

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 SUMMER TERM 2015

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

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

On Thursday evenings at 8pm from 7 May to 25 June there will be a series of talks on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

The Summer afternoon course will be held on Sunday 7 June 2015, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Details are given on the inside back cover.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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SMART IDEAS

Every new social trend has its critics. The latest target is not the smartphone itself, which, wisely used, can be a crucial aid to life-management. The target is smartphone dependency—the addiction to interacting with the screen, and spending more time communing with the screen-mediated world than with its real life counterpart.

Complaints range from a kindly concern that our posture will become stooped, to claims that the obsession with on-line media desensitizes the mind and atrophies faculties like memory and imagination. Why memorize, when the information can be invoked by a few deft motions of the fingertips? Why bother to let our creative imagination soar skywards, when there is so much of interest on the video-sharing sites? The whole trend, as one heavy-hearted columnist opined, makes people ‘selfish and oblivious’.

The tendency of human beings to become fixated on aspects of the outer world, is universal. What changes are the available objects, not the inclination. Indeed, those who rail at the trend may find themselves being ‘obsessed with the obsessed’, so that the very sight of an absorbed

smartphone user sets off uncharitable thoughts.

The cause of such fixations is something far more basic to our human condition. It is the belief that life can only be experienced in a certain way—a way that assumes that joy flows from our communion with objects. Always our inner thirst seeks fulfilment through relating our self, as the ‘subject’, to some thing or person or situation, usually through contacting it by means of one or more of our five senses. Thus, we think of happiness as a partnership, and our partner is the object we commune with, be it a book, a form of work, a worldly scenario or spectacle, or other human beings. If a reactionary government were to ban mobile appliances, other objects would rush to fill the vacuum.

Swami Rama Tirtha has a poem in which he compares this natural tendency of the human mind to commune with objects, to the way we lose ourselves in gazing at a screen. His poem pre-dates the era of film, but he nonetheless shows how our mind has its attention hooked on externals, in a mode of experience which adds little to the quality of our being, and often steals away the precious time and energy at our disposal. Yet ‘one cannot lift the eyes from a sight like this’, as the poem says after each of the scenes it describes.

The enlightened sages offer a different option, which requires us to lift our gaze from all that is objective, and discover the true nature of the subject. They point out to us how the way of the world is based on ‘the uncritical acceptance of duality as it is presented to our view’, while all the time the innermost point of our being, our ‘Self’, transcends the subject-object relationship. It is the ultimate, all-revealing light, the source of bliss, the completeness of knowledge.

Life may furnish us with little time to investigate and reflect on the true nature of our existence, but if we turn our gaze in this direction, we are lifting our precious attention away from screens and illusions, and facing the light of ultimate truth. With this new perspective, our engagement with the world and its wonders will be based on conscious, illumined choice, not addiction. We shall be able to let go instantaneously and joyfully if needed, for our ultimate resource is the peace and wisdom that is the nature of our higher Self.

Being One with the Light

THE MOST important knowledge we gain from the non-dual teachings is that the reality at the core of our being is eternal, self-luminous consciousness. This knowledge is revealed to us together with the practices that will bring it to life, and lead to the direct experience of ultimate Truth.

Our enquiry focuses on the fundamental fact of our being, the deepest self-knowledge possible. Enlightenment is closer to us than our thought processes. It is pure consciousness that reveals, supports and enlivens the mind. In fact, ‘being one with the Light’ means realizing that we *are* that underlying reality and ultimately that there is nothing but this reality, which is self-illuminated absolute consciousness.

The word ‘light’ is a pointer only, for words are in the realm of limitations, and the Absolute is ‘That from which thought and speech turn back, baffled’. An illumined yogi writes:

Since I was united with my real Self, my joy is beyond description.
The mind cannot comprehend it.
O friend, here speech itself becomes silence!

This is because our mind exists in the region of change, and truth transcends change. We are more than the mind and it is our innermost consciousness that illumines our mental world, but itself is changeless, infinite, immortal and the source of all. This consciousness, which is our innermost Self, is all-pervading. Our human nature hides, as it were, the infinity and perfection of our true nature. We are here in this world to realize our true identity.

Therefore in essence our nature does not have to be improved, matured, perfected, purified or illumined, because, fundamentally, we are already perfect, pure, free, enlightened—liberated. The region of our being that does require adjustment and transformation is our mind, so that it becomes the means of realizing our ultimate nature.

In ordinary experience, the mind is restless and ever-changing, tied to the material world and giving no hint of deeper powers and hidden treasures. But there is a higher faculty latent in the mind, the eye of

wisdom, which can be awakened. This is our intuitive capacity which, when developed, transforms the mind. It then becomes a revealer of our true nature, a way to harmony, peace and fulfilment. This is the role of the spiritual Yoga—to remind us of the higher potentialities of our mind and to give us ways and means by which we can realize the freedom and glory of our real Self.

Imagine it is early evening and you are enjoying a walk in the woods. It is so beautiful that you just walk on, unconscious of the time. Suddenly it gets dark. Very soon you find yourself wondering which direction to turn in order to get back. Now the pleasant feeling is eclipsed by apprehension. Everything seems to have changed. The rustling of the leaves, which was music before, harbours threats of ambush; the boughs of the trees creak and sway with sinister purpose. All we want now is to get out of the wood. We long for light, even a spot of light to help us find our way.

In this situation, light is not just something that colours and beautifies. It leads us out of fear, danger and uncertainty, into relief, security and knowledge. Has anything really changed in the wood? Have the trees moved? No. So what has happened? Suddenly there was no light and our imagination calls up a whole new set of associations. Fearsome ideas that have lodged in our mind from the past now invade our thoughts. In this sense, the state of our mind is more significant than the outer situation in determining our bondage or freedom, our ease of heart or distress. And this is why the yogic training focuses on the mind. It helps to dispel false imaginings, to make an inner clearing, and to connect with the region of light, peace and fearlessness that ever abides at the core of our being.

Sometimes we may feel as if our mind, or even life itself, has led us into a dark wood, where we cannot see how—or if—relief or deliverance will come. We yearn for a ray of hope. The ultimate solution to this mental predicament is not through depending on outer help but on learning how to elicit our spiritual resources, the great potentialities in us all for transforming our inner life. There is a path to absolute freedom and peace. It comes to light when we learn to calm the waves of thought and find rest and bliss in the depths of our own being.

The light of Yoga is the light of an illumined understanding. Such an

understanding dissolves the inner clouds. It leads to the peak of experience, so that we know that our reality is the source of light, and all else is illusion—an illusion sustained by our thoughts alone and which never had real sway over our higher being. The whole remedy to dispel the inner gloom and doom is to release the light within us, the ultimate light, and to realize that this is the true nature of the self.

There is a meditation text which affirms:

OM THE SUN OF TRUTH DISPELS THE FOG OF ILLUSION.
LO! IT IS PEACE EVERYWHERE. ALL IS BLISS. OM.

We may say: ‘No, no—there is too much gloom and tragedy everywhere.’ But does it help to stress the negative? Joy and progress are possible for everyone through meditation and conscious, purposeful spiritual living, and its effects will feed through into the outer life. If we want to help ourselves and others, it is far better to be positive, hopeful, cheerful and encouraging. It is our thinking that confines us or frees us. At any time, our thinking can be given a new direction that will help to pacify our heart and disclose the eternal wisdom reigning supreme at the core of our being. This is the result of pursuing the deeper self-knowledge.

We live our lives under the light of the sun. This is the light we see outside ourselves. But there is a fundamental light that is not external to our being. When we go to sleep and dream, it is not the sun that lights our world, supplying the daylight of our dream. Man lives by an inner light. This light makes experience of any kind, inner or outer, possible. This light is the greatest fact about us. Everything else is secondary. To know the nature of this light—the light of our being—and to be one with it, will establish us in the reality of our true nature, and bring final fulfilment.

Do we need to create this light? Sometimes the advice given to us is: ‘Kindle the light of truth in your own soul. Create light within.’ What this really means is that we need to awaken that great faculty in our mind that will allow the light that is *already there* to shine through. The spiritual yoga is about making our mind receptive to the inner light. In a way, this receptivity is already happening, for our interest in these ideas is a sign that we have a feeling or conviction that there is

something more to life than the play of appearances.

The source of our being is infinite light and it is independent of the condition of our body and mind. Physical blindness relates to the outer world only. The eyes may not see, but the inner being may be privileged to have experience that is far superior than the transient pictures brought to our retina by the sense of sight. The poet Milton, who lost his sight in the prime of life, left immortal lines based on his inner radiance and inspiration. He tells how he missed the outer beauty, the sight of flocks and herds, fields and flowers, and what he calls the 'human face divine'. But he rose above this deprivation, and writes:

So much the rather—Thou—Celestial Light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate. There plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

Let us consider this ultimate light in another way. We are all blessed with two things: knowledge and a desire to know more. However much knowledge we accumulate, there is in the human heart a desire to know more. Why? Because there are certain great questions which we have not resolved—which we do not know how to answer conclusively. For example, 'What is this world?' 'Why are we here?' In some ways this world is our home. In other ways, and we know it well, it is just a stopping-place. In the words of the Buddhist sage, Kobo Daishi, 'What benefit in writing and reading, finally to die?' We do not like these areas of ignorance that overshadow our life like mountain peaks darkening a valley. We want to remove these limitations to our knowledge and have a clear understanding. But we do not know how to proceed. And so we take refuge in transient things and try to push behind us the deeper issues regarding the purpose of life.

But this desire to know—to know perfectly and be fulfilled in knowledge—is the real 'me'. It is the essential 'I am' impatient, so to say, with the press of limitations, and knowing, at the deepest core of our being, 'I am free and must realize my freedom in direct experience of reality.' This element in us is the supreme light. It is there, but needs a condition of mind in which it will shine through clearly. Then we will

get guidance and a sense of direction. We will advance on the path to the real knowledge that has no limits and gives fulfilment and completeness. This is why we have to cultivate inner peace and the feeling of goodwill to all—to comprehend that there is one divine life and light animating all.

In one of his writings, the Sufi master, Al-Ghazali, gives the following illustration. A man is resting on his bed at night. He notices a bright patch of light on the floor. He sees it is reflected from a mirror. The mirror in turn has caught the moonlight shining through the window. And the moon has borrowed its light from the sun, which cannot be directly seen, but is the ultimate illuminator of the whole scene.

In the same way, underlying all our experience, sensory, mental, intellectual, artistic or religious, is the one fundamental light. Everything depends on it, and it is greater than all its expressions. It is in fact the divine light, uncreated, eternal, self-luminous.

What is the way forward so that we may realize that we are ever one with the supreme light? We need to remember that the wisdom of enlightenment is to be discovered in our own being. We need to be willing to turn our gaze from the borrowed light of the sense world and make experiments in tranquillizing our mind.

The sun's rays, scattered in all directions, lack the power to ignite a flame. But when those rays are focused through a specially constructed glass, the heat-energy is concentrated and a fire is kindled. Similarly, the experience we have through our mind and senses when our attention is scattered, does not awaken our highest potential—an illumined understanding. But focus the thoughts on some idea related to our divine nature and we will find that our concentration becomes creative. What it creates is an opening in the mind-screen, as it were, allowing us to become increasingly aware of the great reality that lies beyond the mind.

This process and progression will endow our life with the highest meaning and purpose, and we will be led to the realization that the light of our consciousness in its fully revealed nature is the light of ultimate reality, universal and non-dual. All of us have this potentiality hidden in the highest part of the mind. When awakened, it will serve as an inner

light leading us to the freedom of enlightenment. Then our experience will be in harmony with the high statements made by those who affirm the supreme truth, like that of Christ, who said: 'Ye are the light of the world', and we will realize what our meditations are pointing to when we affirm:

OM THE SUN IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.
I AM THE LIGHT OF THE SUN. OM

There is a story which indicates the completeness and eternal validity of an illumined understanding. An aged disciple was dying. The teacher came. He said: 'Shall I lead you on?' The disciple replied: 'I came here alone and I go alone. What help could you be to me?' The teacher answered: 'If you think you really come and go, that is your delusion. Let me show you the path on which there is no coming and no going.' The disciple smiled and passed away.

The same teaching is transmitted to us in the text for meditation:

OM I AM HE WHOSE DWELLING IS THE INNERMOST HEART OF ALL. I AM THAT PERFECT CONSCIOUSNESS WHICH KNOWS NO COMING OR GOING. OM

B.D.

A VERSE FROM PANCHADASHI

Through the many months, years, ages and world cycles, past and future, consciousness is the same and self-revealed. It persists and, unlike the sun, neither rises nor sets. This ever-abiding consciousness is the Self.

It is the objects of consciousness which come and go. The substratum of perception—consciousness—is eternal.

From H P Shastri's translation of this Vedanta classic.

TEACHINGS OF SHRI DADA OF ALIGARH

The mind not only thinks, but it has the power to choose what to think. Let it decide to think what is good, what is beneficial to all, not what is at the time alluring but ultimately leads to suffering. I do not let my mind think what it likes. I keep it busy with thoughts of God, yoga and benevolence.

Open the *Bhagavad-Gita* at random and choose a sentence. Keep it before your mind all day. Choose also such a sentence for the week and one for each month. Use them daily—the mind needs change and variety.

The mind has the capacity to know the nature and essence of things; it enquires into the how and why. It can dive into the workings of creation and discover the laws of nature which guide and regulate the universe. It can take celestial flight and finally reach the palace gate of that great and all-seeing Power, at whose footstool every law of nature is dictated. Overwhelmed by the majesty and grandeur of the Supreme Being, it surrenders its vanity at His altar, and loses itself in love divine.

When the mind is thrown into a condition of thoughtlessness, as in meditation, it loses all restlessness and finds peace and calm. There it is lulled and soothed by the breezes of great rest and peace. There it is conscious of its own existence; upon its unruffled surface the whole universe is mirrored. This calm is *sat*, pure existence, and it is also *ananda*, bliss.

Blessed are the virtuous, who have cleansed their hearts of the dirt of ignorance, and victorious are those heroes who have conquered their insatiable and ungovernable mind.

When the mind gains its serenity by the cultivation of good qualities, the mists of its errors and ignorance gradually fade away like clouds before the rising sun. The good qualities, appearing in the sphere of the mind, like stars in the moonlit sky, give rise to the luminary of reason, which shines in it, like the bright sun of the day.

Society of the good is an harbour, affording the restful shade of peace and yielding the fruits of salvation. Thus prepared, the mind becomes devoid of its desires and enmities, and is freed from all its troubles and anxiety; it avoids feelings of grief and joy, pleasure and pain. All its restlessness dies in itself.

Freedom from ignorance (*maya*) means shaking off our bondage to unreal values which separate us from reality. It means that all corporate self-seeking and sensual satisfactions are only the upper layers of life—not the deep stream of the waters of bliss and liberation.

Our stay in this body is temporary and uncertain. We must therefore refrain from harming anybody in thought, word and deed.

Wisdom arises from the depth of our being, when, from the stillness and purity of the heart, the finite contacts the infinite.

Hari Prasad Shastri

A PRAYER

based on the Vedas

We take refuge in Him, who is the substratum of the universe;
Who is the sole cause of all this creation;
Who has himself become the universe;
Who is beyond the effect and its cause, and who is self-evident.

At the destruction of time and the worlds
A darkness profound and inscrutable covered all.
May He—that all-pervasive Reality,
Who was then shedding his undiminished splendour
Beyond that darkness—
May He protect us and all others.

H.P.S.

Faith—Scientific and Spiritual

Referring to the path of inner enquiry that leads to self-realization, the sage Shri Dada of Aligarh once said: ‘The goal is beautiful, and so is the way’. What is beautiful about the way? There are two things in particular. The first is that on the way we increasingly find freedom from fear, or a place within ourselves that is invulnerable to the fears that beset our life in the world. And the second is that on the way we increasingly find goodness and purpose underlying the world in general. Both these, the refuge from fear and the vision of goodness, stem from a common source, which might be called faith, specifically faith in a deeper reality which is unbounded by the limits of the mind and the living organisms with which minds are associated, and faith that this enduring reality is the heart and foundation of our own being.

Faith as it is understood here is something that everyone has; where we differ is in the nature of our faith. We all have an active conviction that something is real. We may be low-key and deliberately reticent about our beliefs, but even if we do not express it, everyone can be made to feel disagreement, outrage, defensiveness, incredulity, and this happens when our sense of what is real is challenged. We can reason about our convictions, but the basic sense of what is real comes in strongly at a pre-rational stage.

Philosophers and psychologists have studied how the senses and the mind are highly complex and that reality as they present it to us, has been much processed and structured before it reaches our conscious awareness. It is not reason that makes us believe that events are arranged in linear time, or that objects exist in three-dimensional space, or that everything has a cause and an effect. These principles have been built into reality as we experience it by the sensory and cognitive processes that occur before the world is presented to our awareness. And so too is the conviction that something is real. We hardly ever have the feeling that we are being presented with an image of the world, made up of innumerable sensory inputs, coordinated by the centres of cognition in the brain, and coloured by our previous experiences and associations, a presentation that could so easily be different.

Interestingly, if we probe a little into what it is that each of us perceives to be real, it is not exactly things in the world, but the underlying substance of which they are made, that we identify as what is real. In general, we have the conviction that what is real is matter, the stuff out of which the physical world is made. The concept of matter is subtle, and has merged with the concept of energy. Actually, the two have always been closely related, because the basic idea of matter is that which is changed by energy, and the basic idea of energy is that which causes changes in matter. Technically now matter is defined as that which has what is called 'rest mass', or 'inertial mass', which simply means it is that which has the tendency to resist the force of energy.

So energy-matter is a flexible concept, but nonetheless we have the conviction that energy-matter is the real substance of which the real world is composed. And in fact we can hardly not have this conviction, because the concept of matter as stuff which fills space and is affected by energy, and the concept of energy as that which causes changes in matter, are both parts of the basic organizing framework which our senses and brains have imposed onto sense data before the image of reality reaches our conscious awareness.

Some of us are led to the view that matter-energy must itself have a source, and so the conception arises of a divinity or metaphysical first cause. For those who have this view, this divinity or metaphysical first cause is worthy of the deepest reverence: in this view, the greatness of the divinity is manifest in the power to bring forth this vast world; and in turn the world is imbued with the majesty and sacredness of its creator.

And so it is here that metaphysical debates arise, with strongly-held and emotionally-charged views on all sides. Among these views are those who see the world as a reality composed of matter-energy, which has been brought into being by a divinity or first cause. And others believe that the whole of reality can be accounted for by matter-energy itself and the laws that describe its properties. That physical laws can account for everything is now a widely-held view. Recently on British public television there was a series of broadcasts on the theme Wonders of the Cosmos, one of which considered whether science can answer the question: 'Why are we here?' This presented the idea of the multi-verse,

as a well-established and widely accepted theory. This is the idea that there exist innumerable universes each with variations of the laws of nature. Further it was proposed that if there are an infinite number of universes, then one just like this one in which we happen to live, has to happen. The view was presented that no deity and no purpose are required; rather the existence of our universe was bound to arise from the laws of physics and the operation of natural selection among chance mutations.

It might be pointed out that it does not logically follow that if there are an infinite number of universes there must be one with life like ours, because there could be an infinite number of universes that do not include life. And the laws of physics cannot by definition include an explanation of where the laws of physics come from. We see that scientific investigation has given us much understanding of how life has evolved, but the question why all this arose instead of nothing is a question that cannot be answered empirically; actually it is not a scientific question.

There will be responses and counter-responses and this debate will go on, and we do not need to get involved in the details. The point we are making is that to hold the view that physics does or may in principle answer all the questions, is not to be lacking in faith, rather it is to have a particular kind of faith. Among those who hold this view, evidently some have a strong faith, in the reality of matter-energy, and in the power of their own intellects, in fact they present an example of strong faith which spiritual aspirants could learn from!

As another example of this kind of faith, a book was published recently by the Emeritus professor of philosophy at New York University. The author argued that minds cannot be entirely reduced to physical processes in the brain. He also considered the question of whether the process of natural selection among chance mutations is alone enough to account for how life has evolved from single-celled organisms to creatures with brains, ears, eyes and minds that can enjoy music and think about the cosmos. He suggests that it is hard to believe that natural selection among chance mutations is the whole truth. The author proposes that to account for the whole of life, it will be necessary to recognize that the fundamental building blocks include not only

matter and energy and natural selection, but also mind and some form of teleology, that is, a form of guiding principle at work in evolution.

The author's claims are modest; he makes clear that he does not believe in a divinity, in fact he is a convinced atheist; and as a non-specialist he is not speculating about how theories should include elements of mind and teleology, he is arguing only that in order to account for everything, future theories may have to include ideas of mind and purpose that cannot be reduced to something material and lacking purpose.

The book is controversial and has been much criticized. Let us simply note that a prominent philosopher has sparked controversy arguing that reality may include elements of mind and purpose which cannot be reduced to something physical and purposeless, which shows how influential and widespread is the idea that everything can be reduced to physical laws and natural selection.

Again, our point is that this demonstrates not a lack of faith, but faith of a particular kind. The view that all of life including mind can be analysed as physical processes and natural selection is not a physical theory about certain natural phenomena, but a metaphysical conviction about reality as a whole, based on a form of faith, a strong faith in the fundamental reality of energy-matter, and the power of our minds to understand everything.

In this controversy there are difficulties for all sides. Those who would account for everything from within matter, are obliged to propose that life has developed from the amoeba to Mozart entirely because of a process of natural selection according to survival value among chance mutations. It is not possible to prove that this view is false, but neither can it be proved to be true and it is clearly a bold claim, one which requires a degree of conviction that goes well beyond current evidence. This view also implies that the mind can be analysed into elements that are not themselves mental. This too is a claim which is not demonstrably false or true and goes much beyond the current empirical knowledge.

So those who would propose that an explanation for everything can and must be found within the laws of physics are obliged to step beyond the laws of physics and into the realm of metaphysics in order to do so,

thus challenging the basis of their own convictions. On the other hand, those who hold that the world of energy-matter must have its origin in a divine or metaphysical first cause are presented with the difficulty of the relation between the physical world and this metaphysical source. If in some way that source is responsible for the origin and sustenance of the world, this implies that it acts within nature, so its actions would appear as natural forces. If they can be accounted for as natural forces, what grounds are there for asserting that they are the actions of a supernatural power? If this divine origin of the universe is not active in the world, then the beauty and majesty of creation seem to belong entirely to nature and its laws, and not to the metaphysical first principle. Also, if mind is not reducible to matter-energy, the perennial problem arises of how the two interact, and we seem to have the deeply illogical suggestion that reality is made up of two separate realities, the mental and the non-mental.

So might there be a way of resolving these difficulties? Let us begin by noting that although those involved in this debate are in disagreement about many things, there is something important which they do agree on, one could say that it is a shared faith, a faith which is so deep and fundamental that one could easily be unaware of it; it is the conviction that what we call matter-energy is the only or at least the main substance of which everything is made, something which alone existed for aeons before the appearance of minds. For some, this is all of reality; for others, energy-matter has in some way been brought into being and sustained by a divinity or first cause, but nonetheless this energy-matter is entirely real and it is a manifestation of the greatness of its source. On another view, matter-energy is the substance of the physical world which for a brief time on one small planet, has somehow interacted with minds.

So this conviction that matter-energy is the real and fundamental substance of which the world is composed is a conviction shared by all sides. And it is also the root of many difficulties. Those who hold that matter-energy is the only reality have to insist that consciousness is reducible to matter-energy. And those who are convinced that matter-energy must itself have a divine origin have the problem we noted earlier of the connection between the two. And others have to

account for the interaction between matter-energy and the human mind.

It is here that the traditional non-dual teachings offer another understanding with the potential for resolving these difficulties. It is a completely new vision of what is the reality in everything that is real. Put briefly and directly, the non-dual view is that what is real is Self, what is real in all is the Self of all.

One might then ask, what is the Self of all? Ultimately this is something which cannot be put into words or thoughts and has to be discovered directly. But it can be said provisionally that the Self in things, and the Self in all, is that which cannot be negated, it is that which we cannot conceive as not-existing. So, what is that? We have to actively enquire into what is real and cannot be negated, in our own direct experience. This is an essential part of the spiritual path. We ask, what in my own direct experience can never be taken away, cannot be negated, and cannot be imagined as non-existent? We will find that we can imagine the absence of any thought, any feeling, any conception or perception. And when all those have been put aside, something remains. What is that? It might be called the awareness of existence or the existence of awareness. This is the awareness in all that we are aware of; it is the existence in all our experiences; this is our Self.

And here the traditional teachings give us further guidance. They say that the reality in all, the Self of all, that which can never be negated, can be indicated positively by three terms: Being, Consciousness, Bliss. These are not three different ideas but three facets of the one reality that is indicated. In Sanskrit they form a single compound: sat-chit-ananda.

We just noticed that when we look within we find being-awareness or awareness-being, what are here called sat-chit or existence-consciousness. And the more we go into this, the more we find that inner peace and fulfilment are to be found here in this awareness-being which is our Self, and that what we call suffering is to be somehow cut off from this, our true Self. And so the traditional teachings indicate the essential reality in us, our own Self, as Being-consciousness and also Bliss. According to these teachings this reality in our Self is the reality in all. From this perspective everything that exists may be understood as phenomena appearing in this manifold of pure being-consciousness-bliss. What we call inanimate objects are where this phenomenal

manifestation is most dense, and the underlying being-consciousness seems to be obscured. Energy can be understood as a phenomenal manifestation more dynamic and less opaque than matter. The exquisite order and balance of the laws of nature are emanations or reflections of the all-pervading consciousness. Thought is a yet more subtle manifestation in sat-chit-ananda. And in the most refined parts of the human mind, the higher intellect and emotions, which are the most subtle and significant phenomena of all, being-consciousness-bliss shines through as the un-negatable Self.

At the beginning of the life of spiritual enquiry we are aware of this only dimly and occasionally in our most reflective moments. At this stage, if we are receptive, the traditional spiritual teachings can help us to understand more clearly in principle the nature of the Self. Then the task is to further purify and refine the mind and actively pursue the enquiry into what is real, until we can say, with the seers of the Upanishads, that we have known all that is to be known and done all that is to be done; or, as Christ put it, we seek the truth until the truth has set us free forever.

Before we consider how we are to pursue this purity and realization, let us note the light shed by these traditional teachings on the problems we came across earlier. We saw that if it is held that the reality in things is matter-energy, then it would follow that mind is not real except in so far as it can be reduced to a form of matter-energy. And if we hold that matter-energy must have a divine or metaphysical first cause, the difficult problem arises of the relation between the world and the divine. It will be readily seen that these difficulties are completely resolved—in fact they do not arise—if we understand the fundamental reality in all as pure being-consciousness-bliss and everything that exists as phenomenal manifestations in That. In fact, the so-called mind-body problem and all the intractable philosophical problems are resolved in principle in this vision of non-duality. At the same time, this vision recognizes that scientific investigation of natural phenomena, without any reference to super-natural forces, is the right way to understand the processes that occur within nature and to learn how to control natural forces for the benefit of our bodies and minds.

The resolution of these difficulties cannot prove to a sceptic that the

traditional teachings are true, although this may further encourage some of us to investigate them. As we saw, to confirm in direct experience what the traditional teachings indicate in principle, we have to actively pursue the traditional spiritual path; that is, we have to further refine and purify our minds in order to distinguish between mental activity and pure consciousness-being itself. Thus prepared, we can seek to look beyond words and thoughts, and discover what is real and un-negatable in direct experience as our own Self, and the Self in all beings.

It is to this end that we apply all the traditional disciplines, such as inner restraint, evenness of mind, dedicated action, and perhaps most important of all, the regular practice of meditation, in which we learn to deliberately and consciously withdraw our awareness from being absorbed in mental activity and focus it steadily in the direction of what is unchanging, unchangeable and ever self-illuminated within.

The effects of regular meditation reach into the deeper layers of the mind, from which spring our conscious thoughts and feelings, our whole way of seeing the world. As we pursue this enquiry, we find that the conviction, the faith, that what is ultimately real is matter-energy, is reformed by a growing realization that the apparent reality of energy-matter in the world is like a reflected light which emanates from a deeper source, a source which is revealed as the reality in our own being, our own true Self. It is in this that we find a refuge and release from fear, and an underlying meaning and purpose in all experience. In this light we find that any experience, however apparently happy or unfortunate, can be taken as a stepping-stone towards a deeper understanding, a more complete realization that our true Self is not the body or the mind or even the most refined thoughts and feelings, but is in truth the pure, untainted being-consciousness-bliss that abides forever in all. And so we may say that the goal is beautiful and so is the way.

P.H.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

IN A DARK, dense forest, the rays of the sun struggle to penetrate through the leaves of the thickly grouped trees, yet only a few beams of light are able to reach the earth. The forest is in a low valley, with high mountains all around. Near a large cave, by a swift-moving stream, three lion cubs are playing like kittens in the grass. As they tumble and frolic, one of the cubs runs away and the remaining two rush to discover its hiding-place. As soon as they have seen the little one crouching, almost invisible, in the long grasses, he runs away again. Sometimes they ride upon one another. How happy they are in this game!

Suddenly, one of the cubs falls into the stream and is being carried away by it. At once the figure of a tall, long-bearded hermit rushes into the water, and, resisting the fury of its current, rescues the creature. The mother, a fierce lioness, now appears. She finds her offspring being grasped by a man. She growls and springs at the hermit. He sees her coming, and drawing himself up to his full stature, stretches forth his hand and says, 'Stop, mother, stop! Here is your little one.' He places the wet cub on the ground, and the lioness understands.

Love, long practised and tried in the fire of adversity, acquires an irresistible force. When a stream emerges from a rock, it is like a silver thread; but trace its course a few miles and you will find it a rushing torrent, hard to cross. Such is love. Tender, defenceless, weak and trembling at the beginning, it easily dries up under the scorching sun of misunderstanding and suspicion. But the wise know how to enrich love; they know that it grows through sufferings, and acquires a power which can tame wild animals and reduce to homage savages and cruel bandits. This the holy maharishi has acquired.

* * *

This year the monsoon has been disappointing. The mighty, elephant-like clouds, which used to come thundering, flying the flag of quivering lightning, have not been seen. The wind blows hard and lacks

moisture. There are signs of anxiety among the Himalayan peasants; already some of the hill men are arranging to drive their flocks and herds to distant pastures.

Shri Yajnavalkya is walking slowly through the pine grove of his ashrama. The sun is about to set and breezes are wafting through the trees. He looks serious and is thinking to himself:

‘Who can judge the rightness or wrongness of the behaviour of nature? It often happens that in order to do remote good, nature seems to be doing harm. Nature is an expression of Hiranyagarbha (the cosmic Intelligence), which is never without love and compassion. Sometimes people seem to suffer, but the soul is immortal and eternal and it is only an omniscient sage who can thoroughly understand the meaning of the occurrences in nature. All that man can do is to remove the sufferings of his fellow-men and beasts, and cease to waste time in criticising nature or blaming the Creator.

‘Take the case of my cows. They can never understand my mind, nor will they ever follow my discourses. The playful, milk-white calves come to my study to be fed on rice balls. Love has made them audacious; sometimes they trample on my manuscripts, then rub their mouths against me, expecting to be patted. They recognize my love, but they will never be able to understand the contents of my manuscripts! Similarly, many have no capacity to appreciate the metaphysical flights of the Upanishads; how can arrogant and critical human beings understand the plan in the mind of the omniscient and omnipresent Lord? They are wise who dismiss their own want of understanding, and the seeming incongruity of nature by saying, ‘It is all maya!’

The sage, looking a little tired, sat down under a tree. There he remained motionless like a statue. Darkness covered the meadow.

Meanwhile, Katyayani had received two messengers from the neighbouring valley with reports that scarcity of food and pestilence were taking a heavy toll of life.

* * *

The following morning the maharishi was seen coming from his study, accompanied by three of his students, who followed him at a respectful distance, all attention. Seating himself under a tree, he turned

to one of them and said: ‘O Brahmadata, ask my beloved Katyayani to come and have a few words with me.’ ‘Be it so, Shri Guru’, answered the disciple. He disappeared and in a short while the disciple returned with Katyayani. She had now passed fifty, yet was still endowed with charms which left an inspiring impression on the minds of those who saw this saintly woman. With a smile, Shri Yajnavalkya addressed her: ‘Be seated, O devi. How much gold have you in your possession?’ ‘Five hundred ounces’, she replied. ‘Does it include the gift of King Janaka?’ ‘Yes, holy one.’

The august rishi looked at Brahmadata and said: ‘Take two hundred ounces of gold and visit the Sumeru valley. Organize a society of the elders of the valley at once, and send men to buy grain and other necessities. Also call a few learned vaidyas (physicians) to the valley. Distribute the grain free to the needy. Such is the command of the holy Shruti (scriptures). My son, remember that without renunciation there can be no knowledge.’ Brahmadata bowed in acceptance of the wishes of his Teacher.

* * *

It is early morning in the valley of Shiva-Vana. Four brahmacharis in their long white robes, carrying satchels of manuscripts, are walking in leisurely fashion in front of the hermitage. The sun has risen above the hills, and the dew on the grass has evaporated, like the evil qualities which depart from a man who submits to spiritual discipline.

One of the brahmacharis, who has been in Shri Yajnavalkya’s hermitage for ten years and has carefully studied the holy teachings, asks the others to pause. They seat themselves under the boughs of a spreading pine tree.

‘Brothers’, he said, ‘have you noticed a change in our holy Guru Bhagavan? He is more serious, and the rippling humour which used to characterize his conversation is no longer evident. His moustache and his long white beard are neglected. The folds of his turban are often untied, yet the Guru appears to be unconscious of it all. Yesterday I saw him seated on that large rock with his favourite calf, Buddha, licking his hand, but he seemed to be in another world.’

The brahmachari Lakshmana agreed, and added: ‘His Holiness, one

imagines, will soon be passing into the state of an avadhuta (an enlightened sage who renounces the world). He used, as it were, to play with the three gunas (the qualities of nature), realizing all the time his complete mastery over them. He used to enjoy poetry, and often asked us to read him the shrutis of the Sama Veda. He was charmed by the chorus of the flutes, but for some time now he has been absorbed only in one ancient hymn, the Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda. I have also heard him softly chanting the last three stanzas of the Isha Upanishad, and was dismayed!* His withdrawal from the sense-world appears to be almost complete. When we ask him subtle metaphysical questions, he answers briefly, and then becomes unconscious of his surroundings. Are we going to lose our beloved Guru?’

Another brahmachari, Subhadra, speaking with emotion, added: ‘We are fortunate indeed to belong to this holy master, the yogi-rajā Shri Yajñavalkya. We have forgotten heaven and earth since we have known his personality. His illumined intellect, his mastery of rhetoric and logic, his memory charged with the holiest shrutis, his unsurpassed eloquence and his humour, all these have charmed us. You are right, brethren, we have seen a change in the mood of our spiritual sovereign. Surely, it is not because our limitations weary him that the holy Guru has gone into this deep subjective mood? But what can we do? He was perfect before; he is perfect now; he will always be perfect. Still, it is to our benefit if the great Teacher retains some interest in the world and is open to the same affectionate association which we have enjoyed for so long. We know he is above the gunas and that his Atman ever contemplates its own identity with the infinite.’

As they were talking thus, they heard the familiar sound of sandals and saw the yogi-rajā going towards the river, his coconut vessel in one hand and his staff in the other. He was walking solemnly, like an emperor of the world moving towards his throne, quietly chanting the Shruti which may be translated as follows:

Brahman is the greatest support. He is manifested through experience.
He, dwelling closest to the mind of man, steers the intellect. All the

* These verses are traditionally chanted at a Hindu funeral service.

moving and the unmoving, all who breathe, abide in Him. He is both the gross and the subtle. Verily, He is adorable. Even the highest beings and creatures cannot grasp his majesty. He is self-luminous and subtler than the atoms. The whole world and all its contents abide in Him. He is manifested as life, speech, mind, existence and immortality.

He is the target which the mind ought to penetrate. O friend, hit the target! Lift up the bow of the teachings of the Upanishads, and fix upon it your mind, like an arrow, rendered sharp by continuous meditation. Draw the string of the bow by being absorbed in His contemplation; in this way, hit the target. The sacred syllable Om is the bow; the individual is the arrow, and Brahman is the target. It should be pursued with an alert mind. The arrow, when it touches it, becomes infinite.

He in whom the upper and the lower regions abide, and also the mind and the vital force (prana)—understand Him to be the one underlying Self of all beings, and give up all other useless talk. By this bridge man reaches the shore of immortality.

The sage sat down on a log and was absorbed in the silence of self-contemplation. It appeared as if the whole creation was at a standstill. Heaven and earth were suffused with peace.

As the time for the evening devotion drew near, Maitreyi approached the rishi. Seeing him absorbed in samadhi, she stood silent in an attitude of deep reverence, and then she began to sing:

Om! I have drunk soma, I have drunk soma (the drink of the gods).
I pull the string of the bow of Shiva.
The Pleiades form a pendant on my forehead.
I lash the sea into storms.
The mountains stand firm at my order.
I have drunk soma, I have drunk soma.
I dance and the cosmos moves;
I sit still and there is peace absolute.
I exhale and the world is born,
I inhale and it is all void.
I have drunk soma, I have drunk soma.
In the silence of the stars I dwell. Om.

The soft, melodious voice of the holy woman created a stir in the placid mind of the king of sages. He opened his eyes. Maitreyi bowed low and said: 'Will my lord grace the evening devotion with his presence?' 'My darling', replied Shri Yajnavalkya, 'how time plays tricks with us! Indeed, it is a creation of our mind. Sometimes minutes are lengthened into weeks. In the samadhi of Shiva, which I also enjoy, years are reduced to a fraction of a second. Time is the cause of all changes. Verily, it is unreal. There is no such thing as change.'

He paused briefly, and then added: 'Let us go.'

to be continued

CROCUSES IN FEBRUARY

Dear flowers, so tender, colourful and fragrant,
You come from an invisible world,
You scatter beauty and peace, delight and radiance.
I, too, try to apprehend the world invisible
But my egoity and love of name and form prevents it.
Teach me, gentle crocuses, to love you,
To live to beautify the earth!
The birds come and sup on your golden stamens,
The bees embrace you in silence—
You are the same to all!
When you return to the realm of truth,
Invisible to me, deliver this message
To the spirit of love, beauty, knowledge and illumination:
That my soul is weary of this world!
Reveal Thyself in all, O Essence of immortality.
Make me the enricher of thy soil,
O gentle friends, O crocuses, ideas of the saints
and the soul of reflection.

H.P.S.

Rumi and Self-Transcendence

JALALUDDIN RUMI is one of the great spiritual teachers in the Islamic tradition. He taught and lived what has been called 'the mystical dimension of Islam' known as Sufism. He lived in turbulent times—during the first three quarters of the thirteenth century, from 1207 to 1273. The times were dangerous because of the rise of the power of the Mongols, who ferociously conquered much of Asia and overran a good part of eastern Europe. When Rumi was about twelve, his family had to flee from their native region of Balkh, in Afghanistan, and eventually settled in the city of Konya in southern Turkey.

The most important thing about Rumi is that he was a man of spiritual experience. He had uncovered in himself that deeper reality which is enshrined in all of us, and which, when revealed, confers on us peace, bliss, and the higher knowledge that brings complete fulfilment of our urge to know, and to understand the meaning of life.

In the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, this realization is often associated with peace—*shanti*. Our teacher's teacher, Shri Dada, said: 'I have found perfect peace.' Buddhism, too, is deeply bonded to the peace of spiritual meditation.

In Sufism, there is a slightly different emphasis. It is on bliss and exaltation of our consciousness through the transforming power of love. The emphasis is on bliss because the path of Sufism focuses on transforming our emotions from wild expressions of desire and anger into the refined love of the supreme reality, called God. And this transformation from the thirst for excitement and thrill into the higher bliss, is compared to the intoxication produced by the drinking of wine. The wine in this instance is not the fermented juice of the grape, but the intense richness of spiritual experience which dominates the mind, so that the joys of the outer life seem mediocre by comparison.

This inner wine is the refined higher love that emerges when our love force has been re-directed and sublimated through spiritual practices. This higher experience—this bliss and exaltation of consciousness—is indicated in Rumi's poem, 'The Man of God':

The man of God is drunken without wine;
The man of God is filled without meat;
The man of God is rapturous, amazed;
The man of God has neither food nor sleep.
The man of God is a king beneath a humble cloak;
The man of God is a treasure in a ruin;
The man of God is not of wind and earth;
The man of God is not of fire and water.
The man of God is a sea without a shore;
The man of God rains pearls without a cloud;
The man of God has a hundred moons and skies;
The man of God has a hundred suns.
The man of God is wise through Truth;
The man of God is not learned from a book ...
The man of God is concealed,
Search for, and find—the man of God.

Rumi was not always a lover in this sense. Like his father, he was a learned man, and rose to an eminence by mastering the conventional Islamic learning of the day. And though he was deeply familiar with Sufism and its doctrines and practices, he initially made his mark as an acclaimed academic with lots of admiring and dedicated pupils.

All this changed when he was about forty and met an itinerant holy man, a Sufi adept known as Shams 'I Tabriz. In this initial encounter Shams made it clear that intellectual knowledge is insignificant compared with spiritual or mystical experience.

Somehow, in that ensuing relationship, this knower of ultimate reality, Shams 'I Tabriz, transmitted that great experience to Rumi himself, transforming him. Rumi used to say that between the heart of one person and the heart of another there is a window through which these higher experiences can pass. The same is true in Yoga with the transmission of truth between Guru and disciple, and also in Zen Buddhism, where they speak of heart-to-heart transmission of the teachings independent of Scripture. In fact, the path of all seekers involves learning how to make our heart a window, not a barricade.

Rumi emerged from his very close contact with Shams 'I Tabriz,

which lasted about two years, as a changed man. Although he did not aspire to be a poet, he found his great experience could only be expressed in poetry. Such was the range, depth and polish of his mind that he was able to create verses in abundance. He wrote thousands of poems to his Guru and soul friend, Shams 'I Tabriz. He also wrote in verse a great book of teachings called *The Masnavi*.

One thing he learned, as we said before, is that intellectual knowledge is one phase of our interior life, but spiritual experience is far superior. Rumi's intellect, in fact, became a wonderful tool or instrument to convey teachings, in the form of stories and spiritual ideas. If he had not been so well-equipped intellectually, this creative abundance might not have been possible. Nonetheless, the following story, in a humorous vein, suggests the limitations of intellectual knowledge:

A professor of grammar embarked in a boat. That self-conceited person turned to the boatman and said, 'Have you ever studied grammar?' 'No', he replied. The other said, 'Half your life is gone to naught.' The boatman became heart-broken with grief, but at the time he refrained from answering.

The wind cast the boat into a whirlpool: the boatman shouted to the grammarian, 'Tell me, do you know how to swim?' 'No', said the professor, 'I never learnt that skill.' 'O grammarian', said the boatman, 'your whole life is naught, because the boat is sinking in these whirlpools.'

Still on this theme—that intellectual knowledge is eventually to be transcended—we find Rumi chiding, as it were, those who have mere academic knowledge and are proud of it. He tells us, in effect, that we may know 'a hundred thousand matters connected with the various sciences', but be clueless as regards the nature of our own soul. We may know the special properties of every substance, but be in total ignorance as to our own essence.

When he speaks of the need to know our own essence, Rumi gets to the heart of all mystical and yogic teaching. His great predecessor, Al-Ghazali, two centuries earlier, pointed out that our deepest need is for self-knowledge, because, as the Islamic traditional saying goes: 'True self-knowledge is knowledge of God.' As he explains in his short book,

The Alchemy of Happiness, self-knowledge does not mean knowledge about our body, or such basics as the fact that we get angry when we are contradicted or that we like music. It means getting to understand what is the very core of our being, the nature of our ‘I am’, which underlies and supports all our experience—this ‘I am’, which Al-Ghazali says is unending.

For Rumi, as for most mystics, this ‘I am’ points to something called ‘the spirit of man’. The spirit is not the mind, but a deeper principle which underlies the mind. The spirit is not confined to individuals. It is One, like the thread of the necklace running through all pearls, though unseen. It is one with God. As Rumi writes, echoing the yogic doctrine: ‘Thou art an inmost ground of consciousness revealing our inmost thoughts.’ And again: ‘We have a spirit of resplendent light... the seven heavens are filled with its light.’

As human beings, we are far superior in our spiritual nature to any excellence we may manifest in the world of time, space and causation. Our true stature is spiritual greatness, and the view of ourselves as weak and limited, mortal and subject to depression, goes against what we truly are, and veils the free, blissful, all-knowledge nature of our ‘I am’. And so Rumi writes: ‘Man is a mountain. How should he be troubled by temptation?’

On the other hand, we do find ourselves constantly troubled by temptation. As we said before, part of the Sufi path—part of every spiritual path—is to transmute the selfish expression of our emotions into something more refined, universal and liberating. One of his stories concerns a Sufi who, in broad daylight, walked through the bazaar carrying a lit lamp. He looked ridiculous. A stallholder shouted to him sarcastically, ‘Oh wise one, what or who are you searching for?’ The Sufi replied: ‘I’m searching for a man.’ The stallholder said: ‘The market is full of men.’ The Sufi went on: ‘I’m looking for a man who can remain calm and unmoved when within himself he feels the thrust of desire and the waves of anger arising, and he can tame these waves. That is a true man to me.’ The stallholder had to admit: ‘Such a man indeed is rare.’ This reminds us of the lines in Hamlet:

Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.

There is a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

He who is able, before the fall of the body, to withstand the force of desire and anger—he is a yogi, he is a happy man.

So the Sufi path has much to do with transmuting our lower impulses into the gold of spiritual experience. Sometimes they refer to this as divine alchemy, like the old quest to transmute base metals into gold. The assumption is that the human mind is transformable. Our present state of intelligence and evolution is not the final one. We can outgrow this human intelligence and evolve in ourselves the understanding of a sage—that is, a man or woman of supreme wisdom.

This higher evolution of the soul is also a fundamental Sufi doctrine. Here are some lines by Rumi on our spiritual evolution.

...from this (human) intelligence also there is a migration to be made by him, that he may escape from this intelligence full of greed and self-seeking, and may behold a hundred thousand intelligences most marvellous.

On the other hand this evolutionary climb, this mystery of our nature, this condition we are in, and the great promise of the higher consciousness, always comes back to where we stand here and now in the world of our thoughts. All spiritual training involves the training of our thoughts. In yogic terms, the emphasis is on quietening the mind, revealing within ourselves progressively the peace, light and bliss that the holy classics tell us about. As the Gita teaches us in its chapter on meditation, when our mind is tranquil, we find a new joy that transcends the senses, and there is nothing like it.

Although the Sufis speak much of higher and higher stages on the path, perhaps giving the idea of a goal that is distant, the great reality becomes self-evident as our immediate consciousness—our ‘I’—when the mind has been silenced. So our forward development is not to accumulate information, unless that information is going to be helpful to us in our efforts to pacify our inner being. In the spiritual arithmetic, the key symbol is not the plus sign but the minus. And what we

progressively subtract from our mind are all the ideas we have woven into our sense of self—the notions of ‘I am such and such’ that we are continually superimposing on the pure unending ‘I am’. This negating, this ‘minusing’, is applied until our ‘I am’ is revealed as ‘I am infinite, I am Truth.’ So all stages of progress are essentially steps in unveiling what we truly are. As the later poet, Dard, has said: ‘You journey only to your own self here.’

This is the point of the story of the painting contest, which is found in Al-Ghazali as well as in Rumi. The Chinese had challenged the Greeks to a painting contest, and this was arranged by the Sultan. Special rooms were prepared facing each other, the artists working on opposite walls. The Chinese worked with colours of every hue. The Greeks had no colours at all. After some days, the work was ready. The Sultan was amazed and delighted by the Chinese mural, but when he turned to the opposite wall, he was wonderstruck. What he saw, writes Rumi, almost snatched his eye from its socket. For the Greeks had devoted their labours, not to painting, but to removing all trace of colour, staining and dirt from the wall. They then polished it until it shone like a mirror. In that unique mirror was reflected the beauty of the Chinese mural, but more delicately and deeply, glowing in the rays of the midday sun.

The mirror wall is like the mind when the superimpositions that veil the pure ‘I am’ have been eliminated. The principle is summed up in eight words by Rumi: ‘Thought is gone, and they have gained light.’ He comments: ‘The perfect saint holds in his bosom the formless infinite form of the Unseen reflected from the mirror of his heart. Here the understanding becomes silent, or else it leads into error, because the heart is with God, or indeed, the heart is He.’

What is it that draws us to this way of life? Something deep within us may be astir that makes us doubtful of conventional goals. Sometimes our own experience leads us into such a mess that we feel desperate to repent and reform. This possibility is indicated in the story of Nasuh and the lost pearl.

Nasuh had smooth beardless skin and dressed as a woman. He was employed in the bath-house of the Princess and was her favourite shampooer and masseur. He was popular, and the ladies took it for

granted that Nasuh was one of their gender. Nasuh knew there was a higher life, and regretted his tendency, but a lasting change seemed to be beyond his power. He asked a holy man to pray for him.

Then, one day, something alarming happened. The Princess mislaid a precious pearl and everyone was to be strip-searched. Nasuh was petrified and did not know what to do. Exposure meant death by torture, and such was his desperation and fear of his guilt being exposed, that he prayed so very deeply that he touched the bottom of the sea of prayer. He fell unconscious.

He only came to when he could hear cries around him saying, ‘The pearl is found, the pearl is found—O Nasuh, what’s the matter? The pearl is found.’ The bridge he crossed in his consciousness, that finally enabled him to desist from the old ways, was his experience of the delight and fullness of deliverance—of repentance—of getting it right at last with his higher nature.

In the same way, some crisis may turn us to this teaching. On the other hand, our interest may be more logical, less dramatic. We may think: ‘Well, this is offering something better, and a new horizon, an expansion, seems to be within my reach.’ But one thing is certain. For both Rumi and Al-Ghazali, this spiritual awakening, this alchemy of self-knowledge, is the ultimate purpose of life itself. Rumi, in an informal teaching, told his followers:

There is one thing in this world which must never be forgotten. If you were to forget everything else, but did not forget that, then there would be no cause to worry; whereas if you performed and remembered and did not forget every single thing, but forget that one thing, then you would have done nothing whatsoever. It is just as if a king had sent you to the country to carry out a specified task. You go and perform a hundred other tasks; but if you have not performed that particular task on account of which you had gone to the country, it is as though you have performed nothing at all. So man has come in this world for a particular task, and that is his purpose; if he does not perform it, then he will have done nothing.

How to realize that purpose? Learning to tranquillize the mind is one phase of this practical path to fulfilment. Another, complementary, means, is to practise self-forgetfulness through love. Self-forgetfulness

means becoming aware that our self-assertion, our self-will, is an obstacle to higher understanding and needs to be transcended.

Rumi was a married man. He knew about human relationships. Some of his stories concern love between man and woman, or between dedicated friends. These stories always have an inner meaning. In one, the man—the lover—is sitting by his beloved, but instead of giving her his attention, he is absorbed in writing and reading to her a flowery love-letter. And she says, ‘I am here beside you, and you—reading a letter! This, at any rate, is not the mark of true lovers.’

The inner meaning is that in our spiritual communion, it is more important to be sensitive to the here and now of the divine presence, and not lose our mindfulness through a flow of words of thoughts, however spiritual these may seem. As Rumi has written: ‘I am silent. Speak Thou, O Soul of Soul of Soul, from desire of whose Face every atom became articulate.’

The same message is imparted in a similar story. A friend knocks on the door of his friend. The call from inside is: ‘Who is there?’ The answer is: ‘It is I.’ The friend called out: ‘Go away. At a table like this there is no place for the raw.’

The wretched man went, and spent a year in travel and self-examination, longing to be re-united with his friend. When he returned, he knocked again, this time with reserve and reverence. ‘Who is at the door?’ He answered, ‘You yourself are at the door. It is you, O charmer of hearts.’ ‘Now’, said the friend, ‘since thou art I, come in, O myself. There is not room in the house for two I’s. The double end of thread is not for the needle. Inasmuch as you are single, come into this needle.’

The ultimate realization in Sufism is that our true ‘I’ is not separate from the divine. Rumi knew this, but had sometimes to guard his expression of it, because he would be accused of heresy. On the other hand, this supreme truth does burst through very often in the course of his writings, and it is implied throughout. He quotes and discusses what he calls ‘the saying of the everlasting and eternal Lord’:

I am not contained in the heavens or in the void or in the exalted intelligences and souls;
(But) I am contained, as a guest, in the true believer's heart, without qualification or definition or description.

Again, he writes: ‘When the soul has been united with God, to speak of that God is to speak of this soul, and to speak of this soul is to speak of that God.’

In this way, Rumi echoes the deepest insight of the Indian sages, that one’s innermost Self is, in essence, identical with God. As an ancient verse puts it: ‘O holy divinity, I indeed am You, and You are I.’ This is the realization indicated in the saying: ‘True self-knowledge is knowledge of God.’

A.H.C.

When I came to the waking condition
From the self-forgetting love,
Lo, I found from my nature proceeded
Prosperity, nourishment and the creation of all.
What thread is to the cotton flower,
So is beauty to love.
Darling, Thou and I are one, one, one.
Why dost thou look on me as a stranger?
Hide no more thy lovely face from me.
Lift thy veil. Come before me.
Darling, Thou and I are one, one, one.
This is the cry of the bubble to the river—
Thou and I are one, one, one.
Never see me as other than thyself,
Darling, Thou and I are one, one, one.
When in the lap of the swinging breeze,
The bud bursts into blossom,
It whispers into the ear of other flowers,
Thou and I are one, one, one.
When she placed the mirror before her face,
Her reflection cried out in ecstasy:
‘Why art thou surprised to see me?’
Darling, Thou and I are one, one, one.’

H.P.S.

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

The saying from the Gospels, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' is profound and practical, though in orthodox Christianity its vitality is sometimes overlooked, and it may seem little more than a prospect of 'pie in the sky', a pious exhortation to purify your heart in this life so that you may see God in heaven after you die. If this is so, there is no sense of urgency, even for the Christian believer.

Some years ago, an advert appeared in the carriages of the London Underground. Two texts were printed side by side. The one on the left read: 'The Bad News: The wages of sin is death.' And on the right 'The Good News: The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.' The appeal of this is hardly dramatic. How many passengers leapt up and jumped for joy when they read it? The promise seems so vague and remote. And anyway it reads as though the gift is exclusively reserved for Christians, whereas what Christ himself actually promised was 'eternal life in God'.

But for the dedicated yogi, this need 'to see God' is paramount. There are at least three reasons why this is so, and in the *Bhagavad Gita* these are given by Shri Krishna, who, like Christ, is revered by millions as a divine incarnation—not a rival 'god', but another appearance in this world of the supreme spiritual power. Firstly, he teaches: 'I am the Self seated in the heart of all beings.' Secondly, he reveals that he can be known and entered into in this very life, and, thirdly, this knowledge and union brings salvation. 'Even here, in this life, the bondage of repeated death and rebirth is overcome by those whose mind rests on equality.' And He goes on to say that this means that they rest in God, the supreme Reality, Brahman: 'For spotless, indeed, and the same in all is Brahman; wherefore in Brahman, in God, they rest.' [5.19]

If you know Dr Shastri's book on meditation, you will remember the words of Swami Mangalath which he quotes at the beginning and which sum this all up:

God-realization is the purpose and goal of life; perfection, everlasting peace and freedom are its fruits. When God-realization is once

acquired, there is no fall from this exalted state of consciousness. There is no gain higher than this.

So in the Gita and in Yoga we have the same promise given in almost the same words as the Christian promise: 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' Christ also stressed the need to see God as the supreme Reality when he promised his disciples: 'If ye continue in my word... ye shall know the Truth and the Truth will make you free.'

What is meant by a pure mind or an impure one? The yogic definition is given in the *Amrita Bindu Upanishad* and also in the *Maitri Upanishad*:

The mind, verily, is said to be twofold, pure and impure; the impure mind is that which has thoughts of objects of desire, and the pure mind is that which is free from desire.

You may say, 'What does this matter? Isn't it natural to desire things? Why struggle to purify the mind? Why try to go against nature?' An answer to this was given by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, and he gives the words to Satan, to the devil himself. The devil is forced to admit that

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

To this extent, at least, the yogis agree with the devil, as the teacher in the *Amrita Bindu Upanishad* goes on to say:

The mind, verily, is the cause of the bondage and liberation of mankind; engrossed in objects it leads to bondage; free from objects it leads to liberation: so they say.

But in the next verse the yogis part company with the devil, for it says:

Since liberation is ensured to the mind when free from desires for objects, therefore by the wise should the mind be ever made free from objects.

Dr Shastri has described this Yoga as ‘the method by which man abandons the nature he thought was his and allows that which he really is to take possession’. This is because the final awakening is not the result of individual effort but of divine grace. As the Lord in the Gita says:

To those who are ever united to Me, worshipping me with love, I give that devotion of knowledge by which they come to Me.

Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, by the luminous lamp of wisdom.

Here is how the commentator and sage, Shri Shankara, explains the meaning of these words of the Lord. Though these words apply to one of the utmost dedication, possibly a renunciate, they give an idea of the higher potentialities hidden in every mind:

Out of mercy, anxious as to how they may attain bliss, I, who dwell in their mind, which is engaged in thinking exclusively of the true Self, destroy the darkness of ignorance, that illusory knowledge which is caused by the absence of spiritual discrimination, by means of the lamp of discriminatory knowledge, fed by the oil of pure devotion, fanned by the wind of earnest meditation on Me, furnished with the wick of right intuition, purified by the cultivation of piety, chastity and other virtues, held in the mind which is completely detached from all worldly concerns, placed in the wind-sheltered enclosure of the mind which is withdrawn from the sense-objects and untainted by attachment and aversion, and shining with the light of right knowledge generated by incessant practice of concentration and meditation.

This throws light on the meaning of purification for one who is determined to pursue the path to enlightenment. The mind has to become detached from worldly concerns whilst still engaged in them. It is such exclusive devotion to God, one’s real inmost Self, which attracts His grace and is the key to God-realization.

In Dr Shastri’s words, the method involves ‘the control and transformation of the mind in order to see Reality or God in the mind itself’. It is a gradual process, but the goal is realizable in this very life.

We are assured in the Gita that ‘even a little practice of this spiritual discipline delivers one from great fear’. Regular practice keeps the mind at its best. It is like a key we use every day—the regular friction keeps it shining and free from dust. Similarly, this Yoga, when applied to daily life, soon becomes a powerful force against spiritual ignorance.

In order to drive a car we do not need a detailed knowledge of how everything works. We may possess that knowledge, yet be unable to drive. But we do need to know the essentials in order to control and steer the car safely to our destination. In the same way, in order to purify the mind through the daily Yoga discipline of mind control and meditation, we do not need a detailed theoretical knowledge of how the mind works. In the Gita, we are reminded of the basic, but crucial fact, that the mind does not only think; it also feels. We usually have in mind this emotional function when we use the word ‘heart’ to mean ‘mind’, in such expressions as ‘whole-hearted devotion to Yoga’; whereas when we call it single-minded, we have the higher intellectual function in mind.

This emotional function, when it manifests as strong likes and dislikes, leading to desire and anger, is associated with a lower phase of the psychological life, what the Gita calls *manas*, in contrast with the intellectual function of discriminating, deciding and willing, known as *buddhi*. And the yogis point out that most of our social and personal problems arise from a failure to control the *manas*, and prevent it overruling our reason, our *buddhi*, which ought to be in command. As the poet Wordsworth has truly said: ‘Whose mind is but the mind of his own eyes, he is a slave, the meanest we can meet.’ Countless private and public misfortunes and disasters have their source in such failures in mind-control.

The Gita points out that the emotional attachment of the uncontrolled mind is the greatest obstacle to living well in everyday life, and is also the greatest barrier to spiritual progress. ‘Attachment and aversion lie towards the object of each of our senses; let none become subject to these two, for they are his enemies.’ Then the divine teacher in the Gita goes on to spell out the problem:

When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises, from

attachment arises desire, from desire arises wrath, from wrath arises delusion, from delusion, failure of memory. from failure of memory, loss of reason (buddhi); from loss of buddhi, he is utterly ruined. [2.62-63]

Dr Shastri comments:

A child sees a doll in a shop window and says to herself: ‘How lovely it is; what lovely eyes it has; how lovely it would be to hold it, and to show it to Paul and Dinah. Oh! it is lovely!’ Each time the child dwells on the doll with delight, she is driving its image deeper and deeper into her mind. It is acquiring a stronger hold on her and will soon occupy a prominent place in her life; it is beginning to exclude from her mind other objects of beauty, thus localizing and weakening her consciousness. She asks her mother to buy the doll, but is told that she cannot afford it. Finding that she will not get the doll, the child becomes sad and she is angry with her mother. Being so preoccupied with the toy, she forgets the respect due to her parents, the importance of truth and so forth. This is what is called in the Gita ‘failure of memory’, meaning not a weak memory but forgetfulness of the law of righteousness (dharma).

The primary cause of all this misery was the harbouring of pleasant thoughts about the doll, an object of pleasure. Therefore the need for detachment is stressed in Yoga training. In the Gita it says: ‘In sense-objects see suffering.’ This does not mean that you should adopt pessimism as your rule of life, but that you should realize that each object which attracts you and overpowers your sense of discrimination [your buddhi] does immense damage to your nature. The deeper the infatuation, the greater the harm wrought. It is a mistake to become mad over anything in the world, or to allow any object to possess you.

And our Teacher goes on to point out that the mind was never meant to be the seat of worldly passions—desire, lust, anger, and (worst of all) hatred—but to be the means to liberation. It is meant, as he says, ‘to reflect the light of the divine mind’. Thus ‘the path to peace lies through harmony. Our emotions should harmonize with our reason and our reason with the dictates of the Divine Mind.’ In the language of the Gita

the meaning is that our manas should be in harmony with our buddhi, and our buddhi, our will, in tune with the Divine will.

How is this meant to work in practice? If you are unfortunate enough to sit on a drawing pin, your sense of touch will promptly report this to the manas, the seat of your emotions. The manas, will instantly register a strong aversion to the pain and appeal to the buddhi, the will, which promptly commands the body to get up. The same process applies in the case of the other senses, such as sight. If when you are passing a house and the front gate is open and from the front door of the house a pit bull terrier suddenly emerges which has obviously got out of its basket on the wrong side that morning, your sense of sight instinctively reacts, reporting the emergency to the manas, the seat of your emotions, which in turn appeals to your will, the buddhi. Whether your body takes successful evasive action or freezes on the spot depends upon whether your will, your buddhi, is fully in command.

The senses control the body, but they, in turn, take their orders from the manas, the seat of our emotions, which should be carrying out the commands of our will, the buddhi. But whether the buddhi, our will, is in command or not depends on its state of purity. Can it think clearly and decisively, or is it disturbed and agitated and therefore unable to do so? We say, for example, ‘He is indecisive, he cannot make up his mind’, or ‘She was determined to slim, she had made up her mind’, according to the state of the buddhi.

Suppose your doctor does advise you to lose some weight and prescribes a calorie-controlled diet. You think it over and, if you are wise, you make up your mind to do so, in other words you exercise your buddhi, and you resolve to diet. But you will only succeed when your efforts become whole-hearted and that depends on your resolution holding firm. Your efforts will fail only so long as they are still half-hearted. When you are whole-hearted and single-minded enough, they will succeed. Of course you need to follow a reliable method prescribed by a competent authority, and the same applies to controlling and purifying the mind. As the Lord in the Gita says: ‘Here on the path of Yoga there is one thought of a resolute nature, but many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the irresolute.’

So during the day in active life we need to practise control of the

mind. The same applies when are trying to meditate. To succeed in meditation the senses must be restrained and the manas fully controlled by the will, the buddhi. The buddhi, in turn, must be focused as often as possible on the one thought of God as our the true Self. The Gita points out that within us all there is a kind of hierarchy, and we can learn to identify with the higher phases of our own nature. The peak of our being is even now one with the supreme:

The senses are superior to the body; superior to the body is the manas; superior to the manas is the buddhi; but one who is superior even to the buddhi is He.

Then knowing Him who is superior to reason, buddhi, subduing the self by the Self, do thou slay the enemy in the form of desire, hard to conquer.

Knowledge of the true Self, God, gradually subdues our false self, our sense of individuality—not by will alone but by the superior attraction of ‘God within’. In this way all selfish desire, or emotional attachment, the chief barrier to spiritual progress, is finally transcended.

Success in Yoga, as in anything worthwhile in life, depends on being whole-hearted. If, for example, one decides to become a qualified teacher, one has to devote oneself to the training. There has to be devotion. The mere desire to teach is not enough—one has to direct it towards the fulfilment of one’s aim, to the exclusion of all conflicting desires. And this is the true meaning of devotion. The emotional aspect of the mind must be under control and fully and consciously involved in attaining our chosen end.

Emotional attachment, however strong, is not itself devotion. The uncontrolled mind all too readily becomes emotionally attached to objects—to those objects or people from which it hopes to derive pleasure. But sooner or later this inevitably turns into an equally strong aversion when it fails to get what it wants from them. An emotional attachment may well be a starting point to a more successful relationship, but this is only made possible when it is controlled and consciously devoted to that end. As one of the Victorian psychologists, Charles Bodington, has pointed out: ‘True devotion springs from the

will. It is the choice and love of the highest good manifested to the human soul.’

As explained by Marjorie Waterhouse in *Training the Mind through Yoga*:

Devotion is not necessarily emotion; it is the capacity to identify oneself with an object, and to consciously recognize one’s basic unity with that object. When the identification becomes intense, it brings absorption in the object.

Two paths of devotion are taught in Yoga. An intellectual devotion to the Absolute is taught, as well as devotion to God conceived as endowed with qualities and responsive to his devotees. Both paths are said to lead to the goal of God-realization. For those who cherish the human need for a personal relationship—the vast majority of seekers—the easier path is said to be constant remembrance of the Lord with a pure heart dedicated to Him. Our Teacher says:

He is to be contemplated as the God of grace whom the soul seeks. A loving meditation on His presence in the mind as the light which reveals the mind is the devotion dear to the students of the Gita. They need not enter into controversies about dualism and non-dualism. In fact the attempts to love Him through the intellect are not meant for all; but for a few special ones. St Mary Magdalene had no degree in philosophy from any university. A sense of humility and self-surrender is enough.

Devotion has to be learnt and intensified through practice until it becomes, in Shri Shankara’s words, ‘an incessant practice of concentration and meditation’ on God or Brahman, the Absolute Truth. The promise is repeatedly given by the Lord in the Gita that ‘by such devotion, the devotee knows Me, the Lord, in truth, what and who I am. Then, knowing Me in truth, he forthwith enters into Me.’ ‘Only by undistracted devotion can I be seen and known and entered into.’

Thus the teaching in the Gita is that through daily practice of this Yoga of mind-control and meditation, desire or attachment to the things of this life, which is the major obstacle that blinds the unenlightened

soul to its true divine identity, can be transformed into devotion, which is the key to spiritual progress and to God-realization. It is the same as the teaching in the *Katha Upanishad*:

When all the knots of desire that fetter the heart are cut asunder, then a mortal becomes immortal here, in this life.

The same spiritual discipline is advocated and practised by the saints and mystics of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Here is a short description of it by one of them. He calls it ‘the inner journey of the mind and heart’.

The way to God is an inner journey accomplished in the mind and heart. It is necessary so to attune the thoughts of the mind and the disposition of the heart that the spirit of man will always be with the Lord, as if joined with Him. He who is thus attuned is constantly enlightened by inner light, and receives in himself the rays of spiritual radiance, like Moses, whose face was glorified on Mount Sinai because he was illumined by God. David refers to this in his Psalms, ‘The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, has been marked upon us’.

This is what is meant by ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’

M.R.H.

SINCERITY

A miser was told that tears turn into gold if they are sincere. He had never cried, and tried his best by screwing up his face. Eventually a tear appeared, trickled down his face and fell on his coin table. At that moment, the sun rose, shone on the tear and it turned golden. But a moment later, the sun’s warmth evaporated the tear, and it was gone. Then the miser really did cry sincere tears, and they all turned into gold. The more he cried, the happier he became!

Meditation—Peace, Purity and Light

A recent session held in Shanti Sadan and led by the Warden

MEDITATION is a means to create peaceful conditions in our mind, and this itself is a strong reason for wishing to develop the practice. Life is not easy for any of us. We are subject to stresses, upsets, fatigue, anguish, and all the other challenges involved in dealing with our affairs. To have a way of regular and reliable relief from these pressures, is to be truly fortunate. Meditation nurtures our inner strength and emotional self-sufficiency, and, through reminding us of the immutable source of our being, it enables us to view the happenings of this ever-changing world from a wider perspective. We gain access to an interior Power that will never let us down, is ever present, from which help flows when we turn to it. The true light is in you, and it is ‘the light which lighteth every man’.

Before we begin our practices let us sit for a minute or two in peace and with reverence for that Power, and for the higher values on which all true meditation is based.

The first of our main practices—the breathing practice—points to something very important about our nature.

Taking slow, deep breaths, we imagine that we are drawing up the in-breath from the navel to the spot between the eyebrows. The out-breath is released normally. As we inhale we make the affirmation: ‘I am peace’. ‘I am peace’.

This statement reminds us that we are doing more than coming to meditation to *create* conditions of peace in our inner life. Our innate being—what we truly are—*is* peace, the higher peace called *shanti*—the peace of fulfilment. So we affirm, strongly and clearly, ‘I am peace’.

Our mind is at home in peace, because peace for us is a kind of homecoming. It may not seem to our mind that it is at home in peace. Our mind reacts to stimuli, and not always in a peaceful way. Yet so often this way of receiving impressions and reacting is a habit, a kind of conditioning. When we become tired of a life of competitiveness and

conflict, we may feel the need for lasting peace; then begins our homeward pilgrimage.

Ensuring that our posture is centred, upright, so that our breath flows without any tightness or tension, let us do the practice for about four minutes, and thus re-connect with the peace that is always there awaiting discovery within us.

For the serious meditator, another quality is valued which promises a profound and progressive expansion of our power to meditate: purity. In the context of meditation, this has nothing to do with resting in a sense of moral superiority. Purity means many things. It has a meaning in our relationship with people, namely, that we do not cherish harmful thoughts towards anyone. It also means, as regards other people, our attitude is not ‘What can I get out of him or her?’, ‘How do they benefit me?’ Rather, it is: ‘How can I learn to see them as one with my deeper being, resting in that same peace that is present at the heart of all?’

Purity of mind is also the ability to tell our worldly thoughts, ‘Not now—later!’ In this way we set aside our characteristic preoccupation with affairs, objects, people, likes, dislikes, plans, and so forth, and through this very power of psychological delay or postponement, we are able to rest in peace and contentment. Contentment and purity go together, just as a calm lake produces a clear reflection. So we can see that if our quest for peace is wedded to this love of purity and freedom, our meditation will deepen and be subject to far less disturbance.

To attain any sense of purity, we are helped if we can saturate our attention in things that are pure, and which arouse peaceful, delightful and harmonious associations within us. These may include love of nature, love of music, some form of service where our self-interest is forgotten. This thirst for purity brings us into touch with genuine spirituality. Genuine spirituality is not about personality enhancement, but is impersonal and self-forgetting, fostering love of the deeper reality underlying all. That reality, itself beyond word or image, may be approached with the help of symbols—themes for our concentration, which are themselves pure. These symbols, so to say, emanate from and point to their source—the realm of absolute purity and peace.

Our second main practice will take up one of these symbols:

Imagine the flame of a candle shining in the region of the heart centre. The flame is still, bright, upward-pointing. Just sit and think of this flame, which is a symbol of the divine Spirit, man's innermost Self.

The light of this pure, unflickering, inextinguishable flame is a universal symbol of spiritual life and light. So here we have an image of light. When we concentrate on it, our mind itself will be filled with purity and light, and as our practice of peace progresses, we become more and more rooted in our true Self. Spend five minutes on this visualization practice. Be open and receptive to your self-effulgent inner light, as you rest your attention on the flame in the heart.

Our third practice is to meditate on the text:

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

In peace and purity, something more will be released from the depths of our nature. It is suggested by the word ‘light’, although the reality transcends word and concept. Let us consider, ‘What is our ultimate nature? What is it in us that seeks to create conditions of peace and purity?’ That nature is itself peace and purity. Peace and purity are the outer court, as it were, of That which is fundamental. Our essential nature is denoted by the word ‘light’, signifying the pure, unveiled, limitless nature of the consciousness that makes all experience possible.

In the ancient text known as *The Gospel of Thomas*, there is the statement attributed to Jesus: ‘If they say to you, “Where have you come from?” say to them, “We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself...”’ [50]

This is a great principle of all the deeper meditative schools: there is light at the very core of our being. Our nature is often referred to as light, and that light is not separate from the light which is the foundation of all creation, of all experience. In another text from the same collection of sayings, we read: ‘There is light within a person of light, and it shines on the whole world. If it does not shine, it is dark.’ [24]

This is the ultimate light. It is what is real and eternal in us. All else will pass, but our true nature, as light, will not pass. It is peace, purity, beauty absolute, complete wisdom—for light means the light of higher knowledge, the knowledge that transcends mind and matter, and which satisfies for ever. Our true Self is light—not the light we can see or imagine with our senses or mind, but that immediacy of awareness that we can realize our identity with, through meditation based on peace and the progressive purification of our thought processes. All this is signified in our text for meditation:

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

Our first two practices have pacified the mind and sensitized our awareness, preparing the way for the great affirmations contained in the text. The structure of progressive practices—breathing, visualization and text—is the means through which we may help ourselves advance in understanding and depth. If we are prepared, the meaning of the affirmations will be assimilated and the immutable Truth, which is beyond the understanding of the changeable mind, can be realized in direct experience. So open up your being to the words of the text, fill your mind with them, and you will come into contact with a power infinitely greater than the mind, yet which has its source in your own being. Meditate on the text for about seven minutes.

These practices—through their deepening influence on our mind—decentralize our sense of identity from the ‘me’ of personal individuality to the ‘I’ which is universal and the Self of all. Merely by doing these practices we are tuning ourselves with the deeper reality and contributing to that pure, peaceful influence that exists for the good of all. So let us rest once more in this atmosphere of peace, purity and light in the knowledge that this too is a service giving upliftment and nourishment to all, and particularly to those who share our need for peace and light.

YOGA IS A LIFE OF CONSCIOUS ENDEAVOUR

From a lecture on the Katha Upanishad by Hari Prasad Shastri

Yogic living is a life consciously directed to a particular goal—the goal of complete freedom and universalisation of our mind. A common life is a life lived without a plan, without consciousness of a goal and without serious endeavour made towards the reaching of any high ideal in life.

The goal is the discovery of the infinite, of Truth, of virtue in our own being, which means identification of the limited consciousness with the absolute consciousness. Yoga wants to plant a real desire for infinite bliss and freedom in the heart of all, so that each caring for all and all for each, the kingdom of heaven may be established on earth. This Utopia is the natural ideal of mankind and there is no force in the world to prevent it from finding realization.

The training of the writer as a scientific thinker has brought him to the conclusion that disorder and disharmony are not according to the laws of nature. The great rhythm of life is in silence. Our body grows in silence, and a perfectly healthy organism is not aware of any noises in his body. If I hear the beat of my heart or the creaking of bones, it is a symptom of illness. Silence, silence, silence, harmony, harmony is the law which governs the growth of entities according to Mother Nature, hand in hand with the Lord Omniscient and Omnipotent.

Yoga means a life of conscious endeavour. A purposeless life is doomed to suffering. Satisfaction of physiological needs is not the ultimate purpose of life; satisfying the empirical part of ourselves is not satisfying the best part of ourselves. Each individual, living harmoniously, body with mind and mind with spirit, and with the whole of society constructed for a definite purpose, like a machine where each screw and each spring has its own part to play—this is called yogic living.

What is the purpose of humanity? To evolve a spiritual culture of the first magnitude and a state of civilization where each can pursue details of that culture free from penury. The apex is the discovery in the individual as well as in the group called humanity, of one unity of

purpose in all. This is the realization of God within. As species grow from simple to complex, so some individuals, getting away from the common life, will be united with the Lord God—this is the purpose of evolution.

To the knowers of Truth, the whole of humanity, nature and society, is an open book. What science knows now is not equal to one grain of sand in all the desert of knowledge; but to the holy Rishis it is all an open book and they are the doctors of the soul of humanity and their words are words of wisdom.

When I was a pilgrim in the Himalayas, and thirst brought me to a waterfall, I often found a notice: ‘This water is unfit for human consumption’. I wish we could label many activities today as unfit for humanity. A fellow pilgrim who could not read, drank that water and in a few days he was full of ulcers. The people of today are suffering from the ulcers of loss of judgment, false desires, false cravings, instability and want of trust in each other. What we need is right education—civilization in the yogic sense.

To live consciously means to direct your life. But before directing your life to a noble end you have to practise control and education of the mind. That education is useless which does not teach us mastery over the senses and mind. There is a light within the mind. The light of the Lord is in everybody, and to discover it in one’s mind is the summit of life, because it gives permanent satisfaction. It quenches the craving for pleasure for ever; it solves the riddle of the universe easily and silently.

How is this accomplished? By daily devotion, discipline and prayer, by unselfishness and service of the Teacher, and above all, a living knowledge of identity with that light. That light is Brahman, meaning ‘majestic’. Infinite majesty is the nature of that light in its totality. Live these teachings—love them. If you extend your compassion to all, at that moment much of your sufferings will leave you. When you meditate on the Lord in your heart every day; when you give your love unconditionally, and when you have seen Him Who shines in everything, you have overcome death. For you have realized the identity of your true Self with that infinite, immortal light.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

The talks given at Shanti Sadan on Thursdays during the Spring term covered such themes as *The Goal of the Higher Yoga*, *Bhagavad Gita—From Grief to Peace*, *The Wisdom of Rama Tirtha*, *Japanese Spiritual Poetry and Art—The Terrestrial and the Transcendental*. The final talk was entitled *Realize What You Are*.

The afternoon course at the Columbia Hotel on Sunday, February 22, featured three presentations—the first and last incorporating meditation, and the second presentation, *The Means to Higher Knowledge*, considered the inherent limitations of empirical knowledge, in contrast with the ‘omniscience’ of self-knowledge as it is taught in the Upanishads. The first lecture, *Meditation—Learning how to Learn*, offered three practical ideas of how we can keep meditation practice fresh and creative. *Actualising the Inner Light*, the last talk, showed how spiritual progress is not based on endowing the mind with any new light; it is essentially a thinning and dispelling of the inner darkness produced by lack of knowledge, wrong knowledge and doubt. The meditation text of the day was a reminder that ‘Peace, Light and Fearlessness are My Nature’. Details of the next afternoon course are given below.

Shanti Sadan’s latest publication, *Awakening to Self-knowledge*, remains on a postage-free offer to readers of this journal.

For the general reader who wishes to become familiar with a range of key Vedanta topics, we may recommend Dr Shastri’s book of 17 lectures entitled *Wisdom from the East*. Topics include Creation, Brahman and Ishvara, the Individual Self, OM and Superimposition. There are six chapters on meditation. This paperback costs £1.50 plus postage.

Summer 2015 Special Course

Sunday 7 June 2015 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NS

Talk 1 *Brightening our Inner Life*

First Guided Meditation Practice

Talk 2 *From Travail to Transcendence*

Talk 3 *The Path of Light*

Second Guided Meditation Practice