.

But there is also a case for saying that this mind of ours, even in our

state of unenlightenment, really wants to be our friend and helper; that its whole function is to please and protect us. For example, if we look at our spontaneous reactions in almost any circumstance, they are so often to do with securing our pleasure or our safety. The mind instantly calculates, 'This will bring me joy; this will make me feel better; oh, I don't want that; now that poses a threat.' We could say that almost every motion of the mind has something of this calculation running through it. The mind wants us to be happy and safe. How can it be our enemy?

The key question is not whether the mind is our enemy or friend, but why even when the mind is at its friendliest towards us, even when it fills us with worldly joy, we still do not feel 100 per cent safe and fulfilled? If our mind has been trying to help us all this time—our lifetime—why this enduring restlessness? Why does one desire lead to another, and why is true happiness always on the horizon and never under our feet?

The answer seems to be, that the mind can help to lead us out of our difficulties, but it needs to be tutored in the way of wisdom and spiritual enlightenment. On the negative side, it still has not learnt (in the words of Sir Philip Sidney) that, 'Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings'. So there is a chance that experience will jerk us awake through disappointments.

But more than this, the mind seems totally unaware of the divine nature that underlies it, the bright pearl within. It needs to be initiated in the idea that there is a true Self, and the mind also needs to be initiated in the methods through which we may awaken to the higher Self-knowledge. Part of this spiritual education involves the clear recognition that the pleasure and safety we are looking for are to be found within, not outside. And then these good things will no longer be called pleasure and safety, but take on new and more appropriate names: bliss (*anandam*) and fearlessness (*nirbhaya*), based on the true completion and fulfilment of our longings. For spiritual illumination alone will bring about the satisfactory closure of the mind's long saga in quest of the holy grail of lasting happiness.

'What can I say of the things of the world?', said a master of the spiritual life. 'They are gained with difficulty, kept with anxiety and lost

with anguish.’ It all depends on how seriously we take things. There is some degree of enjoyment to be had, if we can manage to avoid getting desperate about our position or our relationships, and if we can stay fairly even-minded as we move through the phases of life. But there is greater enjoyment if we realize the limitations of the search for outer happiness, and seek the bright pearl within our own being. The highest good available to us arises from the depth of our soul and from nowhere else.

There is a story by John Steinbeck, called *The Pearl*. A poor fisherman in a colonised land spends part of his time diving for pearls. Actually, the oyster beds are not so far down, but you need clear water and excellent breath control, to choose the best oysters for plucking. One day, Kito, for that is his name, glimpses what seems to be the sheen of a large pearl, peeping through the shell divide. And it turns out to be a pearl the size of a seagull’s egg—the greatest pearl in the world. But, and we can guess it, the possession of this pearl starts a train of appalling problems, as eyes turn green around him, and his situation becomes life-threatening. The story shows how, in the world, whether our aims are simple and innocent, or selfish and villainous, consequences escape our control, and often burden us with quite unanticipated worries and anxieties.

What we really want is safety, bliss, contentment, fearlessness, fulfilment, wisdom, with no hidden thorns. And these are all enshrined within us. The quest for wisdom and enlightenment is a safe quest, coveting nothing, envying no one, but willing to learn by following the footsteps and markers left by the great masters of the path who have gone before us.

Perhaps we can now widen the metaphor to indicate the practical implications of following a spiritual path. The sea is the mind, the pearl is the true I, the divine Self. And the oyster is like the faculty of spiritual intuition which develops in the mind as we pursue the way of self-knowledge.

Every man and woman is not only divine in essence, but possesses the latent capacity to grow in spiritual wisdom and know the supreme Truth of ‘I’, and be free. This is our birthright as human beings. The faculty of perfect wisdom is dormant in the higher and innermost phase

of our intellect. It is stirred to life when the mind works on itself through the practice of the higher yoga. It has been called the super-conscious mind, and holds within itself the power of transcendent knowledge, as the shell holds the pearl. This faculty is itself subject to expansion, until recognition dawns; then its function, and the work of the mind, generally, has found completion.

In Yoga, there is no embarrassment or apology in saying that we are engaged in a quest for the highest joy. Our quest for joy in the world is a sign that we are made for joy; but we need to be connoisseurs, experts, in this matter, and not naive victims of false suggestions. The real purveyors of joy are the knowers of Truth. There is no private motive to pursue, because they have replaced personal egoism with the feeling of their oneness with all.

The true Self is eternal and we all can find that pearl within us. Therefore, we need never be discouraged by the chaos or dejection we may find in our mental life. The mind is not the real I. And we should not be dismayed at the changes that happen to the physical body. Our spiritual nature is never touched by change or decay. It is ever pristine and perfect. As the Taoist poet Han Shan, has sung:

Though face and form alter with the years,
I hold fast to the pearl of the mind.

In the same way, we too have the opportunity to deepen and intensify our spiritual focus at any time, and realize that the goal we seek is the true nature of the one who seeks it.

B.D.

THE YOGI

A poem by Swami Rama Tirtha

The yogi lives in the forest, sometimes happy, sometimes sad,
Yet ever unattached;
Peace flows through his mind and body.
OM OM HARI HARI* OM.

Naked, he wanders here and there, rivers of love pour from his eyes;
Ever contented with his fate, his mind is merged in bliss.
OM OM HARI HARI OM.

A song is on his lips, his dewy innocence is like a child's;
His thoughts are a rosary, his form a temple of Shiva.
OM OM HARI HARI OM.

Life or death are one to him;
Food, rest and sleep are the same to him;
Days, weeks and months have no meaning for him;
The breezes dry the moisture on his brow;
OM OM HARI HARI OM.

Birds approach him fearlessly, rivers sing their melodies to him;
Clouds rain down to refresh and purify him;
Trees know him to be their friend.
OM OM HARI HARI OM.

The flaming dusk, in rich apparel, bows before him;
A yogi's glance confounds and quickens the heart;
His word leaves an everlasting trace.
OM OM HARI HARI OM.

The moon is high, it is but a ray of the great Sun;
The heart of the saint is a beam of Yoga;
From him, fountains of peace and joy gush forth unceasingly;
Verily, the world is filled with his light.
OM OM HARI HARI OM.

Translated by Hari Prasad Shastri

* Hari – a name of God.

The Upanishads: Understanding the Oneness of All

SHANKARA, the remarkable philosophical and religious thinker who lived in the early part of the eighth century AD, and whose teachings are followed at Shanti Sadan, is thought by many to be the greatest of all the commentators upon the Upanishads. Let us take as starting point a passage from one of his writings. He is commenting upon a verse found in the very ancient *Chandogya Upanishad*, and what he says captures the compassionate spirit which permeates the whole of the Upanishadic literature. Here are his words, as translated in Dr A.J. Alston's *Shankara Source Book*:

Consider the case, my dear one, of how in the world some thief might bandage someone's eyes and take him away from the land of the Gandharas [that is to say, the region around the modern city of Kandahar in Afghanistan, which to the Indians of the Upanishadic period would have seemed extremely remote and distant] and deposit him with his eyes bandaged in some distant spot in the jungle far away from all human life, and how that person, having lost his sense of direction, might yell at the top of his voice straight out in front: 'I am from Gandhara. My eyes have been bandaged and I have been left here by a thief.'

Suppose, then, that some compassionate person freed him from his eye-bandages and said, 'Gandhara is to the north from here. You must first go to such and such a place.' He, being thus freed by the compassionate person, would go from village to village, asking the way to the next village each time. For we assume him to be an educated and intelligent man, able to understand the instructions for proceeding to another village. Such a man would eventually reach Gandhara, though not a person too foolish to understand the instructions, or a person carried away by his desire to see some other place.

The man from Gandhara is of course each one of us, and just as in the Christian myth of Adam's Fall from Paradise, he finds himself lost in the world and exiled from his true home, we too find ourselves in this

strange and inexplicable world, surrounded by uncertainties and dangers, without knowing how we came to be here or what our own real nature and the true direction of our life is.

It was the object of the teachers of the Upanishads to help us remove the bonds which bind and blind us, and to discover our own true nature and the oneness of all existence; just as the man from Gandhara was guided back by the compassionate person who freed him and directed him towards his own distant country beyond the mountains, passing in easy stages from one village to the next.

Ever since they first became known to the West, a little more than two centuries ago, the Upanishads have been thought of as constituting the inner core of Indian spiritual knowledge. Together with the *Bhagavad Gita*, they hold an exceptional place in the literature of Hinduism, although strictly speaking we should not really speak of 'Hinduism' at all. That name for the religion of India was coined not by the Indians themselves but by outsiders, the Greeks, and at a later period, Moslems and Europeans, for the religion which is found around and beyond the great Indus River.

The Indians themselves called, and still call, their religion *Sanatana Dharma*, the 'eternal truth' or 'primordial tradition', which, although it takes on many forms, has always been known to mankind. In the ancient literature of India, the Vedas, this tradition can be traced further back than any other religious tradition of the world. For several thousand years its central ideas and texts were passed down orally by the Brahmin caste, whose whole purpose was the preservation and practice of these principles.

There is, however, no minimum doctrine which you must believe, and no central authority, such as the Christian churches, to hold it together. It recognizes that different persons are at different stages of inner development, and will see and understand things differently. You do not have to obey the Brahmins, and indeed there are many differing approaches and shades of opinion among them.

What is it, then, which holds the tradition together, and has done so for several thousands of years? The answer is that it is a single idea: the idea that we are not the limited individual being which we take ourselves to be, but something quite different from this. The Upanishads,

the *Bhagavad Gita*, and Shankara's commentaries upon these works, make it clear that we are not the *jiva*, the individual 'living being' (to use the Indian term), subject to limitations of many kinds, constantly driven by desires which are never fully satisfied and by fears we cannot escape, and ultimately subject to dissolution at death. This is how we now think of ourselves, it is true, but it is an appearance and ultimately false. Our true nature, even though we have lost sight of it, is other than this. It is in fact one with the reality which underlies all existence: 'That Thou Art', '*Tat Twam Asi*', as the *Chandogya Upanishad* expresses it.

It is in the Upanishads that this idea was most clearly presented and debated, and it is for this reason that they hold the central position they have in Indian thought. Nevertheless, the origin of the idea that each of us possesses a second and ultimately real nature, quite different from the ordinary everyday self with which we normally identify, goes much further back even beyond the oldest of the Upanishads. It is found in the Rig Veda, the very earliest portion of the Vedic literature, which is close to 4000 years old even on conservative estimates and is perhaps older still (it is sometimes referred to as 'the oldest book in the world'). In the Rig Veda we find the following verse, which is subsequently repeated in several of the Upanishads:

Two birds with fair wings, bound with bonds of friendship, in the same sheltering tree have found a refuge. One of the two eats the sweet fig tree's fruitage; the other, eating not, regardeth only.

So here we have two selves or 'birds', seated together in the tree of life or, if you like, in the body. One of these birds eats the fruit of the tree. This is the ordinary, everyday self which engages in the world and seeks to enjoy its benefits; the *jiva*, the day-to-day self we normally identify with and think of as 'me'.

What, then, is the other bird perched in the tree of life, the bird which 'eating not, regardeth only'? This second self, which does not seek enjoyment in the world but merely observes and watches, is what Indians call the *Atman*, the true Self, the Self with a capital S. In Advaita Vedanta it is often called the *sakshin*, the 'witness', which does not participate in or form any part of the life of the world but merely witnesses it in silence. This second self, the Upanishads tell us in many

places, is our true and real nature; and it is of the same nature as Brahman, the final Reality underlying the universe and supporting the whole of manifestation: 'This Self is Brahman', '*Ayam Atma Brahma*', is one of the four *Mahavakyas* or 'Great Sayings' of the Upanishads.

This might at first seem an amazing claim. 'How', we might wonder, 'can my Self be the essential reality of the universe?' To grasp its meaning and real significance, we have to understand how the Upanishadic teachers saw the world. For them, the world is not something which exists independently of our minds and outside ourselves. It is not the solid, external, material reality that it appears to be. It is true that it has a provisional and apparent reality, a practical and transactional being, but it is not finally and utterly real. It exists as a pattern of ideas, of conceptions, in our minds, and if there were no minds, it would have no existence at all.

In philosophical terms, such a position is of course a form of Idealism: the world is not material but ideal. It is made of ideas and not of matter. We can find similar doctrines in European philosophy; in Berkeley, Kant and others, and indeed right back to Plato's famous Myth of the Cave and the early Greek thinkers. However, we are not concerned here with doctrines about the reality-status of the world but with teachings concerning our own reality, our real and innermost nature, our own Self. And we have seen that for the Upanishadic teachers it was important to understand that we have not one, but two selves: an ordinary, constantly active everyday self, the *jiva* or individual living being, with which we are usually completely identified and which occupies, as it were, the entire foreground of our existence; and an ultimately real Self or Atman, of which, since it is always present and never changes or draws attention to itself by an action, we are usually completely unaware and oblivious. It is this second Self which, the Upanishads tell us, is identical with Brahman and one with the true being of the universe.

What, then, can its nature be? What kind of an existence is it? The answer lies in a single word: consciousness. 'Consciousness is Brahman', '*Prajnanam Brahman*', is another of the Great Sayings or *Mahavakyas* which are at the heart of the Upanishadic teaching. Once we have this clue, we can begin to understand how it is that the ancient

teachers can tell us that our own Self is the ultimate Reality which supports the universe. Behind this assertion is their conclusion, reached after long meditative thought, that our innermost nature is consciousness, and that this in fact is the only reality, the only thing which truly exists in the sense of being absolutely stable and permanent.

The teaching is that consciousness has two forms, conditioned and unconditioned. As conditioned consciousness we are the ordinary, everyday, empirical self, the individual living being or *jiva*. As unconditioned consciousness we are the Atman, that pure awareness which is entirely free of all wanting or desiring, indeed of all acting; and yet is always there as the Witness of everything, shining like a lamp that is sheltered from the wind, or like the sun which lights up the whole of existence.

In the same way that the world we experience exists in our consciousness, and has no truly external existence outside it, the universe as a whole appears in the consciousness of the totality of living beings who experience it, and has no existence outside this. Its only reality, as Shankara frequently tells us, is the underlying base of consciousness on which it rests. The inter-subjective nature of the world—the fact that individuals of the same species experience what is very nearly, although never absolutely, the same world, arises from the fact that they are subject to common conditioning factors. But the world is not, in the view of the Upanishadic teachers, the fixed and objective reality we suppose it to be. To different species it appears differently. The world our dog knows is by no means the same as our own. Perhaps it is 60 or 70% the same, but it contains many things, a whole world of smells, for instance, of which we are quite unaware, while our own world contains large areas which are very real and important for us but simply do not exist for a dog. And we have to remember that there are many other species which are much more distant from us than our dog is, and experience a world almost entirely different from our own.

Thus, for the Upanishadic teachers, the important point is that all experience, and therefore the entire universe, is ideal in nature. It exists as ideas, conditioned forms arising in and superimposed upon the one reality of consciousness. This is why the Upanishads declare that the Self, Atman, our own unchanging innermost awareness, is Brahman;

that it is identical with the inner reality upon which the whole of manifestation is superimposed.

The theme of the oneness of all pervades these writings. If we take, for example, the short *Isha Upanishad*, we find it said in verse 4 that

The Self is one, unmoving and yet faster than the mind. Having preceded the mind, it is beyond the reach of the senses. Ever firm and steady, it outstrips all that run. By its mere presence it enables the vital cosmic energy to sustain the activities of living beings.

All of this makes perfect sense if we think of consciousness, but otherwise is quite incomprehensible. The next two verses read:

It moves, and it moves not. It is far, and it is near. It is within all this [as immanent], and is also outside all this [as transcendent].

He who sees all beings within his Self, and his Self in all beings, does not despise any creature.

Our teacher, Hari Prasad Shastri, wrote of this statement:

In this verse a great truth is advanced. It is a recognition of the oneness of all spirit and the unity of life. How does man cease to look down on others as aliens or foreigners? It is by convincing himself of the fact that all beings are included in his own great soul. By listening to the holy truth, by cogitating on it in the light of reason, and by reflecting and meditating on it, the Self is realized as being one and non-dual by nature. To the sage who knows this, there is no distinction between man and man. All other attempts at political and social reform are inadequate.

The *Isha Upanishad* continues (verses 7 and 8):

When a man realizes consciously that all beings are his own Self, there is no further grief and delusion for him, because he is established in the unity of the individual and the cosmic soul.

He [consciousness], the self-existent, is everywhere, radiant, bodiless, invulnerable, pure and untouched by limitations. He is the seer, the all-pervading one, who has assigned to all their respective functions.

Dr Shastri remarks that these verses show that the only way out of grief

and the magic show of delusion which is the world, is the inner realization of the unity of the individual soul, understood in its true nature as Atman, with the underlying reality of the universe, Brahman. Devotion, the practice of charity and benevolence, learning and heroic actions can be used as a means to this realization; but they are not the end of life, which is realization (moksha).

The embodied soul [he continues] in all walks of life experiences sorrow. The king on his throne, the youth who imagines that life is all a bed of roses, the dictator fanned by the winds of power, the poor man in his hut, are all subject to grief, desire and aversion... As thirst is quenched only by cool pure water, so is the soul of man only truly happy when freed from the delusion which makes the mirage of the world (samsara) appear real and its support and substance (Brahman) appear unreal.

Thus the whole purpose of the Upanishads is to help us to realize our true nature and to bring about a profound change in the way we think of ourselves.

We see the same idea in the magnificent images of Shiva Nataraj, the dancing Lord Shiva, which were created centuries ago in the south of India. Shiva, who represents both the ultimate reality of the universe, Brahman, and our own innermost being, the Atman or Self, is dancing within a circle of flame or light. He is full of beauty, grace and energy. But if we look closely, we see that he is dancing upon a second figure: a small, distorted, dwarf-like figure who lies at his feet. This dwarf is an image of ourselves as we now are, or, more correctly, as we now think ourselves to be: the limited, individual self or jiva, struggling to get through life as best we can. And the Shiva who dances upon this unhappy figure represents our true nature, as it is understood in the Upanishads: that shining consciousness which never changes and in which the whole world, including our ordinary everyday selves, appears as a changing series of pictures having no more than a passing reality—the Dance of Shiva.

The whole meaning and purpose of the Upanishads, and of Indian thought in general, is the transformation of our self-understanding, so

that we come to know that we are in reality that shining Lord Shiva, that constant, unchanging light of consciousness or Atman in which all appearances come and go, and not the little dwarf-like figure, the individual self or jiva, which lies helplessly at his feet.

In this latter condition we are like the man from Gandhara, who is separated from his true country and finds himself in a jungle, thirsty and hungry, without knowing how he got there. He has lost his sense of direction and stands in desperate need of help.

Such also is the case [Shankara writes in his commentary] of the one who is torn away from his real condition as the Self of the universe by the merit and demerit arising from former deeds, and deposited in the jungle of the human body... Here such a one resides, with his eyes bandaged by the thick cloth of infatuation, and afflicted with thirst for tangible objects...

Eventually, when he has become indifferent to the objects of the world, he is taught, 'Thou art not a denizen of the world, with worldly characteristics such as being the son of so-and-so. Thou art pure Being.' In this way he becomes released from his bandages of nescience and delusion and reaches his own true Self; the inhabitant of Gandhara reaches Gandhara and becomes happy.

S.C.

DHANJI

In Hardwar I met a saint who was named Dhanji, which means 'Great Uncle'. He was not a man of education. It was said that he had once been a jeweller of Delhi. He used to live by himself. He talked very little to those who came in contact with him, but those who saw him recognized at once that his soul was in touch with the higher world of the spirit all the time.

He used to come out in the afternoon to walk under the cool breezes on the bank of the Ganges. Many people had a few words with him. His proximity gave peace, and he avoided all worldly talk. As his conversation consisted mostly of riddles, he was called Bhagwan by the

people. Everybody thought that he was intoxicated all the time, but they did not understand it was Self-intoxication. He used to retire alone into the woods and sleep somewhere under the trees or in a cave.

I often had the privilege of talking to this saint and have no doubt that he had realized the highest, but the influence of Jnana (spiritual knowledge and realization) on him was neither cultural nor instructive. By his mere presence he taught the people the unreality of the world. He treated men, women, children, young and old, rich and poor, all with the same high consideration, and refused all honour or physical advantages that were offered to him. Such was the influence of Jnana on the saint known as Shri Bhagwan.

He possessed nothing. I saw him very often at Hardwar on the bank of the holy Ganges. He always looked half inebriated and never talked to anybody unless approached. Blessings radiated from him as does coolness from the holy stream of the Ganges. He used to be dressed partly like a layman and partly like a renunciate; but in fact, he was quite unconcerned about it. Those who knew him had great veneration for him. He used to take food when placed before him. Though his diet was strictly vegetarian, he did not follow the rules attached to the mode of eating. Some Punjabi women tried to help him to food with their own hands. He always refused it. Outwardly he created nothing for the good of others, nor did he teach. Still, good was flowing from him like a stream, and peace covered all those who came near him.

One year, he did not appear in Hardwar. Many enquiries were made as to what had happened to him. All that was known was that he had entered the deep Himalayan range and did not come out of it. I think he was blessed, and blessed were those who contacted the saint. Shri Dada saw him at Hardwar once or twice and spoke highly of him as a Brahma-jnani.

H.P.S.

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

ADHYATMA YOGA is practical and meditation is central to it. We are asked to meditate daily and follow an ethical code of behaviour. What then do the teachers of this school say about the purpose of following these teachings and meditation practices? Throughout the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita* it is taught consistently that unregenerate woman and man, caught up in the world of *sansara* or illusion, has, metaphysically speaking, to realize God, that is, the cognition of one's own true Self as ultimate reality, thus solving the riddle of life. 'Know ye the truth and the truth shall make you free.' (John 8:32) To know this, one has to overcome inertia and agitation by the practice of virtue, dharma, prayer, devotion, meditation, charity and philanthropy on a non-sectarian and universal basis.

How do we know that this is both necessary and possible? At some point in our lives we begin to ask deeper questions. We may pursue pleasure and ambition, and derive satisfaction in worldly pursuits, but at some point we end up beside a grave in tears—this image can be both literal and metaphorical—and an understanding arises that the play of the world, in which our little ego acts the central part, will not give us the satisfaction we need in our deepest self.

In Buddhism the central tenet is that the world is a place of suffering, but there is a spiritual path leading to freedom. We may also get a flash, a moment of inspiration where there is an intuitive sense of a higher power at work, a deeper pattern.

The world is noisy and the mind wheels, distracted from distraction by distraction, as the poet T S Eliot put it. In approaching the spiritual path two things have to be recognized: the attraction and noise of the world has somehow to be lessened, and the internal movement of the wheeling mind has to be slowed. This is, broadly speaking, done through tried and tested meditation practices; these practices, if done with determination, will give rise to the conditions in which the power behind the mind will reveal itself—indeed it is always there, but hidden.

So the necessity which impels us to search for spiritual solutions to life's enigmas arises, but how do we know that success is possible, that there really is something divine within us? It is in the spiritual records of mankind that we find the way mapped out for us, if we are prepared not to be too credulous, nor too sceptical, but to make a sincere effort to understand what the great teachers have to say about the goal of life. The claim of this Yoga is that you can become consciously immortal, and that you will have peace and satisfaction for ever: 'O Arjuna, I shall fully teach thee this knowledge which is a matter of experience, and when it is known subjectively and spiritually, nothing remains unattained.' (*Bhagavad Gita* 7:2). The same claim is made in the words of Jesus: 'Whosoever drinketh of the living water that I shall give shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.' These are statements made by two seers of Truth, one Jewish and one Indian. So let us be practical. We need silence and stillness— stillness of the body and silence of the mental processes.

Firstly we approach our meditation in a spirit of reverence and calmness, feeling that we are in the presence of the divine, within and without. Mentally bow to that invisible power. Let us spend a minute or two preparing ourselves in this way.

Breathing practice

Sitting in relaxation, in the meditation posture, breathe slowly and deeply, mentally repeating the holy syllable OM. We hear the O sound as we breathe in and the M on the out breath. The OM sound and symbol is used throughout India and Asia and it is considered the holiest and most profound syllable.

Combining this with an awareness of our breathing helps bring peace to the mind-body complex and places us in a mode of being separate from our busy external noisy lives. It might be called a contemplative mode, or zone, as is it commonly put now. Dr Shastri referred to it as the yogic mood. We will do this now, repeating OM in this way for 21 times.

Visualization

We imagine the flame of a candle shining in the heart centre, which is located just below where the ribs meet. The flame is bright, still, upward-pointing. We mentally place this image in a physical location, but also think of it as a symbol of the divine spirit, man's innermost self. It is most helpful in all these practices to think of them as greater than ourselves, so we try not to do this visualization mechanically, but we try to surrender our little ego, feeling that this approach to the inner spiritual light is the beginning of true understanding. This light will eventually flood the mind, dissolving the darkness of nescience, that which binds us fast to the world. Breaking the grip of worldly associations, we shall feel a new freedom and joy. It is the mind acting upon itself in order to free itself. Let us do this visualization for about seven minutes.

Meditation on a text

OM. I AM ONE WITH THE INFINITE POWER OF LOVE.
I AM PEACE. I AM LIGHT. OM

The body and the mind are those parts of us which are passing; here we affirm a higher reality. In other words, we begin to look up; the ego is no longer identifying itself with the mind and the body, or the world. A thought of very great beauty and truth is placed before the mind. The mind will try to run away, but we bring it gently back and give it the same food. After some time it will take a delight in the meditation. We can take each phrase for a short time, allowing its flavour and meaning to impress the mind, and then rest in the atmosphere of the text as a whole, spending about ten minutes on the practice.

End the meditation session with an offering of thoughts of goodwill to all, without exception. Spend about one minute in this attitude, which will ease our path in life, and help us to live in inner and outer harmony.

A.N.

The Way to Self-Dependence

The lives of the spiritual men of the past and present show that their power and significance spring from an interior co-operation with a power which they have drawn forth in themselves, and not from circumstances, mental brilliance and physical well-being. Harmony is the result of the discovery and uncovering of this power, which is present, though unrevealed, in every man. It enables those who know it to excel in spiritual wisdom and action at one and the same time.

Training the Mind through Yoga by M V Waterhouse

To depend only on the Self, my children, is the greatest of yogic practices.

Shri Dada of Aligarh

THE PURPOSE of Yoga practice is to enable us to awaken consciously to our identity with God, who is our real Self. The teaching is that this knowledge of Truth, which is the goal of life and which alone brings the peace and bliss all are seeking, is an awakening to what is already a fact. As a great modern Yogi, Swama Rama Tirtha, has said: 'This God-realization is not something to be done, something to be accomplished. You are God already, Truth personified already. You have simply to undo what you have already done in creating your own bondage.' The same point is made in *Meditation – Its Theory and Practice*, when Hari Prasad Shastri writes: 'Meditation does not create perfection. It allows perfection to disclose itself by removing the obstacles to its manifestation.'

Daily study of spiritual texts plays an essential role in this process. As Patanjali says in the *Yoga Sutras*, self-discipline, self-study, including study of the spiritual classics, and resignation to God, are the three main practices prescribed by Yoga for removing these inner obstacles or afflictions from the mind.

Study alone is not enough. We may hear or read these texts about the Self, and when this is done with reverence they will uplift the mind for a time. But the Teachers point out that if we just leave it there, it will only be like a rock splashed by a wave on a hot day. The rock will be cool for a short time, but the water soon dries up and the

rock becomes hot again. In the same way, hearing the Truth uplifts the mind at the time, but the mood is easily lost as worldly preoccupations take over again. Hearing the Truth is not enough. In order to realize the true Self, we must also reflect and meditate upon the texts. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: ‘Verily this Self has to be realized. It must be heard about, reflected on and meditated upon.’

Not only hearing (*shravana*), but also reflection (*manana*) leading to continuous meditation, or *nididhyasana*, is the way to grasp that the Truth applies to oneself.

Consider, for example, the statement of Shri Dada: ‘To depend only on Atman, the true Self, is the greatest of yogic practices.’ Place it alongside the verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

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

We now have a profound and rewarding theme for our *manana*, or spiritual reflection. Both statements stress the need for self-reliance, but in seemingly different ways. In the first statement, depending only on the Self means depending only on God present within us as our innermost Self and the divine ground of our being. But the second text seems to be enjoining self-reliance in the opposite sense: that one has only one’s individual efforts to rely on. The challenge for our reflective faculty is how we can reconcile these two statements about self-reliance and about the Self.

The familiar saying ‘God helps those who help themselves’ suggests a possible answer, but in that case, how exactly do we qualify through Yoga practice? So let us take a closer look at each of these statements and try to discover how they fit together, starting with the second text, ‘Let a man raise himself by himself, let him not lower himself...’

The teachings of Yoga are based on direct experience of the spiritual Truth. Therefore the message is positive. Each of us has this choice: either to raise the self or lower the self. We learn how to exercise this choice consciously in our daily life. If we want our life to be uplifted and to be a source of moral and spiritual upliftment to

others, there is something we can do about it. But the decision rests with us and it is for us to implement it. Nobody else can do it for us.

This teaching—the real Friend and Self of man is God—is not confined to Yoga. One finds it echoed by the practising mystics in all the spiritual traditions. In the letters of Brother Lawrence, for example, we are told:

Not to advance is to go back. But they who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep.

We may feel that if it is entirely up to God or the Holy Spirit, where does personal endeavour come in? But, as any yachtsman will tell you, although his progress is entirely dependent on the wind, if he wants the gale to blow him along in the right direction, he has to trim and adjust his sails to take advantage of it, instead of trying to oppose it.

Shri Shankara, commenting on man’s need to ‘raise himself by himself’, explains that man is ‘submerged in the sea of *sansara* (worldly life)’, with its inevitable sorrows and restrictions, leading to old age and death. But man can free himself from total identification with this level of his being and realize that his true nature transcends both mind and matter, and is infinite. The way to absolute freedom and fulfilment calls for an attitude of equanimity and detachment, not just to the thorns of life, but also to the roses, which are equally transient. As Swami Rama Tirtha put it in his essay on ‘Worship’: ‘Desire and enjoyment of the sense objects lead man to a state which is like that of a dried gourd which has been dropped in the water, and is half submerged, at the mercy of the storms and the waves.’ It is to discover the source of higher joy in one’s being—a joy which needs no outer contact to initiate or sustain it—that Yoga is practised.

Therefore, Yoga may be viewed as the means to ‘raise oneself by oneself’. It requires a training which can be applied progressively to one’s way of thought and action. Says Shankara: ‘Let man so train himself as to become one who is established in Yoga; let him practise and attain to Yoga.’

Man longs to live at ease with himself and enjoy a sense of well-being which goes deeper than worldly prosperity, and can even hold

up at times of strained relationships or separation from loved ones. This potentiality is present in all, for ‘man alone is the friend of himself, he alone is the enemy of himself’. The statement seems opposed to our culture of ‘networking’ and dependency, but Shankara underlines the principle in his commentary: ‘There is indeed no other friend that can lead to liberation; nay, the so-called friend is only inimical to him who seeks liberation, as he forms an object of attachment, which is the cause of bondage. Hence the emphasis ‘he alone is the friend of himself’.

The later commentator, Madhusudana, observes: ‘Through a discerning intellect, the individual soul sheds attachment to sense objects and attains to unification. “A discerning intellect” means one in which *buddhi*, the faculty of spiritual intuition, has been awakened through mind control and daily meditation.’ The *Gita* teaches self-control, not for its own sake or to avoid divine disapproval, but for the basic reason that lack of self-control thwarts the emergence of the soul’s finest faculties, and so often leads man into appalling difficulties and mishaps, so that he becomes ‘his own worst enemy’. On the other hand, self-control, coupled with spiritual aspiration, prepares the way for man’s latent faculty of spiritual wisdom to unfold and develop, through the process that is generally called ‘the purification of the mind’.

What this means is indicated by Marjorie Waterhouse in *Training the Mind Through Yoga*: ‘By purification is meant the elimination of waste products in the form of idle promptings and thoughts, and the concentration of the mind on ideas which have a creative and transforming quality.’

Adhyatma Yoga, the essential spiritual Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gita*, teaches that realization is attainable while actively engaged in the duties of life. Therefore the teaching on Yoga practice in the *Gita* begins with commending a particular way of action, of daily living, aimed at helping this purification of the mind. This great path is called Karma Yoga. Its essence is summed up in the following verses:

He who acts, having given up attachment, offering his actions to Brahman, to God, is untouched by sin, just as the leaf of a lotus is untouched by water.

Therefore yogis perform all action, whether of intellect, mind, body or senses, without attachment, for the purification of the mind.

A pure mind is no longer disturbed and distracted by desires, and leads to maturity of devotion. As Krishna goes on to explain:

The steady-minded one, abandoning the fruit of action, attains the peace born of devotion. The unsteady one, attached to the fruit through the operation of desire, is firmly bound.

We are apt to blame our misfortunes on the weakness of individual human nature. We say that ‘man was born to err’. But the spiritual Teachers and the Lord in the *Gita* teach the contrary: man was born to be free from all error and delusion. He is only in bondage and an enemy to himself while he continues to seek lasting happiness outside himself, where it can never be found.

It is true that our human desires draw us outwards, as if we are tugged by an irresistible force. Our nature is charged with energies which need constant and safe discharge. But the desiring part of our mind is not destined to be a law unto itself; it is pregnant with higher potentialities which will emerge through inner training and education in what is man’s highest Good; namely, what will enable him to be a friend to himself, and not an enemy. The highest Good is attained through inner peace and harmony, and through having an appreciation of the spiritual dimension of life, as the source of infinite bliss. Desire the highest, the Infinite Peace, Self-Realization or God-Realization, and the limited desires and aspirations will be viewed in the right perspective, and will cease to dominate our life.

The verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* which discourage ‘desires’, need to be accepted in the light of the supreme fulfilment that will manifest when the inner confusion and distraction of worldly desire has been forgotten:

That man attains peace who, abandoning all desires, moves about without attachment, without selfishness and without vanity.

Whoso has his joy within and his pastime within and who has his light within only—that Yogi attains the bliss of Brahman, himself becoming Brahman.

Shankara, in his *Gita* commentary, quotes another text which makes the link between the inner revelation of higher knowledge and the removal of selfish desires: 'Knowledge springs up in the mind on the destruction of sinful karma; then the real Self is seen in the mind as in a clean mirror.' 'Sinful karma' means the unwanted hidden desires resulting from past action.

One of the important points about abandoning desires is that it means abandoning regrets about the past and worries about the future. We read in the *Yoga Vasishtha*: 'The way to be rid of this delusion of the mind is to fix your attention upon the present moment and not to employ your thoughts on past or future events.' Abbot Amakuki, one of the modern Japanese Zen Masters, gives the same advice. 'Satisfaction for the past, gratitude for the present and spiritual energy for the future: this is the spiritual attitude to the three states of time.'

You can confirm for yourself how effective the daily Yoga practices are, when performed in this way. As Shankara remarks: 'Karma Yoga practised in complete devotion to the Lord and without desire to enjoy the fruits, conduces to the purity of the mind. The man whose mind has been purified is competent to tread the path of knowledge, and to him comes knowledge.'

Therefore 'let a man raise himself by himself' means 'let him polish the mirror of the mind through Karma Yoga, detached and dedicated action performed in a spirit of active benevolence to all, along with daily meditation.'

What sort of a man is the friend of himself and who is his own enemy? The answer is given in the next two verses:

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

The self-controlled and serene man's Supreme Self is steadfast in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain, as also in honour and disgrace.

Madhusudana explains: 'Sensations like heat or cold and emotions like pleasure, pain, honour and dishonour, distract the mind, but are quite ineffective in the case of a person who has identified himself with Reality. Because he has attained to an equipoise of mind, he sees no difference among sense-objects and thus has no longing or hatred for anything or anybody. The Self, the illumining, pure spirit, is realized by him. He is always in a state of union. Thus it is only through self-control and mental quiet that self-realization is achieved.'

We have now arrived at the depth of understanding indicated in the statement: 'To depend only on Atman, the true Self, is the greatest of yogic practices.' And we have found that it is by 'raising himself by himself' through the daily yogic practice of mind control and meditation that the aspirant becomes increasingly able to depend entirely on the real Self, God.

Shri Dada also pointed out that total devotion to God means that 'the whole life of thought, feeling and volition should be applied to no other object'. In other words 'Taking refuge in God' involves our emotions as well as our reason and also our will. It is perfectly true that, as it says in the *Gita*, 'even a little Yoga practice protects one from great fear'. But it is also true that for total success in Yoga, our intellectual and emotional commitment has to become total. 'Only through exclusive devotion can I be seen and known in reality and entered into', says the Lord in the *Gita*. He also promises that 'To those who are ever united with Me, I give that devotion of knowledge by which they come to Me'.

What has to be gradually eliminated through the daily Yoga practices is the spiritual ignorance which makes us cling to our individuality. The author of *The Imitation of Christ* devotes a whole chapter in Book Two to the problem of 'How self-love hinders our search for God'. He begins with Christ addressing the soul in the following words:

My son, you must give all for All, and keep back nothing of yourself from Me. Know that self-love does you more harm than anything else in the world. All things hold your heart a prisoner in greater or lesser degree, in proportion to the love and regard that you bear them. If

your love is pure, simple and controlled, you will not become the slave of these things. Do not hanker after things that you may not rightly have, and possess nothing that may hinder your spiritual progress or rob you of inward freedom. It is strange that you are not able to trust Me with all your heart, together with all that you may desire or enjoy. Why exhaust yourself in useless grief? Why burden yourself with needless anxieties? Trust in My goodwill toward you and you will suffer no hurt...

Hence the need to ‘raise the self by the self’—to purify the mind through self-discipline and self-study until dependence on our real Self, God, is fully attained. In the words of one of the great Zen Masters:

The moon which rests reflected
In the water of the pure heart,
When the wave breaks—
Becomes light.

M.R.H.

Wherever there is beauty or attraction—the serene heavens, the restless breeze, the swaying grass, heart-inviting poetry and art—know it is a reflection of thy Self, the Ultimate Cause.

This is the way to enjoy beauty and love of Truth.

H.P.S.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

The Summer 2012 special afternoon course took place on Sunday 10 June with the theme *Finding Real Freedom*. The first talk on *Your Mind is your Treasure* made clear that it is the mind that is the focus and locus of the spiritual enquiry, and presented ideas and practices that can begin to fit the mind for deeper research and intuition. The second talk, *Through Inner Harmony to Illumination*, illustrated how compassion and a universal outlook are characteristic of the traditional path. The course concluded with a talk entitled *Realizing the Infinite Peace* on the ultimate goal of the Yoga path and how vital characteristics of our daily life, such as the prominence of the ego, are pointers towards the summit of Self-Realization. At the time of going to press, this talk is available for all to hear on the Shanti Sadan website.

During the Summer term at Shanti Sadan, the weekly talks and meditation sessions continued. Every Tuesday there was a meeting dedicated to meditation, with some introduction to the principles on which it is based and then a series of traditional practices, including breathing practices, visualizations, and meditation on spiritual texts. The Tuesday evening meetings continued throughout the Easter break, and will continue through the summer as well, providing an opportunity to maintain a weekly rhythm that may compliment the rhythm of daily practice, which is so important if we want to derive the full benefits of meditation.

On Thursday evenings the presentations also included some meditation practices, but also more about the principles of non-duality and their application in the life of dharma and inner enquiry. There were talks on *The Power of the Spiritual Yoga*, *Removing the Veils*, *The Infinite Potential Within Each of Us*, *Creative and Skilful Living*, *A Way of Life not just of Thought*, *Spiritual Unfoldment*, *Paths to Enlightenment*, *Spiritual Idealism in Daily Life*, and *Direct Experience of Reality*.

Readers of *Self-Knowledge* are reminded that an on-line version is now available. Subscribers who do not yet have access and would like to should contact us by email and log-in details will be provided.