

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

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE SPRING TERM 2015

Weekday evening meetings at Shanti Sadan

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

On Thursday evenings at 8pm from 5 February to 26 March there will be a series of talks on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

The Spring afternoon course will be held on Sunday 22 February 2015, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Details will be available shortly.

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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SUBLIME THOUGHTS

‘I would that my tongue could utter / The thoughts that arise in me’

Even in our busy and distracted lives, sublime thoughts sometimes visit us. They may arise in the context of tragedy and loss, as in the words of Tennyson quoted above, or their occasion may be joyous—the unexpected joy when the mind suddenly becomes quiet and relieved. For most people such sublime intimations—peeps into a world beyond this world—are rare visitations, which flit away like passing birds and leave us once again with our mundane preoccupations.

Our mind is not destined to be a factory of dreary and commonplace musings, based on utility and our transient thirst for sense pleasure. At the core of human nature is the immutable Reality, and when we recognize this, we can change the whole trend of our thought, so that it reflects the truth, beauty, peace and bliss of our divine source.

To initiate this great development, the mind’s contents and associations need to be nurtured anew. The more the mind can be fed on the great thoughts and ideas rooted in the spiritual, philosophical and

literary classics of mankind, the richer will be its internal connections. Instead of responding to life and people from a narrow base, thinking: 'What use is this to me?', the appreciation will be, that behind these appearances there is a divine essence which is the true nature of all we see and experience.

Our associations can change radically. Take the word 'friend'. The boxer, Muhammad Ali, was once asked, in his retirement, if he had many friends. 'Friends!', he exclaimed. 'A friend is someone who will lay down his life for you.' In a spiritual context, the word 'friend' has even deeper significance, which raises it above worldly relationships. In the Persian and Urdu languages, the word for 'friend' is *dost*, and it is one of the names of God. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is the same idea: 'On knowing Me... the great Lord of all the worlds, the Friend of all beings, he comes to peace.' Such can be the transformation of the connections in our mind as regards this simple word 'friend'.

There is a poem by Thomas Hardy called 'In the British Museum'. The poet finds himself staring fixedly at an ancient grey slab, the base of a pillar—a bit of antiquity gleaned from Greece by British collectors. 'Why', says an imaginary companion, 'does this ashen blankness hold your attention?' It turns out that this stone had come from the Areopagus in Athens, the very place where St Paul had stood and told the crowd that God was not to be thought of as unknowable, for in Him we live and move and are. The poem ends: 'I can't help thinking that stone once echoed the voice of St Paul.' It was a sublime association.

Only we ourselves can create, through conscious effort and choice, new linkages—new internal connections—so that 'the thoughts that arise in me' arise from a purified and enriched inner base. It is not simply a case of mental labour. The mind itself, as St Paul indicated, is rooted in pure being and eternal consciousness, and light from that innermost source will itself aid us in our efforts to convert the material of the mind into inner illumination. It is then that, in the words of Swami Rama Tirtha, we will see 'this mental energy transforming itself into the most noble activity on your part, and this knowledge you will see transforming itself into happiness and bliss for you.'

The Complete Life

WHAT IS the complete life? The fulfilment of spiritual enlightenment, where we know in direct experience that our true Self is infinite, immortal, ever at peace, ever satisfied. This has everything to do with how we feel in our own mind rather than with the prosperity or completeness of our outer situation. For, as life teaches us every day, there is no guarantee of security in our outer affairs. Life is a manifestation of the ever-moving stream of *sansara*. However competent we may be in managing our life, we can only control things up to a certain point.

But as for our inner life—the world within the mind—this is a realm we really can transform and uplift if we have the desire and will to do so. This will lead to the realization that we have a deeper nature which is perfection, fearlessness, the source of bliss and tranquillity, and where there is nothing to cast a shadow of doubt over the inner sun of our understanding. We have the certainty that we know the ultimate purpose of life and have fulfilled it.

You may ask: 'How can we experience such a complete life?' This completeness of being is already an accomplished fact within us. It is the true nature of our being, the reality behind our appearance, the power behind our mind. What is it that roots us in a sense of limitation and imperfection? It is our way of thinking—the totality of our thoughts, ideas, opinions, desires and anxieties. These generate our strong conviction that we are identified with our body, mind and senses, and are nothing more. The complete life is the expression of our reality, free from the influence of these fluctuations of the mind.

This higher life is hidden deep within us, concealed by the forceful presence and assertiveness of the thoughts and ideas we have accumulated as we have developed. The way of progress and inner revelation is through transforming our mind into a source of peace and higher understanding. To do this, we need to become aware of all the forces in our personality and turn them into our helpers, not impediments.

Broadly speaking, the means to a complete life are:

- 1 A way of action that creates and expresses harmony within and without, and frees us from anxiety.
- 2 A way of emotion or feeling that expresses the wholeness of our being.
- 3 A way of intelligence that leads us from intellectual knowledge to the wisdom of inner light.

Controlling our own destiny is not easy because our actions have unforeseen consequences, and our destiny is the unfolding of those consequences. In the East this fact about human nature is attributed to a great law, the law of karma. There is a shop near Shanti Sadan where the proprietor is obviously aware of this principle and has put up a sign which reads ‘Don’t steal our goods—remember the law of karma!’ This is because karma will bring upon us unsought consequences, either outwardly or more importantly, if unfavourable, through destroying the harmony of our mind. The same idea is expressed in the saying ‘to harm another is to harm ourselves’, and in the Gospel we find: ‘As ye sow, so shall ye reap.’

Is there a way of acting which can keep us safe from making karmic mistakes or from getting ourselves ever more entangled in the consequences of what we do? We can try to live skilfully and benevolently, depending on our own worldly aptitude. But depending on our own efforts is never fully reliable. We never know when desires—or what desires—will creep in, or how we will react to unexpected threats and opportunities. There appears to be no escape.

And yet there is a way to loosen and eventually transcend this bondage. What we have to do is to widen our understanding and believe that we are not really imprisoned in our individuality, but we are part of the great all-knowing Whole. In the book, *Meditation – Its Theory and Practice*, you will find the words:

Our individual minds, conditioned by our bodies, are but small fractions of the divine or cosmic Mind, and possess the power of receiving from the cosmic Mind all that they require for their harmonious growth.

How we name that supreme principle is for us to decide. We may call it the ultimate Source, the ‘Dharmic body of the Buddha’, or Brahman, or God, or the cosmic mind. But if we can do our actions as an offering to this universal power that is the source of our own being, we will discover the path to inner freedom.

This way of action means that we are doing our best, but our happiness and peace of mind are no longer dependent on the results. If things do not go according to plan, we will be spared the feelings of self-pity or self-blame, and if we are successful we will not be carried away by self-glory. For true yoga is equanimity, not only in meditation but in our life of action. In other words, the consequences will lose the power of binding us, because our psychological point of reference will be our higher mind, which is consciously joined to the universal mind, and not our individual ego.

So one way of self-upliftment is to try to forget the individual focus—the self-interest—and to lose ourselves in what we are doing, for its own sake. This creates, as it were, an aperture in our consciousness and gives us a sense of inner freedom. This possibility of transcendence through self-forgetfulness, however short-lived, is recognized by the poet T S Eliot when he writes of:

... music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.

Through this self-forgetting concentration, the duality of hearer and heard, thinker and thought, doer and what is being done, is momentarily dissolved. In fact Eliot brings out the yogic principle of action-without-egoism a few lines later, when he writes: ‘Thoughts of past and future have nothing to do with the way of action.’

In practice we will find it effective to offer consciously what we do, to this great underlying Power that ultimately moves and rules the world. For example: ‘I offer this work, even this leisure or entertainment, to You. May my mind stay tranquil and may nothing hinder my spiritual progress.’ It is up to the individual to express this in her or his own way. The *Bhagavad Gita* has many verses on this liberating way of acting:

Those who perform their duty without attachment, surrendering the results to the Supreme God, are not affected by sinful action, as the petals of a lotus are untouched by water.

The aim is to live in the world, as we must, but not be entirely of the world. A similar image from the Taoist writings is that we have to live and move in the world as a boat moves on water. What is important is to make sure the water stays under the boat and does not fill it. It is the same with life. If we can do our actions in this free and unselfish way, our mind will be relieved of a host of unnecessary—and largely self-created—cares and concerns.

Once we can accept that there is this transcendent dimension of our being, and that we are attuning our mind to this infinite Presence, we find that we are establishing a relationship that has deep implications, and where there is no real dividing line between us and the supreme Reality.

Nowadays relationship is celebrated more than ever, through social networking and our love of being in touch. This suggests that most people feel a need to be in constant communion with others. On the other hand, we do not want our relationships to be hollow and superficial. This shallowness is also described by Eliot in his poem, ‘The Hollow Men’, which begins:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

There is one relationship which is deep, pure, ever unfolding, ever expanding. And this is possible if we have a spiritual view of life: the conviction that our life can be linked with the infinite, and will finally reveal itself as nothing other than the infinite. In the words of the Sufi master, Rumi,

He is a lover of the Universal, and he himself is the Universal:
he is in love with himself and seeking his own love.

This identification is the ultimate fruit of the fusion of our individual consciousness with the universal consciousness to which we have learnt

to offer our actions. This way of living and acting will prove such a relief that we will naturally wish to draw nearer to that deeper Reality with the sense of devotion.

Here too we find a way to be helped—emotionally. As we know, there is no more unsettling force in the mind than the desires that come up in us and demand our immediate attention and submission. The desiring habit has held sway throughout our human evolution and is indispensable for our life in the world. But as human beings we have an option. Our mind not only desires but has the power to choose what to desire. One great desire, which is the opposite of the hollow and superficial, is the urge for deeper communion, fusion and identity with the infinite.

We may say: ‘This is impossible. How can human beings desire the infinite?’ And yet there is something deep in human nature that itself has an affinity with the infinite. This very principle is intimately present in our being but it is more inward and subtle than the mental life. Being pure awareness, it knows the mind from within—not as one of the mind’s faculties, but as an interior vantage point that transcends the mind. This is the infinite in us seeking, one might say, to realize its true nature as infinity, just as the space in a jar, if it were conscious, may seek to realize its true identity as the universal space.

As the infinite has no form, it is not easy for the human mind to connect with something so subtle, abstract and universal. And so we are given symbols of the infinite, ideas and images that our mind can grasp and which attract us and absorb our attention. Symbols are not ends in themselves. Their ultimate aim is to lead us beyond all limitations to the realization of our true nature. To give some examples: a holy sage or saint we admire may be a symbol—a focus of our attention. An avatar—an incarnation of God—may be a symbol, claiming our reverence and devotion. A word of power like peace, light or OM may be a symbol. Even a philosophical world view, like Vedanta, is an extended symbol, pointing to a deeper reality. What is symbolized in all cases is the Infinite, the One, the Source, and these symbols are not meant to be walls that limit our range and aspiration, but windows that enable us to pass through into that same infinite reality.

We mentioned before that there is an element in us which transcends the mind, which is the infinite trying, as it were, to realize itself through

our self-realization. This is why the completeness of being is already an accomplished fact within us. It is a new way of understanding, and not a fundamental change in our nature, that will open the inner door. Once we can appreciate how to live in the world in tune with the infinite, and how to liberate our feelings from what is superficial and narrow, our ultimate guide will be our thirst for the supreme knowledge.

We all have a need to know, and, if we are seeking the complete life, we will not rest content until our faculty of cognition—of knowledge—is satisfied for ever. And blessed are we, if we have this divine discontent. What we are seeking is what is nearest to us. It is inseparable from our ultimate being as ‘I am’. This is our true Self, the Atman. It is not that we possess it. In a sense, it possesses us, being superior to all. But it is as if we have become unmindful of it. The true meaning of mindfulness—the deepest meaning—is to be mindful of what we are.

Can we attain our own Self? Is the word ‘attain’ appropriate? In one sense, it is valid. If we feel incomplete, we have, as it were, to attain to completeness through effort. If we feel we do not know ourselves in this perfect way, we need to attain the knowledge, we need a goal to move towards. But in a deeper sense, our goal is ever achieved. When we try to attain, we place it at an artificial distance. We set up an image in our mind, something which is actually different from what we are.

So the goal of our endeavours is ever attained. It is the completeness of our being, even now. Our challenge is to realize this, not create it. The step we are preparing ourselves for is to transcend our current experience of our self as rooted in limitations and transience, and realize the Self as infinite consciousness.

In the Chinese Zen (or ‘Chan’) tradition there is a story about a monk who went to a Master and asked about the true meaning of illumination. The Master answered: ‘Not to attain, not to know’. It goes back to the idea that when we try to attain to illumination—to completeness—we place it at an artificial distance. The monk then asked: ‘Is there some turning point in going beyond, or not?’ In other words, some step or steps must be needed, because it is obvious that we human beings are not completely fulfilled—that we are not at rest in the bliss of self-realization. Something must be necessary! In answer to this, the Master simply said: ‘The vast sky does not hinder white clouds from

flying.’

The teaching is that the glory of our true nature—absolute consciousness, limitless and free as space—is not in conflict with our mental states or our body-consciousness, any more than the infinite sky is in conflict with the clouds that sail in it. Realization is the withdrawal of our sense of identity from the limitations of our individuality to the absolute, unbounded freedom of consciousness absolute. It is not an attainment, not something to be known as different from ourselves, but the realization of the eternal completeness of our being.

We will no doubt be told that the complete life is to do good and make a difference to the outer world as best we can. As human beings we need to be caring, co-operative, friendly, open, sincere and generous-hearted. But such a life will flourish only if our consciousness is steeped in the inner light and peace of true wisdom.

In fact the spiritual Yoga rests on something deeper than virtue. It helps us to consciously bond our inner being with that in us which is the fountainhead of all goodness and truth. And we do this by merging our limited consciousness with the supreme consciousness through the yogic way of action, feeling and knowledge. With our mind thus transformed, we may be active in the world or live a more retired life. In either case, we will be a channel through which good flows unselfishly and spontaneously for the peace and upliftment of all.

B.D.

PEACE, MY LOVE, PEACE BE WITH YOU

‘You want the best seats—we have them.’ The theatre agents advertise their business in such terms. We want peace and permanent delight, but there seems to be nobody who promises: ‘You want peace and delight—we can teach you how to have it.’ None can give others peace and delight. I cannot eat or drink for you, neither can I sleep for you. Peace creative, and delight that is free from agitation, are to be discovered in one’s own being.

Do not poetry, drama, good food, new and fashionable clothes, give us delight? Yes, but for how long? Like alcohol, they cheer the mind for a while, but do not solve the problem of lasting joy. Is pleasure our ultimate objective? If so, why are we given reason, a delight in knowing the how and why of the world, an urge to renounce sleep and comfort, to gain knowledge or in favour of philanthropic practices? What sense-delight did Howard, Kobo, Confucius or even Columbus have in their career devoted to the higher pursuit? None.

We cannot accomplish anything worthwhile as long as we are ruled by sense-delights. We rise to our full stature only when we are conscious of our main purpose in life, far above the plane of sense-delight, in the realm of ideas.

The main objection to devotion to the pleasure-sense is that it does not elevate our soul, teaches us nothing that is inwardly enriching, and does not help the creation of ideas and objects calculated to serve others.

I love poetry, philosophy, art, nature and friends, because they are incentives to a higher life of the spirit and to the life of reason, as George Santayana says. ‘I love you. I will therefore serve you to enrich your mind and heart with the honey of wisdom, the blossoms of knowledge and virtue, with a view to offer you at the altar of universal truth. Come into my embrace, if you seek this supreme consummation of knowledge,’ I say to the ones I love or who are candidates to my affection.

The most happy nights I have passed in my youth have not been on a bed of roses under cool moonlight and soft breezes. They were the nights entertained on the Vasishtha Mountain, in a muddy, leaking shed, with big toads, not far from crawling, venomous cobras. Why? Because

my love, my saint, my friend, my mentor, the most beautiful person I knew, Shri Rama Tirtha, was not far from me, and the dark, rainy, thundery night was an interlude between my associations with that God-man. With practically nothing to eat and ill with a slow fever, what sense delight was there? But the joy and delight, the peace, the surges of love inundating every corner of the soul, the urges to serve man, the re-orientation of all the life ideals, the adumbration of the holy Truth—all, all invited my soul to melt and flow in a stream to wash his feet.

Could Yudhishthira, Harischandra, Socrates, Dante be lights of the world to guide the feet of man in the dark night of ignorance, had they lived a life of dalliance and pleasure? Where then, is delight, peace, elevation of the soul? In pursuit of Rama, in the ardent quest for the discovery of the jewel in the lotus, in service without egoism to enrich mankind in knowledge and virtue.

He attains peace who, giving up all the pleasure and power desires, moves about without attachment, without selfishness, without vanity. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:71)

Hari Prasad Shastri

POEM OF INŚAY

If you say he exists only in the Kaaba,
'Tis false.

Wherever my gaze turns I see Him plain.

O Inśay, what else can I say?

All the quarters of the two worlds

Are filled with the light of the Lord.

He occupies all abodes from eternity.

Translated from the Urdu by A.J.A.

More Light from Japanese Poetry— Kukai

THE JAPANESE love of poetry is well-known and deep-rooted. As far back as the second half of the eighth century AD, about the time Shri Shankara was teaching in India, the Japanese scribes, probably on the instructions of the Emperor, produced one of the world's first and biggest anthologies, the *Manyoshu*, comprising 4516 poems. The poems were written by those privileged to be literate—aristocrats, royalty, some military people, priests, and others. The compilers would have been familiar with Chinese culture and eager to produce something comparable, yet characteristically Japanese.

The poems of the *Manyoshu* put into serene and dignified language the deepest longings of the human heart. To give you an example of their poetic power, here is a poem by one of the greatest of the *Manyoshu* poets, Hitomaro. Note the simplicity and frankness of his expression, and the Japanese sea-scape ambience of the similes: the rock pool, the waving seaweed, the great ship. The poet is referring to his secret marriage:

Since in Karu lived my wife,
I wished to be with her to my heart's content;
But I could not visit constantly
Because of the many watching eyes.
So our love remained secret,
Like to a rock-pent pool;
I cherished her in my heart
Looking to after-time when we should be together,
And lived secure in my trust

As one riding a great ship.
Suddenly there came a messenger
Who told me she was dead—
Was gone like a yellow leaf of autumn,
Dead as the day dies with the setting sun,
Lost as the bright moon is lost behind the cloud.

Alas, she is no more, whose soul
Was bent to mine like bending seaweed.

When the word was brought to me
I knew not what to do or what to say;
But restless at the mere news
And hoping to heal my grief—
Even a thousandth part of it,
I journeyed to Karu and searched the marketplace
Where my wife was wont to go!
There I stood and listened
But no voice of her I heard,
Though the birds sang in the Unebi mountains;
None passed by who even looked like my wife.
I could only call her name and wave my sleeve.

Later in that century, or perhaps in the early decades of the ninth century, another highly talented poet wrote a very different poem in response to a nobleman in Kyoto who wanted the poet to stay in the city and enjoy life. This is part of what he said:

You ask me why I entered the mountain deep and cold...
Have you not seen, O have you not seen,
The water gushing up in the divine spring of the garden?
No sooner does it arise than it flows away forever:
Thousands of shining lines flow as they come forth,
Flowing, flowing, flowing into an unfathomable abyss;
Turning, whirling again, they flow on forever
And no one knows where they will stop.

Have you not seen, O have you not seen,
That billions have lived in China, in Japan?
None have been immortal, from time immemorial:
Ancient sage kings or tyrants, good subjects or bad,
Fair ladies or homely—who could enjoy eternal youth?
Noble men and lowly alike, without exception, die away;
They have all died, reduced to dust and ashes;
The singing halls and dancing stages have become the abodes of
foxes.

Transient as dreams, bubbles or lightning, all are perpetual travellers.

I have never tired of watching the pine trees and the rocks at Mount Koya;
The limpid stream of the mountain is the source of my inexhaustible joy.
Discard pride in earthly gains;
Do not be scorched in the burning house, the triple world!
Discipline in the woods alone lets us soon enter the eternal realm.

The writer is the great spiritual luminary, Kobo Daishi, who lived from 774 to 835. Kobo Daishi is not a name but a title. It was conferred after his death and means ‘the grand master who propagated the Buddhist teaching’. Otherwise, he is known as Kukai. ‘Ku’ means sky and ‘kai’ means sea—and it is said that while meditating on the place where the sky meets the sea, he was inspired to take this name. He was in his twenties at the time.*

Kukai’s family was linked with the court, and he was educated as an aristocrat. But in his late teens, he became disillusioned with material goals and was drawn to the quest for spiritual enlightenment, that he knew about from the Buddhist scriptures. Buddhism in Japan at that time was what Kukai called ‘exoteric’—that is, chiefly concerned with externals. Devotion to the Buddha was conducive to harmony in society. Buddhist temples were supervised and sponsored by the government. The Buddha was prayed to for worldly prosperity, security and protection, the fruitfulness of the harvest, the mildness of the weather. But what Kukai did not find was guidance on the fundamental quest for spiritual illumination.

In his early twenties, he abandoned his formal studies at the government college and took increasingly to spending long periods meditating in the mountains and living as a wandering ascetic, although he always eventually returned to the capital. He felt especially at home on Mount Koya, south of Kyoto and Osaka.

* Quotations from Kukai’s writings and biographical facts are mainly drawn from *Kūkai and His Major Works*, translated by Yoshito S Hakeda. Copyright © 1972 Columbia University Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

An early biographer writes:

He read widely in the classics and in history, showing interest especially in Buddhist scriptures. He constantly told himself, however, that what he was learning was only dregs derived from men of old. They benefited him little at that time; how much less would they benefit him after death... He then thought it essential to learn the ultimate Truth.

At twenty-one he committed himself to Buddhism, but not yet as a monk. Here is a poem he wrote about his wanderings:

I have neither family nor country to which I belong;
I am completely free from the ties of kinsmen...
Mountain birds call on me, warbling from time to time;
Monkeys exhibit before my eyes their superb leaps from tree to tree;
Spring flowers and autumn chrysanthemums smile upon me;
The moon at dawn and the breezes at morn cleanse my heart.

Solitude, self-purification, emptying the mind. Around this time Kukai came across a Buddhist teaching, an Indian text of relatively recent composition called the *Maha-Vairochana Sutra*, which he knew would awaken him to the light. He found the text difficult and felt the need to go to China, where esoteric Buddhism—the deeper spiritual teaching—flourished.

His visit to China turned out to be part of a large government delegation, with several priests and monks, and at this time Kukai became a monk, in line with the requirements of the delegation. The plan was that he would stay in China for twenty years, absorbing the teachings and bringing them back to Japan. While there he learnt Sanskrit from Indian Buddhist pundits, and also extended his knowledge of Chinese. Visiting many monasteries, at length he met an illumined teacher, Master Hui-Kuo, the head of the Shingon or True Word sect. The Master was elderly, and when he saw Kukai he smiled with pleasure and said: ‘I knew that you would come. I have waited for such a long time. What pleasure it gives me to look upon you today at last! My life is drawing to an end, and until you came there was no-one

to whom I could transmit the teachings...’

Exceptionally, he transmitted the whole of the teachings to this man, who alone was ripe to receive them. He also charged him to take the teachings back to Japan, so that people everywhere may know peace and contentment. His last words to Kukai were: ‘Do your best! Do your best!’

And so Kukai collected hundreds of manuscripts, several spiritual paintings, and other articles needed for the initiation ceremonies and rituals of what he called ‘esoteric Buddhism’—the great teaching which enabled one to realize ultimate Truth in this very life.

He returned to Japan after two years, not twenty, and though it was some years before he was authorised by the emperor, he eventually founded a new religious order devoted to the pursuit of spiritual illumination, finally setting up a great monastery on Mount Koya.

Kukai was not just a contemplative. He was also a practical genius. For example, he was deeply interested in spreading free education and he founded the first school for all children, rich and poor, though unfortunately, it was not sustained after his passing.

Among his accomplishments was his work on the Japanese alphabet, the ‘kana’ script. Before then characters had been borrowed from Chinese ideograms, which, when voiced, were close to the sounds the Japanese wish to make. If you wanted to write the sound D, for instance, you might invoke the ideogram for the Chinese word ‘Dao’ and perhaps simplify it. It was an untidy and somewhat arbitrary method, full of variables.

Kukai applied his knowledge of the Sanskrit sound system, precise and scientific, to tidy up the script of his own land. To help children learn the 47 syllables, he composed a spiritual verse of four lines in which every syllable was included, and just once. He took as his model the Buddhist sutra that runs:

All earthly things pass away:
This is the law of all existence.
Going beyond this law of extinction,
We are in the bliss of Nirvana alone.

He remoulded the lines into the following verse:

The blooms are fragrant, but alas! they fall.
Who in this world can remain for ever?
Crossing this day the mountains of transient existence
We see no more shallow dreams, nor are we deluded.

Here is part of another short poem suggesting the positive outcome of being free from delusion:

By removing the mist, we see the light;
We find the inexhaustible Treasury open to all to enjoy,
Shining forth ever more fresh day by day.

The mist is the self-created, self-sustained mist of our own thoughts, and we remove the mist by calming the mind and introducing a dynamic spiritual thought of light, peace and self-knowledge. The mist cannot abide in the atmosphere of contemplation of eternal truth.

Kukai believed in the power of repeating mantras—combinations of sounds charged with spiritual meaning and power. We are familiar with what has been called the great seed mantram, OM. Others, like OM NAMAH SHIVAYA, are alluded to in *The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching*. The efficacy of a mantram depends on the attitude of reverence and aspiration with which it is approached. It is usually imparted at a holy ceremony in an atmosphere of purity and receptivity, and repeated inwardly with calmness, close attention and love. When this is so, Kukai’s following statements about mantra recitation may be appreciated:

A mantra is supra-rational;
It eliminates ignorance when meditated upon and recited.
A single word contains a thousand truths;
One can realize such-ness (reality) here and now.
Walk on and on until perfect quiescence is reached;
Go on and on until the primordial Source is penetrated.

The Shingon Buddhism that Kukai taught believed in holy ceremonies, visualization practices, the contemplation of *mandalas*—pictures with a spiritually symbolic design— and other ritualistic acts.

But these were only means to create in the mind serenity, concentration, spiritual sensitivity, and the power to penetrate the primordial Source—the source of our own being—the universal, non-dual Self that transcends individuality.

He believed the aspirant could draw inspiration directly from the Buddha—not as the human figure who appeared as a man on earth, but in his abstract all-pervading form as the inspirer of the highest spiritual teachings and mantras. He quotes these lines from the *Maha-Vairochana Sutra*:

I have realized that which is unborn;
It is what language cannot communicate;
It is free from all defilements;
It transcends causality.
I know that is void like space,
I have gained the wisdom to see things as they really are.
I am free from darkness;
I am the ultimately real and immaculate.

Kukai's teachings tend to blur, indeed erase, any fundamental differences between the non-dual Vedanta revealed in the Upanishads and the esoteric Buddhism of the *Maha-Vairochana Sutra*. Here are two more quotations, in verse, that show how Kukai indicates realization in terms of non-duality, echoing the upanishadic utterance: 'It is to be known through the mind; there is no duality whatsoever. He who sees as though there were differences, goes from death to death.' Kukai's sayings are:

Form and emptiness are non-dual from the beginning;
Particulars and the universal have always been identical.
The One Way, unconditioned and signless, is spotless;
It unfolds the teaching of non-duality, of neither being nor non-being.
When both the seeing and the seen are negated, the eternal ground of quiescence will be found...

The lines of poetry of Kukai so far cited, have been heavily laden with abstractions, and we might well feel, in the context of Japanese

poetry, a yearning for the imagery of nature. So here are the lines which end the biography of Kukai by Yoshito Hakeda. They were probably written on Mount Koya, the place he loved and where he passed away in April 835.

We need to know that the sound 'bup po so' has a meaning in Japanese Buddhism, signifying the three treasures—the 'Bupposo'—Buddha, dharma and Sangha, the spiritual community, in which the devout Buddhist 'takes refuge'.

In a quiet forest, sitting alone
in a grass hut at dawn,
'Bup po so!' I thought
I heard a bird cry.
Was it a bird's cry?
I heard it in my mind.
The sound, stream, clouds and mind
diffuse brightly in the morning rays.

Notice that the mind here is spoken of in the same terms as nature: 'The sound, stream, clouds and mind diffuse brightly in the morning rays.' It too is an object, and the poet has long since ceased to be identified with it. We remember the earlier poem:

By removing the mist, we see the light;
We find the inexhaustible Treasury open to all to enjoy,
Shining forth ever more fresh day by day.

A.H.C.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

IT IS morning in the capital of Videha. The streets have been sprinkled with rose water and are decorated with green arches and flowers. It is a holiday in the city. Men, women and children are lining the processional route. The pundits are holding baskets of flowers, and young girls also have their offerings of gold and silver petals and baskets of rice. The crowd begin to murmur: 'Here he comes, here he comes!'

Riding in a golden palanquin, on his way to the palace, comes the maharishi Yajnavalkya, while King Janaka himself is waving a fan over the silvery head of the holy sage.

In a chariot behind him are the two brahmacharis, attended by the family priest of the royal household. Chanting mantrams from the Veda, the pundits scatter their flowers in the path of the illustrious knower of Truth; the young girls also, throwing their golden and silver blossoms, are singing: 'Jai to the Teacher of the knowledge of Brahman (the Absolute)! Jai to the supreme spiritual Guru! Jai to the maharishi Yajnavalkya!'

Somewhat against his will, the holy teacher has accepted accommodation in the royal palace. The queen has been personally supervising the needs of her august visitor. A large number of brahmins have been supplied with sumptuous meals and the traditional gift of pieces of gold.

Many holy renunciates, living in the forest which surrounds the capital of King Janaka, have been informed by the king of the visit of the great yogi-rajah, and on this day of the full moon, attended by their serving disciples, they have come to the garden where Shri Yajnavalkya is to give a discourse. Here the company have spread their antelope skins. Sitting down in complete silence, with their rosaries in their hands, they are concentrated on a holy mantram. It is indeed inspiring to witness these contemplatives—who have turned their faces from the vanities of the world, in quest of the ultimate reality—assembled together to hear a discourse from a holy sage who has himself crossed

over the ocean of being and becoming.

A great canopy has been set up, and under it a lion throne installed. In the late afternoon, when the heat has been mitigated by cooling breezes from the Himalayas, the sound of distant conch-shells is heard, as the maharishi and his two brahmacharis slowly approach the assembly.

After exchanging salutations, the holy sage is seated on the lion throne. King Janaka, dressed as a simple commoner, sits at his feet. Shri Yajnavalkya addresses the assembly thus:

'Holy ones. The scriptures insist upon truth, asceticism (*tapas*), right insight and a life of absolute purity (*brahmacharya*) as the essential conditions for the unfoldment of the Self within man. Self-realization cannot be achieved by much discourse, by a keen intellect, or by the performance of rituals. A devotee who has performed unselfish acts of benevolence in the past can, by his tenacity and strong unflinching purpose, realize Atman (the real Self). For such a disciple, the life of Self-realization is superior to the life of action.

'In order to realize the spiritual realm one should go in a spirit of humility, with fuel in hand, to a traditional Teacher, one who knows the supreme philosophy and practises it. The whole world, holy ones, is a mantle of experience put on by the eternal reality, the Self. Learn to concentrate voluntarily on any object you perceive—then forget its appearance and meditate on the reality on which that appearance is superimposed. Finally, identify your meditating entity with the essence of the object meditated upon: thus will you know Brahman. Involuntary thinking does not help a candidate for the spiritual wisdom.

'All the learning you need, all the best and highest spiritual teaching, all the experience of the sages, is summed up in one word, and that word is 'Om'. See it and meditate upon it. This is the secret of spiritual realization. If, with patience and a pure heart emptied of all earthly desires, you thus meditate on 'Om', you will realize the imperishable.

'O sadhus, know that the realization of Brahman is easy and simple to the one who is desireless and who is devoted to his Guru; whereas for those whose minds still dwell with pleasure on possessions, ambitions, and so forth, it is difficult.'

The discourse ended. All present, bowing low to the revered sage,

chanted 'Om Tat Sat!'. From the royal kitchens bowls of fresh milk, fruits and sweets were then brought out and distributed as prasada (consecrated food) to the assembly.

* * *

In a private interview with Shri Yajnavalkya, the King asked him what should be the cornerstone of the state, and what policy he should adopt for the good of his people. The holy Yajnavalkya replied:

'O Janaka, the highest good of the realm is purity, prosperity and ethical upliftment of the people. Eliminate all hunger; educate the people and teach them spiritual methods whereby they can realize the infinite within themselves. As the maker of a mirror continues to polish its surface until the reflection of the face in it is clear, so, by moral discipline (dharma), by the practice of universal goodness and strict self-analysis, the personalities of your subjects will become transparent and susceptible to the images and influences of beauty.

'Extend the frontiers of your dominion, but not by military force. Military conquests cause loss of men, material and morality in the beginning, the middle and the end. Assure your people of security and reasonable property. Dispense justice without prejudice. Do not yourself indulge in pleasures, such as unnecessary eating, which are not available to your subjects. When kings grow fond of luxuries, their people try to imitate them—and so the roots of social prosperity are cut.

'My son Janaka, have an army adequate for defence, but not for aggressive attack. Appoint righteous men of good education as the heads of your military power, keeping a secret eye on all your civil and military employees. Thus you will see that they are not corrupt and do their duty according to the eternal law.

'Luxury has a far greater attraction than austerity. Therefore, my son, adopt the simple life yourself, and then there will be no discrepancy between your precept and your example.

'The aged and the children deserve your special care. The animals, the bulls, cows and horses should be treated with kindness. Establish hospitals for them when their bodies are worn out. Follow these practices, and your people will incline towards dharma.'

King Janaka bowed low and said: 'O blessed acharya, for some time it has been in my mind to crave a boon from you, but I have hesitated to bring the matter to your notice. Will you pardon my boldness if I now make it known to you, holy one?'

'Speak, my son,' replied the maharishi. 'The spiritual ruling is that one should neither grant a boon, nor receive a favour. The paramahansa, who has found the egoless state and lives a life of perfect freedom, uninfluenced by ignorance and its effects, is above both. He neither blesses nor curses any. Therefore, speak, my son.'

King Janaka said: 'O lord of my heart, I feel I must ask your permission to retire from my task as ruler of this great kingdom. I desire to live in your ashrama, blessed one, doing personal service to you.'

Shri Yajnavalkya smiled and said: 'O Janaka, the time has not yet come for me to appoint a vice-regent for your kingdom. So far, my son, you have done your duty well. Go on with the task. A jnani, a knower of Truth, neither wants to possess something new, however beautiful, pleasant or meritorious it may be, nor does he try to be withdrawn from any circumstances, however unpleasant they may appear. A palace in a dream, provided with all luxury and comforts, or a poor hut, destitute of conveniences, are one and the same.

'My son, the personality (antahkarana) of a jnani, with its egoity, its convictions, its ideas of beauty and of scholarship, is to be surrendered and recognized as maya (illusion), because it is unreal. As long as the personality is retained, with any speciality attached to it, it is a burden. Sin and sorrow, merit and demerit, grief and joy, pilgrimages and battlefields are all dream objects. O Janaka, many people make the error of identifying themselves firmly with their antahkaranas, yet they pronounce the world they perceive to be unreal. But real knowledge consists in realizing the illusory character of this thinking, feeling, imagining, memorizing entity, called personality or the mind. If a wave in the sea realizes the unreality of all waves, yet still thinks itself to be real, to be an abiding entity, then its realization is not complete.

'My son, visit my ashrama and we will talk more on this matter. Tomorrow I take leave of you. Let there be no public demonstration in my honour. Permit me to pass from your capital as a rainbow dissipates itself after a slight shower.'

The King did not reply. Both the acharya and the disciple sat in

complete silence and peace—the antahkarana of Janaka at one with the conditioned entity of the great sage. It was thus, in this peaceful silence, that Janaka realized the highest Truth. He saw his own Guru, Shri Ashtavakra, in the maharishi Yajnavalkya. This unuttered teaching impressed the intellect of the King and created in it a thought (vritti) of the universal Consciousness.

No disciple realizes the true love, majesty and glory of the Teacher until he has himself acquired the highest state: that of the knowledge of Truth. It is in order to convey this that the Guru establishes a spiritual contact with the disciple.

To be continued

VERSES FROM THE YAJUR VEDA

May my mind ever think of the good of all beings.
That mind, which is a means of divine knowledge, which takes man far, far during the waking state, which causes objects to be known to the senses, which abides in the subtle cause in the state of sleep—
May that mind ever think of the good of all beings.

The mind, which manifests its modifications in the form of the intellect, will and memory, which is the means of accomplishing the good of all people,
May that mind be directed towards justice and the exercise of truth and love—
And may it ever think of the good of all beings.

The mind, in which a knowledge of the four Vedas abides in seed form, which has the capacity to know what is best for all beings—
May that mind of mine ever think of the good of all beings.

Translated by H.P.S.

Meister Eckhart and Shri Shankara

THE MEDIAEVAL German mystic, Meister Eckhart, was born about 1260 and died about 1327. He became a friar of the Dominican Order and enjoyed a brilliant career both as a scholar and as an administrator. He was also a magnificent preacher, perhaps one of the best there has ever been in Christianity, but unfortunately his own mystical sensibility prompted him to introduce into his sermons material that went far beyond official Church doctrine, and at the end of his life he fell foul of the Church authorities, lost his post, so to speak, and had to recant whatever he had said wrong, while protesting that he had been misunderstood. He is thought to have died on the way to Avignon to argue his case before the Pope.

Let us take stock briefly of the form of Christianity into which he was born. It taught the sinfulness, worthlessness and impotence of the human soul, which has been wallowing in sin since the time of Adam, and could only be raised from its lamentable condition by divine grace. An absolute dualism was asserted between a transcendent God, on the one hand, and a fallen humanity, on the other, perpetually stigmatized by Adam's sin. While attainment of proximity with God was the goal of life, it was not held, or was only rarely held, that this could be attained before death. Even the soul who had been saved was regarded as standing over against God, his Creator. And God was in no way a state of consciousness that could be enjoyed, but only a goal that could be striven for but never fully achieved.

The Gospel message did not ask for rational pondering about one's state. It required self-abandonment in faith to a revealed truth. And it preached action rather than any form of contemplation. It required faith in a historical fact, the incomprehensible fact that God had made himself man, had died on the cross and was ready to subvert the laws of nature in favour of those who believed in Him. And this answered to a need. Set down in a world more dangerous and uncomfortable than we can easily comprehend, mediaeval man longed for a loving father who would eventually release him from his suffering.

Even within the Church, long before Eckhart, a school of mystics had grown up whose members paid attention to the demands of reason.

The human characteristics—will, love, even self-consciousness—that had been attributed to the deity, were stripped away, and He was left as pure Being, void of personality and love, immutable and inflexible, not amenable to human prayer, but self-identical unity, what Milton later called ‘the army of unalterable law’.

But the soul cannot remain satisfied in a world of inexorable laws. In the earlier part of the Middle Ages, a new school of Christian mysticism grew up. They turned again to God in prayer and faith. They rose to the full height of personal religious experience. In certain moments at least they felt absolute certainty as to God’s existence. They entered a region of concrete experience beyond all doubt, where speculative problems and the demands of reason had no meaning. They knew nothing but the light flooding the depths of their inner consciousness. For others, the external world may have been the only reality. But for them the world itself became the loving symbol of God, who, as free spirit, was gently drawing them towards previously unsuspected areas of inner felicity.

This was a mysticism of bare feeling, that did without reason. But on this account it was imperfect. It did not yield a perfect, unshakeable possession of God. It remained merely an irrational feeling which asserts itself now more strongly, now less strongly, in certain privileged moments only. It had to be constantly re-established in face of the multiple demands and suggestions of the external world. This constant renewal of the living sense of the divine implied free activity. We are not here in the realm of the religion of blind conformity, of the passive reception of dogma in faith. We are in the realm of continuous efforts at renovation—and this implies thought, what Indians call *vichara*, for only thought can justify a continuous course of action, since it requires thought to link the various efforts together. Thought here is not the characteristic rationalism of the philosopher, pursuing a rigid, definite rational system without regard to genuine human desires and aspirations. Thought here is reason based on faith in divine revelation, and used to strengthen it. The mystics who constitute the main stream of the Christian mystical tradition have simply accepted mystical experience as a brute fact, and attributed it to the incomprehensible

grace of God.

Eckhart was, so to speak, a thinking mystic. He tried to demonstrate rationally how a feeling of identity with God could be possible. He tried to show that the soul was not a mere creation of God, but was identical with God by its very nature. On this account his teaching transcended the bounds of traditional Church dogma and came into close affinity with, though not of course identity with, the teaching of the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita* and their interpreter and commentator, the great philosopher, Shankara, who lived in the eighth century AD.

What are we to do with our lives? If we do not turn to God, we are left with the instincts, modified by the environment, prudence and human tradition. Nature clearly has the urge to perpetuate itself, to keep the show going, so it implants in us two master sentiments, one to propagate the species further, the other to effect self-preservation, without which we could not preserve our offspring. If left unbridled, the instinct to self-preservation expresses itself as the will to dominate.

The classical instance of the will to dominate in the Western world, was the world-conqueror, Alexander the Great, and his example was held up as a caution by the mystics of Christianity and Islam alike. Alexander turns up in the role in Eckhart’s Latin writings (he wrote and preached in both German and Latin). He meets with a sage, who tells him, ‘The world, which you think too great to win, I think too small to despise.’ A relatively modern teacher of Vedanta, Swami Rama Tirtha, wrote a poem on this theme. He made the sage, who had realized the true nature of his Self as the Self of the universe, more eloquent than he appears to be in Eckhart’s version of the anecdote, and the Swami himself sums up in a passage in which practically every image could be reproduced from the sermons or writings of Eckhart about the man of God. The Swami says:

The emperor had paid respect to the body,
But the true emperor was the sage whose home was in the Self.
His impregnable fortress towered higher than the sun,
Proof against gunshot or the thickest swarm of arrows.
Viewed from this fortress,
The earth and all its monarchs
Are no better than dots or atoms,

Or like the stars which disappear at dawn,
All gone to destruction,
Reduced to an imaginary point.
Past, present and future—all are the One.
All things have vanished like the stars in sunlight.
Who has the strength to glimpse this light?
The sage was the King of kings,
Whose writ covered the whole earth.

We shall hear later of Eckhart's teaching about the fortress in the inner depths of the soul of man, but let us now consider his view of the need to strive to rise above the biological urges, or at any rate turn them to account for the spiritual life. It is an often repeated theme amongst the philosophers, perhaps first clearly stated by Aristotle, that what distinguishes man from animals is reason. Eckhart says that man's special greatness does not lie in the fact that God is within him. God is within everything. Man's greatness lies in the fact that he can know God within him, or rather, to use a better term which we are happy to have in English, man can *realize* God. If man's superiority to the animals only consisted in reason, it would be limited to learning how to dominate the world for the sake of his own comfort. Our teacher once gave a devastating summary of the philosophy of Victorian rationalism as exemplified in Lord Macaulay, as a good breakfast, followed by a good lunch and a good dinner. Let us contrast that with some words of Eckhart.

Wherein does blessedness lie most of all? Some masters have said it lies in knowing, some say it lies in loving, others say that it lies in knowing and loving, and they say better. But we say it lies neither in knowing nor in loving: for there is something in the soul from which both knowing and loving flow, but it does not itself know or love in the way the powers of the soul do. Whoever knows this, knows the seat of blessedness. This has neither before nor after, nor is it expecting anything to come, for it can neither gain nor lose. And so it is deprived of the knowledge that God is at work in it; rather, it just is itself, enjoying itself God-fashion. It is in this fashion, it is in this manner, I declare, that a man should be so acquitted and free that he neither

knows nor realizes that God is at work in him.

Here Eckhart indicates that it is the glory of man that he can pass beyond rational knowledge and rest in identity with the source of his own being and the being of the whole world. Eckhart and Shankara agree that the goal towards which man should work if he wants eternal peace lies beyond all activity of the mind, even the highest functions of reason. Eckhart says:

The soul has a light within that is never extinguished, a small spark of supersensual knowledge. But our soul also has another kind of knowledge, directed towards external objects: the knowledge of sense-objects and knowledge of the truths of reason. But this knowledge, even in its higher rational form, hides the other knowledge.

Shankara also speaks of the goal of spiritual life as lying beyond the sphere of subject-object knowledge. He says:

To begin with, there comes the gross world of waking experience. When this is absent, there comes the private world, the world of dream. Then, when this is absent, there comes 'the beyond', the felicity of dreamless sleep. But when, through spiritual practice, one has eliminated these three forms of knowledge as illusory, one awakens to ultimate reality, called 'the Fourth', which is non-dual, birthless and deathless, free from danger and fear. When this occurs, that person of great understanding, being now the Self of all, attains to omniscience here in this very world. As he comprehends that which transcends all empirical knowledge, his knowledge never leaves him. When reality is once known, that knowledge never departs. He who knows the supreme reality does not first acquire knowledge and then find he has to revise it, in the manner of secular philosophers.

Well, so much for the great masters—but what of us pupils? Our gaze is still largely fixed on the external world about us in the hope of somehow extracting happiness from it. But Eckhart reminds us that the external world as revealed by the senses is a chain of causes and effects. Each object in it refers back to something else as its cause. In so far as

the soul identifies its interests with the objects of this world, it falls into the realm of causation and loses its liberty and forgets its own true nature. In this realm, the soul's actions are determined by a particular end, by a particular love of a particular person or thing, or by some particular dislike for a particular person or thing. Such actions are not really actions but passions, they are not active self-determination but passive submission to the pull of objects. Their motive force comes to the soul from outside, not from within.

As might be expected, Shankara has much to say on this theme of moderating our zest for external objects if we hope for permanent and lasting happiness. Commenting on the *Katha Upanishad*, he says:

The sense-organs are turned outwards. Therefore whatever one perceives is an external object composed of the physical elements and belongs to the domain of the not-self. Engaged with external objects, one cannot perceive the true Self within. It is like swimming against the current of a river. He who has in this sense averted his gaze from all objects, who has performed this purifying discipline, sees the true Self within.

Why should a wise man be prepared to go to such lengths in restraining the natural tendencies of the sense-organs and mind in order to see the Self? This our present outward-turned vision, which sees the not-self, is called ignorance. They are caught in the all-pervading net of death, that is the complex of ignorance, desire and desire-prompted action, in the net of transmigration, in the net of repeated acquisition and loss of a body, organs, relatives, home and so on. But the wise, those who know the true Self, do not desire anything whatever in this almost wholly evil world of transmigration, amongst these transient objects.

Is worldly life so bad as all that? Are there not cakes and ale available for most of us? Yes, there are, but these great figures like Shankara and Eckhart have left us their teachings to remind us how transient and paltry these sense-joys really are. Who did not sympathize with Mother Theresa when she asked the organisers of the Nobel Prize celebrations to forgo the banquet and devote the money to the poor? Eckhart reminds us of the transience and imperfection of all created forms. He says:

So long as the soul sees forms, its vision is imperfect, whether it sees an angel or whether it sees itself as a creature having form—so long is there imperfection in the soul. Yes, even if it sees God—in so far as He has form, in so far as He is a Trinity—it remains true that there is still imperfection in the soul. But when everything with form is separated from the soul by discrimination, it sees the Eternal One alone, and the bare unformed being of the soul perceives the bare unformed being of God—a super-being rather than a being. O miracle beyond miracle! What a noble experience it is, that the being of the soul then undergoes, not a dream or a shadow of a distinction even in thought of name.

Shankara for his part graphically paints the grievous loss that comes to the soul through its preoccupation with the external, even though the soul may not realize it at the time. He says:

This 'being-the-Self-of-all' is the highest state of consciousness of the soul, the supreme natural state. But when, before this, one feels oneself to be other than the true Self, even by a hair's breadth, that is the state of ignorance. The results of knowledge and ignorance are 'being-the-Self-of-all' and 'being-of-a-limited-nature' respectively. Through ignorance one becomes finite. One becomes cut off from others. Being cut off, one finds oneself opposed. Being opposed one is struck, overpowered, stripped. This happens because, being in the realm of the finite, one becomes different from others. But when one is the All, how could one be different from others that anyone could oppose him. And if there be no opposition, how could he be struck, overpowered, stripped?

And Shankara goes on to affirm that one can indeed, through Vedantic discipline, rise to an awareness of one's own true nature as the Self of all, and this fact alone shows that ignorance is not a natural property of the soul, or otherwise it would be impossible to get rid of it.

The problem of how to realize God is not solved on the plane of thinking, though some *vichara* or philosophical reflection may be regarded as a necessary preliminary. Eckhart expresses this as follows: 'What is the basis of the true possession of God?' he asks. Its basis, he says, is not the continuous and uninterrupted thought of God.

That would be beyond human power, or at least supremely difficult. And it would not even be the best thing either. Man should not rest content with a God who had merely been thought. For then, when the thought passed away, God would pass away too. Man must take possession of God not in thought but in being. God is superior to everything created. And this God, thus realized, does not pass away even if you turn your face away from Him by an effort of will.

Thus for Eckhart there has to be a radical and revolutionary change of direction of the will so that the whole person turns away from pre-occupation with the realm of creatures for its own sake. As Shankara expresses it, if the soul wants permanent happiness, it has to become as vigorously pre-occupied with the search for God within its own depths as it formerly was pre-occupied with the search for scraps of happiness from the objects of the external world.

Shankara, like Eckhart, emphasizes the need to pass beyond thought and mental representation of God, which come and go, to immediate identity feeling. He says specifically:

When the yogi has a mental cognition in which the pure consciousness which constitutes his true Self is reflected like a face in a mirror, he is apt to think that he has seen his true Self. But only he deserves to be called the best of yogis who has risen beyond this as above all other false mental notions. The Veda says, 'Thou art He who is the Knower of Knowing'—and this must be the immediate vision of the highest yogi, with a feeling of identity. All other experience is false. How can there be ideas or absence of ideas in Me who am of the nature of eternal consciousness? He only is a knower of the true Self who is aware of himself as unbroken light, void of agency, and who has lost the feeling 'I am the Absolute'.

The search for God is both outer and inner. There is a search for God in the external forms of the world. On the one hand, the beauty, order and harmony of nature imply a deity. And the objects of the world can be seen as expressing God in symbolic form. But the more direct path, both for Shankara and Eckhart, is the inner search. Thus Eckhart says:

When I came out from God, as the divine Ground, into this world of plurality, then all creatures declared, 'A God exists', that is, a creator. But that cannot make me blessed. For here I conceive myself as creature. But when I break through to my origin, the Ground, I am more than all creatures. I am then neither God nor creature. I am that which always was, ever remains, and always will be. There I become so rich that God cannot satisfy me in all in which he is God, through all his divine works. For I perceive in this breakthrough what I and God are in common. There I am what I ever was. There I neither increase nor diminish. For there I am that immutable one which moves all things. Here man again reaches that which he eternally was and will ever remain.

Eckhart points out that the word 'soul' has two meanings. It means the entity that confers life on the body. But the word 'soul' can also refer to the true essence of that entity, above time and space, simple and changeless. The higher aspect of the soul has no name. Reason can at least prepare the way for the apprehension of the higher aspect of the soul, which is bereft of all the accidental attributes with which the mind is used to deal. Truth lies in the ground of the soul, hidden from the intellect.

The small spark of the soul is a unity, not related to anything outside itself. It comes from God's nature. It is not distinct from God, like a creature. It is so near to God that it forms an inseparable unity with Him. Eckhart stresses the inwardness of the small spark, which has no name or form. Elsewhere he observes:

It is a sad thing that one has to describe God through images derived from sense-experience. But of these images, God is neither one nor the other, neither this nor that. God is not satisfied until he has withdrawn from all determinate being into absolute unity. In that unity all wood and stone and tufts of grass are one. That is the best of all and I am in love with it.

He continues:

Knowledge of unity is not pursued for curiosity but because it brings beatitude. I speak often of the Godhead, because our happiness flows

from it. There is a divine part of the soul, an uncreated and uncreatable light. I speak of this light habitually in my sermons. God is not outside us. He should not be sought outside us or even thought of outside us. He should be thought of as our own and within us. You have all the truth in you as your own nature. Why do you look outside yourself? Why not remain with yourself and take advantage of your own treasure?

A.J.A.

POEM OF SURDAS

I myself have found my true Self within.
The teachings shone forth manifestly,
My true Guru conveyed the secret.
The musk deer wanders in search of the musk,
But when he pauses to reflect,
It is found in his own body.
The princess thought she had lost her necklace;
When her companions told her
She was wearing it, her troubles were over.
A woman dreamed she had lost her son;
When she awoke, he was there as before;
He had neither departed nor come back.
Having understood this secret, Surdas smiles.
The magic of this joy is indescribable;
If you have tasted it, you are like a dumb man
Who has eaten molasses.

Translated by A.J.A.

A MEMORY OF CHINA

While living in Shanghai, one day I noticed a well-dressed Chinese, riding in his private rickshaw, pulled by a liveried servant. He wore a costly fur coat with a hat to match. When he saw me walking along the road, he halted the rickshaw, got out and coming near me, he stood for a while and said: 'A million salutations to you; my most hearty salaam to you.' Then he advanced and began to touch my feet.

I wondered who the man was and why he was so respectful. I felt that he was under a wrong impression and mistook me for someone else to whom he had been beholden in some way or other. When he came near, I recognized that he was Abdul Rahman, a Chinese Moslem whose father was a mullah in the local mosque.

I knew a number of Indian tea merchants who were Moslems, and I often visited the mosque with them. I liked the old mullah, who spoke the Indian vernacular and who had been a pilgrim to Mecca. He spoke as an orthodox Moslem, was firm in his faith and did the ritual prayers five times a day. In order to express my appreciation, I often presented the old man with a basket of fruit and other articles. He accepted them with kindness and was very good to me.

Abdul Rahman said: 'You have been so kind to my old father. I appreciate all you have done and wish to prostrate myself before you to show that I am a filial son and that anything done to my father is recognized by me as an act of kindness done to me. May God bless you.' Then he took me to a neighbouring Chinese restaurant and had with me green tea, melon seeds and a few Chinese oranges.

Filial piety, expounded by the great Chinese sage, Confucius, was a trait of character very noticeable during my years in China (1918-1929). It softens one's feelings and encourages mutual respect. It reminded me of the devotion to Guru emphasized in the spiritual Yoga. It surely has a very good influence on the heart. One such main trait of character gives rise to many virtues, and fosters the feeling of love and reverence.

Hari Prasad Shastri

Create in Harmony with the Whole

ONCE I WAS taken to see the machine of a mill in which I worked as a clerk. First I saw the engine which was being driven by a boiler. The steam generated in the boiler imparted motion to a huge wheel, which was set revolving at a tremendous speed. Then there were countless little wheels spread all over the great building of the machine-house, and each of them was being utilized to do some kind of work or other. It was a revelation to me to see how the motion imparted to one big wheel set into motion countless little springs and wheels, and gave employment to over five hundred people working in the mill.

In the same way the cosmos is comparable to a vast machine. The source of energy is the Absolute, the Unseen, the Unknowable, yet the Being of all and the Reality in all, called Brahman. This energy evolves into a particular Being, which is infinite in scope, power of activity, wisdom, intelligence, and so forth. This Being is technically called in the Vedantic terminology, Ishvara—the Ruler of the universe. He sets into motion a grand wheel, which is called the wheel of Maya, and this Maya sets into motion the innumerable little wheels, which constitute the minds (antahkaranas) of human beings and the latent intelligence in trees, rocks, and in the invisible forces of nature, which make possible the visible organisms.

It is not implied here that the cosmos is a machine. It is all a projection of the same cosmic energy, the will to manifest, the will to be in the realm of activity; and as the source of it, Brahman, is infinite, so this energy—called Maya—is also infinite.

The Lord revolves the large wheel. When the motion is imparted to the little wheels in the factory, it is not controlled by the people who work there: it is controlled by the engineer in the engine-room, who can regulate it, and correct any irregularities. The energy originally passing through these little wheels assumes a new name, *avidya*, because it is a conditioned, limited form of the original cosmic energy which came into manifestation by the desire of the supreme Being. If this illustration is kept in view, then many useful lessons can be learnt from it.

The first thing to be noted is that the existence of the whole machine was to produce textiles: it had no other purpose at all. Its *raison d'être*

was neither show, nor beauty, nor the noise it made, nor the smoke it belched out, nor any other thing but the production of the finished textiles.

The second thing to be noted is that although the same motion, originally springing from the one great source, passes through all the wheels, it is not always with the same intensity and expansiveness of the original motion. The world is alive, but a machine is dead. Every particle is alive, every being is alive, every cloud swells with life, but the original source of this life, let us not forget, is Divine Life.

Every living thing has a certain amount of independence: it has to work according to the plan, as the machine worked to produce textiles, but to a certain extent it has the power to frustrate the plan in its individual being.

Imagine that the little wheels are alive; then they will need food, sleep, companionship, and many other things; they will also have a choice, to a restricted extent, either to go slowly or to go fast, or for a time to suspend their work entirely. These are the characteristics of life, as we find them explained in the biological sciences.

Man similarly is a *jiva*, an individualized entity, comparable to a little wheel. His mind works like a little wheel, but his *buddhi*—the higher phase of the mind characterized by will and intellect, has the option either to let itself work according to the cosmic plan or according to its own little plan.

Suppose the little wheels developed self-consciousness; then they will also at the same time develop a social consciousness, and some of them truly may try to appear more steady, more tidy, and perhaps more useful than the others. A degenerated form of this impulse to tidiness, utility and harmony, is the excessive regard for appearances, though its root is the urge for peace, harmony, utility and beauty. If the wheels develop that lower preoccupation, then much of their time and energy, which should have gone to the production of the textiles, would be dissipated in other forms, that is to say, only in appearances.

What corresponds to the textiles produced in the mill in the being of man? What does man exist for? Needless to say, for production, for creativity. Motion according to a pattern brought into order and harmony is called creation. Then man is a creative being. It is for him to create discord, strife, disharmony, or to create their opposite, peace,

beauty, regularity, and so forth; but the ultimate purpose of this little wheel, the *antahkarana* or mental composition of man, is to be an aid to the cosmic purpose for which the Creator has projected his Maya and then split it up into the countless forms and organisms.

There is a plan working in nature which is observed in all biological units. They start with simple forms and then grow into more and more complex ones, but the complexity is in harmony and design, to create certain specific results. The unicellular organisms become multi-cellular and develop a nervous system, the ability to think, and so forth. We know something of the cosmic purpose of the universe, and it is that the energies of nature and in man's mind, may so harmonize together that they produce light and peace. Any force can be converted into light; electricity, gas, and heat, can all be converted into light. Similarly, the forces of sloth (*tamas*) and passion-struggle (*rajas*) in man must be converted to make works of beauty, utility, and instruction, based on peace and light (*sattva*).

This process applies especially to the mind of man. Let us not forget the example of the little wheel. It has its own motion, but its own motion is connected with the cosmic motion. Similarly, an individual antahkarana has its own motion, which is expressed in the coarser forms of life, like the satisfaction of the different appetites and so forth; and yet it has a cosmic motion, and that cosmic motion is the execution of the will of the Creator of heaven and earth.

Before the soul of man is able to carry out its conscious purpose in the grand scheme, it has to have knowledge. Knowledge is the basis of voluntary and successful life. Therefore let man know what he is. He has to know the nature of his individual being and also the nature of the cosmic being. Only then is it possible for him to co-operate successfully with the whole scheme of the Creator, and as the machine created the textiles, so man has to create what his Creator wants him to create.

Intelligence, will, inspiration and imagination, all play a very important part in the life of man, but if the whole life is devoted to the satisfaction of the appetites and instincts only, then man fails to execute the cosmic purpose, and naturally he will have to be detained in his present position or even be thrown back into the lower forms of life to gain the necessary experience so as to be able to execute the will of creation.

Philosophy begins with the urge in man to know the reality in the universe, and to discover the thread of Truth which connects so many little centres of life and activity. Therefore it is indispensable for man to know the elements of philosophy, that is to say, the why, the how, and wherefore of his own existence, and then the supreme question of his own nature.

The appetites have to be regulated; the instincts must be given only as much attention as is necessary for them; and all the major part of the refined energy of man has to be devoted to the creation required by the Creator, and this is the creation of emotions by which the heart of humanity can be lifted up to the higher ideals, called by the Greeks the 'eternal verities'.

In the system of philosophy which the most compassionate Shri Guru, Shri Dada, gave to the people, he teaches that the limitations of man are too evident; temptations in his way are not a few; his weakness is more evident than his strength; hence the shorter cut is for man to realize the presence of the cosmic Being in his own soul through love, through intellectual synthesis, and this can be corroborated by logic to show that it is free from self-contradiction and that there is a unitive purpose running throughout the scheme.

Then the jiva has to throw itself entirely on the mercy of the Cosmic Spirit, to cease to think of its little self, but to see in the little self an expression of the Cosmic Self through simplicity and through a life of application. Dependence upon that Cosmic Spirit revives our sense of a supreme purpose, and enables us to perform the higher functions of life easily, while the lower functions of life, which go towards the preservation of his physical and mental vehicles, are taken in hand by the Cosmic Force. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Cosmic Spirit says: 'I take care of what my devotees need; I preserve what they have.' This is true, very true.

Let this self-dedication be complete. If it is not complete, the results will not follow. A very important fact in life is that when one small chord in the machinery of the human heart sounds in the form of an aspiration, its repercussions in the cosmos are almost infinite. Every desire reaches the throne of the Almighty, to speak in theological language. Let man know this well.

There is a child in each and every man. Even such great intellects as

Aristotle also liked to play, particularly with children. The child in man expresses itself in affection, in sport and in various other types of psychological function. The child needs an idol, and the idol in the progressed life becomes an ideal. This is the value of the traditional relationship between the learner and the teacher (Guru) spoken of in the Upanishads. In order to express these higher forms of our life and to shape them into fit instruments of the Cosmic Force, we have to revere and if possible serve the Guru. If the faith and surrender of self-will is complete, then the Cosmic Spirit takes charge of the child that has been trying and struggling to come to the Cosmic Father. In this way we find that life works more smoothly.

There is no progress without obstacles. Progress is another name for the overcoming of obstacles. The obstacles are power-desire, pleasure-desire, popularity-desire, egoity, laziness, love of comfort, and so forth. They can be conquered if there is an overpowering impulse in man of love for Guru and the Cosmic Spirit, and a consciousness of the real purpose of life as expressed in this paper. The poet Saadi has said: 'Stop a spring when it is small.' Let all the impulses which are obstacles be dealt with at once, without any hesitation. If you let them run a little while, they will become strong, and if you still give them latitude, they will overpower you, but if you are alert and set on inner enlightenment, you will triumph over all impediments and know true peace and freedom.

Hari Prasad Shastri

The Inner Enquiry

IF WE TRY to answer the question 'What is it that everyone wants in life?', the answer is likely to be: 'Happiness'. If we then ask: 'How do we go about obtaining happiness?', it might be difficult to convince everyone that there is a common solution. Each has their own specific idea about what would make them happy, but we might guess that typical answers would be along the lines of things like money, power, love and fame. Even if a genie were to grant us three wishes, would we have attained anything more than a few drops of temporary happiness?

Choices like the ones mentioned are based on the happiness we felt after obtaining certain items in the past, which, ranging in magnitude, might include new clothes, a new car, a new house. Common logic suggests that the larger our gain, the more happiness we experience, but a little reflection shows that it is not only gains that can bring us happiness. If we learn that we have lost weight on our diet, or a painful tooth is removed, or that a troublesome neighbour has moved out of the area, or that a terminal illness has been cured by surgical removal, losses like these can also result in a period of happiness.

Unfortunately, from whatever source happiness visits us, whether from gains or losses, it is always a transient visitor, even though we feel deep down that it should be a permanent feature in our lives.

The yogis of the past came to the striking conclusion that happiness does not come from gaining possessions, but arises spontaneously in the stilled mind when the desire for objects is absent from our mind. They reasoned that our desires were the main cause of unhappiness in our lives. This insight is mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62-63):

When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises. From attachment arises desire; from desire arises wrath. From wrath arises delusion; from delusion, failure of memory; from failure of memory, loss of conscience; from loss of conscience he is utterly ruined.

The point here is that if we are denied any of the desires that we earnestly want, particularly those we have pursued with vigour for some time, we are likely to become angry and it is this anger which starts us down the slippery slope towards the ruin mentioned in these verses.

So, although happiness appears to come from successfully satisfying a desire, happiness only truly arises when our mind enters a state of desirelessness. In fact, happiness cannot have any connection with or reside in any object, otherwise the same object would bring happiness to everyone that possessed the same thing. But experience proves that ‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison’. Similarly, if happiness were part of any object, accumulating more of the same thing would give more and more happiness, which is an absurdity.

By analysing what actually happens within our mind when we obtain something we have been hankering after, we note that the mind becomes still and we enter a temporary lull in our desires on its attainment. It is in this resultant stillness that we experience the seed of happiness which is embedded in our own being, but was obscured by those very desires. This sequence of cause and effect of happiness is not immediately obvious, but once it is brought to our attention, we can check its validity by careful observation.

We can appreciate that when we want something really badly and it becomes the sole focus of our attention, all other wants and desires get pushed to one side. The more we want and focus on one thing, the more our other desires and wants are forgotten. Then, at the moment we obtain our heart’s desire, for a few instants our mind is empty and completely still, because all else has been displaced by this single desire, so the mind reaches a place not often experienced—the place where there are no desires; and in that complete stillness, happiness is experienced. This is the place where happiness really resides, and it has nothing at all to do with the object of our original desire.

This whole concept may seem unreasonable. Most people would claim that the way to continuing happiness is to keep creating more desires which we can satisfy, and so experience a series of fleeting glimpses of happiness when the desire is fulfilled. We repeat this process over and over, until in the course of time, we realize that this approach is flawed, and sooner or later tire of it. Without further advice, we are left only with that still small voice within that insists that permanent happiness is our birthright, even though we now realize that chasing after material things will never allow us to achieve it.

The yogic approach is to look inwards for the solution. Dr Shastri gave this introduction to the yogic method of inner enquiry as a means

to acquiring lasting peace and happiness when he said:

We direct our studies to acquire the peace of God and the ability to communicate this peace to our fellow-men. Life is short and insecure. Our supreme duty is to direct it to the acquisition of the inner peace and wisdom so that we may get over the ocean of ignorance and bask in the sunshine of the true knowledge of God.

The main principles of this Yoga are straightforward and relatively easy to grasp, but their application is more difficult. They require a certain level of determination and guidance. In any other discipline where total proficiency is wanted, it becomes clear that once the individual reaches a certain level of self-development, the help of a teacher becomes necessary. Top musicians like the Chinese pianist, Lang-Lang, will seek guidance from an expert teacher like Daniel Barenboim about the correct interpretation of different composers. But despite examples like this, there is a marked reluctance from those looking for spiritual peace and happiness to acknowledge the same need for guidance in spiritual matters, due to the inherent sense of egoism.

This has not always been the case. In the ancient classics on Yoga, stories abound about those who were determined to reach the end point of God-realization and how they always turned to a spiritual teacher who had been down the same route before them. In the Upanishads we hear how Narada was reviewing his yogic progress and was feeling very dissatisfied with himself. He remembered that the sage Sanatkumara was living nearby so he went to see him, sitting before him in an attitude of reverence. The holy sage asked: ‘O Narada, tell me what has brought you here.’ Narada’s reply was: ‘I have studied the four Vedas as well as the six systems of philosophy. I know all about grammar, astronomy, engineering, etc. Yet, my Lord, my heart is sad; I see that there is something wanting in me. This is what has brought me to you.’

There is an urge in us to seek continual expansion, but no matter how far our worldly state improves, or however intellectually competent or morally sound we may be, we are always left with a sense that something is missing. Eventually, we sense that there is something more to life, that we have missed. A new approach is needed to achieve the ultimate expansion which will take us towards an all-fulfilling goal, and if outer achievements lack the key to happiness, it must lie within

ourselves. This is the point where we decide that a purely worldly life is not enough, and that an inner enquiry has to be undertaken in search of where true happiness and permanent peace reside.

If we have never considered the spiritual yoga before, then some trial of the practices will show whether it is for us or not. Once we feel that further guidance is needed, then a Teacher's help can be sought, but we are still expected to apply fully what we are taught about the methods involved. There is a fine balance needed at this point, where we have to put our ego aside and apply what we are taught with an open mind and in an attitude of trust, while at the same time taking responsibility for ensuring that we are applying the ideas taught in the right way.

Through the meditation practices we can test the theory that stillness of the mind leads to experience of happiness. A variety of practices are performed during a meditation session, which bring the mind gradually to stillness, with the eventual aim of revealing the experience of inner peace, contentment and bliss that is not achievable through the pursuit of any worldly activity. A typical set of practices is given in this issue. In order to gain lasting and progressive benefit, it is recommended that the practices are done every day, keeping to the particular set of practices you have chosen for a minimum of thirty days.

Why is it that stillness of the mind is considered so important in Yoga? The explanation is that the real Self of man is hidden behind the individualized ego, and that ego distracts our attention from its cause, namely the real Self. This wrong identification with the ego-self is similar to what happens when a spectator in the audience of a play becomes so associated with one of the characters on the stage that he laughs and cries with the character as the play moves from comedy to tragedy. It is only at those times when the mind is still, that we remember, as it were, that our real nature is the real Self and not the ego-self with all its associations with the outer world. We then rest momentarily in the real Self and experience our true nature as perfect bliss, peace and the light of true understanding.

All too soon the mind becomes re-associated with the stage character, the ego-self, and we return to the play in the outer world with all its associated problems. While the mind is kept in a state of constant motion by the play of action in the outer world, we stay locked in the character of the ego-self. When we make a conscious effort to bring the

mind under our conscious control, and deliberately create periods of stillness when we can return to the natural state of the 'selfless' Self, we again experience the natural bliss and happiness of our real Self. This is the aim of the yogic practices: to create those periods of stillness when we can bathe in the bliss and happiness of our real Self.

We tend to think that if we allow the mind a totally free reign to wander where it will, it will be creative and take us to areas we have never visited before, but the exact opposite happens. It returns again and again to revisit those scenes which have a strong emotional significance for us and nothing new is created in our mind by this process. In fact it lays down stronger bonds with those areas of thought and they become more and more of an attraction for us over time.

Creativity comes when the mind is brought under our conscious control and purposefully directed towards an idea we want to explore, and held in gentle concentration on that theme. Undoubtedly, it will wander off, but we should bring it back as soon as we notice that it has strayed. This is done gently. The last thing that we want to do is become agitated or angry with our own mind, for this only disturbs it and creates an association of dislike for the process of meditation. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the teacher says this to his pupil:

By whatever cause the wavering and unsteady mind wanders away, from that let him restrain it and bring it back direct under the control of the Self.

Supreme bliss verily comes to this yogi, whose mind is quite tranquil, whose passion is quieted, who has become Brahman (the supreme reality), who is blemishless. (6:26-27)

Helped by some daily spiritual practice, you will find that your inner being will expand, and the rest of your life will begin to settle down to one of peace and calmness. This is surely a thing to cherish and to continue with, until it becomes permanent.

S.M.B.

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

A recent session led by the Warden

Meditation is a time when we remind ourselves of the realm of peace that always lies beneath the surface of life and is to be found within our own being, when we develop tranquillity and our power of one-pointed concentration. Through meditation we learn to calm and strengthen the mind, and prepare it for the discovery of the treasures that lie hidden at the ground of our being—treasures of peace, fulfilment, unshakeable security, based on the realization of the immortality of our true Self.

We usually overlook this dimension of experience, because our attention and hopes are fixed on the outer world, where we never find complete happiness and absolute security. The world is like a fast-flowing stream that we have to cross. There are stepping stones which seem to be firmly set, but we never really know in advance how stable these stones are, until we plant our foot on them, and then they may prove very wobbly and unreliable. Such are the uncertainties implicit in the outer life.

But there is also an inner support and true stability which we can discover within ourselves if we turn our interest and our hopes to the quest for enlightenment. For this quest will awaken us to a different order of reality within our own being—not the short-lived ‘reality’ of the thoughts and feelings, or the seemingly longer-lived form of our physical body. We have to look deeper, and there at the mind’s source we will become awake to the transcendent nature of our ultimate being, which is beyond both self and other, but for which we use the word ‘Self’ as the most effective pointer to its presence.

Meditation is the most direct means of achieving this depth and quality of consciousness. It is a central practice to bring us back to the ultimate stability and security of our deeper nature.

Let us approach this time of inner communion with a calm and reverent mind. We feel ourselves to be in the presence of the divine, within and around us, making an interior bow to that invisible power.

It is important to devote a minute or two to this preparation, because by doing so we are, as it were, letting go of our limited self and opening ourselves to the freedom and serenity of our infinite Self.

Breathing practice

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

The practice is a focus for our power of concentration, and is a means to stop our mind from wandering, or, when it does wander, to enable us to bring it back to the focus. The conscious and slightly deeper breathing puts our body in a good state, dispelling stresses and tensions, and calming us down generally. The holy word OM harmonizes naturally with the breathing cycle as we have described it in the practice. Spend about four minutes on this exercise.

Visualization

Imagine light, light everywhere—warm, peace-giving light, and you are in that light. Feel that your whole being from head to foot is flooded with this light and that it is issuing from every pore of your body.

This visualization increases our sensitivity to the light at the heart of our being—the ultimate centre and source of all. So here we have another wonderful method to replace with light any worries or darkness that may for the time being overshadow our mind. Once we have established this practice in our meditation sessions, we can do it during the day to recharge our mind with the power of enlightened thought. The practice will remind us of the higher perspective: that all these disturbances, tensions and stresses are passing waves and have no real power over our ultimate nature, which is an infinite ocean of light. Practise the visualization for about six minutes.

Meditation on a Text

OM I AM THE LIGHT OF THE MIND.
THE WORLD IS REVEALED IN ME.
PURE, INFINITE, EVER TRANQUIL IS MY SELF. OM

This meditation text turns our attention inwards, not just to the thoughts, but to the source of all mental power and animation. That source is our faculty of knowing—our very consciousness, awareness. The secret of our deeper nature will be revealed in and through our faculty of knowledge and cognition. The meditation brings us back to our self in this fundamental sense, that we are enquiring into the root of all our experience, of all that we mean when we say ‘I am’, ‘I know’. The most important fact about us is that we are knowers, that we have knowledge, consciousness, not only of things, but we are the light of pure consciousness itself, independent of all things and even independent of thoughts. Together with the enlightened sage, Ashtavakra, we affirm: ‘My nature is knowledge and nothing other than knowledge. The universe is revealed under the light of my Self.’

The last sentence of the meditation, ‘Pure, infinite, ever tranquil is my Self,’ reminds us of the purity, peace and absolute freedom of our higher nature, which is consciousness absolute, the source and revealer of all.

The truth contained in this meditation text, when realized, solves the riddle of the meaning and purpose of life, because it reveals the reality behind the transient appearances that make up the inner and outer world. Its meaning will unfold as we do it and go deeper into it, not only through practising the meditation every day, but also through thinking it over at other times as a profound saying that we need to fathom in order to realize ultimate truth. We focus on the text for about eight minutes.

We close our meditation session by extending thoughts of peace and goodwill to all beings, without exception. A higher part of our being is always in touch with the whole and our thoughts of oneness and goodwill do have an effect beyond our normal understanding.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

During the autumn term, presentations on Thursday evenings covered fundamental themes, such as *The Way to Fulfilment*, *The Path to the Inner Summit*, and *The Illumined Understanding*, as well as a lecture which focused on the *Bhagavad Gita*, and one that further explored the beauty and spiritual meaning of the poetry of Japan. Each Tuesday evening throughout the year is devoted to meditation, giving encouragement and guidance to those who wish to regularise and deepen their practices as a means of making progress towards the great goal of self-realization.

The Sunday afternoon course held at the Columbia Hotel on October 19, saw a slight departure from our recent pattern. A smaller room was chosen and the many visitors filled all available seats. On this occasion the meditation sessions led on directly from the talks. The first presentation, *Towards Peace of Mind*, addressed a pressing human need, with practical examples on how our mind may be made our friend not our captor. The second talk, *Self-knowledge—the Key to Freedom*, considered how the human mind generally processes experience, and the skills needed in order to awaken our faculty of spiritual understanding. The final talk and meditation session explained how the *Life without Limits* is already implicit in our deeper nature, and with examples from art and poetry, showed how the main barrier to our higher awakening—the insistence on the importance of the personal ego—may be transcended.

This issue of *Self-Knowledge* includes an article on the Japanese sage Kobo Daishi (Kukai) whom Dr Shastri called one of the great guides of humanity. Readers interested in Japanese spiritual culture as appreciated in the light of the non-dual philosophy, are reminded about the book on the Shanti Sadan list, *Echoes of Japan*, a collection of short pieces by Hari Prasad Shastri based on his stay in Japan from 1916 to 1918. Many years ago, a reviewer discerned the spirit of this work when he wrote: ‘We are taken on a very revealing journey into the spiritual essence of Japan, the humility of its people, the wisdom of its monks—all of which serve to awaken us to the beauty of our true being.’