

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

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SHANTI SADAN, 29 CHEPSTOW VILLAS, LONDON W11 3DR

to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE AUTUMN 2015

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

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

Thursday evenings at 8pm — autumn term dates to be announced shortly. There will be a series of talks on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

The Autumn afternoon course will be held on Sunday 18 October 2015, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Details to follow. All events organised by Shanti Sadan are free of charge, and there is no need to book in advance.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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LIVING TO ONE'S SELF

The phrase 'me time' has found its way into the dictionaries, meaning 'time spent relaxing on one's own'. As a child of fashionable talk, its active life may turn out to be short. But the concept behind it is life-giving, if our 'me time' is spiritually creative.

Our wish to spend time in voluntary solitude signals a crying need of the soul. The world is too much with us, and our mind is like unset clay, forever being pounded by the opinions of others, so that we hardly have time for independent thought and inner space. We also need a little 'me time' to prove our capacity to be alone but not lonely. Life is bound to bring us times of aloneness. If we are prepared, we can learn to feel at home with ourselves and rise above the sense of emptiness and rejection we call loneliness. It all depends on how we use the time.

Nearly two hundred years ago William Hazlitt wrote an essay called

‘On Living to One’s-self’. Hazlitt, a vigorous and controversial writer of essays and articles, had his share of inner torment, and knew the value of forgetting, for a while, not just the world, but his own individuality. For him, ‘living to one’s-self’ meant ‘Never thinking at all about one’s self, any more than if there were no such person in existence. The character I speak of is as little of an egoist as possible.’

Hazlitt’s therapy was to withdraw to his country retreat, and take refuge in books, nature, quiet and simple living, in company with his own thoughts on the many topics that interested him. In this way he would gain temporary relief and emotional recuperation.

But our ‘me time’ can be more fruitful than this, if we are aware of the spiritual dimension of our being and practise daily meditation. When we close the windows of our senses, and try to collect our thoughts, we forget outer supports, however cosy, and sensitize our mind to the great presence, the supreme spiritual power that underlies and transcends our human nature, and which is our true Self.

The ultimate use of our voluntary retreat into the solitude of a timeless hour each day, is indicated by Shri Dada of Aligarh in one of his discourses in *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*. He reminds us that our life is a sacred trust. Instead of losing ourselves in trivialities, we can create something of ineffable good within ourselves, if we develop the daily habit of going into voluntary mental and nervous relaxation, and concentrating our mind on a symbol of Truth, whether it be a word, a concept or an image. It is in this prolonged silence of the soul that we will become aware of the patterns of what we are to create in the inner and outer world. This need not be anything tangible or perceptible, and can be the creation of beautiful thoughts and a serene inner atmosphere. For in the mind of each of us there is ‘an infinite world of beauty and goodness’.

Such a process leads to the end of all torment, the fulfilment of every need.

Light from Meditation

MEDITATION is a profound and life-giving practice. When it is based on an appreciation of the deeper dimension of our being, meditation is a way of progress and inner expansion, introducing us to that inmost ground of consciousness that is free from all limitations and self-effulgent.

This flowering of meditation will only come about if we treat the practice seriously and as relevant to our entire outlook on life. The methods are available to everyone, but the hidden light and peace of our own being will only be revealed through dedicated application.

This light and peace are not benefits we need to acquire from some wonderful person, place or resource. They are qualities of our true nature and are therefore potential in the mind itself. Through our mind the supreme and liberating wisdom is to be realized. But the mind needs to be guided and made peaceful, and needs to cherish a longing for lasting fulfilment, before its great qualities can manifest. This guidance is the gift of the higher yoga—the yoga which focuses on the mind and the source of its life, power and being.

Most people are unaware of the supreme faculty of wisdom lying dormant in the depth of their own mind. We constantly underestimate ourselves and see little point in looking within in order to discover a better quality of experience. When we are alone and left with our thoughts, we often feel bored and inadequate, limited and closed in. We seem to be more at home with outer noise and constant diversion. Little do we suspect that in inner silence, something wonderful and radiant will be released from the source of our own being.

We are encouraged to live at peace with others, but if we are not at peace with ourselves, as tested in our own private experience, what we can do for others might not go very deep. For the central fact on which true meditation is based is that within us all there is something utterly serene and fulfilled, and which knows no limitation whatsoever. This transcendent principle is within us all equally. A Japanese verse says:

Under cherry blossoms
All are friends,
None a total stranger.

An enlightened understanding discerns a hidden bond of unity, and knows all life as an expression of the one infinite life and beauty. None is superior or inferior. At any time, we can remind ourselves of this deeper reality and open ourselves to its liberating power, by pausing in our activity for a minute or two, and focusing on such affirmations as:

OM Peace light and fearlessness are my nature.
I am not the mind, which is ever changing. OM

All great achievements have small beginnings, and meditation begins as a practice where we learn to sit quietly, turn within and bring our wandering thoughts to a focus, sometimes with the help of deep breathing. In time meditation will become as natural and agreeable as taking rest or food. But we need first to accustom ourselves to its procedure, such as sitting still, silent and undistracted. This self-discipline helps to create some degree of inner space, or inner peace. Then in that peace, something higher and purer will come alive in our experience, and we will know with certainty that there is supreme value hidden in our being that is worthy of exploration and discovery. We need not seek far for happiness. The priceless gem of higher wisdom is enshrined within us.

Our challenge is to make our mind serene and sensitive, so that we may awaken and mature our faculty of higher intuition, and, in the end, confirm the realization of the sages in our own experience. The effort we have spoken of involves seeing ourselves in a new light and guiding our mind in a new way.

The following calming practice, which reminds us of our true nature, may be performed as part of our preparation for meditation or whenever we have a quiet interval.

Breathe slowly, drawing up the in-breath as if from the navel to the spot between the eyebrows. With each breath say silently:

‘I am peace; I am peace.’ Devote five minutes to this exercise.

In following the life of meditation and enquiry into the nature of reality, we are not trying to add anything new to ourselves. Our innermost Self *is* the reality we seek. Our approach is to remove the false ideas and tendencies that confuse our understanding of our true nature. There is a Chinese verse by Kaigen that gives a hint of this negation of error and confusion generated by the thoughts of our mind.

The old master held up fluff
and blew from his palm
revealing the source itself.
Look where clouds hide the peak.

Our present mental world, if it hides the Truth, is compared to the fluff, and the practice of meditation is like the blowing away of this fluff. In other words, our approach is to remove the obstacles to illumination, and thus reveal our ultimate nature, not to create an inner state that we do not already possess.

At first, our research concerns our mind as it is operating right now. We learn to view our mind impersonally and with detachment—a standpoint that is itself liberating. The secret of enlightenment and inner freedom is linked to the way we manage our thinking processes—our thoughts and our feelings. Uncontrolled thinking, which goes on automatically without self-awareness, forms a subtle veil over the deeper level of our being, and cuts us off from the inner peace and light.

The first stage of removing this veil is to become more aware of the state and tendencies of our mind, and to give a direction to them that accords with our higher aspiration. This means that our thoughts are generated according to our wishes, and are not allowed to lead us spontaneously into moods or fits of rage or depression. Applying our thought-force consciously is a step towards self-mastery.

The mind itself, including our feelings, is not our true Self. Even the mind’s history of experiences, its make-up and moral state, are not our true nature. Our true Self is consciousness absolute and it transcends the

mind. It ‘witnesses’ the mental stream, not actively, but as the ultimate principle of awareness that, like an interior sun, reveals and illumines all. Hence we are offered for reflection such statements as: ‘My Self is witness, consciousness absolute, one in all.’

How, then, should we regard the mind, which is likely to be our life-long companion; and how might we ensure that it is a true companion and not a trouble-maker? Athletes or certain performing artists sometimes speak of their bodies as instruments that must be trained and treated with care and wisdom, if they are to perform well. Yoga takes this a stage further. It teaches that our mind, too, with its energies and capacities, is a much more potent instrument than the body. Our mind is meant to be an instrument of the supreme power, which is one with the innermost Self of all. As such, our mind can learn to gain a sense of direction from that superior power, and to use its energies for the furthering of our highest good, enlightenment. We want to be truly free, and meditation equips us with those levers of control and insight that will eventually lead us to realization of the Absolute as our true Self.

To view our inner life objectively, from a deeper standpoint, confers a new sense of freedom and power. It is a great relief to be able to observe our inner world as if it belonged to someone else, and to direct our mental interests from that position of independence and authority. For example, we will find that we gain a progressively clearer knowledge of what is going on in the mind. We will see, in a way not realized before, how thoughts and ideas, feelings and memories, flow into the mind all the time. They spring from a seemingly inexhaustible source of subtle energy, so that our mind appears to have a life of its own which usually goes unsupervised.

Therefore, when we are asked to concentrate on something in particular, say, a text for meditation, we are likely to meet with interference, in the form of restlessness, distraction or sleepiness. These mental influences are examples of unconscious or unmindful thinking. No one chooses to be agitated or distracted: it just seems to happen.

To apply the force of our thinking consciously means the capacity to think what we like for as long as we like. It is the power to say: ‘No! I won’t think of that just now. It is a distraction,’ or ‘Yes! This is interesting and useful. I will give it my concentration.’ Conscious

thinking means controlling and directing the inner energies. With training, it can bring great alertness and the capacity to spot negative signals in ourselves, like thoughts of harm, and swiftly divert our thoughts to what is worthwhile. A few minutes spent on the following exercise will help us to cultivate our strength in taking responsibility for our thoughts.

Sit in relaxation, turning your attention inwards. Allow thoughts to appear, but when you become aware of your thought, let it pass on by using the following formula: ‘Not wanted now. You are passing clouds. I am the sun.’

When we first apply these teachings, we may feel that our mind is hopelessly uncontrolled, and that we have failed. In reality, we have achieved a victory. It is an insight to realize that our mind is uncontrolled. That itself is a conscious thought. In most people the true extent of the inner chaos goes undetected, because they never look within. In time, given patience, sustained interest and regularity of practice, meditation will reveal itself as the key to equanimity and self-discovery.

We have talked about the mind and its thoughts and how we can learn to step back, see what is happening and make a change—if we need to. The same wisdom applies to emotions and feelings. At first sight this seems impossible, because feelings are strong, spontaneous, and, we may feel, should be left to themselves. In other words, we doubt whether it is desirable or psychologically healthy to control emotion.

But in yoga, rigid control and suppression are not meant at all. It is more like a rechanneling of those selfish and self-centred emotions that have a narrowing effect on our experience, into more expansive expressions, such as unselfish love, compassion for those who are suffering, universal goodwill and tolerance, a feeling for the unity of all life, and devotion to the one great Reality behind everything.

Then how can we gain some leverage over our emotional life, so that it serves our true welfare, and does not lead us into misery and frustration? This integration of our personality is possible through

practice and through deeper understanding, matured gradually, not forcefully. This is why in the course of a meditation session, we are given preliminary practices to help create inner calm. Once we have calmed ourselves down, and are reasonably relaxed, yet alert, it becomes possible to introduce a particular idea or spiritual sentiment that the mind can focus on and develop. One meditation text that fosters universal goodwill, for example, is: ‘OM. I am one with the infinite power of love. I am peace. I am light. OM.’

All of us are blessed with the higher faculty called will. Meditation means consciously using our will on the inner plane—to try to keep our focus and to dismiss distracting thoughts by telling them: ‘You are not wanted right now’ and letting them pass away. We recall the image in the Chinese poem of blowing away fluff from the palm of our hand. Use your authority as the conscious and superior power that can banish any thought if it chooses to do so.

When we want something badly in the world, we galvanize our will in order to get it. In fact we are very good at consciously turning a deaf ear to advice that goes against our wish. This selecting-out is applied in meditation when we dismiss unwanted thoughts. Our will is fundamentally strong. It has more power than thought and emotion, as a lion is stronger than a fly. The will is at the centre of our personality. So our will is a key member of our inner team as we turn our efforts to the path of enlightenment, and each of us can plant the seed-idea: ‘I can and will transform my mind into an instrument of peace and freedom.’ If we occasionally affirm this during the day, we will be strengthened and energised by its light and power.

There is a principle within us which is higher than will. This is our real Self or our real I. Sometimes this real Self—this real I—is called the Inner Ruler of the personality. It is that in us which is truly conscious, and this consciousness is immortal and the ground of our being. We may not recognize or feel it, but it is ever present. The nature of our innermost Self is peace and bliss. Ultimately, there is only one Self that underlies all beings equally. On this fundamental level, we are all united. Despite the discords on the surface, to the one of deeper understanding, there is but one reality, and we meditate on this one reality in order to awaken to our eternal identity with that reality.

So we come to new and higher reasons for wishing to control our thoughts and emotions. We want to create harmony within ourselves and, through our meditative mind, that harmony will spread around us without our needing to do anything—without our being aware of the peaceful influence that emanates from our serene mind. As we move in the world, we live in the awareness that no one is a stranger or outsider, and that, in the words of the Urdu verse by Zauq:

In this world of forms,
There are a million appearances.
All are the creations of the Divine Artist;
None is mediocre.

Inner harmony means that all the forces in our personality are pulling in the same direction because they are reaching for the same goal. We may say: ‘There are so many interests in life, so many tendencies in my nature, and they all need their different kinds of food.’ But the realization of the infinity of our true Self is the peak of fulfilment. The real object of our love in all our adventures and researches turns out to be our innermost Self. All other loves are partial and imperfect substitutes for the true object of love. Only spiritual enlightenment will quench the thirst of the soul for a love and fulfilment that even physical death cannot challenge.

As we pursue our practice, something in our intellect that is higher than our will becomes operative. This is the faculty of higher intuition, which leads us to understand the true value of the light of meditation. The spiritual nature within us is our ultimate source and support, yet in itself is transcendent. It belongs to a different order of reality and is neither material nor mental. It is purity and perfection itself.

Meditation produces highly significant changes in our inner being, which unfold a new understanding. Our faculty of wisdom, *prajna*, abides in a higher part of our mind, and when purified, reflects and ultimately reveals our identity as the true Self, the source of all.

If we want lasting fulfilment, the best thing we can do for ourselves is to pause occasionally during our day, turn within and quieten the lower activities of our mind. This will help us put our state of mind and

circumstances into perspective and remind us of our higher nature. We can do this with the help of our meditation text or a calming practice. If we make small and regular applications of this wisdom, the time will come, possibly very soon, when we will know in our own experience that there is a deeper dimension within us which is not of the world, which transcends limitations, and is the source of all fulfilment and meaning.

Keeping alive our spiritual aspiration has been compared to carrying a feather—a task that is easy enough, one would think. Yet how easy it is to forget that we are carrying a feather, because of its lightness. In the same way, the instructions for spiritual practice are straightforward, but the practices will only help us if we remember to do them.

B.D.

THE CELESTIAL LAKE

O Lake of crystal water,
Do not invite elephants
To bathe in thee.
Do not permit dogs
To swim in thee.
Forbid vultures
To drop the blood-stained innocent doves
In the pearly waters.
O Lake Celestial,
Grow lotuses and lilies
And reflect the Milky Way
In the clear moonlight.

* * *

Protect your mind from outer influences more carefully than you would protect a rare diamond.

H.P.S.

Considerateness

Hari Prasad Shastri lived and taught in China from 1918 to 1929. Here he discusses the great quality of 'Jen', promulgated by Confucius.

THE TEACHINGS of the sage Confucius, which have given stability to China, can be summed up in one word. In English it can be translated as considerateness. This item of ethics is easily eclipsed, when our reason and individualism do not allow us to look into the hearts of others with sympathy, co-operation, or a feeling of inner unity. Let us see what Confucianism means and try to adopt it in our daily life also.

It is said in the classics that long ago in China there were two brothers who were considered rivals of their elder brother and sharers in the vast patrimony which their father had left. These two brothers were conscious of their inability to administer the property efficiently or to devote it to the purpose of benevolence and righteousness. They therefore gave the property to the eldest brother, who was by common consent considered to be the right person to administer the estate for the good of themselves as well as others. They made no claim, but quietly left the town and began to live in the woods, leaving the elder brother in full and undisputed possession of the property and the pursuit of righteousness and benevolence through the estate which their father had left for them. They were not heard of again. This conduct cannot be called rational, or even just, from the ordinary standard of justice, but it was the highest considerateness.

Through a family arrangement, a youth was married to a simple village child. The youth became a scholar, devoted to the good of others through literature, politics and sociology. When they set up home together, he discovered how ill-suited they were from an intellectual point of view. Yet he did not leave her, nor did he show resentment against her. He paid every consideration to her, employed teachers to teach her and made her as comfortable as he could, remaining devoted to her. This also is Confucian considerateness.

A well-dressed young man, slightly vain and proud of his social position, was walking in a crowd. Someone stepped on his toe. His silk gown was soiled and his toe hurt. He looked at the man who had

trodden on his foot and found that he was a poor, blind stranger. He carefully led him out of the crowd and put him in the charge of a man who guided him, and gave him a meal and a little extra money. Reason does not dictate such behaviour, but it is considerateness.

Once Shri Dada, on his way to the holy Ganges at Rajghat, travelled in the same compartment as an illiterate man, poorly dressed and by no means an entertaining or interesting companion. Shri Dada talked to him, as he always used to do, in a friendly way. The man asked his name and Shri Dada gave him his name and address. About six months later, he received a letter from the man, informing the holy saint of the sudden and serious illness of his old mother and asking for his advice and help. Shri Dada at once despatched his disciple, Teerath Mal, with a blanket, money and instructions. Someone asked: 'Is this man an old friend of yours?' Shri Dada replied: 'No, he travelled with me in the same compartment some time ago when I was going to the holy Ganges.' Not to judge from the point of view of justice, but to show considerateness, is a firm pillar of virtue.

If you ever meet a person and you travel with him or hold a conversation with him, considerateness demands that you think well of him that day and also again when the occasion may arise. Considerateness is not guided by any personal consideration, or by reason or justice, but by dharma, and the ethical law dictates that all is Atman (the true Self), and so everybody whom we come to know has a claim on our affection in some form or another.

Before renouncing the world, Swami Rama Tirtha bought a piece of very good silk and called a tailor to make a robe for him. When someone asked why he indulged in such an expensive luxury, the professor answered: 'When a woman in India wants to immolate herself with the dead body of her husband, she puts on the best of dress. Rama too is going to immolate his personality at the altar of Truth, in the fire of renunciation and this is his robe for the occasion.' The tailor who came to take the order was a very ignorant man. Finding that his client was what he considered to be a thoughtless and uneconomical man, he charged him much more than was due and took twice as much cloth as was actually required to make the dress. Rama's friend, Harlal, said: 'Sir, the tailor is a cheat. Why should you allow yourself to be swindled

by such an unscrupulous man?' Professor Rama Tirtha Swami said in reply: 'How can I blame my own Self? He is my Atman.' After a few days the tailor came in a spirit of great remorse and repentance. This incident shows considerateness.

Considerateness is a great virtue, and I wish to impress upon us that it is a pillar of the edifice of our life. Let us be considerate. Let us give considerateness to our brothers and sisters. Let us be considerate even to the poor animals.

In the Hindu traditions, King Shantanu, the royal father of Prince Bhishma, a very high character in the Mahabharata and a great devotee of Shri Krishna, fell in love with a fisherman's daughter. He could not marry her because he had not the consent of his son, Prince Bhishma. The prince found that his father's mind was very agitated. He went to him and gave his full consent, cheerfully and willingly, to the proposed marriage of the king. He also relinquished his right to the throne as an heir of the king and agreed to the condition laid down by the girl, that her own son, when born, should inherit the crown. This is another example of considerateness.

Suppose we have a friend today and he is good and kind, companionable and interested in the pursuit of learning. We keep on friendly terms with him for some time, say, a few years. Afterwards the character of the friend changes, and he ceases to be interested in the same things as we are. Should we give up our friendship with him? No, it is not considerateness.

The moral ruin of a man begins when he gives preference to his own comfort and convenience over the comfort and convenience of his friends or neighbours. If he is versed in the ethics of considerateness, he will keep on with the friend under any circumstances.

There is a very great joy in the exercise of considerateness. When such questions have to be considered, we have to lay aside our reason and our petty sense of justice. This the only way to root out our individualism, which is pampered by our narrow sense of egoity. In this way considerateness becomes a very great help. I am sure that by the practice of this great virtue, you will experience a great peace and delight which you cannot find in the ordinary affairs of life.

The Pathway to God in Hindi Poetry

The title of this article comes from a book published in 1954 by the Marathi scholar, R D Ranade. He says that his idea for the anthology, *The Pathway to God through Hindi Poetry*, came to him through conversations with academic friends he made in the course of his travels as a scholar, and who shared his taste for mystical poetry. The book consists of two volumes, one with 120 short songs by mediaeval religious Hindi poets, followed by a hundred separate verses of the same authors, in the style called *doha*. The second volume contains a kind of free commentary on them in English.

Ranade divides his anthology according to five themes: incentives to spiritual life, the necessity for moral preparation, the relation of God to saints, the beginnings of the pilgrimage, and the highest ascent. We will try to say a little on each of these heads.

But first a few generalities about mediaeval Hindi religious poetry. The main body of the authors were preachers and religious reformers, who avoided Sanskrit and composed simple songs in the vernacular that people could sing either alone or in community singing, and which would remind them of the spiritual dimension of life, so easily forgotten in the rush of daily life. Such singers had, or at least it was believed that they had, inspiration from God, with whom they were in direct contact, frequently with a sense of identity. It was believed that this did not come except under the guidance of a spiritual guru who had himself attained the sense of identity with his Maker, and was equipped to hand it on to those pupils who were prepared to pay the price in obedience and one-pointed devotion to the Lord.

Such teachers were known as Sants, and though the approximation of this word in sound to our word 'Saints' is purely accidental, it is more or less appropriate to think of a Sant as a saint in our sense, except that he did not require to be consecrated as a Sant by any ecclesiastical hierarchy, and might indeed show hostility to the external forms of conventional religions, in so far as their rituals might either be meaningless or else conducive to further rebirth and suffering. This would apply if such rituals were performed in the hope of the fulfilment

of narrow desires. It might also be the case that congregations of people who visualized God in one particular form might harbour feelings of enmity towards those who conceived him in another form. For all these reasons, the Sants were cool towards organised religion.

We shall see that the poets of the pure Sant tradition largely held back from identifying themselves with any particular Hindu or Islamic sect of their day in Northern India. But some of the poets introduced, such as Surdas and Tulsidas, were religious poets advocating worship of God in personal form, as Krishna and Rama respectively. These are here quoted only where their work accords with the moral and spiritual teaching of the Sants. Because the Sants held back from exclusive or fanatical association with any particular religion, they were able to identify with the one God who is worshipped in all religions, and that is why our teacher, Dr Shastri, was fond of referring to his own teacher, who was in many respects a Sant, as the Saint Universal.

Our first theme, then, is incentives to spiritual life. One of the messages of the Hindi mediaeval poets is to remind us of the downside of life as we are apt to live it. These reminders spur us on to enhance our occasional impulses to break free from the bonds of habit and turn to the teachings of holy men and women. For they show us the path to freedom from disease, old age and death, and thereby how to focus our desires on something broader and more enduring than the satisfaction of our ego feelings and attention to the immediate needs of the body. The Indian cultural heritage is such that if an Indian is religious at all, he usually believes in rebirth, so that if we do not cut the bonds of conventional living tied to the ego and the body, with its inevitable disappointments in this life, we shall have to go on having more lives with the same result until we do cut them. But the teachings hold good perfectly well for this one life, even if the dimension of rebirth and endless repetition is not accepted.

The first song we shall consider is by Surdas. Surdas was not strictly a Sant because he was an exclusive worshipper of the God Vishnu, particularly in the latter's manifestation as the God Krishna. So he lacked the character of universality that we associate with the Sants—strictly-so-called. But he composed a number of songs on moral and spiritual topics in the style of the Sants, and when his songs came to be

written down and collected long after his death, these songs were put first, perhaps to help establish the mood in which his songs depicting the life of Krishna should be sung or heard.

Incidentally, we have hardly any hard information about the lives of any of the poets represented in the book, *The Pathway to God*, because the scraps of information that survive are hopelessly interwoven with legends. We can just say they lived in Northern India roughly between AD 1400 and 1600.

In this song Surdas addresses God and confesses that he has mis-spent his life. It is not a personal autobiographical confession in the manner of the opening books of St Augustine's *Confessions*, where the bishop confesses the sins of his youth in autobiographical narrative with a view to demonstrate to the reader how God will watch over, protect and ultimately reform a sinner, if the sinner turns to him in time. Surdas apparently confesses sins and mistakes as if he had himself committed them. But the suggestion is that he is describing how unreformed humanity behaves in general and what the consequences are—along with suggesting that he, too, is a man, with the same sinful tendencies as anyone else, and needs to turn to God for protection and forgiveness. He illustrates his theme with the same simple and clear images taken either from traditional poetical clichés and proverbs or from everyday village life of the time that mark the work of all the poets we shall be considering.

We could paraphrase his words something like this:

Living in this world, I was again and again deceived and disappointed. I did not understand what was happening. I was caught and held by the perfume of sense-objects as the bee is caught and held by the perfume of the flower. Even though God, Hari, was present in my house (in my own heart in my body), I could not find him, like one who loses a diamond though he knows it is lying somewhere within his house. In birth after birth I confused water with what is really sand. I rushed about, here and there, pursuing sense-objects but none of them quenched my thirst. I was like a deer vainly pursuing mirages in the desert. In life after life I was active, but in the end my actions only led to further entanglement. I was like a parrot which pecks at the fruit of the silk-cotton tree. After hours of work night and day, it pierces the

husk and finds that the kernel is nothing but packed cotton. It buries its beak in the packed cotton and becomes entangled in it. I was like the monkey of a strolling entertainer, dancing on the end of the string in hopes of some crumbs as a reward. Bereft of the worship of the Lord, I became a soft morsel for the boa-constrictor of death.

Here Surdas stresses the downside of life. We know it. Worldly objects are changeful and uncertain, old age and death certain. But under the impulse of thirst for pleasure from sense objects, we forget to worship God who is all the time present in our hearts. Like the parrot, we labour day and night to amass wealth wherewith to obtain the luscious fruit of sweet pleasure, only to bury our beaks and entangle them in layers of tasteless, sapless, silk-cotton.

On the second topic, that of the necessity for preparation before the path can be begun, we have a poem of Tulsidas. The poet Tulsidas, who was both a devotee of Vishnu in his avatar as Rama, and also a true universal Sant welcoming God wherever found, reminds us, under the figure of a warrior's chariot, of the virtues we have to cultivate. The song merely sets up an allegory, and does not in anyway claim to be a metaphor. That is, there is no particularly significant connection between the different parts of the chariot and the virtues for which they are made to stand. The poet merely aims to produce a noble picture of a warrior's chariot, inviting us to use the various parts of the chariot, so to speak, as peg-racks on which to hang our mental images of the virtues we should pursue. Of course, it does this more effectively as a song in rhyme and metre than the speaker can do as a prose paraphrase.

The chariot which takes us to true virtue is different from an ordinary chariot. Courage and patience are its two wheels. Its flag-pole and banner are truth-speaking and good conduct. It has four horses to supply the motive power—physical strength, intellectual power to discriminate the enduring from the transient, control of the senses, and the will to serve others. They are joined to the chariot by the harness of forbearance, kindness, and equimindedness. The skilful charioteer is the repetition of the name of God. Non-attachment to things of the world is the armour of the chariot. Contentment is the sword and generosity is the battle-axe. Intellect is its ferocious force in battle, deep wisdom its tight-strung mighty bow. A pure and motionless mind is the

quiver for its arrows. Self-discipline in its various forms are the various arrows. Worship of the Guru and of holy men and women generally is the high and impregnable super-structure of the chariot. There is no other instrument of victory to compare with it.

The self-disciplines referred to are those given in Sutras 30 and 32 of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Without attempting a complete catalogue, we could consider a few of them as explained in the classical commentary of Vyasa. Ahimsa or harmlessness prescribes that there should never under any circumstances be aggression against any living creature. Our Teacher would not have endorsed this to the point of invariably turning the other cheek and failing to resist evil. Like a swan, you can always hiss, he used to say. The commentator says that all the other virtues mentioned under the heading of self-discipline are for the sake of acquiring harmlessness. To be totally harmless in thought, word and deed implies virtues of a high order, particularly when one feels oneself to be insulted.

The Persian mystic, Attar, in his biography of the saints, cites as a model the case of a holy man who was pursued as he walked through the streets of Baghdad by a man who kept shouting ‘Hypocrite’ at him in full view of the passers-by, and showering him with abuse. The holy man went on his way without paying any attention until he got within a couple of hundred yards of his home. He then turned round to the man and said, ‘What you are saying is perfectly true and I thank you for it, but I advise you to keep quiet from now on, as we are going to where I live and there are people living round here who might come out and do you a physical injury if they heard you.’

The other disciplines contribute to harmlessness because they remove greed and hatred from the mind. The first mentioned is truth-speaking. This includes the rule of speaking the truth sweetly if it is necessary, even though it will be at first unwelcome to the hearer. But it does not mean we should follow the character in the play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, who said, ‘On an occasion like this it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one’s mind—it becomes a pleasure.’ Some inimitable examples of the right way to speak the truth sweetly to those who need it are given in our teacher’s biography of his

own teacher, Shri Dada, called the *Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*.

Amongst other practices recommended in the *Yoga Sutras* under this head are cleanliness, contentment with what comes, study of religious texts to keep their content in mind, and worship of God. According to a modern commentator on the *Yoga Sutras*, worship of God does not just mean performance of ritual—it means cherishing the thought ‘God and I are one’ to the point where all acts are performed for the sake of God and without desire for personal reward. The goal to be aimed at is to become so sure of the presence of God within that one loses or at least comes close to losing the sense of personal agency.

Returning to our basic text, the book called *The Pathway to God*, we pass from the topic of moral preparation to the third topic, that of the relation between God and the saints.

To illustrate this topic, we have a song by Ramananda. Apart from a report by a contemporary Muslim, we know little about him, but that scanty information is significant. It runs in part:

There was a famous Mahatma in Benares in the Panc Ganga Ghat. He is a brilliant figure and a master of Yoga. He is honoured as a teacher by all the worshippers of Vishnu. He is a model of good behaviour and of devotion to God in the most abstract form. He knows the secret of the Supreme Self. He has great influence both amongst those who worship the Lord and amongst Vedantins who pursue God in abstract form. At present he only comes out from his cave to bathe in the Ganges at the sacred hour before dawn. His name is Swami Ramananda and he has about five hundred followers. About twelve have received his full abundant grace, Kabir, Pipa, Raidas and others. He is spoken of as a Vairagi. A Vairagi is one who has given up all desires for anything in this world and the next. The founder of his tradition was Sita, spouse of Rama. Sita gave the teachings to Hanuman. The tradition is called the Shri Sampradaya. The guru whispers the name of Rama in the ear of the disciple, concealed in a mantra. The disciple wears a rosary of Tulsi beads around his neck. When reciting his mantram he places his beloved Lord Rama in his tongue while clinging to Him with his mind. These disciples are known as sants, atmaramis, or paramahansas.

So much for a Muslim's contemporary report. High claims have been made for Ramananda in modern times. The Shri Sampradaya to which he belonged was founded by Ramanuja way back in the twelfth century, in the south, near Madras. It was called the Shri Sampradaya because Lakshmi, female consort of Vishnu and known also as Shri, meaning prosperity, is supposed to have inspired him. Trained in Shankara's school, Ramanuja founded a rival school which made more room for devotion. Part of his reason for this was the explosion of devotional Krishna poetry that had occurred some centuries earlier in the local language of the people in the area where he lived, namely Tamil. These poets took no account of caste—they had, among their number a Brahmin, an untouchable, a woman, and a king who had abdicated to find God. Ramanuja himself did not reject caste, but he promoted this poetry as a means of salvation for those not entitled to the traditional Sanskrit training of a monk. He called it the fifth Veda.

Ramanuja's Shri-Vaishnava tradition has persisted to the present day, divided into different sects. An important figure was the poet Ramananda's Guru, Raghavananda, said to have been fifth in line from Ramanuja as head of the sect. He appears to have become estranged by the retention of caste beliefs amongst the members of his school, to have renounced his comfortable position as head of a well-endowed monastery, and to have come all the way up north to Ayodhya, Rama's birthplace, where he gave help to anyone he could, treating men, women, untouchables and Muslims alike.

Some think that this was the birth-place of the Sant movement in northern India, with Ramananda taking the baton from Raghavananda and handing it on to Kabir the Muslim weaver, also to Raidas the tanner, Sena the barber, Pipa the Rajput Prince and others. Anyway, we must abandon historical speculation here and listen to Ramananda's poem which illustrates the relation between God and the saints.

Where could I go?
 My mind is attacked in its own home.
 It will not move out
 And has become like a cripple.
 One day, my mind prompted me
 To prepare incense and go to a temple of God for worship.

But my Guru told me, 'God is in the mind within'.
 Wherever you go, there are stones for worshipping images
 And water for a bath at a sacred place.
 Now I have seen it,
 The Lord is present within all.
 I searched the Vedas and Puranas,
 But was looking where God was not.
 O my holy Guru, I lie prostrate before you
 In utter reverence. You have brought
 All my vain wandering to an end.
 Swami Ramananda is revelling in God;
 The Guru has rubbed out the consequences of a million acts
 Just with a single word.

Here the poet reflects on his condition. He has realized intuitively the truth of his Guru's teaching that God is not ultimately to be found in external objects, not in temple-worship or even in the sacred texts. But if the mind can be fixed on God within, then all external objects become a temple, all water like a sacred bathing-place. This realization comes through the Guru. In a sense, the Guru is greater than God, because he reveals God to a sufficiently attuned pupil. The attitude of the sage is summed up in the *Katha Upanishad*: 'The Self is not to be sought through the senses. The creator pierced the openings of the senses outwards and this is why people look out and not within. A certain wise man beheld the inmost Self. He had closed his eyes to the external, desiring immortality.'

The fourth of the five topics in Ranade's *Pathway to God* is entitled 'The beginnings of pilgrimage.' We shall take from it another poem by Tulsidas, from his work called the *Vinaya Patrika*, a title which our teacher translated as *Love-letters to the Lord*. He included some fine specimens from it in his *Indian Mystic Verse*. Tulsidas was a learned poet. A few of the introductory verses of his epic poem on the deeds of the avatar Rama are in Sanskrit, while the body of the work is written in the eastern dialect of Hindi, so that the people of Ayodhya and Banares in his day could understand it. He wrote his *Vinaya Patrika* in the dialect of western Hindi to give it a wider currency throughout north India, and

this dialect is closer to the modern idiom, but the ideas are often more complicated than the straightforward narrative of the Rama epic.

Often the Hindi religious poets address their own mind and give it a good wiggling. Here Tulsidas addresses his tongue, and recommends it to leave off gossip and slander and to take to reciting the virtues and holy deeds of Rama and repeating his name. Because he personalises his tongue, he is able to tax it with listening to talk about worldly joys.

He says: O my tongue, why do you not sing of the deeds of the Lord? Why do you ever become more and more fascinated with dwelling on the faults of others? You are located in the beautiful temple of the human mouth—why do you put it to shame? Why do you talk of the mirage-waters of sense-objects when you are already close to the immortal nectar exuded by the moon? [That is, to the eternal peace that emanates from repetition of the Name of God.] Talk of worldly joys is like moonlight to expand the petals of the white lotus of Kali Yuga [the materialistic ‘iron age’ in which we live]—yet you listen to it with attentive ear. Cease from this talk of sense-objects and sing of the virtues of Rama instead, which cleanses the ear of listening to worldly talk. String a carefully woven necklace of jewelled thoughts and acts on the golden thread of your mind, and hang it on the neck of King Rama—King Rama, a sun to expand the lotus of the dynasty descended from the sun, a joy to those who seek Him for refuge. Give up the taste for argument, worship God, melt your mind in contemplating his deeds on earth. Tulsidas says, if you do this you will cross over the ocean of re-birth and obtain fame in the three worlds.

This difficult poem has been interpreted in different ways by different people. But it is clear that its general message is that there has to be active use of the tongue, and indeed of all the organs of action at our disposal, especially the mind with its power of thought, if we are to put up a fight against the various seductions of hearing and talking in worldly life, indulgence in which robs us of the purity needed for significant progress on the path.

We come now to our fifth and last topic, the highest ascent—the account given by the Hindi poets of the summit of spiritual experience. Here the Hindi mystical poets are, so to speak, in the same boat as all the other mystical poets: they have had an experience that they can only hint

at but not properly describe in words. The Persian poet Maulana Rumi describes himself in this situation as being like an ass floundering about in the mud. The Hindi mystical poets can only try to suggest what their feelings are by images of worldly objects, while taking care to ensure that the images do not stand for anything actually experienced by ordinary people in the unregenerate state.

For example, here is a poem of Kabir trying to describe what it feels like when the final goal of life has been achieved. He says:

There where nectar is dropping down to form a great lake,
A mysterious sound breaks forth, reaching up to the heavens.
A river has overflowed its banks and absorbed the ocean.
This state is beyond description.
There is no sun, no moon and no stars.
There is neither night nor dawn.
Music is heard from sitar and flutes,
And a sweet voice repeats softly ‘Rama, Rama’.
Millions of flickering lights are glittering on all sides.
It is raining, but without water,
And the ten incarnations of Vishnu pass before one’s eyes
in a single night.
Hymns of praise spring to one’s lips of their own accord.
Kabir says: These things are mystic secrets.
Only a few rare people come to understand them.

Some people feel exalted reading such poems. For them, they are like the coloured photograph of a Himalayan peak on a travel brochure that entices us to want to make the effort that will be needed for the distant trek. Others may feel less attracted. But these poems have to be seen in the context of the spiritual strivances that have gone before, and on the poet’s bond with the spiritual teacher.

To judge from his own poems, Kabir’s life was devoted to worship of God and love of humanity. He says that at a certain point in his musings he gradually became aware of God, and that after that, he did not wander about any more. Gradually he came upon that pure water that it is the business of spiritual poetry to describe. It is the water that slakes the thirst of spiritual enquiry for ever. Kabir calls it Rama-water, after the incarnation of God called Rama. Though it cannot be described in

words, his Guru gave him the hint with a gesture. Eventually it became a matter of personal experience to him through remembrance of God and reflection. When enlightenment came, his sins melted away. One could not describe the glory of the Lord, he said, if all the seas were ink, all the trees were pens, and the whole earth was paper. Still, he could not keep such a precious experience to himself, and had to express it as best he could for the inspiration of others.

We end with a poem that might be regarded as his final confession:

I have obtained knowledge of the Absolute, eternal peace.
Through the compassion of my Guru, the lotus of my heart has opened
out in flower.
The light of knowledge shines, and is evident to me in every quarter,
wherever I look.
Till now, I was a helpless, half-dead soul, but now power has come.
The bow and arrow of knowledge has slain the wild beast of repeated
births and deaths.
I have woken from the sleep of delusion.
The sun of knowledge has dawned and the night of ignorance is at an
end.
Though the reality is inconceivable and indescribable, I have
experienced it directly.
My body was formerly like valueless paste, but now it has been
transformed into gold.
My mind swims about like a fish in an ocean of bliss.
My individual consciousness has united with the universal
consciousness, as the water in a pot unites with the larger body of water
if the pot is lowered into a lake.
Spiritual exercises, worship of deities, bathing at sacred places of
pilgrimage are now no longer needed.
Now my delusion is at an end, and I shall no longer be reborn.

A.J.A.

The Nature of Existence

A lecture by Hari Prasad Shastri

NOTHING can exist without existence. The existent is phenomenal, changing, subject to birth and death, but existence, upon which all stands phenomenally, is unchanging, imperishable, immortal and the all. If we remember just this one point, it will be easy to follow this line of thought.

Existence is common to God, matter and all the modifications of matter, such as grass, trees, etc. The thing is what it is by virtue of *Sat*, existence, is-ness, Truth. Truth is that which is essence, and essence is that without which nothing can exist. Aristotle distinguishes between essence and attributes. Essence is existence, existence is not an attribute. To say 'God exists' is wrong, because this affirmation implies He exists somewhere, in heaven or Paradise or in the universe or at some time, and this would make Him mortal not immortal.

This philosophical truism cannot be refuted. Kant says that man can imagine the absence of everything except time and space. If he says: 'There is no time and space', he is nevertheless unable to imagine no time and no space; no, you cannot do so. There is one thing which transcends time and space, about which he cannot say: 'it is there or then'. It is beyond them, and that something is now even as it was in 1754. What is that? It is existence—*Sat*. To have a correct idea of existence is to understand the backbone of the Vedanta philosophy.

Look at this table; there is is-ness in this table, that is, being, and being is existence. Being and existence are one. Existence is beyond time and space, and is immortal.

What is proof? Those who want proof do not know the ABC of philosophy. *Sat* is all. Existence is all—immortal, infinite and all-pervasive. It is absolute; it has not the attribute of being existent. The absolute is existence. The absolute can have no attributes. Attributes are limiting adjuncts. Consider the expression 'black cow'. This means it is neither white nor purple, etc.—that is all. Blackness limits

the cow. If the absolute had attributes, it would have limitations, and consequently, it would be perishable. Time and space are the agencies which introduce change.

One might say: 'Such an absolute is nothing,' yet in thinking of nothing we assert being. You say: 'There is nothing.' This statement contains two declarations: 'there is' and then 'nothing'. This is a fallacy. In the philosophy such stress is laid on 'essence'—essence and substance are the same thing. 'Sub-stance' means 'stands under'. What is the essence, or what stands under the clay pitcher? Clay. The pitcher is born, ages and is destroyed, but the clay remains. Waves come and go, but the water abides forever. The substance of the whole universe is existence, and from it comes the existent. In the course of time, it is re-absorbed again. Existence abides forever.

The ignorant argue that because the earth is perishable, heaven is perishable, then God too must be perishable. The argument is erroneous. To exist, a thing must be in time and space, and subject to the laws of cause and effect. It can then be destroyed. But God is beyond time and space, and cannot be destroyed. All forces have come out of the womb of time. In Him they exist, therefore He is immortal, imperishable, all in all.

Aristotle quotes the following illustration: 'Peter is sad.' Now 'sad' is an attribute, Peter is the basis. 'Sad' is an accident because in the evening he is glad, but Peter himself has not changed. Similarly everything changes, but not God. Aristotle defines 'being' thus: Being is that which exists by itself. Earth exists by virtue of space. The cosmos exists on God because he is the substratum in which time and space are accidents, just as 'sadness' is an accident in Peter. 'Being' exists by itself and God is called 'svayam jyotih', self-illuminated, because all other light exists by virtue of His light.

In the Upanishads it is said that man performs his functions during the day in the light of the sun, at night by the light of the moon or the stars, by the light of sound. (If you are caught in a dense forest on a dark night, the sound may indicate direction to you). Is anything more luminous than sound? Yes, your own self who cognizes sound. The absolute is free, all-pervasive and ultimate reality.

First we prove a thing. God is not conditioned by time and space. We put this forward by the authority of reason. Common sense recognizes two categories—subject and object, knower and the known, the eater and the eaten. You are the seer, you see the sun, the moon. What is that which is above both subject and object? Is there anything? There is. The subject knows the object, the object does not know the subject. What knows both?

In deep sleep there is neither subject nor object, but you are! You do not cease to exist; if you did, how do you account for the continuum of existence? These two categories—subject and object—exist in atman, Self, but atman itself belongs to no category.

Atman, self, is existence, and it and consciousness are one and the same. The terms are synonymous. Both subject and object disappear in deep sleep, and that on which both stand is *turiya*—that which transcends relativity. Waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep are states of the soul existing in *turiya*, the fourth state, Brahman, independent of subject and object. The corollary is that the principle which is independent of subject and object, *chit* or *sat*, is not subject to the laws of cause and effect. Shankara says: 'The absolute is without activity.' If you attribute activity to God, He is limited and ceases to be the absolute. He is that which is more subtle than time and space, more subtle than mind, beyond the operations of time and space. He whom the mind cannot know, He is that, He is all in all. The nature of existence is Truth, that which cannot contradict itself, called Brahman, whom theologians call God. Shri Shankara postulates a God who will stand infinite reasoning, towering beyond all, on which falls perpetual sunlight in *ananda* (bliss). Krishna, Buddha, OM, the cross, Christ—these are all symbols of that holiest of states, *sat*, Brahman, waveless bliss.

Now we come to answer the question on the nature of existence, Brahman. It is absolute and affirmative. There is no possibility of negation of limitation. Can you negate yourself? Secondly, the absolute is simple, not subject to inner antithesis or contradiction, never transitory, ever unchanging. Thirdly, it is free from all qualities (*nirguna*), immutable—such is Truth, existence.

If you practice discipline, then alone will you be able to understand 'tat tvam asi'. Being is existence, to be thought of in affirmation. Being transcends time, it is immortal. It transcends space, therefore it is infinite. All attributes are perishable. He is existence and consciousness.

He is one. He is not many. He is not even one, because one refers to something in time and space. He is advaita—non-dual. He is existence, consciousness, bliss. Sat means he is not unreal. Sat is He. What is real? None can know That, for He is beyond mind, speech and the senses. He is chit. Chit means he is not inert. Ananda means there is no suffering in Him.

He is each and every being, the one, the 'isolation' of transcendence itself in all beings. He is Shiva found everywhere. He is akshara—the imperishable. He is mass existence, He is immutable, and to Him we offer our salutations again and again. OM

All objections have been met by Madhusudana Saraswati. They say there are two objects—Brahman and matter, and they coexist. But the coexistence of two reals is inconceivable. There is no plurality in Brahman. He is above all.

I will quote a short paragraph from Aristotle: 'Human life may be compared to public games, attracting diverse men. Some compete for honour, others for trade, others for enjoyment. So it is in life, some work for honour, some for profit, a few for Truth, and others as witnesses of joy.'

All may be summed up in one word: OM. We are here to realize this in our being. Then alone we may know joy, happiness and peace, That which alone is peace. Verily there is no other way.

* * *

INDEPENDENCE

To walk on the radius of a circle is painful. Walk in the centre and rest. Desires for name, pleasure, love, comfort and to be known are the radius. The centre is independence of all. That is eternal.

H.P.S.

Making a Friend of Your Mind

THE YOGA OF Self-knowledge draws particular attention to the world of the mind and the emotions. It teaches that this mental world of ours is a wonderful fund of energy, and if used creatively in the quest for lasting fulfilment, the whole of life can be uplifted. There is a way of inner progress. In the *Bhagavad Gita* we find the verse:

Let a man uplift himself by himself, let him not lower himself. He alone is the friend of himself, he alone is the enemy of himself.

Our happiness or sorrow, our glory or gloom, depends on the state of our mind. By simple practices and an adjusted life-style, we can radically influence the condition of our mind, and learn to live on a deeper, calmer, more expansive level of our own being.

Why should we take the trouble to explore this type of development? Is not effective participation in the outer life more than enough? It may be enough for some people. But if the mind is left to itself, we are likely to find ourselves slipping into states of mind which are restrictive and even painful. We know these states perfectly well: worry, anxiety, tension, confusion, irritability, remorse, disappointment (actually, the ego wants to be in on everything—it is therefore bound to be disappointed!), feeling inferior or hopeless, self-pity—why has this happened to me?, envy—others are advantaged, I am deprived; worries about the body, and so on. In this way, our consciousness becomes contracted. These restrictive conditions hinder our concentration and make us strangers to real relaxation. More than this, there is no inner progress in them.

But there is a way out of this human predicament—this dubious sanity, which is more like insanity. Those in quest of the remedy may find what they need in the teachings of yoga. As the Gita says, the person who is distressed is one of those who may turn to yoga and find relief and meaning in life. In this tradition, it is said clearly: 'Who is qualified? In a way everyone is qualified. He who is miserable is qualified to be happy.'

On the other hand, this restricted phase of the mind is only one side of our mental and emotional life. The other side—and even this is not the whole story—is that the mind is the home of wonderful powers and capacities. The greatest wonder in the world of nature is the human mind. It is the mother of all invention, of art, philosophy, science and social organization. These are all the outcome of the creative side of the human mind.

Time and space, which condition the physical body, do not appear to restrict the imaginative flight of the mind. As the poet Keats said, we can learn to ‘open wide the mind’s cage door’. Some of the greatest philosophers and scientists evolved their greatest ideas and insights, while living in restricted and humdrum outer conditions. For instance, Emmanuel Kant, Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, and so many others, lifted their minds far above the immediate physical and social environments, and learnt to fathom many of the secrets of human heart, or of the universe.

But more relevant to us is the fact that even the ordinary mind shows, as a matter of daily experience, a dazzling range of extraordinary qualities, which we normally take for granted. The fastest computer cannot recall as quickly as the mind does under the power of the law of association. We have only to say some evocative word, like ‘home’ or ‘music’, and a whole range of images flash into the mind. Consider how the mind is able to multi-task, apparently able to do several complex things at the same time, or with such quick shifts of attention that it looks like the same time. Someone on the underground, for instance, may be absorbed in a newspaper, applying the hard-won skill of reading and assimilating information. At the same time, we notice they are wearing headphones, listening to music. And yet, they never miss the stop! The mind has levels of awareness and competence. This seems a trivial example, but it points to one thing: that our mind is a wonderful instrument. Whatever our background, our education, our position in this world, everyone’s mind is pregnant with untapped potentialities. As the sage Shri Dada insisted: ‘Every human being is a budding sage, an heir to peace and wisdom—a candidate for higher understanding.’

Thus there is another type of seeker—not just the one who is distressed—who may be drawn to the higher yoga: the seeker of knowledge. This mind is a wonder of wonders. Does it not make sense to investigate its root power, and not just to restrict our focus to outer things? Only when we have solved this mystery of self-knowledge can we learn to bring out the best in ourselves.

A third, less obvious, aspect of the mind is that it hides a greater reality than itself, as a leaf held before the eye might conceal the sun. The root of our mental life—its ‘Self’—is in the realm of peace and pure consciousness absolute. This is the spiritual side of human nature—its divine ground. Behind the mind is Self—unlimited, free from all tension, fulfilled. The destiny of the mind is to be a revealer of this deeper reality.

Lao Tzu called the mind our mysterious mirror: ‘Can you polish your mysterious mirror and leave no stain?’ All have this mirror—the mind. But as well as taking the image of outer things, the mind can be polished, that is, purified, so as to reflect light from the inner realm of the Self. A Japanese writer has said: ‘The brightest mirror is not on the wall.’

How can this be done? The method centres on a special kind of action: inner action. The essence of this is to learn how to consciously intervene in our own mental world, in order to give it a new direction. This includes the attempt to reduce the surface mental activity and to turn within to the deeper realm where there is stability of peace, and constant unwavering light.

Yoga teaches the great principle and method: that if we want enduring peace and joy, we can and must intervene in the inner world of thoughts. As it is said in the *Bhagavad Gita*: ‘No one becomes a yogi who has not renounced thoughts’—who does not exercise himself in seeking to control the inner world. All our inner difficulties are assigned to our present ways of thinking, and a new way of thinking is the first aid which yoga prescribes. Feeling also falls within this self-development, for our emotional energy and expression can also be refined and channelled in a way that will give us greater light and peace.

It is said that a certain spiritual teacher, when approached by any enquirer, would only have one thing to say, and that was reduced to three words. He told his visitors: 'No delusive thoughts!' Some were disappointed and dismissive of this spiritual shorthand, but those who gave it their respect and reflection, came to realize its depth and positive power as an inner affirmation.

It is easy to see that most of the restrictive mental states we talked about before: worry, irritability, and so on, are supported by crowds of thoughts which can neither be called rational nor wise, and which are in fact inner delusions. Every disagreeable mental state, in the last analysis, is made up of a collection of thoughts which usually exaggerate and distort the real situation. When depressed we may think many thoughts which add up to such sentiments as 'I'm no good' or 'Life is hell', and so on. But is it really like that? Surely our mental life contains a good deal of fantasy—and so the old teacher wisely said: 'No delusive thoughts!'

We have the power and the right to take active steps in order to train and guide our mind to peace and light. There is a power of authority in us that is lodged in our higher mind. Hari Prasad Shastri in a lecture once illustrated this spirit of inner authority when he recommended the following affirmation:

OM. My personality is an army of which I am the supreme commander. I give the word: my emotions will obey me, my imagination will obey me, my will will obey me. OM

No one likes to be ruled by a military government, where soldiers with guns patrol the streets, and we never know what the next knock on the door might lead to. It is a most unnatural and undesirable state of affairs. On the other hand, we can appreciate a good defensive army, which remains the servant of a benevolent state, and which can be a great asset in times of need. In that case, the army is our servant and not our ruler.

In a similar way, to be dragged along by our uncontrolled emotions, or an obsessive will, or an imagination which manufactures pictures of fear and anxiety—this is like living under a military government. We are not our own masters, and at any moment we

may become the victims of a major upset. But we can learn to tame these inner forces—to get them on our side and to yoke them to our higher purpose. Then we have a great force—a fusion of forces—of which we are the supreme commander.

This invisible struggle for self-mastery on the inner plane is an important phase of our journey to enlightenment. It is learning to make the mind and its forces a friend and not an obstruction. How to intervene? What should we recommend to our own minds? One of the expressions of Christ is: 'Peace be with you.' There is an outer peace, which we all appreciate. But this outer peace is to be used as the background setting for the cultivation of inner peace. As St Augustine wrote in his *City of God*, the people of the City of God do not undervalue the outer peace when it comes, because they use it to the utmost as a precious opportunity to cultivate the inner peace.

So one great practice is to turn the mind into a lover of peace, of inner peace. It takes a little development, but it is possible and it will uncover a great inner resource.

Here is a short, characteristic inner practice of yoga. We are invited to sit in alert relaxation, with eyes closed, and to try to become aware of the activities of our own minds. Never mind the quality of those mental activities, whether they are dull, agitated or peaceful. Simply sit and observe the flow of thoughts. Then we intervene and say to our mental world, our classroom of pupil thoughts: 'OM. Peace. Peace. Peace. OM.'

This practice illustrates a fundamental yoga principle in dealing with the mind. It is to treat the mental life as a sphere we can influence—we can command, restrain, guide, and also, when necessary, rouse into action and interest.

Another similar practice, useful for situations in daily life, is to take a spiritually powerful phrase and hold it in the mind. Such a phrase is: Tranquil Endurance. This is a key practice in overcoming irritation. Life confronts us with many taxing situations. There are minor vexations, as when we are queueing and something goes wrong with the till, and we are in a hurry. At these times, remember: Tranquil Endurance. The words can also be visualized interiorly in letters of light, if we are in a situation where we can close our eyes

and focus inwardly, as when we are in a train and there is a delay. This is to make a great use of our mental energy and keeps us in tune with higher values.

One useful general principle is: do not fight with the mind, do not hate it. Give it loving guidance. The journalist, Katherine Whitehorn, wrote a book: *How to Survive Children*. She gives some shrewd advice when there is a little conflict.

If a child shouts back at you, don't say to the child: 'Don't answer back.' It's a bad sentence, because it denies the child's right to say anything. Instead say: 'Don't talk to me like that.' Now this is a question of how he does it.

In the same way, it is no use getting angry or extreme with the mind when it puts up resistance or loses control. Instead, it needs to be steered wisely, lovingly. Say: 'Yes, you can express yourself, but it must now be *my* way, based on peace and sanity, and not your old instinctive, unreasoning, raw reactions. Come, O my mind, let us learn this new culture together.' This intervention usually includes an aspect of 'renouncing thoughts'. One of the teachings of the sage Shri Dada of Aligarh was this:

The mind not only thinks but has the power to choose what to think. Let it decide to think what is good, what is beneficial to all, and 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.

This great process will gradually awaken higher capacities and powers latent in the mind itself.

One of the great but fundamentally simple inventions is the braille alphabet by Louis Braille. This consists of letters and signs formed of six dots raised by embossment. It has to be learned with patience, conscious effort and overcoming much frustration. Then gradually the range of sixty-three combinations is mastered, letters merge into words, and, to speak poetically, the human fingers become endowed with eyes. This power was latent in the fingertips all along, but it took a definite training to bring it out, motivated by the intense desire to expand one's experience—in this case through the written word,

and through this, to gain access to a new and wider horizons. The case is similar with the training of yoga. At first there may be difficulties, because we are entering a new field. But if we can rise to the challenge, a degree of self-mastery is inevitable. Besides, it is refreshing to do something based on our innate higher authority.

The habit of regular practice will support us in good times and bad. We need not wait for a crisis to resort to spiritual thought and practice, which is rather like learning to use the fire extinguisher when the house is on fire. Train the mind while you still have some control over your situation, and the inner resources thus developed will aid you in time of trial.

Another counsel of the illumined teachers is to apply a wise moderation: to do what we can sustain on a daily basis. Twenty-five minutes of focused application each day is better than a monthly 'intensive' with nothing in-between. Avoid extremes. There is no need to leave our home or our job, if we have one. It is better to try to insert into our present situation some manageable programme, supported by a more spiritual approach to daily life, based on harmlessness and harmony. In this way, we can make a little space in our lives for creating peace within and around us.

The Sufi master, Rumi, would counsel: Be patient with the mind for 'patience is the key to happiness'. He said the mind is like a guest-house and we are the master of the house. The thoughts come in—a thought, say, of sorrow. He advises: adapt yourself to it and be agreeable. A thought of joy will assuredly follow. In other words, do not think the gloomy mood will last for ever. Do not give it authority. Behind the mind which says: 'I feel on top of the world today' or 'I am down in the dumps', there is a witnessing principle which is quite independent. This principle is not entangled in the mental and emotional mesh. This is our inmost Self, the ever-aware Spirit, the true I, which can affirm of itself: 'I am unaffected.'

A final aid to making our mind companionable and spiritually rich is: Retain some interest in culture—in those aspects of the social world which can help to uplift, beautify and pacify the mind. Very few people have the spiritual stamina to drop all interest in everything but the direct quest for enlightenment. For a long while,

the mind needs a degree of variety and change—some good mental and cultural food, and not always from the same menu.

Hari Prasad Shastri himself enjoyed reading good western books, and knew much of philosophy, science, literature, art and history. During his life he spent many peaceful hours in galleries of art, first alone and later with his spiritual friends. The idea was not to do a quick round in an art gallery in order to see everything. Rather it was to spend a quiet time in front of particular pictures. At these times, talk was not necessary, silence was preferred. In this way, with great pictures, one could open oneself to something deeper and more abstract than what was displayed before the eye. This was a technique of picture-viewing he had learnt in Japan. It was like coming into touch with the very spirit that had inspired the artist, before this was expressed in form.

Again Dr Shastri said: ‘The value of a work of art lies in the associations it arouses in our minds.’ Does it make us more peaceful, more sensitive to beauty and truth? Then these were good associations. He also commented that great art lifts the mind above the puerile values of the everyday world, and permits a glimpse of something better than the world of appearances. Like nature, such art was a pointer to the infinite, allowing us to forget for a time the world of profit and loss.

The yogic teaching on making a friend of our mind is suggested in one of the prayers he composed:

We meet to still and purify our restless mind.
The mind is our instrument; it can create bondage and also release.
It can diffuse spiritual beauty and infuse the atmosphere with
peace and love;
But when uncontrolled it becomes a force destructive and
productive of strife.
O Lord, grant that we may train and restrain this mind
And devote it to Thee for the good of all living beings.

A.H.C.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

THE DISCIPLES were gathered in the devotion hall, a thatched room which had four open windows and two large doors facing each other. Deer skins, blankets and cushions were spread, and there was accommodation for about a hundred souls. It was raining and cool breezes could be felt in the hall. Lamps of brass with cotton wicks filled with fresh butter had been lit and covered with protective gauze. Occasionally the note of a bird was heard; otherwise, except for the pattering of the rain, there was complete silence in the large room.

As the mahatma entered, the whole assembly stood up, saying ‘Jai!’ He blessed them by raising his right hand and occupied his seat on a small platform covered with the skin of a black antelope. A young brahmacharini came forward with a coconut vessel filled with the pure water of a stream, placed it beside the holy sage, and slowly retired without turning her back towards him. Shri Yajnavalkya, saying ‘Om’ three times, then chanted:

Verily, ignorance of the nature of the Self leads the mind to the perishable. Contemplation of wisdom leads to immortality. But the supreme reality, imperishable, infinite, hidden deep, who is the substratum of both wisdom and ignorance, and from whom they arise, is different from wisdom and ignorance. The forces of nature are ruled by Him. He controls every form and every means of production. He gives birth to Hiranyagarbha, the cosmic mind, from whom the universe is projected.

The holy rishi paused a while. All heads were bent low. The disciples sensed a peaceful, invisible presence pervading the room and the surrounding ether. It seemed as if every atom had lost its earthly aspect and was transformed into spiritual reality. Five young disciples, standing in the middle of the assembly, began to sing:

We meditate on the transcendental and adorable master of the universe, who is the Master of all masters. He is the God of gods; there is none above Him. He is above both cause and effect. He has nothing to achieve, neither has He organs of creation. His great power is of many kinds. Knowledge, power and action are ascribed by the Shruti (scriptures) to Him. May He grant us the grace of absorption in Him—He who covers Himself by the manifestations of His nature, just as a spider covers itself with the threads drawn from its own navel. He is the one Overlord; He is hidden in all beings; He is the innermost Self of all creatures. In Him abide all beings and by Him are ruled all actions. He is the Witness. He is pure Consciousness. He is One, and there has not been nor ever will there be one beside Him. Free from the three attributes of nature (gunas), He is.

There was again silence. The rain had ceased and the moonlight, shining through the windows, revealed the form of the august mahatma. The wind had now risen, and the leaves on the branches, swaying in the breezes, seemed to be clapping hands. Shri Yajnavalkya drank a little water from his coconut vessel, and said:

Om Tat Sat! We come into this life to act according to dharma. Our pure actions incline our minds to the study of Truth. Selfless benevolence, a tranquil heart, patience in adversity, bring us into touch with a knower of Truth. We perform rituals, we carry on our holy study, but this is not all. A circle has two arches, the ascending and the descending; so is our mundane life made up of projecting actions, and of withdrawal into calmness.

Action is to be undertaken up to a certain point, until our desire which arises out of the necessities of our empirical being is calmed. Then the mind grows serene, like the sky after a tempest, and it is lit by the tranquil moonlight of the deep conviction: 'Brahman is all; plurality is an illusion. Atman or Self is the all-pervading reality.'

Then we travel the descending arch of life. We withdraw all our empirical connections and relationships. The mighty swan (paramahansa) who, by flapping his wings, has brought into being the sparks of the stars in heaven, begins to eat, one by one, the pearls

of the stars, until His own light shines above and below, and all is covered by that resplendent light.

Know that then we realize that our father, mother, wife, children, king, art, beauty and love are nothing, nothing, nothing! They are no more than colours observed in a bubble. The bubble breaks, and in the one great light all is absorbed.

They are wise, who perpetually feel in the region of their own hearts the presence of Him, who is the one Ruler; to them belongs eternal peace and to none else. The sun does not shine there, neither the moon nor the stars, what to say of the little quivering lightning, or of this fire? As He shines, everything shines after Him. By His light the universe is lit and made known. Let us adore Him. Om Tat Sat!'

As the holy rishi was leaving the devotion chamber, two sweet voices sang:

In the middle of this world there dwells the one destroyer of ignorance.

He is the fire which is stationed in water.

One overcomes death by realizing Him.

There is no other path to emancipation.

He is the soul of the universe.

He is the Overlord, the immortal, all-knowing, all-pervading, eternal Ruler and protector of the universe.

None else is competent to govern the universe eternally.

He is tranquil, faultless, free from all taints, qualifications and conditions.

He is like the fire that has consumed its own fuel.

In order to realize liberation (moksha)

I take refuge in that effulgent One,

Whose understanding inclines my mind towards the great soul. OM

Shri Yajnavalkya disappeared into the darkness. The sound of his sandals grew fainter and fainter until it entirely ceased. The disciples came out of the devotion hall; some went to their huts and lit small fires in order to read their manuscripts; others walked under the starlit sky.

Bhagadatta said to his companions: 'It is clear to me that the holy Guru Bhagavan is intent on retiring into solitude. I have tried my best to keep his consciousness on sansaric (mundane) objects, but now neither the holy music, nor the subtleties of logic, nor his beautiful calves seem to interest him—not even Buddha and Humna, the two milk-white heifers, who used to lick his hands and receive his close attention. Yesterday the holy mother Katyayani told me she also noticed this change in her lord. He is not interested in the freshly churned butter of the Nandini cow, which once he used to relish. Nor does he seem inclined to sleep. He is not gloomy or melancholy, but there is a kind of abstraction which has come over our revered teacher. I am sure that wherever he goes we must follow, for without him these beautiful pines and cedars, these cows and calves, this hermitage and the slowly winding stream will become to us objects breeding only sadness.'

The disciple Buddhadeva nodded in agreement, and added: 'Yesterday I saw the holy one standing by the stream, apparently gazing at the pebbles under the water. I stood behind at a respectful distance, expecting some command from him. He was so absorbed that for more than an hour he did not move at all. I am sure some invisible devas were adoring him, because a supernatural fragrance pervaded the atmosphere all around.'

As the disciple stopped speaking, the sound of a conch-shell was heard coming from the bedchamber of the holy rishi.

to be continued

Matter and Spirit

FOR MUCH of our time, our life is shaped by routines, relieved by harmless distractions. But this gentle ride is occasionally shaken by events which give us a jolt. A work colleague suffers an injury or falls ill so that they have to leave work prematurely, or a relative dies unexpectedly. If our social interest is sufficiently advanced, world events and the news of human sufferings, may prompt us to think about the wider aspect of our own lives. All in all, life seems intent on prodding us to re-evaluate what is happening around us and look for a deeper explanation to it all. Once we start to think about it, we can see that there is more to man than just a body—the mind stands distinct from the physical body and can be seen as that which animates the body and uses it as a tool to achieve its aims and desires in life. But exactly what is the nature of the mind?

Some seek an answer in the empirical world of science and engineering, both of which aim to determine how things work. In the engineering world, 'systems engineers' are employed as technical managers with responsibility for all things technical from start to finish of a project. One of their main roles is to ensure that the whole system, like an aircraft for example, is designed in a structured way. Various parts may be built on different sites or even different countries, and it is the systems engineer's job to ensure that all the pieces fit together correctly, and that the whole system functions as originally intended.

In the theory of Systems Engineering the underlying idea is that a new project will take basic materials and combine them in new ways to produce what they call 'new emergent properties'. For example, steel and rubber can be engineered to make a bicycle. The emergent property of a bicycle is a means of transport which allows a human being, using nothing but their own effort, to travel faster and further than they could by walking or running.

In an aircraft, the main emergent property is flight, but there are many more emergent properties, like the ability to navigate, to take off and land safely and so on. The systems engineer also has to

ensure that there are no unwanted emergent properties that might affect the safety of the aircraft passengers, for example, engine failures under certain adverse conditions, or external doors that could be opened inadvertently. If we consider computers in the same way, it is all too easy to form the impression that machines are now being built which have a rudimentary mind, much like a living animal. After all, we are able to build computers which can challenge the best grand masters at chess. As a result of this type of research, a line of reasoning has emerged which likens the human brain to a computer, and views the mind or consciousness as nothing more than an emergent property of the complex machinery which makes up the human brain.

The impression then is that the emergent property of consciousness is being observed in these ‘thinking machines’. This is strengthened by the fact that computer scientists are examining human thought processes constantly in an attempt to emulate them in computer software. In parallel with this line of reasoning, the mind is seen as a product of the chemical reactions and electrical signals in the physical organ of the brain. In other words, the brain is regarded as a sort of super-computer, and consciousness the software which has emerged from it as we experience life.

This is not a wholly satisfactory analysis of the information available, and we might reasonably ask one question related to the parallel argument about brains and computers, and that is: ‘Who is the creator of the human brain?’

All inventions, like aeroplanes and computers, presuppose an external agency or intelligence which has created them and which checks and appreciates that the right property has really emerged from the invention that it conceived. Where and what is the external agency in the case of the human mind? In answer to this, the same people who made the comparison between the brain and a computer are now likely to revert to the idea of evolution to explain it all. Their line of reasoning is that chance has given rise to the development of the human mind. The idea of an external agency, particularly in the form of God, is discounted.

The teachings in the yogic texts do not agree with them, and to a first approximation—not a final position—God is taken to be the creator of all things in the universe, although the full and final answer is not as simplistic as this. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the teacher explains this relationship to his pupil. The teacher is Shri Krishna, an incarnation of God, and his pupil is a warrior Prince, named Arjuna, who is waiting for a major battle to start very shortly. The Lord in fact gives a variety of explanations which are not easy to follow at a first reading, but which form part of a carefully structured exposition.

First of all, the Lord explains that the whole universe is made up from two aspects of matter (or *Prakriti* in Sanskrit); and they are what we might call gross matter and subtle matter. Gross matter is the root cause of the physical aspect of the universe, while the subtle form is that which sustains the universe and seems to animate the living organisms. In chapter seven it is described like this:

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, thought, reason, egoism—thus is my Prakriti divided eightfold.

This is the inferior Prakriti; but as distinct from this, know thou my superior Prakriti, the very life by which this universe is upheld.

The whole universe is made up of the two types of matter, with the higher form of matter being the very life which supports it all, including we assume, the life-force in man. In these verses the Lord appears to be confirming that he is the ultimate Systems Engineer and that he has created everything in the universe using the two forms of matter or Prakriti combined in various ways, and that from one of these combinations has emerged the property of consciousness in man. Shri Krishna then continues in the next two verses:

Know that all beings have their birth in these. So, I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe.

There is naught else higher than I, O Arjuna: in Me all this is woven as clusters of gems on a string.

Here then, is a new point. He, the Lord, is like the thread of the necklace on which the gems or pearls are threaded, which makes the divine reality an intrinsic part of creation, and not just an external

intelligence, like the systems engineer who creates an aeroplane. Still, we are left unsure of the relationship between the individual, whose consciousness derives from the higher form of matter, and the Lord, who is the thread on which the gems of the universe are threaded.

In chapter thirteen, Arjuna is given an explanation which sheds further light on the relationship. He is told that the body can be likened to a field (*Kshetra*), because the fruit of action is reaped in it. The consciousness associated with the individual is now described as the 'knower of the field' (*Kshetra-jna*), and this idea points to the fact that the body is not the real 'I', but is the environment that we live in, so to speak, and which brings us experiences from the other objects in the universe. The mind is the principle which supports our bodily life, but the spirit is like an observer of the activities of both body and mind.

As individuals, there is a sense in which we can stand aside from our body and regard it as an external object, like any other object. We say: 'My arm aches today', where we regard our arm as our possession in much the same way that we regard our car as our possession when we say: 'My car is dirty'. Arm and car are both external to and separate from their owner—me. That owner—me—as pure awareness, is called the knower of the field (*Kshetra-jna*). In other words, the Lord has created the body and mind out of Prakriti, is the life-principle within it, and, in a deeper sense, is the pure awareness that reveals and knows all, yet remains transcendent and unaffected by the continuous mutations of mind and matter. He is the immutable Spirit—the true Self.

And do thou also know Me as Kshetrajna in all Kshetras, O Arjuna. The knowledge of Kshetra and Kshetrajna is deemed by Me as the [highest] knowledge.

The teachings on matter and spirit first suggest a resemblance to the creation of an invention by an engineer who puts something of himself into his invention. However, it becomes clear from the further descriptions given by Shri Krishna that there is a deeper explanation to it all. He adds these words in Chapter 13:

When a man realizes the whole variety of beings as resting on the One, and is an evolution from that (One) alone, then he becomes Brahman.

The One is the underlying substratum of the material of the universe and of that which animates it—the ultimate reality. Behind the universe, there is an underlying reality, which exists much like the canvas on which a painting is produced. In yoga this is known as the impersonal aspect of the Lord, although it is beyond the capability of words to express what it really is or to describe it in any way. It is not some abstract concept, for it is the reality in all that exists, including ourselves. It is also subject to direct experience through the yogic practices.

How can something so fundamental be hidden from our view? It is through the mechanism known as superimposition. All that we see and conceive of in the universe is a superimposition on that absolute reality, as the picture created by an artist is inseparable from the canvas.

This may seem like a far-fetched concept, but it bears a similarity to the conclusion of modern physics, which tells us that the apparent diversity of matter is an illusion. From hydrogen to uranium, from rock to living tissue, from a grain of sand to a star, it is all made up of similar sub-atomic particles. And what is the nature of these particles according to science? Not solid matter at all, but energy, wave-particles of indescribable structure, held together by incomprehensible forces. That is the scientific view of creation. It is human perception which superimposes the ideas of solidity, fluidity, this or that colour onto matter. In scientific reality, it is all energy.

This view is not far removed from the yogic conception that the whole of creation belongs to and is part of the Creator. Matter or Prakriti is non-separate from its Creator; it is human perception that superimposes the ideas of separateness and diversity onto it. The goal of yoga is to see through this diversity and realize our identity as that underlying reality. This is what meditation and the other yoga practices for bringing the mind under control will ultimately allow us to do.

Do we really superimpose one thing on another in this way, veiling the formless, limitless substratum and projecting the name and form—which are inseparable from our mind?

A lady went to visit her friend to see the new wardrobe she had bought. ‘Come on, let’s see it!’, she said to her friend, who was busy in the kitchen. ‘Oh, go through to the bedroom. It’s in there against the back wall’, she was told. When she put her head round the bedroom door, there was no wardrobe to be seen! Bed, curtains, vanity unit, etc., but only a space against the wall.

‘Is it in the other bedroom?’, she shouted to her friend. ‘No, it is where I told you. Go in and have a proper look.’ So she went right inside the bedroom, and there on the floor was a long cardboard box with the words ‘Self-Assembly Wardrobe’ on the side. ‘Now you know why I invited you round’, said her friend, who had come quietly from the kitchen to stand behind her, ‘I need your help to assemble it!’

Let us ask ourselves, is that a wardrobe on the floor in the cardboard box, or isn’t it? If it isn’t a wardrobe when packed flat, then at what stage of construction does it actually become a wardrobe?

The truth is, that ‘wardrobe’ is a concept that we superimpose on materials put together in a certain way. The wardrobe has no separate existence apart from the materials which are its substratum. Take that self-assembly wardrobe apart, and at what point does the wardrobe cease to exist? In one sense it never did exist except in appearance, or as a concept. All that ever existed were the materials from which it was made.

And what of those materials? The chipboard planks—do they exist separately from the wood of which they are made? Wood is a concept superimposed on the tree from which it was cut. Tree is a concept superimposed on the chemicals which make up wood: those chemicals are concepts superimposed on the sub-atomic particles which the scientist talk about, and so on. And behind it all? The unchanging substratum or God on which everything is superimposed. It is He who is the underlying, unifying principle in all.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* the teacher, Shri Krishna, summarises this principle of yoga to his disciple Arjuna. Arjuna is part of an army which is about to do battle with an opposing force that, through a turn of fate, happens to include friends, teachers and relatives, and he asks his teacher if it would not be better for him either to run away or allow himself to be killed without resisting. Shri Krishna reminds him of the reality behind the apparent situation with these words:

For those who deserve no grief thou hast grieved, and words of wisdom you speak. For the living and for the dead the wise grieve not.

Never did I not exist, nor you, nor these rulers of men; and no one of us will ever hereafter cease to exist.

Just as in this body the embodied Self passes into childhood, youth and old age, so does He pass into another body. There the wise man is not distressed.

Our true Self, the ‘knower of the field’, is not conditioned by the material of the body, nor by the thoughts and feelings of the mind. It is not matter but spirit, transcendent, and yet without this Self, the world of plurality—its phenomenal expression—would not exist. To know one’s Self is to realize its nature not only as immortal being and consciousness, but as non-duality and bliss. Then, the knower ‘becomes Brahman (the All)’, because all notions of not being Brahman are dissolved in the light of higher wisdom.

S.B.

SHANTI

When I was in Colombo, I was taken to visit a Buddhist temple. The steps to the temple were covered with moonstones. I did not want to tread on them, but the priest who had invited me to the temple said: 'These steps have been here for several centuries. Do not hesitate to tread on them. How can you reach the holy of holies unless you climb these steps paved with the best moonstones?' I hesitatingly did so and entered the temple. I saw the holy image of the Buddha, which was made of solid gold. There was peace in the temple, and the monks who came there to meditate reflected the serenity of nirvana.

Such is our life. Our steps in life leading to the holy of holies are paved with delights, talents, love of poetry, nature and art, incursions of fame, strains of music, and so forth. Unless we tread these steps and put down our feet on all of these, we cannot reach the temple of *Shanti*, the supreme peace. Our whole life will be incomplete—full of melancholy, scepticism and neuroses of several kinds, if we hesitate to crush under our feet the moonstones of name and fame, of adoration from appreciating men and women, of desires to acquire holiness and sanctity in order to be famous. He is a hero who absorbs his mind unconditionally in the pursuit of Atman.

What about making decent living? Nobody prevents a yogi from making a decent living, that is, a legitimate, honest profession which does not taint the soul with insincerity, dishonesty, flattery and so on. Let us remember that we reap in this life what we have sown before; therefore the yogic rule is contentment—*santosha*—and doing good to all, to the best of our capacity.

To be happy and contented depends on what use we make of our mind. If our mind is absorbed in contemplation of reality, we will feel happy, even though in the worldly sense we may be far from rich. Let us therefore learn to be contented, peaceful, devoting our mind to the study of the spiritual philosophy. Then we shall be blessed with Shanti.

H. P. S.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

The summer term's lectures at Shanti Sadan explored further aspects of the teachings of Adhyatma Yoga and Advaita Vedanta, and showed how the deepest insights into human nature are common to all the great spiritual traditions, finding clear and consistent expression in the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*. One of the talks considered the scope and importance of the fundamental principle or 'law': dharma. This was introduced as 'dynamic spiritual living—to live in such a way that meets and fulfils our present stage of development, and helps us on to the next stage. It means a progressive awakening of our higher potentialities so that we advance on the path of light and fulfil our highest destiny.' Another talk, 'The Secret of Inspiration', compared and contrasted spiritual inspiration with that associated with the arts, pointing out that the mature spiritual life is itself a life of inspiration, where one's egoism is minimised, and the inner and outer life are based on dependence on communion with the deeper reality.

The Tuesday meditation sessions are held throughout the year, and provide an opportunity for group meditation for those seeking tranquillity and a deeper understanding. As well as guidance in the practices themselves, various aspects of meditation are discussed, difficulties are acknowledged, and ways they might be overcome are suggested. A point made in a recent session is that the meditator faces two main challenges. The first is the natural restlessness of the mind, which is the experience of all who meditate, and is ameliorated by the preliminary practices that are offered. A more subtle challenge is posed by the fact that we feel identified with the mind, and the idea that our true Self transcends the mind is usually assimilated with the help of our study of the Vedanta philosophy.

The nature of both the mind and the Self was the main theme of the afternoon course given at the Columbia Hotel on 7 June. Through various illustrations it was shown that there is a changeless principle that transcends personality, and this is implicit in all the great spiritual teachings. The final presentation was on 'The Path of Light', and referred to the great prayer from the Upanishads: 'Lead us from darkness to light, from error to truth, from death to immortality.'