

SELF-KNOWLEDGE



**A YOGA QUARTERLY
DEVOTED TO SPIRITUAL
THOUGHT AND PRACTICE**

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ADHYATMA YOGA

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

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

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

EVENTS FOR THE SUMMER TERM 2016

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 May to 16 June there will be a series of talks on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

The Summer afternoon course will be held on Sunday 22 May 2016, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Details are given on the inside back cover.

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RESOLUTION

A pilgrim, dusty from travel, passed an aged countryman resting by the roadside. He asked: 'How long will it take me to walk to the next village?' The countryman remained silent, and the pilgrim felt: 'Oh, well, not everyone is friendly', and trundled on his way. No sooner had he taken about ten brisk paces, than the countryman called out: 'Half an hour!' The pilgrim turned back and said: 'Thanks—but why didn't you tell me before?' 'I first needed to know how quickly you walk.'

We may also ask: 'How long will it take me to achieve peace of mind?' It is impossible to answer this question, because peace of mind, though a reality, is intangible and immeasurable, and so are the subtle interior changes which lead to it. We can only walk on, doing our best, and trusting that help is at hand, as long as our own hand is ready to clasp it.

In spiritual matters, our rate of progress depends partly on the tendencies of mind that we bring to the path of practice. Very few are blessed with the disposition of Japanese Zen master, Dogen, who conceived an 'aspiration for enlightenment' while still a boy, and took the necessary steps to see it through. Our own mind-set is likely to be influenced, if not conditioned, by the secular values that smother us from childhood, and persuade us that physical beauty, riches, fame and status are assuredly good things. Not only does our intellect get saturated in these values; our moral sense also adjusts to their pursuit. In this mental atmosphere, which forms in our mind unconsciously as we are compelled to make our way in life, all talk of inner tranquillity and higher quest is likely to cause embarrassment.

Yet worldly values cannot hoodwink the human heart indefinitely, and sooner or later faults in the great tapestry come to be noticed, and the mind seeks for something better. But that mind is still an archive of worldly impressions and tendencies, which interfere with our practice and keep us to some extent identified with our unenlightened self. Then what to do?

Conscious, clearly-conceived, purposeful spiritual thought and practice is immensely more powerful than the unselective mental activity of the undirected mind. We have to remember that our secularised mind-set developed unconsciously, and though it seems formidable, can be undermined completely by the vigorous pursuit of a higher goal. No one consciously resolved, 'I will devote myself to pleasure and power desires; I will intentionally cultivate a restless mind.' These states of mind came upon us unawares, through thoughtless habit. But through the conscious power of spiritual resolution, and the thoughtful, deliberate habit of meditation, the old value system can be replaced by our own personal 'aspiration to enlightenment'.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* there is the verse: 'Here there is one thought of a resolute nature; many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the irresolute.' This one great thought, based on the principle that our real Self is immortal and infinite—based on the indestructible reality of our being—is so mighty that it can subvert the totality of false values, and draw us into that highest Good.

Realizing the Infinite Peace

He who holds Shanti (peace) in his heart, dwells in a sea of bliss.

Tulsidas

The state of eternal peace, the higher transcendental Truth, space-like
am I.

Avadhut Gita

THE INFINITE PEACE is with us right now, ever present, yet apparently hidden. Verses like those above, when held in the mind, revive our remembrance of our true nature. This positive, conscious use of our memory is a key practice of the higher Yoga. It brings relief from stress, and also points to something deeper and fulfilling, reminding us of our potentiality for complete inner freedom. The highest possibilities are open to all of us: we can learn to lighten our psychological burdens, and we can also learn how to throw them off completely.

A man was once struggling along an uphill road with a heavy rucksack on his back. A kindly man driving a horse carriage overtook him and said: 'Climb in!' The stranger got in and sat down. But after a few yards the driver said: 'You are sitting, it is true. But you are still holding that burden on your back. Do put it down and get some real relief.' 'O no, I couldn't possibly do that. It is kind enough for you to give me a ride without putting my load on the seat.' In the same way, we can opt for a limited peace and relief, or we can make use of the practical means prescribed by the knowers of Truth which light the way to permanent freedom through self-realization.

It is natural at first to feel that the deep peace we yearn for is something we do not possess. There is a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins expressing the aspiration of a nun who has just entered her new life.

I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,

Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea.

The ideal seems far away. Yet it is also very near. For peace is the true nature of the one who seeks for peace. True are the words that Pascal puts into the mouth of the Highest: 'You would not be seeking me if you had not already found me.' Our seeking is a sign from our own heart that our true element is peace. After many experiments, we find that the way of our salvation is to turn within and seek the peace in that which underlies our own personality.

We are reminded of the story of the man who lived in Baghdad and dreamed of a hidden treasure in Cairo. He journeyed to Cairo, received some hard treatment, and was told by his assailant that, strangely enough, *he* had experienced a similar dream about a treasure stored in a certain garden attached to a particular house in Baghdad—and he indicated the stranger's own residence. The moral is that we often have to go through much outward searching in the world before we are ready to accept that the treasure we seek is implanted deep in our own heart and needs to be uncovered within us and nowhere else.

During our extrovertive adventures the infinite peace is very far from us, so it seems. When we come back to our own being, and dig deeper, we find that it is very near, for it is the true nature of the Self. 'The state of eternal peace, the higher transcendental Truth, space-like am I.' Deeper than the life of the senses, subtler than the mind, transcending the intellect, is what the *Katha Upanishad* calls the Self of peace. This is the innermost ground of our being and it is pure consciousness—our true identity at the deepest level.

Can there be peace while there are thoughts? Yes, our mind can be made relatively peaceful, but the supreme peace—the peace that passeth understanding—is different from the experience we have in the realm of thought. It is experience that transcends the mind—a peace lit with an illumined understanding and which has no limit. Our efforts to make our mind relatively peaceful are a preparation for the realization of the supreme peace—*Shanti*.

In order to cultivate a serene mentality, we need to colonise our mind with peace-giving thoughts and associations. These are called, in the yogic terminology, *sattvic* thoughts, thoughts of harmony, clarity, unity,

peace, goodwill and tranquil happiness. This treasury of mental tendencies will make our path in life smoother and lead our thinking into harmony with the infinite. So we need to nurture in ourselves peace-giving sentiments. These alone will expand our consciousness and put our mind in tune with our true being.

Such thoughts of peace, unity, spiritual reality and higher self-knowledge, find expression in the sayings of the masters—Christ, Buddha, Krishna, and the enlightened sages and mystics. We make these thoughts our own by affirming and savouring them. They have the dynamism to open a way to the spiritual region within us. And when this way is opened, the light and wisdom of our higher Self will shine through, not as a stream of transient thoughts but as a new mental atmosphere based on something constant and real that is always there—the divine essence of our being.

What about the mind as a whole and its role in this development? Our practical experience suggests that we are the body and the mind, and that we have to live out our lives identified with these limited and perishable instruments. But our innermost Self is neither material nor mental. It is transcendent. Through meditation and the deeper enquiry into ‘What am I?’, aided by the revealed teachings found, for example, in the Upanishads, we will realize our true Self as immortal and infinite.

From this standpoint, our mind occupies an intermediate position between the body, on the outside, and the ultimate interiority of the Self. Like a mirror, our mind receives the images that come before it through the channels of the senses. This is its functioning in the realm of matter. But the mind also has a higher faculty. Like a magic mirror, the stilled and refined mind can receive experience from the inner realm of the Self, and that experience is pure, peaceful and illumined.

In ancient China, they knew how to create ‘magic’ mirrors. The outward-facing, reflecting surface was made of highly polished bronze. But on the back of the mirror there was an elaborate carving, of calligraphy, or a mountain landscape, or perhaps a dragon. And the optical effect was that when bright sunlight hit the mirror, the image concealed from behind the mirror would show enlarged on a wall in front of the mirror.

There was, in fact, a highly skilled technique for achieving this

‘magical’ effect which involved microscopic etching and scraping of the surface of the mirror in order to imitate the picture on the back. In a similar way, through carefully treating our mind, through etching on it, so to say, the pattern passed down to us by the knowers of truth, our mind will become like a magic mirror—not just working as a centre of response to outer material things, but as a centre of higher experience receiving light, peace and wisdom from the realm of infinite peace that lies behind the mind. The sage Lao Tzu has said: ‘Can you polish your mysterious mirror and leave no blemish?’ He is referring to the mind and its capacity, when ‘polished’, i.e. purified, to mirror the perfection and infinity of the Self. This truth, or insight, is expressed in the following meditation:

OM. TAKE UP THE MIRROR OF YOUR STILLED HEART AND
LOOK AT THE REFLECTION OF INFINITY IN IT. THIS IS WISDOM.
THIS IS PEACE. OM.

As well as our mind having this hidden capacity to reflect the higher peace and light, the ego, too, that is, our natural feeling of ‘I’, or ‘I am’, has a spiritual dimension which is not normally recognized or understood. Behind our little ego is the infinite ‘I’ of Truth, or God, the ‘I’ that is one-without-a-second and which makes us all one in reality. When we are self-assertive in the small sense, we close our mind to the higher influence, but when we subdue our little ego and affirm our deeper Self, as we do in meditation, we create an opening in our ego which reveals the true light behind it. Therefore the ego has been called the seal on the treasury of bliss hidden within us. Why not break the seal, says a poet, and enjoy the divine wealth?

Let us take an example. If we want to thread a needle and we pick up a pin by mistake, there will be a problem. The unevolved ego is a bit like the pin. However delicately we try, the pin does not allow itself to be threaded. But the attenuated ego of someone who is drawn to the teachings on self-transcendence, is an aid to illumination. Like the needle, it has, as it were, an opening, and this opening points inwards to the region of the supreme Self. In other words, our ‘I’ has concealed within itself a great potential. This potential opening in our ‘I’ is what we appeal to in our meditations that focus on the ‘I’. Such a text is:

OM I AM INDESTRUCTIBLE. I AM IN PROFOUND PEACE. I HAVE NO BOUNDS. I AM PURE. I HAVE EXISTED FROM PRIMORDIAL TIME. OM

These I-affirming texts are means of attuning our sense of identity to the pure consciousness that underlies the ego. Through this concentration, we can access the inner treasury and expand our consciousness beyond the little world of our individuality. In other words, we are preparing ourselves to pass the thread of our concentrated attention through the attenuated ego, and transcend its limits.

The peace we are referring to is never far from us. In our true being, we *are* that infinite peace. This state of restlessness of the mind and the belief that our self is this separate individual, is a false position. It is not the final truth of what we are. We are more than this person. We are one with the whole.

Inner peace brings spiritual knowledge, and this knowledge dissolves the limitations of the human understanding. That light of higher knowledge reveals that our state of bondage and our striving for release are comparable to an adventure in a dream, from which we have now awakened. Here are some lines of Swami Rama Tirtha:

What a strange affair the dream was.
I was searching for Rama (God) in the forests,
And found that I myself was Rama.
The dream home that I was searching for
Was my own shadow.
O Rama, now I am the home of all homes,
Having found my true home.

Self-realization is the only way to perfect peace. Body and mind are mortal and subject to the changes in time. But we shall know that our essential being is immortal and that it is our true Self. Our higher destiny is to realize that this consciousness is the reality, and that the transient happenings in life never taint or touch the eternal Self, which is pure, perfect, infinite, ever illumined, ever present—the only Reality.

B.D.

An Introduction to the Avadhut Gita

From Hari Prasad Shastri's translation of this Advaita Vedanta classic

THE WORD 'GITA' means a song. Many of the holy scriptures were written as songs, their theme being the non-dualistic philosophy of the Upanishads. Among these the least known are the *Shiva Gita*, *Rama Gita*, *Vyadha Gita* and *Devi Gita*, and the best known is the *Bhagavad Gita*, which came into prominence when the greatest of the teachers, Shankaracharya, wrote a commentary on it, acknowledging its great metaphysical and devotional value. Another reason for its popularity is that its teachings are universal. The beginner in metaphysics, the layman, the highest initiate, and the greatest philosophical genius can find food there for his spiritual nature.

The *Avadhut Gita* is a special classic and is meant for the use of those advanced students of Eastern metaphysics who have learnt self-control to an appreciable extent, risen above the prejudice of this or that religion, and who have made the ultimate reality—Truth—their sole God. The narrow worshipper, the fanatical adherent of an exclusive creed, the one who loves anything other than the highest knowledge, the megalomaniac and the egotist will find the study of this Gita brings little consolation. It is for those who practise detachment in daily life, and are eager to realize God at any cost.

The lower form of prayer consists in singing hymns and repeating mantrams in which the ultimate reality, the secondless, all-transcending Brahman, is conceived in terms of duality. The higher form of prayer consists in feelingly singing of Brahman in terms of non-duality, and in the first person, 'Shivo 'ham,' ('I am Shiva')*, 'Aham Brahmasmi' ('I am Brahman'), and so forth. Our inner life is coloured by those attributes of God which we repeat or of which we sing. In the *Avadhut Gita* the Rishi Dattatreya sings of the ultimate Reality in terms of absolute freedom.

* 'I am Shiva': Recognition of one's identity with supreme bliss symbolized by the third aspect of the Hindu Trinity—God as the destroyer of ignorance.

The aim of life is to realize Truth and to be eternally free. Purification of the heart is essential to this realization. Practice of virtue, devotion to God, pilgrimages and other religious practices, are useful only so far as they purify the heart from the taint of *meum* and *tuum**, and bring before us a great vision of Truth, which makes worldly achievements mediocre and ultimately valueless. These observances create in us an undying desire to realize Truth; but the direct cause of realization of God is knowledge of Truth within. Knowledge is the magic wand which frees the Spirit of peace and bliss (*ananda*) within from the rock of personality, converting the fearing ego into a conflagration, burning up all duality and its cause, ignorance.

The *Avadhut Gita* contains this knowledge in its purest form. The word 'Avadhut' means a high renunciate, a great Mahatma, one who has found unity with God, and lives a life of perfect freedom, uninfluenced by ignorance and its effects.

Who was this Mahatma Dattatreya, who gave this priceless gift of his Gita? There is no other writing attributed to him. When and where he lived cannot be said with certainty. To some yogis and devotees he is an immortal, and they still see him and talk with him. In a temple, among the calm and beautiful peaks of the Girnar Mountains, a bed is made for the Mahatma daily.

It is clear that he was a historical person, and not a mythical Mahatma. From the fact that most of his devotees live in the Bombay Presidency we can infer that he lived in Western India. There are many legends about his miraculous birth and life, but they do not take us far.

There is a mention of the Avadhut in the Eleventh Book of *Shrimad Bhagavata*, a great Indian classic of metaphysics and devotion, attributed to Vyasa, written in a highly poetical style in pure modern Sanskrit. The following is an extract from this book:

Salutations to you, O Sage. Kindly tell what Guru has given you the great knowledge which has made you perfect in wisdom, full of peace, and devoted to the good of all living beings.

* *Meum and tuum* Latin for 'mine and thine', signifying, in this context, the conviction of separative individuality which obstructs the realization of non-duality.

This was the reply of the Avadhut:

One's own Self is one's chief Guru. By knowledge of Self alone through perception, inference and mystic communion one obtains the great bliss.

He further said that he did not learn from one particular source, but from many teachers, each source of knowledge being his Guru. He then mentioned twenty-four special teachers. Of them the following are worthy of note:

Water, the earth, the wind, space, the moon, the sun, the sea, and the arrow-maker.

From water I have learnt purity and the good taste of tastelessness. As water is sweet and pure, so is Atman. Man should manifest sweetness and purity in his conduct. I have therefore taken water as one of my Gurus.

Patience, forgiveness, supporting others without expectation of gratitude, I have learnt from my Guru, the earth.

The wind blows everywhere, over the flower-beds, deserts, marshes, palaces and prisons, without being attached to any of them, without preference or dislike. So I, an Avadhut, go everywhere, scattering my blessings of peace, without being attached to anyone. My Guru, the wind, has taught me this lesson.

In the all-pervading space there exist clouds, stars, planets, dust-storms, and so on, but it is not touched by any of them. So is Atman, which, pervading all the bodies of men and animals, of saints, sages, kings, madmen, sinners, and paupers, is untainted by any of them. So do I feel, having learnt this lesson from space, my Guru.

As the moon is perfect, in spite of its waning and waxing, which do not exist in it, so is Atman ever perfect, in spite of its seeming imperfections. This is what the moon, my Guru, has taught me.

As the sun through its rays absorbs water from the earth, only to give it back in a cool and pure form, so ought a Mahatma to take the things of the world, not for his own sake, but in order to give them back in a richer and better form. This is what my Guru, the sun, has taught me.

Though thousands of rivers empty themselves into the sea, yet it remains within its limits; so remains undisturbed the mind of the knower of God, though objects of all kinds pour themselves into it. Thus the sea, my Guru, has instructed me.

From the arrow-maker I have learned the value of concentration. In a certain town there lived an arrow-maker who devoted his full attention to his occupation, Once he was beating the point of an arrow, when the king and his procession went by in the street. He was so attentive to his work that he knew nothing of the king's passing, and when they asked him how he liked the music of the procession, he said, 'What procession? When did it pass?' So ought we to concentrate on Truth that no external object or event should disturb us.

The teachings of Rishi Dattatreya are similar to those of Vasishtha, Lao Tzu, Abou Ben Adhem and Jalaluddin Rumi. There are still many who follow the path of spiritual solitude. They are free from the pairs of opposites, established in Atman, and radiate peace and spiritual upliftment. They do not shun human society, and yet do not relish it. Of them it is said:

Heed then no more how body lives or goes,
Its task is done. Let karma float it down;
Let one put garlands on, another kick,
This frame; say naught. No praise or blame can be
Where praiser and praised, blamer and blamed are one.
Thus be thou calm, Sannyasin bold. Say,
OM TAT SAT OM.

In the calm of the Himalayan valleys, on the banks of the holy Ganges, one often hears this Gita sung by Yogis, Sannyasins and Brahmacharis. The great Teachers who have thrown away all books, having found everything worth knowing in their hearts, still keep this Gita in their caves and huts. It breathes the purest spirit of Shri Shankaracharya and the Sages of the Upanishads.

Dharma

IN ITS BROADEST SENSE, dharma stands for the most subtle, fundamental law underlying the universe, well-known to sages and seers. Indeed, it is by trimming their sails to this law that they have discovered the way which, as the Upanishads say, 'carries one beyond sorrow'—the way which is called Yoga.

Increasing our knowledge of the natural laws governing the universe, we have been able to make great strides in civilization, and are no longer entirely at the mercy of natural forces. We cannot change them, but we can learn to react to them wisely, so that they help us rather than cause us to suffer. It is the same with the fundamental law, the spiritual law of dharma, which affects every aspect of our lives. We cannot change it or go outside it, and must therefore experience the consequences of our actions within it. But this is not a restriction. It is a means of freedom, for this law is benevolent, a divine law of love, which works for the highest good of all. When we begin to understand its operation and consciously work in harmony with it, real progress in life begins.

The word 'dharma' comes from a Sanskrit root meaning to hold or sustain. The spiritual teachings reveal that, supporting and sustaining this whole phenomenal universe and dwelling within each individual as its Lord and very essence, is one divine Reality, the immortal being of our being. This truth is not immediately recognized because we live on two planes of existence at once, the visible and the invisible, the perishable and the imperishable. The perishable outer forms, separate from one another, are phenomenal only. They partly obscure the one spirit, which shines alike in all. Its presence is manifested on the plane of multiplicity as the law of unity or harmony called dharma which runs through all. Hari Prasad Shastri has spoken of it in *Wisdom from the East*:

There is a law which keeps all the little bits of the cosmos in their proper places, obeying which every individual and every object is related to any other in a certain specific way. This law is called dharma... The greatest gift of ancient India to the world is the

knowledge of this word dharma—regulator of harmony between man and man, man and beast, and nature and man. Love is but one manifestation of this law, and beauty in any form, whether in music, rhythm or architecture, is also a manifestation of this law of dharma, which postulates one great force running in and through all men, creatures and objects... To recognize and apprehend this law is the first duty of every human being.

The right response of the individual towards this law of cosmic harmony is also called dharma, in the sense of righteousness. It is not an ethical code, imposed from without, but an inner prompting from our own universal spiritual being, which, when followed, leads onwards towards spiritual awakening. To violate it by harming others, who are aspects of our own being, or by condoning wrong without a protest, is to make a reality out of outer appearances, and will inevitably recoil on ourselves and bring suffering in the long run. All the upheavals and conflicts in the world are caused because people contravene the law of dharma. How much the world needs this message today.

It is easy to feel that what we as individuals do or think in private—our secret animosities, dishonesties, acts of moral cowardice and so on—has no far-reaching implications on our state of mind. Sometimes, we may insist, it is necessary to make a compromise with truth in order to survive. After all, we can do more good alive than dead, can't we? Sometimes lies can only be countered by lies, evil by evil.

The answer to all this is that anything which basically violates the law of dharma, can in no way promote good either to the individual or to society. Appearances may seem to contradict this, but this is only a short-term view. The ripples of disharmony proceeding both inwards and outwards from non-dharmic action may be great or small, according to the degree of the violation of law, but they are certain and inevitable.

It is sometimes said that the end justifies the means. But it is a self-contradiction to try to reach a worthy end through an unworthy means; the workings of dharma are subtle but unfailing, and the original end will be distorted in the process. Gross violations of the law of dharma will produce powerful adverse reactions both on the environment, and perhaps even more so, especially if concealed within one's own heart, on oneself.

The psychologist Jung discovered that a hidden sense of guilt caused by some grave violation of the cosmic moral law gave rise to many illnesses and psychological disturbances which it was impossible to cure until the offence was drawn out into the light and acknowledged. After that, the trouble subsided of itself. It was as if life itself, having sufficiently judged and punished the offender, could now only gain by taking him back to atone for an offence against natural law, so that he could live in the world as he had not been able to before. As the ancient lawgiver of India, Manu, expresses it: 'Dharma protects those who protect dharma.'

The ancient sages taught that there are four main values to be pursued in life. The first is dharma itself. Living in accordance with the law of cosmic harmony means negation of all narrowness, antipathy and exclusive self-interest. It is the foundation of the good life.

The second value is the pursuit of economic prosperity in accordance with dharma, sharing what we have with others and with those in need. One can only experience real prosperity on the basis of dharma; otherwise, one is a prey to care and anxiety.

The third value is the pursuit of pleasure and joy, again in accordance with dharma. The ancient teachers were not killjoys, but they taught that we should pursue those joys which exalt the soul, not those which degrade it. This may include the joys of friendship, music, poetry, nature, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the appreciation of beauty in any form—the criterion being that it is free from selfishness and uplifts the soul.

All seek joy through love, but we have to learn how to love without self-interest—to be a giver and a carer, whose love goes beyond infatuation with appearances. Then love expands, because it is intrinsically love of the infinite. Love which is rooted in the law of dharma leads to universalization of consciousness. Love is not complete until it is love of the supreme reality—the inner essence of every living being, ultimately to be realized as transcendent and one-without-a-second.

This brings us to the fourth and highest value of life—the quest for *moksha* or liberation. This is our endeavour to discover the immortal, infinite essence of our own being. All lesser ideals are fulfilled in it: all joy, all prosperity, all dharma.

All joy. Knowers of ultimate truth view the ups and downs of life as inevitable conditions of the phenomenal world, and, though these changes register on the senses and mind of the illumined, they are received in equanimity, and never mar their identification with the reality as Self—all-pervading and invulnerable.

All prosperity. The sage may appear poor in possessions, yet all needs are supplied without anxiety, in the spirit of the *Bhagavad Gita* verse: 'Those who meditate on Me as non-separate—I provide what they need and protect what they have.' Knowing one's Self to be the Self of all, no illusory desires can interfere with the peace and spiritual prosperity of enlightenment.

All dharma. The very being of the sage is the perfection of the law of cosmic harmony. The illumined ones are ever engaged in furthering the good of all living beings, whether they are still or active, silent or expressive. Their presence purifies, harmonizes and uplifts those in their proximity, and on the invisible plane their universalized consciousness has a cosmic efficacy for good.

So we see how dharma is the beginning and also fruition of the yogic life. Unless the foundations are well-established and sustained, the building will fall and never be completed. But with right resolve the great edifice of a spiritualized character can be constructed anew at any time. In the Gita it is said that the unrighteous, if they strive to reform and one-pointedly fix their heart on Me—the Lord, are to be accounted righteous, because soon they will become so, and are led to the ultimate good. This is the highest dharma—to fix one's mind on the supreme reality, either in the personal form or on the formless pure being-consciousness-bliss, with the aid of the discipline called yoga.

Dharma is thus the cosmic law of harmony and a manifestation of the one Lord pervading the whole universe, present as our own being—our deepest and innermost Self. Through this law we are prompted to discover our ultimate identity with infinite reality, in freedom and joy. When we follow the law, we draw nearer to our reality. When we concentrate on That as the only reality, we fulfil the law. We realize that the inner essence of God and man is one and the same, and that the world is a phenomenal appearance within that self-illumined reality.

M.A.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

HUMAN LIFE is subject to certain laws which must be obeyed. The purpose of law is the welfare of the details, if that is commensurate with the welfare of the whole. The individual exists for himself only so as to make himself fit to help the evolution of the whole. Whenever there is a conflict between the detail and the whole, the whole must have precedence.

The ancients organized human life on a basis of law which was absolute. Up to the age of twenty-four, one had to be a gatherer of knowledge, skilled in action, proficient in forming the right judgement and generally prepared for a life of beauty. An ancient philosopher has said that the object of education and training of the mind is to make the world look beautiful.

From twenty-four to the age of fifty was the period assigned to worldly pursuits in a legitimate fashion. The accumulation of rightly earned wealth, children, property and general well-being, were among the chief objects to be sought during this creative period of man's empirical life.

At fifty years of age, householders, and even rulers, made over their business affairs to their sons and retired into the forest to contemplate and to pursue the deeper ends of life. A man could keep his wife with him and cultivate with her the inner life to help the progress of the soul. Worldly considerations were not allowed to interfere with the life of contemplation, study, the creation of literary works of beauty and upliftment, and the training of the mind so that it could meet any situation undisturbed.

At the age of seventy-five, a man was expected to renounce his wife and family, his dwelling and his library, his friends and all other worldly connections, to wander about as an itinerant universal man, conferring the benefit of his wisdom and spiritual experience on the younger generation. To own nothing, to belong to no particular creed,

caste or country, and to embrace the whole world in spiritual love—this was the state called renunciation (*sannyasa*).

This mode of life was complete. All friction in the home and society, the conflicts in one's own being and in the external spheres, were avoided when this way of life was followed. Even tyrants were compelled to abdicate at the age of fifty; despots would adopt the universal life at seventy-five. The dominant factor was selfless benevolence and the good of the world.

Such a *sannyasi* was also called a *parivrajaka*; and when this homeless monarch of his own self had the inner vision of the universality of the Self, he became a *paramahansa*, that is, a destroyer of the darkness of ignorance in the hearts of countless others.

The wise live to illustrate the spiritual law in their own lives. Therefore Shri Yajnavalkya, now grown old in his physical body, decided to leave the world and become a *parivrajaka-sannyasi*, a supreme renunciate.

He had already known the Truth. Now he could exercise his faculty of universal compassion and teach dispassion and detachment more effectively as a homeless wanderer. He would be like the sun coursing in the infinite sky, illumining the worlds and conferring a million advantages on living beings; like a cloud charged with pure water, showering it on the thirsty soil and feeding the springs and wells.

There are two ancient modes for adopting the life of *sannyasa*. They are called *vividisha*, which entails an elaborate rite at which this new stage of life is conferred on a qualified disciple by a *Guru*; and *vidvat*, which has no rule and which applies to one who has already known the One-without-a-second (*Parabrahman*) in his own integral being. He has only to shave his head, to discard his sacred thread and exchange his domestic robe for the unsewn garment of a monk. He carries a staff, called *danda*, made of bamboo, as a symbol of the unity of all life in that region which is beyond all conflict. Touching no metal, carrying no money, not staying under one roof for more than a night, living on alms once a day, the *yati* (ascetic) lives in the world like a lion in a forest. This was to be the future way of life of the holy Yajnavalkya.

* * *

It was a morning in late October, on the day of the full moon. Apart from an occasional light breeze, the Himalayan valley of Shiva-Vana was quite calm. The flower garden of the hermitage still bore many blossoms of various tints and beautiful forms. The sky was clear except for a few patches of purple cloud that were floating on the wings of the wind, to disappear when they came in touch with the great Narayana mountain.

The disciples sensed that something extraordinary was to happen. They gathered at about three in the afternoon in the pine grove. Shri Yajnavalkya, scantily clad, carrying no manuscripts, walked slowly towards the grove, his eyes set on the ground some thirty yards in front of him.

As he came near, the whole assembly stood up and greeted him with 'Jai', three times. The rishi bade them sit down. One of the disciples unrolled a black antelope skin and the sage seated himself on it. A young brahmachari brought the maharishi's coconut water vessel and placed it by his side.

After a few moments, bundles of manuscripts neatly wrapped in yellow cloth were brought to the spot by five disciples. Several drinking vessels, silver bells, silken turbans, gold locket and other precious articles, carried on trays, were placed to the right of the holy Guru. He poured a little water from his vessel into an earthen pot, drinking slowly, and pronounced the words:

This is perfect, that is perfect.
From perfection comes forth perfection.
If perfection be subtracted from perfection,
Perfection remains.

'My beloved friends, your course of instruction with me ends today forever. I have tried to share with you the divine knowledge which I received first from the holy teachers, then proved logically to myself, and finally confirmed by my own experience.

'I have neither taught you anything fantastic, nor have I tried to impress you with my self-importance. My only aim in my association with you has been to help you to fulfil the supreme purpose of life.

‘Beloved ones, I have a few gifts for you. Do not take them as mementos or tokens of my loving relationship with you. If they are tokens of anything at all, they symbolize my feelings of gratitude to you. It is good to give, but it is also good to receive in the right spirit. You have looked after my cows. You have given kindly services to the holy mothers, Maitreyi and Katyayani, whom, owing to my own preoccupation with my spiritual thoughts, I have failed to serve adequately. Where I have failed, you have succeeded. You have stood by them in their hard work, in the time of their illnesses, and have been like real sons and daughters to them.

‘I am not really leaving you, for I meet you at the common centre of this circle of *sansara*, where each of you in the form of a radius, so to speak, finally converges. It is an imperfection of love to think only of empirical meetings and external advantages, dwelling in the realm of time and space. Beloved ones, love is the life of the immolation of the sense of individuality in the infinite light of Self (*Atman*).

‘I hope you will do your duty to your families, your king, your brethren, to all living beings, to your ancestors, and also to the holy spiritual science, *Brahmavidya*. I commend to your attention the eighteen verses of the *Isha Upanishad*. Take them as your guide and see in them your Teacher, who was once known as Yajnavalkya. I adopt the mode of life of a *parivrajaka yati*, a wandering ascetic, which my duty as a *brahmana* enjoins. Tomorrow will be the ceremony of my farewell to the two devoted companions of my life, Katyayani and Maitreyi, to my dear cows and my beloved calves. I will say goodbye to these mountains and pine groves, and I invite those of you who care to attend to be present on this occasion.

‘I renounce all, even my name, my caste and my position as a Teacher. Beloved ones, help yourselves to these gifts which I give you today. Here are some valuable manuscripts; please study them and propagate their teachings. Those of you who desire to enter the life of a householder may take these other precious gifts which King Janaka and other wealthy disciples of mine have brought from time to time.

‘Brethren, do not be sorrowful, and also do not be happy. Keep your mind on study, and work for the good of humanity. Look around you and see how innumerable beings are suffering in ignorance (*avidya*).

Live to uplift them. Om Tat Sat!’

Silence fell on the assembly. A few sobs were heard. Tears were running down the cheeks of some of the older disciples. The saint Gargi was calm, and so were the others who had known the holy Yajnavalkya as he truly was.

* * *

A cold wind has begun to sweep over the valley, and the birds have returned to their nests. The cows have been led quietly to the pasture. The calves have been taken to a larger fold where they are frisking playfully. In the large pavilion with its thatched roof, supported on bamboo pillars, sits the *maharishi*. Maitreyi and Katyayani are seated before him in an attitude of reverence. Shri Yajnavalkya says:

‘O Katyayani, let us meditate on the sun, the source of life and light for this planet. Let us realize Him in the midst of the mind; forgetting the inner and outer self, let us feel at one with the great sun. But this is only a preliminary step. After a while, meditating in this way, let us merge the sun in that higher Sun, called Consciousness, in which millions of our suns shine, without obscuring its light.’

Katyayani thus began to meditate. Maitreyi said: ‘O holy lord, I have meditated on you, and today you are the sole object of my meditation.’

‘Be it so,’ answered the sage. They all meditated for some time; then Shri Yajnavalkya said: ‘Today I leave this little home for the greater eternal home in which we move and have our being. O Maitreyi, take my cows, take all the gold which remains after gifts have been made to others.’

To Katyayani he said: ‘This hermitage is yours, with all its contents; the pastures, the calves and the remaining cows. All are yours. I make no condition. You may live as you like.’

Maitreyi* said with great reverence:

‘O holy teacher, if death is the end of all our earthly possessions, they do not seem to be of any great use. A goat which is to be sacrificed tomorrow may be fed on the best food today, but if it is conscious of its

* The ensuing dialogue is based on *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV.v.

coming end, how can the food be enjoyable? Of what use are kine, wealth, fame, or any other thing, as long as we have to leave the world involuntarily and unexpectedly? We do not want to go, yet it is forced upon us. This is not a very happy state of affairs. Tell me, my lord, what will make me immortal? My great problem is how to conquer death. How I long to experience the nectar of immortality, in which there is no coming and going.'

Shri Yajnavalkya smiled and said:

'Immortality can be realized consciously in this very life, because the nature of the Self is immortal. O darling, all that functions in the realm of time and space is subject to change and is mortal. There is the higher realm of *Atman*, the Self of man, and once it is realized, immortality dawns as our birthright. You will ask how immortality can be realized. O darling, make the right quest and earnestly seek immortality over and above all transient and passing objects. Set your mind firmly on this quest and let it not be distracted by any allurements, attractions or promises. All the pleasures of the world, friends and possessions, fame and learning, health and good taste, are no better than the clouds passing in the sky.

'O darling, the first essential of the science of immortality is the one persistent, all-consuming quest for Truth. Listen to teachings from many quarters; give your ear to those who claim to have known the science of immortality. Listen to one and listen to many with reverence, my darling. Then sift what is best from all that you have heard. By the faculty of reason you must come to the conclusion that the Self is the highest object of the quest. When you have found out the way, then tread it fearlessly. Meditate on the holy Truth of the immutability, all-pervasiveness, eternality and all-blissfulness of the Self. Meditate on it, talk about it to those who are your companions on the quest, and exclude all other conversation which binds your thought or soul.

'That which is really important, my darling, is that you should cultivate the mode of mind which is helpful to the acquisition of the great vision: "Self is all; Self is real; nothing except Self exists."

'The mind, my dearest one, is dual in character; sometimes it runs after the flowers which are sure to fade away; sometimes it wants to clutch the rainbow. Tutor the mind daily. Reason with it to show it that

all which is finite can give but passing joys.'

Maitreyi interposed, saying: 'My lord, I have received nothing from this! Your speech is beyond my mind. The Self is neither this nor that. If it has no qualities, such as colour, extension, weight, gravity or any other attribute—then surely it is nothing! How then am I to perceive this ideal? Enlighten me, O my sole lord.'

Shri Yajnavalkya replied:

'O darling, how can the knower be known? Your eyes see everything in the world which is to be seen, but they cannot see themselves. Your fingers can hold a pen, a needle and thread, the leash for the calves—but they cannot take hold of themselves. Such is that universal principle of light through which all else is seen, heard, tasted and so forth. Therefore, how can it be seen, heard or known?'

Maitreyi looked confused and said: 'My lord, can we predicate anything about this Self? Is it not simply emptiness? Is it not almost nothing? If I cannot know its existence, how can I know that it exists? Have not the ancients imagined a principle which they have called the Absolute, and then just handed it down traditionally?'

Shri Yajnavalkya said:

'Darling, it is not so. I have told you that the Self (*Atman*) is infinite, and anything that is conceivable, perceivable or imaginable, has its phenomenal existence in a mode of the Absolute.

'O Maitreyi, do not say that *Atman* does not exist. It is that very principle which is making the statement that *Atman* does not exist! It is that which is asking the question. *Atman* is neither small nor great; it has no colour, no form, no attributes. It is free from the three kinds of differences.*

'It is by meditation that the Knower knows its Self. Know, my darling, that reason prepares the way but, fatigued in its quest of the Absolute, reason stops short. It is like an eagle that flies at the sun and, after going a few miles, grows fatigued and drops down to the earth. In

* In *Panchadashi* II 20, Swami Vidyananda describes the three kinds of differences as (a) differences of genus, e.g. between a tree and a rock; (b) difference of species, e.g. between one tree and another; (c) internal differences, e.g. between leaf and flower of the same tree.

this region, O Maitreyi, no duality exists. Therefore it is beyond the range of the intellect, which functions only in the realm of duality. Reason analyses, synthesizes, unites and separates; it finds the general among the particulars and discovers the law; but in the region where there is only pure existence (*sat*), reason can have nothing on which to function.

‘O Maitreyi, it is a matter to be meditated upon. When, under the heat of one-pointed meditation, the outer shells of the mind begin to wither, and that part of the intellect which illumines an object is separated from its adjuncts, then what remains is something nameless, attributeless.

‘O Maitreyi, “That thou art!” As a lump of salt, dissolved in water, loses its identity and becomes water, so the refined and purified intellect, trained in concentration, dwelling on the Absolute, becomes dissolved in it. There, my darling, what can one think? What can one say? What can one feel? I assure you, O Maitreyi, that this region is not darkness; being free from limitations, it is not grief; being the Light of lights, there is no veiling in it. That thou art!’

As the holy rishi was talking to his wife, he was transformed physically. His whole body appeared like a flame, shedding the light of peace and wisdom. Maitreyi fell at the feet of her lord. The darkness dissolved. All was peace. The inner eyes of Maitreyi were opened and she realized the Truth of the statement of the holy rishi. But she could not give expression to what she felt. She was like a dumb woman eating lumps of sugar—how could she describe the taste?

In this way Shri Yajnavalkya conferred his grace on Maitreyi. Henceforth, she resolved to pass her life in contemplation of the highest. To Katyayani, the illustrious sage left his material wealth.

* * *

This was the last day of Shri Yajnavalkya’s life in his dear hermitage. For fifty years he had lived there, taught his disciples and kept his cows. Kings had visited him in this spot, and the rays of the light of his knowledge had radiated far and wide. But everything in this world is passing and changing. It is useless to expect a baby to remain in its

babyhood. Youth turns into age and age into the radical transformation called death. According to the law of universal change, called *maya*, nations arise, come to the surface and play their allotted part. If they keep the law of harmony (dharma) their existence is full, prolonged and prosperous. Otherwise they sink into nothingness in a very short time. The maya of the Lord is understood when we grasp intuitively the nature of the ultimate reality.

A man casts a shadow; the shadow is known fully when the man is known, and not *vice versa*. He is wise who conforms to this law of change and, transforming his mind voluntarily into a higher and yet higher principle, conditioning his emotions, his will and his thinking faculty, brings his being into the universal rhythm.

All the disciples of the hermitage and the *rishis* who lived in the vicinity, had congregated in the valley in front of Shri Yajnavalkya’s home. Many sages were present in the assembly. Shri Yajnavalkya, his head now cleanly shaven, dressed in a flowing yellow robe and holding a bamboo staff in his hand, appeared among them and said: ‘*Om namo Narayanaya*, O holy ones.’ They saluted him with the same words. The great Yajnavalkya then gave his parting words:

‘My own Self in a multitudinous form, today I bid farewell to you! Farewell, O sacred pinegrove, O rocks, promontories, flowing rivulets, rolling streams! O birds, dear cows and calves—farewell! Farewell to learning, and even to *Brahmavidya*. Farewell to “farewell” itself!’

He bowed low and slowly walked out of the hermitage, like a golden swan swimming across a translucent lake. All stood silent in awe and reverence as the aged figure, diffusing light, slowly disappeared between two mountain ranges as he entered another valley. His shadow was seen for a short while, but that too finally vanished.

Maharishi Yajnavalkya had become an avadhut.

LANTERN LESSON



A recent presentation at Shanti Sadan made use of this handcrafted candle cover. Shaped from thin brass, with tinted cut-glass stones circling centre and base, it is covered with fine engravings and pierced with many minute openings. A night-light burns at the centre.

Hari Prasad Shastri once commented that our body may be out of sorts, our mind may be agitated, our emotions may be disturbed; yet within us is a centre of peace that is untouched by vicissitude of any kind. That centre is the key to what we are.

We can compare our body to the brass form of the candle cover, elaborately shaped, engraved and embossed from edge to edge. As the Islamic mystic Al-Ghazzali has said: 'Our body is marvellously made and for some great end.' Like the body, the candle cover is symmetrical; it is, some may feel, attractive—but it is not perfect, and has suffered some wear and tear, resulting in dents and unevenness. The body can never be perfect; or—we could say—its apparent perfection of appearance is short-lived. As Shakespeare reminds us in Sonnet 15:

When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows...

Notice the tinted cut-glass stones, translucent rather than transparent—allowing a partial, diffused emission of the central light. There is beauty here, too, and the stones (of which there are five of different colours) represent our five senses and the wondrous physiology behind them.

At the base of the candle cover, there are more tinted glass stones. These are also lit from within, but less conspicuously than the sense lights, representing, one might suggest, our internal faculties—intellect,

feeling, will, memory, imagination, and the rest.

We seem now to have a complete 'kit' for functioning as a human being. Body + senses + mind = me. We can easily go through life thinking this is all we are, one of billions who have spent a little time on this planet and then vanished—who knows where, and with what?

But the great spiritual teachers draw our attention to a deeper phase of our nature that will not be obliterated with time, and is not a fragment but is one with the great whole. That is symbolized by the light itself—the central flame, the true Self, the eternal consciousness, the spirit. The candle-cover is only meaningful in relation to the candle.

Happiness, peace and liberating knowledge come from unfolding our spiritual nature, getting to know more and more about the constant light underlying the fluctuating mind. Just as, in this tiny flame, there is light and heat, so too the nature of our innermost Self is consciousness-bliss—a knowledge that is blissful, a happiness that is knowing.

What is necessary to lead us to appreciate this wholeness of our being, light eternal, bliss imperishable?

If we look closely at the lantern, we find it is full of openings, apertures—little windows through which the central flame may be glimpsed. These openings represent those moments in our own life when we are free from thoughts of our body, when we are withdrawn from the hypnotism of the senses, and when our mind is sufficiently calm that even our engagement with our inner faculties—our desires, hopes, fears, memories—is calm and harmonious. It is in this quietude, this freedom from psychological congestion, this openness of experience, that we become aware of the inexhaustible source of our being, our deeper Self. Like the working of alchemy, our inner life will be transformed, strengthened and liberated by this communion.

The special time for tranquillity and inner unfoldment is sometimes confined to our periods of meditation. But once we grasp this principle of withdrawal and inner attunement, we will find there are many other times during the day when we can briefly withdraw and reconnect with true being—the central flame. The more we attune ourselves to this way of peace and higher knowledge, the more our burdens in this world will be lightened and borne with good cheer and calmness.

Higher Knowledge

HIGHER KNOWLEDGE is that which makes known the fundamental nature of everything. Is such knowledge possible and if so how is it to be sought? These are pressing questions because we live at a time when human knowledge of the world around us is growing faster than previous generations could have imagined possible. And very recently there have been particularly fascinating advances in the understanding of nature.

The Large Hadron Collider at CERN near Geneva accelerates beams of protons to near the speed of light and then causes them to collide so that researchers can detect the particles and radiation that occur only in such extreme conditions. As was well publicized, using the LHC, strong evidence has been found to support a theory of how elementary particles gain mass, by interacting with a field associated with the so-called Higgs particle.

Turning from fundamental particles to cosmology, it is now well understood that the universe is expanding, or rather that the distance between galaxies is expanding. At least within the region that can be observed, galaxies are moving apart in such a way that the distances between all of them are growing equally. This evidently implies that the universe was smaller in the past, and began from a point of extreme density. Researchers have been extrapolating backwards to describe how this expansion has occurred. And current theories now reach back to a time when the age of the universe was in the order of 10^{-32} seconds.

In the light of developments like this there has been speculation about whether we could be close to a scientific explanation of everything. Progress seems to have been so rapid, is it not likely that soon there will be a scientific answer to the question of why everything is at it is, and where it comes from? For some who are inclined to a scientific understanding of the universe and find religious or spiritual ideas unattractive, it is appealing to think that there could be such an explanation in which an entirely natural process would take the place which some religious teachings ascribe to a God as the ultimate source and origin of all that is.

Still, not all developments are indicating that the end of the scientific quest is in sight, or even getting closer. There are no suggestions that the LHC and related projects might be closed down in the foreseeable future because their tasks are approaching completion. In fact, after publication of the results concerning the Higgs particle, the LHC was upgraded to almost double its power to enable it to create even more extreme conditions. This was in order to seek evidence for theories about another level of nature, and no-one is seriously suggesting that this will be the last. Whatever answers are found, or not, will be the starting point for the next set of questions.

In the search for an ultimate explanation of everything, the limit is not just a matter of how powerful the instruments become. There will always be a limit, in principle, to how far explanation can go. This is because with any empirical explanation, something has to be accepted as given initially.

There is a well-supported theory that our universe began with what have been characterized as fluctuations at the level described by quantum mechanics. This theory may be further substantiated, yet even if it is true, it cannot explain the origin of these initial conditions and laws. The theory does not and could not include a reason why the universe is like this and why these natural laws apply. One could only say that it just is the case that there is not nothing, there is not chaos, there is not an infinite number of other situations, but there is this particular universe where the features described by quantum mechanics apply. There would be no explanation of why all this is as it is, simply the statement that in fact it is so.

Sometimes it is said that these quantum fluctuations describe how something could come out of nothing. But this is to speak loosely. The theory is that energy could appear from space, for short periods of time. But, space as described at this level is very different from nothing; space is believed to have come into being with the big bang, it is rich in structure, and is intimately associated with time and energy. So to say that here something comes from nothing is either a bit of an intellectual blunder, or rather misleading.

It should be clear that the intention here is not to belittle the immense significance and interest of these theories as descriptions of the world.

The point being made is simply that they do not and cannot in principle provide an explanation of everything, in a way that would take the place of a God in some religious views as an answer to all the questions. There is no reason why scientific researchers have to make such claims for their theories; it is only those who wish to engage in polemics beyond scientific questions who might choose to do so. The most comprehensive and successful scientific theories must leave the question of the ultimate source of what they describe completely unresolved. Actually, by revealing more of the complexity and structure of the world, they highlight the magnitude of what remains unexplained when all the facts are known.

Beyond theories about the origin of our universe, there are further hypotheses, with respectable support, which suggest that there may in fact be many universes, with variations on the laws of nature. This has been referred to as the multiverse. One appeal of this idea for some of those who support it is that it provides an answer to the question of why the universe we live in should be suited to life. Researchers have noticed that for a world like ours and beings like us to exist, the laws of nature need to be precisely set. The rate of the expansion of the universe has to be just right; the forces acting within atoms and between galaxies have to be suitable; specialists have concluded that if such basic features of the universe were different from the way they actually are, life as we know it would be impossible. It seems to be an extraordinary fact that the universe is 'fine-tuned' for life in this way, and this requires explanation. According to some multiverse theories, there may be so many universes that it is not so surprising or statistically unlikely that among them all there is one or more where conditions are such that higher life forms can occur.

Still, even if such a version of the multiverse theory were true it would still leave a limit to how much has been explained. The multiverse would have been described, we would have learnt that the multiverse exists, but there would be no explanation of why there is this, rather than nothing or anything else.

Some theorists have extended the idea of the multiverse with the suggestion that there are so many universes in the multiverse that everything that could happen does happen somewhere. This, it is

proposed, really would be the ultimate explanation of everything, because here there would be an answer to the final question of why it is all like this: the answer is that it has to be, because everything that could happen does happen.

This is so speculative and far from anything testable, and raises so many difficulties of its own that one may be inclined not to take it seriously or to find it positively unscientific, so the idea is highly complex and controversial. But as a potential solution to the ultimate question of why our universe is as it is, its inadequacy quickly becomes apparent.

A difficulty arises about the meaning of 'anything that *could* happen'. If this means that some worlds could happen and others could not, then the question arises of the origin of the principles that define what is possible or not, so the question of the source of what ultimately determines the nature of things stands completely unresolved. On the other hand, if it were suggested that there is really *no* limit to what could happen, we would be led into further difficulties. It is possible that there could be absolutely nothing; it is possible that there could be only one universe consisting of one hydrogen atom. If absolutely anything that could happen had to happen, then there would have to be something, and nothing. In other words, the theory leads to contradictions, so it is false. Leaving that aside and allowing the idea to get off the ground momentarily for the sake of argument, there would be different laws of nature in different regions, our universe would be embedded in wider totalities, and therefore, far from explaining everything, our scientific theories would be merely descriptions of how things are in one speck of total reality, while all the rest remained entirely unknown to us. Thus, whatever its other merits or otherwise, to the question of the ultimate source and origin of everything, this multiverse theory offers no solution at all.

We have been led into strange and highly speculative ideas. The point we wish to make is that even if they were true, they would not have provided an ultimate explanation of everything. Either we would be left in complete ignorance, or we would know some fundamental qualities of the universe or universes, but have no explanation of why it all is as it is and not otherwise.

For some people this simply means that we are presented with a great mystery. For others it suggests that beyond the limits of our understanding we can only conceive of some mighty power or being which is ultimately responsible for all this, which is incomparably greater than we are, and yet which is the origin and support of our own being. This is the basis of religious feelings, which therefore remain as alive as ever. It is a reasonable human response to the great mystery, but it brings us no closer to a real knowledge of what is that ultimate being or reality. We have inferred that this ultimate being must be there, but apart from that, we can say nothing about it, as it is beyond anything we can understand with our minds.

Does this mean that there is a limit to what can be known beyond which we cannot go?

It is not only in recent times that it has been understood that however many facts we know, there are still fundamentals which remain unexplained. In one of the Upanishads we find this interchange between a pupil and a teacher.

[The pupil asks] What is that through which, if it is known, everything else becomes known?

[The teacher replies] Two kinds of knowledge must be known, this is what all who know Brahman [Absolute Reality] tell us, the higher and the lower knowledge.

The lower knowledge is the Rig-veda, Yajur-veda, Sama-veda, Atharva-veda, phonetics, ceremonial, grammar, etymology, metre, astronomy.

But the higher knowledge is that by which the Indestructible [Brahman] is apprehended.

Chandogya Upanishad, 7:1:1-2

So according to this teaching there are two kinds of knowledge, which could be called higher and lower. The lower knowledge refers to everything that can be known about the world; higher knowledge is knowledge of the absolute reality.

The list here includes all the branches of worldly knowledge available at the time this text was written; it mentions grammar and the rest, and also the Vedas. The Vedas are the scriptural basis of religious teachings, so it might be surprising to find them included in lower

knowledge. The point is that the Vedas contain ideas about the creation and sustenance of the world, and how one might propitiate the powers at work there; these are ideas about the phenomenal world, the realm of change according to cause and effect. So whatever is being described here cannot be the ultimate explanation of things, and therefore according to this text, all this belongs to lower knowledge.

Higher knowledge, according to the Upanishad, is that, by knowing which, everything becomes known; that is, which reveals the ultimate source and nature of everything. So we come back to the question of whether such knowledge is possible, and if so how might it be realized?

According to the traditional teachings of Advaita Vedanta, there is such a higher kind of knowledge, and it can be realized. Still, these teachings are not concerned with giving us new facts or theories about the constituents of the world. If we want to know about the building blocks and forces of nature, careful observation and analysis is the way to find out. Spiritual teachings are not going to give us alternative answers to the same questions asked by science. The spiritual teachings are concerned with a different way of looking, another way of enquiring into the nature of reality. And we should not expect alternative answers to empirical questions; we need to be open to a completely different vision in which the divisions and differences that characterize the empirical world-view do not arise.

So what is this new way of seeking? Up to now we have been looking into things using our senses and minds. These are good tools for dealing with practical matters in the world, and it might seem that there is no other way of finding out about things. But in all this it is easy to overlook something important, which is that there is a difference between the world as it appears through our minds and senses, and reality itself. What we experience has passed through our senses and minds, which are highly complex instruments that have evolved to help us survive and prosper in the world. But they are themselves details within reality and what they present to us is quite different from reality as a whole. Through our senses and minds everything appears separated into different points in space and time. And perhaps most important of all, there is the difference between the things that are experienced and the one who experiences, the distinction between subject and object.

There is no reason why those separations should exist in reality itself, in fact logic clearly points to reality as a homogeneous unity. This suggests that the way we experience things is far different from reality: but this should not surprise us—science tells us that.

Now the question comes, might there be any way of knowing about reality without using our minds in the way that creates the difference between our experience and reality? In fact, one might say that this is a fair description of basically what we are trying to do when we meditate. In meditation we are seeking for something which is not conditioned by the forms of perception and conception. Here we are not looking outwards into the world in search of truth, and neither are we looking for some mighty Being who creates and sustains us from some dimension outside ourselves; in meditation we are seeking reality as the ground of our own being. Logic suggests that the ultimate reality is the basis and substance of our own being and might thus be sought as such. Here is the one point where there might be a kind of knowledge that does not involve a distinction between the knower and the known, between subject and object. And as reality is one, not many, to know the reality in our self, or as our Self, would be to know the reality in all. Just as to know one atom of gold is to know all atoms of gold, to know the true nature of our individual self is to know the universal Self. This is where the possibility arises of solving the great question of the ultimate nature of everything.

This might sound like a specialized pursuit, but it is continuous with a universal human need. All of us are prompted frequently to turn within, to find a way through the motion on the surface of the mind, and reconnect with what is lasting underlying the changing impressions. We might call this meditation, contemplation, prayer, simply moments of inner recuperation, or no name at all. In time we become more consciously aware of a need for careful inner enquiry, with guidance when it is available, and at this point we may adopt the traditional time-tested meditations and related practices, with the explicit goal of discovering the objectively real behind conditioned appearances.

To understand how meditation might lead to knowledge which transcends the subject-object divide, we need to be clear about an important point in the teachings, the distinction between the mind and

consciousness. Often we speak loosely and refer to mind and consciousness as interchangeable terms, but in fact they are distinct and this is made clear and explicit in the non-dual understanding. Mind here includes our thoughts and our feelings and also all the sensations to do with the body; all this is mind. Everything in the mind, like the world of which it is a part, has a particular form and character. Consciousness, by contrast, is not the mind or any content in the mind; it is that which is aware of the mind. In itself it has none of the forms that belong to experience; it is the pure light in which all experience occurs. One essential difference between the mind and consciousness is that the mind is constantly changing, and consciousness never does. In the spiritual enquiry it is necessary to distinguish between the mind and consciousness, and one can quickly do so by applying this criterion: anything that changes belongs to the mind, while consciousness itself is ever the same, like the sun it simply shines on all things equally.

Closely connected to the distinction between mind and consciousness is the understanding of the nature of our self. Generally, one is vividly aware of the mind and its contents, and has the compelling sense that 'I am this mental activity, this is my self'. Psychology also takes the aggregate of mental qualities as the self of the individual. In the non-dual teachings, however, it is made clear through careful reflection that all mental activity belongs to experience, while the Self is properly identified as the unchanging subject. And this Self is identical with consciousness, when consciousness is distinguished from what it illumines.

Having understood this, we are ready to embark on the kind of meditation that has knowledge as its aim. In meditation, consciousness is deliberately turned from mental activity onto the light of consciousness itself. This consciousness is not the product of mental processes, but their prerequisite, so here unmediated knowledge is possible. As consciousness is the Self, here too the subject-object divide is resolved. And this instance of Self is not different from Self universally, so objective reality is approached.

This is far from being only an abstract philosophical exercise. In meditation we go experientially into the truth that I am not the mind, I am pure consciousness, in my Self there is no darkness, no boundary. It

is a great relief to detach our attention from all the happenings on the surface of the mind and to do what we earlier called getting more deeply into contact with ourselves, with the inner light which we are in essence.

So these teachings present us with a doorway to a higher knowledge. It is worthy of being called a higher knowledge because it is not knowledge mediated by a mental process where experience and reality are different, rather it is direct knowledge of reality at the one point where this is possible, in the nature of consciousness, Self itself. Through meditation and the related disciplines, and guided by the principles of non-duality, it is possible to pass through the surface of experience to the underlying truth, the Self, in all.

It was noted before that these teachings do not provide alternative empirical hypotheses; they offer a completely different way of enquiring into the nature of reality. Still, the aim of this enquiry is knowledge; it may not be a form of knowledge that can be expressed in a formula or shared publicly, but it is knowledge, in fact it is direct knowledge by acquaintance. These teachings hold out the possibility of knowledge of the reality underlying all, and in this sense knowing that from which all this apparently arises.

P.H.

VERSES OF TULSIDAS ON SHANTI

Says Tulsi, there is no happiness like Shanti (spiritual peace);
It burns up the root of anger and ends all desire for pleasure.
O Tulsi, the sea of Shanti is a source of happiness;
Whoever bathes in it loses his egoity.
Life gives peace and delight,
But without Shanti it becomes a blazing fire.
He who holds Shanti in his heart, dwells in a sea of bliss.

Translated by H.P.S.

Progress in Self-Knowledge

KNOW THYSELF! In the first part of this article, the meaning of self-knowledge was looked at from a psychological point of view, with examples from literature, both comic and tragic. We also examined the idea, elucidated by the psychologist, Alfred Adler, that human beings have a fundamental need for significance and to overcome restrictions. This urge can lead to selfishness, or it can be transmuted into 'social feeling'—in which case 'man would develop in a direction that furthered universal welfare' (Adler). This promise of expansion was also made by Shri Dada of Aligarh when he told his disciples: 'My children, every human being has fellow-feeling and, if he exercises this virtue selflessly every day, it will create the flame of love in his heart.'

At this stage, we need to ask an important question. If fellow-feeling and social interest are golden keys to an inner development, why do we hear so little about this development in daily life? There are millions of people who are helpful and supportive. There are innumerable organisations specialising in altruistic social work, and the workers, by definition, are set on the wider welfare of the community. Yet though many people may speak of job fulfilment, this seems to be rather different from any kind of expansion of consciousness. So, is there really a direct connection between fellow-feeling and the awakening of the inner flame of Love spoken of by Shri Dada?

The answer is that there can indeed be a direct connection if we approach our work and our dealings with other human beings in a certain way. This way gives priority to creating harmony and goodwill within our own being first, and this will automatically be expressed outwardly. As the saying goes, a pot drips what is in it, and if the contents of our own heart are good, then what is released outwardly will also be good.

This inner approach is recommended in one of oldest Yoga classics, the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. Patañjali teaches that qualities like goodwill and compassion are tendencies that we cannot just adopt as a matter of show. He recommends that we meditate on these great qualities, to plant the thought of universal compassion deep in our being. These feelings he calls *bhāvanas*, here used as a technical term meaning

something like ‘rooted conviction’ or ‘master sentiment’, suggesting that all our inner force is put into the practice. Such meditations are considered a potent way to overcome any ill-will that may be lurking in our heart, and will help us to bring our mental life into harmony with our ultimate nature. Many years ago, this journal published an affirmation formulated by Hari Prasad Shastri which merges the master sentiment of desire for universal well-being with that of the quest for enlightenment:

OM. I WILL KNOW GOD, WHATEVER BETIDE,
IN ORDER TO BRING RELIEF TO SUFFERING HUMANITY.
I WILL ATTAIN NIRVANA, YES I WILL! OM

Though the affirmation is not made from the highest non-dual standpoint, it represents a valid and creative *bhavana*, to aid our inner development.

The teaching is that at the heart of our being, there already is goodwill and compassion, fellow-feeling and consideration—because at this level of our being, we *are* one with all. There is an underlying unity. But this deeper unity needs to find its way into our conscious mind, and one of the ways is to perform these meditations or *bhavanas*.

Therefore, fellow-feeling, in Yoga, is something that we release from the depths of our being—and it will influence our daily life, whatever type of work we may be engaged in. The traditional teaching is that if we perform our actions as offering to the divine power, an inner clearing and relief will inevitably follow, and we will be in a position to recognize how we can make progress on the great path of life.

Another question may also arise at this stage. It was said that Yoga agrees that the primary urge in the human heart is to rise superior to all restrictions. It was also recognized that this urge could be a menace to society, and could lead to self-delusion, if not properly understood and guided. If this urge to transcend limitations is present in the human heart, can it ever be fulfilled, or is it just a kind of delusion, a dream?

No one would deny that human beings can have aspirations which appear to transcend what is possible for human nature as we know it. There are some lines from the Elizabethan poet, Marlowe’s, play about the conqueror Tamberlaine:

(Nature) Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet’s course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves and never rest,
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

Although the last line throws us back on shaky ground (Shakespeare wrote: Uneasy is the head that bears a crown), the sentiment expressed in these lines is not foreign to any of us. The desire for glory strikes an echo of agreement in the heart of any child who has learned about kings and queens, champions and heroes. Every sports enthusiast knows about the glory of winning, and every pop fan partakes of the exaltation induced by the gestures and sounds made by their idol. No doubt the same kind of attraction has its subtler counterparts in more reflective minds. This innate urge to identify ourselves with the great and glorious (as we imagine it) cannot be explained away as just a delusive impulse: there must be some deeper reality behind it.

It was said before (in part 1) that the yogic view is that the universe is the manifestation of a divine power that supports and sustains whatever appears to exist and whatever we appear to be. It was also said that when we are released from self-centredness, and feel community and sympathy for other human beings, a lightening of our inner atmosphere takes place, and this may show itself in a sense of inner spaciousness and promise. At this stage, we may give a serious hearing to the spiritual teachings. The purpose of these teachings is to throw light on the deeper realities of life, and to introduce us to what may be entirely new ideas about our deepest nature. The ideas start by being new, but on reflection, our response grows into one of recognition. Somehow, they seem to confirm what we already know, but may not wholly understand.

Fundamental to these teachings, and that which gives them practical value and power, is the proposition that this divine power is also the

inner ruler of the kingdom of our mind. Its presence illumines mental and emotional activity from the inside, and enables it to happen.

Because this divine power rules and penetrates the whole, it is also present in the human mind, which is a tiny fragment of the whole. In view of this higher principle underlying our mind, it is no surprise that we feel ourselves to be uniquely significant. To speak fancifully, it is as if our higher nature is transmitting messages to us, whispering: 'You are great. There is glory and greatness within you. Why have you lost touch with it?' This sense of the presence of something great but unrealized, can stir within us at any time, because this divine power runs through each and every human heart equally. Therefore, each of us can lay claim to a fundamental significance and value, by virtue of the divine Lord seated in our heart—to use a mystical metaphor.

On the other hand, none of us can claim any individual superiority based on this metaphysical fact about our higher nature. The superiority, the significance, the glory, if it is to be realized at all, has to be realized as a shared glory—a glorious truth not just about our own nature, but about all human nature. Indeed this innermost glory goes even beyond that. The poet Nazir alerts us:

Do not see Him only in your narrow heart.
See Him in every garden, desert and stone.
Know Him, the colourless, to be colourful and playful.
See Him in the journey, in the way and in the goal.

And in another short verse by the Urdu mystic, Zauq, we are reminded:

In this world of form, O Zauq, there are a million appearances.
All are the creations of the Supreme Artist, and none is mediocre.

Earlier (in part 1) we quoted a verse from the Vedanta classics that spoke of the divine power in the third person as 'That from which the universe came forth, in which it abides, into which it will finally be dissolved.' There are many teachings that speak to us more intimately, and directly address the matter of self-knowledge. And this theme for enquiry is linked with our thirst for final security and unchallenged

fulfilment: our desire to reach life's goal.

These teachings speak of the divine power in a way which is direct. They use the word Self, supreme Self. At first it may seem that the scriptures cannot mean what they are saying: that the innermost Self of man is divine. They must surely be pointing to some other divine principle, perhaps called the Self in order to comfort us, or reassure us of some sort of nearness. But surely this divine principle cannot really be our self. That is too much to believe.

But this philosophy taught by the yogis, based on their own enlightened experience, is profound and subtle. It challenges us to discover this universal divine principle in ourselves, and not to confuse it with anything limited or finite. Such confusion can easily set in because of our strong sense of individuality and separateness. So we are warned that although our individuality is the starting point of the quest, and that we have first to seek in our own being for the deeper reality, our individuality is not the end-point. It is like a signpost that points to something beyond itself, just as an inland signpost may point us in the direction of the sea, but is itself not the sea.

Within and behind this limited individuality, which we may call the ego-self, there is the true Self that is not restricted to an individual body and mind. Unlike the body and mind, that Self does not weaken and die. It remains ever new, ever illumined, boundless, and this Self is common to us all. Although unseen, it is the cohesive force behind all empirical experience. We find a similar point made in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where the Lord Krishna, speaking of the highest reality, declares:

There is nothing that is higher than Me. In Me all this is woven, as clusters of gems on a string.

A necklace of gems may be crafted so that we see nothing of the string that holds it together, but it would be folly to deny the presence of the string. No string, no necklace.

This true Self, conceived as the ego-transcending innermost essence and support, is the source of all quality and significance. The egos are many, like the waves on the sea. But the sea is one, and so is the Self. This is the infinitely significant consciousness behind our individuality,

and its presence, when unrecognized, is the source of our restlessness, and also of our intimations of glory, which we wrongly transfer to the individual ego. Hari Prasad Shastri once said: 'Seek significance—but let that significance be infinite, and one that recognizes the infinite significance at the heart of each and every phenomenon in the universe.'

A final key question remains. It seems that our very thinking mechanism is ego bound, because we cannot help thinking with reference to an individual centre of consciousness. I think, I feel, I want, I like, I don't like, I did it, I should have done it. Our mental life is dominated by such terms of reference, by such thinking in the first person. How can we penetrate beneath this level of finite selfhood, into the pure infinite Self that is free from these limitations? How can we go beyond our own individuality and be sure it is worthwhile to do so?

Yoga has a simple, though inspired, approach to this problem. This is based on the fact of experience that the ego, or sense of individuality, as we sense it internally, is never found alone. It is never found naked—it is always dressed in some kind of quality or association. Examples of qualities are: I am embarrassed, I am happy, I am disappointed, I am running short of funds, I am busy. The ego is always mindful of its links with other things and other people, either as colleagues, supporters, rivals, or simply means to help it get what it wants. In other words, the ego needs these qualities and connections to have any meaning at all. And this linking of the ego sense with qualities and associations forms the material of thoughts and feelings. Strip the ego of these links, and it is like a decimal point without any numbers alongside it: completely meaningless, or like a full stop without a sentence.

This limited I-sense has apparent strength and relevance only in partnership with other ingredients of our inner world. It cannot stand alone. It is only valid when there are thoughts that say a little more than 'I'. 'I' has to be extended to such sentiments as 'I want', 'I like', 'I ought'. These in turn have to be expanded into: 'I like this, I fear that'. In this way, our mental activity seems to become centred on an enduring individuality. But all the time, as Shri Shankara says, the ego remains just a notion, a part of a thought or a sentence, a mere link in the chain of experience, that cannot stand in isolation.

According to Yoga, the way to transcend the ego, and withdraw our

identity back into the deeper infinite Self, is not to meet the ego head-on as an enemy. This idea of battling with the ego gives the ego far more reality and prestige than it deserves. Ego, when it appears, is to be witnessed, not punished, and witnessed calmly, as if we are noting a commonplace component of a transient show, and not anything special.

The practice of the higher Yoga is a continuous endeavour to influence and transform the whole range of thoughts and feelings, on which all ego reference depends. The entire thinking process is quietened and brought under self-management through the various practices of Yoga. When this is achieved, the sense of limited individuality automatically weakens. In the quiet mind, the ego has no thought to link with, and its authority as a key element in experience is undermined. This principle is signified in a prayer composed by Hari Prasad Shastri:

I hush into serenity my desires
I suppress my thoughts
These are the waves on the sea of my consciousness
That hide the Truth.

But this is just one side of the spiritual practice of Yoga designed to awaken us to our true nature as the infinite Self, the perfect inner unity behind all appearances. The complementary method is to make use of this word 'I' to transcend itself. To do this, we join the word 'I' to ideas that point to its fully revealed nature purged of all ignorance and confusion, such as:

OM. I AM ONE WITH THE INFINITE POWER OF LOVE.
I AM PEACE. I AM LIGHT. OM

There are no limited ego-associations in this thought, which is universal in its implications. This is the truth about our innermost being, in so far as it can be indicated in words. It is inner quietude that facilitates the transfer of our sense of 'I', our sense of identity, back to the Self-ground; thus we realize the wholeness of our true nature.

Our progress to self-knowledge has led us through some interesting landscapes or atmospheres. We saw that a little self-knowledge in daily

life, conveyed through instruction, humour or grim experience, was necessary in order for us to discover and put an end to our self-deceptions. We found that a crucial key to sanity and to our further development and progress was the cultivation of fellow-feeling or social interest. This tendency, fused with a spiritual purpose, brought about new openings in our understanding. At this stage on our advance we began to find the teachings about our divine Self especially meaningful. Then again, although our own personal significance seemed to lose out through our increase of fellow-feeling, this significance was restored to us in an infinitely enriched and transfigured form, when we realized that our true Self is divine and transcendent, and one with the true Self of each and everybody. This innate realization that ‘My Self is the Self of all’, brought us the highest fulfilment, and enabled us to reach the sublime goal—a goal that some great thinkers, not privileged by a living contact with a true spiritual tradition, thought was unreachable. Such is an indication of the progress in Self-knowledge made available to us by the enlightened sages.

The method for self-awakening is briefly denoted in these sentences from Dr Shastri’s commentary on verse 127 of the *Crest-Jewel of Wisdom* (Viveka Chudamani). They are worthy of deep reflection.

OM

I SAY , ‘MY BODY, MY MIND, MY LIFE, MY INTELLECT’.

WHEN I SUBTRACT THESE WHAT REMAINS IS ‘I’

AND THAT ‘I’ IS GOD.

OM

A.H.C.

MEDITATION PRACTICE

A recent session led by the Warden at Shanti Sadan

In meditation we turn our thoughts from the noise and pressures of the outer world to the source of life and consciousness within our own being. That source seems to be hidden, but through our ongoing efforts we learn how to create conditions of peace and harmony in our mind, and it is these conditions that will lead to the fulfilment of our highest human potentiality, the freedom of self-realization.

It is true that in life we may get help and courage from some wise saying that we hold on to as we meet the daily challenges. For example, there is the well-known advice: ‘Count your blessings and discount your woes.’ The idea is that we can, hopefully, cheer ourselves up and recover our sense of perspective if we remember the positive aspects of our situation—the freedoms, advantages and faculties we still enjoy—and if we do not allow our mind to indulge in ‘gloom and doom’.

But such advice as ‘count your blessings’ is easier to prescribe than to practise. For we are being urged to help ourselves by *thinking differently*. And this is not so easy, unless we have some way of practice that involves our mind—unless we have developed the power of choice in the world of our thoughts. In fact, as the owner of our mind, we do have this power to turn our thoughts and feelings in any direction we wish to. But if we are not aware of this inner power or have no practice in how to apply it consciously, we need to learn or relearn this skill. This is well worth doing, for our ability to stabilize and uplift our mind is the greatest skill we can develop in life.

As we try to meditate, we gain an understanding of the challenge posed by the mind, and how it yields to our guidance if we attend to it regularly and with love. In due time we discover that our mind has higher facets, and that the more peaceful our mind is made, the more revealing it becomes. What is revealed are powers, qualities and virtues relating to our innermost nature, which transcends the mind. This can be indicated by a story.

A man went to a spiritual teacher and the teacher asked: ‘What are you looking for?’ The man answered: ‘I am looking for enlightenment.’ The teacher replied: ‘You have your own treasure house. Why do you

search outside?’ The man asked: ‘But where is my treasure house?’ and the answer was: ‘What you are seeking is your treasure house.’

The story has many lessons about where and how to seek for lasting happiness. But one of its implications is that our very interest in this teaching about our deeper nature, our willingness to hear about it and enquire into it, indicates that this great realm within us—our treasure-house, the potentiality for enlightenment—is astir with life, and its vital, though hidden, influence, is the prompter of our interest. This is our inner bond with what is highest in us—the thirst that senses the presence of the ‘illimitable fountain’ close at hand—in our own heart.

This deeper reality is our ultimate identity—our true and only Self, and it is the one Self in all, just as in a circle, billions of radii have the same central point. The Self is the source of all wisdom, bliss and peace. The great gift of the higher meditation is that it helps our mind to uncover this innermost aspect of our nature. In so doing, our mind will reflect more and more of the light and delight that emanates from our true Self. This becomes possible when the mind endeavours to still itself and, through inward focusing, withdraw into this depth of our own being.

Let us now turn to our practices.

Preparation

We approach the meditation in a spirit of calm introversion, leaving behind thoughts of our business in the world. In peace we feel we are approaching a deeper Reality and we mentally bow to this divine power with our mind open to its guidance.

Breathing Practice

Breathe in, imagining that you are drawing the breath up from the navel to the spot between the eyebrows. As you breathe in, fill the mind with the thought, ‘I am. I am’. If possible let the out-breath be the same length as the in-breath. (Do this for four minutes, or 21 breath cycles)

The affirmation ‘I am’ is a key to the depth and fullness of our being. When our mind is active, our ‘I am’ appears to possess qualities, and our thoughts tend to be variations of ‘I do’, ‘I know’, ‘I think’, ‘I have’, ‘I said’, and so on. These pathways of thought seem to claim and colour the ‘I am’. They are transient, limited, and often tinged with anxiety. But the ‘I am’ in itself is free from transience, tension and limitation. Always: I am. We can think of ourselves without ‘I have’. What I have may grow or diminish, or be taken or lost. But all the time, whatever I have or lack, ‘I am’. We can think of ourselves without ‘I do’. Every ‘I do’ has to be followed by rest, when ‘I do not’ do anything. ‘I am’ accompanies ‘I do’ and it also accompanies our rest from doing.

In our breathing practice, we give our attention to being, not doing or having. Our ‘I am’ has no wish or fear. It is complete, ever at peace, one in all, infinite.

We enter this practice aware that we have a key to the deeper truth that underlies the mind—the truth of Being. If other thoughts appear in our mind, we say ‘no’ to these diversions—everything can wait during this short period of practice.

Visualization

Draw an imaginary line of light, from the top of the forehead, down between the eyebrows, down the nose, lips, throat, heart-region, to the navel. Imagine this line to be a line of light and concentrate on it. In the beginning you can draw your finger down this line if it helps you to visualize it. Then sit and just think of this line of light. (Six minutes)

This practice, like the breathing practice, helps us to draw our attention away from the uncontrolled mental activity and to centre inwardly with the help of an image—the line of light. This line of light symbolizes the power, radiance and centralness of our ‘I am’. We visualize it extending from the top of the forehead to the navel. Imagine this line of light within you, a lit interior pathway, a refuge free of thoughts, danger and disturbance, ever established in the peace of pure being. We focus on light within, centred in this consciousness, safe in its purity, inwardness

and perfection. The concentration deepens the more we fill ourselves with the thought of this line of light, its purity and perfection within us. Rest in this line of light, dismissing all other thoughts.

Meditation on a Text

OM
I WITHDRAW MY CONSCIOUSNESS
FROM THE SENSES AND THE MIND,
AND REST IN THE PEACE AND BLISS
OF MY TRUE NATURE
OM

The first part of the text refers to two levels of withdrawal. First we withdraw from the senses, signified by our sitting still, free from stimuli, focused within. But what does it mean 'to withdraw from the mind'?

The challenge, recognized by all who meditate, is that when we turn within, our mind still sometimes loses itself in thoughts which have nothing to do with the meditation. What do we do when this happens? As soon as we notice that our attention has wandered, calmly take a deep breath and bring your attention back to the words of the text and refocus. The idea is:

If my mind drifts into dream
I bring it back to my central theme.

We all have the power to do this, because we have a higher faculty which has authority over the wandering mind, and in meditation we take our stand on this higher faculty, which relates to our Reality, our ultimate Self. Through this focusing of our inner energy, we create, so to say, a channel through which our consciousness is reconnected with the peace and bliss of our true nature. Through the authority and confidence with which we affirm our meditation text, the light of the higher Self-knowledge is awakened in our being.

Devote eight minutes to this practice.

We mentioned earlier that we have the power to guide our mind, to become receptive and open to this inner revelation. But we have to attend to our practices regularly and with love. The power that will help and drive us on has its source in our deeper nature.

As well as our dedicated periods for meditation, the practices can be applied, with great advantage, for brief intervals during the course of our day. For example, the line of light, where we bring our attention to our deeper centre, can help us overcome stress, confusion, nervousness, and revive our innate inner strength.

Let us end our session with thoughts of peace and goodwill to all.

TEACHINGS OF SHRI DADA OF ALIGARH

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

The goal of self-realization is uphill, but when a certain progress has been made, the goal comes near. In fact the search and the goal lie in one's own Self.

Each step forward on the holy path means upliftment of the universal soul. As the force of every wave affects the whole ocean, so do the meditation and purity of one mind affect the whole universe. When one attains true bliss, or the infinite, one realizes the true Self. Then all actions are good and the good flows spontaneously. That is the law.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

The first lecture of the Spring term went to the heart of the non-dual philosophy, exploring the theme: *Realize What You Are*. This was followed by a talk on chapter five of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Practical ways of enriching and transforming the mind were suggested in the next talk on inner development. This was followed by a lecture on Islamic mysticism with special reference to the Koran. The recognition that all religions lead to the same goal inspired a presentation on *The Poetry of Zen*, while *Spring, New Life and the Inner Light* focused on our daily renewal through spiritual practice. The term ended with *The Way to Fulfilment*, based on the Mundaka Upanishad.

The Tuesday meditation sessions went more deeply into the practices described in the last article of this issue: the breathing practice with the affirmation 'I am'; the 'line of light' visualization; and the text: 'I withdraw my consciousness from the senses and the mind and rest in the peace and bliss of my true nature.'

At the afternoon course held on March 13, the first lecture, *Finding a Deeper Happiness*, reminded us that happiness is to be found within our own being, and this was supported by the Vedanta doctrine known as 'the five sheaths' which seemingly enclose the Self, from the physical body to the sheath of bliss. The first meditation session also took up the theme of happiness as being dependent on the forgetfulness of narrow egoity. The final talk, which led into a further meditation session, was on *Life's Achievable Goal*, emphasizing the positive and practical approach of the Vedanta teachings, based on the promise of ultimate fulfilment in this very life.

Summer 2016 Special Course

Sunday 22 May 2016 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NS

Talk 1 *How to be Inwardly Rich*

First Guided Meditation Practice

Talk 2 *The Liberating Truth*

Second Guided Meditation Practice