

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

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN TERM 2013

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from 8 Oct to 5 December 2013. The Tuesday evenings will be guided meditation sessions. On Thursday evenings there will be a series of discourses on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

SUMMER 2013 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 20 October, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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FINDING THE CLUE

If asked how many letters there are in the Swahili alphabet, we may be forgiven if we answer: 'I haven't a clue.' If asked 'What is the purpose of life?', our response may be more hesitant. Something deep within us makes us feel that we *ought* to know why we are here, and that to profess total ignorance in this matter is not to be true to oneself.

A superficial answer is that we are here to maximise our joyful experiences and minimise the painful ones, and the acquisition of wealth promises to aid us in this approach. Unfortunately, the human body has no guarantee of lasting health, and the poverty of this plan soon becomes apparent.

A more hopeful course is to refine and enrich our inner faculties, so that our mind becomes an easy, pleasant and interesting companion, even if our outer life seems unexciting. Such a mind will serve us well as time passes and our mobility decreases; we can always call up the inner treasures.

But a rich mind, in itself, is not sufficient to confer certainty and assurance as to our place in this world, and our higher destiny. The real meaning of life unfolds when our mind grows rich in peace,

benevolence and spiritual experience.

The specialists in spiritual experience are the protagonists of the great religions. We underestimate their teaching if we regard its goal as a heavenly after-life. What they indicate, in such sayings as ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you’, is higher illumination in this very life, an illumination which dispels all our not-knowing. The purpose of our existence finds fulfilment, yet no words or reasoned arguments can approach its glory.

The supreme spiritual Force is the living power behind all minds, and when the mind is conscious of its link with the Divine Life, its own small efforts will be infused and supplemented by that higher Life. Everyone who helps in this unseen way is a force for good, who not only spreads relief and illumination, but is also open to receive spiritual support when in need.

The great Maulana Rumi begins a poem:

The world gave you false clues, like a ghoul.
You took no heed of the clue, but went to that
which is without a clue.

The false clue is that the world promises: ‘I will end your sorrows and difficulties’, but is never true to its word. The real clue is to turn within and to follow the path that leads to self-realization. Such a clue sheds light on the inner meaning of life, philosophy, art and religion, for, as the Upanishads say, when the Self is known, all is known.

* * *

I sought the way to the Friend
With open eyes:
In vain, in vain!
When I closed my eyes,
I was there at His door.

An Urdu verse

Our Highest Potential

IN EACH OF US there are hidden spiritual potentialities for inner peace, light and wisdom, leading to enlightenment. Yoga gives clear methods and advice on how we may bring out these potentialities and realize our innate freedom and fearlessness. Our true nature *is* peace, fearlessness and bliss, and we will not be satisfied with life until we are spiritually awake. We therefore need to know about our deeper spiritual potentialities.

Our latent faculties are so far-reaching that they can only be brought out gradually and through an inner training. This training has stood the test of time, and is workable in daily life for those who are serious about it. Such people are likely to enter what is called a spiritual path. The spiritual path gives us a sense of direction and is the means of making continuous progress towards the great goal of life, enlightenment.

What is the path of progress in Yoga? It is the path from bondage to freedom, from anxiety to serenity, from insecurity to fearlessness, from darkness to light. Ultimately, it is a path leading to the knowledge that our true nature transcends all limitations and is essentially one with the Absolute.

This light of understanding is not a matter of gaining something we do not already possess. It is more like a discovery, an unveiling, an uncovering of what we really are in our inmost nature. And, during our apprenticeship, so to say, we learn to cultivate those tendencies which will help us to penetrate into the spiritual dimension within us—the realm of true independence. In following this way, we realize that our true helper is the spiritual power within, the real master is our deeper Self, and that the source of peace and happiness is here in our own heart.

Let us explore an account of this great path as it is expressed in the Zen tradition, namely the ten ‘Ox-herding Pictures’. There are different versions of these pictures, and we will be using and displaying those painted by the Chinese master, Kuo-an, (Kakuan) who lived in the twelfth century. From them we can gain valuable insights about the stages of the spiritual path and the challenge that lies before us.

Though known as the Ox-herding Pictures, the animal in question behaves more like a bull than a mild-mannered ox, as will soon become evident. So in common with many Zen accounts, we shall refer to it as a bull.

The first picture shows a young man standing in the midst of a scenic Chinese landscape, and he is looking for something. He looks to one side, and we have the feeling that he has been looking in all directions for something. This picture is called: **The Search for the Bull**.



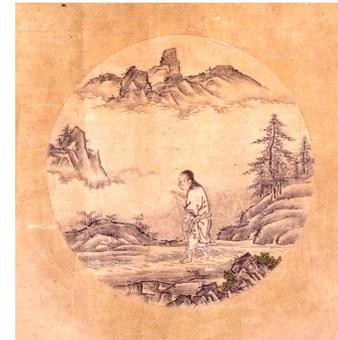
It symbolizes the beginning of the spiritual quest—when we seriously ask ourselves: ‘What is the real cause of my restlessness?’ This represents a turning point in our life. What leads to this turning point is the feeling that the usual distractions in which we take refuge seem to lead nowhere and bring no lasting enrichment to our life, despite all the time and effort we

put into them. Yet we have the feeling that our life should be moving in a definite direction. But where and how? The answer seems to be hidden, just as in the picture the man does not know exactly what he is looking for, or what he is meant to be doing.

Then why search? Because intuitively we know there *is* something to be found which will bring fulfilment. Our mind is beginning to become sensitive to the deeper spiritual nature within us, and needs a new kind of growth and expansion. The fact is that we are beginning to outgrow the limitations of our present mental framework. What we are searching for in this condition is really not distant from us at all. It turns out to be our true Self. An old commentary on this picture reminds us:

The bull has never been lost. But the herdsman turned away from himself.

Finding the Traces In the next picture, something has caught the herdsman’s attention. He has noticed a track. Now he knows which direction he must turn in order to find out more.



Translating this picture into our own situation, this sudden change can happen through the impact of some teaching that strikes us with its relevance to our personal position, and throws light on something deeper within us. At this crucial stage, inner decisions are being made and expressed in the form: ‘I must go further into this. It’s important and may lead me in the right direction.’

We welcome information that helps us to follow these traces and make sense of our situation. Sooner or later we will become active investigators, and in due time our attention will be drawn to the radical idea that the source of peace is our true Self. We shall learn that the cause of our frustration is our own mind in its unenlightened state. And we shall seek further guidance on how we can adjust our inner and outer life so that we may transcend our apparent limitations and go free.

Seeing the Bull In this picture, there is a breakthrough. The herdsman has been giving his attention to the traces—the signs of a track.



Now, for the first time, the bull comes into view. It is not seen fully, nor for long. But it has been seen. Seeing the bull means for the first time looking in a new way at our own mental activity. We begin to realize that, far more than outer happenings, it is our own moods and emotions that are influencing our sense of freedom or bondage, expansion or restriction.

These are only glimpses and we do not see the problem clearly, nor do we yet know what to do about it. All the same, this first real peep into our own inner world is an essential stage in self-knowledge.

In daily life, we often tend to feel that it is other people who are restricting us. The yogic insight is: 'No. The root cause of all restriction is my own mental activity and want of understanding.' If we can accept this, we are ready to begin the training of the mind. This training, if properly carried out, will not only sharpen our awareness but will open the way to the treasury of spiritual peace at the heart of our being.

Before pondering our next picture, let us reflect briefly on what is going on. There is a bull. We have seen it. And now a choice has to be made. Do I really need to catch and tame this bull? After all, it's going to be rather demanding, and do I really need to change? Do I want to change?

The next picture is called **Catching the Bull**.

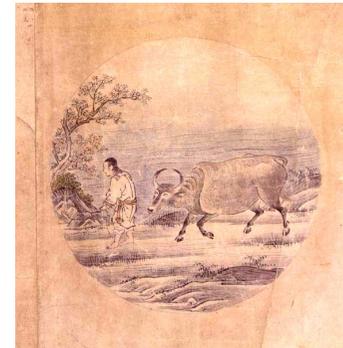


A positive decision has been made. 'Yes, I must deal with this problem', which turns out to be the problem of the untrained and unenlightened mind. More specifically, the problem is how to convert the mind from its present state of restlessness and agitation to the condition of spiritual peace that I have heard about.

This problem will not go away, yet time is flashing by and I have no peace, no real direction. Something must be done.

Well, let us suppose that we have made the great decision: 'Yes, I will catch this bull. I will learn how to train and spiritualize my mind.' We have accepted the challenge, which is the ultimate challenge of life. Now, as you see in the picture, do not expect a smooth run. Do not expect the bull to yield to your lasso without a struggle. There is bound to be resistance. But why is the bull furious? Simply because it is a creature of habit. It is deeply attached to the old ways, and fears the

unknown. But the true welfare of the mind (which the bull represents) only comes to light when we create peace and harmony within ourselves. It is then that the mind becomes a revealer of the infinite and immortal spiritual knowledge that underlies it.



Taming the Bull

This picture shows a definite advance. The bull is on the way to becoming domesticated, that is, tamed. It is following the herdsman, who is leading him by the nose ring. Note that the herdsman is still holding the rope and it is not a long rope. In other words, the bull is being carefully controlled, but is no longer resisting

this control. He seems to be falling in with it quite naturally and even contentedly.

But we must not forget the short lead. It symbolizes our need to guide the mind with alertness and care until the destination is reached. The apparent contentment of the bull suggests relief that the mind has at last found a purpose and a goal. It is now being fed with the right food and does not need to be restless or in the dark any more. The way of light and peace is open to it.

What exactly is this spiritual training and what is its purpose? The purpose of the training is to shift the mastery of the personality from the mind to the true Self which underlies it, and which is the Spirit of man. The true position is that the Self is the inner ruler of the personality, the power behind the mind. Our training restores the mind to its true status as an instrument of the supreme spiritual Power behind it. The mind is meant to be a clear channel through which the divine power and peace may flow unobstructed. This crucial leverage over the mind is symbolized by the rope fixed to the bull's nose ring. So the picture, *Taming the Bull*, denotes real progress, chiefly through making a spiritual use of the will.

Returning Home on the Back of the Bull



In this picture, the herdsman is calmly and joyfully riding on the back of the bull. He is no longer holding the bull, either with a rope or with reins. His hands are free and he is playing the flute. This picture symbolizes the deep change which has taken place in the mind. In yogic terms, the main expression of the mind has become *sattvic*, a Sanskrit word suggestive of

peace, harmony and a happiness that springs from within oneself and not from externals.

At this stage, the pupil may well feel that he has done what he set out to do. After long application and dedication, perseverance and loyalty to the path, his mind is thoroughly improved and well-controlled. But this is not the end of the journey and there are dangers lurking in this condition. The great goal of self-realization must not be forgotten or taken for granted. We must go on and penetrate the truth until we realize our identity with it. The advice is: Do not rest satisfied with the limited peace which comes to the mind. Pursue the quest until the Self is realized in its true nature as one with the Absolute. And be ready to let go of all limited ideas about yourself, even such sentiments as: 'I am established on my spiritual path. I am a servant of Truth. I am dedicated to the good of others, to the good of all. I am a devotee.' These are all mental ideas centring on our individuality, and the highest truth, our spiritual destiny, transcends all conditions.

The Bull Forgotten, the Herdsman Remains. Now our herdsman-pilgrim is ready to take a further step. The main thing about this picture is that the bull is forgotten. Before now it was not forgotten. What does this mean? For a long time our efforts are concentrated on trying to create in the mind spiritual conditions. As this progress continues, inner changes take place, in the form of expansion of consciousness.

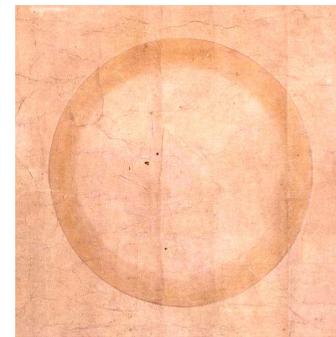


A deeper phase of our nature comes into view, revealing something of the spiritual Power at the heart of our being, and its emanations of peace and light. Slowly but surely, the pupil loses his preoccupation with his own mind and its imagined virtues or imperfections. What now claims our attention and interest is the development going on at the centre of our

being, which can be indicated by the term 'spiritual experience'. We now know that the way forward is through attentive silence, focused on our divine centre, which is one with the Supreme. Thus we follow the path of devotion-knowledge.

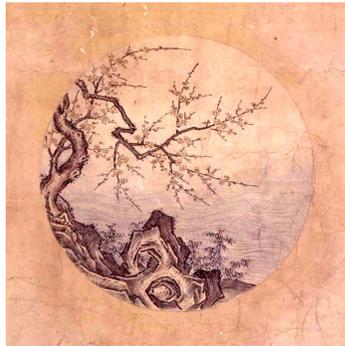
The grace of a higher understanding is closer than we might imagine. It is an inner revelation of non-duality and is revealed as a consequence of the cultivation of the highest ideal of spiritual living. Prepared in this way, the sense of limited individuality associated with the word 'I', dissolves, and all restrictions of consciousness fall away. In an instant the truth is revealed. This realization of non-duality is the experience of the sages.

Bull and Man Both Gone out of Sight



This picture suggests that the herdsman has come to the end of his journey. It is an image of empty space and indicates the transcendental nature of spiritual truth, which is beyond the range of speech and thought. There is nothing objective that can depict it, because in the end, there is nothing objective. All is Self alone and we are that.

Now there are two more pictures for us to consider. The first one is called: **The Return to the Ground and Origin.**



We see once more the landscape. In fact nothing seemingly has changed: the tree is still a tree, the rock is still a rock. It seems as if the world of duality has reappeared. But for the sage, and only for the sage, the vision is of quite a different quality. Before enlightenment, as it were, the world of duality, and its impression in the mind, were taken as real. Now they are known to be unreal.

When taken as real, the world of duality seemed to limit the Self, to affect it, and possibly to harm it. In the experience of the enlightened sage, nothing whatsoever limits the Self, nothing affects it, there is nothing to fear—because there is nothing separate from the Self. Anything that appears does so within the Self, it has its being in the Self, and, as an appearance only, it dissolves in the Self. The sage sees with the inner eye of wisdom that this whole world of plurality is a phenomenal appearance superimposed on the canvas of infinite consciousness. The changes which take place in the names and forms create no disturbance at all in consciousness, which remains ever free and transcendent.

The final picture is entitled: **Entering the Market of the World with Open Hands.**



To the onlooker the sage appears to re-enter the world of appearances, the everyday world, and mix with the people as one of them, as if engaged in a real situation. But to get a clue to the true position, we need to recall that earlier picture where bull and man had both vanished.

To the onlooker, there are enlightened beings. Like the sage in the picture, they bring to mankind the spiritual food it needs in order to achieve the realization of the same divine truth. This is a very true and necessary picture from the point of view of the onlooker. The holy sages transmit to us the priceless knowledge that will enable us to transcend the limitations of life, including death, and to realize perfect, infinite freedom.

From the standpoint of the sage, there is no such situation. The realization is: Self alone is the ultimate reality, and there is no duality whatsoever. The unenlightened see the sage in different ways, according to their degree of spiritual insight. But only self-realization will reveal that one's own Self is the sole reality of the universe, and that—for purposes of self-awakening—the sage was one's own Self in apparently objective form. The sage is thus, as it were, a unique means within the phenomenal world to bring about a spiritual awakening that in fact exposes the unreality of the phenomenal world and establishes the absolute Reality of Self as One-without-a-second.

A man in a dream sees his dream body and mind harassed by a dream tiger. A rescuer hands him a gun and he shoots the tiger, and the relief somehow awakens him. But when he awakens, the reality of all the elements in the dream equally dissolves.

The sage is that particular appearance within the realm of appearances, that can liberate those who feel they are in any way in bondage or darkness. He has a practical and acute understanding of the mental and physical worlds that he himself has transcended. There is a definite way to transcend the bondage, to dissipate this darkness, and the sage is to be resorted to, and his teachings cherished, as the way to freedom and light.

This enlightenment exposes the illusory nature of all duality, and brings to light the eternal fact of non-duality. The true sage is not identified with any phase of the world appearance, nor with any role within it. Such a role is assigned to him by others. To the unenlightened onlooker, the sage appears, as in the picture, to enter the market place of the world with precious spiritual gifts to offer to the people. But in himself, he is infinitude and transcendence itself, and that Self of the sage is not different from the Self of the seeker.

This identity, which has its root in non-duality, will be revealed once our false ideas have been dissipated. It is then that we realize directly that the fulfilment we have been seeking is the fully revealed nature of our innermost Self, and that we have never been anything other than That.

B.D.

PHILOSOPHY

By reasoning, investigation and tranquil experience, philosophy discovers a vision sublime. It reveals an order in the inner being of man, which is beautiful, sympathetic and perhaps tragic.

Philosophy employs in its service investigation and reasoning to explain the essential meaning and purpose of life in the form of a theory. A theory is not something tentative or a hypothesis arbitrarily conceived to explain facts. It is a steady contemplation of the worth and order in the things which occupy us in life.

Philosophy must make us detached, observant of both the outer and the inner phenomena and convinced of the importance of the refinement of our mind and the control of the passions. The outer life is for the sake of inner life. As philosophers, it is our duty to teach others how to transform the love of the sensual into a pursuit of a spiritual ideal, the goal of life.

Some philosophers think that the inner life is for the sake of the outer life, to enable it to adjust the body to its surroundings.

The secret dreams of the soul, playing in a self-possessed atmosphere and reverberating tenderly, constitute a real part of our life.

Let us know our environments and improve them and not take them as parts of our dreams.

Nature is beautiful, and so are the lives of great men like Newton, Spinoza, Da Vinci; but the commentary they provide is useful to us and not a mere reverie on their merits.

H.P.S.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

KING JANAKA has convened an assembly of the holiest and wisest men in his kingdom and also of the neighbouring realms. His invitations have been accepted by munis (sages) and sadhus (holy men) living in distant Himalayan retreats, and also in the plains.

The assembly hall, on the orders of the king, has been especially decorated with flowers and silken yellow draperies. Holy images have been placed there and gold and silver hangings deck the walls. In the centre of the assembly hall is a small pond filled with crystal-clear water, a pure white lotus afloat in the middle. Gold and silver seats are arranged around the shallow dais, covered with simple yellow cloths.

In an open field adjoining the hall is a large herd of cattle, all healthy, their horns washed and polished. They form a delightful sight in the gleaming sunlight. The little calves frisk and gambol, following each other with their tails in the air. Small brass bells hung round their necks sound like heavenly music, and the mothers often lick their calves. To the horns of each cow are tied silk handkerchiefs, containing a number of gold coins from the treasury of the King.

Late in the afternoon the munis and sadhus began to assemble, some wearing long saffron-coloured robes of cotton, others in antelope skins, with their matted hair piled high. There were youthful ones in the assembly, and also students who had come in the company of their Gurus, carrying their manuscripts and water-vessels; these occupied seats behind the sages.

Each figure was serene, with downcast eyes, or perhaps with gaze fixed on the tip of the nose as an aid to meditation. Some smiled; others were silent. It appeared as if hundreds of Buddhas had emerged from their caves in order to participate in this holy assembly of King Janaka.

The balconies of the palace were occupied by the ladies of the royal household, while their maids-of-honour, carrying baskets made of filigree silver wire, filled with golden blossoms, were standing behind them. It was as if pearls, amethysts, emeralds, lapis-lazuli and garnets

had been collected together in the forms of these beautiful women. They looked down on the assembly from above, their faces full of serenity.

When all had assembled and taken their seats, Shri Yajnavalkya entered the hall. It appeared as if the moon had broken through a veil of clouds and come forth to teach the other luminaries how to shine in tranquil splendour. His presence brought with it an atmosphere of a unique kind. As he came slowly forward, the royal ministers guided him to the special lion throne of Vyasa which he was to occupy. He saluted the assembly with joined palms, saying 'Om Tat Sat'.*

One part of the hall was occupied by women ascetics. Among them was one of about nineteen years of age, her body so well moulded, her face so rich in beauty and attractiveness that all thought the consort of Shri Vishnu had indeed come to adorn the assembly. She was simply clad and sat in the meditation posture, merged in contemplation of the Supreme. It was clear that she was not conscious of her body, and the force of her spiritual purity was so overpowering that none could look upon her with any feelings of relativity. She was the saint Gargi. She offered special salutations with her eyes to Shri Yajnavalkya and it was evident there was a bond of spiritual understanding between them.

Then the great Janaka, King of Videha, arrived with his eight ministers of state. He wore no crown or royal robe, but was clad like any other citizen of his realm. Bowing low three times, he offered the greeting of 'Jai!' to the holy sage and the mahatmas assembled there. Taking his seat, he addressed Shri Yajnavalkya as follows:**

'O holy maharishi! Have you come to obtain more cows for the maintenance of your spiritual ashram and for your boundless hospitality, or are you about to confer a gracious favour upon me?' [Cows were a main source of economic wealth in ancient India.]

Shri Yajnavalkya replied: 'O King, the object of my visit is both. Tell me first, what have your teachers taught you?'

King Janaka replied: 'The teacher Jitvan, the son of Shilina, instructed me that the origin of speech is Brahman (the Absolute).'

* Three words each signifying ultimate reality.

** This part of the narrative is based on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV.i.1-IV.ii.4.

'Did he', answered Shri Yajnavalkya, 'tell you about the abode of the origin of speech and of its support?'

'He did not', responded the king.

'Yet', continued the sage, 'Brahman does not produce anything, O King!'

'Will you then, O holy Yajnavalkya, tell us what it is?'

Shri Yajnavalkya said: 'O King! The abode of the origin of speech is Brahman and it is supported by the undifferentiated ether (akasha). To know this mystery, meditate upon Brahman as intelligence. He who meditates on Brahman as the origin of speech, he is ever eloquent and all beings eagerly come to him. Verily he becomes a god and he attains to the gods.'

The king was highly pleased to hear these words of the illustrious sage and said: 'O Guru! Allow me to give you a thousand cows and a bull that is like an elephant!'

Shri Yajnavalkya replied: 'My father has taught me that one should not accept wealth from a disciple without fully instructing him. Therefore tell me, O King, whatsoever you have been taught up to this time. Have you been taught what is the abode and support of Brahman?'

'Revered Teacher', answered the king, 'I have not. Will you instruct me in this matter?'

The holy sage then said: 'The vital force is its abode, and the ether, the undifferentiated, is its support. To understand it clearly it should be meditated upon as being dear to us, nay, as the very dearest.'

'Then, holy Guru', rejoined the king, 'is mind the ultimate essence? Is there anything beyond the mind?'

'Your Majesty', answered the sage, 'Brahman is supportless. The mind passes into oblivion, or suffers distraction, or is subject to fluctuations of intensity; it is not Brahman, the ultimate reality. Yet the mind is the abode of Brahman, and in order to know Him, one should worship and reverently pursue Him as Bliss.'

King Janaka then offered the illustrious Guru a thousand cows and a bull as large as an elephant. Descending from his raised seat, he said in a clear voice: 'I bow down to you, O Yajnavalkya! Be good enough to teach me further.'

Shri Yajnavalkya continued: 'Your Majesty! Just as a man who

wishes to make a long journey would furnish himself with a chariot or with a ship, so is your mind well furnished by the holy Upanishads. You are honourable, wealthy and well-versed in the lore of the Vedas. Then tell me, O King, where will you go when departing from this place?’

‘Sir, I do not know,’ he answered.

The sage then said: ‘Know, O King, that He who looks out through the pupil of the right eye is the One who is behind all. In the body there issue hundreds of thousands of minute arteries, each finer than a hair, divided a thousandfold, and through them flows a brilliance of light called *tajasa*. This ultimate essence, O Janaka, cannot be positively described. All that I can say about it is: ‘*Neti, Neti*’ (not this, not this). Know further that He is incomprehensible, undecaying, unattached, ever free, and to reach Him, O King, is to become absolutely fearless!’

On hearing these great words of most subtle wisdom, the King bowed his head in reverence before the great sage, offering his whole realm and also himself as his servant for life.

To be continued

A PRAYER

O Inscrutable Reality, O Sun of suns, O Truth sublime, Who alone rulest the universe. Even our personal affairs are ruled better when our minds are united with Thee in peace and devotion, and we have purged our hearts from all hate and filled them to the brim with love for Thee.

Take us and everyone else into Thy hands and lead us. We have relied on our own intellects and each day they have betrayed us. Illumine the hearts of all with knowledge of the real value of peace and devotion and the unreality of possessions, and teach them that compassion is greater than power.

H.P.S.

The Bhakti Movement* — Part One

THE WORD ‘BHAKTI’ means devotion. It is a recognition of the importance of the emotional life. Man is not just intellect. He is also emotion and will, heart and feeling. These are the forces which give him energy and direct his actions and thought. They are the well-springs of his life.

The Bhakti movement believes that man wants to love the good, and that if this is placed before him, he will be drawn to it. It seeks not to by-pass the emotions but to integrate them into the spiritual life, to utilize them in the interests of spiritual growth. As a result it has been able to offer an effective religious path to the broad masses of men and women in India.

Bhakti sets no preconditions. It requires no learning. It is open to all. The Bhakti movement is broad and many-sided, and we can only touch on some of its aspects.

It is first seen as a distinct form around the fourth century BCE, when several groups appear who worshipped a supreme God under such names as Vasudeva (‘the good god’), Bhagavan (‘the adorable one’), Narayana and Hari. In time, all of these came to be identified with the Vedic god, Vishnu. Also identified with Vishnu were two notable figures appearing in the epic literature, Krishna and Rama: both were seen as his *avatars* or incarnations. In consequence, Vishnu grew greatly in stature and became for millions of Hindus not just one god among others, but the supreme God: God himself.

Others focused in a similar way upon the god Shiva. Some aspects of Shiva probably go back to the Indus Valley civilization; others belonged to the Vedic god, Rudra, with whom he merged. From then on, Vishnu and Shiva, each regarded by his adherents as God himself, have been the principle recipients of the great flood of devotion which is the Bhakti movement.

Nevertheless, Bhakti tends to be associated more closely with Vishnu

* First published in *The Elements of Hinduism*, Element, UK, 1994. Adapted for *Self-Knowledge* with the permission of the author. It will be concluded in the next *Self-Knowledge*.

than it is with Shiva. This is because the cult of Vishnu is almost entirely encompassed by the Bhakti movement; while in the worship of Shiva, devotionism is only one of several important elements; for example, Shiva is also thought of as the Great Yogi. Hence, Bhakti and Vaishnavism are terms which are often, if somewhat inaccurately, used as synonyms.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The *Bhagavad Gita*, ‘the Song of Bhagavan, the Adorable One’, is the first great monument of the Bhakti movement. Although it does not form part of the Vedas, it is greatly esteemed by almost all Hindus. The Gita is not a separate book, but an episode embedded in a vast epic poem, the *Mahabharata*. This tells the story of a great war between the Pandavas, rightful heirs to an important kingdom in the region of what is now Delhi, and their cousins the Kauravas, who have usurped the kingdom. As with the Trojan War—and the *Mahabharata* is often likened to the *Iliad*, though it lacks the latter’s unity—such a conflict in all probability once took place (guesses as to its date usually range between 900 and 1400 BCE). The Gita was added to the *Mahabharata*, one of many embellishments which grew up around the original story, perhaps around 200 BCE or a little earlier.

The Gita has the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, the leading warrior among the Pandavas, and his friend, Krishna, the prince of Dvaraka, who is acting as his charioteer. It is dramatically placed at the climax of the epic tale. The two mighty armies are drawn up face to face, and in a short while the final battle will be joined. As the first arrows begin to fall, Arjuna and Krishna range their chariot between the armies and stop to view the opposing force. Arjuna looks on those he is to fight, and is suddenly assailed by doubt. It is not fear which troubles him, for no warrior is more courageous or skilful than he. It is doubt about the morality of what he is about to do. The slaughter will be fearful. There in the opposing army he sees men he grew up with, close kinsmen, loved and revered teachers. All these he must strive to kill. Surely, nothing could justify that terrible act? It would be better to be slain oneself without resistance, he cries out, than to commit the sin of slaughtering one’s own relatives. The great Arjuna sinks to the floor of

his chariot, his heart shaken with indecision and grief. It is Krishna’s reply which forms the rest of the dialogue; and, perhaps surprisingly, he tells Arjuna that he should fight.

The setting in which the dialogue takes place is packed with symbolic meanings. The opposing armies represent duality, inseparable from life in the world. The chariot is the same chariot of man that is used as an illustration in the *Katha Upanishad*. Arjuna is the *jiva*, the individual soul—brave, active, energetic, yet entrapped and bemused, torn between the opposing forces of good and evil, right and wrong, pain and pleasure. The only change from the simile in the Upanishad is that the charioteer, instead of being the *buddhi*, the higher mind, is now the Lord himself, the divine reality dwelling in the heart of every being.

According to the Indian rules of chivalry, charioteers were not regarded as combatants. Krishna, the Atman (man’s true Self), is not himself engaged in the battle of life; he stands apart as its witness. The kinsmen and revered teachers in the opposing army, whom Arjuna shrinks from destroying, are significant: they are those elements in the individuality to which we attach value, but which nevertheless must be sacrificed if we are to come to the supra-individual Self.

The teaching which Arjuna receives is complex, and it ranges across the whole spectrum of Hinduism as it then was. While the Gita is first and foremost a Bhakti work, it is also more than this. Its greatness lies in the way in which it unites the principal tendencies of the time, knitting together the Sankhya and Yoga traditions with the insights of the Upanishads and those of the Bhakti movement. The result, typically Hindu, is a powerful synthesis, in place of fragmentation into opposed positions.

The Gita teaches that there are three Yogas, or disciplines, by which the spiritual end of life may be attained. These are Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga—the ways of action, love and knowledge—and to some extent they are three stages of a single process. As for Jnana Yoga, the way of knowledge, it is possible to read the Gita as giving it first place. However, the Gita was composed long before the time of Shankara, and in it Jnana Yoga is associated with the Sankhya school, as well as with the Upanishadic tradition.

Karma Yoga, the way of action, is the discipline of detached activity,

and it forms an important part of the Gita's teaching. It is our emotional engagement in action, not action in itself, which binds us to the wheel of rebirth. Krishna tells Arjuna that the real Self of man does not act, and in the battle to come it will neither kill nor be killed. Our bodies and minds are formed of *prakriti*, the metaphysical principle or 'primordial substance' that makes the material and mental worlds possible. We think that it is we who act, but in reality it is the three *gunas* of *prakriti* which do so. The *gunas* are conceived of as the essential modes or qualities of *prakriti*, and move ceaselessly in all phenomena, and whilst we are in the body they will never cease to act in us. The *Gita* analyses the *gunas* with particular regard to man's mental life; we are encouraged to cultivate the peace, harmony, clarity and balance that characterize *sattva guna*; to tame the self-centred, passionate and forceful domination of *rajas*; and to overcome the heaviness, laziness and obstinacy of *tamas*.

It is no good trying to withdraw from action, as Arjuna proposes: for an embodied being, action can never be avoided. What matters is that we should not identify with action—that we should maintain awareness of our changeless inner identity, standing apart from all activity. Actions bind when we lose this identity and believe that it is we ourselves in our full reality who act. Then there is emotional involvement. Then the *vasanas* (deep tendencies to desire) are formed. Then we are bound by our self-created *karma*.

Since there is no escaping action, the only question is what sort of action we undertake. If we act from personal motives, there is the creation of *karma*. Therefore, Krishna says, it is what is ordained by duty, or *dharma*, which is to be done, in the spirit of an offering to the supreme Lord. The wise man acts as duty and necessity dictate; and in Arjuna's case, he will perform his *dharma* as a warrior upon the battlefield. Such a man acts without attachment. He does not seek the fruit of action. He accepts whatever comes with equanimity, knowing that in their innermost reality men and women are untouched by all that happens. This is the art of living—Karma Yoga, the Yoga of action.

But of the three paths, that which receives most emphasis in the *Gita* is Bhakti Yoga, devotion to the Lord. Krishna himself is this Lord. He is Bhagavan, the Adorable One. For those who follow the way of devotion, the Supreme Reality is not unknowable. The Supreme Reality

is *Ishvara*, 'the Lord', personal, loving, merciful and responsive to our love. He is everywhere; the whole universe is His body. As the Upanishads recognized, He is not only beyond qualities (*nirguna*) but also with qualities (*saguna*), not only transcendent but also immanent:

Thou art the dark blue butterfly, and the green parrot with red eyes. Thou art the thunder-cloud, the seasons and the oceans. Thou art without beginning, and beyond all time and space. Thou art He from whom all the worlds are born. (Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 4:4)

Vishnu, the Supreme Reality, is the inexhaustible treasure-house of the universe, from which all its forms, all its beauty and glory, come forth. Halfway through the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna reveals to Arjuna His universal form as the Supreme Lord, the infinitely glorious Being who is the source of all:

Such as would be the radiance of a thousand suns bursting forth suddenly in the sky, such was the radiance of that mighty Spirit. There the son of Pandu (Arjuna) beheld the whole world with all its differences, gathered together in the body of that God of gods. (Gita, 11:12-13)

But this vision of Totality is not, for the individual self, a comforting one. It is, the *Gita* tells us, both wonderful and terrible, and before it the worlds tremble. Even Arjuna can barely sustain it. He sees the great warriors of both armies crushed by the relentless passage of time, and all the forms of the universe flowing towards destruction. Yet the mighty Lord of the Universe, within whose being those forms exist and pass away, is at the same time close to us. He is in the chariot of Arjuna, the Lord dwelling in the heart of every creature. At the end of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna:

Hear further My ultimate word, most secret of all; thou art exceedingly dear to Me, therefore will I speak what is good for thee. Set thy heart on Me, full of love for Me, sacrificing to Me, make obeisance to Me, and thou shalt come to Me; this is truth I promise thee, for thou art dear to Me. Putting aside all other duties, come for refuge to Me alone; grieve not, for I shall set thee free from all sins. (Gita, 18:64-66)

'Come for refuge to Me'—that is the essential message of Bhakti.

BHAKTI IN SOUTH INDIA

Throughout the first millennium, the Bhakti movement grew in strength. The South of India played an important part in this; so much so that some sources claim that Bhakti is a product of the South. Between the seventh and ninth centuries, the devotional movement attained a level of very great intensity in the Tamil-speaking areas of South India. Here, two groups of poet-saints, the sixty-three Nayanars or 'Leaders' who were devotees of Shiva, and the twelve Alvars who worshipped Vishnu and his avatar, Krishna, exerted a profound influence which continues to this day.

The Alvars and Nayanars claim no merit for themselves. They throw themselves upon the mercy of Vishnu or of Shiva. For them, self-surrender is the way to salvation. One worships not by means of sacrifice or meditation, but by devotion and service, given without thought of return. One is saved not through one's own efforts, but by the Lord's grace. Constant remembrance of God and calling upon his name will attract that grace. Rather than seeking to transcend the individual condition in the manner of the Vedanta, they seek an intense relationship with God which implies a separate existence of the individual. They seek to enjoy His presence after death, and in life to experience His divine beauty spread throughout the world:

Blessed, blessed is the world; the dark curse on life is lifted.
Wasting has been laid waste, and hell is in ruins.
Worn-out Death has nothing he can call his here.
Behold, the dark ages are dead,
For everywhere on the earth myriads of God's servitors
Are singing and dancing, dancing and singing His praise.¹

The Nayanars and Alvars established a pattern which later came to characterize the Bhakti movement right across India. First, since the individual's relationship with God was all-important, they tended to disregard traditional religious forms and the restrictions of the caste system. In consequence, the Bhakti movement took on at times an almost revolutionary character, so that initially it was sometimes

¹ Nammalvar; translated in V Raghavan, *Devotional Poets and Mystics*, (Part 1), Delhi, 1983, p. 35.

opposed by the Brahmins. High caste and low caste, rich and poor, men and women, learned and ignorant, all could follow this path. Nammalvar, the greatest of the Alvar poets, whose songs, it was said, contained the essence of the Four Vedas, was a lowly Shudra; Kulashekhar was a king; Andal, another of the Alvar saints and one of the most famous poets of India, was a low-caste woman. The independent spirit of these two groups is seen in one of the Nayanar songs:

We are not subject to any; we are not afraid of death;
We will not suffer in hell; we live in no illusion;
We feel elated; we know no ills; we bend to none;
It is all one happiness for us ...²

Secondly, they expressed their vision by means of songs which were composed, not in the usual language of literature and religion, Sanskrit, but in the vernacular—in their case, the Tamil language. This was in keeping with the popular character of the Bhakti movement. They wrote in a manner with which everyone could identify. Their religious insights are expressed in the language of familiar human feeling, often that of passionate love:

He has kissed these shoulders, these breasts;
And I know not where to turn for refuge.

I am the flower
That the Divine Bee has sucked and torn.³

These songs, combining deep religious feeling with poetic merit and musical beauty, spread rapidly among the people. They have never been forgotten. To this day, they are known and loved throughout the Tamil lands.

² Appar; translated in W T de Bary (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York, 1958, p 353.

³ Nammalvar; translated in V Raghavan, *op. cit.* pp. 39-40.

S.C.

Goethe

Hari Prasad Shastri valued many of the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). He regarded Goethe's *Faust* as an odyssey of an aspiring soul striving to transcend all limitations.

GOETHE'S GREAT DRAMA, *Faust*, opens with discontent. The scholar, Faust, despairs of satisfaction, having failed to find it in philosophy, science, law, literature or theology. He despairs of it, and now seeks some means of making his dissatisfaction enduring.

Faust descends to the level of the earth, and invokes this gross means in order to find a narcotic which may help him to endure his despair. Mephistopheles offers him such a means. He cheats Faust into believing that he can find the narcotic he seeks in sensual pleasures.

A great point in the philosophy of Goethe is that the full consummation is always beyond—beyond even life on earth. As the final chorus says: 'The things that must pass are only symbols.' Faust cannot 'bid the moment stay' unless he sees it in the light of eternity, which Faust knows Mephistopheles cannot provide.

The great riddle of life and death, of the Infinite assuming finite form, defies solution; and even when solved, the solution cannot be given in words. 'Man's thought can only be called thought when it is of something he cannot think about.' Mephistopheles fails, and, in the end, Faust disregards him, to work out his own salvation, through service of man and contemplation.

Goethe, being a positivist in science, does not expect to penetrate into the Absolute Truth. But he is not an agnostic, and, since he is a poet, philosopher and religious mystic, as well as a scientist, the sense of the greater Whole is always present with him.

In the second part of *Faust*, Goethe illustrates his position. Man cannot look with the naked eye into the Sun, the Absolute, which is the ultimate Truth and the Cause of all things. He can see Him reflected in, and lighting up, His creation. Though fleeting and imperfect, these reflections cannot be separated from their source. Man can come nearer to the Absolute by making a proper use of Its appearance.

The particular, in Goethe's symbolism, represents the universal, not

as a dream or shadow, but as a living, momentary revelation of the unfathomable. Man can lift time into eternity, if he lives the moment as well as he thinks it, seriously, in right relation to everything else.

Like Aristotle, Goethe thinks it our business to make ourselves immortal through reason, using all things, keeping their essence, but letting their non-essentials go.

Waste not a word on the things that must pass.
To grow immortal—that is our task.

Immortality is in the spirit, in the conscious realization of it, while yet living. Effort is essential to man, but its reward is not here but elsewhere.

From one point of view, Goethe thinks of the world as eternally perfect, from another, as though it were imperfect, but developing. Goethe is one of the pioneers of the idea of evolution. He does not give a scientific theory to explain evolution, but one feels that he would have preferred Lamarck's doctrine to Darwin's. The early Darwinians laid stress on the external environment as the factor governing biological development. Goethe does not subscribe to this soulless doctrine, and he believes in the efforts of creatures to do new things. According to him, the whole universe is growing. He speaks of the one universal breath of life, which governs the whole of nature. Both organic and inorganic nature are served by one cosmic life-force. 'The thinker has divided so deeply that he can unite, and united so deeply that he can divide.'

Goethe, as a great sage, believes, while modern science and logic eschew all belief beyond what they consider to be demonstrable truth. He extends belief beyond knowledge. He believes that nature yields its secrets to thought; that human action aids the purposes of external nature; that nature is an instrument of God; and he believes that the soul survives death. He is adamant in this last belief, and it is evident that, in his deep meditation, he had seen the vision of immortality.

Man must struggle, fight and work here, to improve the spiritual, moral and material conditions of the world, and should leave the future life to itself. A wind, blowing in him from Infinity, kept Goethe resolute and sane. *Faust* is essentially the spiritual biography of this great seer

and poet, and an account of his own experiences. Goethe's great achievement, which is expressed in *Faust*, is his recognition of the living art of discovering Truth by struggle—a discovery which leads to the experience of a great calm within, which no passions can shake.

Tolerance towards those who are still struggling in life, and abstention from blame, are points which Goethe teaches with perhaps unrivalled eloquence. 'One has only to grow older to become more tolerant,' Goethe wrote, when he was himself an old man. He did not believe in remorse or repentance. In the personality of Faust, there are two souls at war with each other. In a lesser degree, this is the case with all of us. The scheme underlying Faust shows the way whereby man may be released from passions, and brought to the eternal calm, in which angels carry his soul to God.

Experience and Nature are the two great teachers of Goethe. His Nature is not 'red in tooth and claw'. This is a foolish view of Nature; it is one-sided. Goethe, speaking of Nature, says:

She has set all things apart, that she may bring all things together. One draught from the beaker of love, she counts payment enough for a life-time of toil... To her, the present is eternity. She is kind and gracious. I praise her and all her works. Man can tear no revelation from her by force, wring from her no gifts that she will not freely give... She has brought me here; she will lead me hence... She will not hate her work.

Nature does not hide God.

He who cannot grasp the truth that spirit and matter, soul and body, thought and space... were and will be the necessary two-fold constituents of the universe; that both have equal rights, and both may be regarded as representative of God; he who cannot rise to the height of this thought, ought long ago to have given up thinking.

Here you find a true pupil of Spinoza.

Goethe believes that the spiritual truth is knowable; that man must discover his likeness to God, in his profound experience. He combats the view of the sceptics, that we can only know the 'shell' of things, while the kernel is inaccessible. He says, in *Wilhelm Meister*:

Every discovery is an inborn feeling for truth. It is a revelation, which unfolds itself from the inner to the outer, and through it, man may surmise his likeness to God. It is a union between the world and the mind, an assurance of the eternal harmony in all Being.

Goethe was a man of love, enquiry, gratitude and contemplation. He preserved the tranquillity of his mind amid discouraging circumstances. The following quotation from his autobiography is significant.

I endeavoured to free my mind from all external influences, to regard all that existed beyond myself with benevolence and affection, and to leave all beings, commencing with man, to produce their effect on me, according to their respective natures, that I might comprehend them as thoroughly as possible. This mode of feeling, gave me, if I may so express it, a particular affinity with every object; attuned me to harmony with all nature; and rendered my soul like an internal echo, in which every sound was reverberated.

The eye of the painter was combined in him with the sensibility of the poet.

The fine and richly cultivated country, fertilized by a beneficent stream, increased my love of solitude and encouraged my tranquil meditation, whilst it allowed them to range freely and unconfined.

Restlessness is a characteristic of a great creative mind in the early stages of its candidature for the great peace. It has to be guided and controlled. Goethe, as a young man, was fortunate enough to know and revere a mystic, Fraulein von Klettenberg, who exercised a great spiritual influence on him. He says of her: 'Her presence calmed, for a time at least, my erring inclinations and tumultuous passions.' In *Wilhelm Meister*, Goethe describes beautifully the mystic thoughts of this woman. The seeds sown by her in Goethe's mind, and the influence of the Moravian Order, developed into a high mystic state in him in old age.

Goethe was a deeply religious man, but neither a Christian nor a Buddhist, nor a Hindu. His great and most generous mind could not be pigeon-holed in any sect or creed. Let us conclude with a translation of

one of the noblest of his lyrics, which Carlyle has styled, 'the marching music of mankind' .

The Mason wanders
Like all who live,
And all the wonders
He strives to build
Are like man's striving.
The future will waken
New joy, new grief.
We see but one step,
And that step brief,
Yet press through, unshaken.
Dark in the distance
There hangs a veil.
Solemnly silent,
The stars are above us,
Beneath us the graves.
Behold them and ponder!
Strange visions will rise,
Changing, baffling
The bravest eyes,
Dread visions, grave-hearted.
But listen! The voices
Call from the sky,
The Spirits, the Masters,
Unceasingly:
'Loiter not! Work!
Here are woven
Here in the calm,
For all who labour,
Full crowns of palm.
We say to you: Hope!'

Hari Prasad Shastri

The Path of Light

THE AIM of the spiritual wisdom is that we should find lasting happiness and be free. This is a freedom and happiness that cannot be disturbed by anything, including the approaching decline of our minds and bodies.

As in all practical fields, there are some maps and guides provided by those who have gone before, and in order to make real progress, we have to consult them. But these teachings are not dogmatic statements about reality which we are expected to just accept. That would be absurd because it is not possible to express ultimate reality in words or even thoughts. The spiritual instructions are really indications of the inner adjustments we need to make in order to be able to proceed with the enquiry for ourselves.

One of the guiding ideas we are offered is this. Think of ourselves as made up of two elements. One of these we can call the mind, although that English word is really too narrow here. In Sanskrit we have the useful term *antahkarana*, which means the whole of the inner organ of experience, including what we usually refer to as the mind and emotions, and which includes sense-perception, memory, imagination and the will.

The second element in our inner nature is what we may call consciousness—that which illumines all our experience. It is not the content of the experience, it is the light which makes all experience possible. Once again, there is a convenient Sanskrit term used in the non-dual philosophy, which is *chit*. This covers the full idea of consciousness as the inner illuminator of all experience.

So here is a guiding idea, that our inner being can be understood as comprised of these two distinct elements: the mind, that is, all the sensory, mental and emotional activity; and the conscious principle that illumines this activity.

Some important implications follow from this. The first is that these two elements are totally dissimilar. On the one side we have the world of thoughts and feelings. Each of these has a definite form, each thought is about something and not about everything else. Each feeling has its own quality and necessarily does not include different kinds of feeling.

The conscious principle on the other hand is quite different. Here it is much more difficult to say what its qualities are. So much so that some have suggested it is not really there at all. But the spiritual teachings refute this strongly; consciousness is absolutely real; if it were not there, nothing would manifest in experience. So consciousness is entirely positive.

Where there is consciousness there is not unconsciousness. It is by its very nature awareness, the life of life, and light. So here is one of the ways in which these two elements differ radically; one is made up of forms and qualities and limitations; the other is free of such limitations.

Now we come to something else that follows from what we have said about these two elements that comprise our inner being. It is that the mind in itself is not conscious, nor does it have life and intelligence of its own. It seems to possess life and awareness and autonomy, but in fact these qualities are borrowed from the conscious principle, which is reflected in the mind, endowing the mind with the semblance of consciousness. Like the moon, it seems to shine and give light and change shape, but in truth this light and dynamism is borrowed from the sun reflected in it.

This leads to one further conclusion, and it concerns something very dear to us. It is the meaning of the little word 'I' that means so much to us. This word properly belongs to the conscious factor, the illuminating principle, and by implication it does not belong to the mind. To put it another way, the usual understanding of what is subject and object, what is our self what is other, needs to be revised. The self, the real I, is the conscious principle, not one which merely shines with a borrowed light. It is the one that illumines and is aware of the experiences and feelings that belong to the mind. Perhaps most importantly, it is a principle which in itself is not bound by forms and limitations, it is the light in which these appear. Our self is intrinsically free of all limitation, and the blissfulness of freedom is its own also.

This brings us to the practical aspect of the teachings. It is that on the path to Self-Knowledge and final liberation the need is to increasingly look upon the mind and all the mental activity as an object and instrument, but not our true Self. And at the same time what is called the path of light is a progressive deepening of the sense of being identified

with the conscious principle within, which we have begun to understand as immaculate, boundless, the illumined Self.

In this tradition we are not encouraged to withdraw from the world, but to treat the world as a great school. This might sound a bit constricting and not what we were hoping for on the path of expansion and liberation. But like all schools, we are not expected to stay in it forever, the intention is that we will pass through it and leave it behind. In the early stages the main focus is on becoming the master of our mind, or one could say on making our mind into a reliable companion and helper. In the later stages, the focus is on using what is now a good instrument to reflect more and more of the beauty and tranquillity of the true Self. One is inevitably in a hurry to enter the advanced stage, but the safest way of doing so is to practise the fundamentals diligently.

One of these fundamentals is a simple ability to stop, start and steer the mind. Marjorie Waterhouse, a former Warden of Shanti Sadan, recommends this practice. We simply say to the mind, stop what you are doing, and for a given time think about something we choose. The subject could be mundane or spiritual; the point is that the mind should turn as we wish. A good time to do such a practice might be a moment in the day, say when we are walking, and find the mind busying itself with something not particularly useful or edifying. Then we say to the mind, from now until the next corner we will think about..., and we choose a subject. Marjorie Waterhouse remarks that this may look baby easy, but if we try it we will learn a great deal, and also that if we make use of such practices we will not need to use them forever.

There are many aspects to this phase of the spiritual life whereby we increasingly make ourselves independent of the mind, all the time growing in the sense of identity with the light of pure consciousness within. Overall, one might say that there are analogies with a mountain climb or a pilgrimage. Both are undertaken with a definite goal and the intention of reaching that goal, where the journey ends. On the way, everything is judged according to how it helps or hinders us on our way, so our values may be quite unlike those with different priorities. Another parallel with a journey is that we are frequently presented with opportunities to exercise our powers of ingenuity in response to changing circumstances. On our inner journey the way leads through

successfully turning our mind into a responsive and effective helper, rather than a despot fixed upon its own interests, so managing the mind's response to things, rather than trying to manipulate outer circumstances, automatically, becomes the central concern. There is great hope in this already, because the will to change the world is likely to end in despair, whereas the will to change ourselves immediately opens doors. In this way one can make substantial progress towards dis-identifying ourselves from the mind.

There is considerably more to this than what might be called simply 'looking on the bright side'; nor is it meant to be a test of sheer will power. The same writer summed up an important idea in the phrase 'inner growth, not endurance'. Dogged endurance is not the yogic ideal. We are not asked to put up with darkness; the idea is to grow towards the light. That is not so much seeing the light or bright side, but an increasing sense that the light itself resides in the heart of our own being.

In this connection Marjorie Waterhouse cites the example of the Rabbi Leo Baeck. As a young scholar in the early part of the last century living in Berlin, Baeck's writings on philosophy and religion made him a famous living exponent of the ancient Judaic tradition. He was an effective administrator as well as scholar and became joint leader of the umbrella organization formed to try to protect Jewish people. During the 1930s he had many opportunities to leave but chose to stay on. In 1939 he brought a train full of Jewish children to England for safety, and then went back to Berlin to be with his community. Finally in 1943 he was sent to the concentration camp at Terezin in Bohemia. There he continued ministering as a Rabbi and also teaching philosophy. He gave lectures on Plato and Kant and hundreds of people squeezed into the barracks to listen. When the camp was finally liberated, he prevented the inmates from turning on the guards and even led them to give up the desire for revenge. Rabbi Baeck did not just endure darkness, but took everything as an opportunity to find light within and around.

There is one more parallel between the outer journey and the inner climb worth noting. The success of our pilgrim, or mountaineer, depends a lot on their ability to find shelter at critical moments. This is

a particularly important test of our growing ingenuity and balance. On the inner path, these places of refuge from the psychological equivalents of excessive heat and cold and storms are provided by those great beings who have passed before and have become one with the landscape and all creation. The lives and personalities of Christ, the Buddha, the Saints and prophets, provide us with sanctuary, warmth and security which theories and abstractions never can. A true seeker will take from them what is needed, as a small child takes what it needs from its parent. This giving and taking is the circulation of the inner spiritual life of the world. And yet, on no side is there any need or wish for one to cease the journey at this point; there is no wish or need to become fixed and static at this point, attached to any particular form. What is essential is the inner life not the outer form. And so the explorer, and the inner seeker, drawing what they need from these vital sources, pass through towards their end and the light.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* the idea of the distinction between the mental forms and consciousness is given like this. 'This, the body, is called Kshetra [the field], The one who is aware of this is called Kshetra-jna [knower of the the field].' The body here means the physical body and also the mind, conceived as a 'subtle body'.

In the next verse we have words which point to the highest truth. They are spoken to the pupil by his teacher, who is Krishna. As with Christ, there are times when Krishna speaks as an individual, and there are times when the universal being is speaking. The words are: 'Know Me as the Knower of the Field in all the Fields. To know rightly the nature of the Field and the Knower of the Field is true Knowledge.' So in a very direct way, the Lord here tells us of the field of experience, and the knower of that field; and that the knower of the field is none other than the supreme one. It is for us to meditate and realize what this means for our own experience—what this reveals about our own nature.

The non-dual tradition, of which the Gita is a central text, is distinctive among the great spiritual traditions in that it makes this statement about the ultimate identity of the individual and the supreme directly and explicitly. In other traditions this idea is often denied and even those who are in a position to say something about it often do so in cautious ways in order not to cause offence or confusion. The

non-dual tradition gives this teaching explicitly, firstly, because it is just not possible to have a coherent philosophy which implies that there is more than one ultimate reality. If two realities fit together then they are parts of the one whole which is reality. If they do not fit together, then one or both cannot be entirely real. If the individual and the universal are ultimately different then they are two ultimate realities, which is absurd. If they are not ultimately different, they are ultimately one, which is the non-dual view. The other reason for stating this clearly is that true humility is not the feeling 'I am very small and insignificant', but 'I am ultimately nothing at all; God is everything.'

It is possible to wholly misunderstand the teaching that the true Self and the divine are ultimately one. We might go off with the notion that my mind and ego are divine. But we would quickly run into uncomfortable experiences to disabuse us of our misapprehension. So we emphasize that the meaning is not that the mind and body are divine, but that the mind and body are not the true Self.

The Gita goes on to spell out what is the field. It includes all the elements of matter, energy, intellect, the ego-sense, the senses, desire and aversion, pleasure and suffering, thought and will. So, it includes everything which has a form: everything in the world around us and all our inner experiences of them.

Then the Gita describes wisdom, that is, the attitude or outlook which flows from having understood the significance of this distinction, enumerating the qualities that will be manifest where this essential knowledge is established. These include humility, integrity, harmlessness, patience, honesty, purity, stability, self-control, indifference to appearances, awareness of the limitations of life, inner independence, even-mindedness, aversion to frivolous company, a desire for inner communion, sustaining awareness of the higher truth and pursuit of the goal. All this is said to be wisdom, and its opposite is ignorance.

These are facets of one outlook—wisdom—which will flow naturally from a deepening understanding of our own selves, of what is limited and objective, and what is the true self within us which is free of limitations and suffering and is all light, ever liberated. We have to exercise our will and make efforts, but the path is not a constant struggle where we have to strain our limited inner strength in a battle

between opposing forces. The idea is not to battle with darkness, but to rise above it, to bring light. We can do this through meditation, reflection and contemplation on that which is most dear and sweet to us, the light of lights, the life of life that pervades our inner world, the precious self at the heart of all experience.

This might sound as if we are interested in ourselves in the negative and limited sense. And in fact there is something of intense interest in what we call the ego, the I-am feeling which is so central to our concerns. Usually we accept its inner dominance as a fact of life, and react accordingly. In the spiritual enquiry we go into this more consciously and deeply. We want to find out more about this dynamo and see if we can harness its powers to our real benefit. Here in particular we are guided by the indication that throughout our inner life there is a distinction between what is limited and inert, which seems to shine, but in fact only reflects; and what is truly light and conscious. This distinction is particularly subtle and significant at this point. If we persevere with our explorations, and learn how to find shelter and sustenance in the places we noticed earlier, pure gold is to be discovered amidst all the dross and dust.

The laboratory in which we investigate these profundities is meditation. In the yogic tradition a special time is made each day for the practice. At this time the demands of the world are put to one side and the focus is entirely on the spiritual enquiry. Regularity, perseverance, full use of the imagination and will are called for. Those who persevere with meditation find sooner or later that a new light seems to be illuminating the inner world, bringing with it a sense of security that nothing in the world can supply. Until now meditation has required efforts to counter the natural restlessness of the mind, but now a new pull of attraction seems to be drawing the attention towards itself. St Teresa of Avila, in her counsels on prayer, says in her famous analogy that at first every drop of water has to be laboriously drawn out of the well, one bucket at a time. Gradually it seems as if an efficient mechanism with a wheel and many buckets has been established and much more water flows with much less strain. This is the second of four degrees of prayer she describes, and refers to it as the beginning of the prayer of quiet. She notes that many reach this point, but that it is easy

to tarry here. It can happen that what is novel and pleasing in this produces a reaction. The understanding is liable to begin theorizing about it, the memory starts to hunt for precedents and the will agitates for fresh directives in the changed circumstances. Then a desire arises that this should be intensified and extended, and the lower part of the active mind anxiously looks for ways to do so. The effect on the meditation of this commotion hardly needs spelling out.

This is one of the reasons why it is important to ensure that the foundations of our spiritual life are strong. At this point we will be sustained by our grounding in the principles of non-duality gained from study and reflection on the philosophy. And we shall draw upon the basic capacity to start, stop and steer our instruments. There is only one thing for all the faculties to do, and that is to carry on doing the practices as they have been prescribed, so long as any awareness of being a doer remains. The understanding is to understand that its powers of analysis cannot enter into the realm of unity and wholeness; it is not to theorize about light, only to be absorbed in it. The imagination is to be applied to the symbol or meaning of the text, and the will to sustaining the direction of focus. Our inner explorer keeps their feet on the path and their eyes on the compass, so the increasingly rarefied atmosphere around does not impede them.

We have been considering an aspect of the teaching: that we can distinguish within us between what is conscious and non-conscious; what is truly living from what is inert; from what is our true I and what is really other; and that the path consists in learning to identify with the principle of pure living light within. It may have occurred to us that there is some tension between this, and the central teaching of this tradition, which is after all called non-duality, the principle that ultimately there are no divisions and separations in reality.

There is a resolution. It is the subject of subtle points of philosophy and deep meditation. The greatest philosopher of non-duality, Shri Shankara, begins one of his best known passages by saying that subject and object, self and not-self, are as different as light and dark, and as obviously so; and that their natures could never be confounded; and yet, we constantly do confound them, and think of what is non-conscious to be conscious and what is not-self to be self. He brings this to our

attention very clearly so that we can learn and act upon it, providing the most complete and uncompromising presentation of the vision that cannot admit of more than one reality.

The path is not really a struggle between opposing forces of light and darkness. Both in theory and in practice we see that when light is brought in and allowed to extend in all directions, then there is only light. Shankara in his philosophy shows that where there is reality there is no unreality. The most demanding intellects will find all they need in the dialectics of Shankara. And the teachings have a very happy and practical conclusion. At the heart of our own being we have found a principle of purity, limitlessness, perfect at-onement, the inner light of all experience. In our meditations and in our life of dedicated enquiry, the task is to see, to affirm and to live in, that eternal Light.

P.H.

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TWO HAIKU POEMS BY ISSA

One evening, the Japanese Buddhist poet, Issa (1763-1827), wrote two short poems that look the same—until you realize that a single word marks the difference between unawareness and insight.

The evening cool
Not knowing the bell
Is tolling our life away.

*

The evening cool
Knowing the bell
Is tolling our life away.

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

A recent meditation session led by the Warden

Tonight we have another opportunity together to turn within in peace and quiet, and come into touch with our spiritual source—a source that is infinite and inexhaustible. If we can make room in our life for daily meditation, we have in our hands a wonderful means of relaxing our body, getting relief from nervous tension, and influencing our mind in the way of peace and harmony. If we can learn to tranquillize our mind, we will be able to stabilize our life, rise above mood swings, and find a deeper relaxation and serenity. We often seek help from others, but ultimately, no one can help us as much as we can help ourselves—and one of the ways is through meditation.

But true meditation is much more than this. For those who want to go deeper into this self-culture, the possibilities of peace and understanding take on a new dimension. For there is a deeper spiritual reality or essence underlying our personality. Its nature is peace, power, light, fulfilment, and it is one with the great power underlying all experience. Meditation helps us to re-connect and merge with this divine element in our being. We learn to look on ourselves as spiritual beings, for whom a great development is possible. We feed our mind on the best nourishment—which is, the truth that we are in essence pure, infinite, ever blissful.

Before we begin our silent practices, let us chant OM 27 times. OM is a word and sound that signifies the highest—the universal spiritual consciousness. When we focus on OM, it uplifts the mind and replaces our thoughts and worries with spiritual power and peace. In other words, it brings us closer to our true nature.

* * *

Next, we approach the meditation with reverence and calmness. We feel that we are in the presence of the divine within and without. We mentally bow to that invisible power.

Now we will do a breathing practice.

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

So sit comfortably on your chair or cushion, upright and nicely centred. It is important that the central part of the body is not constricted in any way, so that our posture helps the free flow of the breathing. Once the body is poised and balanced it can be forgotten, and that is the real purpose of finding a good posture. As you do the breathing, feel that you are shaking off all tiredness and tension, the entire burden of thought. Associate the in-breath with the feeling of breathing in a pure clean current of air. This will prepare us for the influx of light and peace from our deeper being. Let us do this for three to four minutes.

* * *

Now we practise a visualization.

Imagine that the morning sun is shining in the ‘heart centre’. We fix our thought on this point, called the centre of vitality, and visualize the morning sun radiating there and let its rays of peace, power and plenty issue forth.

Through our breathing practice, we make, as it were, some ‘inner space’. We prepare the way for the light from the inner spiritual sun to shine through, revealing peace, power and abundant energy. So in our visualization practice, we try to keep our awareness in this central region of our body, and focus on the image of a bright, radiant inner sun which fills us with peace and light. It is a symbol of the inner illumination, which is not really localized in any place or form—but this type of concentration helps us because it points to something deeper in us that is immortal, perfect and full of light. Let us now do this for five minutes.

* * *

Our meditation text takes us a stage further and indicates the universal or cosmic nature of this inner light, first discerned at the centre of our own being.

OM. THE LIGHT WHICH ANIMATES MY MIND
ANIMATES THE SUN AND THE STARS ALSO.
THAT LIGHT IS BLISS. THAT LIGHT AM I. OM

This spiritual light is the supreme source of all light. It is the revealer of all experience, outer and inner. Texts like this are a kind of description of our own deeper nature. They point to what is eternal in us. When we meditate with faith, they open a path home to our true Self. We will come to find that our real I—our innermost Self—is boundless and blissful, and is the reality in all we experience.

Take your time in assimilating the text. Affirm it to yourself slowly, firmly, with trust. Then, when your attention is held—it can be just a part of the text that engages you, or the whole text—take it a little deeper into yourself. Rest in it. If your mind slips away, take a deep breath, look at the text again, and try once more to hold it. Let us do this now for ten minutes.

* * *

We often feel we should wait for ideal conditions before taking up meditation. But those ideal conditions never come. On the other hand, if we can learn to practise in spite of the difficulties—and these are common to us all—we really will make progress in inner peace and strength. What is highest in us—our truth, beauty, peace and virtue—will enrich our own life, and flow naturally for the good of all.

We end our session by sending out thoughts of peace and goodwill to all. Here are some words that express this feeling. They are themselves a meditation, which we will do for a minute or two together.

OM

TRUTH AND BEAUTY ARE THE PROPERTIES OF MY SPIRIT.
PEACE AND VIRTUE DROP FROM THE CLOUD OF MY SOUL.

OM

The Holy Name OM

SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA has said that ‘volumes have been written about OM in the Sanskrit language’ and that ‘In fact all the Vedas, all Vedanta, and all the other sacred scriptures of the Hindus are contained in this word OM.’ Our own Teacher Dr Shastri also commented: ‘This Holy Name of God, OM, is universal in its significance and in its application.’ So all we will try to do now is to cover a few of the main aspects of the teaching about OM from the practical point of view.

The spiritual Truth is universal and is to be found in all truly spiritual traditions. Let us take for example the Sikh tradition, which also venerates OM as a word indicative of the supreme Reality.

Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikhism. Sikh is the Punjabi word for ‘disciple’, related to *sikhna*, to learn. Guru Nanak’s disciples were the first Sikhs, and repetition of the Name of God, *nam japan*, and recollection of the Name, *nam simaran*, are still the basic spiritual practices in Sikhism. The outer rituals, like wearing a turban and carrying a dagger, came later, introduced in response to persecution.

Nanak taught his disciples, or Sikhs, what he had discovered in his own experience: that *sahaja*—the state of perpetual freedom and bliss through knowledge of Truth—is attainable in this life, and that it can be earned through constant repetition and recollection of the Name of God. His own first words on attaining this Self-realization were ‘Ik Onkar’, ‘OM is One’. These words are the basis of the Sikh doctrine of liberation through repetition and dwelling on the holy Name, and this is why you will see ‘Ik Onkar’ written in the Punjabi script on the canopy above the holy book, the *Guru Granth*, which represents the Guru in all Sikh temples or *Gurdwaras*, as they are called.

Nanak taught that by repeating and dwelling on the Holy Name one could reduce and finally eliminate ‘*haumai*’, the feeling of ‘I and mine’. In Yoga also, egoism, or *ahankara*, is held to be at the root of spiritual ignorance, the one great obstacle to spiritual enlightenment. Says the Rishi Ashtavakra in the *Ashtavakra Gita*:

Where there is ‘I’ there is bondage. Where there is no ‘I’ there is release. Know this to be the truth...

Always contemplate the ever fixed Intelligence, the non-dual Self (Atman). Giving up all inner and outer identification of the Self with the not-self, abandon the notion of the individualized self.

And in Yoga also, as in all the genuine Hindu traditions, as well as Buddhism, the repetition and recollection of the holy Name OM is enjoined for this purpose.

The teachings of Yoga are based on the Upanishads, also known as the Vedanta. These are the ancient Hindu scriptures which record the statements of earlier Rishis or ‘seers of the Truth’—such statements as:

The ever conscious Self is never born, nor does it die at any time. It sprang from nothing and nothing sprang from it. Eternal, abiding and primeval, it is not slain when the body is slain.

This Self, that is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great, is seated in the heart of every being. Through tranquillity of the mind and senses, one who has become desireless sees that glory of the Self and becomes free from sorrow. *(Katha Upanishad, 1.2.18 & 20)*

Nearly all the major Upanishads teach meditation on OM. The *Chandogya Upanishad* begins with the injunction to meditate on the sound OM: ‘One should meditate on OM as the *Udgitha*. For one begins the chanting by pronouncing OM.’ The *Udgitha* was the chanting of selected Vedic texts at a sacrifice in which the juice of the Soma plant, symbolizing the nectar of immortality, was offered. These texts became the *Sama Veda*, and the *Chandogya Upanishad* was later added to them. This is why the Upanishads are also called the Vedanta, which means ‘end of the Vedas’. Their function is to reveal the ultimate truth taught in the Vedas: the identity of the human soul with Brahman, the Supreme Reality or God. Therefore the *Chandogya Upanishad* opens with this injunction to meditate on OM and then goes on to describe the value, manner and results of such meditation.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* presents meditation on OM in terms of our everyday experience—what we see or are aware of when awake or dreaming, and fail to see in deep sleep. It also draws our attention to the conscious experience of unbroken bliss and freedom which the Rishis tell us lies beyond these three states of bondage awaiting rediscovery through Yoga practice. This is how the *Mandukya Upanishad* opens:

The Word OM is all this—all that was in the past, all that is now and all that will be in the future. And, verily, That which is beyond these three divisions of time is also OM.

For all this is Brahman. This Self is Brahman, the Supreme Reality—God.

An analysis of the states of consciousness follows, in terms of the constituent parts of OM as represented by the letters that make up the word, and also the visual symbol, shown on the cover of this journal. The lowest and largest curve represents our consciousness of the waking state. The middle curve represents our consciousness of dream. The upper curve represents our consciousness of bliss in dreamless sleep. Above these three states is the detached Witness Consciousness beyond the three divisions of time, represented by the the curve or incompleting circle, indicating infinity and the point or *bindu* or point standing for transcendence and immortality. This is the true Self, Brahman, or God, supreme, immortal and changeless, the ultimate illuminator of all experience. The true meaning of OM will come alive when it is meditated on as sound and as light.

Can we find any support for this teaching outside Hinduism—in the Christian Gospels, for example? The most likely place is in the Fourth Gospel, attributed to St John, which is acknowledged to be the most mystical of the Gospels:

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, ‘If ye continue in My Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ *(John 8:31-32)*

It is a conditional promise, and the condition for its fulfilment is given: ‘If ye continue in my word’. This refers us back to the familiar opening verse of this Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

As the commentator on the New English Bible explains, the author of St John’s Gospel actually used a Greek term ‘logos’, meaning ‘the immanent divine rational principle of the universe’, to represent the Word of the Lord spoken of in the Jewish scriptures and the Old

Testament—the Word used to create the world in Genesis and given to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus. Now if we look up the beginning of the account in Exodus, we find that something important happened before the Lord gave the Commandments to Moses. What we read is this:

And Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

‘In the beginning was the Word—the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ Then the Lord proclaimed the Word as the holy Name. The text says that God gave Moses the holy Name first, before He gave him the Divine Law—the Torah, the Commandments.

So we have two possible meanings of the promise given again by the Lord in the form of Christ: ‘If ye continue in My Word ye shall know the Truth and be free.’ First is the generally accepted interpretation: ‘If you continue to keep My commandments.’ Christ said this means ‘Loving God with all one’s heart and soul and mind’—which comes first—and ‘loving your neighbour as yourself’.

Krishna in the Gita gives the same teaching.

Fix thy mind on Me exclusively, be devoted to Me ...

That man is dear to me who hates no living being, who is friendly and compassionate to all...

But how do we practise these two commandments? According to Yoga, ‘obey the commandments’ is only the outer meaning of ‘continue in My word’. An inner meaning was also given which answers this question: continue to repeat and dwell on the Word, the Holy Name which the Lord proclaimed to Moses first—continue to practise repetition of the Name of God and dwelling on its meaning.

Can we find any evidence for this in the writings of Christian mystics? Do any of them actually enjoin this practice? I quote just one of many possible examples. It comes from *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

...if we wish to pray intently to receive good, let us cry either with word or thought, or desire no other word and no more words but this

one word, ‘God’. This is because all good is in God, either by cause or by being... Proceed... with this little word ‘God’.

Not merely repetition of the Name of God, like some magic spell, but also dwelling on the meaning. The author continues:

Fill yourself with the spiritual meaning of it without any special attention to any of His works, whether they be good, better, or the best of all ... What does this matter to contemplatives?... They think that if they have God they have all good and therefore they have no special desires for anything but only for Good God. Do the same yourself as far as you are able to by grace. Intend God altogether, and all God, so that nothing works in your mind but only God.

So we do find repeating the Holy Name of God and dwelling on its meaning being taught by practising Christian mystics as a means to knowledge of Truth and freedom. And the Christian Gospel identifies this Holy Name as the Word which was in the beginning, just as the *Mandukya Upanishad* does.

Does that name have to be OM? Our Teacher Dr Shastri said ‘No!’ Choose the Name with which you can identify most readily. ‘Take any name of God’, he used to say, ‘take Jesus—a very good name I assure you—take Rama, or Krishna, or take the holy name OM.’ God is the one ruler of the universe, therefore all names of God are names of the same Lord who takes human birth to save mankind whenever the need arises, as Krishna says in chapter four of the Gita: ‘I take birth in every age to re-establish dharma [the divine law leading to salvation].’

So all the different names are, so to say, the Name of God in different languages. In the language of the Upanishads and the Gita that Name is OM and all other names are heard and seen as variants of OM. Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras [1:26-28] says:

The word expressing God is the mystic syllable OM. There should be repetition of it and dwelling on its meaning [bhavana].

Shri Vyasa, the commentator, says that

in the case of the yogi who thus repeats the mystic syllable and dwells on its meaning, the mind attains one-pointedness (*ekagrata*). And so it has been said: ‘Through self-study (*svadhyaya*) let him practise Yoga;

through Yoga, let him meditate on self-study. By perfection in self-study and Yoga, the Supreme Self shines forth clearly.’

Another commentator, Vachaspati Mishra, describes dwelling on the meaning of OM as absorption of the mind in it again and again and that ‘attaining to one pointedness’ means that ‘his mind comes to rest in the Exalted One. The Lord then gratifies him by conferring on him *samadhi* and the fruit of *samadhi*.’ In the Gita, also, the Lord promises that

To those who are ever established in Yoga, worshipping Me with love, I give that devotion to knowledge by which they come to Me. Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the luminous lamp of wisdom.

Whoso constantly thinks of Me and long, to that ever united Yogi I am easily accessible.

Thus the result or fruit of the meditation on OM is the grace of God, as Shankara explains in his commentary on the *Chandogya Upanishad*:

OM as the name of the supreme Reality is nearest to Him. When it is used, He becomes gracious, just as a man does whose favourite name is used.

Again we can find confirmation in the experience of the Christian mystics. In the *Imitation of Christ*, Thomas á Kempis writes:

Happy the man who is instructed by Truth itself, not by signs and passing words but as It is in itself... Those to whom the Eternal Word speaks are delivered from uncertainty. From one Word proceed all things, and all things tell of Him; it is He, the Author of all things, who speaks to us. Without Him no one can understand or judge aright. But the man to whom all things are One, who refers everything to One, and who sees everything as in One, is enabled to remain steadfast in heart, and abide at peace with God. O God, living Truth, unite me to Yourself in everlasting love...

‘In the beginning was the Word’ and the Word, the Holy Name, was with God. Before the beginning there was only God, Who is eternal and nameless, being beyond all names. But even then, ‘the Word was God’, or rather is and ever shall be God. For God is eternal.

In the tenth chapter of the Gita, the Lord declares: ‘I am the Word OM in all the Vedas’. Therefore, through meditation on the Holy Name OM, the meditator reawakens to his true identity with God, who has no name. The *Amritabindu Upanishad* says:

By sound let a man effect Yoga, then let him meditate on the non-sound, then through the meditation on the non-sound, the non-being is seen as being.

The commentator Shankarananda gives the meaning:

By meditating on the constituent sounds of OM—A-U-M... the aspirant should achieve Yoga, the restraint of the mind, culminating in the knowledge ‘I am Brahman’. When firmly established in OM, he should meditate on the OM beyond sound—that is, he should dwell on the mere idea without the help of the sound. When such meditation reaches its consummation in the intuitive knowledge ‘I am Brahman’, in the absence of nescience and all its effects, he sees the essence of Brahman.

The *Amritabindu Upanishad* takes its name from the point, or Bindu, which represents the divine Consciousness or true Self in the OM symbol. ‘Amrita bindu’ means ‘point of immortality’ and Amrita is another name for Soma, the drink representing the nectar of immortality which was offered at the sacrifice while the Udgitha was being chanted. The Upanishad continues:

The syllable OM, the Word, is the Supreme Reality, Brahman. When that disappears, he who knows the Imperishable should meditate upon that Imperishable if he would seek peace for himself.

Two kinds of knowledge have to be known, the Word-Brahman and That which is known as the Supreme. The adept in the Word-Brahman reaches the Supreme Brahman.

Here is a simple daily practice of meditation on OM recommended by Dr Shastri in his book on Meditation. You do not need to know the symbology of OM to benefit from this practice:

Sit comfortably [in the meditation posture] and take the name of God OM. Repeat it several times [our Teacher said it can be repeated inwardly and that inner repetition was the most potent form], and then

imagine that a bright light is shining in your breast, in the heart centre. Imagine that it is shining up into the throat. Now let it rise to the brain and issue from the head, spreading in all directions, carrying illumination with it. Send forth the rays with thoughts of friendliness and compassion to all.

Those of you familiar with the Benedictus from St Luke's Gospel will remember the beautiful words in which Zacharias proclaimed, under divine inspiration [being 'filled with the Holy Ghost'], that the Christ child had come 'through the tender mercy of our God... to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.' The same promise is given in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This way of peace is the way of Adhyatma Yoga.

In some lines from his poem, *Shanti Shataka*, One Hundred Verses on Inner Peace, the great modern Rishi, Swami Nirbhayananda, reminds himself and us how to follow this way of peace, which leads to freedom through knowledge of the true Self 'even while we are here in this life', as the *Chandogya Upanishad* promises:

At every step cultivate friendliness, O Nirbhaya. Recite the holy Name...

Nirbhaya, call ceaselessly on God; do not delay now or tomorrow.

Nirbhaya! Give the same love to Hindu, Christian and Turk. Renounce the conception of 'I' and 'thou'; do not tire thy soul.

Realize the spiritual meaning of life, O Nirbhaya, and sit in silence; smile secretly, merged in the divine vision.

M.R.H.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

One of the Vedanta classics translated and commented on by Hari Prasad Shastri has just been reprinted, *Direct Experience of Reality*, attributed to Shri Shankara. The book focuses on essentials: the nature of Self, the nature of ultimate reality, and their intrinsic identity. Dr Shastri's commentary is noteworthy for its exposition of how the Vedanta world-view can and should influence thought and action in daily life. A leaflet about the book accompanies the mailing of this issue of *Self-Knowledge*.

At the recent summer afternoon course, we were joined by several subscribers, some of whom had travelled a considerable distance to participate in the event. Proceedings began with a short talk on how the spiritual yoga can help us live more skilfully. The second presentation considered the problem of fear, and the qualities we can cultivate to minimise and eventually banish its influence from our life. The final lecture, *Self is Infinite Consciousness*, showed how the spiritual vision transcends thought itself, and yet, in the fundamental sense, is ever achieved.

The meetings held at Shanti Sadan included lectures on *Meditative Insights from the Christian Tradition*, *Treasures of the Here and Now* and *The Spirit of Universality*. The final talk, *Self is the Greatest Gain*, presented the Advaita teachings with special reference to the *Avadhut Gita*. The Tuesday meditation sessions were particularly well attended throughout the term, and will continue during the summer break period, giving encouragement to sustain the practice of meditation and benefit from its regular application.

Readers are reminded that almost all the past issues of *Self-Knowledge* are available at a very reasonable cost—details on application.