

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

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### ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

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### EVENTS FOR THE SPRING TERM 2012

#### Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from Tuesday 31 January until Thursday 29 March 2012.

#### Spring 2012 Afternoon Course

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

# SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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### THE GOAL OF MAN IS THE WORLD OF REALITY

There are three worlds, two of which can be bracketed under one category, the world of appearances (maya). These two are the world of perception and the world of conception. Being transient, they have no ultimate reality. The third world, the spiritual realm, is the real world.

An Arab was carrying a cat in his arms. A friend met him and asked: 'Where did you find this bundle of mischief?' Another friend remarked: 'Why are you carrying this fickle, unreliable and unfaithful animal?' A third man said: 'What a pet, what a dear creature, loved by our prophet, and such a useful being!' Now the cat is one, but each of the three men has woven his own world around it.

The world of reality is the world of spirit, and, being beyond time and space, it cannot be subject to the law of cause and effect. Its indestructibility is evident.

The world of perception is the hardest of all. It knocks us on the

head and constantly makes its presence felt. How can one living in a war zone hear patiently the whistling bombs and missiles in one's own vicinity? We are very conscious, perhaps too conscious, of this world.

But only a part of our life is concerned with the world of perception. There is another important part of our life, which is related to what is called the inner world, but which ought to be called the intermediary world, because it forms a link between the outer and the spiritual realms.

Our instincts, which we have inherited from our ancestors, the lower animals, force the world of perception on us continually. But we forget the outer world and cease to take any note of it when we are afflicted with a great pain. A man, suffering from a terrible toothache, is interested neither in a delicious dish nor in beautiful music. Madness, in the form of love of power, or intoxication bred by the sense of possession, also makes us insensible to a large part of the perceptual world. The ambition of Alexander made him jump within the guarded city of Babylon, where almost sure death awaited him. The great poet, Tulsidas, madly in love with a woman, crossed the river Ganges in flood, supporting himself on the dead body of a man, unconscious of its nature.

We can see clearly that at a certain stage of development the perceptual world loses its bitterness and sweetness. Are we not right in thinking that it is the colour of the conceptual world, the world of love, hate, honour, fame, disgust, appreciation, imagination, sympathy, compassion, debasement, etc., which dyes the world of the senses and makes it appear in the colours which we have perhaps unconsciously applied to it?

The ultimate world is called the pure world, because it has no attributes and is not cognized either by the senses or by the mind. Does it exist? Is it not a supposed hypothesis of the idealist's brain? Can its existence be proved?

Any illusion, any passing, moving, transient phenomenon, stands on a basis other than its own being. An illusion is created by somebody and stands on something, which, if removed, leads to the fall of the phenomenon.

Limitations have no reality of their own; the conditioning adjuncts

must condition some entity. Who can ever imagine a self-conditioned condition?

It is the height of egocentricity to dismiss anything which the mind and the senses do not understand at present, as something nebulous. Besides, the world of conception derives its power of appearance, and energy to function, from some source or other. That source is the spiritual realm.

The world of Spirit, not of the supposed spirits and fairies of children, not of the discarnate souls or ghosts, but the realm of infinity and the home of the eternal verities of life, is the world of God.

We pass from the world of perception to that of conception. Let us not forget that we are pilgrims to the highest realm. There is no rest for the human soul except in God. As the process of history shows that sub-men must one day become human, and human super-human, similarly our experience from the objective world to the subjective must culminate in the supramental realm, the realm of Light and Bliss.

History is on the march; it is a pageant of robbers, kings, presidents, dictators. Where will it end? Professor Toynbee's 'superman', which is the consummation of history, must be a purely spiritual man. What is this spiritual man? What is his nature? The question is answered in the *Bhagavad Gita* in the concluding verses of the second chapter.

Let not our cognizing consciousness become attached either to the world of perception or conception. It is by their control and mastery that we return to our home, God within. Those who want rest, peace, and the continuation of ever more refined creative powers, have no other alternative but to understand the significance of the two lower worlds and rise to the spiritual world.

**Hari Prasad Shastri**

## The Supreme Security

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THE SECRET of security is to find that realm of pure Being within ourselves that is ever secure, ever free from all disturbance and threat and is of the nature of peace and bliss. Yoga is the method through which we bring this about.

Where is this principle of supreme security? It is the ground of our being, always with us, much more than any guardian angel. We are here in this world to prove this to ourselves through Self-realization. Those who have realized it, who have Self-knowledge, no longer feel identified with or imprisoned by the body and the mind.

This sublime inner freedom is indicated in a verse from the *Ashtavakra Gita*:

Wonderful am I! In spite of the body and its properties, I am one. I go nowhere, I come from nowhere. I abide in my Self, pervading the whole universe.

It means realizing our identity with that which is immortal and infinite within our own being.

How can this spiritual illumination become our own experience? How can we get help in daily life from this deeper understanding? We can, if we learn to still the hurly-burly of thoughts and feelings. It is then that we become aware of the revealing calm beneath the tumult of mental activity. Is it really possible to do this? We know from our meditation sessions that it is not easy to withdraw our consciousness from the senses and the mind, and find rest in the peace and bliss of the true Self. But if we persevere with our practice of meditation and self-development, even when we don't feel like it, we will create peaceful channels in our mind that will allow more and more of the spiritual light and peace to be reflected in our consciousness.

For self-development, we do need to soak our mind in teachings that tell us about the spiritual path and its goal. We need to see ourselves as students of this higher experience, appreciate its liberating value, and be really interested in this higher form of culture. Interest leads to love, and love leads to knowledge. But all the time, we keep in

mind that our aim and goal is the living force of direct experience of spiritual reality, and not the accumulation of book knowledge for its own sake. For the truth is, as expressed in the lines of Kobo Daishi, the great Japanese Buddhist master:

The Buddhas in the innumerable Buddha lands  
Are nothing but the Buddha within our own soul.

All the spiritual information we gather from inspirational literature, books, magazines and lectures, must be seen as means to the higher end of opening up the treasury of peace and bliss in our own heart.

The principle of security within us is our true Self. This Truth is the ultimate saviour that dissolves our mental and emotional stress, and is the source of wisdom and enlightenment. There is a Sufi verse, attributed to Ali:

The malady is within you but you see it not,  
And the remedy is within you but you know it not.  
You yourself are the universal book of divine knowledge  
But you think yourself to be the small body and fail to discern your own spiritual worth.

What is this inner malady? We often feel uneasy about our psychological and spiritual state. It is usually a vague feeling not wholly understood by us. It manifests as sense of restriction, frustration, unrest, dissatisfaction and sometimes desperation. These are all symptoms of a central problem at the very source of our human understanding. That problem is that we are not awake to the true nature of the Self. But, thankfully, the remedy is also within us, though we may need help in applying it. It is to gain the knowledge of our true identity and realize conscious immortality.

The Yoga teachings, and all true spiritual teachings, are meant to fire us with a living faith in our essential divinity, and the living knowledge that will confirm this to us in our own experience—like the coming of daylight after darkness. There is an old blessing to those seeking this enlightenment: 'May you be free from hindrances in crossing to the farther shore beyond darkness.' It is an inner journey, an inner 'crossing', to the home that we have never really left.

So Self-knowledge is the goal of the spiritual Yoga. It means direct experience of the divinity of the true Self, and the realization that there is only one Self in all. Through this realization, the purpose of life is finally understood and fulfilled. Each step taken towards this consummation of experience will give us spiritual and psychological help, and support us as we face the challenges of life. There is help all along the way. We need not be at the peak of the mountain of enlightenment to enjoy the pure mountain air. Breezes are available even in the foothills where we stand at the moment. There is a Japanese verse:

Even at the foot of mount Fuji  
I am uplifted by the fresh breezes  
That come from the heights.

In the same way, we can also be refreshed by the spiritual breezes, if we keep mental company with these teachings, seek to know more and more about Self-knowledge, and cultivate our mind in a way that is spiritually helpful. We will gain an increasing sense of security that is based on the revelation of our own inner resources and not on outer things.

This is not to deny our human need for social, physical and financial security, which leads us to depend on many outer sources of support. But a spiritual person looks on this security as a means to an end. That end is spiritual enlightenment, and the worldly peace and ease that may be ours, is really meant to provide a safe environment in which we can pursue our ultimate quest.

We are so fortunate that we have freedom of movement, freedom of choice and of speech, when in many parts of the world there is persecution and suppression. But we can never take our freedom for granted, and, as Christ teaches, we should work while the daylight of opportunity is with us and make the most of it while we can.

Let us now look at this question of the insecurity that we ourselves may feel and how it influences our own experience, and also what we can do about it. When we feel insecure, it is because of the thoughts that are clinging to our mind at that time. The basis of the higher Yoga is that thought currents can be changed with training and practice. This

is not to deny that many developments in life cause us genuine and justifiable concern. Fear, and the feeling of insecurity, often give us alarm signals of genuine danger. We have to have these feelings up to a point. As it is said, fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But generally speaking, our mind gives too much space and time to contemplating imagined dangers and losses. As the writer, E M Forster, observes: 'With infinite effort we brace ourselves for a crisis which never happens.'

Our imagination is such a painter of pictures that it can easily make a difficult situation worse through fear, while a calm practical response will put things into perspective and enable us to meet the situation wisely. An old story tells of a sage who was sitting on a hillside when the Spirit of the Plague passed by. 'Where are you going?', said the sage. 'I am on my way to Benares, where I shall kill a hundred people.' A few days later the sage was again seated on the hillside when the Spirit of the Plague passed by on his way back. 'You told me that you were going to kill a hundred people. I have heard a thousand people have died.' 'I did kill a hundred people. Fear killed the rest!'

The mind is easily gripped by distorting emotions, and then we act out the scenario they suggest, and very often it is a 'worst case scenario'! But if we want to overcome this natural tendency—which is a kind of self-inflicted slavery—there is a way to do so. We can learn to tame and tranquillize our mind in all circumstances, if we develop a spiritual focus within ourself. This will make us resilient to the suggestions of others, and even to the murmurs that come up in our own mind, for we will come to recognize them for what they are—for the most part, unreal phantoms.

Hari Prasad Shastri gave an affirmation we might apply inwardly when we notice such thoughts appearing in our mind and getting out of control. It is to pause for a minute or two, take a few deep breaths, take a look at the mental activity, and affirm:

OM. You are unreal phantoms. I banish you as undesired images. OM.

We say it and we affirm it, based on the authority of the higher Truth within us.

We also recognize that feelings like nervousness, panic, anxiety,

tension and so on, are very personal states of our mind. This is why we ourselves may be deeply disturbed by something while our companions are at ease. We alone know our own inner pain. An English travel writer tells how he was rambling with a friend through some glorious scenic countryside, when his companion suddenly released an agonized sigh. 'What is hurting you, my friend?', he asked. 'My mind is hurting me!' We all know something of this inner condition. What happens on these occasions is that we somehow allow ourselves to be drawn on by our negative thoughts, and these extend themselves like vigorous weeds the more we indulge them.

Yoga reminds us that the mind is our instrument as much as the pen is the instrument of a writer, or the voice the instrument of a singer. We can learn how to step back inwardly, so to say, and dis-identify ourselves from the stream of thoughts, and learn consciously to direct the mind as we wish. This stepping back is a shift in our awareness.

Take the example of these two expressions: 'I am thinking'. 'There are thoughts.' With 'I am thinking', in the sense of being lost in thoughts, we are for that time identified with the stream of thoughts, enjoying or suffering the pictures that the mind is imposing on us. With the insight, 'There are thoughts', we have taken up the position of a detached witness or spectator.

This simple principle can also apply to our feelings or anything that appears on the mind's stage. For example, 'I am angry' is very different from 'There is anger'. Similarly, 'I am nervous' can be confronted with 'There is nervousness'. This kind of witnessing insight—this shift in awareness—is very helpful to our mental balance and can, if developed, liberate us from mood swings. For this momentary detachment will free our consciousness from the mental net, and give us a glimpse of the independence of the true Self.

The spirit of this witnessing practice is indicated in a verse of Swami Nirbhayanandaji:

In inner silence watch the activities of your mind.  
Smile secretly, merged in the divine vision.

What is the philosophical principle behind this practice? It is that we are more than the thinking and feeling mind, and that we have the

power to observe this mental play and not be wounded or made insecure by it. In fact we are taking our stand on the security and freedom of our true Self. This practice of witnessing the mind is subject to development and maturity, as our sense of identity is gradually restored to our spiritual Self.

One important point springing from this Yoga is that our mind, with its thoughts and emotions, is a source of abundant energy which can be wasted, or converted into spiritual illumination. The ordinary man or woman does not usually give much attention to the inner life of the mind, unless, perhaps, we want to remedy some disorder. But, generally, we just let the mind go on thinking without much awareness or supervision, and we drift into moods, without giving the process much thought. Living in this way, we miss the great spiritual potentialities for peace, bliss and wisdom that lie latent in the mind itself.

We rarely give ourselves time for quietude and for diving deep within our own being. 'Where will we find time?', we say. Here is another haiku:

Flitting from flower to flower,  
The butterflies, even, it seems,  
Have no time for quiet dreams.

The point is that our most rewarding time is not that which is spent in excitement or entertainment, but in inner quietude focused on the highest Truth, the Truth relating to our divine nature.

There is a divine power of inner transformation, which has its source in our true Self. A point of inner contact or focus emerges within us when we habitually turn within with the desire to uncover the spiritual peace and light. What happens at these times is that we are merging our little individual self in the infinitude of the true Self, the Self of peace. The true Self is not only the supreme security. It is also our greatest support. It is not a support in the sense that the earth supports the mountains, or the sea supports the ships. The ground of our being is the supreme, conscious, living, loving force, the intelligent force behind all the forces of the universe. As such, it is an ever vibrant centre of peace light and power. In religious terms, it is a centre of grace, for grace

surely manifests itself in the form of peace, light and power, when we draw on it for help in time of need.

In any situation, however challenging, we do not have to look far for help. Someone has said that heaven is six inches above our head. It is much nearer than that. The true *svarga* or heaven is in man's heart. This is the teaching of the Upanishads. Spiritual reality is here and now. It is the life of life, in the sense that our wonderful human nature, functioning in this vast, beautiful and awe-inspiring cosmos, is a fragmentary and phenomenal expression of the true life, imperishable peace and bliss. And our little life, at its centre, is fixed in that higher life. So it is not surprising that spiritual help is always available to us, because our own being, in its higher aspect, is the ultimate source of that help.

Our strategy should not be to wait for a crisis and then seek a remedy. Let us practise inner communion with our deeper spiritual Self at normal times as often as we can. If we do this we will be helped in any situation. More important, this turning within will revive our spiritual memory, so that we shall become what we really are, fearless, blissful, conscious of the immortality of the Self and of its nature as the sole reality of the universe. Meister Eckhart calls this spiritual power within us 'the fortress', and it is eternal, higher than the mind, and will never let us down. It is the Witness Consciousness, the utterly calm, changeless Seer of our mental life, above time, infinite, the same in all. This is spiritual reality, and the only source of real security. It is our true Self.

**B.D.**

### A PRAYER

O Hari, the crescent moon is your eyebrow,  
The Milky Way your private walk.  
Spring and autumn are your royal chambers,  
The polar regions your resting places.  
The full moon is your pendant,  
And the cluster of Seven Sisters a brooch on your breast.

The Himalayas proclaim your glory,  
The starry heavens publish your peace.  
The storms are your messengers;  
Death is your telegram bearer.

The universes dwell in you as a twinkle in a star.  
The rising sun brings us your light  
And the darkness is rolled back like a carpet.  
Majestic Rama, we are your manifestations  
And our only duty is to know you as our being  
And adore your semblance as the Creator of the inner  
and outer worlds.

With a splash of the rose-water of detachment,  
Open our eyes to your glory  
And awaken our infatuated hearts to your wisdom.  
Be to our hearts what an oasis is to a traveller in the Sahara.  
Cure us of the myopia of love and hate,  
Of the deformity of love of pleasure.

Sprinkle the perfume of your compassion on our hearts  
And lift up our souls to your infinite Beauty, within and  
without,  
To a vital sense of unity and harmony, to the crying need of  
contemplation of your essence as our Self.

Eternal Sun, sweep away by your rays of enlightenment  
The dew drops of our ambitions, exclusiveness and narrowness,  
Which mar the tranquillity of the spring of our minds.  
Soothe our mercurial hearts with the vernal heat and breezes  
of your devotion.

Majestic Mayavi (magician), lift up your magic wand of  
'That Thou Art'  
And calm the storm of duality in the heart of all.  
May they see the One-without-a-second in the many  
And enjoy the dawn of Knowledge-Devotion as brethren,  
Helping, serving, suffering. OM.

**H.P.S.**

## Some Teachings of Meister Eckhart

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IF WE ARE to pay reverence to all teachers of truth, we should certainly include Meister Eckhart in that category. Not that his world-view would measure up to those of modern science, but his writings, and his spoken words, as copied down from his sermons by his hearers, bear the unmistakable stamp of a mind that has broken through bondage to the finite objects of the world and discovered its identity with the principle of infinity that is their support. In this sense they are a confirmation, if any were needed, of the truth of the central teachings of the Upanishads, and, even more interestingly, an example to show that a Christian theologian living on European soil, and concerned primarily to convey the full weight of his own Christian tradition, can break through the crust of traditional Church dogma, without abandoning it, and find himself in company with the most honoured mystical teachers of Islam and Asia.

Eckhart lived from about 1260 till about 1327. He was born in Thuringia, in the forests of eastern Germany, and he later spent a good part of his life there, in charge of the administration of the various centres for Dominican preaching friars over a wide area of Germany. He was held in the highest esteem, both for his learning and his sanctity. Earlier, he had received his intellectual training in Cologne, under Albert the Great, and later in Paris. Unfortunately, when he came back to Strasbourg and Cologne as preacher late in life, he fell foul of the Bishop of Cologne, who was keen to stamp out heresy and regarded Eckhart's sermons as liable to promote it. The Inquisition committee set up to examine Eckhart's works found 108 sentences from the Latin works and the topics of his German sermons heretical. Eckhart agreed to withdraw whatever he had said that was offensive or could be misconstrued as going against the teaching of the Church, though insisting that his meaning had not been understood by the inquisitors. He managed to get the papers sent to the court of the Pope at Avignon, and the Pope's Commission greatly reduced the number of propositions counted heretical—17 were counted downright heretical and 11 as capable of an interpretation in line with Church teaching but dangerous

all the same. This was in February 1329, and Eckhart was referred to as already dead. He was, so to speak, excommunicated posthumously.

In spite of this attempt at suppression, Eckhart's writings and reputation survived. His two greatest pupils, Suso and Tauler, continued to propagate his teaching in what the Church would have regarded as an ameliorated form, and his Sermons were still copied and discreetly circulated for a few years, as has been demonstrated from surviving manuscripts. Suso continued to pray to his dead master, and had more than one vision of him in dreams. He wrote in his autobiography that 'the holy master Eckhart now lived *in* God and *as* God', and that he (Eckhart) had exhorted him (Suso) in one of the visions to die to all things for God, and to sink into his own self, with deep indifference to all else. More important historically is the fact that when Tauler's sermons came to be printed at Basle in Switzerland in 1521, 55 sermons of the 'teachers and fathers from whom Tauler derived his wisdom' were included at the back, and here the work of Eckhart predominates. Right up until the middle of the nineteenth century, when a search began for manuscripts hidden away in the libraries of cathedral cloisters, these few German Sermons were all that was publicly and directly known of Eckhart's work. It was on the basis of these sermons that the Dane, Bishop Martensen, wrote a book on Eckhart in the early nineteenth century, as did Schmidt of Strasbourg, the latter as a contribution to the Romantic movement in which Germany looked back to discover her spiritual past. It was on the basis of Schmidt's work that Schopenhauer declared that the essence of the wisdom of Christianity was one with that of the Upanishads.

Worth noting is that the Basle edition of Tauler's sermons was early translated into Latin. It has been conjectured that they were studied by St John of the Cross and other Spanish mystics in this form. Traces of Eckhart have been found in the English mystics of the fourteenth century, but in the Low Countries, the devotees were warned against Eckhart, taken as being, in the modern phrase, over the top. Warnings of this kind were given by Ruysbroek, by de Groot and the authors of the *Imitation of Christ*. All this had to do with Eckhart's sermons in German, taken down by members of the various congregations who heard them.

In 1857 industrious search in cloister libraries by Franz Pfaffer brought up nearly 700 pages of German sermons and other pieces, the basis of Miss Evans's two-volume translation and of the more modern three-volume version by Walshe. But substantial parts of his written Latin works also survived, locked away in libraries. The two biggest collections of the Latin works were at Erfurt, Eckhart's home town, so to speak, where they seem to have lain untouched till the late nineteenth century. Above all, there is the collection made by Nicholas of Cusa in his own home town of Cuis or Cusa on the river Meuse, in the extreme west of Rhineland, Germany. This collection, also, was, so to speak, marked 'staff only' and also left untouched till the late nineteenth century. But it was not untouched by Nicholas of Cusa himself. That great fifteenth century churchman, cardinal, scholar, philosopher and saint in all but name, had the Latin works of Eckhart that had survived diligently copied out for him and they manifestly influenced his own work. We can even speak of Eckhart's indirect influence through this channel on Bruno, student of Nicholas, and on Spinoza, student of Bruno, and on the German post-Kantian idealists, students of Spinoza—an influence that was specifically recognized by Hegel. The man who opened up these libraries and made the Latin works known was a Dominican monk and scholar called Denifle, working in the 1880s, a man of quite appalling conceit and such a brutal, sarcastic, destructive critic of other investigators that no-one else dared publish a work or an essay on Eckhart as long as he remained alive.

Dean Inge claimed that Plotinus and Eckhart were the two greatest figures in the history of Christian mysticism. Plotinus was inserted definitively into the Christian tradition by St Augustine, and it is curious to reflect that St Augustine, who could not read Greek properly, was dependent for his knowledge of Plotinus on the Roman scholar Victorinus, whom he met, and the sole characteristic of whom he mentioned in his *Confessions* was his towering conceit. It appears that to transmit a knowledge of a mystic through translation, you do not necessarily have to be of a mystical temperament yourself.

Eckhart's Latin works are in part very technical, and it has taken the Germans 100 years to sort them out and publish them in enormous learned tomes. They are of less appeal to the general public than his

German sermons, because they were written to be read by monks trained in scholastic thought. This article will be based on secondary sources that deal mainly with the German works. But the speaker would like to record his guess that when the Latin works are fully digested and appreciated, an even deeper affinity will be found between Eckhart and the Indian Advaita tradition than that discovered by Rudolf Otto in his famous study of Shankara and Eckhart called *Mysticism East and West*, based on the German works alone.

Let us now look at some illustrations of Eckhart's way of interpreting the Bible, which show how close he often brought its teachings to the teachings of the Upanishads.

To discuss Eckhart's view of the plight of the average sensual man, we need not go too deep into philosophical fundamentals. Eckhart accepted the traditional Christian view that the mortal body is inhabited by an eternal soul. In a sense, he retained the traditional teaching of the Church that since the time of Adam, man was naturally sinful, and that he needed to be, and had been, redeemed by God manifesting on earth as the human being, Jesus, and undergoing voluntarily the most terrible form of death with physical torture. But Eckhart's tendency was to downgrade the importance of Christ's incarnation as a historical fact, capable somehow of redeeming us if we merely believed in it. With Plotinus, Eckhart saw all individual existence, all entry into the realm of manifestation in space and time, as a partial fall from the perfect Being of God into the realm of non-Being, of flux and change, of here-today and gone-tomorrow. And, for him, our basic sin is love for and attachment to our creaturely state as a finite individual. The individual 'is nothing', in the sense that it is but a partial fall of perfect, infinite Being into the realm of time and non-being, and yet in this state, at least in the cases of conscious individuals, the individual feels himself to be everything, or at least everything that matters.

The traditional doctrine of the fall of man with Adam, and his redemption at a particular moment in time through Christ, is transposed by Eckhart into a different key. Sin is part of the natural order, because manifestation implies time, and time implies non-being and defect. In the words of the hymn, 'Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away.' It is the love of our own creaturely, time-infected state that

is the root of all evil, according to Eckhart. It is part of our natural state as creatures, not a tragic visitation that came when Adam sinned, and required to be set right by the birth of a Redeemer long ago. Sin and redemption, for Eckhart, are not to be traced to past events, weighing down on posterity like fate. Both the fall and the redemption by Christ are things which happen in us, here and now. As long as the soul considers itself a creature in time, it is infected with non-being and with sin and suffering. It escapes this fate not through belief in some external past event, but through turning its attention inwards, and discovering and identifying itself with its own true source and origin, in fact its own true nature, the changeless, timeless infinity of God within.

The crude idea that Jesus has saved us if we only believe, was decisively rejected by Eckhart. It is we who have to do the work, not that Jesus has done it for us on the Cross. To be saved is to realize our own true nature as God. But Eckhart's ultimate conception of God was not the personal God of traditional Christianity; it was the Upanishadic conception of infinite Being, and, because infinite, without even internal rifts or subject-object division. Absence of subject-object division might seem to us as blank darkness, and, indeed, to accommodate it to our point of view, Eckhart speaks of it as the desert. But it is only from our present ignorant standpoint that we have to think of it as a desert, because it is the negation of all the finite, changing being that we are used to. As the *Bhagavad Gita* puts it, 'What is night to all beings, therein the self-controlled one is awake. Where all beings are awake, that is the night of the sage who sees.'

Eckhart says that we have to discover the great silence, the unspeakable joy and peace, hidden behind the turmoil of daily activity, and that we have to do it ourselves and in the midst of our activity. He says that it is a skill only learned gradually and through practice. Borrowing an image from the *Enneads* of Plotinus, he compares it to learning how to write. The process is slow and painful to begin with, and requires conscious thought at each step. But in the end, after enough work, it can become automatic. Shri Shankara uses a variant of the same image. Seeing God is a skill that has to be learned gradually, as a jeweller learns to discriminate between different kinds of jewels.

But once learned, it is easy and automatic.

The just man, according to a conception coming down from Plato, is the good man. Of course, man includes woman, and Eckhart was in fact a specialist at preaching to women of mystical proclivities, of whom there were many in Germany at the time. It has been conjectured that some of his German sermons were taken down by women. The just man of Eckhart belongs to the highest conceivable category of humans, what would be called in India, a God-realized man. Although this term is of modern origin and is not found in the ancient Sanskrit classics, it answers exactly to the Upanishadic conception of the true nature of man, not as an individual soul created by God, but as God Himself, with his true nature temporarily obscured by metaphysical ignorance.

To bring his hearers or readers to God is all Eckhart really cared about. But he is faced with the difficulty that confronts anyone who tries to talk about God—how to communicate something infinite with the help of words, which are not designed for such a task. He says that he tries to think up suitable similes, and also arguments, which he thinks help to make an understanding easier. He says at one point, 'I shall make use of natural proofs, so that you yourselves can grasp that it is so, for though I put more faith in the scriptures than in myself, yet it is easier and better for you to learn by means of arguments that can be verified.' A speech without explanations and proofs, he says, is like a blow struck at water.

Eckhart wanted to strip away all images and similes for the soul and for God in the end, to help enable the soul attain a pure intuition of the Absolute. But he acknowledged that as long as the soul was benighted by its self-identification with the body and senses, the Absolute could only be communicated to it through similes. He says, 'for just as the soul is bound up with the body and material things, so whatever spiritual things are to be shown to her must be bound up in material things before she can recognize them.'

In illustration of this, he quotes, rather surprisingly, a practical and not a metaphysical example. He quotes the text, 'What manner of child shall this be?' from the passage, following the Magnificat, about the naming of John the Baptist by Zacharias, his father. Eckhart disregards the historical aspect of this passage as a record of events, and says that

it refers universally to what always has to happen to the soul here and now if the Holy Ghost is to work through it. The state of such a soul must be that of a child, that is, pure joy, which is unblemished. The soul must be pure and clean if the Holy Ghost is to work in her. She must also 'dwell in Sion', where Sion means a height or watchtower. Thus the soul must be elevated above all transitory things, and withdrawn from mortal, impermanent things, and again, she must be on the watch for coming hindrances.

So when Eckhart is talking about similes in scripture, he is thinking primarily about practical hints for the spiritual path that can be derived from it, rather than about concrete images to suggest the nature of metaphysical reality, though these, too, are also found in his work. For Eckhart, the greatest importance of scripture lies not in the facts that it states or the doctrines that it communicates, but in the fact that everything it speaks of can happen to the student. As he puts it, 'that is why I said in Paris that in the righteous man, all things are fulfilled that holy scripture and the prophets ever said of Christ; for, if you are in a right state, then all that was said in the Old and New Testaments will be fulfilled in you.'

Unfortunately, when he goes on to describe the right state, one sees that it is very difficult. He says it means 'in the state where time drops away for you'. There is then no before and after, everything that is, is present and new, and you see there in a single present vision, all that has ever happened or will happen. There, there is neither before nor after, everything is there present, and in this present vision I am possessed of all things. Then, I am in a right state, and then I am truly the only Son, and Christ.

Truth lies within us, he said. No-one finds it who seeks for it in external things. God is most surely found in my inmost depths. On the subject of the futility of the external search for happiness, he quotes the legend about a meeting between Alexander the Great, conqueror of almost all the known world, and the philosopher, Diogenes, alone and penniless in his tub. Diogenes says, 'I am greater than you, as I have given up more than you have conquered. What you would think great to win, I think too small even to despise.'

This teaching is bound up with Eckhart's theory of the double

meaning attached to the word 'soul'. He said that the word 'soul' was used in two completely different meanings. On the one hand, it was used to denote the principle that confers life on the body. But this principle is itself not self-existent. The 'truth' or 'true essence' of the soul as animating principle is something actionless, changeless, simple, above time and space. This higher aspect of the soul, strictly speaking, has no name. It is called 'soul' by a figure of speech, as we might refer to a man as a carpenter, when his essential nature was only to be a man. He is strictly only a carpenter in the act of carpentry, not when he goes home to rest, and he could take up another trade without any change to his essential nature. So 'carpenter' is a kind of convenient misnomer, referring to him by his accidental, inessential characteristics. Similarly, we refer to the true self of man as his soul, meaning by that, the principle that animates his body and thinks in his mind, by a convenient misnomer. Far behind the soul in that sense lies another principle, on which it depends for its existence, which, as Eckhart explicitly says, is beyond name and form, though sometimes referred to as the small spark or as the fortress or by other arbitrary denominations.

Eckhart distinguishes three kinds of knowledge, somewhat in the manner of Spinoza. He says: 'These three things stand for three kinds of knowledge. The first is sense-perception. The eye sees from afar things outside it. The second is rational, and is much higher. The third denotes a noble power of the soul, which is so high and so noble that it takes hold of God in his own Being. This power has nothing in common with anything. It knows no yesterday or tomorrow, for in eternity there is neither yesterday nor tomorrow. There is a present *now*.' This answers to the relationless (*asanga*) ground of all appearances taught in the Upanishads, which is also the ever-present witnessing consciousness in man (*sakshi*), like the small spark of Eckhart.

Eckhart agreed with Aristotle and with Thomas Aquinas that all knowledge begins with sense-perception. The soul is bound to the five senses of hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling by its lower powers. It is through the medium of the sense-organs that the soul comes to know what it has to know for the practical purposes of living. When the senses come into contact with objects, they produce sound, the various touch-sensations, visual images, taste sensations and

sensations of smell. In knowledge of external objects, it is only these sensations that come before the soul, not the objects themselves.

But whatever is perceived can only be perceived by something that is itself imperceptible. The eye could not see anything corporeal, unless it was itself illumined by a light that was non-corporeal. (This is surely a reasonable proposition, as we can see from consideration of the case of a corpse.) In order for my eye to perceive colours, there must be something in me that is free from all colours. This is so even in the case of sense-perception, which is narrow in its scope. The range of thought, however, a faculty which distinguishes human beings from the animals, is declared by Eckhart to be amazing. Unlike the sense-organs, it is not narrowed down to the present place, present time and surrounding matter. I can think of what is overseas as easily as of what is close by. But above the thoughts is the intellect itself, which enquires and seeks. And above the enquiring, seeking intellect, which the Indians would call the *buddhi*, stands an unchanging light. 'I say that it is in this light that all the powers of the soul are exalted.'

Let us just recapitulate these points made by Eckhart about the knowing-powers of the soul. They start with the sense-organs, which yield very incomplete and imperfect knowledge. Higher than the senses is the mind, because of its vastly greater freedom. But higher than the volatile mind is an unchanging light. Without the presence of this light, none of the lower faculties would be of any use whatever. They could not operate. And yet it is expressly said that this light is not anything that could be perceived as we perceive objects.

Finally, we found that Eckhart thought that the word soul was used in different senses, higher and lower. I think that any student of Indian philosophy would see a remarkable resemblance in all this to some of the teachings about the Self or *atman* in the Upanishads. Like the word 'soul', the word *atman* is used in different senses, higher and lower. In very early times it meant breath, and it has been connected by philologists with the Greek word *atmos*, meaning vapour and with the modern term 'atmosphere'. By the time of the Upanishads, the meaning of the word *atman* had come to be refined, and the word was by then usually used to refer to the metaphysical reality, of which the world is a distorted appearance, and as that which shines as changeless

consciousness in all human beings—in fact, as the soul in the highest meaning of that term given by Eckhart. The word used for the soul in its lower sense was *jiva*.

Here is a short passage from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* which shows how close the thought of the old Upanishadic seers was to the teachings of Eckhart.

He, the Self, entered in here (the body) even to the tips of the nails, as a razor is hidden in a razor-case. Him they see not, for as seen, he is incomplete. When breathing he is called the vital force, when speaking, the voice, when seeing, the eye, when hearing, the ear, when thinking, the mind. These are merely the *names* of his acts. He who meditates on one or other of these functions does not know the Self, for the Self, as associated with one or other of these functions alone, is incomplete. The Self is to be meditated upon in itself, for in it all these functions become one.

The Upanishad later makes it clear that even if we speak of meditating on the Self as it is in itself, this does not mean that it can be known as an object. Meditating on the Self means, in the end, the difficult task of learning how to inhibit all thought of objects. Then what remains is the Self, shining in perfect peace and beatitude. When the mind is silenced, what remains over is the presence of God untrammelled, and not mediated through any organ such as the senses or the mind.

In the same spirit, Eckhart points out that anything we know which comes to us from outside implies an impression, however slight, an element of passivity, if you like, of unfreedom and bondage. If we are to know God, he says, it must be without means, without a medium of any kind, and then nothing alien to God as our own true nature can enter in. He goes on to say that if we do see God in this light, it must be quite private and indrawn, without the intrusion of anything created. Then we have an immediate knowledge of eternal life.

Of course, Eckhart and the Upanishads are here talking about the very summit of spiritual life. All great things, as Spinoza has said, are as difficult as they are rare: *omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara*.

So let us hear a little of what Eckhart says about the humbler activity of preparation, which must come first. We need a teacher and a teacher

who not merely teaches us how to read the texts, but also teaches us how to live. A teacher of how to live, he says, is a thousand times more holy than a teacher of how to read.

Then we need to be active if we are to improve, to be up and doing. Probably most people remember the mention in St Luke of the two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha, if I may so express it, did all the running about, while Mary sat at His feet and heard His word. Eventually, Martha began to feel the strain and said, 'Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.' Jesus thanks Martha for all her trouble, but adds: 'But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.' Eckhart interprets this in an unexpected way—in favour of Martha. He treated Mary sitting, still at the Lord's feet, as literally a school-girl, and one who had only just gone to school, who needed to be instructed in how to live. Mary, he said, was filled with joy and bliss, listening, and had only just entered school to learn to live. Martha was older and had already been through her schooling, and was able to live. Martha, according to Eckhart, was not just complaining that Mary was doing nothing, and all the work was falling on her. She was saying, 'Lord, I do not like to see Mary just sitting there for joy. I want her to learn life and possess it in essence. Bid her arise that she may be perfect.'

But Eckhart has a good word for Mary too, in a most interesting and unexpected sense. Mary, he says, was not the real Mary while she was only sitting at Christ's feet. And then he applies the historical story, as was his way, to the spiritual life in general for everyone. He says, 'I term Mary a well-disciplined body obedient to a wise soul. By obedient, I mean that whatever understanding dictates, the will accepts.' Later he adds:

And so, when Mary sat at the feet of our Lord, she was learning, for she had just gone to school to learn how to live. But later on, when Christ had gone to heaven and she received the Holy Ghost, she began to serve; she travelled overseas and preached and taught, acting as a servant and washerwoman to the disciples. Only when the saints become saints do they do good works, for then they gather the treasure

of eternal life. Whatever is done before, repays old debts and averts punishment. For this, we find evidence in Christ. From the beginning, when God became man and man became God, he began to work for our salvation, right to the end, when he died on the cross. Not a limb of his body but practised particular virtues. That we may follow him faithfully in the practice of true virtue, may God help us. Amen.

**A.J.A.**

### **FROM THE WRITINGS OF HENRY SUSO**

*a pupil of Meister Eckhart*

What is the goal of a truly detached person in all things? It is to sink away from self, and with the self, all things sink away.

What is the smallest obstacle? A thought. What is the greatest obstacle? When the soul remains under the control of its own will.

Do not press yourself on anyone too much. Where the most importunity is, there one is sometimes the least pleasing. A humble and restrained manner of conduct is proper for you. Whenever someone does not act in accordance with what sort he is, it does not well suit him.

There are many more rational people than simple people. People are called rational if reason leads them, but the multiplicity of things as they are in themselves disappears for simplicity because of simplicity's quiet nature. Its manner of seeing is different. Simplicity becomes somehow the very being of the simple person. And he is an instrument and a child (of God).

Letting one's senses wander about far and wide removes a person from inwardness.

From *Henry Suso*, translated and edited by Frank Tobin, Paulist Press, New York, 1989. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

# The Eternal Wisdom

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

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## The day of the Guru Puja

IN ANCIENT times, the holy contemplatives who dwelt in the Himalayan region pursued the truth of the identity of the individual soul with the cosmic soul, discarding as futile all the pomp and power of the world. They used to set apart one day in the year to be devoted to the worship of the holy Teachers (Guru Puja) by their own serving and loving disciples.

This day of the Guru Puja falls in the middle of the rainy season. Preparations to observe it are made weeks before the actual occasion. Each disciple collects the best gifts that he can procure for his Guru and offers them on the day dedicated for this purpose. Those disciples who have finished their studies and have gone to distant places, also return to their Gurus on this day. They cross rivers in flood, they scale high mountains, they pass through dense forests—yet they come! It is their faith and their sense of gratitude for the holy knowledge received from the selfless Guru which prompts them to return to him, the living source of their enlightenment.

Today is the day of the Guru Puja. The disciples of Shri Yajnavalkya have decorated with leaves and garlands a spot on the bank of the sacred river Alaknanda. They have spread tiger-skins on the ground and set up a canopy of yellow cloth. Some of them have brought manuscripts, some new sandals, some loin-cloths, some shawls for the holy mothers; and each disciple has brought fruit and flowers which are arranged in baskets before the high seat, traditionally called the 'lion throne', set apart for the illustrious sage.

Though it is the rainy season in the Himalayas, today sunshine bathes the whole valley and birds are singing in the neighbouring woods. The green lawns studded with daisies, and the rocks decorated with gentians, are crowded with youthful figures, men and women, whose hearts are beating with expectation.

The tall, majestic figure of Shri Yajnavalkya, carrying a wooden

water bowl and a staff, emerges from the hermitage. He is followed by two young female disciples, one carrying an antelope skin and a rosary of rudraksha beads, the other, a clean cloth and a bundle of manuscripts. As the sage slowly walks forward, his eyes are directed towards the ground. He pauses, and softly sings the chant of an ancient Sanskrit verse, as if he were whispering a secret in a musical language to an invisible being:

From me all this is born;  
By me all is maintained;  
In me all phenomena are dissolved.  
Unchanged, eternal, immortal, all bliss,  
I abide in myself.

The two attendant disciples wait for any orders. Their faces are serene and, though in the prime of life, they look like two heavenly beings. Their eyes, their very souls, follow the movements of the holy sage.

After a short time Shri Yajnavalkya advances; a few birds are circling round him. Now the disciples have seen their master. They shout: 'Jai! Jai! Jai!' As the Teacher comes nearer, all heads touch the ground in reverence. Shri Yajnavalkya lifts his hand and says three times: 'May you be fearless!'

He occupies the seat set apart for him. About a hundred souls stand in reverence, holding flowers. They chant:

Guru is Brahma;\*  
Guru is Vishnu;  
Guru is the Lord Shiva;  
Guru, verily, is Brahman Himself;  
Reverence to that holy Guru.

\* According to Hindu tradition, the Divine Power has three aspects with relation to the universe: Brahma, Creator; Vishnu, who sustains the universe thus created; and Shiva, who presides over its 'withdrawal' at the end of a 'world-period'. Brahma is not to be confused with Brahman, the impersonal Absolute.

The Teacher raises his hand. All are seated, and the great sage then addresses them. He says:

‘My children, the supreme purpose of life being the realization of infinite Consciousness in your own being, you have to work diligently to acquire a direct intuitive perception of Truth. One who is without strength cannot attain to the direct perception of Self (Atman). Strength does not mean physical strength. It means unflinching faith, courage, the will to sacrifice, perseverance in the spirit of dedication of the whole personality

‘Physical force accounts for little in our daily life. I have seen a child of twelve guiding a mighty tusker, sitting on his neck. Everyone has the strength to know the Truth. It grows by cultivation, by the practice of renunciation (*tyaga*) and by the discipline of asceticism (*tapas*).

‘The power of mental concentration on a spiritual object is the real strength of man. Such a man meditates on Truth in the morning, in the evening, at noon in the blazing sun, or at night under the star-filled heaven.

‘The mind of such a man is liquid: it is moulded into love of the abstract truth. Those who follow this path receive setbacks. They are visited by storms of passions and moods. Failure and uncertainty are whispered into their ears. Yet they persevere unflinchingly and steadily, with renunciation and meditation on: “I am That! I am That!”

‘It is not a brilliant intellect nor is it a well-filled brain which leads the soul to the great truth “All is God” (*Kham Brahman*). Make yourself worthy of illumination and it will shine forth through you. Your desires and thoughts are registered in the primordial mind-stuff (*Hiranyagarbha*, the ‘cosmic mind’). Let them be pure, selfless and elevating. Strive for the liberation of Hiranyagarbha from the self-imposed restrictions in maya.

‘Countless individualized beings await your attainment of illumination, as swarms of bees are waiting for the blossoming forth of the buds, to extract the honey of the holy wisdom from them. This is the supreme duty of each individual, just as it is the duty of a seed to grow into a plant, into buds and blossoms. Absolute self-reliance, inner self-independence is the key to the door of enlightenment. Om Tat Sat!’

As the holy sage ended his discourse, the disciples rose and offered salutations to him, crying: 'Jai!' The Teacher blessed them and said:

‘My children, you have fulfilled a great tradition today and have come nearer to the spiritual truth. Anything that reduces the weight of one’s individuality and expands the consciousness should be welcomed; while anything that stresses individuality and narrows the functions of the mind is to be considered as an impediment. OM.’

Shri Yajnavalkya then left the assembly, a few of his disciples following him to the ashrama, bearing the baskets containing the gifts.

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The yogi-*raja* entered his library, which consisted of a thatched cottage of three rooms. The manuscripts inscribed on bark, carefully tied and wrapped in pieces of cloth, were resting on planks of wood attached to the mud walls. The floor was covered with a few tiger-skins, and some seats of kusha grass were spread about the room. He sat down on a black antelope skin and was merged in meditation.

Then, from the shelves, he took out an ancient manuscript and read the eight chapters on The Adoration of Rudra, from the Rig-Veda. At last the manuscript dropped from his hands. He sat like a statue. The room was filled with the radiations of his purity; it seemed as if even the wind washed its feet before entering this holy of holies.

The sun sank below the horizon. A young woman, her hair flowing loosely on her shoulders, wearing a sari of coarse cotton cloth, silently entered the room. She took down a one-stringed instrument hanging in one of the corners and tuned it carefully. Then, to its accompaniment, she sang:

Salutations to that Guru who is transcendental bliss,  
The giver of delight!  
He who is One;  
Who is Brahman in human form;  
Free from the pairs of opposites;  
Brahman, to be understood by the great utterances,  
such as ‘Tat twam asi’ (That Thou Art);

The Witness of all;  
The one compassionate Teacher.

The Maharishi opened his eyes and the young disciple stood with folded hands and said: ‘Blessed one, they are waiting in the meditation hall for your august presence; it is the time of worship.’

Shri Yajnavalkya stood up like a flame slowly emerging out of a rock, and walked with the disciple to the adoration chamber.

**H.P.S.**

### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT\***

The world is a school; it neither improves nor degenerates to any appreciable degree—it is the pupils who do that. When it has educated a student up to a certain point, its work with him is at an end, and he must enter higher and more advanced centres of learning.

Liberation is the goal of Yoga, and it is the goal of life as well. Both life and Yoga afford countless opportunities for a man to learn how to free himself from his servant-like status and take his seat on the throne of omniscience! But whereas, in the case of life, these opportunities often pass by unnoticed, Yoga is a conscious process, which means that the pupil is taught to turn every happening to his own ends, that is, to analyse and learn from it.

The mind is not a territory in which we can live out our lives, but an instrument which is subject to manipulation, that is, which is responsive to, and capable of change and expansion, and this is the assumption on which all training is based, otherwise it would not make sense.

\*From *Training the Mind through Yoga* by Marjorie Waterhouse

## **The Taittiriya Upanishad**

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THE WORD ‘man’ as in ‘mankind’ can be traced back to an ancient Sanskrit word root, *man*, which means ‘to think’. Our species is forever thinking, scheming, dreaming, intending. Such a large part of our mental activity has to do with the future that we have to be reminded to live in the present by wise people.

Another department of our minds is concerned with inquiry, rather than a manipulation of circumstances with a view to getting what we want. Many are the questions asked by inquiring minds, such as the old Aristotelian question, ‘What is the good life?’ and the Platonic question, ‘What is Absolute Good?’ Such inquiries seem innocent but may arouse opposition. Socrates ended his days by drinking the hemlock because he asked too many penetrating questions and taught the young to do the same.

Then there are the thousands of questions which give rise to the sciences. Many of these inquiries have met overt opposition from those who have a vested interest in, say, the inerrancy of the Bible. But resistance to inquiry does not only come from without. Charles Darwin had an energetic promoter in Thomas Huxley, who was no mean scientist himself. Huxley once challenged an audience to write an accurate description of a rose. This is the fundamental activity of science: to describe things as they appear to the senses. He observed that anyone who tries to describe a rose will rapidly become aware of how inept, inaccurate, lazy and incompetent his or her own mind is.

This is very true. Especially in the modern world, where we have devices which do everything for us, where we have media to do our thinking for us and make our observations, people tend to be as mentally inactive as they are becoming physically obese. This is sad because it is the fact that we have a conscious mind, taken in the broadest sense, which makes us human. Mind comes from the same root, *man*.

Lazy-minded or not, we all have a desire for knowledge. But which inquiries are the most important? Jesus said, Don’t ask ‘What shall we eat or what shall we wear?’ because everybody asks these questions.

We may infer that he wanted his listeners to make a deeper inquiry than gastronomy or fashion has to offer.

Scientific inquiries have been wonderfully fruitful. But no-one can say that science has conferred wisdom and peace on humanity. The world of values has not been reduced to science. There is no agreed solution on the questions, 'Is it better to be rich or just to have enough?', 'Should we be compassionate or is it merely a form of weakness?', 'What type of society is best?' Any one of these questions is interesting and could consume a lifetime of effort. As usual, we cannot do everything, go everywhere, know everything. The shortness of our life forces us to choose.

There is a question which can claim to be primary. It is likely to raise the greatest inner and outer opposition. It is simply, 'Who am I?' In ordinary life this question is not allowed; it is inadmissible. It is axiomatic that a normal person knows who he or she is. Adhyatma Yoga does not deny this level of self-knowledge, but teaches that it is incomplete. We do not know ourselves until we know the reality within. All the Upanishads deal with this question, 'Who am I?' The fact that the question is so central explains why these writings have a claim upon our attention.

In the third section of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the pupil Bhrigu goes to his father Varuna and asks, 'Teach me, Sir, what is Brahman?' That is, what is the essential reality of everything including myself. Varuna gives him various preliminary ideas, and then says, 'That from whom all beings are born, in whom they live and into whom they finally enter, Him do thou desire to know, He is Brahman.' This universal self is not the limited individual body or person we consider ourselves to be.

Given that we do not know ourselves, our knowledge of anything else would seem to be insecure. How do we know what is truly important if we are living a half-truth? If we do not know ourselves, how can we truly know anyone else?

'Who am I?' It is a subversive question and pulls the rug from beneath all our mental habits. There was a teacher of Vedanta, Ramana Maharshi, who gave this question to his disciples for meditation, and little else. But as with all quests, there is opposition, and it will likely

be found, if one embarks on such a discipline, that the ego sweeps it back under the rug as fast as possible. Like all inquiries, the quest of self requires some discipline, persistence and preparation. As is it so evidently central, it requires at least as much commitment as any other serious inquiry. There are no real obstacles to Self-Knowledge—after all, it is your own Self and no one can take it away from you—but through the discipline and practice of the spiritual Yoga, it is as if you convince yourself that you really want to know.

Hari Prasad Shastri described the climax of this process as 'the final relaxation' or as the 'Great Peace'. This is not the temporary peace you may experience as you sink into a warm bubble bath with a double whisky and the latest offering from your favourite novelist! It is independent of outer conditions and confers complete fearlessness. As the Upanishad teaches, when there is no other, no alien, how can there be fear?

Although this reality is beyond the grasp of the mind, nonetheless the question, 'Who am I?' has an answer which sometimes finds expression in ecstatic utterances. So the *Taittiriya* gives us the statement of a sage called Trishanku after the attainment of realization: 'I am the invigorator of the tree of the world... My source is the pure Brahman. I am like that pure reality that is in the sun. I am the effulgent wealth. My wisdom is divine, and I am immortal and undecaying.'

Trishanku was someone like us. He saw the sun rise and set, he watched the stars moving in the sky. No doubt he ate many bowls of rice, maybe he was married. We don't know who his teacher was. But that is what he said and it was remembered.

The commentator remarks: 'It can be understood that the self-repetition of Trishanku's words is calculated to lead to knowledge.' In our meditations we use such texts which affirm the infinity and glory of our inmost reality or self. We may feel well, we may feel sick, but such statements express the spiritual truth and banish the little limitations which we impose on ourselves.

This vision of unity is the birthright of everyman, because there is a scintilla, a little sparkle of consciousness in the heart, which is connected with infinity. Life is less than life until we find it, or are found of it.

The commentator continues: 'It becomes evident that the visions of the seers with regard to the Self, become revealed to one who engages in the obligatory duties enjoined in the Vedas and Smritis, who is devoid of selfish motives, and who hankers after the realization of the supreme Brahman (the Absolute).'

As is well known, a civilisation existed in ancient India which was quite independent of any other. The Vedas and Smritis were the extensive scriptures which were memorized by the caste called the Brahmins and which gave ethical and religious guidance on every department of life. There were very many do's and don'ts which maintained the family, the community, the society and, as they saw it, the whole cosmos.

So Shankara expected those who wished to have the vision of the wise to behave well in the terms of the society of his day. The *Taittiriya* records the universal aspect of this ethic in the final instruction given by a teacher to his students.

Speak the truth. Practise good conduct. Make no mistake about the value of study. Offer wealth to the teacher. Have a family. There should be no inadvertence about truth. There should be no deviation from righteous activity. There should be no error in caring for oneself. Do not be careless about learning and teaching. There should be no error in the duties towards the gods. Let your mother be a goddess to you. Let your father be a god to you. Let your teacher be a god to you. Let your guest be a god to you. Those actions of ours which are commendable are to be followed by you, but not the others.

In Attenborough's film, *Gandhi*, there is a scene where the young Mahatma is standing dressed as a western barrister, with highly polished black lace-up shoes. The children come in and lay their heads at his feet. It is shocking for a Westerner because we forget that Gandhi himself laid his head at his father's feet and so on back in a chain. 'Pitri devo bhava—let your father be a god to you.' There are few things that can cause more grief to a human heart than a bad son or daughter. Conversely, few things cause more joy than good ones.

Cultures and habits are different, but the human heart is one. All good ethics are based on a knowledge of it. Dr Shastri spent many years

in China and found much to admire in Chinese culture. There was a quality much prized there called 'Jen', which means human-heartedness. He said that once you made a friend of a Chinese person, you had a friend for life. He admired the great care they had for their parents and the elderly.

Very recently, an accident took place in a town in Guangdong province. A little two year-old girl walked out into a street and was run over by a van. The van didn't stop and shortly after, another vehicle hit her. All this was captured on a street video. Worse was to come. The little girl lay bleeding profusely in the street. No less than eighteen people walked past, glanced at the girl and then walked on. This is not human-hearted. The Chinese media engaged in great soul-searching when the event was publicised. How can we have become a society which behaves like this?

It is easy to see how upset any Chinese mother, or any mother, or anyone at all, would be by this incident. The little girl was finally attended to by the nineteenth, a peasant woman, who alerted the mother. She was taken to intensive care in a local military hospital. Sadly, her life could not be saved.

In 1864, Karl Marx was asked to be the Secretary of the newly formed International Working Men's Association. They produced a founding document which was far too complicated and confused to serve its purpose and Marx rewrote the whole thing to everyone's satisfaction. He was a great man of letters in his way. In a letter to Engels, with whom he shared his real aims and intentions, he wrote:

My proposals were all accepted by the sub-committee. Only I was obliged to insert two phrases about 'duty' and 'right' into the preamble to the statutes, ditto 'truth, morality and justice', but these are placed in such a way that they can do no harm.

In Marx's view, these words belonged to the vocabulary of those who oppressed the proletariat and were anti-revolutionary. Truth, morality and justice: just a way of grinding the faces of the poor and fattening the purses of the capitalists. The later *Communist Manifesto* left all such words behind. Anything which promoted the revolution was good, however treacherous or dishonest. Material reality, economic reality,

was the only reality, and the workers would come to inherit the wealth of the world after the revolution had taken place. Politics and economics are dirty games anywhere, but anyone who reads the history of Communism will easily understand how human-heartedness can become politically incorrect.

In point of fact, there are cases all over the world where severely injured people are ignored and left to die by those who could help them. Most people know Jesus's story of the Good Samaritan. He had been asked to say what the word neighbour means. All Jewish people know that they are meant to love their neighbours. The Samaritans were the most despised people of the day. The story went that a man went from Jerusalem to Jericho, was set upon by thieves and left dying by the side of the road. A priest came along and 'walked by on the other side of the road'. He would certainly have been familiar with the words 'Truth, Morality and Justice.' Perhaps he was rushing to preach a sermon on them. Then the Samaritan came by and stopped and took care of the injured man. He was a true neighbour because he was human-hearted.

No-one has a monopoly of ignorance, but it is very arguable that things become darker if truth, morality and justice are written out of the constitution. If there is no truth, morality or justice, who can you trust? This is how tyrannies always work. Your wife, your brother, your son: any of them could inform on you to the authorities. Soon you hardly know that you have suppressed your own thoughts and feelings.

What really matters in connection with these words truth, morality, justice, *Jen*, is: are they real to you? Is the meaning of these words alive in you?

There is no possibility of self-realization when one has an addiction or obsession. Why? Because the addict has made himself smaller than the drug to which he is addicted. He subjects himself to it. Likewise, if we treat our neighbours with cruelty, indifference, if we exploit them for our private personal pleasure, we shall not be visited by spiritual wisdom. The Marxian view is based on the division of humanity into antagonistic classes. But in the *Bhagavad Gita* we read that the man of wisdom sees himself in all. The spiritual vision is a vision of unity.

Seeing oneself in all, in old and young, male and female, pink, yellow, brown or black, proletarian, bourgeois or whatever, what

occasion would there be for harming anyone else? Quite the reverse. One would work for their wellbeing as for one's own. There should be no mistake in caring for oneself, says the *Taittiriya*!

It will be very hard to make progress on this way unless one is in a right relation with others. So the Upanishad says, speak the truth, do your duty, practise good conduct and so on.

The *Taittiriya* has three sections: the pupil part, which concludes with the words quoted; the bliss part, *anandavalli*; and the final part, named for a disciple called *Bhrigu*.

The second part begins:

The knower of Brahman attains the highest. With regard to that, there is an [even older] verse or mantra, 'Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity'. He who knows Brahman who lives in the intellect, in the supreme space in the heart, enjoys all desirable things simultaneously, being identified with Brahman.

The Upanishad makes it clear that this spiritual realization is the climax of human life. There is nothing beyond it. It asks us to imagine the happiness of a young man in the prime of life, good, learned, expeditious, most strongly built and energetic and wealthy. Call that one unit of human joy. Multiply this unit of joy one hundred times and it will equal the joy of a man-gandharva (an angel, we might say); then that is a unit of joy of the man-gandharva. The joy of the man of realization, who is free from desire, is equal to that. Multiply that joy one hundred times and it will equal the joy of a divine-gandharva (say, an archangel). The joy of a man of realization, who is free from desire, is equal to that. And so it goes on up the chain of being, multiplying by one hundred at every step, leading us to think that the joy and bliss of a man of realization is unlimited and infinite.

In the sad and troubled human world depicted by the media, beset by all sorts of worries and anxieties as many of us are, it is hard to credit the spiritual truth. Does anyone have the right to be blissful? But the Yoga doesn't deal in rights; it is a question of verifiable Truth.

Besides, there is always something to worry about. Before the Cold War, there was the Second World War, before that the Great Depression, before that the First World War which was going to be

over by Christmas 1914, before that the Boer War. In 1780 there were riots in London, now called the Gordon riots. A bill had been passed in Parliament which emancipated Roman Catholics and allowed them to work in England. Naturally they poured in from Ireland—it was the canal building age—undercutting the wages of the locals. Immigration was the issue! Lord Gordon whipped up the London mob and they swarmed everywhere, causing mayhem. There was no police force, but some of the rioters were hauled before the magistrates, who had the power to put them in prison. But the magistrates soon became reluctant to do their duty because the rioters turned up at the magistrates' houses and broke all their windows. In the end George III had to call out the troops. 285 rioters were shot dead, and 450 arrested. After that the rioters went home.

There will be always be something to worry about. Our whole culture or civilisation feeds on anxiety; we don't notice because we are all in a similar state. If you have the appetite for fruitless worry, someone will feed it and you will probably pay for it. An anxious mind is in motion from morning till night. It can be made to stop, by one of life's great shocks, such as the death of a parent, or the news the one has a terminal disease.

Or you can decide to stop it. The mind is one of your faculties, an organ. It can be turned in any direction just as surely as you can turn your arm or hand, even if only for a while, if one's attention span is short. The problem is that one's mind builds up a set of habitual tracks it likes to run down. You can say the mind develops a mind of its own. The more complicated and conflicted you are, the more of a mind of its own it has.

We all have to live with ourselves, so speak the truth, practise morality and justice. An ethical life contributes to a good, constructive society. It is a great thing if you have nothing to blame yourself for. If you cannot get a good night's sleep because of nagging thoughts, how will you meditate?

In this Yoga, you have to learn to decide what the contents of your mind are to be, and not leave it to the dictation of the media, your neighbours, your boss, your family or your passions. This may require much patience because one's mind needs to be re-trained. But it is one

great benefit of meditation that you learn, perhaps with almost infinite patience and care, to make it dwell on something you have chosen for a focus. If we persist we find that not only the foreground but the background of our minds is changed and enlightened.

The *Taittiriya* presents us with a picture of man's physical, mental and spiritual make-up as comprised of five *kosha* or sheaths surrounding a central light. These sheaths are arranged one inside the other like Russian dolls, but each is more subtle than the one before as you go inwards. The outermost is the food sheath, the *anna-maya-kosha*, which is the physical body. Our bodies come from food, are sustained by food and in the end become food for other creatures. The next is the sheath of *prana*, breath and life. Without this, the food sheath is inert and is not energized. We can see that energy, life, breath is that from which everything comes, by which everything is sustained and into which it finally returns.

The same is true of each sheath as we go inwards. Within is the sheath of the lower mind, *mano-maya-kosha*. This is the realm of perception and reaction. The *manas* ('lower mind') organizes the perceptions of the senses into a single picture. A scientist discovered recently that in seeing what is in front of us, only one quarter is provided by sense data, by the light coming into our eyes. The remaining three quarters is filled in by the mind on the basis of previous experience and expectation. So the *mano-maya-kosha* has plenty of work to do. The next sheath inwards is the *vijnana-maya-kosha*, the sheath of knowledge, higher mind. Almost everybody has a similar experience in meditation. One sits down with a particular intention that the mind should consider such and such a thought, or attend to such and such a visualization. There is the knowledge that this practice is said to lead to certain results. But the lower mind wanders off like a sheep in the field looking for a nice tuft of grass.

With patience, the lower mind needs to be brought again and again to the focus and in the end it will become accustomed to being relatively still and begin to enjoy it. This *kosha* of knowledge, determination, decision, has the power to govern the *mano-maya-kosha*, but it tends to be rather weak. We can go for years in our ordinary life without making any decision at all.

Within this *kosha* of decision, there is one more: the *ananda-maya-kosha*, the bliss sheath. Dr Shastri remarked that just as a mountain peak catches the first rays of the sun at dawn, this higher mind, sometimes called *buddhi*, can catch the first rays of the inner bliss. *Anandam* means bliss. Bhrigu's question, 'What is Brahman?', was answered by his realization, in his meditation, that bliss is Brahman. In this Upanishad, Brahman is also called *satyam-jnanam-anantam*: Truth, knowledge and infinity. Bliss sounds very attractive and yet this *anandam* is infinitely greater than any pleasure or worldly happiness, as we saw with the sequence starting from the young man who had it all. All the bliss which we ordinarily experience is based on the contact of our senses with outer objects. So to correct that possibility, it is called *satyam*—the innermost unchanging reality. To dispel the idea that bliss is non-conscious and therefore less than a person, it is called *jnanam*, knowledge/consciousness. But all the knowledge we know is knowledge of finite objects, and so the knowledge of the nature of Brahman is called *anantam*, meaning infinite. We see how the teaching is a kind of staircase of self-correction which leads towards that which is most inner, most subtle, most subjective in us, namely the Self.

Shankara held that what we do in life, which for him was principally our religious duties—*karma*—could not lead to liberation. Only spiritual knowledge can bring about liberation. But if one performs one's *karma* faithfully, with no selfish motives, then one's mind and heart would become pure and simple in a good sense. One would acquire integrity. In that type of mind the spiritual knowledge might arise. What is this knowledge? It is not ordinary knowledge which always involves a subject and an object. It is rather the answer to the question, 'Who am I?'

The Upanishads give us a method: hearing, cogitating, contemplating. First, we have to become silent. If we cannot become silent, we only hear what is circulating in our own minds. Once silent, we listen and gather information, materials, stories from the spiritual teachings. Some parts of what we hear will seem interesting, so we make a note of it. We read something from the great scriptures which have inspired people for millennia.

The next step involves cogitating, thinking things over, mulling

through what we have heard. If we hear a talk, it is best to sit down afterwards and recall the most significant points. At this stage, constructive reasoning and questioning is important. The Adhyatma Yoga, the philosophy of Self-Knowledge, is more than reasonable. It rests on some assumptions, such as that there is a spiritual reality, that there is something called self-realization and that our self-knowledge may deepen as we progress spiritually. But all inquiry rests on assumptions.

This is another verse from the *Taittiriya*: 'The enlightened man is not afraid of anything after realizing that Bliss of Brahman, failing to reach which, words turn back together with the mind.'

After we have adjusted our lives in a simple way so that we are in harmony with our fellows, we have the possibility of appreciating the teachings about what our nature is. We listen and then think them over. 'Who am I?' becomes a living question. Perhaps we begin to appreciate the value of truth, goodness, justice to the human heart. But in the end we have to go deeper than the mind. Listening, cogitating, contemplating, The last process is different: a deep unshakeable concentration on the truth leads beyond the mind.

The mind will take you a long way, but in the end, words together with the mind fall back from reality, Bliss, Brahman. What can be said then? The enlightened man is not afraid of anything.

One of Dr Shastri's fellow disciples said, 'I was not one of the best of the Guru's disciples, but he conferred the realization on me'. Another man, a friend of one of Dr Shastri's disciples, just said, 'One day my boat came in.' He also remarked, 'Wherever I go, a family forms around me.' He didn't have any blood children, but he found himself the centre of a family wherever he stayed.

Fearlessness, human-heartedness, a feeling of oneness: doesn't that make a good definition of a good family?

**A. S-B.**

## Think ‘I am’ not ‘I am someone’

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PEOPLE SOMETIMES express their desire for a better life experience by saying that they need to ‘find themselves’. We may hear of a friend or acquaintance who has gone to India for six months in order ‘to find himself’. It can be any place, usually distant, that gives us a sense of immunity from the old associations, and holds the promise of time and space in which to think and meditate.

‘Finding oneself’ is linked with the idea of making a new beginning. If only we could shake off the type-casting forced on us by friends, family, colleagues, supervisors and society generally, we feel our consciousness will flower free from restrictions. Deep down, we know our higher worth and want to realize it. This desire to re-connect with something pure and untainted is a genuine need of the soul and a sign of spiritual growth. Hari Prasad Shastri once composed a prayer which begins: ‘I am tired of this superficial living. Desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, do not give the peace my mind needs.’ Yoga is very much concerned with ‘finding oneself’.

But we do not need an outer journey to free our consciousness. Through Yoga, we can change our inner environment, creating a better mental and spiritual state. The final reward is not temporary relief. It is permanent inner enlightenment. The spiritual Yoga, if studied and practised, will reveal a dimension of being that transcends personality, and is whole and complete. Most interesting of all, this level of our being is indicated by the simple, everyday phrase, ‘I am’.

Let us glance at this little phrase, which at first sight seems too meagre to stand alone. Surely it is only meaningful if linked with qualities, actions, or describable conditions: ‘I am surprised’, ‘I am hurrying’, ‘I am in the garden’, and so on. Does ‘I am’ really make sense when detached from such associations? Can the contemplation of ‘I am’, divested of its richness of association, mean anything except loss?

In Goethe’s great drama of spiritual aspiration, *Faust*, at a certain point Faust is handed a small key, a symbol of wisdom and intuition. His reaction is: ‘That little thing?’ But he is told: ‘Take hold of it, not

undervaluing!’ By holding firmly to the key, he is led to regions of sublime experience. In a similar way, the spiritual teaching is that this ‘I am’, this level of fundamental being, penetrates and supports all experience. It is nothing finite or limited, but it is ‘where’ the infinite Divine Being may be realized in man. ‘I am that I am’, says the Lord in the Bible. If we want expansion through ‘finding oneself’, the contemplation of ‘I am’ will prove a key.

In Yoga, this ‘I am’ receives our attention and gratitude. It has a status which is holy or divine. Those who have fathomed the mystery declare this dimension of being to be timeless, absolute and purely spiritual. In its fully revealed nature, it is known as the source of all knowledge and joy, hence it is signified by the term existence-consciousness-bliss absolute, *sat-chit-ananda*. There is a verse of Shri Shankara:

‘I am Brahman (the Absolute), ever the same and most peaceful, by nature reality, consciousness and bliss. I am not the body, which is ever changing and unreal.’ This the wise call knowledge (*jnana*).

*Direct Experience of Reality, 24*

Those who have read about the Victorian poet, Tennyson, will recall how, in early life, he used to go into a kind of meditation. His boyhood was in many ways an unhappy one. He often felt himself to be without outer supports, and wished to die. But then he stumbled on a method of self-reflection which brought new light and reassurance. This involved repeating his own name silently, alone—that name, he says, which is ‘the symbol of myself’. This led to a remarkable discovery, which he wrote about much later in life, both in his poem, ‘The Ancient Sage’, and in autobiographical comments.

More than once when I  
Sat all alone, revolving to myself  
The word that is the symbol of myself,  
The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,  
And passed into the Nameless, as a cloud  
Melts into Heaven. I touch’d my limbs, the limbs  
Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,  
But utter clearness, and thro’ loss of self

The gain of such large life as matched with ours  
Were sun to spark.

We note he said that the life he gained—or glimpsed—was something so great that our little everyday life, in comparison, was like a spark in the presence of the sun. There was nothing dream-like about this experience. He insisted that it was clear and sure. He has written elsewhere that it made death seem ‘an almost laughable impossibility’.

This region of widened self-awareness has its source in the spiritual dimension of our being, which normally lies beyond our reach, like an unknown continent. Its superior quality is evident from the poet’s words. It drew him inwards, so that even ordinary thought itself was lost in that vision of glory. Tennyson here, according to the yogis, stands for every human. Each and every person is ‘fixed’ on a divine centre, as the spokes of a wheel are fixed on the hub, to use an image from the Upanishads.

The poet did not have the benefit of a spiritual teacher, a real ‘ancient sage’, to help him understand the significance of his experiences. In later life, he admits that he had lost ‘this grace’, and his wife said that he felt this loss—as well he might.

The purpose of Adhyatma Yoga is to investigate and solve this riddle of self-knowledge once and for all. Progress in this quest can only be made if certain conditions are met. These include inner quietude, reverence and sensitivity to the deeper values of life. Man also needs to be weaned from his natural egoism, to allow him to rest and merge in the deeper ‘centre’, the greater ‘I’, which is impersonal and transcends qualities. (Like most of us, Tennyson himself had difficulty in this area, being deeply disturbed by the smallest criticism.) Yet if we persevere in such a course, in due time an intuitive faculty will awaken in us. This will give us some aptitude in separating ‘I am’ from all the limiting ideas and self-images. Finally, this ‘I am’ will be understood as ‘I am infinite and eternal’.

Part of this process is to gain the ability for refined, one-pointed concentration, because, of all the subtle forces that make up the human personality, the ‘I am’ subsists as the innermost ground of being, ‘more subtle than the subtlest, greater than the great’, in the words of the

*Katha Upanishad*. It is easy to lose ourselves in concentration on a movie, since the mind is at home with movement. More challenging is to concentrate deeply on something still, but such concentration can awaken insight, as when Keats contemplated the Grecian urn, and wrote his great ode, beginning: ‘Thou still unravished bride of quietness’. Still more demanding is when we try to make our own mind a ‘bride of quietness’, and rest our attention on something abstract and symbolic of Truth within the mind itself, like ‘peace’, or OM, or the ‘lotus in the heart’. But the greatest challenge of all is to grasp the pure ‘I am’ in any meaningful way, since it is the limit of interiority and subtlety. As Rumi has said: ‘Extreme proximity is a mystifying veil.’ The very effort to concentrate on ‘I am’ seems to render it ‘not I am’, and perplexes our inner powers of cognition.

Is there a path to pure insight and realization? The way forward is to forget ‘I am someone’. When all that is encapsulated in the ‘someone’ we think we are is set aside, ‘I am’ alone remains. To do this is no short task, and there is much truth in the lines of T S Eliot, that tell of

A condition of complete simplicity  
Costing not less than everything.

For the fact is, our whole life development, as far as society is concerned, is based on expanding and consolidating our conviction: ‘I am someone’, and someone who counts!

As ‘someone’, we walk in step with other people, and sometimes clash with them. It seems that to make any headway in this world, we have to represent ourselves as somebody who is special, with something valuable to offer. It is no good noting on our CV, ‘Actually, I’m not someone. I am!’ The response would be a reprimand, calling for facts, not dreams, in the form of a well-documented background.

And so it is, that our long development from babyhood—from the moment we get a name—forces us to think in terms of ‘I am someone’. The receptive innocence of early childhood is banished by the competing, calculating ego, which can spring up at an early stage. Some years ago, in a London garden, a child of about seven shaped for himself some sort of hideaway in the bushes. In the gap which served as its entrance, he hung a notice: ‘Little children — Keep out’, showing

a self-importance worthy of an elder.

But whether our egoism is well articulated or politely restrained, it would seem that to succeed in the world we have to make a favourable impression. We may assert that it is all a game, and that, underneath it all, we retain our spirit of independence, and don't really mind what people think of us. Unfortunately, the game tends to lose its playfulness, and we find our joy and sorrow are all too closely joined to our triumphs and falls on this world playing-field. Our security and survival depend on us being 'someone' who takes life seriously.

On the positive side, we might urge that it is a sacred obligation to take this gift of life seriously and make our contribution. To do so is to show gratitude to our predecessors and to those who have helped us on the way. Yet the assumption behind all our worldly involvement is that both our individuality and the world it operates in, are stern realities. 'I am someone'. This is the empirical truth. Can the spiritual truth be different? How can we reconcile the assertion of a divine Self beyond individuality with our human experience?

Actually, there are signs and clues that suggest there is much more to human nature than meets the eye. Every man and woman has mysterious deep urges which seem to show a knowledge of a world beyond the walls of personality. This intuition is expressed in the verse of a Japanese poetess:

I do not consider myself worth counting  
But sometimes even for me  
Heaven and earth are too small.

Great art and music are pointers to something more perfect that lies beyond the borders of everyday experience. The restlessness of the heart suggests an intuitive, though incomplete, knowledge that there is a place of rest, and we are not there yet. Man feels within himself an unquenchable flame; he cannot really envisage his own non-existence, the obliteration of his 'I am'. He recoils when criticised, as if to say: 'I am perfect. How dare you!' He is not good at saying: 'I was wrong', unless to wriggle out of an awkward situation. Like George Bernard Shaw, his hidden heart whispers: 'I delight in being right, when other people are wrong!'

In fact, deep down man seems to have a subconscious awareness of something god-like and inviolable in his being that transcends human frailty. Noteworthy, too, is that on a cognitive level, man has a curious capacity to stand back from his own inner world and judge it. Many have the gift of raising a detached smile about their situation, however difficult. A friend was made redundant. It was unexpected, and only he had been asked to leave this seeming job-for-life—a hard blow indeed. Yet in his letter to colleagues, he was able to write: 'I've been made redundant (sob, sob).' There was the hurtfulness of the situation, yet something deeper stands back and can say, with a smile, 'Sob, sob'.

All these are signs and pointers that there is something in us that transcends the limitations of both the inner and outer worlds, that there is a place of rest and perfection, a realm of our being which, in the phrase of the Bible, has never 'tasted death'. This is the world clearly apprehended by the knowers of ultimate Truth.

What is the means to its realization? Their advice is: Tranquillize the mind through meditation. Practice harmlessness and goodwill to all. Then, forget yourself. Forget I am English, I am important, I come from this family, I belong to this particular group. In fact, during these times of inner tranquillity, dare to forget, 'I am someone'. Breathe calmly and deeply, resting in that unique sense of being. Then, like Tennyson, we will have some insight into the spiritual reality of 'I am'. The true being has been called 'the infinite ocean of light and bliss'. This is the real world in which we live, move and have our being.

From a spiritual perspective, what matters is not how we appear in society or what we have achieved, nor is our inner psychological history of much interest in itself. The crucial, transformative fact about our life is the presence of the divine Power at the core of our being, and the intensity and earnestness of our desire to realize that divinity.

There is a saying by the Chinese sage, Mencius: 'He who gets to the bottom of his mind comes to know his own nature. Knowing his own nature, he also knows God.' It is the mind itself that is of central importance in our quest for self-discovery. And the treasure to be grasped is within, not outside. The same idea—that the mind itself harbours a treasure—comes in an unexpected form in a poem by James Stephens. He wrote it while watching goats on a sunny hillside that was

covered with purple heather. He noticed how the goats now and again paused in their browsing and sought a quiet place to lie down and gaze at the sky, as if meditating; and the poet thinks that he would do well to follow their example!

If I were as wise as they  
I would stray apart and brood,  
I would beat a hidden way  
Through the quiet heather spray  
To a sunny solitude;  
And should you come, I'd run away...

But the most telling lines come at the end:

I would think until I found  
Something I can never find,  
Something lying on the ground,  
In the bottom of my mind.

The spiritual realm of 'I am', or the presence of God, does not lie on the ground in the bottom of our mind. It is that ground. We are That in our true nature. And this ground of Being is also a ground of Consciousness, Consciousness Absolute.

This divine ground of being and pure awareness does not belong to the mind. It is set back, so to stay, like the cinema screen on which dramas, comedies and documentaries are superimposed for a time. The screen supports the moving appearances. But whatever happens in the screenplay, the screen remains untouched. If there are Star Wars, the screen needs no repair afterwards to mend the tears; if there are comic goings-on, there are no creases of laughter left on the screen to be ironed out. It supports, yet stays uninfluenced, by all appearances and events.

In a like way, the true ground of our being, the 'I am', is not disturbed when the mind is disturbed. A person may lose the balance of their mind, but the innermost 'I am' is not affected or challenged. Or we may have as rich a mind as Shakespeare, and be a creative genius. Even so, the 'I am' is not influenced or enhanced by the richness of the mental life.

This 'I am' is pure being and pure consciousness, infinite and immortal. It illumines all the mental events, and, by extension, all experience. This is the truth signified in the meditation text:

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

Can we pursue this quest while living an active life in the world? Can we sustain the appearance of being somebody—as we have to—while at the same time working to melt this limitation and live in the infinite light and being of 'I am'? Can we stay the person others know and love, and yet work towards self-transcendence?

The answer is: Yes, it is possible. First of all, spiritual realization has to be approached gradually. The new way of thinking is introduced gently. The veils of misunderstanding, of wrong identification with the body and the mind, are thinned slowly and by stages. Spiritual education is as comprehensive as secular education. It provides the means for slow but sure progress and acclimatization, rather than forcing on sudden revelations for which we are not prepared.

Another point is that for most people, it makes good sense to keep our connection with the world. Whatever we may think at times, most of us need the support of the familiar, the stability of set routines, the structured way of life, and, not least, interchange with other human beings, even if they do not always agree with us. All this helps our mental strength and stability, and saves us from getting lost in a private dream world.

Again, as mentioned, we have received much in this life, and there is an obligation to reciprocate—to play our role, make our contribution, however small. Our personal development, through schooling and work skills, has not been in vain, nor is it expected to come to an end because our sights are set on spiritual enlightenment. We can learn to live in the world in a way that will be spiritually helpful to ourselves and others.

The spiritual vision includes the idea of unity of life. It is an intuition of peace and underlying harmony. It discourages crude self-assertion, and promotes modesty and cooperation. There is a verse by the Indian spiritual poet, Tulsidas:

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

All these values are to be learned and applied in the outer life.

In fact, our human nature is sufficiently complex and versatile to enable us to live in the world and yet maintain our spiritual integrity, if we have a will to do so. Dwelling among those who believe in the quest for pleasure and power, a spiritually-minded person can learn discreetly to avoid absorbing himself in these interests, yet without any trace of censure or of being 'holier' than his fellows. Our attitude may earn us some mild derision, even resentment, to start with; but the tide will turn, for spiritual poise and stability of character exercise their own attraction. Those who are becoming tired of the pendulum of joy and gloom, may grow sensitive to the presence of someone who is centred in peace, and may yearn to discover his or her 'secret'.

Meditation is the time dedicated to pacifying the mind and impregnating it with the seed ideas of peace, unity and the nature of 'I am' as the spiritual reality. It is also the time when we forget 'I am somebody'. When we practice in this way, we will feel we have found something to rely on, a mode of self-exploration with infinite capacity for inner growth and expansion—until the transcendental nature of the higher Self is finally realized. Then, the supreme potentiality concealed within the 'I am', will be confirmed in direct experience. It is signified in the third verse of the *Avadhut Gita*,

I alone am, ever free from all taint. The world exists within me like  
a mirage. To whom shall I bow?

A.H.C.

During the Autumn term there was a further series of guided meditation sessions every Tuesday evening and once again these were consistently popular. Each included a preparatory breathing exercise, meditation on a spiritual text, and a visualization. Many of those who have practised meditation note that visualizations require considerable application; yet the power of these spiritual exercises to harness the creative capacity of the mind and bring about an upward turn in the mental life, has been confirmed by seekers in all times and places. For this reason they are included in the meditation sessions with full explanations.

Throughout the festive break, the meetings on Tuesday evenings will continue to be open meditation sessions, and all are welcome, whether or not previous meetings have been attended.

The talks on Thursday evenings during the Autumn term were a series taking their themes directly from the Upanishads. The series began with *Understanding the Oneness of All*, on the Isha Upanishad, one of the shortest and most concentrated of all the Upanishads. The presentations followed the invaluable commentaries by Shri Shankara, the great eighth-century scholar-saint who drew out the essential message of non-duality at the heart of the Upanishads. There were further discourses on the Shvetashvatara, Taittiriya. Katha, Mundaka and Kena Upanishads, plus another on the Bhagavad Gita, which contains passages very similar to the Katha Upanishad. The final talk of the series, entitled *The Living Heart of the Upanishads*, considered the essential teachings and their application to our own lives.

A particular interest in the practical aspects of the Tuesday evening meetings has been noted, so next term the Thursday evening presentations will take the form of discourses on essential Yogic themes together with immediately practical elements such as spiritual preparation, meditation and visualization.

The Spring 2012 special afternoon course is on the theme *Adhyatma Yoga - A Direct Way to Self-Discovery*. There will be talks on *Finding the Way to Inner Freedom*, *The Light Beyond Thoughts*, and *Discovering the Bright Pearl Within*. In addition there will be two guided meditation sessions. It will be an opportunity to reflect at length on the teachings about our true Self.