

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 SPRING TERM 2013

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from 22 January to 21 March 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.

SPRING 2013 Afternoon Course

The afternoon course will be held on Sunday 3 March, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Please see the inside back cover for details.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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CARRYING ON

For countless people in the world, existence is a struggle for survival in the face of poverty, human cruelty, or both. The good-hearted long to ameliorate the conditions. Our admiration goes to those brave volunteers who visit the places of danger and distress, risking life in order to help. Others, who cannot take such radical steps, give in charity, though the calls for aid are ever-mounting. The spiritually-minded, whatever else they may do, believe in invisible help through prayer and kindly thoughts and feelings, wishing not only relief for the victims but an enlightening change of heart in the perpetrators.

It may be claimed that such thoughts of light and peace may make the thinker feel better, but any influence ranging beyond our own mind is purely imaginary. This is to underestimate the world of thought. As we know from contact with any individual, the mind generates an atmosphere which affects others, whether or not we welcome this influence.

One of the disciples of the sage, Shri Dada, was an Englishman known as Brother Allnutt. It was said that ‘he was not a religious man, but he lived religion’. In other words, his deep and benevolent thoughts and feelings found expression through his ordinary daily conduct, not through any show of piety or speech designed to improve others. His goodness was unconscious.

One day he asked his Guru whether he might resign his post as a railway official because it took up too much of his time and interfered with his peace of mind; he could manage to live independently as a simple devotee. Shri Dada smiled and said: ‘My son, the Yoga is flowering in your heart. Vairagya (detachment) is the perfume of the yogic bloom. Your example is necessary for other civil servants of your race. You understand your Indian staff and have earned their love by your wise treatment. There have been no strikes, no discontentment, no drunkenness, no quarrels since you have been in charge of the establishment. Continue, my son, in the same position for a few years and then carry out your spiritual wishes.’

There is a spiritual doctrine, found in the Upanishads, that our individual minds are parts of the cosmic mind, and that thoughts generated consciously do contribute to the general thought-world of humanity. Shri Dada told his disciples: ‘Let your love of truth, let your yearning for the good of all humanity, become a force able to strike into the darkest materialistic corners of the world.’ Behind this impetus there is something greater than the power of positive thinking. ‘Do not think’, Shri Dada continued, ‘that you are weak or that your resources are small; this is the worldly way of thinking. In you is seated Narayana; in your vritti (mental modification) dwells Shiva; in your heart is abiding Shri Krishna Himself.’

In other words, 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 Immovable Wisdom

IF WE THINK about our life and our experience, we find ourselves living in two worlds. One is the world we see around us. The other is the world we find within us, the private world of our individuality. Both these worlds give joy, as well as sorrow. Let philosophers debate about where the inner world ends and where the outer world begins, and vice versa. For us, the crucial fact, the fact that will make us free, is that underlying the inner and outer worlds, is the hidden source of all, the supreme spiritual reality. This is the true Self of man, the ground and essence of his being.

This Self is one alone, one in all. It transcends both the inner and outer world, and is universal. All that we experience owes its manifestation and knowability to the light of that supreme Self, the motionless light that illumines all intellects and is illumined by none. The aim of Adhyatma Yoga is to awaken us to our intrinsic identity with this infinite Reality.

What hides this realization? In reality, nothing! But if you do not agree with this, then we can say that it is veiled by a kind of ignorance, a not-knowing, a not-recognizing, set up and kept going by wrong thinking. In this case, the purpose of Yoga is a curative one: it is to remove the ignorance that prevents us from realizing—from being—what we truly are.

Just as light banishes darkness, there is the inner spiritual light which, when uncovered, banishes the darkness of ignorance, so that we know our Self in the deepest and truest sense.

How can we make this light manifest fully in actual experience, this light of fulfilment and bliss, the light that is even now illumining our intellect? This is brought about by awakening the faculty of wisdom lying dormant in the mind itself. There is a faculty of supreme wisdom—*prajna paramita* (the wisdom without a limit)—present in each and every one of us, but it needs to be awakened. When it is awakened, the true nature of the Self will be revealed.

This is not a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge in order to add material to our mental store. This path to the immovable wisdom

requires a special cultivation of the mind, so that the seed of divine knowledge that is already within us, will germinate and lead to the harvest of enlightenment.

Then, what are the qualities we need in order to bring out what is highest in us? These can be summed up as:

Peace

Patience

Self-study in order to unveil the true nature of the Self

So many of the great spiritual virtues and practices are aimed at promoting peace of mind, that is, to make the restless, distracted mind restful and focused. In this inner development, the need for patience, applied in many ways, is indispensable. There is a saying: 'Patience is the key to happiness.' But peace and patience are not ends in themselves. They create in our mind the conditions that are helpful to the rise of spiritual knowledge. Our practice of peace and patience has to be motivated by the urge to unveil the true nature of the Self, to know the reality behind the veil of appearances.

We will only seek to go deeper if we want something more than the material values of the world, and also feel a need to expand beyond our present inner spiritual state. This is called divine discontent, because it provides the fuel that will drive us forward on our spiritual quest.

The primary quality is peace of mind. If we want to thread a needle, our hands have to be steady, our attention focused, and we need good light. We can't do it if we are on the move, if our eyes keep glancing in all directions, and if the light is dim. In the same way, if our mind is always in a state of intense activity, if our emotions cause us upsets and difficulties, and if the light of our understanding is dimmed by prejudice, we won't be able to detect that thread of divine life in us, which, even now, is one with the divine life that underlies the universe.

Some of us may insist that the nature of the mind is to be active, and the more active the better; and we may also urge that the nature of our feelings is to express themselves and that we need to be emotional. Why this emphasis on peace, which implies restraint of these natural functions?

There is some truth in this. But what matters is not thought itself or

emotion as such, but their content and purpose. When we examine our inner life, do we find that these inner forces escape our control, and are, so to say, making us dance to their tune? Or do we feel that we are their conscious conductor, who, like a good conductor, knows how and when to calm certain sections of his orchestra and when to stimulate and arouse others; for he is working with a higher purpose.

It is the same with the inner life of man if he is to progress and transcend suffering and be truly free. There is a great progress to be made in the realm of human thought and emotion, so that our thoughts combine into meaningful ideas that open a way to the inner light, and our emotions become helpful, positive, transcending self-interest and devoted to the highest good of all. The fact is that the mind and its emotional charges are not yet fully evolved, and their true advance and fulfilment is when their content and purpose become spiritual.

Let us also remember that our true Self, is not in need. Our innermost Self has no divine discontent, let alone earthly dissatisfaction. It is ever fulfilled, contented. So when our mind tells us: 'You need this, you need that,' it is good to ask ourselves: 'Really? Do I?', and to keep in mind the complete and perfect nature of the Self. Yoga will teach us how our thoughts and emotions can be uplifted, refined and made helpful on the path to the higher wisdom.

What is this spiritual wisdom? It is the permanent experience of the immortality, infinity, freedom, bliss and peace of our true being. It brings inner satisfaction that needs nothing outer to promote or sustain it, and which no change of fortune can challenge or destroy. It is the supreme goal that is worth pursuing, the higher knowledge that satisfies forever. In the words of the Tibetan sage, Milarepa:

Knowing one thing, I know all things.

Knowing all things, I know them to be one.

I have perfect knowledge of Reality.

Life has been compared to the sea—the ocean of *sansara*. Like the sea, it is unpredictable, sometimes calm and relaxing, sometimes rough and threatening. We never know what will happen next. We need something to hold on to, something firm, immovable, reliable. We need

to connect with the spiritual source of our being, and not just depend on the resources of the intellect.

This need to know the essential thing, the saving knowledge, is indicated in the story about the professor of grammar and the boatman. A certain master of grammar needed to be ferried across some waters. When in the boat, he said to the oarsman: 'Have you ever studied grammar?' 'No', he replied. The professor said, 'Then you have wasted half your life.' The boatman remained silent. Then, a strong wind cast the boat into a whirlpool. The boatman called out to the professor: 'Tell me, sir, do you know how to swim?' 'No', said he, 'I have not learned how to swim.' 'O teacher', said the boatman, 'your whole life has been wasted, because the boat is sinking in these whirlpools.'

The boatman had the saving knowledge necessary in that situation. Similarly, if we develop spiritual wisdom as we journey on the sea of life, we will have a source of strength and guidance to help us deal with whatever happens. This is because we will have something *within our own being* that we can take our stand on. And this spiritual element in us, when fully revealed, will be known to transcend fear, disappointment and death.

The immovable wisdom is not distant from us. It is most near, the nearest of all. We can realize this, if our aspiration is for spiritual light and we make the experiments in tranquillity. The immovable wisdom is nearest because it is our own true Self. It is divine knowledge.

We ourselves hold the vital clue to realization. That clue is the inner light of awareness, the light which enables us to see our thoughts. It is the light that illumines our dream world, even though, when we turn to sleep, we shut out the outer light. We cannot see with our eyes or our intellect this purity and infinity of consciousness, because we *are* that infinite Consciousness. Our Consciousness seems to be identified with the mind, but it is not so. And by following the inner training of Yoga, we will have the insight that Consciousness, so to say, transcends the body and the mind, and that it is our true 'I'.

How do we set about the quest for the immovable wisdom, the wisdom of self-knowledge? Through developing peace of mind, patience and eagerness to investigate and reveal the true nature of the Self.

Peace of mind is not the goal of Yoga. The goal is knowledge of ultimate Truth. It is in peace that the inner clouds part and the sun of Truth is revealed as our true I. Here are some lines of the Taoist poet, Han Shan. They hint at the clarity of understanding that results from our cultivation of inner peace.

The clear water sparkles like crystal.
You can see through it easily, right to the bottom.
My mind is free from every thought,
Nothing in the myriad realms can move it....
When you have learned to know in this way,
You will know there is no inside or out!

What is the value of patience? Patience is at root a spiritual quality. When we forget to be patient, our mind loses its poise and becomes too busy with ego-assertion. In impatience we are fully identified with the mind. But let us know that our real Self is not the mind with its frustrations and reactions. It is ever still, ever calm, and not in need of anything. And when we exercise patience, when we stay calm, we are conforming, not to the world, but to our spiritual being. Patience brings us closer to our true Self, to what is highest in us.

There is a story in the *Masnavi* of Rumi. It tells of a Christian holy man who went into the market place in the bright daylight, holding a lit candle.

Someone said, 'Hey, what are you seeking beside every shop? Why are you going about in search of something with a lamp in bright daylight? What's the joke?' He replied, 'I am searching everywhere for a man that is alive with the life inspired by that (Divine) Breath. Is there a man in existence?' 'This bazaar', said the other, 'is full of people. Surely there are men, O noble sage.' He answered, 'I want one who is a man on the two-wayed road—in the way of anger and at the time of desire. Where is one who is a man at the moment of anger and at the moment of appetite? In search of such a man I am running from street to street. Where in the world is one who is a man on these two occasions, that I may devote my life to him to-day?'
'You are seeking a rare thing,'

Does it not bring to mind the words of Hamlet:

Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart.

This overriding patience, this ability to endure, to stand back from these forces of desire and anger that arise within every human heart, has the deepest spiritual significance. This is made clear in the verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

He who is able, while living in the body, to stand firm amid the uprising of the forces of desire and anger within himself—he is a yogi, he is a happy man.

This is not to say that anger and selfish desire will cease to arise in our heart. But we need not be identified with these energies. Never forget that man is far greater than these psychological manifestations. They are not expressions of what is highest in us. Learning to be patient with oneself when these impulses rise up, is true heroism and inner strength. It brings our mental life into harmony with the immovable peace of our own spirit, our true Self.

One affirmation we might use in this respect is:

OM In my true nature, I am immovable, completely calm, unaffected, serene, contented. OM

The practice of peace and patience will transform the mind in such a way that it will be able to probe into and unveil the true nature of the Self. Peace and patience thin the veil of not-knowing, the veil of ignorance. Let us strive to follow the ancient dictum: 'Know thyself.' For when the Self is known, all is known.

Self is what is nearest to us. Our consciousness may seem to be a mere aspect of our mental life, as transient as the mind itself. But it turns out to be the only principle in experience that is true in the deepest sense. Everything else, joys, sufferings, the form of our body, our possessions, our sense faculties, our mental states, are passing, are not

the same for more than a little while. What is real in us? The conscious Self before which all these things appear. Everything else needs that conscious Self in order to be experienced at all. In this sense, the Self is the source of all experience.

The awakening of the wisdom faculty in us brings this supreme knowledge to light. In the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

The Self abiding in all beings, and all beings abiding in the Self, sees he whose self has been made steadfast by Yoga, who everywhere sees the same.

It is the birth of a new understanding.

A child is watching a puppet show, enthralled by the characters who are now fighting, now chasing each other, now embracing, now throwing things, and so on. Lost in the drama, the child laughs and recoils at the action taking place on the platform of the booth where the puppets have their stage.

Then, suddenly, one of the planks holding up the booth collapses. It leaves a gap, and through the gap the child can see the puppet movers — they are his own parents. Now he knows the truth about the whole show. If he likes, he can go on enjoying it, admiring it—but in a different way, tracing the skills and the artistry to its source, his parents. But whatever he decides to do, he will now be experiencing the spectacle in a new light, and will never again be deceived.

The immovable wisdom is to apprehend the entire experience of the inner and outer world in a new light. It is to know that all things are a phenomenal manifestation of one's own higher Self. This revelation cancels all fear and anxiety, confusion and error, and one knows the supreme Reality in one's own experience.

If we pursue this way of wisdom, if we practise peace and patience, and if we strive to unveil the nature of the Self, there will be a great opening in our inner faculty of higher understanding, and we shall know the supreme Truth and be free, absolutely and irreversibly identified with the freedom of transcendence, which is the true nature of everything, the Self of all.

B.D.

The Attainment of Peace

A commentary by Hari Prasad Shastri on *Bhagavad Gita*, II.70
given in a public lecture on October 21st 1955.

He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which, filled from all sides, remains unaltered; but not he who desires objects.

THIS VERSE embodies the spirit of Yoga. Our life is given to us so that we may learn the spiritual truth, we may annihilate the bristling egoity which creates a spirit of separation between man and man, and between man and God; that we may fill our intellect with the pure understanding of absolute cognition—not even knowledge, but absolute cognition—and thus gaining inner enlightenment, we will live to adore, to love, to serve, and our life will be like the life of a waterfall dashing out of a glacier, singing songs of glory, beautifying the slopes of the mountain, giving life to herbage and to plants, and finally finding lodgement with the Universal Sea.

We receive impressions through our five senses, and these impressions enter the field of our consciousness and create reactions. It is not the value of the impressions that matters in life, but it is the value of the reactions that we have to the impressions which enter into our field of consciousness through our eyes, ears, taste, tongue, hearing and so forth. This much is well-known to modern psychology. The departure in the yogic science which is made by the holy Himalayan Rishis is this: that the reactions can be controlled, that life is not only impressions and reactions, but the main goal and purpose of life is transcendence through enlightenment.

The verse of the *Gita* says: ‘Let our inner self be like the sea, immovable, filled to the brim with knowledge of truth.’ Just as rivers, flowing into the sea, do not disturb the equilibrium of the sea at all, so, too, may it be the case that all the impressions of sight, touch and other senses falling into our mind, or that higher phase of the mind called *buddhi*, do not mar our tranquillity at all. This is the dominant note of the yogic philosophy and the yogic science. That man who has made his soul like the sea just described, who is not disturbed by the impressions,

who is resolute in its pursuit of his identity with Divinity and with the Whole, who is always calm and tranquil, ‘He obtains the spiritual peace, not one who runs after pleasure-desires’. Just as the waves rising and falling in the sea, just as the waters of the rivers finding lodgement ultimately with the sea, do not disturb the equilibrium of the sea, so that man is a Mahatma whose soul is not disturbed by any impressions. And his state is called the state of ‘samata’, which means the light of inner tranquillity, equimindedness, indisturbability by reason of the understanding that the impressions are *mithya* (illusory) and that the Reality, which is the soul, is not touched by them. This is the real message of Yoga.

If we like we can waste our time in running after pleasures, but this way of life is comparable to that of a blind mole striving for the light which it can never enjoy. The message of Yoga is that man can learn how to control his thoughts and render them benevolent, tranquil and based on love universal. Our life is given to us that we may tranquillize it, we may discipline it, we may study the spiritual wisdom; and in this way we may transform our life into the light of spirituality.

What is the world? When I reflect deeply and carefully, this world is like passing clouds. It has no value in itself, but has a message to give us, like a postman. It is like a cloud that has brought the cool water of Infinitude from the highest to shower upon us. ‘If I reflect carefully’, says a Sanskrit verse, ‘then the world as perceived by the five senses and conceived by the mind is an infinitesimal part of the reflection of the Spirit’. And in this world, there is no greater gain than the achievement of the knowledge of the nature of Self.

When we try to know, we try to know the things which are nearest to us, and they are easier to know than the things which are distant. And what is nearest to us? Our ‘I’, ‘I’, ‘I’, (in Sanskrit) ‘Aham’, ‘Aham’, ‘Aham’. Then we must try to know what is the nature of this ‘Aham’. And when we know the nature of this ‘Aham’, we have solved the problem of life; we have acquired the water of immortality; we have acquired the Eden from which there is no fall for Adam. God may fall, but Adam will not fall from the real Eden or Heaven which is his own Self.

You prepare the soil and then you plant trees in it, and then it can be

said that you have done very well. Life is the ground. Plant in it associations of good, of virtue and of beauty, of peace and service; and let the beasts of anger, pleasure-desire and power, dwell far from it. Life is defensive; life is not offensive, but it is protective; and the growth of enlightenment is the real growth of life. Not power, not wealth, not territorial ambition, not oppression over others: enlightenment, benevolence and compassion.

You have created the present conditions of your life in which you are; they are not given by nature or created by a blind force of evolution. Then what to do? Take your life as a raw material and construct out of it beautiful images, beautiful fruit-trees, peace, benevolence, compassion, composure, and attainment of transcendence in the Spirit. If you do that, you have served the purpose of life. Then you will be one who attains the creative peace or *shanti*. Spiritual peace is not static; it is dynamic and highly creative. Can you tell me the example of greater activity than that of Shri Shankara, Shri Sureshvara, Shri Dada Bhagavan? Such peace creates forms of Truth and beauty for the good of all.

Your present conditions are the legacy of the past. You can outgrow them. There are two ways of dealing with what is called the situation in life. One is to try to change the outer facts, the environment, and fit your life according to them. The other is the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*: change your life within into peace and light through meditation, discipline and devotion. Change your life into peace, *shanti*, into creative *shanti*, and you will be able to deal with the outer situation in any form that it comes without being disturbed.

The great epic of India, the *Mahabharata*, relates how, when the Pandava brothers were going into exile, they came to pay respect to their mother, Kunti. She said to them: 'My children, I pray that you may meet misfortune at every step!' Somebody said: 'What a maternal blessing—that you may meet misfortune at every step!' She said: 'Yes, misfortune is the only thing, by conquering which and by wrestling with which, and by transforming it, you can prove yourself to be a true man.'

The greatest mistake that we make is that we think that by leading the life of devotion, knowledge and spirituality we shall be happy in the world. Unless the word 'happiness' means *shanti*, there is no such thing

as happiness in the world. Can you say that the Lord Jesus was ever really happy in His life? Can you say St Francis of Assisi or St Francis Xavier were ever really happy? Swami Rama Tirthaji, whom I knew well, Mahatma Mangalnathji at whose feet I have sat for days and days together, were never in what you call good health. But what had they done? They had adjusted their *buddhi* (intellect) and their inner life into the Light within, and therefore it mattered not to them whether the circumstances were oppressive, or scornful, or full of rest or otherwise.

Therefore, we should try to make our mind like the sea, in which the rivers fall all the time, but they do not disturb the equilibrium of the sea. The sea never goes beyond its boundary and, more than that, at the bottom of the sea, even when the storm rages and hurricanes sweep across, bringing violent thunder and lightning, there is absolute peace and tranquillity in the bottom of the sea, and that bottom of our life is your 'Aham', your 'Aham' 'I', 'I', your Self; 'I' as your Atman.

If we direct our mind from the realm of pleasure-desires towards the real 'I', the real spirituality; if we follow the discipline; if we give devotion which, according to Shri Ramanuja is both the means and the end, then we can become creative in the world, we can live to glorify God, we can live to adore Him, and we can live to serve His children with truth and with light; and that is the highest object, not comfort or pleasure.

The Greeks have taught us many lessons, but the Greeks held that the greatest virtue of man was courage. The Greek word for 'man' is derived from the root which means 'courage'. Until Aristotle the word courage was misunderstood by Greeks. It was Aristotle who, in his *Ethics*, made a distinction between the animal courage and the spiritual courage, the moral courage. This is the courage to wrestle with life and meet the facts of life. Over and over again in the *Gita*, it is written: 'That man who, giving up his contact with the world of desires, lives in communion with his higher Self, beyond his *buddhi*—that man acquires *shanti*.' *Shanti* is the last word in the yogic vocabulary, and *shanti* does not mean what we call in the world happiness.

In the holy scriptures it is said that the knower of Brahman (the Absolute) attains Bliss, but the word *ananda*, meaning bliss, does not mean joy or happiness as the world understands it. It means the ability

to suffer whatever comes in life in the spirit of devotion and peace, and to give our adoration to the Lord more and more, undaunted, fearless, to the scorn of consequences, keeping to the Truth and Truth alone which is taught by the holy scriptures.

Therefore let us have courage. The Teacher is one who turns the evil associations into good. He is your Teacher who turns the evil associations into good; he who teaches you how to live according to law, how to live according to *dharma*, who teaches you that love of Truth under any circumstances is higher and superior to any object or tendency in the world. To live wisely means to create high associations and cultivate good habits, and educate the mind in the *Gita* wisdom, *samata* (equanimity). *Samata* is the central word of the *Gita*: ‘O Arjuna, he who does not care for possessions, who does not fear the loss of possessions, who is the same in gain and loss, that man is *shanta*, that man is peaceful, that man has known the spiritual silence.’

One thing more. There is one recipe given in Vedanta which people usually forget. It is the power of the Name of God. Mahatma Gandhi has said: ‘If you put the Name of God on your lips, God will find His entry into the heart.’ Swami Rama Tirtha, when he was not teaching or writing, was all the time was merged in ‘OM! OM! OM!’

I quote finally a verse from the great poet Saint, Tulsidas: ‘O Tulsi! Place the Name of Rama on the doorsill of thy mouth, so that the Light may go within and enlighten thy intellect and the Light may come out and bring peace without.’

If you want to avoid evil associations, if you want to turn the evil of the world into gold and transparent crystal of knowledge and devotion, if you want to stand firm under adversity, if you want to be like the lantern-light of a Japanese Shinto temple, burning in a storm at the top of the hill; then adorn your lips with the Holy Name of God. Take any name! Take Jesus. Take Rama. Take OM. Take Krishna, or if you are His disciple, take the name of Shri Dada: and by doing so with meaning, with concentration, and repeating it with real spiritual force in your heart, you will create a new land, a new island, a new sea, a new forest and a new river in your heart. In this way, you will be able to remake your personality, and you will live in the world like a true spiritual hero. May you ever remember verse seventy, chapter two of the *Gita Shastra*:

‘The man of serenity, devotion and *shanti*, acquires the spiritual peace, and not one who runs after pleasure and power desires of this world.’

H.P.S.

A POEM BY SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA

Lord of the two worlds, I alone exist.
I have no desire for the joys of the world.
I alone am all the delightful objects
Of this world and the next.

For a time I accepted the world as real,
In the manner of a dream.
When I awoke I saw that I alone existed.
Existence, Consciousness and Bliss
Was hidden by name and form,
But now the veil of ignorance has gone,
And I alone exist.

Nothing apart from me exists,
No world, no God, no company of souls.
I am the reality in every whole and in every part.

I have drunk of the infinite spring of love,
And it can never leave me.
I alone exist.

Duality has been torn up by the roots,
Even unity has said goodbye
And I am not aware of the world.

It is my light that illumines the world on every side.
I alone exist.
I am the light of the sun and the moon.

Translated by A.J.A.

Yoga in the Gospels

THE LAST VERSE of the last chapter of St John's gospel reads, 'If all the things which Jesus did and said were written down in books, I dare say the whole world would not be big enough to contain them.' (*John*, 21:25) What we have in the gospels is a sample of the whole, most of which remains unknown to us. For example, how did He spend the first thirty years of his life? Nobody knows.

It doesn't follow that what we have is insufficient. To determine whether rice is cooked, it is enough to taste one grain. For those who sincerely wish, as so many have, to catch the gist or spirit of his message, there is plenty.

But those who say, 'Jesus never said such and such because it is not to be found in the four gospels' may be accused of imprisoning Jesus. A limited Jesus is no Jesus at all. To be free means to be free of conditions and limitations. Whatever He did He did freely, even allowing himself to be crucified. 'No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself.' (*John*, 10:18) And the Spirit is like the uncontainable wind which blows where it wills.

Given that we have a partial record of his life, we should not be surprised that a collection of 117 of his sayings was found in 1945 in Nag Hammadi in Egypt. The first verse reads, 'These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and Judas Didymus Thomas wrote. Whoever finds the interpretation of these words will not taste death.'

St Thomas' gospel was one of the texts (known as the Nag Hammadi Codices) found at the site. Many of them were known to Christian history as heretical works. They can collectively be described as Gnostic. They were buried around 340 AD after Christianity had become the religion of the Roman Empire and when the powerful bishops had made a definitive list of canonical writings of the New Testament. They had the political power to enforce their point of view.

The French philosopher Derrida once quipped that a scholar was a library's way of maintaining a library. Before printing, scribes and

copyists were also required as well as scholars and librarians. A considerable community would have been required to service the Nag Hammadi library. Whoever they were, they were not orthodox and their values were no longer in favour. Rather than burn the books, they buried them. There they lay in the sand for sixteen hundred years.

Some half of these sayings are close parallels with those in the gospel. Scholars say that the version of St Thomas' gospel is often more original. Some sayings are known as *agrapha*, that is, sayings of Jesus which are not in the gospel but which were recorded in other early Christian writings. A famous church father called Origen wrote in his commentary on the book of Jeremiah: 'The Saviour himself says, "He who is near to me is near to the fire, he who is far from me is far from the Kingdom."' This saying is not found in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John but it occurs in St Thomas' gospel as logion 82.

Some sayings in the collection are expansions of ones we know already. 'Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he will be troubled, and when he has been troubled he will reign over the All.' (Logion 2) Others are altogether new: 'Blessed is he who has been persecuted in his heart, he has known the Truth.' (Logion 69)

The new sayings are often mysterious, but they share this enigmatic character with many known in the Gospels. How can anyone 'reign over the All'? The All is just what it says, everything of which we can be aware. He who reigns is a monarch who has power. Whoever reigns over the All is therefore omnipotent. But how can this be? If there is one thing we ordinary mortals do not feel, it is omnipotent. And what does this mean? 'He who understands the meaning of these words will not taste death?' (Logion 1) This seems to belong with other sayings in St John where Jesus says, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live for ever.' (*John*, 6:51) Or 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water which I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up to eternal life.' (*John*, 4:14) Is it possible to transcend the biological conditions of life?

What is this knowledge? When Jesus was castigating the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers, he said, 'Woe unto you, lawyers! For ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves and them that were entering ye hindered.' (*Luke*, 11:52) The lawyers were expert in the Torah and the Torah covered the whole of secular and religious life. So in the tradition there was a key which gave entry to the Kingdom of Heaven and it was some kind of knowledge.

St John has Jesus saying, 'you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free'. (*John*, 8:32) The theme of knowledge was not absent in St Paul either. In I Corinthians 13 he puts *agapé* or love above hope and faith. *Agapé* is the indispensable prerequisite for the validity of all forms of religious endeavour. At the climax of this passage he says: 'For now we see in a mirror darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.' (*I Corinthians*, 13:12)

We infer that this special type of knowledge entails both knowing and being known. As we do not have such a relation with objects—we know them but they do not know us—we can say that this special knowledge is of a person or persons. The Greek word *ainigmati* translated as 'darkly' is recognisable as enigmatically. An enigma is a riddle or a puzzle. So we may ask who we would see if we looked in a mirror not darkly but clearly when the riddle had been solved.

Even as late as the end of the second century, we find the first of the Church Fathers, Clement of Alexandria, praising the true Christian Gnostic. But there were many forms of false knowledge or partial knowledge. The ancient mystery cults were still operating, promising a vision to their adherents, there was the philosophy of stoicism with its great ideal of *ataraxia* or imperturbability, and Platonism which culminated in the vision of the Good. Astrologers swarmed in Rome and all the emperors from Tiberius to Hadrian, except Trajan, either cast horoscopes or consulted them.

St Paul tells us that knowledge 'puffs' a person 'up' and even the possession of a great fund of knowledge is not necessarily associated with modesty and humility. The attitude that 'I know and you don't' makes a man a fool. It appears that some forms of gnosticism required the practicant to learn a complicated cosmological system of

aeons and archons in order to navigate the journey of the soul back to its divine origin. However the kind of knowledge recommended in the Gospel of Thomas is other than academic, philosophical, religious or scientific knowledge.

Jesus said: if those who lead you say to you: see the Kingdom is in heaven, then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you it is in the sea, then the fish will precede you, but the Kingdom is within you and without you. If you know yourselves, you will be known and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are poverty. (Logion 3)

Hari Prasad Shastri, the founder of Shanti Sadan, was unequivocal on this point, that true spiritual knowledge is self-knowledge. Among the commentators on the Hindu scriptures, he followed Shri Shankara, who also maintained that when all rites and rituals, all devotions and studies had done their work of purifying the soul, salvation came by a new self-knowledge. Hence we talk of self-realization not in the worldly sense of fulfilling one's potential, but in the sense of realizing what or who self is. In this ancient tradition, it was the knowledge contained in the scriptures which made for salvation. The greatest blessing a student could be given was that he might understand the meaning of the scriptures.

You may say that the scriptures of ancient India and the scriptures of Christianity are very different. But how deeply have you read them? If you only have an eye for differences, that is all you will see, but even in academia it will be accepted that the ethics recommended by the different faiths have much in common and that the mystics of different faiths seem to walk hand in hand. So although there are those who disagree, we hold with good reason that the climax of the spiritual paths of all the great faiths is the same. The attainment of *nirvana*, the entering into the Kingdom of Heaven, the realization of Atman (the true Self) and so on, are synonymous.

Among the sayings or *logia* in this new gospel we find some which are familiar. 'Come to Me, for easy is My yoke and My lordship is gentle and you shall find repose for yourselves.' (Logion

90) The word 'yoga' comes from the root 'yuj', to join, which in its Indo-European form was the origin of our word 'yoke'. Yoga 'brings together' the individual self with the universal and divine Self. In the language of the New Testament, 'God was in Christ, reconciling all things to Himself.' (*II Corinthians, 5:19*) To reconcile means to bring to a state of oneness. The *Paramatman*, or Supreme Self, the reality underlying all things, is called 'one without a second'. There are cardinal numbers: one, two, three. There are ordinal numbers: first, second, third. Then there is absolute oneness, where the first are last and the last first. Why? Because there is only one.

So in St Thomas' list of sayings, logion 22 runs:

Jesus saw children who were being suckled. He said to his disciples: these children who are being suckled are like those who enter the Kingdom. They said to him: Shall we then, being children, enter into the Kingdom? Jesus said to them: when you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner, and the above as the below, and when you make the male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female not be female, when you make eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in the place of a hand, and a foot in the place of a foot, and an image in the place of an image, then you shall enter in the Kingdom.

Extinction of duality means entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. In the philosophy of Advaita, these dualities are only real in appearance; ultimately, in the one without a second, they mean nothing. But it is a mental and spiritual battle to overcome them. The world is a deceptive place and that upon which we rely for support often turns out to be shifting sand. If we are not to taste death, if we are to eat the food and drink the water which leads to a cessation of hunger and thirst, we have to build on the rock of incontrovertible and absolute reality.

In logion 72, we read: 'A man said to Jesus, tell my brothers to divide my father's possessions with me.' This is the kind of complaint heard to this day in solicitors' offices all over the world. Jesus replies, 'O man who made me a divider?' He turned to his disciples and said to them, 'I am not a divider am I?' Because he was

leading them towards the unity of the Self, and they had left all to follow Him.

His yoke, he told them, was easy and his lordship gentle. Does a good teacher ever use violence or force his authority on anyone? At the last supper they began to argue over who would be accounted the greatest.

And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is younger, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as one that serveth.

(*Luke, 22:22-24*)

The duality of master and servant, Rabbi and disciple, must also be overcome. In St John's version of the last supper, Jesus removes his outer garment, takes a towel and a basin of water and washes his disciples' feet. Peter objects strongly, feeling that proper relations are being turned upside down, but Jesus insists. He tells them that he is no longer just their Rabbi and Master, because they know what he is doing. They understand and have begun to participate in his relation with the Father, a relation of oneness and non-difference. They have become his friends. He says to them,

I tell you the Truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (*John, 4:12*)

Considering the signs he performed in changing the water into wine, giving sight to one born blind, walking on the water and raising the dead, one can see what confidence he had in the human beings who believed in Him.

When we hear these wonderful words and supposing we count ourselves as believers, we might be tempted to rush out and test our faith—the faith that moves mountains—against the grievous afflictions of war, natural disaster, plague and famine, the riders of the apocalypse which gallop across our world. But things have to be done in a certain spirit. We may be called to such tasks, but the

scriptures contain caveats. We have to watch. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we read:

Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one doing the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy (preach) in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers.’ (*Matthew, 7:21f.*)

To our soft ears, this sounds harsh. The ministry of these would-be followers of Christ would appear to be successful. They would appear to know what they were doing. How many vicars can claim to have cast out demons or performed miracles? In spite of all their religious and spiritual successes, in spite of the apparent spiritual power enjoyed by them, something so vital, so central and essential is missing that Jesus calls them evil doers.

The uplifting thirteenth chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians has been mentioned already. We find St Paul issuing a similar warning and a similar promise:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not agapé, I am only a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophesy and can fathom all mysteries and if I have a faith which can move mountains, but have not agapé, I am nothing. If I give all I have to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not agapé, I am nothing. (*I Corinthians, 13:1*)

These words are very familiar to many people, and the point may be overlooked that the most extreme acts of self-sacrifice, the greatest eloquence, even the most unshakeable faith and profoundest insight may be spiritually worthless.

So what is agapé? Love is the usual translation but love is a word which is easily twisted. St Paul does not define it metaphysically, but almost ethically: Agapé is patient, love is kind. So wherever there is impatience or unkindness, agapé is not. He continues, ‘Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.’ (*I Corinthians, 13:4f.*) Envy, boasting and pride entail making a difference between oneself and another self, whereas true love is not a divider. ‘Love is not rude, it is

not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.’ Consult your own acquaintance and you may well see that the people who display some of these qualities in their daily lives are the ones who are most highly valued, even if not the most popular.

St Paul’s audience were not complicated people and to demonstrate the meaning of love he gave them a pattern of conduct. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, we find the following pattern presented as prerequisites to the attainment of spiritual knowledge: Absence of self-importance, modesty, harmlessness, patience, simplicity, service of the Teacher, inner and outer purity and steadfast pursuit of Self-Knowledge. The list in chapter 13 of the Gita continues but we can see that a yogi with these qualities would have been given a warm embrace by St Paul. We should not underestimate the importance of these resonances and congruencies between the different traditions. The human condition is one and the same everywhere. The Chinese say, ‘Within the four seas, all men are brothers.’ The differences of the races, of the genders, of the classes, of the stages of life, are superficial.

Somehow this divine quality of agapé or love, without which all spiritual activity is meaningless, is intimately related to self-knowledge. To love truly we must know ourselves, and to know ourselves truly we must love. Logion 25 reads: ‘Love thy brother as thy soul, guard him as the apple of thine eye.’

It ought to be understood that self-knowledge does not relate to anything that we can see or hear or be aware of in our minds. Ego or little self is something we can be aware of and which tries to bind us in its littleness. The true self underlies and supports everything and is, strictly speaking ineffable, beyond mind and speech.

Today it is fashionable to declare oneself an atheist and attack faith as if it were a disease. Such people often have a one-dimensional view of scripture, failing to understand that the great faiths contain a critique of earlier and other forms of religion and in an ascending ladder also criticise themselves. Jesus said: ‘Thou hast heard it said of old, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say

unto you....' (*Matthew*, 5:38) Thus he raised the standard above that of Moses. In the last verse of the twelfth chapter of *I Corinthians*, St Paul says: 'And yet show I unto you a more excellent way...', then verse 1 of chapter 13, 'Though I speak with the tongues of angels and of men...' It is clear from the mere fact that Jesus taught that there is something to be understood. The parables were given to all as exoteric teaching, but when the disciples were sitting in a circle (*Mark*, 3:34), he taught them the esoteric meaning.

As we are being taught of the deepest human concerns and the highest truths, we have to come again and again, ascending to the Truth in a upward spiral. Understanding oneself has some resemblance to understanding any subject, but a full knowledge of physics or chemistry will not free a soul from the taste of death, nor from hunger and thirst. Truth like Spirit is subtle. Self is also subtle because it is the subject of all experience and does not come into view as an object.

So how to proceed? There is a famous parable called 'The Prodigal Son'. Prodigal means generous, so it might be better called 'The wastrel son and the prodigal father'. You may remember that the son demands his share of the inheritance from his father, goes to a far country and wastes his substance in riotous living. A famine arose in the land and he began to be in want. Nobody helped him although they had no doubt helped him spend his money. He took a job as a swineherd. He was so hungry that he envied the pigs their ability to eat carob bean pods.

Three significant words, which are an exact translation of the Greek, are now used. He 'came to himself'. (*Luke*, 15:17) This is what we have to do as well. To begin on the path we have to sober up and scrutinize our lives. The wastrel son remembered that even his father's hired servants ate better than he, and he determined to make his way home and apply for a job.

Logion 63 in the *Gospel of St Thomas* is blunt and sobering. It reads: 'Jesus said: there was a rich man who had much money. He said: I will use my money that I may sow and reap and plant and fill my storehouses with fruit so that I lack nothing.' Would we not consider this a sensible provision for old age, good pension planning?

Jesus continues. 'This is what he thought in his heart. And that night he died. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.'

It is part of our lack of sobriety that we ignore the facts of life and death. Again, everyone likes to put a good face on things. 'How are you?' 'I'm fine.' 'I'm good.' Well, are you? Ask a therapist, ask a psychiatrist, listen to people's stories and you will find so many tales of disease, difficulty, family problems, crime, fraud, financial manipulation, emotional blackmail: it goes on and on. And this is before you have tried with sincerity to read your own heart.

The Buddhists say that life is *dukka*, which may be translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness. Unsatisfactory is a good word, because wealth does not satisfy, fame does not satisfy, power doesn't either nor a wide and influential social circle. Poverty doesn't satisfy either. They are all like drinking sea-water. It is never enough to quench the thirst. Only the spiritually wise are contented and satisfied. And they are satisfied because they have found their way home to their Father's house. The wastrel son was still a son. He knew he didn't deserve to be called a son anymore, but whatever he may have done he was still a son. His father recognized his sonship, the fact of his being his son, and ran out to meet him the moment he saw him. Likewise, all the teachers of the line of Adhyatma Yoga affirm our Atmanhood without any exception. The Self is not the body or the mind. The Self is divine and Thou art that Self.

Forget what the newspapers say. Forget what your family has told you, forget your culture, your caste, even your creed if it gets in the way. Come to yourself. Life is short and how many of the things you have tried have brought peace to your soul? Make your way home to your universal self. Jesus says in the gospels, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. Let us keep heaven happy, let us repent every second of thinking ourselves mere finite physical beings and not infinite spirit, not sons or daughters of the living Father.

Let us conclude with three sayings from St Thomas:

Logion 5: Know what is in thy sight and what is hidden will be revealed to thee.

We have to turn within in meditation and prayer and we have to watch this inner world of ours. Read the book of your own heart. As for those who are fixated on the knowledge which come through the senses:

Logion 67: Whoever knows the All, but fails to know himself, lacks everything.

Here, we take knowing the All to mean knowing the All as an object, scientifically perhaps. It is the kind of knowledge which can be gained by excluding the subject.

Logion 66: Show me the stone which the builders rejected, it is the cornerstone.

Our senses look outwards so we neglect the subject and concern ourselves entirely with objects. What is a cornerstone? It is a stone of special shape, of a different kind to the rest. Similarly, the subject is of a different nature to the objects. But once we learn to cherish the innermost subject, the self, deeper than mind or heart, the arch of life will be completed.

A.S-B.



This is the cause why we are not at rest in heart and soul: that here we seek rest in things that are so little there is no rest in them, and we do not know our God who is all mighty, all wise and all good. For He is true rest.

Lady Julian of Norwich

The Eternal Wisdom

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

AN ASSEMBLY of those ascetics and hermits who dwell in this part of the beautiful Himalayan valleys is being held in a ravine. To the east a stream of translucent water, originating at the summit of a high hill, is gliding down and losing itself under the shadows of the tall trees. Nearby there is a clear pool in which the blue sky, with its sailing clouds, is mirrored on this late summer afternoon. The wind bears the fragrance of lotuses, which blossom at a great height on the mountain lakes.

About two hundred hermits are assembled. Many have long beards which sweep their breasts and silver curling locks which cover their shoulders, waved by the breezes. They are seated on their antelope skins, with their water vessels, mostly made of clay or wood, placed beside them. It appears that the formal meeting has not yet begun and groups of these sadhus are speaking seriously in whispers.

On a high rock is seated holy Yajnavalkya, with a few of his disciples and the radiant young Gargi, a beautiful girl of nineteen. The Teacher is silent; there is expectancy in the assembly. Then a conch-shell is sounded. An ascetic, one of the Charvakins (a follower of Charvaka, the founder of the Hindu school of materialism) rises and says:

Sadhus! Let us be wise. Error is our greatest enemy. The sole authority for cognition is perceptual knowledge born of the contact of the senses with their objects. There is no such thing as 'release' other than death. A future life is either just a comforting guess or it is invented by well-meaning philosophers, who live as parasites on others, for their own comfort. There is no proof of a future life. The only real ends of human life are sensuous love, physical health, wealth and a quick and clever mind.

Sadhus! What is the use of postulating a Creator? It is vain talk! If there is a Lord (*Ishvara*), then He is the author of all the evil we see

in the world. There is no permanent consciousness. Wisdom, O sadhus, means to make the most of life. Whatever you may do, you will never be able to know for certain what you call truth. Why waste your energy? You are in search of a black cat in a dark room with your eyes blindfolded and the cat is not there! Eat, drink and be merry, sadhus! This is the teaching of the sage Charvaka.

The young brahmachari of Shri Yajnavalkya who was presiding over the assembly then quietly rose, with a smile playing on his lips, looked towards the Charvakin and said:

O materialist, arrogance is the badge of your sect. So weak is your case that it can hardly stand examination. Consider human nature and you will see that it is not satisfied by the sensualism you advocate. Animals also enjoy the pleasures of taste, lust and companionship. Why should nature create human beings endowed with reason if sense pleasures enjoyed also by animals are all that matters? Surely the human mind, with its urge for immortality and to create works of art and of philanthropy, cannot be satisfied by your methods?

You say that sense-perception is the only instrument of valid knowledge. Well, Charvakin, tell me, is the sky really blue? Do the sky and the earth really meet at the horizon? Is there really a twinkle in the stars? Your hypothesis lacks universality. Your attempt to sway this holy assembly is like the endeavour of a frog, who knows nothing of the sea, to convince others that his own dark well is the largest reservoir of water!

How can a family or a society exist on principles other than self-sacrifice for the good of others? Think, why should the mother endure the burden of child-bearing? Besides, your thesis is contradicted by experience; it has no support in the holy scriptures (*shastras*). In short, it is not established by reason and is contradicted by experience. It is not based on the accumulated experience of the experts in logic, psychology and the inner vision. Please find some other assembly in which to air your groundless philosophy.

The Charvakin rose angrily, became enraged and began to use disrespectful words, after which he left the assembly, shouting loudly.

Next the spokesman of the dualists, the followers of Kapila's Sankhya philosophy, which postulates two co-eternal realities, spirit and matter, raised his voice, saying:

Sadhus! The truth given by the sage Kapila is the only truth. The world is the result of the loss of balance between the three constituent qualities (*gunas*) of primordial matter (*prakriti*). When the equilibrium of the primordial substance is thus disturbed, by no external cause, a process of mutation starts. After a long series of such changes, it assumes the form of the world and of man. The process is spontaneous; there is no Lord. The only rule of conduct for us is the practice of solitary contemplation, self-control and holiness, which leads to complete isolation of the spirit (*purusha*), freed from the trammels of matter (*prakriti*). Sadhus! Know that Sankhya Yoga is the only and highest Yoga. It is sanctioned by *Shruti* (the revealed scriptures, especially the Upanishads).

As the speaker sat down, a middle-aged sage stood up and said:

Blessed followers of Kapila! Your theory is erroneous, for there is still fear. Besides, you should realize that the primordial substance (*prakriti*), unguided and without the supervision of the spirit (*purusha*) cannot create the cosmos out of chaos. A blind man cannot reach his distant goal unaided by one who has sight. Under the action of the wind, the sands of the desert have been shifted from place to place for thousands of years but they have never formed a pyramid or a palace. O sadhu! To evolve the cosmos out of chaos you need the supervision of the principle of consciousness.

If the laws of matter transform grass, eaten by a cow, into milk, then why is not the grass eaten by a bull also turned into milk? You admit that the primordial substance is blind, and you admit the existence of the spirit. Then tell us of the relationship existing between the two. You say that the spirit is merely a disinterested witness; yet in the primordial substance we find the law of cause and effect in operation. Then why should a disinterested Witness bring into being such laws and determinations in the substance (*prakriti*)?

We admit the moral code you prescribe for liberating the spirit from matter (inner and outer control, etc., as described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras II.29 onwards). but, my dear sadhu, you have made no

provision for the emotional aspect of human nature. Your analysis of the world and your twenty-four categories* make no provision for human love. How can society exist without the basis of love? You, O sadhu, have not fully understood the meaning of your founder, the sage Kapila, but men will arise who will rightly interpret the Sankhya philosophy.

A wave of satisfaction swept over the assembly. Then many of the ascetics present looked at the great maharishi Yajnavalkya, as if imploring him to favour them with a few words. The master of wisdom said:

Salutations to you, O sadhus! The holy Shruti (revealed scripture) is the kind mother whose main object is to induce the wayward truants to return home. We have travelled far from our true nature, which is existence, consciousness and bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). The holy Shruti is like a compassionate mother who has ways and means suitable to her children at different levels of consciousness. Those who have not yet practised self-control and self-abnegation and who, on account of the special bent of their intellects, fail to see the fundamental unity of matter (*prakriti*) and spirit (*purusha*) in Brahman (the Absolute) receive from the kind mother Shruti the gift of the Sankhya philosophy. There are others who have a deep desire for rituals and are not prepared to listen to the subtleties of metaphysics; to them the Shruti gives the path of rituals (Karma-Mimamsa). Yet others, whose minds are steeped in discursiveness, who love to discuss and to analyse—for them is the school of logic (Nyaya).

All these paths lead finally to the highest school of enquiry, as expressed in the first of the *Vedanta Sutras* of holy Vyasa: 'Now we begin an enquiry into the nature of the ultimate reality, Brahman.'

Holy ones, there is no contradiction in the scriptures. Some of the statements of the Shruti describe the Truth as it is; some reiterate it in different ways. Blessed ones, when you speak to children you speak to them in their own language. They would not understand the dualistic

* The twenty-four categories (tattva) of the Sankhya school of Kapila are the five elements (bhutas); the five vital airs (pranas); the ten organs (indriyas) of action and of knowledge and the four main faculties of the mind.

terminology of the Nyaya-Shastra; so, in the Shruti, there are dualistic expressions, as in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, where it is said: 'On the same tree are seated two birds...' Yet, holy ones, what we call the great utterances (*mahavakyas*) contain the acme of Truth.

You are aware that the ultimate reality (Brahman), which is beyond the law of causation, defies expression. Therefore, the Shruti explains the holy Truth by the simile of the branch of a tree and the moon. The new moon's slender form eludes the vision of many of us. Even when pointed out we do not perceive it. Then a kindly soul asks us to concentrate on a certain branch of a tree, and when we have done this he says: 'Look in a straight line to the horizon...' We do so, and then we see the new moon.

In the same way, the worship of the Divine Incarnations (Avatars), or of symbols in the temples, of holy rivers or sacred mountains, is intended to lead the devotee or enquirer to the vision of the supreme and unchanging reality. Thus he who today is an atheist or a materialist, will grow first into a sceptic, then into a dualist, then a monist, and finally into a non-dualist (Advaitin) if he keeps his eyes open and pursues the Truth with sincerity and single-mindedness. Many of us are too hasty in forming conclusions. We allow our prejudices to interfere with the forming of a correct judgement. The purpose of the holy Shruti is made clear to those who are steeped in devotion to the Guru and God, as the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* points out.

Blessed ones, there is no finality in the region of relativity. He who truly seeks, he obtains. When the subtle intellect (*buddhi*), endowed with complete steadfastness, analyses its experience, it passes on to the region of non-duality.

Sadhus! What can there be beyond non-duality? You cannot imagine anything further, for there is no possibility of a further category. The Shruti says: 'That is the climax; That is the supreme state.'

Venerable ones, there is no room for a quarrel. Contradicting opponents only hardens their minds. With kindness and loving affection, expose the holy Truth of non-duality (Advaita) to them and

they will understand it. The knots of misunderstanding, the tangles of doubt, the whirlpools of suspicion, all will at last be negated by the light of Truth. Om Tat Sat!

As the great sage finished his discourse a chorus of 'Jai!' arose on all sides. Shri Yajnavalkya saluted them with humility and then gave his blessings to the younger ones who pressed for them. A brahmachari approached the illustrious Teacher with reverence and said: 'Sir, the time for the evening devotion has come.' Shri Yajnavalkya then offered a prayer to the One who supports the firmament, the eternal Truth, and took leave of the holy assembly.

To be continued

A TEXT FOR MEDITATION

OM

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

OM

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

Meditation is a means to make our mind, which can be as restless as a hearth-fire on a windy night, restful. This is not the rest prior to sleep. It is rather to make time for relaxation, repose and relief from the pressures of this hurrying world, and the inner disturbances caused by our unfulfilled desires.

In this sense, meditation is good mental therapy, enabling us to recharge our batteries and make our mind fresher and more resilient to face life's challenges. But true meditation goes deeper and has something far more significant to offer us. If we look at a fine oriental statue of a meditating figure, such as the Lohan in the British Museum, we may discern a depth of peace beyond the range of worldly values. And meditation is a kind of passport to spiritual peace, or *shanti*, which eludes the analytical grasp of human understanding, but which is nonetheless available to every person.

Meditation is thus a pacifier and a revealer. It reveals a deeper phase of self, our essential being. Here is a realm that is not touched or bruised by life's impacts, nor is it in need of life's allurements. It is a principle within us of peace, purity and perfection, that will not be swept away by tragedy or death, but is the ever-still reality that underlies the physical and mental appearances. Meditation can help us if we are looking for a lead in life, because it leads to the highest.

We are invited to approach our meditation with reverence and calmness, for we are paying respect to our spiritual self. In life, we may find ourselves acting like Romeo, Othello, Falstaff or Cordelia, but behind these manifestations of human character is something more fundamental and undisturbed. That is our essential 'I'. So, for a minute or two, let us pause, rest in, and bow to this deeper aspect of our nature, which, when truly understood, transcends our personality, and is one with the Divine Force that pervades the entire universe.

We prepare the mind for meditation by spending a few minutes breathing consciously and a little more deeply than usual. There is a link between calm breath and calm thought, and a Taoist saying is that 'the superior man breathes from his heels'. This is an indication that the breath should proceed as our good servant and without fretfulness. An ideal means of achieving this is to imagine the breath

moving along a central line in the upper body, starting at the navel, and ascending to the point between the eyebrows. This is sufficient for the in-breath, while the exhalation is released normally. This 'centering' has a place in many spiritual practices, for it is found that our mind becomes more spiritually sensitive and reposeful if its attention is drawn from distractions to this middle region.

Having breathed in this way for 21 times, we apply the 'centering' principle to envisage a line of light extending from the navel to the top of the forehead. The path of this luminous line can be traced with our finger, drawing it up past our chest, neck, lips, etc. The image is to be conceived as a straight line, interior to the body, yet nearer to the front than the back. The light should be pure, unflickering, a fine column illumining the inner darkness. Then, try to keep the attention held on the line of light for 5-7 minutes. As well as helping our mind to become spiritually sensitive, one can regard this phase of our nature as an indicator of pure spirit, a thought-free zone within us. To revive the practice during the day is a great shield from adverse and disturbing influences.

Our text for meditation is:

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

The statements signify our spiritual nature as an eternal fact. By turning these sentences over in our mind, by affirming them, we set in motion a process of uncovering which will bring to our conscious awareness traces of the light and peace that underly our everyday mind. With brass rubbings, the paper is superimposed on the original embossed work of art, and gently and methodically rubbed with chalk. The underlying image begins to appear, but its form is not created by the rubbing process, merely revealed by it. Similarly, meditation does not create spiritual perfection, but by allowing the mind to work on itself in peaceful concentration, it becomes impressed with the sublime qualities of that which underlies it: the perfection of being. But the original perfection is only fully revealed when the mind is transcended, as the original on which the rubbing is based is exposed when the paper is lifted.

Meditation is not continuous willed affirmation or repetition of the text, and there should be no tension as our mind assimilates the words. Slow repetition should be punctuated with periods of inner repose, permitting the affirmation to lodge more deeply in the mind. Then, when other thoughts intrude, the text will need to be restated, and our attention brought back to its main business, which is to saturate the mind in the sense of the divine presence as Self. Following on from the breathing practice and visualization, the meditation on the text, done for ten minutes, will give the mind a new orientation.

We are told that there are invisible forces close at hand to aid the sincere aspirant. There is an old Christian story which goes back to the days when young children were expected to work like grown men. A little boy stood at the foot of a hill with a huge load he was meant to carry to the top. He couldn't do it. Suddenly a strong man with rolled up sleeves appeared. 'Can you help me?' asked the boy. 'You have a choice', said the man. 'I can carry you, your burden or both! Which would you prefer?' And within a few minutes, both boy and load were on the hilltop.

The age of outward miracles may have passed, but for those who earnestly meditate for their own good and the general upliftment, inner miracles are possible. A dark mood can be turned to light in the twinkling of an eye, or a bow of the head. The supreme spiritual power is not a remote abstraction. He is the Friend of all beings, and though our path may seem a solitary one at times, in the phrase of the bible, we are 'alone, yet not alone'. (*John*, 16:32)

A.H.C.

Peace and love are always alive in us, but we are not always alive to peace and love.

A cheerful giver does not count the cost of what he gives. His heart is set on pleasing and cheering the one to whom the gift is given.

Lady Julian of Norwich

The Way of Understanding

Reflections on the Mundaka Upanishad

ONE OFTEN HEARS of discussion about the question ‘Do you believe in God or not?’ and much heated debate flows from the different answers to that question. One more rarely hears the question ‘What does one actually mean by God, or whatever it is that you say you do or do not believe in?’ When this question is asked, the answers are much more tentative.

Let us approach these questions in the light of the philosophy of *Advaita*, or non-dualism. If one were asked, ‘Do you believe in God’, from the non-dual perspective one might respond that one does not really believe in anything else. The non-dual view is that there is an ultimate reality, which has been given many names. What matters is not what we call it, but how far we have come to know it and to live consciously in accord and within it. The non-dual view holds that whatever exists has its existence in this reality, like waves in water. This has the significant practical implication that a full knowledge of one’s own true Being is a knowledge of the Being of All, as knowing one atom is to know all atoms.

And so the theoretical question of ‘Do you believe in God?’—or whichever term we prefer—which can never be definitively answered, gives way to the practical question, ‘How far do we know our own true Self, the reality within our own being?’ According to the teachers of *Advaita*, it is possible to fully realize the answer to this question, and that to do so is to resolve the great problems and riddles of human life.

This practical side of the teaching is called *Adhyatma Yoga*, the enquiry into the Self through the practice of meditation, dedication and the other methods. Here an interest in purely speculative metaphysics gives way to the living activity of inner enquiry and development. Dogmatic answers to simplistic questions become irrelevant, as we try to carefully, delicately enquire into what is real and what is illusory within and around us. It is at this point that texts like the *Mundaka Upanishad* will take on real interest for us.

The philosophy of non-duality was given its fullest expression by the great saint and teacher, Shri Shankara. Some see Shankara as a philosopher comparable to Plato; his followers see him as a spiritual personality like the Buddha and Christ. Like Christ, he died probably in his early thirties having sown the seeds of a renewed tradition which is even today the source of spiritual illumination to much of humankind.

Shankara presented his teachings mostly in the form of commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* and the principle Upanishads, including the *Mundaka*. So this is one of the texts whose authority is recognized by all the schools and to which spiritual seekers have turned for guidance down the ages. As such, it is a truly traditional document, one of the classics of human spirituality.

And yet whenever it is read with fresh eyes we find that this is also a truly radical treatise, one might say a revolutionary one. The *Mundaka Upanishad* boldly states that those who cling to a narrow, limited understanding of sacred teachings are far from a full understanding of their real significance.

The Upanishad says that there are two kinds of knowledge, the lower and the higher knowledge. In its own words:

Two kinds of knowledge must be known—that is what the knowers of Brahman [God, the Absolute] tell us. They are the higher knowledge and the lower knowledge.

The lower knowledge consists of the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, siksha (phonetics), kalpa (rituals), vyakaranam (grammar), nirukta (etymology), chhandas (metre), and jyotis (astronomy). The higher knowledge is that by which is attained the Imperishable. [1.1.5]

It may come as a surprise to find the Upanishad saying that the lower knowledge includes what is found in the Vedas, the most ancient spiritual texts. These contain hymns, mantras and rituals which were performed by pious people under the direction of the Brahmins, whose role in life was to know intimately the Vedas and the correct way of pronouncing the verses and fulfilling the rituals. The purpose of so doing was to attain prosperity in this world and heaven in the

next. According to this Upanishad, the knowledge of how to attain heaven is the lower knowledge.

The Upanishad does not deny that performing the rituals may bring the person what they wish for. But it does say that this is not the highest goal. The problem is that anything which is achieved through any process of cause and effect will have limited results. Evidently the people sincerely believed that they could attain the desired result—getting to heaven—by using a certain method—the right performance of the ancient rituals and sacrifices; and the prestige of the Brahmins rested on this idea. The power and status of priestly classes have been based on parallel ideas in all times and cultures. But, says the Upanishad, anything that is achieved as the effect of a cause is itself still subject to the law of cause and effect and must therefore be superseded in the course of time. The Upanishad expresses this in vigorous terms:

Dwelling in darkness, but wise in their own conceit and puffed up with vain scholarship, wandering about like the blind led by the blind... these performers of karma do not know the Truth owing to their attachment. They fall from heaven, when the fruit of their work is exhausted... regarding sacrifices and humanitarian works as the highest. They do not know any higher good. Having enjoyed their reward on the heights of heaven, gained by good works, they enter again this world or a lower one. [1.2.8]

We remember that at this time the orthodox religious were highly influential. But the author of the Upanishad was a knower of truth and inspired to make the higher truth available to others, however much that went against any vested interest.

In our own time the situation is rather different. There are influential voices claiming that particular religious observances and practices are the necessary means to a vision of heaven or salvation in this world or another. This outlook often stands in contrast and opposition to the view that only nature exists and that knowledge consists in the observation of nature and understanding of natural laws.

As we noticed, there seems to be an irresolvable antagonism between these two views. Proponents of the naturalistic view point to

the growth of knowledge that has transformed our understanding of the physical world and the quality of our lives in recent centuries. The religious show that science alone can provide no secure foundation for ethics nor satisfy deep needs of the human heart.

From the point of view of the Upanishad and Shri Shankara, there is substance of value in both the scientific and conventional religious views. The limitation arises with a belief in either case that there is nothing more. Both are concerned with the realm of cause and effect, and tend to recognise nothing else. In this sense both belong to what the *Mundaka Upanishad* calls the lower teaching. But, says the Upanishad, this is not all. As we heard, there is a further knowledge, what might be called the higher knowledge, concerned with Brahman, God, the Absolute, where the law of cause and effect does not apply.

So let us turn to what the Upanishad calls the higher teaching. It begins by recognizing the limitations of the ordinary understanding. Our minds can only begin to think of the higher reality as the source and sustainer of the world we see around us. At this point we are no longer trying to attain some advantage for ourselves in this world or any other. Our objective now is knowledge of the higher reality for its own sake. But we can still approach it by thinking of it as the ultimate source and power behind all. The Upanishad says:

By the higher knowledge the wise realize everywhere that which cannot be perceived and grasped; which is without source, features... which is eternal, omnipresent, all-pervasive, extremely subtle and imperishable, and which is the source of all. [1.1.6]

And it goes on:

As a spider spreads out and withdraws its thread, as on the earth grow the plants and trees, as from the body hair grows, so out of the Immutable does the universe emerge here. [1.1.7]

So, we are presented with the idea of a higher reality, which is not limited by any of the qualities that thought can grasp, and which yet is the ultimate source of all that can be experienced.

It is helpful that there is more than one analogy here as this makes it very clear that none of them are complete or entirely adequate. We have to use our own imagination and understanding to form for ourselves an idea of the world as proceeding from some great underlying source, in a sense as plants come forth from the earth.

What is the value of this understanding? It leads us into spiritual enquiry. It inculcates a spirit of reverence and openness. Knowledge of nature is wonderfully useful and effective in its own sphere, but it is always knowledge of things outside us which are known by us. The higher knowledge cannot be divided into the known and the knower; it must be the reality that includes them both. The naturalistic view, however useful pragmatically, leaves all the perennial metaphysical questions unanswered. What is the relation between the object as we experience it, and the reality in itself? What is the connection between consciousness and the objects experienced in consciousness? These questions remain, so the longing for enlightenment about the nature of reality is unfulfilled.

The higher knowledge is what will resolve this fundamental darkness. Evidently it cannot be knowledge in the sense of more facts. It is a different kind of knowledge, not knowledge of facts about things; it is not knowing about something but *knowing through Being*. The state of mind that will help us to approach this understanding is one which sees the whole world as proceeding from one underlying source, where that source is what we want to know directly. Another verse says:

As from a fire, fully ablaze, fly off sparks in their thousands that are akin to the fire, similarly from the Immutable originate different kinds of creatures and into it again they merge. [2.1.1]

When we read this statement in the 21st century it is worth remembering that the Upanishad is not trying to explain to us the origin of creatures or of the universe. It is trying to indicate to us the nature of what is behind and beyond all creatures. Or rather it is trying to indicate the outlook or attitude through which we can best approach the spiritual practices.

What can the Upanishad indicate about the ultimate source of all beings? The understanding can only approach this by inference. We see the world around us and we know that what we see is a tiny fraction of the whole. Reason and logic imply that the whole is there, but our senses and minds cannot encompass it. This is what the Upanishad is telling us about. What is it saying? It cannot state facts about the higher truth, or describe it. Only what happens in time and space can be described; the higher reality contains time-space, it is not contained by time-space. So what are the Upanishads telling us about That?

Two things can be said. One is simply that the higher reality is there. This is not trivial. Our minds and reason may infer that beyond the limited is the unlimited, but whether that is true or not, our minds cannot determine. The Upanishads, like all revealed scripture, assure us that it is. Spiritual enquiry is not futile; the holy truth is real and knowable. Can we be sure about this? Is it really worth making the efforts and sacrifices required? Let us be clear that nothing can prove this in the ordinary way. No event in space or time can reveal to us what is timeless and everywhere. It is the recorded utterances of enlightened men and women that can reassure us. If we constantly press for further proof we are actually asking for something to be revealed to the mind which by definition cannot be contained in the mind. So we have to persevere, understanding that what is sought cannot be presented to the mind in the ordinary way. If we constantly ask for proof, we are repeatedly drawing backwards by making the mind the highest authority and forgetting that the mind is limited while the transcendent is boundless. This is why intelligent faith is considered so valuable in spiritual enquiry, and why those who have it are said to be able to make swift progress. Real faith is the opposite of naive credulity.

So this is one thing the Upanishad tells us, the higher reality is there. Second, the Upanishad impresses on us that this is the ultimate source and sustainer of living creatures. It is that from which we come, and in which we are have our being. This is not far from the God of conventional religion and it tells us that the Divine, or Absolute, is not only real but is also the creative power behind all

things. In this light we will come to think of the higher truth with reverence, awe and gratitude. Some say that religion begins with fear of God. We prefer the thought that it begins with a sense of awe. Those who study cosmology often remark that they are humbled and awestruck by the magnitude and genius of it all. The Upanishads and this phase of religious teaching generally, say how might we feel, then, not only about this cosmos we see all around us, but about the source and sustainer of all the effects we see. And thus we are led to feelings of reverence, gratitude and worship, not as sentimental reactions, but as the intelligent, considered response to what is before our eyes.

Such an attitude may be the only appropriate response to the facts, but it is also helpful to our spiritual enquiry; it conduces to a quality of mind in which inner discoveries are possible. The great respect and reverence we feel are good; of particular value spiritually is a certain openness and alertness. When we feel the power and significance of the Reality behind everything, we gain a heightened sensitivity, a receptivity to a new light on things. This in particular is of value spiritually.

And so it is right and spiritually helpful to feel reverence and gratitude for the supreme Being, as we are encouraged to do by reading of it as the source and sustainer of all. And yet there is another phase to the teachings. At a certain point we may come to reason that there is no creator God. This thought may arise if we have read or understood that the world is not separate from God.

In the highest reality there can be no movement, no change, hence no creation. Or one may consider that the world is an appearance, not a substantial reality, and if it is not really real, then nothing really created it.

Let us consider the force of these arguments: in the highest truth there can be no change, no action, and hence no creation. The world as we experience it is different from reality; what is not really real has not really been created.

There is much force in these ideas and when we begin to think in this way, a new phase of the inner enquiry opens up. However, such thoughts will only help us if we are seriously pursuing the spiritual

enquiry, if we are practising inner methods like meditation in order to bring out the faculties that lie latent beyond thought. Such thinking can lead to a kind of nihilism which considers nothing to be valuable and sees no ground for respect or reverence, which makes us dismissive and callous.

However the spiritually wise implication of such thinking is not to make us sceptical about the higher reality; it is to make us sceptical about the authority of our intellects. It brings home to us that the mind cannot reach beyond its own limits to what is objectively real. The intellect can only think in terms of space, time, matter, energy, cause and effect, but these categories do not apply to the ultimate being. This insight need not make us dismissive of the idea of a higher truth and the need to live in reverence and harmony with That. Rather, on the contrary, it will lead us to a new level of thoughtfulness, carefulness and alertness.

The sense of the all-pervading presence of a supreme creator and preserver of all, induces a heightened sensitivity which is conducive to inner growth. And now we find again that the understanding that our usual ideas of action and creation and sustenance cannot be adequate to the supreme reality. This too heightens our willingness to think anew, put aside our mental habits and become open to the idea of a quite new kind of inner light and knowledge.

At this point we will turn to the training and disciplines offered by the traditional spiritual schools not as unwelcome restrictions, but as doors that have opened and are letting in light. The Upanishads express with particular force this dual aspect of the higher teachings: that the supreme Truth is worthy of the highest reverence and love as the ultimate source and creator of all, and also that it exceeds every quality that can be encompassed by thought, is beyond all action, change and creativity. In this way the mind itself is led to understand its limitations and the need for a new degree of respect for truth, and we are impelled to turn to the practices that will purify and sensitize the faculties of knowledge and allow us to see more deeply beyond the surface of thoughts into the depths of consciousness within. A verse in the Upanishad says:

The Divine is formless, existing inside and outside, unborn, free from energy and mind, pure, and greater than the great unmanifest. [2.1.2]

This seems a mysterious idea. The Upanishad says that we sometimes think of Reality as an unmanifest cause of all that we see. This is not wrong, and yet beyond all causation is a supreme being in which no action or any other limitation can be really said to apply. So we come to spiritual practice. In the second part of the Upanishad are these famous verses [2. 2. 2-4]:

On that which is self-luminous and subtler than the subtle, all the worlds and their inhabitants are supported. That is the imperishable Absolute. That is the basis of life, speech and mind; that is truth; that is immortal; that should be meditated upon. Dear one, meditate upon it.

Taking hold of the bow, the great instrument of the Upanishads, fix upon it an arrow sharpened by dedication, draw the string with a mind absorbed in it, and hit the target, the imperishable.

The bow is OM; the arrow is Atman [Self]; Brahman [Absolute] is called the target. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then Atman becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target.

It is said that all the teachings can finally be summed up in the one syllable OM. Many volumes have been written on the principles of non-duality, considering them from all perspectives and establishing that the ideas can meet any logical objection. When the intellect is satisfied, the essential teaching is subtle and simple. OM is a name and symbol for all levels of consciousness and being, and that in which they are encompassed. The penultimate thought is ‘the individual Self is not different from the absolute Self’, or ‘I am That’, and this thought itself condenses into the one syllable OM. The spiritual practice is to stabilize and purify the mind, through dedication to the ideal and letting go of what is incompatible with it. Then the mind is to be brought into one-pointed concentration on the truth symbolized as OM. In daily life we try to live in the light of that principle, accepting what comes as coming from That and offering our exertions back to it. At the time of meditation the ideal is to leave

behind even the thought ‘I am meditating on OM’ so that only OM itself remains.

In some further teachings from the *Mundaka Upanishad*, we are told:

There are two birds, holding on to the same tree. They are always together and known by the same name. One of them eats the many fruits of the tree, the other looks on without eating.

Sitting on that tree, a person grieves, distressed by their own frailty. When they see the other, the Sovereign majesty, the person is freed from sorrow.

When the seer sees the Self-luminous, all-creative source of all, the Supreme Being, then the seer sheds both vice and virtue, is purified and attains identity with Oneness. [3.1.1-3]

Very much has been distilled into these poetic, memorable verses. The bird who eats the fruit is the individualized self, one who feels itself to be a doer of action and the enjoyer of the results. The other bird is pure consciousness itself, ultimately the reality in all, and which may be said to be related to action only as the illuminating witness. Both these are sometimes referred to as the self. We usually use the word ‘self’ to mean the individualized mind and personality; the philosophy holds that this identification with the limited personality is in fact a misidentification.

In reality, the mind is in itself an inert object and only assumes the appearance of life and independence because of the light of consciousness that illumines it. This consciousness is the real Self, but it is subtle and is the principle which observes everything else and cannot itself by definition be observed. Thus the ordinary mind completely overlooks it.

This is a major theme of the Vedanta teachings, worked out in much detail elsewhere. The fundamental error at the root of our difficulties is held to be this conflation of the mind—which is in fact an object—with the true Self that illumines the mind but cannot be an object of experience. It is this wrong identification that makes our egos the centre of our personal lives and drives us to consider our egos as supremely important, while at the same time we somehow

know that this deification of the ego is at best slightly ridiculous and at worst frankly demonic. The practical aspect of the spiritual path is largely concerned with overcoming the hold that the ego has upon us, which is a challenging and delicate process. This brings us to the next point.

So long as we remain identified with our mind, we are inevitably aware of our vulnerability to forces beyond our control and ultimately to death. This causes us grief and uncertainty. But this changes when we become aware of the other bird.

We first see the other bird when we consciously come into touch with a traditional teacher of the supreme truth. Then we find one who unlike all the others is not identified with their ego. Although they may live like an ordinary man or woman in the world, they are distinguished by an inner freedom which is a source of unique help and inspiration with those who are sensitive to it. In practice, it is held that the process of disentangling oneself from the ego is all but impossible without such light and guidance. When, with the help of a traditional teacher, the bondage to the ego is loosened, we are able to turn with affirmation and loving identity to the true Self. When this is known fully, what remains cannot be called either good or bad, because one cannot be without the other, and we find identity with the one without a second.

Let us give the final word to the Upanishad:

Know that Self alone which is one without a second, on which are strung heaven and earth, the mind, life and living beings, and give up all other talk. This is the bridge leading to immortality. [2.2.5]

That Brahman shines forth, vast, self-luminous, inconceivable, subtler than the subtle. He is far beyond what is far and yet near at hand. Verily, He is seen here, dwelling in the cave of the heart of conscious beings.

Brahman is not grasped by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the other senses, nor by penance or good works. A man becomes pure through serenity of intellect; thereupon, in meditation, he beholds Him who is without parts. [3.1.7-8]

This Atman cannot be attained through study of the Vedas, nor through intelligence, nor through much learning. He who chooses Atman—by him alone is Atman attained. It is Atman that reveals to the seeker Its true nature. [3.2.3]

P.H.

THE FULFILMENT OF PRAYER

For the last ten years or so of his life, Dr Shastri gave regular weekly recitations of the Ramayana, the great Indian epic poem describing the life of the incarnation of God, Shri Ramachandra (Rama). Though he translated the whole of the original and ancient Ramayana of Valmiki, his recitations were drawn from the sixteenth century re-telling of the story by the Hindi poet, Tulsidas. He would sing a verse, translate it, and then offer some spontaneous commentary. The following transcription is based on a passage in the final part of the classic, known as the Epilogue, which includes a great and heartfelt prayer by a Guru in intercession for an erring disciple.

Prayers are responded to. Many people who do not know how to pray or who pray half-heartedly, or who pray for the things of the world, find themselves disappointed. They say: ‘O well, I prayed so long to have a good job, or to have money, and it has led me nowhere. And therefore prayers are of no use at all whatsoever.’ Several European writers, who were at one time devout, became agnostics or atheists because they found their prayers were not responded to.

But the fact is otherwise. For a prayer to be responded to, it must flow from the very bottom of the soul of the man and should be for the elevation of the soul and not the acquisition of any temporal or worldly interest.

Of course, in a lower sense, it is good to associate our daily wants with God also. As it is said in the great Christian prayer: ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ It is good to associate our daily wants with the Lord, who is the only fulfiller of our wants, and there is none else.

But when we come to the art and science of prayer, as it is defined by Swami Rama Tirtha in his essay on ‘Upasana’ (Worship), when

prayer means elevation of the heart, proximity of the inner peace and entry into the illumination of the soul, this is the main purpose of prayer, and it is always responded to in some form or other.

It is silliness to expect that our worldly prayers will be responded to. Let us remember that we are only a detail of the cosmos. Every object in the cosmos is interrelated with every other object, and we are only a detail. Our desires, our wishes and our wants are merely temporary and microcosmic. When we pray, let us pray from the macrocosmic point of view. Otherwise, there will be a conflict.

For example, there is a law working in nature, as defined by physics, and you want to set up something in order to contradict that law. Well, of course your wish will be thwarted. Because the law is the eternal decree of God. Then you will cry and you will say: 'O well, my prayers are not answered.' Why have silly prayers?

When we have shut all the channels of inner and outer expression very carefully, and set our mind on the spirit within, the great 'I', the macrocosmic 'I', then there will rise a voice. It is not exactly a voice, but it cannot be defined by any other term. Then there will be a kind of urge, or light, and it will ask you to adjust yourself to that great Light, and that is called the fulfilment of the prayer.

H.P.S.

A UNIVERSAL PRAYER

Teach us to forgive all fancied wrongs,
for, in reality, no outside entity can either harm or profit us.
Teach us not to harm ourselves through our own ignorance,
and enlighten our hearts with the supreme spiritual truth.
O may the clouds of nescience roll away, away from the
surface of the earth!

May those who are deluded realise that all is One,
that all the nations of the earth are beads
strung on the same thread of consciousness.

H.P.S.

New Book—Understanding 'That Thou Art'

We are pleased to announce the publication of Hari Prasad Shastri's translation of the Vedanta classic, *Vākya Vritti*. Its theme is an enquiry into the meaning of the sentence 'That Thou Art', the essence of the spiritual wisdom of the Upanishads. The text is attributed to Shri Shankara, and the translation and commentary were completed by Dr Shastri early in January 1956, three weeks before his passing. In his introduction he writes:

'It is not a purely logical treatise. People often ask what to meditate on, what to contemplate. Here is a treatise by the greatest of our Āchāryas, Shri Bhagavatpāda Shankara. It is an invaluable gift of the holy master, and anybody who practises contemplation in the spirit of these verses will have peace within and goodwill towards all living beings, and finally spiritual illumination, which will break the bonds of all limitations.'

It is currently available on a postage-free offer to readers of this journal, and it published under the English title, *Understanding 'That Thou Art'*.

The Autumn term at Shanti Sadan included a series of talks on Thursday evenings drawing on teachings from a wide range of spiritual traditions. Among them were a talk on the Sufi teacher and poet Rumi, and another on the deeper teachings of the Christian Gospels, including the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. There were also presentations on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mundaka Upanishad* and *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*. The Tuesday evening meditation sessions attracted consistent interest and, as before, they continue through the festive break.

Spring 2013 Special Course

Sunday 3 March 2013 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NS

Talk 1: *Quest for the Eternal*

First Meditation Practice

Talk 2 *Transforming the Mind*

Second Meditation Practice

Talk 3 *Your Reality is the Eternal*