

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

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN TERM 2014

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Every Tuesday evening at 8pm throughout the year there is a practical guided meditation session.

On Thursday evenings at 8pm from 9 October to 27 November there will be a series of talks on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

The Autumn afternoon course will be held on Sunday 19 October 2014, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Details are given on the inside back cover.

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SEEING MORE DEEPLY

We see with our eyes, with our everyday mind, and with the inner eye of spiritual intuition. The seeing of the eye is shared by all creatures endowed with the sense of sight. The seeing of the mind, conditioned by the mind's tendencies and associations, likes and dislikes, is individualized and unique to each experiencer. 'So many men, so many minds.' The seeing with the eye of intuition springs from a deeper level of our being, and sees through the changing appearances, discerning that existence is one universal unity, though clothed in manifold forms.

Each of the world's great religions seems to have evolved its own cultural empire, and although there is a trend towards co-operation and mutual respect, sectarianism and fundamentalism still claim thousands of victims. Yet every religion glows with a higher meaning and purpose

that transcends narrowness. Only those who have awakened the eye of intuition can shed light on this higher path. They alone can guide others to a vision that sees more than the diversity apprehended by the senses and the restless mind. For wisdom is to see deeper than with the eye, and with sympathy.

Who is to develop this sympathetic vision? We ourselves. When the mind is brought to a condition of harmony and serenity, through meditation, the strong sense, tribal or individual, of being different from others, disappears from our inner landscape, and a wider sense of selfhood takes over.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a scripture of inner freedom and universality, teaches that enlightenment is ‘to see all beings in one’s own higher Self, and one’s Self in all beings’. The vision that insists on differences, and fears or oppresses those who are different, is called *rajasic*. It springs from psychological tendencies that have yet to be evolved into something higher; failing this evolution, the fruit of *rajas* can only be personal pain through the perpetuation of conflict and the stifling of our higher potentialities.

Higher than the passionate unrest of *rajas* is the peace and kindliness of *sattva*, won through our efforts at meditation, spiritual thought, and action based on harmony and harmlessness. The fruit of *sattva* is not only the deeper happiness released from the source of our being, but the clarity of higher knowledge. And this knowledge reveals the underlying unity of our innermost Self with the reality behind all experience.

Some may contend that this higher vision blurs the differences between faiths. Yet ignoring such differences for a time will do no harm, and reminds us of our common humanity. The same supreme Power underlies and makes possible the spiritual aspirations of all the peoples, and the sense of our spiritual unity draws human beings together in a bond of oneness that has been sanctified in the highest temple of all—the temple of an illumined mind.

Remembering our Spiritual Destiny

OUR HIGHER destiny is to realize fully the bliss, peace, wisdom and freedom of our true nature. This is the complete life, the enlightened life, and everything else is a preparation for it. The fulfilment of this destiny is close at hand. But while we remain engrossed in the matters that relate to this finite world, we do not sense its proximity. This divine destiny is not just close but immediate. There is no chasm between what we are here and now and the fulfilment of our spiritual destiny. For it is a matter of self-realization. In our deepest nature, we are identified with the supreme that we are seeking to discover.

The Self to be realized is something far greater than the self we normally identify ourselves with and which acts and reacts in the world. This higher Self is infinite, immortal and perfect. To discover the immortal, we need to awaken our latent potentialities, through cultivating tranquillity and concentration. By concentration is meant the ability to focus our attention on something uplifting which has an affinity with our deeper spiritual nature.

Every religion has its symbols that point to the supreme truth. These symbols give us something our minds can rest on. Such symbols can be in the form of words or images. They may be inspired sentences, or a name of God, or a picture of a saint—something that arouses pure and peaceful associations within us. What is important is to appreciate that these images or concepts have a real connection with our own essence, which is pure and perfect. And so our tranquillity and concentration have far-reaching results and a purpose deeper than the acquisition of material advantages. They enable us to make a clearing, as it were, in the thickets of our thought-filled mind. Through that clearing the light which ever shines at the core of our being, will be more and more clearly reflected in our mind and inspire our conscious life with its peace and wisdom.

Our higher Self does not abide within us as a part of the mind, like a refined feeling. It is the ultimate illuminator of all experience, the true inner light. It is the power *behind* the mind, in the sense of being the source and support of the mind. But it cannot be called ‘the power behind the Self’ because it is the Self, and there is nothing beyond it. For it is ultimate reality.

We are sometimes advised to 'be ourselves'. Generally, the meaning is to be ourselves in the sense of being more relaxed and accepting of our personality as it is. It sounds an appealing and sensible therapy. But even this course is not as easy as it sounds. A writer has said that to be normal is the hardest pose of all. This remark is not merely playfulness. For, how do we know which aspects of our personality are the truest representation of our self, the truly normal 'me'? Besides, we need progress and inner growth, and not to be pinned down by any idealized image of ourselves. And our greatest need is to transcend sorrow, realize ultimate happiness in ourselves, and be established in the eternal wisdom that solves the riddle of life forever. This is true normality and confers total inner security.

Now is this really the case? Surely, for many, perhaps for the majority of people, the life which is dominated by hopes and fears, expectations and disappointments, is the normal life, and it appears that there is no alternative. But such a life fills our mind with illusions and cuts us off from the innate peace of our own being. And there certainly is an alternative if we are willing to pursue the quest for enlightenment. For the supreme peace is fully revealed in the deeper self-knowledge. In this peace, our sense of identity is realized to be the transcendent reality, and this is complete inner freedom.

The following verse from the *Avadhut Gita* gives us an idea of the grandeur and sublime nature of this divine ground of our being, our true Self:

Know the Self to be infinite consciousness, self-evident, beyond destruction, enlightening all bodies equally, ever shining. In It is neither day nor night.

'Enlightening all bodies equally.' This is a message of very great hope for each and every human being. What is the chief use of having a human body? It seems to be a great mystery: to live, to experience, and finally to withdraw from this field of action, perhaps never having done what we wished to do, or even to have enjoyed the feelings that we longed to enjoy. True are the words of the Urdu poet, Ibrahim Zauq:

Life brought me here and I came.
Death beckons me and I go!

I did not come at my own wish.
I do not leave of my own will.

Our life has a social value, certainly. We are part of the human family, and must learn to work in loving co-operation with all to help sustain the world in peace and harmony. But this is not the final purpose. The real worth of human birth is that it is an opportunity to come into touch with the way of inner illumination and thus to further our evolution towards full self-knowledge. This is the way our experience will be life-enhancing in the highest sense. For we shall discover that principle within us which never dies. This discovery fulfils our deepest need forever. There is in fact only one need behind all human endeavours: it is the need for expansion leading to complete freedom from limitations. This need can only be met by spiritual means.

One great aid to self-unfoldment is the regular hearing of the spiritual truth given in the traditional way, or, if this is not possible, continual contact with the teachings through the written word and applying them to our own life.

The traditional way of transmitting this truth by word of mouth is that it should be impersonal, not tied to any particular leader or sect, and carried out for love of truth and for no other motivation.

The importance of regularly hearing teachings of this kind is not that we accumulate information—although, on an intellectual level, this is useful and valuable. But the real importance of hearing, *shravana*, is that it will awaken an echo of recognition within our own being. It is like the revival of a memory, recovering awareness of what is already within us.

Normally memory calls up facts or images that have been impressed on our mind by past experiences. These memories belong to the finite world, the world of limitations. What we recall has entered our mind at some past time. It was not there at the beginning. Reviving our memory of our fundamental nature is very different from recalling worldly events. Our spiritual memory is also concerned with bringing to light something that is already within us. But what is there within us turns out to be the only thing that truly *is*, the real substance of all experience. This is the divine ground of our being, the substratum of our mind and of the world, our true Self.

This eternal reality was never introduced into the mind at a point in

time, like the experiences that originally formed the impressions lodged in our memory. The mind itself abides phenomenally within this deeper and most subtle reality. All mental forms, whether present thoughts or memories, turn out to be less than entirely real, because they are ever-changing, like the shapes of animals that we may imagine in the passing clouds. Hearing the truth is intended to awaken the realization of our ever-established infinite nature.

At the end of the *Bhagavad Gita*, when the disciple Arjuna finally awakens to Self-realization, his words to the Lord Krishna are:

My delusion has been destroyed and memory has been regained by me through your grace. I am firm with doubts gone. I will do thy word.

It is not that the truth of our higher Self, when realized, will come back to our mind like any other thing that we remember. For truth is not a thing. It is the unmoving innermost centre of our being, the eternal reality that stands behind the changing mental images. It is the ultimate light of consciousness that reveals all our thoughts. As such, it can never be made an object of thought. Then, what does it mean when we say, as Arjuna did, that the truth is remembered?

At the heart of our being, pervading our inner world, is the supreme, immutable principle whose nature is truth, beauty, peace and bliss. This is not a lifeless philosophical abstraction; it is a living reality, for truth is the source of peace, purity, joy and light.

Long before we realize the ultimate truth—that in our intrinsic nature, we ourselves *are* this truth—our mortal mind can receive ‘intimations of immortality’, insights that confirm in us the presence of a deeper reality. To speak metaphorically, our conscious mind can be lit by beams from the inner sun of the real Self long before we realize our identity with that Sun. This ultimate light, so to say, first makes an impression on the highest and most refined part of our intellect. The Self does not in reality move or act, for it is infinite and all-in-all. But our mind and intellect can make certain interior adjustments that render it increasingly sensitive to this ultimate light. The sage Shri Dada of Aligarh has said:

Our senses read matter, mind reads the senses, and spirit [the true Self] reads the mind. Spirit is the heavenly force which witnesses the

functions of the mind and gives a direction to them if the mind endeavours to still itself and approaches the spirit.

The crucial practical hint is contained in the phrase ‘if the mind endeavours to still itself and approaches the spirit’. It is this continual communion with our deeper nature that is the way of progress towards enlightenment.

There is a verse from the *Chandogya Upanishad*: ‘The man of realization does not meet with death, nor disease, nor even sorrow. The man of realization sees everything, attains everything in every way.’ (VII.26.2) In other words, his fulfilment is absolute.

The verse then goes on to state the means to this realization. ‘From purity of food follows the purity of the mind.’ Food here does not just mean what we eat. It means the sort of material we absorb through all the senses. Our mind is like a sponge, and we are advised to be most careful about what we expose our mind to.

There is an ancient prayer: ‘May my mind only see what is peace-giving, beautiful, uplifting.’ It means: ‘May my mind only *seek out* such uplifting and pacifying experiences, and not fill itself with influences that lower the mind and throw it into agitation.’ In this way ‘purity of food’ brings about purity of the mind in its broadest sense.

But this is not the final stage. For the verse says: ‘From purification of the mind comes unfailing memory. After the achievement of memory comes falling asunder of all the knots of the heart.’

The memory of our deeper spiritual reality can only take place when the mind frees itself from the conditioning imposed by all the other memories that sweep over us, and often drive us before them like straws in the wind. These mental currents have their root in the impressions and tendencies that have been formed in our mind in its unenlightened state—what the Upanishads call ‘the knots of the heart’. Our memory of the ever-achieved divine Self shines through, so to say, when we gain some degree of mastery over our thinking processes and can say to our involuntary thoughts and memories: ‘No. Not wanted. I choose to think of something else, something spiritually helpful. OM.’

To develop this skill in inner control and direction, we need to remember that the mind, including its faculty of memory, is not our true Self, nor is it the supreme authority that runs our life. Like the body, its

real role is to be an instrument of the higher Power, the Power behind the mind. So we certainly have the right to affirm our independence of the mind and its memories. Indeed, we can develop the skill to call up those memories which will help us on our spiritual path, or, in practical life, which enable us to fulfil efficiently the demands of the moment. This skill also develops the power to veto the intrusion of memories that we know will disturb the mind, throw us into a mood, or waste the precious minutes in daydreams.

Cultivating our memory is a great and central spiritual skill. It is potential in all of us. Our memory can be used as a light on our path. For our real life begins when we know how to replace the spontaneous undirected thoughts with mental material that will intensify and deepen our spiritual consciousness.

Through soaking our mind again and again in the spiritual teachings, we are laying down the most helpful impressions. Our spiritual idealism begins to penetrate our mind more deeply. Good thoughts and feelings rise spontaneously from the depths of our being. These are also memories, but are not like the memories based on our personal history. Such limited memories usually reinforce our worldly identity. As we know, when we reminisce about the happenings in our life, we often find ourselves reviving old emotions, which of course also revive our sense of identity with the person we were at the time. But the spiritual memories are not based on our personal history, but on impersonal and universal truth. They lead us into the serene and spacious region of the spiritual consciousness, as it is increasingly reflected in our controlled and tranquillized mind.

There is nothing strange about this inner transformation. It is quite natural for people of faith to sustain an awareness of the presence of God. Hari Prasad Shastri once recalled an encounter he had in a park in Shanghai. He said he used often to meet a somewhat ascetic-looking elderly Japanese man and would exchange conversation with him. One day, he asked the man about his way of life. 'I live alone. I have no wife, no children and few friends. All the time, I remember Jesus.' It is a simple example, but it enshrines a principle that is not just simple, but life-transforming.

From our discussion so far, it will be seen that the cultivation of the

mind is the hub of the training on our path leading to ultimate fulfilment. The supreme all-pervading reality, God or Truth, is man's ally on this quest, as long as he is willing to open his mind to this dimension of experience.

If we want to use the Internet, one thing is necessary: we have to go online. Similarly, we ourselves have to organise that living link which joins us to the great Whole. In the case of the computer, the link is usually a telecommunication. In the case of the human heart, the link is simply the conscious use of memory.

Our access to the divine region in ourselves is through the mind. The most wonderful fact about the mind is that it can be made a channel through which the supreme truth may be known. By making certain adjustments in our life, and, more especially, in the inner life of the mind, the immortality of the Self will be revealed in our own experience.

Our memory is intimately connected with our sense of identity—of being a particular, unique individual. It is our most fundamental psychological possession. Without memory, our personality would disintegrate. We know how awkward it is when we have a 'mental block'. These are times when facts we know perfectly well simply will not come to mind. In such cases, our effort to call up the information only increases our frustration. We know that we know. And yet, it is as if we do not know. Then, to our relief, the missing information or forgotten skill may flash back into our conscious mind. This often happens when we have abandoned hope and stopped trying. Then we feel: 'Of course. How obvious.' Our mastery of the situation is instantly re-established and the mental block itself is deservedly forgotten.

In a similar way, the knowledge of our innate divinity is never separate or distant from us. It is always here and now, and needs no steps to establish its presence. Our true nature *is* this knowledge. It is the ground of memory and of the mind. This innate spiritual knowledge cannot be separated from our sense of existence, of what we might call 'isness'. 'I am' and 'I know' have the same source. That source is 'I'. This is the dimension of our being which is not individual but universal, not finite, but infinite. It is not mortal, but eternal, and it is never in ignorance of itself.

But as regards its practical realization, there seems to be something

resembling a mental block. It is not just that the knowledge of our Godhead appears to be veiled from our inner sight. In its place, we find the characteristic world of the mind. This is a rich hamper of experiences, and there always seems to be room for more. Although we are half-aware of the transient nature of our inner world, we tend to take the inner experiences of thoughts, memories and feelings as our own, and even to feel: 'This is the real me.' Spiritual realization overturns this conviction. This revelation corrects our sense of identity once and for all. The Self-realized sage knows:

I am the Absolute, one only without a second, the beginningless principle, to which nothing else can be compared, far removed from all vain imaginations such as 'you', 'I', 'this', 'that', real and ever blissful.

I alone am the reality present in all creatures, I exist everywhere, the support of all, within and without, as Consciousness. I am the sole reality in all that was previously seen as separate.

Crest Jewel of Wisdom (Viveka Chudamani), 494 and 496

The reality that is thus realized is not something foreign to our true nature. It is the wholeness of our being even now, ever achieved and never really unknown. Yet it is seemingly hidden, as if by a mental block. This mental block is caused by our tendency to identify the self with the endless details and transformations of our mind.

Whether we realize it not, pure consciousness permeates all experience, for it is the reality behind the appearances. Once again, we recall the phrase from the *Avadhut Gita*: 'enlightening all bodies equally'. Human beings are blessed because they have the capacity to realize this supreme truth. We remember that Prince Arjuna, at the end of the *Bhagavad Gita*, expressed his realization by saying: 'My delusion has been destroyed and memory has been regained by me through your grace. I am firm with doubts gone. I will do Thy word.'

We may ask: 'In the light of this spiritual realization, what happens to a person's normal memory, so to say? Is it swept away, totally replaced by the consciousness of the Divine, so that earthly life loses all meaning?'

Prince Arjuna, after declaring that his divine memory had returned, adds the significant statement: 'I am firm with doubts gone. I will do

Thy word.' The instruments of the body and the mind are still present, and the worldly skills and memory are totally unimpaired. But now, there is no more wavering due to doubt and insecurity, which are in turn based on wrong identification. Through spiritual training the mortal memory is purified and made subject to our will. The capacity to think that which is peaceful, beautiful and uplifting has become a natural expression of the soul. So we may be sure that spiritual enlightenment is the flowering of the inner life of man and its supreme manifestation.

In the old epic stories of both East and West, we often find that the heroes were equipped with celestial weapons, weapons with hidden and extended powers, which, if used in combat, would prove unfailing and guarantee success in the fight. These heroes had all they needed—but there was one simple condition: Remember to keep the weapons close by and be ever ready to use them in order to fulfil the noble mission.

Man also has his noble mission to fulfil and that is the realization of his Godhead. To bring this about he has also been endowed with celestial weapons, but these are not external. Such weapons are forged from his psychological faculties, which include his will, his memory, his intellect and his power of concentration. These seemingly common faculties, which all of us possess, conceal within themselves the celestial power of spiritual perception leading to Self-realization. This power of higher knowledge is brought out through our efforts to tranquillize the mind and focus it on symbols of the higher truth. Thus our seemingly forgotten Godhead will stand revealed in its full glory.

The classical texts of Vedanta are there to teach us about our own higher nature. Their highest teachings are the affirmations of the essential identity of our innermost Self with the supreme reality that underlies and supports the whole world of appearances.

Let us end with a text which expresses the highest spiritual affirmation. It may be found in the book called *Triumph of a Hero* by Swami Mangalathji.

What bliss that I have now come to remember that whatever existed in the past was verily my own Self, and whatever I knew was indeed my Self-cognition!

B.D.

Thought is a Creative Force

THOUGHT IS a creative force on the subjective as well as the objective plane. What is the source of thought?

Thought is a function of the mind, and the mind itself, being an evolute of matter, reflects the light of the spirit beyond it.

Every gift of nature is subject to improvement and deterioration. The fluctuations of the mind are governed by deeper laws which control the constitution of the faculty. By means of thought-force, wonders are achieved in the external world, but they are temporary and perishable. There is something in man which looks for permanence in the great values of life. Eternity is foreign to the objective world. The spirit eternal, which has created the perfect astronomical order, cannot leave man only to search for permanence and never obtain it.

The two great values of life are: spiritual peace and spiritual light. Is the mind competent to discover these two great values which it is yearning for? The sage, Shri Dada of Aligarh, made psychological experiments in a scientific spirit and came to the conclusion that eternal peace and eternal light are discoverable, if the mind acts on itself persistently and in faith.

Napoleon said: 'Imagination rules the world.' Perhaps it would be more correct to say that faith rules the world. The advocates of reason will disagree, but they must understand that reason cannot produce any valuable results without the reasoning people having faith in the infallibility of reason. In his essay on 'Matter end Memory', Henri Bergson has struck a definite anti-rational note.

Faith means a strong conviction, arrived at either by thought process or on the authority of a teacher, that the hunger of the soul for peace and light can be satisfied. The means to attain satisfaction is the psychological process of subjective concentration and spiritual discipline.

To sum up: the rays of the mind, passing through the doors of the senses, discover the wonders of the objective world; but when these rays are consciously withdrawn and focused on the spirit in the inner

silence, the soul discovers the jewels of everlasting peace and light.

Man creates and destroys, pursues and discovers, but his whole career is the pursuit of inner peace and light. The present chaos in many parts of the world cannot be attributed solely to social and economic systems, nor to the love of power in certain individuals. Spiritually speaking, it is attributable to an erroneous understanding of the spiritual wants of man and the elusive ideals which he pursues.

The social problem cannot be solved by an imposition of authority from above. As man divorced from the land and nature in general is made more miserable than before, so his uncontrolled, unregulated, and unilluminated mind, applied to the creation of material objects and luxury, has made him still more miserable.

It is a pity that, while considering political and social systems, we neglect the study of man and do not try to study his real needs. As a disease manifests itself in symptoms, so the ignored spiritual wants of the body politic express themselves as unrest and chaos.

Unilluminated leaders, when in power, want to retain it at any cost, and party machinery degenerates into a field of internecine conflict. Remedies are proposed to camouflage party interests. Political peace is a myth without a direct understanding of the nature of man's spirit. To turn to the spirit is to enter a region flood-lit by peace and wisdom. Inner peace and spiritual illumination are the keys to individual, national, and international peace and prosperity.

Hari Prasad Shastri

Nothing but the practice of the spiritual truth in daily life will transmute the hearts of the people into living torches of peace and inner illumination. All other aspects of human happiness in the social and international spheres are contingent on the state of spiritual illumination in personal life.

H.P.S.

Intellectual Knowledge and Spiritual Wisdom

SPIRITUAL WISDOM and intellectual knowledge, though different, are not incompatible, and in some ways overlap and fit together. This is important because in our search there are some things we can do with our intellect, in fact there are things that we have to do with our minds; and there are also places where the intellect is not competent and other faculties have to be engaged.

By intellectual knowledge is not meant the kind of knowledge that is merely theoretical and is not based on experience, or that has no emotional significance. We are referring to true, meaningful knowledge that involves the intellect together with the mind and senses. The distinction we are making is between knowledge that we gain through our minds and senses, and spiritual wisdom, which has different sources. As we go on, we will come to what those sources are, and we will clarify what is meant by spiritual wisdom, which could also be called the higher knowledge, or metaphysical understanding.

So what is the right use of our intellect on the path of self-discovery? First we have to use our minds to live in the world and fulfil our responsibilities. The way of deeper self-knowledge begins with what the classic texts called Dharma, which means ethical, right living. The basis of dharma is straightforward honesty, not to cause unnecessary hardship to others, and to fulfil the responsibilities which life presents us with or which we have taken on. For this, we have to apply our minds to what is needed and to make sure we do our tasks adequately, and our minds are well adapted for precisely this purpose. Living in this way is the essential first step, because it means that we are not dominated by narrow self-interest that sets us apart and in conflict with the rest; rather our lives are taking their places in harmony with the greater whole.

There is another sense in which using the senses, mind and intellect is important. Sometimes our senses or reason tell us things that we would rather not know. At such times we might wish we could ignore what our eyes and reason are telling us; we might appeal to some

supernatural power to change what we have done or how things are. But, to grow inwardly, we have to take things as they are and move on from there. So at this point, respecting the authority of our senses and reason is an important spiritual discipline.

Thirdly, we can use our senses and mind to investigate the world. We do this as part of effective living in many ways, and then there are the specialist forms of scholarly and scientific research. Again, the mind is well adapted to these tasks. In fact some philosophers and thoughtful scientists have noticed that it is a mystery and a wonder that there is such a close fit between the deep structure of nature, and the capacities of the human mind, especially the aptitude for analysis and mathematics.

The non-dual teachings throw much light on this mystery of why the world and the mind fit together so closely: according to these teachings, consciousness is not the end-product of evolution which appears in individual instances in space and time; rather consciousness is understood as the fundamental substance underlying all beings; creatures differ in the extent to which they are refined enough, or one could say transparent enough, to reveal or reflect this underlying consciousness. On this understanding, nature and mind are both evolutes of consciousness, and this common basis accounts for their deep connections.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. We note that one of the right tasks of the intellect is the investigation of the world. Recent advances show that the more we use our senses and minds to see how things are in the physical world, without any preconceptions, the more effective this investigation is. As a result we have gained knowledge of the universe which is fascinating in its own right, and has led to technology that saves us from so much discomfort and drudgery.

We notice that the arts, literature and music also are products of the creative use of our senses and minds. They too reveal a deep correlation between our powers of appreciation and the fabric of the world. And they begin to offer not just a means to live well, but a reason for doing so.

Is it then for the intellect to take on the task of trying to solve all the great problems? Well, evidently artistic gifts are no guarantee of lasting

happiness and fulfilment. And to date every scientific discovery has revealed more questions than it has solved. The realization that the universe is expanding led to the project of deducing from this expansion all the way back to point zero. This project has been remarkably fruitful and the understanding now approaches very closely to the origin. But it is inadmissible to think of something coming from nothing. So now consideration is turning to what might have been the preconditions of the so-called 'big bang'. This mystery is as deep as anything that faced explorers in the fifteenth century. So there is no apparent limit to scientific progress, but there is no scientific reason to believe that as knowledge progresses it approaches completeness. There is always a point at which we can only say that things are as they are, not why they are so.

Scientific explanation describes how things are formed by the laws of nature and their constituent parts, but it can always be asked how and why those laws and constituents came to be. The enquiry would only come to a final end with something about which one can no longer ask: 'Why is it so?' This would be something eternal and which for some reason has to be the way it is—an everlasting and 'necessary' Being. This takes us out of scientific enquiry and into precisely the issues about which theologians have been speculating for centuries.

There is one area of empirical research where there has been a marked lack of developments: research into the nature of consciousness. There has been progress in determining which parts of the brain are associated with particular mental functions, and how the chemistry of the brain is related to states of mind. This tells us about processes that are associated with consciousness; but it tells us nothing about the nature and origin of consciousness itself.

The difficulty is that consciousness is intrinsically subjective; it is an experience 'from within' as it were. Any explanation of consciousness that itself lacks this essential subjectivity is leaving out the heart of the matter. This has been called the hard problem of consciousness; and it is just as hard now as when it was formulated decades ago.

Here then are two limitations on intellectual knowledge. The mind is a detail within total reality, so how could it encompass the totality? And any explanation of consciousness that is not consciousness itself is

inadequate. These are particular ways of expressing the general realization that no amount of intellectual knowledge will ever answer the question 'What is this amazing universe, and why?', nor will intellectual knowledge answer the question 'What am I?' For most of us, the pressing question is 'What really am I?', because another way of asking that question is 'How am I to find inner freedom, completeness and lasting fulfilment?' These are questions that the intellect alone cannot answer.

But they are precisely the questions addressed by the traditional teachings of non-duality. On this path, in meditation and other practices, we go into the nature of consciousness by turning the light of conscious awareness on to that awareness itself. We ask, who is it that asks 'Who am I?' Not in a theoretical, abstract way, but by actually looking. In this deliberate turning of consciousness upon itself, consciousness is heightened and brought into focus and whole new possibilities open up. We become increasingly aware of the essential difference between everything that belongs to the mind and senses, which is full of effort and limitations, and the light of consciousness itself, which is ever free, transcendent, perfect.

At the same time, these inner discoveries turn out to have more than just personal significance. In focussing the point of awareness on to the inner light we resolve the usual division between subject and object, Self and other. Here there is no separation and no boundary between the one who knows and what is known. We find that direct knowledge of our own inner being is direct knowledge of all being. A celebrated formulation from a classic spiritual text declares:

The innermost consciousness of man is the infinite bliss without a second, and the infinite bliss without a second is none other than the innermost consciousness of man.

The traditional teachings set out both the principle of non-duality, and also practical methods by which it may be realized directly. And again we find that here, in the practical phases, the intellect has its place. By intellect we mean all the finer powers of the mind; to understand, to love, to see beauty.

It is said that the teachings are approached in three stages, and these

could be called, receiving, assimilating and realizing; or hearing, reflection and mature meditation.

First we hear or read about the ultimate identity of the individual and the universal. The ideal at this stage is simply to hear without immediately swamping what we hear with associations and comparisons.

Then comes the stage of reflecting on and assimilating the idea of an underlying unity in which divisions appear like bubbles in the sea. The foundational idea is that there cannot ultimately be more than one reality. There are innumerable opinions and thoughts, but beyond them all is reality itself, and that is one and undifferentiated. It follows that differences and separation exist not in reality but in appearances—as reality appears to be when experienced through a mind. It follows also that reality is never far from us, in fact it is ever the basis of our own being. And, the teachings assure us, it is here, at the core of our own being, that we can pass from appearances to reality itself by absorbing the inner light of our empirical consciousness in the inner light of the supreme consciousness. We need to reflect deeply on these principles until we are convinced of their validity and their immediate relevance to our needs.

This inner reflection and focusing is the heart of the enquiry. It needs to be supported by other adjustments, such as the abandonment of inordinate likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions, which prevent us from gaining inner clarity and stability. In general one might say that the instincts and passions are to be brought under the harmonious control of reason, so here is one more right use of the intellect. This might sound rather dry and restrictive, but the important question at every turn is simply ‘Will this help me realize my goal of inner freedom and illumination?’

So, we need to be satisfied that this vision of non-duality is entirely reasonable and puts the inner and outer worlds into harmonious perspective, and to gradually take our stand in life on this understanding. It is for each of us to do this in our own way, using our own powers of thought and feeling and sensitivity. This is the right and necessary use of the mind on the spiritual path.

There are some things which are not for the intellect. In particular,

it is not for the intellect to try to prove whether the teachings are true or not. The mind must prove to its own satisfaction that they are reasonable, and that they provide a solution in principle to our deepest concerns. But whether they are true or not is entirely beyond the competence of the intellect to establish, because truth is the transcendent ocean in which the intellect is a ripple. The highest point for the intellect is, in seeking truth, to understand its own limitations and thus bring itself to stillness. It is this natural, willing, stillness of the mind that makes possible the stage of realization, the higher meditation in which the apparently individualized consciousness is absorbed in the peace and bliss of its own higher nature.

At the time of meditation the discursive intellect is to be held in abeyance. Having listened with open ears and hearts, and then thought it all through, we turn from thoughts about being and consciousness and non-duality, towards being, consciousness and non-duality itself, as our own Self. Now we can hear again the essential message of all the great teachings: ‘To know one’s Self is to know God.’

P.H.

A THEME FOR MEDITATION

As the earth is surrounded by a soft atmosphere which permits the play of life on its surface, so is my soul surrounded and pervaded by consciousness, that force of forces, which lends it light, knowledge and activity. As I roll in it, consciously, and open my soul to its influence, it turns into wisdom, virtue and beauty.

As my soul must expand, let it be an eternal lover of immortal beauty and a creator of harmony and peace.

As the sun is the only source of light and life on the earth, so, O eternal truth, O essence of virtue and beauty, O dharma and wisdom, Thou art my very life, my reason, my power to love.

In Thee I live, move and have my being. I am because Thou art.

H.P.S.

A STORY FROM GOETHE

Wilhelm Meister is a long novel that unfolds the inner development of its young protagonist. Towards the end, Wilhelm is travelling through Germany on horseback with his small son. They enter a beautiful area, where youngsters of varying ages are working on the harvest. When these boys see the visitors, nearly all of them interrupt their work, stand and perform a distinctive kind of salute. The youngest place their arms crosswise over their breasts and look cheerfully up at the sky. Those of middle size hold their hands on their backs and look smiling to the ground. The eldest, with arms stretched down, turn their heads to the right and form a line. The others do not move from their places.

Afterwards, Wilhelm learns that he has entered the land owned by an unusual educational establishment, which aims to arouse in children the highest principles of co-operation, love and aspiration. 'But', Wilhelm asks, 'what about these strange physical gestures—the sky, the earth, the line. What are you trying to teach?'

The elders of the school ask a question back. 'Children bring many gifts into the world, but there is one thing which no child brings into the world with him—and yet it is on this one thing that all depends for making man in every point a man.' Wilhelm thought about it but couldn't come up with an answer.

'Reverence, reverence. All lack it. Perhaps you yourself are lacking in it.' They then explain that the gesture of looking upwards denotes reverence to what is above us, notably that there is a God 'above'. Looking at the earth with cheerful attention means we remember the unaccountable benefits we are gaining from it. Lining up side-by-side indicates reverence for what is equal to us, being in combination with one's comrades—to have reverence for them also. 'Out of those three reverences springs the highest reverence of all—reverence for oneself!'

'But who are those children who did not join in?' The elders answer: 'The highest punishment which we inflict on our pupils is that they are declared unworthy to show reverence, and are obliged to exhibit themselves as rude and uncultivated natures. But they do their utmost to get free of this situation, and in general adapt themselves with great rapidity to any duty.'

The Eternal Wisdom

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

AT LENGTH Shri Yajnavalkya decided to visit his disciple, King Janaka. He went not in royal state, but as a renunciate. He walked the long distance in easy stages, attended by two of his brahmacharis. Wherever he halted during the earlier stages of the journey, crowds of men and women came to pay homage to the venerable and illustrious maharishi, revered by all and by the King himself.

While purple cloudlets floated above and winged creatures sang in adoration to the Lord immanent in nature, the sage passed through wooded glades, mountains and forests. He crossed running streams, meditating on the way. He used to halt near the great waterfalls. Sometimes standing motionless for a long while, he seemed to be communing with the spirit of the falls; or pronouncing his spiritual benedictions on the swift-moving waters, which could thus carry his peace and blessings to the rivers below, where the faithful performed their ablutions.

Occasionally Shri Yajnavalkya would be greeted by some aged recluse who dwelt in this region, or by some ascetic who performed his spiritual practices far removed from the haunts of pride, vanity and ambition. One such sadhu, the hermit Bahubriha, asked him: 'O venerable master, please tell me something of the moral ideal. Should one obey public opinion, the dictates of the elders, or the tradition as laid down in our scriptures?'

Shri Yajnavalkya replied:

'O brahmana, I teach the autonomy of the spirit. First of all, one should dismiss as enslaving and childish all hedonistic urges, and the impulse to fame and power. The path of the good and the path of the pleasant are not the same. The pleasant tries to seduce the soul from its high purpose in life. It should be avoided by means of critical judgement.

'Make virtue your habit, O sadhu; let goodness spring from your

heart as pure water springs from these mountains. Choose always what is good and avoid the merely pleasant. Know that in the pursuit of this philosophy a danger is involved. This danger is pessimism. Know that anti-hedonism is liable to degenerate into pessimism. Therefore take care, because pessimism is as wrong as optimism with regard to this world. The ideal state is acquired through a balanced, spiritual tranquillity, which is above both hedonistic optimism and pessimism.

‘Know also, blessed one, that some clouds sailing through the sky look like a funeral procession, others like palaces for the enjoyment of a king. But they are all clouds and nothing more. That mind is not yet fit for spiritual enquiry and an investigation into supreme Truth which is swayed by either hedonism or pessimism. It may appear that I favour asceticism; in fact this is not so. Real asceticism only comes when the heart is set on the eternal (Brahman). Real asceticism is also the basis of true renunciation. Whatever brings the mind nearer to the eternal is to be embraced. Unwise asceticism may be as much a barrier as a foolish indulgence in sense pleasures.

‘Simplicity of life is my answer. Let us educate our senses and keep our minds occupied in contemplation of the eternal. This simplicity of life is a childlike simplicity. It is tiresome, O brahmana, to give oneself to too many words. Understand all that I have said in a few.’

The sadhu bowed low and offered a basket of fruit and herbs to the holy Yajnavalkya, who shared the fruit with his disciples and drank cupfuls of pure running water from a nearby stream. A few of the fruits were cut up and laid aside for the forest birds. Then, blessing the woods and the waterfalls, the yogi-rajah resumed his journey.

Night overtook them as they walked in a dense forest on the mountain side. The holy sage was mindful of the comfort of his brahmacharis, and as the stars peeped forth overhead and the young moon made her appearance, he looked about him and said: ‘My dear ones, let us remain here; we will resume our journey tomorrow.’

The two disciples were sent to look for a cave, and found one on the green slope of the mountain on which they stood. The blanket of their Guru was spread, and he seated himself on it, while the brahmacharis carried their coconut vessels to a stream and brought water. Shri

Yajnavalkya washed his face and hands, and the disciples washed his feet. Then they bowed in reverence and left him for two hours. When they returned, the twilight had disappeared and the wind was rustling through the pine and fir trees which abounded in the forest.

Standing before their Guru with joined palms, they said: ‘Adesha, adesha! What are your orders, revered acharya?’ The holy sage motioned them to be seated. For half an hour there was a peaceful silence, except for the wind, which rose and fell in melodious cadences. The sacred syllable ‘OM’ was then chanted—the syllable which stands for the contemplation of the eternal, the ever-blissful reality, the basis of the individual personality (jiva) and of the universe. With each ‘OM’ their consciousness expanded, and their faces were lit with a light which could truly be called heavenly.

It is a characteristic of the mind that, when it is burdened with thoughts of the world, or of the future, or of self-preservation—in fact with all the useless ‘how’ and ‘why’ of life, it becomes opaque. Then the reality (Atman), on which the mind is superimposed, is obscured. When the mind is relieved of its finite anxieties, its love for what is passing, and its grief for what has already gone, it grows transparent.

After a while, the holy Yajnavalkya said:

‘My children, never doubt that pure Self-Consciousness is the final reality. For the time being I ask you to set aside such problems as “Why does the infinite appear as finite? Why has the absolute been transformed into the relative? Why is the ever-blissful One seeking pleasure in the transitory sense-objects?” I do not say these questions are not legitimate; but the intellect alone will never be able to furnish a reliable answer to them. Equip your mind with the lenses of spiritual insight. When you have realized the all-embracing Consciousness as the Self, then you will find a ready answer to all these perplexities.

‘Know, as I have often told you, that this infinite reality is realizable by man. The absolute appears relative, but all relativity is finally absorbed into its substratum, the absolute or Brahman. The intellect by itself is not capable of this realization. How can the Knower be known? Can the eyes ever see themselves? Can the fingers of your hand take hold of themselves? How can the finite intellect presume to grasp the

essence of the universal? My sons, pure Self-Consciousness can only be glimpsed in a state of mystical insight or realization. The answer to the problem is the supersensuous and supra-intellectual state, based on the faculty of *prajna*, which is superior to either sensuous perception or intellectual cognition.

‘There is no agnosticism in this knowledge. That from which words turn away, together with the mind, being unable to comprehend its fullness, is the ultimate reality. Wonderful is the one who knows this; wonderful also must be the Teacher. That by which everything is known—how could He himself be known? He is the eternal seer, without Himself being seen; the eternal hearer, without Himself being heard. Beyond Him there is no thinker; beyond Him no being who comprehends. OM’

* * *

Half the night had run its course in the forest. The two brahmacharis, according to the time-honoured tradition, offered to massage the feet of their Guru. Shri Yajnavalkya remained in his samadhi and gave no answer. The disciples, after bowing three times, then lay down and slept on either side of the cave, as if guarding their Teacher or waiting to fulfil his wishes. Like a calm statue sat the holy man, his face radiant with light. A gentle sound, like the soft singing of ‘OM, OM, OM’, seemed to issue from the mouth of the cave. Many small lights flickered in the forest. Perhaps the invisible devas were visiting the maharishi to offer their services or await his instructions. Were they not the guardian deities of the forest? The scriptures say that he who is established in union with the universal Self is the object of worship of all the visible and invisible forces of nature, personified in the form of the devas.

Calmly the night wore on. Then the golden rays of the rising sun began to spread their net of light on the peaks of the mountains. The wind stirred gently, flowers opened their petals and birds began to sing, as nature awakened from her sleep. Every object seemed to express adoration of the invisible Lord of lords, obeying His commands. The moon disappeared and the sun, as if trembling with awe, slowly rose above the high peaks.

The two disciples, having brought fresh water, washed their Guru’s feet. Shri Yajnavalkya stepped out of the cave. He looked as refreshed and tranquil as submarine rocks at the bottom of a clear sea. The brahmacharis offered their salutations, saying:

O Bliss of Brahman, O giver of delight!
Thou art One, the sole cause of the world!
Holy Guru, thou art realizable by contemplation
of the sacred utterances such as ‘Tat twam asi!’ (That thou art).
Salutations, salutations to thee!
May we live to be thy servants.

They bowed low. The maharishi, lifting his hand, blessed them and said:

May you ever be free from the fear of death.
May the light of the love of Guru and God
ever be kindled in your hearts and eyes.
May you look upon the world as a transient phenomenon.
May nothing save the absolute Truth ever attract your minds.
May divine peace (shanti) be with you.

Walking with slow steps, fixing his eyes not more than thirty paces in front of him, the yogi-rajā, with his disciples, resumed his journey, passing through the villages in the plain.

After a few days, Shri Yajnavalkya and the brahmacharis entered the east gate of the city of Mithila, the capital of King Janaka’s realm. It was dusk. Birds were returning to their nests and the dust-soiled cows were leaving their pastures, lowing to announce their return to their calves. Children were playing in the shade of the trees, while their mothers were milking the cows or preparing sweet dishes for their young ones.

The maharishi and his disciples came to a temple and applied for a rest room. The priest offered them a cordial welcome. They deposited their meagre yet sacred belongings on the floor of the room. The brahmana then asked the disciples who it was he had the honour of

welcoming. He was told that their holy Guru was a mahatma from a Himalayan ashrama, who had come to pass a few days in the capital of the kingdom of Videha.

Shri Yajnavalkya sat down under a banyan tree in the quiet courtyard. The disciples fetched water and gently washed his feet. Then they participated in the arti ceremony of the temple. Those who were gathered round were struck by the peaceful and dignified demeanour of the newcomers. Food (prasada) was then offered by the priest. It was pure, simple and delicious.

At about midnight the maharishi was sitting in the courtyard under the light of the stars when a stranger in the garb of a travelling brahmana approached him and offered an obeisance. He took a seat near the holy sage, and said: 'Revered sir, are you being kindly treated in this temple? Do you consider the people of this city hospitable, righteous, truth-loving and studious? Have you, holy one, heard anyone complaining against the government?'

Shri Yajnavalkya looked steadily into the eyes of the stranger beside him, and quietly said: 'My son, Janaka, I am glad you are mindful of the spiritual consciousness of your subjects.' The stranger was indeed none other than the King himself, who, disguised as a brahmana, was finding out at first hand the condition of his subjects. He said respectfully: 'O holy acharya, the kingdom belongs to you and I am merely your agent. When my revered Guru, Shri Ashtavakra, said goodbye to me and went to some other region (loka) to preach the great doctrine of non-duality (Advaita), he commanded me to look up to you, sir, as my spiritual guide. I do my best to administer the laws of the illustrious rishi, and ever think myself to be your humble servant.'

'Go then, my son', replied the divine sage. 'May Brahman remain ever revealed to you in your Self.'

To be continued

Treasure the Here and Now

THE TREASURE of the here and now is the experience of peace, bliss and understanding that is ours when our mind is set in balance, harmony, contentment, benevolence, consideration and control. It is called having a mind set in spiritual conditions—*sattva shuddhi*. To abide in this experience is to be truly human. The discord, conflict and anxiety we feel is a departure from our true nature. And yet this condition of peace, this understanding based on the mind set in harmony and contentment, is an ideal that we have to work for, something apparently lost which needs to be recovered.

Before going further into this, let us ponder a sentence of Swami Rama Tirtha, to remind us of the natural spiritual state of our being.

WITH A MIND AT PEACE AND A HEART GOING OUT IN LOVE
TO ALL, GO INTO THE QUIET OF YOUR OWN INTERIOR SELF.

If our experience seems to be other than the peace, bliss and understanding that radiates within us here and now, it is because something in our mind is in the way.

If we have a house with a garden and a view of the landscape, horizon and sky, and then we decide to grow bamboos all around the house because we love the swishing and murmuring sound of the bamboos swaying in the breeze, then, as time passes, the plants will proliferate and the view will be blocked. If we want to recover the view, a sufficient opening will have to be made. In the same way, if we want to enjoy peace, bliss and understanding, which are ever filling our experience here and now, then a kind of inner clearing has to be made in the world of our thoughts—thoughts that spread and multiply, and, like the bamboos, quickly proliferate and block our access to the inner realm of higher wisdom.

There is a very old Japanese poem that expresses in a charming way this need to make a clearing. It is by Haku Rakuten and it is called 'Cutting Down Trees'.

The trees that were planted have reached the eaves in the front.
As they grew taller, the branches and leaves were luxuriant.

I missed the forms of the distant hills,
 Hidden under this thick screen of leaves.
 One morning, I took an axe
 And cut them down in one place.
 A myriad leaves fell about my head,
 But a thousand peaks appeared before my eyes.
 It was like the clouds and mists suddenly opening,
 And seeing the expanse of blue heaven,
 Like being confronted with a friend we have yearned for
 After long years of separation.
 First the cool breeze flows in;
 Now at last I see the birds fly back to their nests.
 My soul is enlarged;
 I gaze southward and eastward;
 My eyes look into the distance; my heart is calmed.
 Every man has his own peculiar bent;
 One cannot have everything.
 It is not that I do not love the tender branches,—
 But ah, the blue hills!

In our case it is not an outer and distant landscape which is obstructed, but a kind of internal barrier, formed of thoughts alone, that hides from us the divine 'inscape'—what has been called 'that region of self-experience which knows no horizon'. To appreciate this region, we need to learn how to bring our thoughts to quiet and stillness, and to foster general conditions in our mind—an inner atmosphere—which will make it easy and natural to bring our thoughts to that serenity. This is no trivial procedure. In Taoism it is called 'the great method'. It is the real meaning of yoga.

One of the great insights of Eastern philosophy and spirituality is the recognition that when thought is rendered quiescent, experience intensifies, expands and frees itself all apparent restrictions. In the words of the Sufi master, Rumi: 'Thought is of the past and future. When you are freed from these two, the difficulty is solved.' And again: 'Thought is gone and we have gained light.'

The great insight of these inner discoverers was that the world of thought—the mind itself—is like a foam that covers a blissful sea—that

is, a deeper reality far superior than any outer or mental paradise, and free from the limitations associated with thought. This infinite abides forever in the eternal now. This deeper realm is called spirit, and Indian philosophy identifies it with the our true Self. This is the eternal treasure of the here and now.

To realize this treasure one has to create spiritual conditions in the mind. Many people are attracted to the ideal of peace of mind—having a more peaceful mentality. There is a sun-dial in Venice which bears the inscription: 'Horas non numero nisi serenas'—'I count only the hours that are serene.' But if we want our serenity to be deep and lasting, if we seek the peace that will enlarge our soul and reveal the light, something more is needed.

The philosophers of yoga know that the mind has hidden depths. Jesus said 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' He also stated that he knew what was in the heart of man—that the human heart harbours many tendencies which create inner discord and outer conflict. So we can have a mind, which, on the surface, is pacified, but which, in its depths, is not purified and may even be a potential volcano! That presence of discordant elements within us, unless transmuted and dissolved, will disturb our peace and challenge our higher aspiration.

A strong government can keep the people controlled and apparently pacified. When the government weakens or collapses, ancient grudges and rivalries can quickly surface and explode into Civil War. So to do a thorough job in our own being, we to have to labour not simply to pacify the mind but also to purify it. How is done? One way is for us to do meditations on the unity of all life—deep meditation on the fundamental underlying spiritual unity of all life.

The yoga classics are rooted in this principle. Here is an example from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. These are called the four *bhavanās* or feelings. Three are positive and the fourth negative. Be happy in the happiness of others. Be compassionate in their misery. Show goodwill to the pious people of other religions. Do not fill your mind with thoughts of the sinfulness of others.

We may say: This is quite easy. I do it anyway. But in fact these principles are *to be meditated on* in the spirit of their being an underlying unity. It may not be so easy to be happy when our colleague

is overjoyed because he has been promoted, or when we are feeling hard up and someone else gets an undeserved win. There is such a thing as envy. So the first of the feelings—to be of good cheer when others are happy—is to dissolve and transmute this very human feeling of envy: to put an end to it.

Then there is compassion for those in misery. Our human compassion has boundaries. There can be disappointment and anger. A friend gave regularly to a seemingly homeless person he got friendly with. We don't want people to be homeless, do we? We want them to have homes, a normal life, perhaps a car, and so on. Then one day the giver passed the 'homeless' one, who said: 'Can you just give me a couple of pounds. I've run out of petrol and need to get back.' He said: 'I never gave him anything again.'

So there are boundaries to our compassion. Are we really unhappy that the person had a home and a car? Would we have preferred him to be homeless? Deep meditation on the underlying unity dissolves these contradictions.

Then, the last one is a warning. Do not fill your mind with thoughts of the sinfulness of others. Of course it is very human, and to some extent necessary, to deplore the evils in the world. But we have to be careful not to saturate our mind in these thoughts. These things can easily dominate our news-soaked mind, and while the mind is thus engaged in fear, sorrow or what is called 'righteous indignation', we are not generating thoughts that lead to peace and wisdom. The better course is expressed by Brother Lawrence when he wrote:

That as for the miseries and sins he heard of daily in the world, he was so far from wondering at them. On the contrary he was surprised they were not more, considering the malice sinners were capable of. For his part, he prayed for them, but knowing that God could remedy the mischiefs they did when he pleased, he gave himself no farther trouble.

So all these sentiments—*bhavanas* or feelings—spring from the realization of the underlying unity of all of us. And these feelings create conditions in the mind that make it easier for us to bring the mind to silence, to formlessness, and so to reveal the formless form of our divine Self, the reality behind the appearance. As well as pacifying the mind,

we are working to purify it, and this wisdom of contemplating the underlying unity will do more for us than a hundred moralistic sermons.

The first few sutras of Patanjali make the point that when our mind is thoroughly quiet, our spiritual Self shines forth as it truly is. Otherwise our sense of self is hijacked by our thoughts. The same teaching is given in the *Bhagavad Gita*. 'When thought is quiescent, having been restrained by the practice of yoga—we realize that infinite bliss that transcends the senses.' And again: 'Without peace of mind, how can there be happiness?'

In a sense this quietening of the mind is our passport to the realm where we discover the treasures of the here and now. 'Be still and know that I am God.' 'Thought is gone and we have gained light.' But the teachers of yoga stress that something more is needed than the efforts we make on the mental plane. This something more is the reality-principle, or the reality idea, the reality of our own deeper being and consciousness. It is a power and presence unsuspected by the mind in its active phase. This reality-principle supplements the efforts we make in mind control, just as a small child trying to pull itself up a tree is given discreet support and protection by his father, always there behind him.

The great affirmation of the reality-principle is that the Self of man is ever perfect, ever achieved, ever at one with the all. Through our own efforts and intelligence we may be able to reach a point where we know: 'I am not the body. I am not the mind. These are instruments and servants of something in me that is higher.' But the true nature of that higher principle—its sublime and divine significance and weight—will escape us unless it is proclaimed from an enlightened source. Through opening ourselves to the reality-principle we know, not only I am not the mind, but I am the reality in all. I am the spirit which pervades all. I was, I am, I shall be.

If we are strolling deep in a big garden, where the exit is a long way off, and we see a large snake, head reared up to attack, we may turn pale, quiver with fear, and we may have heart palpitations. Then if someone tells us: 'No, no, it's not a snake—it's not a snake', we may recover our calm. It is like being told: 'You are not the mind with its fears and restlessness. You are not that mind.' But there will only be

closure and normality when we know: 'Well, if it's not a snake, tell me what it is. If I am not the mind, tell me what I am.'

Then we are given the crucial, error-banishing, calm-restoring information: in the case of the imagined snake, it is only a curiously-curved fallen branch from the tree. In the case of our true identity—you are pure consciousness, infinite, one with the supreme. Your consciousness was never limited. Never have you been imprisoned in individuality, just as there never was a snake in the garden.

Our efforts to calm and silence the mind are like the stage of inner development when we tell ourselves: 'Yes, don't worry—the mind can be pacified, it can be purified, it means no harm.' But the force of the reality-principle is to awaken us to what is really here and now, as the reality behind the mind. Then there is irreversible certainty.

The reality idea is: The kingdom of heaven is within you. That is what is truly there in your experience here and now. Treasure it—realize it. In the words of the poet, T S Eliot: 'Quick now, here, now, always—A condition of complete simplicity (Costing not less than everything).' The reality principle is that our own Self is the Self of all, and that on realization, all error, all fear, all unrest, vanishes as does a snake imagined in a rope when we know it is only a rope.

A.H.C.



When you pray in the calmness of your devotion, and your prayer is correct, then, at that time, you are neither English nor French, neither man nor woman, neither brother nor sister, but purely universal, and it is this universality of prayer that is valuable for the advancement of mankind. If there were two hundred people in a country who felt that universal relationship with their being, this world would be a hundred times better than it is.

H.P.S.

MAKING LIFE WORTHWHILE

Every man has the faculty called reason. It is the special prerogative of man. Like any other faculty, it is subject to cultivation and improvement. If neglected, it deteriorates. If we fail to make use of it, we stand in peril at every step of our life.

We are often faced with problems in life, and we ask: 'Shall I do this or that?' Desire says: 'Do this', but reason says: 'No'. For instance, a man suffering from malaria usually has a desire to drink sour milk, which, if taken, will aggravate his complaint. Reason says: 'Do not drink it.' Our progress in life depends on accepting the lead of reason. All desires are not harmful, but the unrighteous desires, unbridled desires, desires for harming others, impede the progress of the soul.

We all want to live happily. There is happiness true and false. False happiness is that which is obtained by being unjust and malevolent to others. Happiness which is short-lived and leaves an adverse reaction is decidedly bad. Our soul is in quest of durable, uplifting, and ennobling happiness. Reason points the way.

There is an ordinary way of life, which means living as a good citizen, a good neighbour, and a good family-member, but it is not enough. All these virtues have reference to our social aspect only. But we are something more than a social unit. If we live in the world of the family and society only, then we are neglecting some most vital functions of our life. For we also appreciate beauty in nature and art, and feel an urge to express his love of beauty by creating forms of beauty. This is the foundation of art.

This urge for beauty also applies to beautiful conduct. Prince Gautama (the Buddha), having renounced his claim to the throne and his family, with the purpose of discovering the solution to the problem of suffering for humanity, finds a herd of sheep being driven towards a temple. He discovers that the innocent little things are being taken to be slaughtered as a sacrifice by King Bimbisara. Overcome by compassion, the prince follows them into the temple and offers himself as a sacrifice instead. This is an ideal expression of beautiful conduct. Reason demands the enrichment of life by the creation of ennobling conduct, of beauty in the forms of art, and something more than that too.

Man naturally likes objects of utility and ennoblement to be durable. When we buy a watch, we want a long-term guarantee. This desire for durability is universal and a constituent of human nature. We want friends and relations to live longer and yet longer. There is something in man which is burning to establish contact with what is eternal and imperishable. Man worships stars, personifies the forces of nature, creates fairies, dives deep into the bottom of the sea, analyses the light of the sun, and probes deep into the bowels of the earth in pursuit of the eternal and imperishable. The man who is not prompted by this quest is one-hundredth of a man, discontented, a would-be suicide or a commercial maniac. Of him no poet has sung, and the only monument marking his grave is the epitaph: 'I came into the world empty-handed, and I leave it burdened with sorrows and disappointments.'

Reason tells us that this quest for the eternal and the imperishable is the only way to real happiness. In the language of religion, this quest is called 'seeking after God', in the language of philosophy 'search after Truth'. The artist calls it the 'realm of Eternal Beauty'.

Duty means the fulfilment of the deeper and abiding demands of life, and the highest demand of life is to live beautifully and to discover Truth. The lower aspects of life have to be sacrificed in favour of the dictates of higher duty. A child has to give up his rambles in the woods to attend his lessons in an inartistic room. Those who want to live wisely must not slavishly follow their pleasure-desires. They should study the science of the higher life as taught by Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Kant, Spinoza, Bradley, and others. Life must be guided by man instead of being allowed to guide him.

The infinite and imperishable God abides in our intellect. By controlling our mind, let us pray to Him for light and Truth above all. Our life is comparable to the cultivation of roses. The soil has to be prepared by simple living, beautiful conduct and thinking; and the seed of meditation has to be planted with faith in the scriptures and the Teacher. Wait patiently. The roses of freedom, bliss and infinity bloom under the hot sun of dispassion and renunciation. Thus have I heard.

Hari Prasad Shastri

Vedanta—the Path of Knowledge*

THE VEDANTA is called *jnana-marga*, 'the path of knowledge'. Vedanta means 'end of the Veda', and the term can be read either as a reference to the importance this school attaches to the last part of the Vedas, the Upanishads; or as a claim to represent the complete knowledge of the Vedas, to be their culmination.

There are different schools of thought within the Vedanta, but the term is most often used with reference to the earliest of these. This is the Advaita or 'Non-Dual' Vedanta, given its classical form by one of the greatest of India's thinkers, Shankara. No doctrine has influenced Hindu thought more than this, and all other schools of Vedanta are modifications of Shankara's position.

Over and above its scriptural source, the Upanishads, the foundation text of the Vedanta school is the *Brahma Sutra* (also called the Vedanta Sutra). It is not known when these verses were composed (guesses range between 200 BC and 400 AD), but they are so brief and compressed as to be almost incomprehensible without the aid of a commentary; in fact, their importance lies in the famous commentaries by Shankara, Ramanuja and others they have inspired.

These short, cryptic verses—memory triggers for those who already knew the teachings—are the tip of an iceberg, the surviving evidence of a continuous tradition going back in all probability to the Upanishads themselves. The *Brahma Sutra* mentions some of the earlier teachers, but we know nothing more than their names. We do, however, know the central figure of the Vedanta school. This is Shankara, who probably lived and taught in the eighth century AD.

Shri Shankara

Shankara is one of the great figures in the history of Indian thought. It has been said of his main work, the famous commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, that it is the single most influential philosophical text in

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

India today, at the pinnacle of Indian philosophical compositions. This work, together with his commentaries on the principle Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, won for Advaita Vedanta its central role in Hindu philosophy. Later thinkers who wished to challenge Shankara's views, felt obliged to do so by composing commentaries upon the same texts, which came to be recognized as the 'three foundations' (*prasthanatraya*) of the Vedanta. In the West, Shankara has long been recognized as among the world's greatest philosophers.

We know little that is certain about his life. The traditional accounts, which date from a much later period, tell us he was born into a Brahmin family in what is now Kerala in the far south of India. Abandoning his Brahmin status at the age of nineteen, he became a sannyasin, a wandering monk. His pupil, Sureshvara, describes him as 'a lordly ascetic who walked with a single bamboo staff', and as 'a noble-minded man who had swept away all the impurities from his heart'.

He travelled to northern India and at Benares and other centres won renown in the great public debates on scriptural interpretation which were an important feature of Indian life. It is said that many pupils, themselves spiritually advanced, flocked to him. He travelled widely and established four famous monasteries which still exist in the North, South, East and West of India. After a brief but amazingly productive life, he died in his early thirties, from a snakebite according to some accounts, leaving behind him not only his writings but one of the great monastic orders of Hinduism.

Shankara's Philosophy

The Vedanta is not interested in cosmology or the processes of creation. It regards all such schemes as symbolic and mythical, and in these areas it is content to borrow from the Sankhya and Yoga traditions. What interests the thinkers of the Vedanta is the reality status of the world, and the real nature of oneself: the question, 'Who am I?' takes on a central importance. 'The noble ones', writes Shankara, 'the seekers of liberation, are preoccupied only with the ultimate reality, not with useless speculations about creation. Hence the various alternative theories about creation come only from believers in the doctrine that creation is real.'

It is a widely accepted principle of Indian thought that anything which changes cannot, in an ultimate and final sense, be real. Reality is not something which comes and goes. It requires stability of being; as the *Bhagavad Gita* puts it: 'For the unreal there is no being, nor any end of being for the real'.

This constitutes a difference with Western habits of thought. In the West, reality is generally equated with experience coming to us through the senses. It is, first and foremost, the material world—hard, solid, objective, 'out there', independent of us. This view goes back at least to Aristotle and, although modern physics has indicated its inadequacy, this 'common sense' outlook remains dominant.

It is not at all the view of Shankara. For him, the material world—the world of growth and decay, of never-ending flux and change—is precisely what is not real. All that has form is subject to change. It has some stability of being, and therefore a provisional reality, but sooner or later it changes and in doing so reveals its unreal nature. And if the whole universe is subject to change, this only means that reality itself, final and absolute Reality, must lie in some other order of being.

This is why Shankara's philosophy is called Advaita or 'Non-Dual' Vedanta. The meaning is that absolute reality lies in a different order of being, outside the duality of the subject-object mode of knowing. That mode of knowing normally encompasses the whole of our experience; it is characteristic of the individual self and of its principal instrument, the mind. Shankara's message, therefore, is a radical one: the world around us and the human individual which experiences it are both of them ultimately unreal.

Shankara is concerned with removing the ignorance of our own nature, which keeps us bound to the phenomenal world; with clearing away the self-imposed obstacles which stand between us and an immediate apprehension of our own innermost reality. These ideas are present in the Upanishads; but the Upanishads, although they contain piercing insights, record the thoughts of many different sages and follow no particular order. The objective of the Vedanta is to derive from them a systematic philosophy. For this school of thought, it is not more faith in gods which is required, but more scepticism about the reality of the world and of the individual self which experiences it.

Degrees of Reality

The basis of Shankara's method is to distinguish between different degrees or levels of reality. There can of course be only one reality as such, and it is that which never changes its nature. The Upanishads call it Brahman. And in man it is Atman, the unchanging consciousness which lights up the changing forms of experience.

In *Panchadashi*, a celebrated Advaita treatise written some six hundred years after Shankara, the Atman is likened to the light which illumines a theatre: There is a witness-consciousness in the jiva (the individual) which reveals at one and the same time the agent, the action, and the mutually distinct external objects. The witness persists through all the mental experiences of hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling, just as a light illumines everything in a theatre. The light in the theatre reveals impartially the master of the house, the guests and the dancer. When she and the others are absent, the light continues to shine forth revealing their absence.

In this illustration the master of the house is the ego (ahamkara), the various sense-objects are the guests, the intellect (i.e. the mind) is the dancer, the musicians playing on their instruments are the sense-organs, and the light illuminating them all is the witness-consciousness. The light reveals all the objects in the theatre but does not itself move. So the witness-consciousness, itself motionless, illumines the objects within and without (i.e. the internal world of subjective experience and the 'objective' world of external experience).

This inner light, which witnesses the flow of the appearances making up experience, is the unchanging reality, without which nothing else would be. Yet each appearance while it lasts has a temporary and provisional reality for those enclosed within its bounds. In this way, our individualized consciousness experiences, at different times, different levels of reality, each of which seems absolute while it lasts. While we are dreaming, the world of the dream and our experiences in it are quite real for us. It is only when we wake up that this changes. What happens then is that our consciousness moves onto another plane of reality, one that is more stable and therefore closer to absolute reality. In relation to this new level, the lower level—that of the dream—is now seen to have been unreal. But waking life too exists at a certain level. Once again,

while we are enclosed within it, its reality seems to us total, but one day—when we die, or when we attain release—we will find that it too was only a greater and more stable kind of dream.

Thus there are different levels of reality: the purely subjective reality of dreams and day-dreams; the more stable reality of the apparently objective world; and perhaps above that other levels which are more stable still, and which the Vedas call 'the world of the gods' or 'the heaven of Indra'. Ultimately all such experiences are found to be unreal and only absolute reality, Brahman-Atman, the canvas upon which they have been painted, truly is; awareness of this being the state of *moksha*, release from illusory 'realities'.

The true Self and the apparent self

We have already encountered the roots of the idea of different orders of reality. They lie far back in the verse from the *Rig Veda*, taken up and repeated in the Upanishads, which speaks of 'two birds' seated in the same tree. Similarly the *Aitareya Upanishad* asks, 'What is that which we worship as this Self? Which of the two is the Self?' Shankara comments on this, 'We are aware of two entities within the body, an instrument which assumes various different forms and through which we have empirical knowledge, and a single (changeless) principle which has knowledge.'

These two entities, Atman and jiva, correspond to different levels of being: Atman to absolute reality (hence its identity with Brahman) and jiva to all the levels of partial and provisional reality which the individual self experiences. To each, the world appears in a different light. From the viewpoint of the Atman, the ever-unattached witness-Self, neither the world of phenomena nor the individual self which experiences it have any final reality. This is the ultimate and unqualified truth. To one who has attained to this state—that is, who is *jivan-mukta* ('released while living')—the empirical world, whilst it continues to appear so long as he remains in the body, is seen and known as a dream: it ceases to be an object separate from the subject.

Gaudapada, Shankara's predecessor in the Advaita tradition, speaks of 'experts in the Upanishadic wisdom who look upon the world as if it were a cloud-city seen in a dream'. But from the viewpoint of the

individual self, the jiva, the world is perfectly real. The jiva is not wrong in taking the world to be real. For the jiva, it is real. The individual self and the empirical world which it experiences are complementary; the two halves of a single phenomenon, as real as each other. Without the world—or anyway, a world—to experience, there is and there can be no individual self. If we ask, ‘Is the world an illusion?’, we must answer ‘Yes’ from the absolute point of view, but ‘No’ from our present point of view, which is that of the jiva.

Saguna and Nirguna Brahman

Just as there is a real Self and an illusory self, so there are two ways of viewing the ultimate reality, Brahman. We have seen that Brahman in its own nature is ineffable and can only be defined negatively, in terms such as the ‘not this, not this’ of the Upanishads. This is Nirguna Brahman—‘Brahman without qualities’; Brahman seen from the standpoint of ultimate truth, and entirely apart from the *gunas* or qualities.

But Brahman may also be seen from the relative standpoint, the standpoint of the jiva. In this context He appears as Ishvara, the ‘Lord’ of the universe, superior to the individual soul and separate from it; and then He not only has qualities, but is the source of all qualities. This is Saguna Brahman—‘Brahman with qualities’; Brahman as He is known in terms of attributes; Brahman as the human mind can conceive Him.

These are not two different Brahman, but two different ways of understanding the same Brahman. Saguna Brahman is the personal God of religion who occupies a central place in the devotional tradition within Hinduism. Shankara gives this point of view full recognition in his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Nevertheless, for Shankara it remains an understanding which is valid at the level of provisional reality only, for it is only at that level that any forms whatsoever can appear. Thus it is the mind, with its need to conceive objects and qualities that it can grasp, which separates us from the Absolute Reality. It is our individuality itself that keeps us from our own real nature. Any position whatsoever which depends upon the mind and its forms must fall short of ultimate reality. Any form capable of conceptualization, and therefore dependent upon the mind, cannot be the final truth.

All those schools which fail to step outside the forms of the mind must preclude themselves from the ultimate truth. For this reason a famous Advaita text, the *Yoga Vasishtha*, comments: ‘For those who have not known the essential nature of the Deity, the worship of form and the like has been prescribed. To one who is incapable of travelling a distance of one *yojana* (about eight miles), a distance of one *kroshta* (two miles) is provided.’

From the viewpoint of Advaita, an ultimate reality which is personal is a contradiction in terms, a ‘conditioned Unconditioned’. However valuable such an idea may be at the level of provisional reality and practical religion, it cannot be the final truth. Shankara writes:

When one becomes awake to the non-difference of the individual soul and the Absolute through such texts ... as ‘That thou art’, this puts an end to the notion that the individual soul is suffering transmigration and also to the notion that the Absolute is a World-Creator. For all empirical notions of distinction, which are introduced by error, are cancelled and eradicated by right knowledge.

Maya

Brahman and the world of phenomena, Atman and the individual self or jiva—these are, Shankara says, opposites, two different orders of reality. The reality in which the individual self lives and in which the mind operates, has as its form duality, the subject-object mode of being. Brahman and Atman—two words which refer to one and the same reality—are of another order of being: they are Advaita, non-dual.

From the dual viewpoint—that of a subject which experiences objects—the non-dual offers us nothing to grasp and so appears as void. But once we step across the line, and instead of identifying with the individual soul, identify with the Atman behind it, the situation is reversed. Then we see in a non-dual fashion. What at present seems unreal is then experienced as the Real, and what now seems real is seen to be illusory. There is no link between different orders of reality, and this disjunction is what the Vedanta calls Maya. The word means ‘illusion’ or ‘magic’.

Maya is simply a name for something which can never be explained. It is the hiatus between two different realms of being; the interface

between Reality as such and the provisional and apparent reality which the individual self experiences and exists in. This is why life is so mysterious to us, why thought and speech turn back baffled from Brahman, and why certain questions can never be answered. Answers are only possible in terms of the world the mind inhabits.

When we ask, ‘When did the universe begin?’ or ‘Why did the universe come into being?’, we are already assuming the existence of time and of causality. But time, space and causality are part of the universe—they are its basis—and they have no existence or application outside it. Questions as to the origin of the universe—that is to say, of manifestation as a whole—can never be answered, but we can understand why they cannot be answered. It is because the question itself assumes the existence of the universe (i.e. of time, space and causality), while at the same time asking about its origin. It therefore has no meaning. Our minds can only function within the framework of time, space and causality; that is, within the phenomenal universe. Maya is the name for what happens when we reach its frontier.

Superimposition

For Shankara the error from which all others arise is that we do not distinguish the degrees of reality. We superimpose the attributes of the relative level (i.e. of the jiva) upon absolute reality (the Atman), and vice versa. This is *avidya*, ignorance, the root cause of all our troubles. We continually confuse our nature as the unchanging witness (Atman) with our ultimately fictitious nature as an individual (jiva) in the world of appearances.

Shankara’s term for this confusion is *adhyasa*, superimposition. In the opening sentence of his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, Shankara explains that the two, unchanging witness or subject-consciousness and all that is object for it (the empirical world, including our individual self), are of opposite natures ‘like darkness and light’. They exist on different planes of being. And yet, he continues, it is for man a natural procedure (natural because it is precisely this procedure which makes man what he is, so that the procedure is coextensive with man) to fail to distinguish the two, and to superimpose upon each the nature of the other. In this way we confuse the truly real with the ultimately unreal. States and activities of

the body-mind are attributed to the Self, the pure centre of consciousness. We say, ‘I am stout, lean, fair, standing, walking, jumping’. Or, vice-versa: the Self is superimposed on the body-mind complex, and we say, ‘it hurts me’, when in fact it hurts the body; ‘I am tired’, when the limbs or the mind are tired.

To illustrate this, Shankara uses the example of a man who is walking along a path at twilight. He sees something lying in the dust just in front of him. It is a snake. A tremor of fear runs through him. Quickly he looks for something to defend himself with. But suddenly he sees that it is not a snake at all, but just a piece of old rope lying there quite harmlessly. He relaxes, laughs at his mistake, and goes on his way. This is superimposition (*adhyasa*). The characteristics of one thing (the snake) have been superimposed upon something else which is in reality quite different, and on this basis the man has become involved in emotions and actions.

We should notice, however, that the illusion rests on something real, the rope. It is because the rope is there, but is not clearly known, that the superimposition takes place. In the same way the individual mind and the world it perceives are superimposed on a reality which has not been properly grasped, the Atman. It is the imperfectly perceived Reality lying behind them which gives to the empirical world and the individual self their seeming and provisional reality.

Thus we, who are in our true nature pure blissful consciousness, unchanging and unattached to anything whatsoever, the precondition and ground of all appearance, identify with the mind, the emotions, the body, our family, our nation, our house, our car, and all the rest of it. In a word, we limit consciousness, we become the jiva, the individual, subject to *karma* and full of needs, wants and worries. The individual self is not a reality: it is an *upadhi*, a ‘limiting adjunct’ placed upon the Atman and obscuring its reality. The cause of this fall is wrong knowledge. Its cure is correct knowledge, *jnana*.

In short, we have forgotten who we are, and the process leading to enlightenment is the process of rediscovering—not just in theory, but as living experience—our own real nature.

Enlightenment is the correction of an error, a change in self-identity. It occurs at the moment when we no longer identify with the limited

individual self (which continues to appear but has ceased to be important to us), but with the unchanging beam of consciousness which stands behind it and illumines all experience. This is why the *Mundaka Upanishad* can declare: 'He, verily, who knows that supreme Brahman, becomes Brahman.'

S.C.

DEWDROPS

'You glisten, you shine, you quiver, O heavenly pearls; so short is your life, yet so beautiful you are. Who will like to possess you, to imprison you, to call you "my own, my own"? Do we know whence you have come? Have you come to tell us a tale? Are you meant to entertain us? Have you a message, you heart-ravishing pearls, delightful orbs. I can neither kiss you nor caress you.'

The dewdrops:

'We come from the unseen, we go back to the unseen. But what we are, what does it matter to you? Admire us, but do not love us, because how can you love what is so impermanent? Be wise, this is our message.'

'We await the kiss of the infinite light of the monarch of the East to evaporate into his being, and do you live for that inner light of Atman and lose your being in His contemplation.'

'You love your little stay in the world. How deluded you are. We have come to go, to lose our identity in the light; to us the censure and admiration of the world are equally meaningless. We stay till the sun is up. What have we to do with the objects about us?'

'You also be wise and stay to be absorbed, in your purity and detachment, into the great Light of all, Brahman.'

'We hate none, we love none. Do you do the same. Live, smile tranquilly, but be ever ready to go. This is our message.'

H.P.S.

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

A recent session led by the Warden

What will meditation do for us? All of us who pursue meditation and spiritual living will find peace, joy and wisdom within ourselves in the course of time, if we are patient and persevering. For nothing is more valuable than a peaceful mind. There is a saying in the *Bhagavad Gita*, 'Without peace of mind, how can there be happiness?'

This means that if we are thrown back on our inner resources, with neither friend nor gadget to engage us, the experience will not be negative or uncomfortable. It can be made creative and expansive, through knowing how to still our mind, and through the awakening of a capacity for inner peace and tranquillity, and the ability to find fulfilment not in outer things but in the infinite nature of our own being, the Self. This arises with the dawn of wisdom, which means discrimination, between what is transient and what is lasting and truly valuable. This discrimination stems from experience and reflection on how much the world can really offer, and the readiness to ask: 'What lies deep within me, below the surface of thoughts and feelings? Could it be that the peace and fulfilment nothing in the world has yielded, is awaiting discovery there, within my own heart?'

At this point we are approaching the door to inner illumination. If we persist with these enquiries, and take the necessary practical steps, such as firmly resolving to make time for meditation every day, something will open up and we will say 'Yes, there is a treasury within.' Then, resisting the exuberance of the mind, which loves to dignify its impulses with the status of 'inspiration', and attending carefully to the guidance of the classical texts and traditional teachers, we will be able to follow that light inwards to its very source, the greatest treasure of all.

It may seem odd and even disrespectful to suggest that as mature human beings we may find ourselves unsettled by the state of our own mind when left alone. After all we have spent our life developing this mind. Why does it seem to lack the capacity to rest in peace and harmony if we want it to? Why is it sometimes difficult to be alone with our own thoughts? This seems to be a universal problem.

In a recent scientific experiment, people were left alone for fifteen

minutes in a bare room with no outer props, no company except their own thoughts. They were afterwards asked how they got on. As far as we know, these people were not versed in meditation, nor did the question of meditation come into the experiment. Many confessed that the experience was disagreeable. Some said they thought of their own shortcomings, and this led to negative ruminations. Another suggestion as to why we may feel mentally unsettled when left alone, is that in daily life we are so used to doing and viewing, that when deprived of these props and outlets for action, we feel the unease of extreme boredom.

So we are very fortunate if we have some skill in sitting still and silent, not just in living with our thoughts, but in choosing for ourselves thoughts and ideas which make for inner tranquillity and contentment, and trust that there is an inner support we can rely on. For however restless our mind may be to begin with, however much it may tend to drift into sleepiness, a great inner transformation is possible. This will make our restless mind restful, and enable our distracted thoughts to focus on something deep and most precious within our own being.

The greatest thought of all, one which we can hold on to with both hands, so to say, is that our true Self is changeless, immortal, beyond fear and danger, and it is the source of life and consciousness that animates the whole play of life in us and around us. Our true Self is reality, and the changing thoughts are appearances. We need not be lost in them. We need not be identified with them. This is the great strength at the heart of the practice of meditation.

Preparation

At these meetings, our first entry into the inner silence is through leading our mind into a mood of reverence and calmness, where we feel we are in the invisible presence of the supreme consciousness within and around us. We mentally bow to that supreme power.

Breathing Practice

Our breathing practice is based on the inward repetition of the word OM.

Breathe slowly and deeply, mentally repeating the holy syllable OM, hearing the sound O on the in-breath and M on the out-breath.

OM is a word of peace, power and wisdom that forms a key part of the spiritual practice of meditators in many traditions. It is a symbol of the universal consciousness, and because of this, it is also a symbol of our deeper Self—the changeless, immortal light and life of the mind. When chanted with reverence and receptivity, it creates the most peaceful vibrations. When taken on the breath silently, it replaces our thoughts and emotions with tranquillity, and frees us from stress.

Do this breathing practice for about four minutes, hearing the sound O on the in-breath and M on the out-breath.

Visualisation

Draw an imaginary line of light from the top of the forehead, down between the eyebrows, down the nose, lips, throat, heart-region, to the navel. Imagine this line to be a line of light and concentrate on it. Then sit and just think of this line of light. Do this visualization for about six minutes.

We may trace this line with our finger, from the top of the forehead down through the centre of the body, ending at the navel. Imagine it to be a line of light. See it as straight, bright, internal, and we rest our attention on this line.

This practice helps to focus our attention inwards. The line of light also symbolizes the deepest part of our nature, the most interior phase of our being, where there is no disturbance of thought, no impurity, no shortcoming, no limitation.

The principle is that when the surface activity of our mind—its restlessness, its need to view and to do—is subdued, we will become

aware of this deeper, pure centre within us. This is more than a comfort zone; it is a realm which is undisturbed by worries and anxieties, a resting place, a safe haven, a pointer to transcendence, pure, radiant.

Meditation on a Text

Our meditation text is one that embodies the power of aspiration.

OM O OCEAN OF LOVE, STILLNESS PROFOUND,
DRAW US INTO YOUR PEACE.
MAY THE NOISE OF THE MIND BE STILLED. OM

The power that we are appealing to in this meditation text is really our own deeper power. The peace we seek to be drawn into is our own deeper peace. Our innermost being is a perfect unity—unity with all—and so it is called the Ocean of Love. It is complete, absolute, full—and therefore it is the Stillness Profound.

We seek to be drawn into this peace, this power of peace, and to be rejoined to what we truly are. We seek to be free from the noise of the mind, with its endless pictures and suggestions that can distract and unsettle us. The meditation is powerful because it draws on our own inner force of higher desire and aspiration.

Allow ten minutes for this practice.

Closing Offering

If meditation did not bring us individual benefit and help, none would do the practice. But when *we* are helped with peace and expansion, all are helped on the interior, invisible plane. For, as Christ said, we are setting our light on a hill where it spreads all round.

So our final practice is spreading the light, of seeing its influence penetrating all around: above, below, in front, behind, right and left—spreading, not stopped by anything. In this way our thought dissolves into pure awareness, free from restrictions—a presence for the good of all. For a minute or two let us be that light. OM There is nothing but light. OM

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

Shanti Sadan is pleased to announce the publication of a new book, *Awakening to Self-Knowledge*. Based on lectures and presentations given by the Warden of Shanti Sadan, the subject matter of each chapter is the highest spiritual truth and the practices that lead to its realization. The book includes colour illustrations of spiritual works of art, and two chapters focus on meditation. More details may be found on the enclosed leaflet, and the book is currently available post-free.

Throughout the summer the Tuesday meditation sessions have been held every week, and among our visitors have been *Self-Knowledge* readers from overseas, who were visiting London and were able to join a session. The practices are rooted in the wisdom of enlightenment, as found in the spiritual traditions of mankind; inner calm is cultivated not as an end in itself but as a preparation for the perfect peace of an awakened understanding. Seekers are informed on our course leaflet, ‘These traditional meditation practices have been performed by students of Yoga since ancient times. They are inexhaustible in their depth and power to expand the consciousness. Their value will reveal itself if meditation is practised daily with interest, perseverance and faith in the deeper spiritual reality within us awaiting discovery.’

Preparations are now being made for the coming term and the next Sunday afternoon course. The details are given below.

Autumn 2014 Special Course

Sunday 19 October 2014 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NS

Talk 1 *Towards Peace of Mind*

First Guided Meditation Practice

Talk 2 *Self-Knowledge: The Key to Freedom*

Second Guided Meditation Practice

Talk 3 *Life Without Limits*