

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

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE SPRING TERM 2014

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

Meetings will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 8pm from 4 Feb to 27 March 2014. The Tuesday evenings will be guided meditation sessions. On Thursday evenings there will be a series of discourses on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

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

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MY TRUTH

The daughter of Mussolini, Italy's ill-fated wartime leader, wrote a book which has the English title, 'My Truth'. In a sense, every autobiography or personal memoir is an unfoldment of 'my truth', a mirror of the world and of life as reflected in the mind of an individual. My version of events may be very different from your account of the same events. My memory is finite, and cannot possibly capture every detail of what actually happened. For certain reasons I may wish to filter out some details and highlight others that harmonize with the overall impression I wish to convey. My integrity may be flawed, and this may lead me to falsify my account, either consciously or unconsciously.

So recalling and expressing 'my truth', as far as the empirical personality and its doings are concerned, is by no means a clear course. A more honest heading, though unsaleable as a book title, would be 'my truth—or what I choose to tell about what I think happened'.

Spiritual seekers are also concerned with ‘my truth’. Paradoxically, ‘my truth’ comes to light only when I allow my mind to forget the details of my personal life. Hidden behind the personality, which is ever changing and uncertain, is the spiritual being of man, and this is his true Self. It reveals itself indirectly to our intellect as the continuity of being or is-ness, which we know accompanies us all through life. Our experience is also continuously illumined by consciousness, which gives us the sense that we know our own mental processes from an inner observatory that is deeper than the psychological flux.

This being-consciousness does not change. And the enquiry which focuses on the question, ‘What am I?’, aims to discern the true nature of consciousness and being, unconfused by mental activity. A person cannot say ‘no, no—I am not this’ to either being or consciousness, because the mere fact of making this negative pronouncement implies the consciousness of being the one who makes it.

But in this ultimate mind-experiment, a person can say ‘no, no—I am not this’ to everything other than being and consciousness. In the Upanishads, this ‘no, no’ is found in the words ‘neti, neti’, ‘not this, not this’, which denies that anything which is transient can ultimately be identified as ‘my truth’. It is a viewing of the inner and outer worlds, and disassociating them from the being-and-consciousness which is the true Self.

There is a saying: ‘True self-knowledge is knowledge of God’. In one of his public lectures, Hari Prasad Shastri told his audience:

Sit quiet and concentrate your mind only on one thing, a thing which is self-revealed and which, as Descartes said, is the only fact which needs no demonstration: your ‘I’. Say ‘I, I, I!’ Negate the modifications of the mind; negate the passions and prejudices; negate the ideas and sentiments that may invade your mind at the time. Go on minusing them, negating them one after the other, until what remains is ‘I, I, I!’ If you follow this practice, and if you follow virtue at the same time, you will realize that this, your ‘I’, is God.

This is the deeper truth that transcends personality. It is the divine light ‘which lighteth every man’, and is one only, without a second. Ultimately, ‘my truth’ is ‘my self is the Self of all’.

Seeking Truth, Finding Peace

To attempt to think of the Self, which is beyond the range of thought, is only to create a new thought. Abandoning such a thought, I abide in peace.

Blessed is he who is established in this peace. Such a man has realized his own nature. *Ashtavakra Gita*

IF WE SEEK TRUTH, we will find peace, because peace always draws us closer to truth and truth ultimately confers on us the wholeness which is nothing but peace. What then is knowledge of truth? Knowledge of that which is most important to us. What is most important to us? Not the facts about the universe, but the supreme fact which is our own real nature. True are the lines of Alexander Pope:

Presume not the heavens to scan,
The greatest study of mankind is man.

Our greatest concern, the one that will solve the riddle of our existence, is to know our own essence and substance. Knowledge of truth is self-knowledge. It is to have direct, immediate experience of our spiritual nature as our true Self and to recognize conscious immortality, unshakeable peace and the completeness of our being.

We live out our lives apparently identified with a particular body and mind which are ever changing and subject to decay and disappearance. But the spiritual truth is that which abides within us, transcending the field of change, ever taintless, perfect, infinite and free. To realize this truth is to acquire perfect peace, called *shanti*.

What is our ultimate choice in life? It is whether to seek our satisfaction in the passing experiences, which is like collecting beautifully coloured autumn leaves or spring blossoms and expecting them never to crumble or fade; or whether to seek to discover the supreme truth that lies hidden behind all these appearances and which abides forever. Like St Thomas Aquinas we can say:

I adore thee devoutly hidden truth,
Thou who art truly hidden behind these forms.

On the other hand, we can spend our lives gathering the rosebuds of pleasure, or seeking the laurels of power, wealth and fame, in disregard of deeper values.

We can transfer our interest to the eternal values at any time, but now is the best time, because tomorrow may never come. If we want to awaken from the dream of transient experience, this spiritual Yoga can help. Why? Because through this Yoga we are handed a torch that throws light on the deeper truth about life. We are also given guidance about how our present life can be adjusted, so that it functions in harmony with the great plan of spiritual enlightenment.

Every meditation text is a torch and a pointer to the fulfilment of the great plan. Here is a text of deep wisdom which can help us to withdraw our mind from the realm of change and to draw it into the eternal peace of the spirit.

OM O my mind, find rest in that most blessed peace which is ever within thee and follow not after that which is transient. OM

There is a deep affinity, and ultimate identity, of truth and peace. If we cultivate inner peace, our mind will be able to contemplate the deeper reality that is the hidden unity behind the various appearances. The more peaceful we are, the more perfectly will our mind reflect the glory and freedom of the spiritual Self that lies behind the mind. This is the path of true wisdom. Not only does it fill the heart with peace, but it blesses the intellect with deeper understanding. It is a knowledge that is revealed in stillness.

In this troubled world, where there is so much strife and so little understanding about the real meaning of life, we need this wisdom as much as we need good air and pure water.

Now in this inner development, our intellect is not to be ignored. If your intellect is not satisfied, how can you be satisfied? The light of true understanding, the knowledge that satisfies forever, is not something that is acquired from outside. 'If a man will but quarry the mine of his own soul, he will find there the central rock on which to build in safety.' The real way to bring light to our intellect, is, in these words of Swami

Rama Tirtha, to 'quarry the mine of our own soul'. The directive of Yoga is 'Enquire within—seek truth within'.

There are questions, which, if we pursue them to the end, will kindle our intellect with the light of the higher wisdom. How can we bring light to the intellect? This light will be kindled when we engage our intellect in the question: 'What am I?' It sounds a small question, and may tempt a superficial answer. But the real answer has nothing to do with speech, but with being. And this answer, or rather, experience, will put to rest a whole range of related questions, which are very far from being superficial. What is this deeper awareness in me? What is this sense of existence and consciousness which is ever present and accompanies me all through life? What is the being of my being? What is the source of my self-consciousness? What is this inner illumination that lights up the world I experience in dream? It is not sunlight. It is surely a kind of self-light, but what is its real nature? Is there an inner point, out of which my thoughts and feelings arise?

All these questions lead our mind in the same direction, inwards to its source. If we ponder them, our mind will slowly be weaned from its addiction to trivialities. We shall begin to live consciously with deeper self-awareness. Our mental activities will become more purposeful and will lead to the uncovering of the deeper peace of the spirit.

Our endeavour to tranquillize the mind will thin the inner veils, if we persevere in this quest. We shall uncover a new kind of knowledge. This knowledge is not made up of words and memories. It is spiritual experience, emanating from the centre of our being. This inner intuitive experience will itself serve as our light on the path, and lead us to the goal, which is the perfect peace of non-duality. There is a sublime partnership of truth and peace that will lead us to self-realization and complete fulfilment. If we want durable peace, we can do no better than to seek this knowledge of ultimate truth.

Real peace is more than emotional relief, and far more than the temporary state of relaxation. It is something that fills the whole of our being, replacing everything else. And such a peace satisfies forever the thirst of our intellect for understanding as well as all the deeper needs of our emotions.

The spiritual Yoga is offered to us as a means to fulfil the whole of

our nature. The most important urge in human nature is the urge to know. How can we rest satisfied while the deeper questions of life remain unanswered? How can we be truly happy if we lack that great experience, which dissolves all doubts and crowns our understanding with the spiritual certainty that we know That which we came into the world to know, and which satisfies forever our thirst for illumination? The only knowledge that will bring us true peace and ultimate fulfilment, is the knowledge of truth. Nothing in the world will match this divine knowledge of spiritual truth.

There is a verse in the Upanishads: 'Even if one should offer you this entire earth, girdled by waters and filled with treasures—this knowledge truly is greater than that.' Even if we discovered some wonderful scientific formula that explained the universe, or even if we owned the universe, our peace of mind will not be won through these means. Our stay in this world is short and uncertain. The only thing we can truly rest in, is the knowledge of what we are in reality.

As for the things of the world, our ownership of them is precarious at the best of times. It has been said that if we see two men walking with a dog, we cannot tell which of them owns the dog. But when the men part, we will know surely enough, because the dog will follow its master. In the same way, while we live in this world, our link with our possessions seems clear enough. But when we have to step down from this stage of life, our material possessions will remain with their real master, and that is the world.

Is there anything at all in experience that we can truly call our own? Yes, there is. This is the wisdom and inner strength we have gained through developing the spiritual life within us. Therefore let us be wise and light our path in life with the torch provided by the knowers of truth. and remember: 'O my mind, find rest in that most blessed peace which is ever within thee and follow not after that which is transient.'

This understanding is available to us. We carry this peace and knowledge within us all the time. This statement is not only true, but is subject to personal confirmation by each and everyone of us. How can this be so? Because this knowledge and peace is the true nature of the Self. Says the sage Ashtavakra: 'My nature is knowledge and nothing other than knowledge. Verily the universe is revealed under the light of my true Self.'

Where is this knowledge to be found? It is first to be discovered within, and through its discovery, the universe itself, the All, will be known in a new light, the light that is shed by my true Self. Our restlessness is essentially a kind of homesickness and our true home is the divine peace and the knowledge that is the very nature of the Self.

A man once went to a spiritual teacher and the teacher said: 'What are you looking for?' The man answered: 'I am looking for enlightenment.' The teacher replied: 'You have your own treasure-house. Why do you search outside?' The man asked: 'But where is my treasure-house?' and the answer was: 'What you are asking is your treasure-house.'

From this interchange we learn that first there is a direction, and then there is a recognition or realization. The direction is within. Unless our mental being, with its spirit of quest, is directed within, there will be no recognition of the truth. But once we understand where our treasure-house is, we are in the right position to realize its true nature, which is our true nature, namely enlightenment.

How to access this inner treasury ? First, by cultivating inner silence and stillness. Will we not lose out by doing this? After all, many people think that quietening the mental activity reduces awareness and impoverishes experience. Again, when we become vividly aware of our mental activity, as, for instance, when we cannot get to sleep, we may feel that it is impossible to bring this stream of exuberant energy to any degree of stillness at all. But, as Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, little by little, through practice and a spiritual way of life, our mind can be brought under control and made peaceful.

Far from depriving us of valuable experience, this quietening of the mind will begin to reveal to us a new and radiant world, the world of our deeper spiritual Self. It is not really a new world, but it is the true and changeless realm that all along underlies our life of thought and action. But when we get identified with our thoughts and feelings, our attention is naturally wrapped up in them and we miss what is nearest to us, namely the existence, consciousness and bliss of our real being. Therefore the mystics say: 'You have your own treasure-house.' 'Allah is nearer to you than your jugular vein.'

There is an old story about a country pedlar who dreamed that if he

went to London Bridge, he would hear something greatly to his advantage. At first he ignored the dream, but when it recurred the next night, he decided to travel to London, which meant walking, in order to get the good news. Lingered on London Bridge, waiting for something to happen, he was spotted by another man, who asked him his business. He related his dream, at which his companion laughed, and said that if he had believed in dreams, he would be in a place called Swaffham, wherever that was, digging up gold under the apple tree of a man called Chapman, but that he didn't believe in dreams and that the pedlar should go back home and carry on with his life. He had in fact named the pedlar's own name and the town he came from.

Returning home, the pedlar dug under his apple tree and found a small pot filled with gold coins. He put the coins away and cleaned the pot, finding a strange inscription. As he could not understand the inscription, he put the pot on his stall and life carried on.

A few weeks later a wandering monk passed the stall and spotted the inscription on the pot. He asked the pedlar if he knew the meaning of the words, and when the pedlar shook his head, the monk translated it for him. 'Under me doth lie, another richer far than I.' When the monk had gone, the pedlar dug under the apple tree again, much deeper this time, and eventually found a treasure of such abundance that he had sufficient for himself and plenty to share with others.

Taken symbolically, the story is yet another pointer to the true field of our enquiry. The treasure-house is our real Self, and what is necessary in order to uncover the treasure, is compared to the process of digging. Any efforts devoted to this quest will be rewarded on the inner plane, just as the man discovered the small pot of gold to start with. But if we want the best, then we are advised to dig deeper; for here we are not concerned with legend or hearsay, but with discovering the treasury of all treasuries, the supreme truth.

In order to discover this inner treasury we first have to create the right conditions that will enable us to pay attention to the deeper realm within ourselves. These conditions are inner peace lit by and linked with our understanding of the ultimate truth.

We all have at the very least a partial understanding of the deeper spiritual reality, derived from what we have heard about the true Self

and from what the scriptures tell us. Drawing on this knowledge and bringing to life this spiritual information, the peace we cultivate will prove to be a revealing peace that is based on reality and not on dreams.

It is truth alone that liberates, not imaginings. How do we bring this knowledge to life? Through giving it our attention and deeper reflection. In this way our mind will be lifted away from its concern with profit and loss, and the deeper peace and higher knowledge will shine through.

This urge to understand the true meaning of life is at root a kind of homesickness. When we study the truth, hear the truth, read about it and think about it, the aim is not to add something wonderful to our being that we do not already possess. It is to awaken an echo of recognition within us. It is to draw our attention to the very ground of our being.

The poet, James Stephens, has written:

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

We cannot find the innermost ground of being through thinking. It is rather discovered through 'sinking'—that is, through sinking our ego in it. And this is brought about by learning to rest our mind in the affirmation of our identity with that blessed peace that is our true nature. This is the ultimate technique of spiritual self-discovery.

Yoga involves the central practice of stilling the mind, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the deeper insight that is disclosed in that stilled and inwardly focused mentality.

Everyone is familiar with taking a walk in the country or in a park, and being quite unaware of the songs of the birds, or the swish of the wind as it caresses the trees, because we are either too busy in conversation or absorbed in our own little mental whirlpool of plans, wishes, worries and fears. It can be quite a revelation to pause momentarily, to lift our attention from the mental screen and realize that the air is full of fragrance, that birds are singing, that there is a sky above our heads, and that nature is a continuous revelation of beauty in form, colour and fragrance.

How much more so does this principle apply to the inner world of

the spirit, if only we can learn to withdraw our attention and support from the worldly thoughts that generally weigh on our mind, and turn this attention to the quiet depths of our own soul. Hence the value of our daily spiritual meditation, and of consciously reminding ourselves that our true nature is one with the divine force that is behind all phenomena.

But what about the ultimate discovery of the true nature of the Self? We remember the words of the Zen master to the enquirer who was seeking enlightenment. 'What you are asking is your treasure-house.' The whole meaning of life and the secret of happiness will become clear when the true nature of the Self is realized. When the Self is known, all is known. The mystery is out, and there is no longer a mystery.

There is a riddle about Self-knowledge, because of the very immediacy of the Self in our experience at any given moment. The attempt to think of the Self, to make it an object of thought, will not present us with the Self at all. It will only bring to birth another thought that cannot be the Self because it is known to the Self. This cognitive challenge, and the real way to deal with it, was stated in the verse:

To attempt to think of the Self, which is beyond the range of thought, is only to create a new thought. Abandoning such a thought, I abide in peace.

We sleep, we dream. In our dream we may travel; there are other people. We experience emotions. We play a big part or we may be passive victims of the stream of events. But the phenomenon of the dream does not depend on any of these details. It depends on the inner light that reveals the dream and makes the dream world possible. The dreamer cannot reach that inner light. He cannot find it anywhere in the dream. Why? Because he himself in his true nature is that revealing light. That light simply reveals, and the dream simply appears. The light is perfectly free. It is never overshadowed, never broken up by the dream play. It is the Light Immutable and Transcendent. That light is the light of the Self.

Even in our waking state, that Self is the revealing light behind all experience. We cannot think of it, because it is the light that makes thinking possible. We do not need to think of the Self. Liberation means

to know directly, to realize directly that we are the Self.

Yoga teaches us how to develop a new inner standpoint. The sense of identity that we naturally feel when we say 'I', is normally mixed up with our mind and our body. But this fusion of the 'I' with the mind and the body is gradually loosened, and realized for what it is: a false identification based on lack of true enquiry into the matter.

At first when we say 'I' we mean our personality, our individuality. Through inner serenity, we discover that this region of 'I' is something much deeper than personality, something abiding beneath all these changing mental qualities. This is the case, because this 'I', when fully realized, is realized as universal, infinite, eternal and completely transcending all limitations, material or psychological.

This enlightened understanding is achieved through spiritual practice and right affirmation. We will be helped if we familiarize ourselves with these great and liberating teachings. For this knowledge will prepare us for realization.

What we are seeking is already beneath our feet. It is the treasure in our own garden, the light in our own heart, the power behind our mind. The great Sufi sage, Maulana Rumi, compares man's position before his spiritual awakening to that of someone riding a horse, but who develops the strange idea that the horse is lost, is missing, is no longer his. He rides from village to village asking: 'Where is my horse?' Even when a villager calls out to him: 'O master, the horse is under your thighs, you are mounted on the horse', such is his delusion that he says: 'Yes, this is the horse, but where is the horse?'

How often do we receive the spiritual teachings that we are the Self, and yet we too, through long habit, respond, so to say, by saying: 'O yes, I am the Self. But where is the Self?' It is not through reasoning but through the conscious practice of right affirmation, that this clinging doubt about the Self will be abolished. Through affirmation, lit by a well-informed faith, our wavering understanding will be replaced by inner light and spiritual certainty.

Solve the mystery of Self-knowledge and our nature will be realized as eternal, infinite peace. We shall know directly the truth that is affirmed in the words: 'That ever-achieved consciousness, bliss absolute am I', and it has never been otherwise.

B.D.

HAPPINESS

You want to be happy, because happiness is the nature of the spirit that you are; yet pain is necessary as a means to unfold the happiness. If you do not apply the right means to bring out the latent happiness, you will pass your life in a vale of tears, groaning, grumbling and complaining, blaming fate, friends and the gods—but not yourself.

Happiness needs a serene mind, a controlled and directed heart, and an educated will. It is by a process of self-purification and concentration on the ideal that you evoke the happiness which does not arise out of a time-spatial cause and does not depend on an external object for its continuation. First know that no outer object can cause real happiness, much less delicious food, inebriating drinks or frolicsome companions.

Do not be afraid of pain, ingratitude, neglect, loneliness and poverty. Make a right use of them and you will be helped by them. Show no dependence on a friend, particularly one of the opposite sex, and do not smoke or drink or be fond of low music and literature. Even Nietzsche finds asceticism valuable.

As long as you want to be happy, you will remain unhappy, and any object you turn to for your happiness will make you unhappy. Do your duty to your Self, to man, to the lower beings, and happiness will come to you unasked.

An active life of learning, self-education, selfless benevolence, devotion and meditation is indispensable to happiness. Parasites are never happy. Do not do anything by way of your profession which violates the iron law of dharma, universal harmony or righteousness. Do not undertake any occupation which exhausts your life and leaves you too fatigued by the evening. You must do your self-study of the spiritual philosophy, your devotion and your meditation, at ease.

Let your own Self be your best friend. A controlled, spiritually educated and guided mind is the only friend. To help others, distribute the spiritual literature and propagate dharma. Do not rush to help others if you cannot tell them how to help themselves. Live unknown, and do not forget that this life is a link in an infinite chain, and that all life is one.

H.P. Shastri

Western Sage and Indian Yogi

ATTAINMENT of sagehood was the goal of ancient philosophy in general, though the nature of a sage was differently conceived in different schools. The ideal of sagehood is not quite extinct in modern times, and it has a certain amount in common with that metaphysical and spiritual liberation that is the goal of Vedanta or Yoga.

The term 'sage' goes back to Latin *sapiens*, which goes back in turn to Greek *sophistys*. This term, sophist in English, originally meant one skilled in some practical craft, but this was extended to men of wisdom, notably the traditional seven sages, who included Solon the Lawgiver and Thales the physicist. By the time of Socrates, say in the middle of the fifth century BC, the term was applied to men who travelled and taught for money about reasoning and eloquence in debate, which was the passport to individual political advance.

If we were to look for the wise men of antiquity among the sophists, we would be going up a blind alley. What we would find would be merchants who had a valuable product to sell—the ability to debate for victory—and were going to teach it to others who would be ready for the training because of the advantages it gave in political assemblies and law courts. What we have to look for is not sophists or people who think they already have wisdom, but lovers of wisdom, philosophers, where the first two syllables 'philo' derive from the Greek word *phileo*, 'I love'. These were people who did not think themselves to be in the possession of wisdom but who sought it, valued it and communicated what they could of it to others.

Forgetting about great figures of the hoary past like Pythagoras, Parmenides and Heraclitus, we will consider Greek philosophy as if it began with Socrates, whose working life roughly spanned the period 350-400 BC. And if we begin with Socrates, it is not to make an enquiry into the historical Socrates, but rather we begin with the figure of Socrates that has been presented to us in Plato's dialogues, for that is a Socrates that has been influential both in antiquity and in modern times.

Perhaps one could say that the popular idea of philosophy is that it is the attempt to give some sort of general account of the world and how one ought to live without contradicting oneself. To contradict oneself is to first say that A is B and then go rambling on long enough to enable it to be shown later that one has also claimed, openly or implicitly, that A is not B. One of the meanings of that tantalizing word 'dialectic' is, precisely, the art of detection of contradiction. Dialectic in this sense exactly corresponds to the Sanskrit term 'tarka' used by the Indians. In a passage in one of his papers, Hari Prasad Shastri has spoken of dialectic as the art of correction of *our own* thought and action in the light of critical reflection, and it was expressed by the Indian word *vichara*, usually meaning the unbiased enquiry into truth.

Socrates was the western dialectician par excellence. He taught no doctrine because he regarded himself as ignorant, but he questioned those who had opinions about what we would call philosophical questions, and pursued those questions to the point where the victim was not only exposed as ignorant on the point he thought himself wise, but also, if he had the sensitivity, was pushed into examining his actual mode of life. Socrates, too, when charged with being a mere critic without anything to teach, was able to answer triumphantly that he taught by his mode of life. And, as is well known, he demonstrated the highest virtue not only by the constant care he exhibited for the welfare of others by forcing them into self-examination, but also by unnecessarily choosing death rather than the evasion of the laws of the state of Athens in which he lived.

The ancients believed that Plato was indebted to Socrates for his conviction that the most important question for philosophy was the conduct of life, and to Pythagoras for his appreciation of the importance for philosophy of a training in mathematics and of living in a community and following a path which would become a tradition. In middle age Plato founded his Academy for study and education in a very broad sense of the term. The general atmosphere was apparently that of a society for the promotion of science as then understood, notably geometry and medicine. Although Plato was

pessimistic about democracy in his day, he aimed to give ethical and political training for future politicians.

The study of geometry and pure mathematics was the dominating feature, conceived as training the mind to think abstractly, with minimum dependence on sense experience. Dialectic, the crowning discipline, was not introduced to a student until he or she—some women were admitted and wore the same attire as men—had been studying for at least five years and was about 30 to 35 years of age. It would consist typically in one person trying to defend a tricky ethical maxim such as, 'Virtue can be taught', against all comers. The aim was not to obliterate your opponent, but to try to carry him with you, so that all participants in the debate could agree that their general knowledge and awareness had been enhanced, even if a final solution of the problem remained outstanding.

But the Academy was by no means a mere talking-shop. Only he who at least strived to live each day with a greater degree of self-mastery was regarded as a true philosopher. The philosopher seeks to die while still alive, in the sense that death is separation of the soul from the body and the philosopher seeks to rid his soul of the demands of the body within the limits of the possible during life.

But for Plato one cannot progress in philosophy merely on the basis of insight into the defects of changing objects and consequent disgust for them. Ultimately the real, the changeless, the beautiful, the good, turn out to be the one real thing hidden among the multitude of changing appearances. Love has to be and can be cultivated for that supreme good. Objects are defective but they are expressions of the real, the beautiful, the good. One abandons them stage by stage by acquiring love for what expresses the real more profoundly. One may begin by loving a single individual beautiful body, but, if not blocked, the love-force can expand to focus on the beauty of bodies in general, to the greater beauty of the virtuous souls that inhabit them, to the truths and the maxims that inspire their virtuous conduct until the lover himself becomes a sage through contemplation of the great ocean of beauty itself, and bursts forth into sublime thought and enunciation of deep wisdom.

Such is the view of the philosophic path put by Plato into the mouth of the priestess, Diotima, encountered by Socrates in his youth. On account of his great contribution to natural science, we might suppose that Aristotle, who studied under and worked with Plato for twenty years, was of a less exalted temperament than Diotima. Yet Aristotle and Plato had much in common. Aristotle founded his own philosophical school, which met at a place in Athens called the Lyceum, eight years after Plato's death, that is, in 335 BC, and it ran concurrently with Plato's Academy.

One difference between Plato's Academy and the Lyceum of Aristotle was that, whereas Plato was ultimately concerned with political training throughout, even though many mathematicians and others attended his classes, it appears that Aristotle's personal pupils were in the pursuit of various kinds of knowledge for its own sake, and that his lectures on practical matters, including ethics and politics, were intended for a wider public. Like Plato, Aristotle seems to have estimated the value of a way of life according to the happiness it afforded to the individual living it, but it must be remembered that the Athens of their day was still intact as a small city state, where the rights of citizenship entailed certain duties and in which happiness would have been impossible for one directly seeking it in mere leisure and luxury.

Aristotle contrasted happiness in the world in his days with the happiness and joy in a community devoted to scientific research and retired contemplation. Happiness in the world was decidedly of a lower order: one had there to struggle with one's passions, to undergo many cares, to engage in political struggles, to procure cash if one wanted to help others, to fight in battle if one wanted to develop one's courage. Safely institutionalized for the philosophic life, on the other hand, one could live quietly in relative leisure and in detachment from material cares. This is not the heroism of a lover, taught by Diotima and practised by Socrates. Aristotle was a man of moderation. Given at the end of his life the same choice as Socrates between an unjust death and exile, he chose exile. He made his point by devising a system that was to last many centuries; Socrates made his by a practical demonstration of how to live.

It is in the closing pages of the tenth book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle makes clear his view that the contemplative life is superior to the practical life, however well the latter is lived. As is the case with certain other parts of his philosophy, if you scratch Aristotle you find Plato underneath. For Aristotle, man has a faculty called *nous*, or intellect, for apprehending universal and necessary truths. He thought that all individual things in the world were cases of embodiment of universal forms in matter. The form of iron is everywhere the same, but one piece of iron differs from another on account of the matter with which it is associated. The various species in botany and biology are fixed eternal forms diversified into individuals by association with matter. The peculiar nature of man, not possessed by the animals, is to have the faculty of *nous* or reason, which can detect the hierarchy of universal forms under which the world is organized, and reflect over them. To do this is our greatest happiness, because, as he put it, 'happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue... and this will be the virtue of the best part of us'. And again, 'contemplation is at once the highest form of activity, since intellect is the highest thing in us, and it is also the most continuous, for we can reflect more continually than we can carry on any other form of action'.

When Aristotle pictured God as Himself constituting the hierarchy of forms under which the world is organised, he was saying in his own way that the highest human happiness consisted in the contemplation of God. And that, as our teacher used to emphasize, is an important part of his message. Of course Aristotle's cosmology was destroyed by Copernicus and his theory of fixed species in biology was destroyed by Darwin. But if modern science has, so to speak, left Plato and Aristotle standing, the impulse which enabled it to do so itself owes a great debt to the inspiration of Plato and Aristotle. And up till the Second World War and a bit beyond, the earnest study of Plato and Aristotle in the original was considered the foundation of a good classical education.

By the time of the death of Aristotle in 322 BC, the conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean along with Persia, Afghanistan and Egypt by Alexander the Great had put an end to the regime where Greece

was a congeries of city-states allied either to Athens or Sparta, and the Eastern Mediterranean was no longer dominated by Athens and Sparta but by two new centres of imperial power which had emerged in the wake of Alexander's conquests, Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. The riches of Alexandria and its libraries and facilities for scientific experiment made it the cultural centre of that part of the world, somewhat as America attracts physicists and scholars today. Nonetheless, the city of Athens held its own for several centuries as the centre for purely philosophical studies. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum had been founded to last as centres of philosophical research or training, and to them were added the Garden of Epicurus and the Stoa of Zeno, founder of the Stoic sect. Apparently these institutions were all founded by charity and did not charge fees. Lectures were frequented casually by members of the public, but there were also groups of devoted disciples who referred to one another as 'friends' or 'companions'.

There were different sects holding different theoretical opinions within the various schools, but what united each school was devotion to a particular way of life. Besides Platonists, Aristotelians, Epicureans and Stoics, there were two other looser traditions, not organized as schools in particular premises, known as sceptics and cynics, names which had not yet degenerated into terms of abuse. The term cynicism today has been watered down to mean a person who lives in the same way as everyone else but is always on the alert looking for other people's bad motives. The original cynics, and they can be paralleled from India, pursued an asceticism of filth. They rejected all social conventions and lived just like dogs in the street, naked and unwashed and performing all acts of nature shamelessly in public. Their most famous representative was Diogenes, who lived in a tub. Today they would be locked up, but apparently the tradition began with a pupil of Socrates and lasted right through antiquity, though it is hard to see what they achieved. Dirt is not a substitute for Dharma.

The sceptics were similar in disposition, but did not go so far. There is a Sanskrit term, *vairagya*, rendered as 'indifference'—indifference to heat, indifference to cold. The sceptics pursued

indifference to the hilt. Their discipline included a refusal to make moral judgements. Unlike the cynics, the sceptics would often justify their behaviour with arguments intended to refute all human reasoning. The founder of the sect was called Pyrrho, and he was said to have been inspired by Indian ascetics he had come across in the course of serving with the army of Alexander the Great in India. Their aim apparently was to liberate themselves as far as possible from human conventions, and to pursue this aim doggedly as a way of life, the only way, they thought, to attain tranquillity and mental composure.

A slightly more attractive figure was Epicurus, who was far from the 'epicure' of popular tradition, pictured as over-indulging in the pleasures of the flesh. Epicurus lived to be about 70, being about 40 in 300 BC and dying in 271 BC. The term 'the flesh', used metaphorically to mean the individual as the one experiencing pleasure and pain, appears to have been an invention of Epicurus. Although a keen student of Plato and Aristotle, he thought that their ideal of the disinterested pursuit of the Good with a capital 'g' was an illusion. In reality, the individual is only prompted by his personal pleasure and interest. Epicurus was a bit like the wife of the modern philosopher George Santayana, who so irritated Bertrand Russell by replying to his query how she passed her time: 'By trying to keep cool in summer and warm in winter'.

It is curious that Epicurus should seek that same peace and tranquillity through comfort that the cynics and sceptics sought through asceticism and discomfort. The truth is, though, that the comfort sought by Epicurus would seem like asceticism to modern man: plain food, just enough to avert hunger, water to drink, loving association with friends, men and women, untouched by eroticism, and constant control of the mind to head off superfluous desires. Life without stimuli is not boring, he maintained, if you learn by daily, even constant, meditation to concentrate with gratitude on the good things that nature has given you to supply your wants. Cultivate your kitchen garden and avoid politics and desire for military glory and power over others.

The impulse is reminiscent of the flower-people of the sixties, except that the far more rigid discipline of an absence of alcohol and drugs gave the movement strength to last for four centuries and throw up the great Roman poet of Nature, Lucretius. In so far as a soul is recognized in this system of thought, it is composed of subtle atoms and dissolves with the body at death, so there is no need to fear suffering in Hades after the death of the body.

From the standpoint of Yoga or Vedanta, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle can all be seen as striving themselves and striving to help others to rise up from their sensual animal nature and realize and give expression to the divine element in their souls. Epicurus had the much lower aim of teaching man to remain purely sensual, while robbing sensuality of some of its sting. An exceptional genius like Lucretius apart, an Epicurean could do little for the public good. His creed did not provide for education for public life. He could at best live harmlessly on the margin of some great empire, where the work of social organisation and military defence was undertaken by others.

Roughly contemporary with Epicureanism was Stoicism, nobler and more influential. Founded by Zeno, it numbered Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius amongst its adherents, to name only the greatest. The writings of Seneca in particular were influential in the Middle Ages and on teachers like Eckhart and Spinoza. St Teresa of Avila used to call St John of the Cross 'Senecita', little Seneca, on account of his small size.

The Stoics were pantheists. God was regarded as immanent within the world and not stretching beyond it. The world was God and God was the world. But as in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, the world is animated by an inner ruler or world-soul, regarded by the Stoics as fiery in Nature and called 'the Logos', much like the logos of Heraclitus in times of old.

The virtue most prized by the Stoics was integrity, remaining true to oneself, especially in the face of difficulties. Unlike the Epicureans, they encouraged engagement in public life, even though the days of the small city-state had passed. Stoics were prominent amongst the great law makers of ancient Rome. As was also the case with the Epicureans, the world view of the Stoics matched and in fact

grew out of their ethical ideal. If the Epicureans saw the world on a mechanical model as made up of a multiplicity of detached atoms, whose co-operation they were not able to explain, the Stoics saw it on what might be called a vegetable model, as a unified organism, with all objects within it proceeding ultimately from seeds. The world-process as a whole is governed by law, termed by Stoics 'fate', but fate does not control every detail and there is scope for human free will and striving. Right and wrong, good and bad, apply only within the limited area of human freedom. Beyond this lies fate, and the only rule here is resignation or acceptance. But within the realm of human freedom, the good is action in conformity with reason, evil is failure in this regard. In ethics the Stoics come somewhat close to the yogic concept of dharma.

But closer to Yoga than any other philosophic school of Western Antiquity, unless we accept Christianity as constituting such, was the last and greatest, the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, so powerful that it virtually silenced the other schools in the last years of the Roman Empire, and was destined to spring up later like a phoenix from the ashes in the mystic schools of Christianity and Islam. In the period of 200 years before the break-up of the Roman Empire, say 250–450 AD, there was hardly one great thinker, but it was a great age for commentators, Porphyry and Proclus among them.

Porphyry, Plotinus's pupil, writes that the meditation or contemplation which leads to happiness does not consist in heaping up trains of reasoning or accumulating masses of factual knowledge. It is not anything built up bit by bit in this way. If happiness could be acquired merely by attendance at lectures, one could acquire it without troubling to change one's diet and go through certain courses of action. But as in fact one has to purify oneself and to change one's present way of life for a new one, we must first find out what lectures and what courses of action will dispose us for a new way of life. He emphasizes, with Aristotle, that the change required is not the acquisition of anything new, but a return to one's true Self which one has abandoned in ordinary living. Our true Self, he says, is the Spirit in us and the goal we seek is to be able to live according to the Spirit. Traces of this nostalgia for the true Self can be found in all the

history of ancient philosophy, which is what makes the study of it interesting and helpful for some students of Yoga.

Of Plotinus himself, Porphyry says, 'He never relaxed his attention from his true Self except in sleep, and his need for sleep was diminished by his meagre diet—he often went without solid food—and the continual focusing of his mind on the Spirit.' Plotinus's goal, said Porphyry, was union with God, and he attained it four times during the six years that Porphyry was with him, while Porphyry himself had attained it once at the time of writing, which was at the age of sixty-eight. Plotinus calls ultimate reality the One. He says that in this context it only means not two, but it is convenient to speak of One, as does Shankara. Plotinus says, 'When the soul is suddenly aware of the presence of the One within it, when it (the soul) has turned its attention away from all else, then the soul and the One are all one and cannot be distinguished. The image for this is earthly lovers, who would like to melt into each other. At that time the soul is no longer aware of the body, and it would not exchange what it had for anything, even if you offered it the heavens and all they contain. At that time the soul is in silence and it is only afterwards that it says, "It is He".' This is the language of the *Katha Upanishad*, and it can be found also in certain exalted passages in Plato and even, according to his commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisia, in the more sober pages of Aristotle.

Here we pass beyond the limits of the language of philosophy. It is not the goal of philosophy to acquire the conviction that the soul can reach these heights of experience: the goal is actually to live on these heights oneself. Through study of philosophy, says Plotinus, one can try to think of the soul in its true nature, but it is only through ascetic practice—what we would call meditation—that one can finally separate the soul in its true nature from all the obstructions that cling to it and prevent us from attaining the vision. We have to play the part of a sculptor, he says, who has gradually to hew away from the rock all that is irrelevant until the statue that was present, virtually, can emerge. Plotinus calls it sculpturing one's own statue.

Today it is good for us sometimes to go back to the Greek philosophers and sages and to the Romans who imitated them

because they help to show us that the life of a philosopher can and should converge with that of a yogi. Today philosophy is typically a subject that one studies at a University. Generally speaking, we are there taught to think of philosophers who construct new abstract systems as ways explaining the world, or aspects of it, or more specifically today, with evolving a new theory of language. From such abstract constructions are deduced theories of morality which follow them. One looks to see what kind of life that would imply. The question whether that life would actually be relevant to the student's behaviour is altogether secondary, if it is raised at all. One learns to know about the theories, to write about them in the examination room, and one eventually hopefully receives one's degree.

But the study of ancient Greek philosophy can bring us nearer to an understanding of the quite different sense in which Yoga or Vedanta is a philosophy. In Greek philosophy, at least from the time when Socrates, as it is said, brought it down out of the clouds, the choice of a way of life is not a sort of optional accessory tacked on at the end of one's study. The doctrine in post-Socrates Greek philosophy is what expresses a way of life. What kind of philosophy you pursue will depend on what kind of a person you are, as Fichte put it.

And secondly, very much as in India, philosophy was not a free-lance activity. One joined a society devoted to a particular way of life, and the doctrine taught was itself very greatly conditioned by the practical efforts of the members of the school to live that way of life. Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, all three, came out with philosophical doctrines that come to the verge of the silence of the Yogi, to the point where words have nothing more to say. The text books will tell us that in exceptional cases, such as that of Wittgenstein, the same operation can still be performed today. The sceptics, cynics, Stoics and Epicureans were, by comparison, people who tried to walk the practical path of wisdom and sage-hood, but, so to speak, got tired and fell by the wayside. The cynics, like Diogenes, can perhaps be written off as exhibitionist. The sceptics, like Pyrrho, founded a discipline for halting the mind in its tendency to judge, but like the

Epicureans, were concerned with the narrow goal of personal tranquillity. The Stoics are a source of refreshment and inspiration to all at the ethical level. But with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, we enter the stream of what has been called the perennial philosophy, that leads on to the ocean of mystical experience, which is the goal of Yoga and Vedanta—the common goal of the great figures of spiritual history in East and West.

A.J.A.

A POEM OF KABIR

O my mind, why do you not pay attention?
The one that speaks
Is not really different from the one who is hearing.
One being only exists throughout the four quarters
Reflected as if in a mirror.
Only when all duality-vision has been destroyed,
Can the one reality be known.
Water congeals into ice
And ice melts back into water.
So, also, it is the one reality
That assumes now the form of the empirical world
And now the form of transcendence.
To understand this secret is called 'success',
And not to understand it is 'disaster'.
Says Kabir: 'Whoso fails to consider this matter
Is a man of very dense intellect.'

Translated by A.J.A.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

THE EVENING worship is over. The days are growing shorter, and as Shri Yajnavalkya paces up and down, merged in thought, his face is lit by the rays of the departing sun. The spiritual monarch now stoops slightly, his steps are slower and for the first time there is a line visible on his otherwise smooth and peaceful countenance.

The disciple Bhagadatta approaches and, bowing low three times, says: 'Holy one, a messenger has arrived from King Janaka. What are your orders?'. 'Wash his feet with cool water, conduct him to a comfortable seat in the pine-grove and place prasada (consecrated food) before him. Ask the revered Maitreyi to look after him. I shall soon be there,' replies the sage.

As the yogi-raj walked to the guest pavilion of his hermitage, he was thinking to himself: 'In the holy teachings which my illustrious predecessors have discovered in their illumined intellects, theism has not yet been explicitly set forth. The scepticism of the Sankhya philosophy and the apparent agnosticism of some of the rishis are not enough to lead the hearts of men to that spiritual peace which is the chief goal and objective. Only a few great intellects can approach the reality through pure intellectual analysis. For example, little Gautami, who helps my beloved Maitreyi in the kitchen, will not understand the theory of maya or the doctrine of superimposition. But the holy truth is universal! It is time to introduce a theistic element into my philosophy.'

The King's messenger and his party of six companions stood up at the approach of the venerable sage and saluted him with 'Jai!' in sonorous tones. The acharya (learned teacher) seated himself on the kusha grass and then said: 'Tell me, is His Majesty rooted in the practice of dharma? Do his subjects look upon him as a righteous and benevolent ruler? Is the kingdom free from poverty, materialism and atheism?'

The minister replied: ‘By your grace, O holy mahatma, His Majesty loves virtue more than his own life, and devotes his every breath to the well-being of his subjects. The realm is now basking in the sunshine of learning, virtue and the creation of beauty, both in character and conduct. The King has sent you a thousand ounces of gold, a thousand selected cows, many baskets of fruits and some robes for the two noble ladies (Yajnavalkya’s wives). There are also some rare manuscripts for yourself, holy one. Be good enough to accept them.’

With a faint smile the great sage said: ‘What occasion has inspired the King to do this kindness to us brahmana recluses dwelling in this natural and beautiful forest? Has a son been born to King Janaka?’

‘No, Your Holiness’, answered the envoy. ‘The King has been celebrating the joyful occasion when he first met you. He has performed a great sacrifice with the help of your own most learned disciples. He gave in charity to the brahmanas and to the poor. Every aged man in his capital received five pieces of gold and every scholar in the state schools was given blankets, bark paper and manuscripts as required by them.’

‘I bless my son, King Janaka,’ said Shri Yajnavalkya.

The minister then delivered the chief message of the king: ‘Will you be good enough to visit the palace of your humble disciple, King Janaka? If a date is fixed, His Majesty will personally come here to escort you, honoured sir. He also asks that, with your permission, the queen should be allowed to serve the two noble ladies in your ashrama.’

‘Be it so,’ said Shri Yajnavalkya.

On the following day, the king’s minister was approached by the disciples of the august sage. He was presented with butter and jars of fresh honey, bundles of the herb brahmi, some rosaries and a few antelope skins, and was told that the honey was a gift from the holy mothers Maitreyi and Katyayani to the queen, and that the other offerings were for the King from the ashrama.

A disciple escorted the minister and his men to the gate of the hermitage. Before departing, they turned their faces towards the ashrama and offered three salutations, saying: ‘Jai to the spiritual

monarch! Jai to the maharishi Yajnavalkya! Jai to the disciples and their cows!’

* * *

Today is the day of the full moon. As the moon rises in her splendour, the holy sage Yajnavalkya appears and greets his disciples. They have finished their evening devotions and are now chanting in chorus some hymns from the ancient Vedas. After further greetings the great Guru begins to give some teachings on the all-important subject of life after death. Shri Yajnavalkya says:

‘The soul of man, in an individual body, is a divine ray encased in the mind so that it may realize its potential as immortal truth, eternal consciousness and unending bliss (sat-chit-ananda). The soul is commanded by the Ruler of the universe to conduct its mental life and practical functions in harmony and unison with the cosmic evolutionary purpose, in order to acquire the final freedom (moksha).

‘Death is an essential purpose; death is as natural to the soul as any other function. As the dreaming state precedes dreamless sleep, so the dreaming state prevails on the eve of death. Again, as during dreamless sleep all sensations cease, so is it at the time of death. Death is the same as the states of dreaming and dreamless sleep, and rebirth is only a reawakening.

‘At death the soul recollects all that it has known and done in this life. Then a new consciousness dawns upon the mind. It thinks ‘I am a father’, ‘I am a farmer’, ‘I am a scholar’, based on its innate tendencies. With this new consciousness settled in the mind, the soul departs, mounted as it were on the vital breath (prana), still retaining in a mysterious way all the impressions of its past life.

‘Know that man is a sentry of his own will. As is a man’s will in this world, so will be his state hereafter. He is a creature of desire; as are his desires, so is his will and his actions. A man attains through action that to which his mind is attached. Therefore, after enjoying the full result of his own deeds, a man returns to this world of action in the form of a new birth.

‘Rebirth does not mean a new becoming. A soul is bound by the inflexible law of cause and effect (karma). It is this karma that draws the soul, under the supervision of the supreme Ruler of the universe (Ishvara), into a new personality.

‘The Upanishad says: “As a caterpillar, after reaching the end of a blade of grass, finds another place of support and then draws itself towards it, similarly, this self, after reaching the end of this body, finds another place of support and then draws itself towards it.” This is the course of the ordinary mortal.

‘It may be asked: “Is this the destined lot of each and every individual?” The answer is, No. One who, through a sinless life, controlled desires, the service of his traditional Guru and of the children of God, has had the supreme intuitive experience of his own unity with the cosmic Consciousness, pure, immutable, untainted and untaintable—his course is a different one. When a man becomes completely free from all the desires of the heart, mortal though he is, nevertheless he becomes immortal and obtains Brahman. Then, just as the slough of a snake may lie on an anthill, dead and cast away, so does the body lie. Being in his reality bodiless, he becomes immortal. His vital airs (pranas) do not depart but are merged in Brahman, and he becomes pure Light. There is no further birth and death for him. He has completed the course of his evolution.

‘Or again: in the case of those who have had the intuitive experience of the grand unity, the mind and the vital forces (pranas) do not pass out. They are dissipated here; they are dissipated here. That man has no further return; he has no further return.

‘He for whom no desires are left, who is desireless, because all his desires are fulfilled in the Self, and whose desire is centred only in the Self, his vital airs do not depart. Such a one, being Brahman even in this life, becomes one with Brahman after the death of the body.’

The illustrious Yajnavalkya looked with compassionate eyes on all his disciples, and then resumed:

‘Beloved ones, take great care what you think and do. Any selfish element attached to your thought or deed draws you again and again into this wheel of relativity. This is a profound subject. Meditate on what you have heard.’

Life is Progress to Enlightenment

WE ARE ALL looking for inner peace and fulfilment, a feeling that we have realized our full potential. So what is the best in us, and how can it be realized? According to the traditional teachings, the best in us is the potential for enlightenment. And the way to realize it is by dedicating our lives to the time-honoured methods of self-refinement, leading to the discovery of our innermost Self, the true Self that is not different in essence from the universal Self.

Living this kind of life may not bring us material wealth or worldly power. But nor is this life meant to be an ordeal or an endurance course. The pursuit of more than we really need is likely to bring us into conflict with the interests of others and to involve us in severe moral compromises. So it is more a relief than a sacrifice to know that worldly eminence is not a necessary step on the way to the highest fulfilment.

Is not the goal of enlightenment very distant, and what is there to support and comfort us on the way? A great teacher in this tradition once said that the goal is beautiful, and so is the way thereto. In this light, the best kind of life, a life of progress to enlightenment, is a life in which we seek, find and cultivate an inner source of joy which depends on nothing external for its continuation, and which nothing can take away. When we find this, we automatically in some degree share it with those around us, and if we have not this joy within ourselves, then our capacity to help anyone is limited.

How and where are we to seek this source of inner light? It has been said that the spiritual path consists roughly of three stages. In the West, Jewish, Christian and Islamic writers have called them the stages of purgation, contemplation and the unitive life. In the yogic tradition the stages are often distinguished as purification, meditation and contemplation, leading to illumination. Sometimes these terms are used in different ways within and among the traditions. But the same essentials can be recognized in each.

The first stage is concerned with the inner preparation that must precede serious attempts to practise higher forms of devotion and

meditation. Before we can go further we need some inner clarity and stability, and we gain these through the practice of what is called 'dharma'. Dharma means learning and accepting that there is a right way of doing things, and giving up the wrong ways. The single most important element of dharma is truthfulness; that is, to adopt an honest, straightforward approach to things, and to avoid all forms of deception, including those forms of deception that are sometimes called diplomacy. Dharma also means to avoid causing unnecessary harm by deed, word or thought.

For the great majority of us, consciously adopting dharma would not require a sudden change in our circumstances or working lives. Generally it is best to make inner adjustments and let any outer changes come about in due course. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the most effective way of making this inner change is taught clearly. It is not to change what we do but rather the basis on which we do it. The way to transform the quality of what we do is to look on all our actions, even the most simple and mundane, as an offering. The Gita teaches:

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever discipline you perform, do it as an offering to Me. [9:27]

In the ordinary way, when we are doing something, part of our mind is concerned with the task, but a lot of mental energy is taken up with thoughts like 'How is it going to work out?' and 'Who will get the credit?'. The Gita teachings show us how to act effectively and at the same time be inwardly free.

This way of acting does not just make us feel better. There is a deep and powerful principle at work here.

Thus you will be liberated from the bonds of action which are productive of good and evil results; equipped in mind with the Yoga of renunciation, and liberated, you will come to Me. [9:28]

The meaning of this verse could be put something like this: 'If you act in this way, that is, as an offering to truth, then instead of being bound by your actions—because of the way one action always leads to another in an endless process governed by the law of cause and

effect—instead of that, by making your actions an offering to truth, your inner being will gradually lighten and expand to recognize and eventually be absorbed in the Supreme Reality.

This phase of the teaching is sometimes called Karma Yoga, or the Yoga of Action. The main point is to learn how to act in such a way that our actions no longer bind us in the law of cause and effect, but help to purify and liberate our inner world and thus fit us for devotion and meditation.

If we are acting because of the result we hope to gain, then that is what we will get. On the other hand, if we act with the feeling, 'This is my offering to truth, and truth is what matters', the results are not binding but liberating. In this way, Karma Yoga leads to the higher knowledge, and to the practices based on that knowledge. At the same time, our deepening knowledge of the reality within and around us, allows us to get better at the practice of turning our actions into offerings. And so the practices based on action, devotion and knowledge support and compound each other throughout the spiritual training, up to the point of final liberation, at which point, the teachings tell us, all talk of space, time, action, reaction, knowledge and knowing, has been left behind.

Adhyatma Yoga is characterized by this understanding of how action, devotion and knowledge are balanced and unified in our spiritual explorations. We see the same principles at work in the practical side of other traditions. One of the most approachable of the Christian mystics, Brother Lawrence, taught this:

That practice which is alike the most holy, the most general, and the most needful in the spiritual life is the practice of the presence of God... We give ourselves a world of trouble and pursue a multitude of practices to attain to a sense of the presence of God. And yet it is so simple. How much shorter it is and easier, to do our common business purely for the love of God, to set His consecrating mark on all we lay our hands to, and thereby to foster the sense of his abiding presence by communion of our heart with his.

So we have heard that the best kind of life is one of progress to enlightenment. From the start we understand that this means a life in which we seek and cultivate an inner joy that depends on nothing

else. The first step is to establish some order and stability in our inner life. This begins with the practice of dharma, which means a love of truth above any form of falsehood, and a wish to avoid causing any harm and to promote the good of all, based on a dawning sense of the unity in all. The will to cultivate dharma leads to the beginning of conscious spiritual practice, when we understand that our actions are in fact our offerings to the higher truth-reality, and that as we sow, so shall we surely reap. Living in this spirit, we begin to discover that our inner awareness is not bound to the causal laws that apply to the physical aspect of our being, and here we find the opening of a way to complete inner freedom from all limitations. This growing sense that our inner consciousness is relatively free, and has the potential for absolute freedom, is the basis of spiritual meditation and contemplation. So let us turn to that.

Though the words meditation and contemplation are sometimes used interchangeably, our interest is in all those ways in which we first learn to concentrate our attention in a particular direction, and then sustain an inner focus through which we become conscious of what lies in the heights and depths of consciousness itself. We can usefully distinguish between two stages of meditation and contemplation; one in which our own mental faculties are active and take centre stage, and a second in which more universal powers are in the ascendant.

In the early stage we are concerned with actively using our inner instruments—our attention, understanding, imagination and will. At the time of meditation we apply them to a spiritual symbol or thought. It could be the thought: ‘I am not just a body, not just a mind. My inner Self is pure consciousness and love, at one with all Love-consciousness’. We use the understanding to gather all the words into one vision, and our imagination to give the idea substance and life; the imagination creates tangible images of light, unity, transparency, boundlessness. And we employ our will to keep the attention, our inner eyes, focused on this vision, to the exclusion of contradictions.

Another form of meditation, one widely practised in many traditions, is to take an episode from the life of a great teacher or

incarnation of truth, and to dwell upon it, again using the imagination under the control of the will, to bring the idea to life, always with the sense that they embody or symbolize the Reality beyond the limited form.

For a long time, usually, we have to sustain such practices by actively using our mental powers to overcome the obstacles. Through distraction, sleepiness, absent-mindedness and innumerable mental associations, the focus slips away, and we have to re-establish it by engaging once again the understanding, imagination and the will. At one point the pupil in the *Bhagavad Gita* exclaims:

O Lord, the mind is fickle, turbulent, forceful and obstinate. Truly, I believe that it is as difficult to control as the wind.

The teacher replies:

Indeed it is not easy to restrain the mind, yet it can be done, by constant practice and detachment. [6:34-5]

The secret of success, then, is two-fold: one, keep going, and secondly, detachment. Detachment is often understood as indifference to the world. But the essential quality needed is a certain detachment from the mind itself. Now we find that what looked like a difficulty is in fact a revelation waiting to be recognized as such. The very experience of finding out how hard it is to do as we wish with the mind, will bring home to us how true it is that this mind is not all that we are, nor is it the best within us. If we cannot even control it in simple ways, how can this mind be our true Self, the ground of our being? This insight is what is meant by a growing detachment from the mind. With practice, and as this insight deepens, the movements of the mind gradually diminish—at least in their power and significance. Then what remains is a deepening recognition of an inner reality and consciousness that is completely unaffected by the imperfections of the mind, like the sun shining in splendour above the shifting clouds. As this awareness stabilizes, our meditations are maturing into sustained contemplation.

In mature meditation, our individual mental faculties cease to be the main agents. Speaking rather loosely, it may be said that the warm light of that inner sun is now the main force of attraction

drawing the focused gaze of contemplation towards itself. For a good while, the mental faculties have a significant secondary role to play in maintaining stability; but they are now like the mechanisms within an optical instrument: they provide for it to be adjusted, but they are not the great lense at the heart of that instrument, nor are they the light that shines through it.

Hari Prasad Shastri sometimes expressed the teachings in poetic form. Perhaps if we still and open our hearts, we might appreciate something of what he is conveying to us in one of his poems:

Being love, I was looking for beauty to surrender myself to her.
In the world of sense-experience, I found her not,
But a waft of her fragrance intoxicated my heart.
Like a lunatic I searched the hills and valleys of the mind,
Running after the bubbles of pleasure and power.
They proved to be slave-drivers, and I desired freedom.
Venus told me of her real abode and that she lived
In the palace of light and Self-contemplation.
It was guarded by time-space; causality was the ever-closed gate there.
'Make thyself invisible' said Mercury. 'How?' I asked.
'Put on the robe of detachment' came the reply.
At great cost I did so, and armed with Self-contemplation,
Leapt over the walls and landed in the garden of liberation.
I floated on the ocean of universality.
My karma exhausted, I was no longer I;
The search for beauty was over.
I was Beauty.

It was said that in this life of progress to enlightenment we seek and cultivate an inner joy that depends on nothing external for its continuation. At first we were drawn along by a sense of incompleteness that prompted us to look beyond the surface of appearances and temporary satisfactions. Now, with the guidance of the traditional teachings, we have gained a more positive awareness of what is the way and the goal.

Meditation and contemplation reveal an inner light which is lit by no other light. In this light the division between what is experienced and the one who experiences does not exist. In this wholeness there is

a subtle but inexhaustible beauty and joy which depends on nothing outside itself. And once found it can never be lost. As a bird in flight can never exceed the sky, no matter how far or high it flies, so our inner being can never be separated from its own light. This light has been illumining all our experience since the very beginning, but its presence and significance eluded us while we were entirely absorbed in the stream of mental activity. St Augustine observed:

People wander abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by...

Meditation and contemplation correct this oversight. They create nothing new, but reveal an inviolable, self-luminous light and beauty in our own hearts. It is now that our own mental powers assume a subordinate role in the spiritual life and we increasingly draw upon the revelations of this light and the attraction of this beauty.

On the way there is work to be done and much care to be taken. The heightened sensitivity and sense of inner freedom may expose us to distractions from the spiritual ideal. So long as there is any desire to appear wonderful in the eyes of others, we can be sure that we are far from that perfect freedom which will rob death and all limitations of their sting. So long as such a desire exists, it shows that our ego is real and important in our own eyes, but in a few years our ego must inevitably go the way of all flesh. Undue heaviness and seriousness are symptoms of the same root. Now we have a great new source of help to adjust them. We have been seeking a joy that cannot be lost, and we have found one that is available whenever we consciously turn towards it. The task now is to cultivate our sensitivity to it and follow that light and beauty to its ultimate source, and be free forever. In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* we read:

When the seeker is absorbed in this concentration, he sees in his own Self, like a light, the true nature of the Highest, who is eternal and free from all modifications. Then he goes beyond the effects of ignorance, and having known the Supreme as his Self, is released from all bonds.

Yoga Practice in the Bhagavad Gita

THE GITA, dear to Hindus, is a universal scripture, representing a body of teaching which is at root impersonal and philosophical. It is an outpouring of divine wisdom, expressed through the Lord (Bhagavan) in the form of Krishna. But if there is a hero the Gita focuses on, that hero is ultimately you—its reader! For the Gita is directing our attention to the real you or I. Its main message at the beginning, middle and end is the divinity of the real man—the Krishna abiding in you.

As soon as we speak of the divinity of the real man, a difficulty arises. Our conduct as human beings often suggests strongly that we are not divine at all, but all too human. Some years ago, a cartoon appeared showing a medieval king—and kings were God's anointed ones—looking bleary-eyed and dishevelled, murmuring: 'If I'm so divine, how come I get hangovers?' Affirming our divinity can easily turn us into 'walking contradictions'.

The Gita leads us to view ourselves at a deeper level, where there is no contradiction, and shows us how to do this. It reminds us that there are parts of our nature that come and go, but our reality is not in anything that is transient or passing. In this category is our physical body, which, the Gita says, is like the clothes that we wear and eventually have to shed. Our mental life, too, is a stream of transient and fast-moving events—thoughts, feelings and reactions. There is nothing divine about these appearances, which come and go.

Underlying all this change, there is a changeless core of being, and it is this that the Gita identifies as the divinity of man. More than this, it is not that we all possess or enclose a personal or individualized changeless core of being, that differs in quality and magnitude from one person to another. There is no distribution or splitting up of pure being into individuals. It is one in all, and it is this universal pure being that the Gita identifies as our true Self.

Even the being of God, the Absolute, is not set apart from the being of man. This would limit both. There is one pure being

underlying the whole universe and it is one without a second. No wonder a humorous poet has written:

It isn't easy as apple pie
To get an answer to 'Who am I?'
I asked myself, a voice replied,
'That information's classified.'

The Gita, as it were, throws open the file marked 'I' and tells us we are essentially not separate from the supreme. In the beginning of chapter two, the teachings signify complete equality in spirit between Krishna, as God or teacher, and his disciple, Arjuna. He says: 'Never did I not exist, nor you, nor any of these people, and none of us will afterwards cease to exist.' In other words, our spirit or true Self is beyond time. Timelessness implies transcendence of the limits of space. And in a verse or two later, we are told the Self is 'all-pervading'—it is here, there and everywhere. This is the primary message of the Gita and it tells us how to awaken to it.

Religions generally, and those 'experts' who interpret scriptural texts, would probably say that this sort of doctrine is something we might believe in and hope for, but fulfilment and verification is bound to be deferred until the after-life. But this is far from the utility, purpose and approach of the Gita. It says that we can awaken to the highest truth in this life. What hides this great revelation from our experience is not some cosmic blindfold or original sin. It is the prevailing conditions in our own mind that render us, so to say, spiritually ignorant. Those conditions can be transformed completely, to make us spiritually enlightened. For our mind, with its thoughts and feelings, is like a store of raw materials that can be converted into inner illumination, where the light we identify with is not different from the supreme light, the light of lights.

If the first great theme of the Gita is the divinity of the true man or woman, the second and complementary theme is the nature of the human mind and how it may be transformed. The yoga principle is that the mind not only thinks, but has the power to choose what to think. At first it seems difficult, even impossible, to influence the mind in any sure way. It is like a restless sea. If an artist wants to

paint even a small section of the sea, he has a major challenge. Each wave moves and curls differently, each reflected spot of sunlight explodes into a different form, and this happens second by second. The mind, too, shares this rapid mutability. But just as Jesus said to the waves: 'Be still', and they were still, in the mind itself there is a deeper principle of authority which can influence, calm and illumine this inner world of thoughts and feelings. This higher principle is associated with our will and intellect, and is often called 'the higher mind'. It is not really set apart from the restless, wavering phase of our mental life, but actually pervades it. Even in our ordinary movements in life, this higher mind is at play all the time and knows the vagaries of what might be styled 'the lower mind'—though we do not always follow its promptings.

An example is what happens when we have to get out of bed on a dark morning. No doubt some spring out of their beds with a feeling of joy and refreshment. But many of us feel we deserve a few more minutes, and adjust the alarm accordingly. There is clearly an inner conflict, as one part of us says: 'You must get up and go to work,' and the other part resists, with 'It's so warm and comfy, and I do need a rest.' We can see this kind of contest between the higher and lower mind having its play in our life at every moment of the day.

Another example, more far-reaching, is furnished by an event that occurred in 1990. At that time, we were troubled by 'the Lebanese hostage crisis'. One of the hostages, Brian Keenan, after four and a half years of captivity, was released and interviewed. He was asked if he sought revenge. He said that revenge would be 'self-maiming and I do not intend maiming myself by going into a rage of anger.' Before that, he gave a useful analogy.

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

He is not really talking about hands but about thoughts—states of mind, and it is an endorsement of the principle that the mind not only thinks but has the power to choose what to think. This principle is at the heart of all the instructions given in the Gita about dealing with the mind. The Gita sows in us spiritually dynamic thoughts—thoughts about our own deeper nature, and about the great reality behind the universe, the source of its beauty, order, punctuality and its evolution.

So far this account of the mind accords with the principles of secular humanism and of common sense. It has nothing much to do with the eternal values of the transcendent. But the crucial teaching of yoga, and one which actually opens the way for us to spiritual illumination, is that this higher part of the mind has a spiritual element in it, and this, ultimately, is non-separate from that divine Self we talked about at the beginning.

This spiritual element is sometimes called the reflection of consciousness, sometimes the image of God reflected and present in the human mind. The presence of this reflection of consciousness creates the attraction of inwardness—of turning within—for our spiritual source is not only consciousness, but bliss. It also makes possible such inward states of mind as one-pointed concentration on a symbol of truth conceived as present within the heart or mind, so that these visualizations and meditations are infused with delight. For unless our mind finds something supremely attractive, it would never wean itself from the pull of the multiple attractions that surround us.

If we want to transform our mind into inner illumination, peace, power and certainty, our higher mind has to learn to work in partnership and communion with the spiritual element at its peak. Yoga means union, and in one sense yoga means this partnership of our mind with the spiritual power within us. This turns our mind into a clear channel through which the spiritual light can flow and influence even the lower mind, so that we 'make our vision the vision of illumination and see the world as an expression of the divine'.

The Gita tells us our reality is this spiritual element. It is as if the divine, in the form of a spark or ray, covered itself with our human faculties, and entered this human experience. But this entry and

apparent bondage to human experience has never really taken place, and the divine in us has never really lost its perfection.

So we have an ultimate choice in what to think, and in what we should make the main quest of our mind. We can work to forge a partnership between our higher mind and the spiritual element within us, making this higher culture and its goal the thing we really want, or we can trust the lesser, transient goals the world offers us. It is the choice between the ordinary and what is truly great within us.

From the Gita's perspective, the divine life begins when we attempt to control and guide our minds on spiritual lines. Our ordinary life is meant to be the gateway, the background setting, to our entry into the higher life of spiritual unfoldment. Our ordinary work is meant in some ways to be a preparation for this higher work of partnership (yoga) with the divine.

This spiritual priority is eloquently hinted at in a chapter of Solzhenitsyn's book, *Cancer Ward*. It concerns an old doctor, nearing retirement, who had become deeply reflective, and had drawn his own conclusions as to what life is really about.

He had to take frequent rests nowadays. His body demanded this chance to recoup its strength, and with the same urgency his inner self demanded silent contemplation, free of external sounds, conversations, thoughts of work, free of everything that made him a doctor... His inner consciousness seemed to crave a pure transparency. It was just this sort of silent immobility, without planned or even floating thoughts, which gave him a sense of purity and fulfilment.

At such moments an image of the whole meaning of existence... of everyone in the world, was conjured up in his mind. At these times he did not see it as embodied in the work or activity which had occupied these people, which they believed was central to their lives, and by which they were known to others. The meaning of existence was to preserve untarnished, undisturbed and undistorted the image of eternity which each person is born with—as far as is possible.

Like a silver moon in a calm, still pond.

A.H.C.

The Life of Harmony

From a lecture given by Hari Prasad Shastri on November 13th 1955

O Lord, take away from our thoughts all the obstacles to a life of virtue, goodness, meditation and spiritual quest, and grant the facilities which make our mind pious, devoted, truth-loving and selflessly devoted to the good of all. OM

I offer a few remarks on the practical side of Yoga, which is based on altruism—on the good of all. Man lives in three worlds. There is the world of his individuality: of his likes and dislikes, his attention and want of attention, his volition and his ambition. He lives in his own individuality.

But this is not all. Man also lives in the sphere of society. If a man does not care for society, and begins only to live for himself, then he will be destroyed by nature in a very short time. Society is organic; it is not something artificially created, and therefore man's individuality in relation to society is also organic. You cannot ignore society; you cannot divorce yourself from society. Perhaps some of you have heard the Greek saying, that a man who wants to live alone is either less than a man or he is almost like a god. A man who is wrapped up in his own intentions, in his own happiness and joys and does not care for society from which he derives a million advantages—such a man cannot prosper; it is against the law of nature.

Morality means social behaviour. Without good social behaviour, man is little better than a beast or a brute. Some try to cheat society by posing to be learned when we know nothing; by posing to be holy when our heart is choked by the bristling follies of ignorance. But that does not last long, and secondly, this state of affairs does not give real peace and real stillness to the heart of man. Therefore man lives for himself to a certain extent, and he also lives for society as an integral part of the social organism.

Here Rousseau, Karl Marx and many other social thinkers of Europe stop. To them there is nothing further than society. But we

must not overlook the infinite ambitions which arise in the heart of a man to keep him in tune with the Infinite.

In the yogic plan, man must live as an autonomous being in himself; as an integral part of society, to benefit society, to promote peace and honour in society, and by precept and by example to be a good citizen in society in general.

The Yoga postulates one more sphere in which man lives. This sphere is denied by those European thinkers who worship society as God. The third sphere, in common unscientific language, may be called the Cosmos, and in the yogic language it is called the Spirit.

'Cosmos' is a Greek word which is opposed to 'chaos'. Cosmos is an ordered universe, because it is governed by law. Whether a man be a theist, a deist or an atheist, it does not matter. He has to recognize that the universe is governed by law. Science means discovery of the Laws of Nature and their application for the good of human society. Then this Cosmos, as we call it, is the basis of human society, of human mind, of the human individuality, and this Cosmos in the yogic language is called God.

Then man has three spheres to live in. He lives in the Spirit; he lives in society and he lives in his own individuality. If there is a concord between the three; if there is harmony between the three; if there is scientific recognition of the real relationship of one with the other two and *vice-versa*, then man is said to live well. If there is no harmony between man and society, between society and the Spirit or God, then man lives in discord, and then arise wars, revolutions, natural disasters, like earthquakes and so forth. Why? When our body is not suitably harmonized with the laws of Nature, it becomes ill. Illness is a reminder of the fact that man is out of tune with the laws of Nature and the other higher laws, which are supernatural. That is the meaning of illness. From this point of view, illness is welcome, because we know then that there is something wrong. That which is wrong should be remedied, not only by material means, but also by moral, psychological, yogic and spiritual means: and if this is done, everything goes very well.

Yoga means education by means of which we learn to live in harmony with our own being, with the social being and with the

Spirit or the Cosmic Being. Anything we do in life has a threefold application. We are quite wrong if we think that whatever we do is: 'Oh, only for myself! What does it matter? Nothing.' Every thought that you think has repercussions in the highest sphere of the world; every desire you conceive, every thought that you have, produces repercussions in the Milky Way—because man is so constituted, and so does he live, that there is no such thing as individuality in his case.

The right way is universal harmony, universal peace, universal law and order, according to which man must live. And then alone there will be no war, and then we will have what is described by Shri Valmiki as 'Rama Raj', the government or rule of Rama, or the rule of God.

An artist makes thousands of models before he finally produces one as the object he desires. Only God knows how many models Leonardo Da Vinci made of the 'Madonna of the Rocks' before he gave the conception on canvas. In the same way, a man forms so many models, but he will never reduce his conception into the social realm, the individual realm, and the cosmic and spiritual realm, unless he recognizes that each individual is connected with the others by a million ties, by society, by God and by all the spheres.

William James, speaking of this truth, says that he saw that a boy took a stone, threw it at a sparrow and the sparrow fell dead. He says: 'What has happened? A sparrow has died, that's all; and the boy goes scot-free. What does it matter if the sparrow has died? There is no court of law in which the husband or the children of the sparrow can sue the boy for having killed their mate and companion.'

In Yoga, every life is considered as sanctified. Sanctity of life is to be universally recognized if there is to be no war and if there is to be prosperity. Confucius has said: 'No man can be a soldier unless he has studied philosophy for twelve years!' And it is very true. When a man has studied philosophy for twelve years, then he will understand that it is entirely wrong to kill a human being under any pretence, or to think of any human being as an enemy.

Yoga teaches us the ways and the means by which man may live as a king in himself, as a god out of himself, as a super god in the Cosmos. This is also a Chinese Taoist conception, which I think

represents the truth. In his own self, each and every man ought to live as a king—independent. Independence does not mean licence. Hegel has said very well, that to be independent means to be master of yourself. A man who is not master of himself is not independent. The first duty of a man is to be independent; that is to be a king. Outwardly let him be a god. What is the meaning of: ‘Let him be a god?’ Let him be convinced of the fact that by millions of ties he is inter-related with every being in the world and every being in the other spheres also.

Therefore, in the Yoga it is emphasized: don’t be an individualist only. Be autonomous, but don’t be an individualist. Don’t be a socialist, because human society is not all; there is a higher society also. Don’t be a socialist, but be a deist or a god. ‘Being a god’ means that you establish your identity with the whole Cosmic Spirit and Being, and when you live like that, all is well and you have fulfilled the purpose of life and found the meaning of life.

This has a practical application to the science of meditation. In meditation we forget our individuality. The first thing in meditation is to forget: ‘My name, my caste, my nationality, my creed,’ because they exist in a very low stratum of the mind. And then, forgetting them, to transcend them; and by transcending them, to throw the highest part of the mind into contact with the Cosmic Mind.

To geometrize the same teaching, it may be said that each and every man is a concentric being. His mind has a centre; his body has a centre; his soul has a centre, and all these centres are concentric. In this sense, he is related to each and every being in the world, because the real centre of all beings is the Spirit or God. I think it is Emerson who has said: ‘God is a circle, whose circumference is everywhere, but whose centre is nowhere particularly.’

We teach meditation, because meditation is to be done by a purified mind. A mind which is choked with the worldly desires is not fit to meditate; just as you cannot create a fire by burning the pieces of wood that are not perfectly dry. And so you dry your mind, that is, all the wetness of *meum* and *tuum* is subtracted from the mind by study, by benevolence and by practising silence every day.

When you have done that, then a ray which is concealed in your

mind reveals itself in your soul. Who knows the mysteries of the mind? Psychology is in its infancy, and no science is so vague and so incomplete as the science of modern psychology. The yogic psychology is based on universal laws. It is fixed and its conception is very well defined.

In silence, in thinking of the good of others, in studying the harmony, law and peace which govern the whole universe, a man sits quiet and he meditates. ‘He meditates’ means he connects his individual mind with the cosmic, organic mind of God. Man’s mind is a tiny bit of God’s mind, and when this tiny bit is in touch with the Cosmic Mind, a new ray of light arises in the mind, and under the light of that ray man sees his Self as it is.

Each and every action of ours, each and every word we speak, each and every thought that we think, has its relationship with the whole universe, not in one but in millions of ties and in millions of forms. Lord Kelvin, the great scientist, lecturing to his class, took a pencil of chalk, threw it on the ground, and he said to his students: ‘My boys, by this act I have disturbed the whole course of the universe, up to New Zealand, nay, even up to the Milky-Way.’ Man is not only individual or social; he is fundamentally and ultimately Cosmic, for his reality is Brahman (the Absolute).

Yogic living means to live consciously as a universal being. All ideas of nationality, of creed, of any ‘ism’—even rheumatism!—are not of any special consequence. What is of real consequence is that God and man are One. Just as a bubble in its fundamental aspect is ever united with the infinite sea, so the human mind is ever united with the Cosmic Mind. Says Vidyaranya Swami in *Panchadashi*: ‘Millions of universes, by the action of the wind of Maya, constantly rise and fall in the great Spirit called God.’

Now this is the truth, friends. This is the spiritual truth and this is the fundamental truth. You can imagine that this leads to peace, great peace, a peace which has no parallel.

If a few yogic souls can be created in the universe, each living in autonomy with himself, as gods in society, and as super gods of the whole Cosmos; a few yogic souls—then the face of society will be changed in no time.

Let those who want to change the environment do it, we have no quarrel with them. But what we say is, let there be a few God-conscious people in society. You be one! Why depend on any? Each and every one of you is potentially God. Try to realize this potential. People become soldiers and they die; people die for different causes in the world. How many people died for the madness of Hitler in Germany? If you die for the sake of God, what a glorious death it is. It is a death which even Shiva and Brahma also will envy, and when you have done that, then your thoughts will revolutionize society. Peace will prevail.

Therefore, we have been trying here to create this spirit. Shri Krishna says in the Gita: 'O Arjuna, I have no duty; I have no task to perform in the world, yet I am active all the time.' Why? To set an example of virtuous living to the people in general. It is not by hypocritical speeches that you can create a better society. The whole secret of the life of Gandhiji was that he was a most sincere man, that's all. He was neither a learned man, nor a scholarly man, but a most sincere man. In the same way, I make a special appeal to you, my friends. Don't try to create a new environment. Try to rouse up the Spirit of God in your own heart.

When the sun rises in the East, the glaciers fling aside their quilts and they begin to trickle down into tiny streamlets. Then the cobra lifts his head and salutes the sun; the birds come out of their nests and begin to sing songs; the wind also is in a state of gentle modulation and covers the earth with breezes; flowers open their buds into blossoms. Why? Because the sun has risen—the sun has risen.

Rouse up the Spirit of God in you. Rouse it up by meditation, by living harmoniously on the three planes of existence of which I have just told you; and then you will create peace in society, you will create reverence for law and order, and you will give a practical impetus to the doctrine that each and every life is sacred.

Shri Krishna used to play the flute, and it is by his flute that he controls the hearts of the Gopis (the cowherd maidens), the hearts of his cows, the hearts of the birds and also the waves of the River Yamuna. All are controlled by the beautiful notes which issue by the pressure of his breath on the bamboo reed, called his banshi or flute.

Once upon a time, one of the Gopis said: 'We love the Lord so much, but he is not attentive to us at all. What has this little piece of reed or bamboo done that she is always dangling on his sacred heart? She always kisses his lips. How we envy it! We have performed austerities; we have performed so many devotions, but it is only casually that he casts a glance at us, yet this Divine Child is in love with the flute. He never leaves it, even for a short time!'

Another Gopi said: 'Yes, your complaint is very true. Let us ask the flute what is the secret of it!' They asked the flute, and the flute said, laughingly: 'You see, look at me! I have removed all obstructions from my nature; I am hollow from one end to the other, and the divine breath of Krishna, when applied to the mouth, goes right through the seven holes and produces great music! You too, O Gopis, if you make your heart vacant of all selfish desires, of all narrow interests, of all individual and social considerations, and you live entirely in Him, for Him and with Him, will become so God-conscious that your own individuality is merged in the consciousness of God. Then you too will dangle on His breast for ever. You too will touch His lips for ever.'

The great doctrine of the Yoga is that God, Who is the Master and Creator of the Universe, is the dear servant of those who are really devoted to Him. Real love and real devotion is the magnet which attracts the Highest to the door of His devotees.

H.P.S.

A TEXT FOR MEDITATION

OM. THE UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS IS IN ME

AND I AM THAT.

PEACE AND LOVE ARE MY ATTRIBUTES. OM

THOUGHTS

The right thought is that which opens a way: the right way is that on which a king advances. The true king is he that is king in himself, and is not made king by treasuries and armies; so that his kingship remains unto everlasting, *From the Masnavi of Jalaluddin Rumi*

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The spring flowers, the autumn moon,
Summer breezes, winter snow.
If useless thoughts do not clutter your mind,
You have the best days of your life. *Zen Master Mumon*

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Whoever dwells among thoughts dwells in the region of delusion and disease, and though he may appear wise and learned, yet his wisdom and learning are as a piece of timber eaten out by white ants. Therefore, though thought should gird you about, remember and forget not to disendow it, as a man takes off his coat when hot, and as a skilful workman lays down his tool when done with; so shall you use thought and lay it quietly aside when it has served your purpose. These things I say not in order to excite thought in you—rather to destroy it—or if excite thought, then to excite that which destroys itself. *From the notebooks of Swami Rama Tirtha*

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Occupy your mind with His thoughts and not with idle fancies. Look at the leaves, the grass, the hills and the sky above; everywhere there is order, harmony and growth. Your personality also must be subject to order, harmony and growth....Your thoughts after a time will return to you with interest, and if you want to be truly dharmic, goodness will assuredly be returned to you. *Shri Dada of Aligarh*

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

The past year has seen three enhancements to Shanti Sadan's range of books, namely, new impressions of *Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita* and *Direct Experience of Reality*; and a new publication, *Understanding That Thou Art*, Hari Prasad Shastri's translation and commentary of the classic, *Vakya Vritti*. Many readers have acquired one or more of these books.

In all, the book list now includes twelve works translated from the original Sanskrit by Dr Shastri, most with his commentaries. These translations are distinguished by the clarity of their style and their focus on how the great teachings of Advaita Vedanta relate practically to our daily life and spiritual endeavours. This applies to all his translations, ranging from the poetical *World Within the Mind*, to the wide-ranging and closely reasoned *Panchadashi*. Our catalogue, as a printed booklet or accessed on the Internet, gives a fuller description of these works.

The meetings at Shanti Sadan on Tuesdays devoted to meditation are enthusiastically attended. Transcripts of these presentations are often included in *Self-Knowledge*, and an audio recording of a recent session may be listened to via our website. Meditation handouts distributed at these meetings are available on request. The Thursday lectures, which also include some meditation, reflect the universality of the essential spiritual teachings, and during the autumn term included talks on *St Paul on Transforming the Mind*, *Spiritual Pointers from Japanese Poetry*, and *Light from Lao Tzu*. The term ended with a lecture based on the *Avadhut Gita* entitled *Solving the Riddle of Life*.

Preparations are in hand for our Spring Term Sunday afternoon course, and details are given below.

Spring 2014 Special Course

Sunday 2 March 2014 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NS

Talk 1 *The Opening to Inner Freedom*

First Meditation Practice

Talk 2 *Using the Mind to Transcend the Mind*

Second Meditation Practice

Talk 3 *Awakening to Self-Knowledge*