

SELF-KNOWLEDGE



A QUARTERLY JOURNAL
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 SPRING 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 4 February to 17 March there will be a series of talks on the Yoga teachings with spiritual practices.

Afternoon Course

The Autumn afternoon course will be held on Sunday 13 March 2016, 2pm - 5pm, at the Columbia Hotel, Lancaster Gate, London W2. Details are given on the inside back cover.

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LIGHT RELIEF

To be human is to be visited by worry and anxiety. Our body is perishable, our mind sensitive, and there are times when life is a struggle. If we were creatures of steel, there could be no understanding of the sufferings of others, no compassion, and social harmony would be impossible. In this sense it is fortunate that we know something of suffering and hardship. It has a bonding influence and makes us realize our kinship with those around us.

Saints and sages of all times have shared this aspect of human experience. Even those whom we may regard as incarnations of God—Avatars—were not immune to sorrow. Jesus wept in empathy with those who grieved over the death of Lazarus. Rama was distraught over the abduction his wife, Sita. In this way, they appear to behave like ordinary men, and people can draw close to these great beings and not feel they dwell in a world immune to everyday troubles.

Yet in the case of those with deeper knowledge, there is a difference in the way these aspects of experience are borne. The ordinary person feels identification with the body and the mind. ‘When my body and mind suffer, it is I who am suffering.’ The ‘I’ is felt to be part of the mind, and hence involved in the experience. For the knower of Truth, the ‘I’ itself is known to be higher than the mind and not tainted or touched by the experience. Nothing eclipses this subtle awareness, because it is based on the realization that the Self, the ‘I’, transcends the world.

In the Upanishads, one of the designations applied to the supreme being is Antaryamin, meaning the Inner Ruler. This refers to the ultimate principle which rules all—not from outside and above, but from within, as the Power at the centre of life. This same Power or Truth is at the centre of our own being as our real Self. Even if our mind is beset by preoccupations, the Inner Ruler ever abides at its core. ‘He who inhabits the mind... whom the mind does not know, whose ‘body’ the mind is, and who controls the mind from within—He is the Inner Ruler, your own immortal Self.’ (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 3:7:20)

How might we mitigate the influence of worldly cares and, and identify with that in us which is free and invulnerable? The answer is to make friends, so to say, with the true governor of our personality—the Inner Ruler, who in some traditions is called the Friend. The way of love is to take refuge in this great Reality, whom the Taaittiriya Upanishad describes as being ‘like a rest-house close by’. The way of knowledge is to learn to associate our ‘I’ with that spiritual ‘I’ which ever underlies our inner life and is the Consciousness that reveals it. Our texts for meditation are reminders of this true identity.

To recall this dimension of experience, lovingly and consciously, is a shield in times of trouble. We will be helped. If we can sustain the awareness of our essential security and independence even during the times that are pleasant and carefree, we are making the best use of our attention and life-energy. Such mindfulness leads to the realization that the Inner Ruler, the true ‘I’, is not simply a deeper aspect of our nature, or a special grace, but the reality underlying our own, and all, experience.

Our Spiritual Awakening

O my mind, wake up, wake up! For a long while you have not seen perfect happiness. Experience now this highest state of beatitude in front of you.

H.P.S.

Adhyatma Yoga focuses on the original Yoga teachings, which are spiritual in their methods and purpose. The aim is to awaken our highest potentiality and find fulfilment through self-knowledge. Let us try to understand this process of awakening in its first stages, and what steps we might take in order to further the process.

The image of an awakening is used in the spiritual classics in different ways. Sometimes it reaches us like a trumpet blast to rouse us from our present world view—a world view which may have become a limited one, especially as regards our own possibilities and potentialities in life. With their trumpet call, ‘Awake’, the sages are reminding us that there is a realm of inner freedom that we are missing out on—something vital and fulfilling that we can learn to realize.

The short verse at the beginning goes straight to the point by encouraging us to give a firm command to our own mind. ‘O my mind, wake up, wake up!’ This already implies that the mind is the instrument and servant of the superior power which lies behind it—the power of the true Self.

Right now we may be seeking for happiness in the wrong quarters, and not finding it. If we ask ourselves what we really want, surely it is a happiness that is secure, lasting, free from limitations, threats and defects. The verse suggests such a happiness is possible. ‘For a long while you have not seen perfect happiness. Experience now this highest state of beatitude in front of you’, that is, close at hand. But to realize this beatitude, certain steps are necessary. The same message was given thousands of years ago in the Katha Upanishad:

Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a razor’s edge, which, when sharpened, is difficult to tread on.

This verse refers to the inner awakening. It has many implications. First, it is a call for us to do something—a call for action. It confirms that a higher

knowledge or beatitude does exist, and is enjoyed, and even taught, by those whom the verse calls ‘the excellent ones’, namely, the men and women of higher wisdom. To acquire such wisdom, there has to be a personal approach, rather than simply depending on information from books. As another tradition, Sufism, affirms: there is a window between heart and heart. In other words, help is available for the seeker from those hearts that are already lit by the higher experience.

The path is not presented as an easy one. It is compared to a walk on the edge of a razor. The image of the razor’s edge suggests a fine line along which we somehow have to advance against difficult odds. The hint of physical hardship is not to be taken literally. All illumined teachers are full of compassion, and none would wish to impose any physical ordeal on anyone. But the image of the razor’s edge does suggest a special kind of challenge. This includes learning how to make the right choices in daily life, so that we are able to keep in mind our higher purpose and follow it. This is easy to forget, because the nature of modern civilization goes against the quiet cultivation of the higher wisdom. Are we not surrounded by so many distractions and diversions, claiming our time and attention, and seeking to convince us that immediate sense pleasure is more worthwhile than inner tranquillity and philosophical reflection?

Then too we have to admit we ourselves are conditioned by our past habits and tendencies, and our present life-style. Therefore, the Bible, on this point, says: ‘Narrow is the way which leads to (everlasting) life, and few there be that find it.’ (Matthew, 7:14) One reason for our difficulties is that the fruit of Yoga practice—inner peace and light—is something of the utmost refinement and is subject to careful cultivation. Its nature and delight are unimaginable when we first set out on our journey. On the other hand, around and within us there are voices whispering: ‘Why are you interesting yourself in this unusual ideal? There are so many things you could be devoting yourself to, which are attractive, tangible and more obviously rewarding. The garden of life is full of charming colours and delightful scents. Why devote yourself to the cultivation of a single herb?’

Unless our determination is firm, these voices and invitations can easily turn our heads. They seem to be convincing and reasonable, and their clamour

is likely to eclipse our more sensitive feelings about pursuing the path.

The verse from the Katha Upanishad says: 'Arise, awake'. At first sight, it looks as if the author of the Upanishad has got things the wrong way round. Can you rise up without first being awake? And yet we all know what it is to be up and doing things, but still to feel half asleep. Do we not sometimes say, even in the middle of the morning: 'O dear, this morning I still haven't really woken up.' Yet the fact that we have risen out of bed—that we have forced ourselves back into the hurly-burly of life—means that we will fully awaken as the day goes on, though it may take time before our brain gets into full working order. The crucial step has been taken: we have arisen. We resisted staying in bed and surrendering to a comfortable, but uncreative, sleep.

To arise means to become an active seeker, enquirer and learner. It means to throw off our natural inertia and love of comfort, and start to look for something which may lead to new psychological openings, to the possibility of an entirely new way of thinking and feeling. And many people at this restless stage do in fact try to make contact with the storehouse of enlightened thought, as transmitted by the illumined masters and their recorded words. Then we may be willing and able to open ourselves to its influence.

This arising is summed up in the words: 'Learn, by approaching the excellent ones.' Only by rousing ourselves in this way, will we be able to recognize and seize the opportunities for advancement and awakening which come our way.

When do the first stirrings of our true awakening come? Usually there are two phases: dissatisfaction with life, and then, a feeling that there must be something more to life. We start to feel that there must exist a higher purpose, which, if followed, will confer greater benefit and fulfilment than anything the world displays before us.

We may say: 'Most people are dissatisfied with life in some way or other—dissatisfaction to do with our work, or our family life, our finances, politics, and so on.' These dissatisfactions are voiced in our conversation and will probably be echoed in some way or other by our listener. But it would be misleading to regard dissatisfaction on this level as a sign of spiritual awakening. Why? Because on this level, the solution is still felt to be achievable within the world of multiplicity, which, we believe, contains what we are looking for, and its

values are still supported and trusted by us.

Spiritual awakening is preceded by a deeper, more persistent dissatisfaction. Human nature has hidden depths and finer feelings. These cannot always be expressed in words, but there is a phrase which may give a hint of the dissatisfaction with life associated with the spiritual awakening: 'divine discontent'. This implies that the whole range of worldly goods and achievements cannot satisfy my deeper needs. Whatever I do, wherever I go, something seems to be missing. This feeling may come as a sense of restriction. We crave expansion and freedom, yet all our experiments in life fail to remove the inner discontent. A poetess of Japan has expressed this sense of restriction in a haiku:

I do not consider myself worth counting
But sometimes—even for me—
Heaven and earth are too small.

Here the poetess claims to be just an ordinary person, as she says, not worth counting. Yet somehow, within her heart, there is an extraordinary desire which seems to aim at nothing less than transcendence—a going beyond both heaven and earth—that is, a going beyond both the everyday world and the world of religious merit.

This thirst for a life experience which is ever richer, deeper and more expansive, is one of the themes of the writings of the German author, Goethe. In one of his works, *Wilhelm Meister*, he includes a short biographical sketch of a woman known and revered by him, in a chapter called *Confessions of a Fair Saint*. Like most rich young women of that time, she was expected to spend her days in trivial, pleasurable pursuits like social gossip, dancing, outings, picnics, flirtations, and so on. These were available in abundance, and seemed to provide everyone with a great deal of fun.

But after flowing with this stream for some time, mysterious changes began to take place within her, which seemed to be connected with something she had experienced now and then in childhood, but which was later lost as other preoccupations took over. Somehow, there began to emerge within her a stirring of the soul, which led to a more persistent dissatisfaction with the life she was leading. This life-style began to seem not only hollow and uncreative,

but in some sense to thwart her deeper longings. She records:

I very soon discovered that the straight direction of my soul was marred by foolish dissipations and by my employment with unworthy things... I required some strong support, but God would not vouchsafe it me, while I was running with the cap and bells.

As we know, the cap and bells were part of the costume of the court jester or fool, whose job was to entertain. In the simple image of the Persian mystic, Saadi, she was beginning to realize that she could not sail in two boats that were going in opposite directions at the same time. Sooner or later, a choice of life aim would have to be made. And so we find this woman asking herself:

What could it be which so changed my tastes and feelings, that, in my twenty-second year, nay earlier, I lost all relish for the recreations with which people of that age are harmlessly delighted? Why were they not harmless for me? I may answer, Just because they were not harmless; because I was not, like others of my years, unacquainted with my soul. No! I knew, from experiences which had reached me unsought, that there are loftier emotions, which afford us a contentment such as it is vain to seek in the amusements of the world; and that, in these higher joys, there is also kept a secret treasure for strengthening the spirit in misfortune.

One may suspect that this kind of inner upheaval is not unusual, but that it is not always easy for people to realize what is happening to them. Nor do they necessarily realize that this development is in fact the brightest window of opportunity that will ever confront them in life.

At this point we may say: 'O well, the rise of such sentiments is simply an emotional response. It may give a stimulus to look for something higher, but it is a stimulus that will soon pass. Common sense is bound to return, and these aspirations will once again be lost in the normal routines of life.'

But this quest, that leads to the spiritual awakening, goes far deeper than emotion. Many serious enquirers have weighed up life and its gifts; they have examined carefully what is on offer here and have decided, quite rationally, that it is not enough to satisfy the deeper urges of the soul. The philosophy of the

Upanishads, on which this Yoga is based, is not one of escape but of outgrowth. The Upanishads are not giving teachings to meet an emotional crisis. They are there to help anyone who has seen clearly the transiency of worldly goals. As one Upanishad says, it is only after thoroughly examining what the world can offer, that one arrives at an attitude of detachment and goes to a teacher for higher instruction.

Where there is this willingness to consider new possibilities, the teachings of the great spiritual traditions become meaningful. Such teachings were evolved to meet this awakening situation and give us precise instructions and guidelines on how to further and complete the process. As we heard from the Katha Upanishad: 'Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones.' This divine discontent—the sign of awakening—can be seen as a cry for the infinite beyond limitations.

Some would say, 'There is no infinite. Even if there were such a principle, it would have no point of contact with our finite human life.' But the truth is otherwise. The dissatisfaction we feel is not futile. It has a deep significance. It is as if we have lost touch with something essential in our own being. We do have a sense of infinity and freedom, even of perfection. We feel it must exist somewhere. It does. It is within us. Our true nature is the infinite and changeless Reality. Any other idea of self-hood will in the end have to be corrected and replaced by our realization of the infinite Self as not other than our own Self. This is the way to ultimate freedom.

The Upanishads make it clear that in this deeper self-knowledge lies the secret of happiness. The Chandogya Upanishad warns us that there is no real happiness to be found in the realm of the finite—the realm of things and experiences which have a beginning, middle and end, and are changing all the time. We need to learn how to enter the quiet depths of our own being, where our self-knowledge is likened to the discovery of a treasury of gold buried in our garden, overlooked because no one told us about it. Turning our attention in the direction of this inner treasury, we approach the source of happiness, the happiness of realization of the infinite. This message is one of great hope and reassurance—a promise of joy, peace and freedom near at hand.

Do the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita teach a new religion? They go

deeper and beyond any religious creed, revealing truth which applies to each and everyone, and to the whole cosmos. They declare that there is one supreme power running through and supporting everything, just as the unseen thread is the hidden support of the necklace of pearls. In the deepest sense, all life is sacred, and there is a genuine underlying unity linking together everything. This being so, the teaching about the supreme reality prescribes an attitude of harmlessness and co-operation, in order to prepare our mind for a higher understanding.

The absolute Reality in which all phenomena inhere equally is called Brahman. And knowledge of Brahman, brahmavidya in Sanskrit, is not only possible but necessary for human beings, if we are to enjoy true liberation. A verse from the Shvetashvatara Upanishad declares:

I have known that great effulgent essence, which is like the sun after darkness, knowing which one goes beyond death. There is no other way to liberation.

This realization is the highest joy, the most fulfilling knowledge and certainty of experience.

How do we advance this process of awakening? First, we need a special kind of faith—a faith that works in partnership with our intellect, and leads to direct experience. Questions and probing are at the heart of all true spiritual traditions. Such faith is grounded in the conviction: ‘Yes, this teaching makes sense and applies to me personally.’ It is not so much faith in a doctrine but in a hidden presence. It embraces faith that we have a deeper Self and the capacity to realize it directly. Such faith also includes trust in the divine Power, as a source of help and as the underlying reality, in essence identical with our real Self. If we are fortunate enough to have an enlightened teacher, a trusting attitude to their guidance will help us most of all.

At this stage, we need to appreciate that we have now entered a learning curve and have become conscious learners. From this position, we regard all that happens to us, including disappointments and seeming calamities, as in some way driving us on to our goal. They have something to teach us, which will come to light if we sustain our research and meditation. This is not superstition or belief in a personal guardian angel. This help is rooted in the

teachings on true identification. True identification means making practical use of the insight: ‘I am not the body. I am not the mind. I am the immortal spirit, and this is my true Self. Everything that happens is driving me to realize this truth.’

The English poet Coleridge gave an indication of the way all our experiences can be made to drive us nearer to our goal, when he wrote:

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of love,
And feed his sacred flame.

Faith in our spiritual potentiality also means faith in our capacity to infuse the teachings with life, for if we follow the traditional instructions, we will gain light. Recalling the metaphor of awakening, we need to be warned that human nature loves to go back to sleep. There is a conservative part of our nature which is against change. Change involves a movement from a position we are used to. It is a step into the unknown, and possibly into a field of unwelcome effort. Our caution and reluctance are understandable, and have their protective wisdom. But the downside of this self-protective attitude is that our highest potentialities remain unrealized. The awakening involves an inner revelation of a higher truth, in which the barriers of finitude fall away.

Our mind is the garden beneath which the treasury of gold is buried. The Sanskrit word for mind is antahkarana, which means ‘inner organ’. For practical purposes, this inner organ is held to embrace the whole of the mental and emotional life—its surface as well as its depths—and includes the higher faculties of will, intellect and intuition. It is this part of our being that is the focus of the Yoga training and the key to our freedom.

It is normal to believe that our mind is basically in good order, and that we have already reached a grade of competence and maturity in our thinking. And so, all we have to do in order to benefit from spiritual teachings, is to get to know them well enough. This may involve an ongoing course of reading, but it seems to be a valid approach.

Yet experience shows that the collection and absorption of spiritual information is not enough to melt the inner chains. Up to now we have been

relying on qualities already familiar to us. To make further progress, we need to learn to draw upon new resources and powers that are lying dormant within us, and which relate to our higher nature.

Each meditation text in the traditional Yoga of Self-Knowledge gives an indication of these new capacities. The meditations have power because they relate to the eternal, omnipotent reality of our true being—the source of peace and wisdom.

As we develop, so does our awareness that the true Self is independent of the workings of our mind. This detached awareness ensures that our outlook stays balanced. For example, we often find that when we try to quieten our mind, it presents itself as a centre of resistance. This resistance manifests as distraction, sleepiness, agitation, boredom, and so on—anything that serves to divert our attention from the theme prescribed for our contemplation. This is all part of the learning curve we are now on. It is essential to the process of getting to know our mind and appreciating that our ‘I’ is the independent ‘witness’ of the stream of thoughts. We also strengthen our will power, by persevering with our practices regardless of the inner suggestions.

We cannot hope to escape from a prison unless we know something of its layout. And we should never feel that this increasing familiarity with our own mental activity is a minus: it is the first insight we need in order to proceed on our journey to freedom. Besides, the mind—that is, our thoughts—are never as uncontrollable as we may first imagine. As in any other sphere of cultural development, through practice things will change, and without practice they will not change. Hence the importance of practice.

The meditation texts of Yoga reflect the beauty and profundity of the supreme truth, and lead our mind from its present atmosphere of unrest, to the peace of the true Self. One such text is:

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

The transformative power of such a text is much stronger than the weak force of casual thoughts and even of our transient emotions. Our true nature is the unchanging transcendent principle indicated in this sentence. Thoughts and emotions are things that pass, and usually pass quickly.

A complementary practice is, inwardly, to stand back, view our mental movements as an uninvolved observer, and when a thought holds our attention, to break the spell by affirming: 'OM. You are an illusion. I do not want you. I will not follow you. OM.' In this way allow the stream of thoughts to pass on, as it will if we stay calm and detached.

So we have a choice in the inner realm of our thoughts and feelings. We can either surrender ourselves to the stream of uncontrolled mental activity as if we are identified with it, or we can learn how to sit back and rest in our deeper Self, or, alternatively, intervene and turn the inner currents in a helpful direction.

In order to prove to ourselves the awakening power of Yoga, something more is needed. This is our constant exposure to teachings that come from an authorised source: either the authentic words of the illumined sages in the classics, or a centre where the traditional teachings are given impersonally and in a spirit of universality.

The material we listen to affects us more deeply than the inputs coming from our other senses. If possible, let us listen to words that appeal to our higher nature—our eternal Self—and which turn our attention inwards to the mind's source. This process of hearing, followed by reflecting on the teachings, gives us a clearer idea of the path and its goal: liberation through Self-realization.

The philosophy behind Yoga, Advaita Vedanta, reveals to us that we do not need to add anything to our nature in order to know ultimate Truth. At the deepest level of our being, we are already enlightened. But our wrong affirmations, our negative thoughts, our trust and reliance on the world for joy and fulfilment, make us forget the ever-enlightened nature of our innermost Self. Let us adopt a deeper understanding of ourselves, accompanied by an affirmative frame of mind, so that we will be well equipped to face the challenge of the inner transformation, and well prepared for its final revelation.

Our spiritual awakening is an awakening to what we really are here and

now, once the preparations, involving faith, practice and enquiry, have been seriously and adequately undertaken. Every human life is infinitely worth while because each life is rooted in the Godhead. The practice of spiritual enquiry will help us detect the everlasting presence of this ground of Being, and realize it as the true Self, transcending individuality and personality.

In one of his songs, Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, points to the extreme nearness of our goal, and also to the need for practice.

Yoga is not the shaven head.

Yoga is not wandering from place to place.

Yoga is not the ability to look at the tip of one's nose.

The Lord dwells in the collyrium on your eyes.

You reach the goal by practice and not by talk.

He is called a Yogi who sees the One in all.

Such a sentiment has power to remove the coverings of ignorance and to dissolve the obstacles to our awakening to the supreme Truth.

B.D.

RELAXATION

The wind may howl on the moors;

The rain may quench the thirst of the parched soil;

The larks will sing to arouse the love of nature;

The dew-drops glisten on the grass and take their departure.

What shall I do?

Shall I run after the glow-worms or sing to the ladybird?

I will sit under a tree, watch the movements of nature

And sip the wine of the cool wind.

H.P.S.

The Eternal Wisdom

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

Shri Yajnavalkya was about to retire for the night after his evening meal, and was sitting on a blanket slowly removing his flowing robe, when Katyayani softly entered his apartment with some almonds mixed with cream, for she thought that they were good for the brain of the holy man.

Bowing low, she said: 'Have you any further orders for me, beloved one?' The sage asked her to sit beside him and said: 'Does anything worry you, my darling? Sometimes you look sad. Tell me if I am remiss in doing my duty of extreme love to you. In this transient world I live to teach the holy Truth and to make you and your sister Maitreyi reasonably comfortable.' Katyayani replied: 'Nothing worries me, only tell me what I should do.'

Shri Yajnavalkya was silent for a while. Then he said: 'Tapas (austerity), a life in the exalted consciousness of Brahman, study of the holy scriptures and service of the Lord (Narayana) as reflected in His creatures—that is all that you have to do. I have known you for nearly forty years, my dearest Katyayani, and I well remember the day your saintly father brought you to me and I accepted you. You have never failed in your duty, nor once given precedence to your own needs and comforts. You have never slept until I had retired to rest. To my brahmacharis, my cows and calves, you have been the milk of kindness.

'Yet know, my darling, that life needs something which is much more important than any of these. As a tree, unless carefully watered and protected from adverse weather and wind, begins to dry up, so our innermost vitality begins to fade unless we add to it the fuel of the holy Truth, by means of concentration on virtue, and meditation on "What am I?"

'My darling, King Janaka and other kings of this sacred land have asked me to prepare for them a smriti, a code of all household, civic, political and religious duties. Having thought the matter over, I have now compiled such a smriti for them. It has been a laborious task, especially the institutes for the

division of property after one's death. The spiritual duties in this work have required all my care. Today, O Katyayani, through your kindly ministrations, I have completed the smriti. It will go down to posterity as a complete code of life, embracing every department of it.'

He opened a bundle and showed her a pile of bark leaves on which the book was inscribed in verse, and said to her: 'First I place it in your dear hands, my darling Katyayani, because without your proper care I could not have accomplished it. Send it to King Janaka tomorrow with two of the brahmacharis.'

'What will it be called, blessed one?' asked Katyayani.

'There is already the Manu-Smriti, but it needs to be revised. Even if I refuse permission, I know they will call it the Yajnavalkya-Smriti.'

Touching it reverently with her forehead, Katyayani carried the manuscript to her own room. The holy sage stretched his limbs on a mat, and contemplated the all-embracing Truth. Then he slept.

* * *

All his disciples, his two wives, and others who knew him as the sun of wisdom, the high Himalaya of spiritual experience, he who, by ever moving his mind and senses in the right direction, was never seen to be disturbed, were now under a cloud. There is no sorrow for the sage, because sorrow leaves him who has realized his identity with the all-embracing substratum. Still, though in his consciousness he was the same king of kings, there was in the behaviour and manner of Shri Yajnavalkya a certain change and lack of interest in external affairs. Manuscripts which had arrived from remote hermitages for his revision lay unnoticed.

It was the day of the new moon, and winter snow was spread over the green valley. The disciples had been given a holiday and were waiting for their beloved Guru to emerge. Nothing delighted them so much as a look from that greatest of men, who, they knew, had lifted his consciousness to the very highest. At length the aged figure appeared, supporting himself on a long bamboo staff and holding his coconut vessel. Looking round, he began to scatter handfuls of rice on the snow to feed the birds, since their means of nourishment were

slender during the long spells of cold and snow.

Gargi had arrived the previous evening. When she saw the holy teacher she bowed low, saying: 'Om Namo Narayanaya Bhagavan.' The rishi looked at her and gave his blessings, slowly uttering: 'O Gargi! May this world create many more like you in the future.' She approached him and asked: 'Have you any orders for me, O holy sage? Every moment in your company is like a bathe in the ocean of the highest bliss. My desires are dead; the sun of illumination is shining over me. I long, O holy Yajnavalkya, to be with you, just as the River Yamuna, descending from the distant hills, longs to be united with the holy Ganges.'

The sage invited her to sit beside him on a rock, the base of which was covered with snow, and Gargi seated herself at a slightly lower level than the rishi. He said:

'O Gargi! You have expressed a desire to do something for me. Proclaim to the world, to the people in the markets, in the lowly huts, in the stately mansions, to children playing in the fields and to the aged musing around their fires—tell them, O Gargi, that the highest bliss, the only bliss that is real, is born of the realization of the innate nature of one's true Self, that is, existence, consciousness and bliss (sat-chit-ananda).

'Perfect limbs, wealth or sovereignty over others are often considered to be the highest bliss of man. But the bliss of the ancestors (pitris), who have conquered themselves, is far greater. Yet their bliss too is surpassed by that of the Gandharvas (celestial musicians). Higher still is the bliss of the gods (devas), who abide in the divine region of Prajapati, who know the Vedas and are free from sins and desires. But the bliss of a knower of Brahman is immeasurably superior to that enjoyed by all these beings. That is the supreme bliss. Food, drink, houses, friendship, education, society, love of nature, benevolence and compassion are nothing but the means to the bliss of Self-realization.

'O Gargi, there are three most beautiful words in my vocabulary: withdrawal, resignation and compassion. I have great compassion for those men who, in the darkness of ignorance (avidya), try to find bliss in the sense objects or in love

of power. They are like the mariners who try to quench their thirst by resorting to salt water. O Gargi, the world would be spared thousands of tribulations, wars, pestilences, rivalries and other afflictions, if this message is accepted and men direct their search for bliss to the inner channels which are behind the intellect. Tell them to identify themselves with virtue, and if they want a visible support for their affections and emotions, tell them to identify themselves with the shining ones (devas), or better still, with their spiritual Guru.

‘O Gargi, if you have the means and the power, let everybody know this. Some try to bequeath land, grain, cows and gold; but I ask you to bequeath the holy knowledge. My darling, I have finished my smriti in which you will find a code of life for all men. O Gargi, circulate it if you can.’

The maharishi then closed his eyes and the silence was only broken by his softly uttered: ‘Om, Om, Om.’ It was like water trickling with sweet cadences from a waterfall high in the Himalayas. Gargi stood with folded hands.

* * *

The glory of Shri Yajnavalkya was greater than the glory of the heavens. He had acquired in his own being that mystic enlightenment which made him master and sovereign of the three worlds. The laws of nature were to him like his tame dogs. The genesis, maintenance and reabsorption of the world took place in the august consciousness of the great rishi, to his full knowledge. Indeed, all the powers of heaven and earth belonged to this knower of Brahman. The Upanishad has declared: ‘Verily, he who knows Brahman becomes Brahman.’ He had overcome all desires. He had no ambition. All the aspirations of humanity found perfect consummation in this great saint.

On one occasion, Shri Yajnavalkya summed up his spiritual experience. He had been approached by Ushasta, the son of Chakra, who asked: ‘O Yajnavalkya, explain to me that Brahman, which is ever present, the witness, that Self which is within every being as its essence.’ He replied: ‘It is your Self which is within every being. That which breathes by the breath is your Self and That is within every being.’

Ushasta then said: ‘You have indicated it as one may say, “This is a cow” or

“This is a horse”. But please explain to me that Brahman which is ever present, the witness, that Self which is within every being.’ Again Shri Yajnavalkya answered him: ‘It is your Self which is within every being. You cannot see the seer of seeing; you cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot understand the understander of understanding; you cannot know the knower of knowing. This is your Self which is within every being. Everything different from it is transient.’

Ushasta became silent. By hearing these words of revelation his consciousness was raised to the highest degree. All that now remained for Ushasta to do was to meditate.

* * *

Shri Yajnavalkya had only one celestial feeling left; this was his compassion for every living being. It prompted him to teach the holy Truth, and to lift the individualized souls (jivas) from the quagmire of ‘I’ and ‘mine’.

One day the holy saint was walking in front of his cow pens, enjoying the sight of his cows and favourite calves. The calves had come to the gate of their enclosure and were struggling to jump out to lick the hand of their holy master, who loved them as his own children. A few white cows were grazing nearby and Shri Yajnavalkya looked at them with great love, as if wishing that their present incarnation would be their last as animals. The blessings of a saint of God are like the arrows of Shri Rama: they never fail to reach the target.

The hillman, who used to wash down the cows and comb the coats of the calves, saw the revered maharishi. He came near and offered salutations, saying: ‘O holy father, you are pensive. Should a jnani, a knower of Truth, be melancholy? I doubt, venerable master, whether there can be any cause to make you sad. You used to be as cheerful as a day in spring but now your manner is grave and your back is bent. How is this?’

Shri Yajnavalkya took the hand of the hillman affectionately. Asking him to sit beside him, he said: ‘O friend, know well that he who is cheerful is bound to be sad one day. The nature of the Self (Atman) is neither cheerfulness nor melancholy. It is said to be bliss. But make no mistake, my friend, this bliss is

not expressed in laughter or in joyful music. It is easy for the crown prince of a country to be joyful. Sometimes the demented are seen to be singing and laughing. People under the influence of drink sometimes grow entertaining and amusing. Children playing in the fields, chasing butterflies on a summer afternoon, are cheerful. But all these cannot be called blissful. The blissfulness which is the nature of Atman consists of the consciousness of infinity, and awareness of the non-existence of the law of cause and effect.

‘You may have sometimes found my mind to be cheerful or pensive, but this is only a characteristic of the nescience part of my human personality (antahkarana). In spite of such moods, the jnani himself remains eternally blissful and at peace.

‘Suppose you experience a dream in which you find yourself among tigers and wolves. They are rushing towards you with a view to make a meal of you! A friend tells you, in the dream, that your experience of terror is only a dream experience. Immediately, your anxiety and fear disappear; but the tigers and wolves will continue to run. Know, my noble friend, that even after the attainment of divine knowledge (jnanam), the antahkarana of a jnani is sometimes sad and sometimes cheerful. If you put garlic in a vessel and then remove it, the smell of garlic will linger for some time, even though the garlic itself has been removed. Such is the antahkarana of a jnani. Since you cannot experience the feelings of a child who, running after a pigeon, laughs loudly, how can you experience the feelings of elation in the heart of a king who has defeated his enemy, ignorance (avidya)? You are free to think what you like, my friend, but the truth is that the experience of a jnani is his own.’

Shri Yajnavalkya looked affectionately into the eyes of the man, who fell at the feet of the holy saint and acknowledged his error of judgement.

To be continued

Bhagavad Gita—From Grief to Peace

In the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita the pupil is led from grief to a vision of transcendent peace through a swift traversal of the essential points in the teaching.

At the start of the discourse we find the pupil in a situation where he is expected to go into battle with people he once knew as family and friends. In despair he declares his intention to give up this world of strife and conflict and take up the life of a spiritual recluse.

This is relevant to us because often the world appears to be full of injustice and futile conflict, and the first stirrings of spiritual longings in us may take the form of a feeling that we should withdraw from all this. The difficulty is that to withdraw from the world is a course of action that will be likely to have unforeseen consequences and there is no guarantee that it will be free of difficult choices. Also this course turns the spiritual life into a negative reaction against aspects of the world; it means we are basically trying to get away from things we do not like, and are relying on our minds for guidance. The life of spiritual enquiry is in fact an entirely positive enterprise, in pursuit of a vision in which everything is seen in its true perspective, and a fulfilment which is independent of circumstances. In pursuit of this objective we have to learn to see past the preferences and reactions of our workaday mind and to be guided by an altogether higher light.

So, what counsel does the teacher in the Gita give at this point? He does not condone the idea of retreating from the world. Instead he first gives teachings on the highest truth, and then offers guidance on how to realize that vision. At first sight this truth would seem to be far beyond the immediate preoccupations of the pupil who is struggling to cope with the worldly situation in which he finds himself. But this statement of reality may perhaps awaken us to the idea that there is something more than this world, which is attainable, and puts all the ups and downs of the world into

a new perspective. What is that higher truth? The Gita says:

Never did I not exist, nor thou, nor these people, and none of us will ever cease to be. [2:12]

The meaning is that within all the apparently individualised beings, who come and go and suffer and enjoy, there is a deeper reality, a higher Self, which is eternal, blissful and free of all sufferings and limitations. Ultimately all grief is unfounded because the true Self in all is untouched by any form of change or suffering.

The question immediately arises 'Why is this truth hidden from us?' The reason given is that it is in the mind that divisions and conflicts arise.

It is the sense-contacts which cause heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and the rest. They come and go, they are impermanent. Endure them bravely. [2:14]

The world experienced through the senses and mind as full of diversity is not at all the same thing as Reality itself which is an absolute unity. This is a most significant point to which teachings return again and again. Here in the Bhagavad Gita it is simply stated that it is in the mind that the experiences arise of distinctions, of good and bad and the rest, and that the less we are affected by these experiences in the mind, the more ready we are to discover the immortal truth.

After just one verse on this practicality, the teaching returns to the higher Self. Apparently the teacher at this point is concentrating on trying to awaken a recognition that such a principle exists and is attainable. Only when it is recognized, however dimly, that there is a truth completely independent of everything that happens, only then will there be the will to pursue something unrelated to the apparent rewards of the world. And only then will there be a willingness to seek guidance from an authority higher than the reactions and preferences of the mind.

The teaching is that ultimately, only the highest truth exists, and everything else is appearance; that is, only Reality itself is entirely real,

and appearances in the mind are just that—appearances in the mind. This might sound like forbiddingly high teaching, and it would be ridiculous and inhuman to say such a thing to someone in severe pain or suffering a personal tragedy. But when we are in a position to reflect deeply, it is worthwhile contemplating this statement: only reality itself is really real, appearances in the mind are simply that—appearances in the mind. In the Gita it is put like this:

Of the unreal, no being there is. There is no non-being of the real. Of both these is the truth seen by the seers of the Essence. [2:16]

The teaching goes on that the reality in all is indestructible. Nothing can harm or diminish it. All objects and events are, as it were, transient forms arising in that infinite ocean of pure being. This is the reality which the Gita draws to our notice.

And now some attention is given to the particular problem that brought the pupil to a critical juncture in his life. The pupil was distressed by the feeling that he would be personally responsible for the death and suffering of those with whom he was to go into battle, whom he had previously known as friends and kinsmen. He imagined that the thought of having done this would thereafter deprive him of all peace and happiness. The teacher continues to respond from the highest perspective, apparently far above the pupil's current concern. But again, if we recognize the possibility of seeing things from that perspective, then the possibility arises of not only alleviating this concern, but resolving it completely. The teacher says:

The true Self is not born, it does not die; it is not killed, it does not kill. The Self is unborn, eternal, unchangeable. If one knows this, how and whom could one cause to die? [2:19-21]

This is high teaching and it must not be misunderstood. The Gita is not saying that we are not responsible for our actions. On the contrary, it has been made clear that all our actions have consequences, even actions like trying to withdraw from the world. But the Gita is addressing a deep

concern of the human mind. We feel that we will for ever be constricted by duties and obligations, and this means that deep down we hardly ever feel entirely carefree. The Gita reveals the possibility of discovering a condition of complete freedom from all duties, doings and consequences. This is true even when our duties and actions appear momentous. For reality, the ultimate Self of all, is not limited by time, space and causation. If we can rise to knowledge of this reality as our own Self, we too can feel that all that is to be done has been done, no duties remain unfulfilled. For a few more verses the teacher stays at this level, presenting a Reality unbounded by any force or constriction, trying, we imagine, to ignite a spark of recognition somewhere in the mind of the pupil.

Then the teaching comes to another level. Passing from the absolute and immutable truth, the teacher refers to an understanding of the higher Self as the mighty life-force that animates all creatures and then passes from worn-out bodies to new ones, while remaining unchanged in itself.

Even if you think of the Self as ever being born and ever dying, even then, you should not grieve. [2:26]

For a few verses the teaching says that even at this level of understanding there are no grounds for distress. And then the Gita comes to an entirely familiar level. The teacher points out to the pupil that if he turns away now, those friends and family he cares about will not think he is acting from compassion and noble motives. They will think he is weak and afraid. Will not the knowledge that people he respects view him with dishonour, also deprive him of the inner peace that he is seeking?

So far the Gita has taught that ultimately there is no cause for sorrow, and therefore we should not let it prompt us to leave our duties and the world. It has also taught why: the ultimate reason is that the higher Truth is our own inner Self and in That there is no death, no suffering. And there is a lesser reason, which is still significant, that to turn away from the situation in which life has placed us will also leave us feeling that something is not right and deprive us of inner peace.

How, then, is this liberating truth to be realized? The teacher explicitly says, so far I have taught you knowledge of the Reality in all, now I am going to teach you about the method, that is, the Yoga, by which this Reality may be discovered in yourself.

This phase of the teaching begins with some encouragement, and a caution. The encouragement is that in this Yoga no effort is ever lost or wasted.

There is no loss of effort here, there is no harm. Even a little of this devotion saves us from much fear. [40]

Sometimes we plant seeds but they do not grow; sometimes medicines have unfortunate side-effects. But any efforts we make in the spiritual Yoga will fructify and will not have unintended consequences. And the Gita says that even a little of this practice saves us from much anxiety, because it keeps our minds firmly turned in the right direction.

This brings us to the caution, which is that we should beware of being distracted by lesser ideals. If we are distracted by lesser goals our thoughts and efforts will become diffused, preventing progress to the one real goal.

Here there is one, resolute, way of thinking. Many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the irresolute. [2:41]

The Gita specifically warns against teachings which appear to be spiritual of the surface, while in fact their objectives are worldly, like health and material prosperity. Such teachings are concerned with manipulating causes and effects in order to achieve a result in the world. If our main concern is with such results, we are still bound to the world of cause and effect, we have not yet firmly turned our sights on the ultimate Truth.

So, having given some encouragement, and a caution, the Gita tells us the right way to proceed at this point. Knowing that the true Self is beyond cause and effect, while in this world action is unavoidable, the true Yoga practice is, to act—to do what is required of us—but without concern for the results. This is the real way to be free of the constraints of action and

reaction, the way to attain inner peace, and ultimately to approach the supreme Truth.

Your concern is with action alone, not with the results. Do not let the fruit of action be your motive.

Firm in this Yoga, do your tasks, casting off attachment, being the same in success and failure. Evenness of mind is the way. [2:47-48]

Why act like this? What is the purpose of acting without concern for the outcome? This is a deep question at the heart of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. For now the answer is given briefly in its most direct form.

One who is wise casts off here both good and bad deeds. So apply yourself to this Yoga. In regard to action, Yoga is a power. [2:50]

The meaning is that when we act in this way, action loses its binding power over us. Normally one action leads to another in the endless process of cause and effect. The more we act in order to get the results of actions, the more we are bound to this process. But if we learn to act without attachment to the fruits, our actions become a liberating force. It does not mean that our bodies will cease to be part of the world process. It means that our inner vision will be purified and we will increasingly realize that we are not just the body, that our true identity is the Self of all, which abides beyond the level of cause and effect.

This then is the practice. In worldly matters we practise something in order to get better at it, to make progress in it. What does it mean to improve or deepen one's practice of this Yoga: what constitutes progress here? The answer to this is the main subject of the next few verses and, briefly, it is to make our knowledge steady.

So far we have gained some understanding of the teaching that beyond the level of appearances is the Absolute reality, our true Self, untouched by cause and effect. When we think about this carefully and are convinced intellectually of its validity, we see that it holds out the possibility of complete liberation. But quickly other thoughts fill the mind, innumerable

other concerns demand our attention, the idea of a transcendent Self is made to appear abstract and distant compared to the immediate demands and appeals of the world. So what has begun as an idea, fleetingly grasped in our most reflective moments, needs to be steadied so that it becomes the firm and constant basis of our outlook and reactions. When it does so, a new phase of this Yoga will begin; for now the question is how to effect this transformation of an idea we can sometimes bring to mind in quiet moments, into a resolute conviction that is more or less constantly at the back or front of our awareness, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. The Gita describes it like this:

One whose heart is not distressed in calamities, from whom all craving has gone, who is free of attachment, fear and anger, such is one of steady knowledge. [2:56]

It is this steadiness knowledge that is to be achieved through the practice of the true Yoga, doing our actions without concern for the fruit, responding to the need of the moment for its own sake. We do this knowing that the body and mind belong to the world process and have to play their parts within it, but at the same time, that our true Self abides in the region above time-space-causality, where there are no actions and no consequences.

To act as the Gita prescribes is to live that teaching, to affirm it, and it has the powerful effect of freeing us from bondage to the plane of action and establishing us in our true nature. The very moment we begin to act in this way a mountain of anxiety is lifted from the mind. This is how we become what the Gita calls one of steady knowledge, standing firm and steady in the Self.

And when we do, a new phase of the teachings begins. This is the subject of the next few verses. The focus now turns inwards and there are no more references in this chapter to action. The inner eye is fixed on the Self as one's own Self and the basis of all. Experiences of pleasure and pain do not fundamentally disturb that vision, nor do the desires. Satisfaction is

found in the Self, and there alone. The enquirer is approaching the higher meditation and contemplation, where the Self of the seeker is absorbed in the Self of the sought.

So now the question is, what is it that can disturb this steadiness of mind? The answer given is that it is the senses that can disturb us, and the essential practice at this stage is to restrain them. Here the word senses is being used widely to include those parts of the mind which receive what the senses tell us and present it to our awareness. The difficulty is that the senses present to us an experience of the world full of diversity and interest and which appears entirely real, as long as we are without the light of understanding about the real nature of the world given by the teachings and understood by the purified mind. And the main characteristic of the senses is that they are pointed outwards, away from the inner Self and towards the external world. This is what has to be constrained at this point on the path—not despised and killed but consciously constrained—the tendency of the senses to draw the attention outwards into the world of vivid diversity and thus lose the deeper vision of underlying unity in the Self. As the Gita puts it;

The dangerous senses, forcibly carry away the mind of a wise person, even while striving to control them. [60]

One might say that opposing forces are competing for attention here. On the one hand the senses are presenting the world, and through the senses comes the strong feeling that what we are experiencing is immediately and totally real. Perhaps there is a survival value in the strength of this feeling. At the same time a more reflective part of the mind, guided by spiritual teachings, has understood that the immediate reports of the mind are far from reliable. The world is not flat, space is not blue; the way things appear actually depends on how minds and brains work. The reality in things is their ultimate substratum, and that is our true Self, in which we wish now to be more consciously rooted.

We can and need to reason with ourselves in this way. No amount of

external compulsion can help us, and anyway it is our own inner strength of focus that needs to be developed. But we can only reason with the rational part of our minds; we cannot reason with the senses themselves; the senses just receive whatever they are turned towards. Even if we have understood the teachings and sincerely wish to pursue them, the senses and the sensory mind will forcibly pull our attention and interest away from the vision of unity and the inner Self and completely absorb us in the diversity and compulsions of the sense-world, if we allow the senses to dwell uncontrolled on sense-objects.

So does this mean we are to shut ourselves off from contact with the world and deny ourselves any form of pleasure? No, it does mean conscious and intelligent nurturing of the mind. The Gita says:

Restraining the senses, one should remain firm, intent on Me. Their knowledge is steady whose senses are under control. [2:61]

The word Me here is significant; it is not just the teacher but the supreme reality apparently embodied in the teacher who is speaking here as 'Me'. This can mean the reality in things in the abstract, the substance behind the appearances. And it also refers to Reality conceived in personal terms to which one can relate with all one's humanity and feelings. There is nothing irrational about this. It is entirely reasonable to conceive of the supreme reality as a mighty and benevolent force that is ultimately responsible for everything we are and have, and such feelings indicate that we have developed a certain sensitivity.

It is also reasonable to think that the highest potential of human beings is conscious realization of the higher Self, and that any efforts we make in that direction will find what feels to us like a response, because then we are in harmony with the underlying truth in all. In simple terms, if we open up and turn to the Self of the Universe, then That will reveal itself to us. This way of relating to the greater whole will give us the inner strength we need to restrain the outgoing senses and keep ourselves centred in our own being.

This is the means to true peace—not the temporary peace we get from satisfying a craving, which is quickly followed by renewed restlessness, but the enduring peace of seeing through the surface of things to the underlying substance, and being grounded at this level of our own being. This peace is not passive; it is in this peace that we can be really creative. Most important, this peace is the door to liberation. The last verses of this chapter are about this peace, which is another name for what was earlier called steady knowledge, the precursor to liberation. The hallmark of this deeper peace, the steadied vision of the Self in all and all in the Self, is that it is not fundamentally disturbed either by the apparently unfortunate aspects of the world, or the opposite.

In peace there is an end of all miseries, for the reason of the tranquil-minded soon becomes steady. [2:65]

This then is the teaching of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, which is the first chapter of teachings—chapter one is narrative and describes the battle scene. It begins with the pupil in distress and resolving to abandon the world. The instruction starts at the highest level with the truth that the real Self in all beings cannot suffer or die for the simple reason that the reality in all is beyond time, space and causation. If some recognition of this truth can be awakened in us, then the spiritual teachings will make sense; if not we shall ultimately still be trying to achieve lesser results in the world of time and space. The way to be free of the bonds of action is not to attempt to leave the world, which is just another action, but to act without the feeling that our true self is unaffected by the process of cause and effect. In practice this means to act according to the need of the moment, without attachment to the results. Living in this way, the idea of the higher Self, free of all limitation, can grow from just an idea, into the steady foundation of our outlook on life.

When this vision is established, the focus turns from action to our inner world. The challenge then is to prevent our attention being distracted by the sensory mind, which presents to us an experience of an apparently real

world full of attractions and repulsions. If we can sustain the inner gaze in the direction of the Self and deeper unity, we shall experience peace, true peace: not an interval between wants, but a positive sense of wholeness from which true inspiration and creativity springs. Most importantly, this peace is the maturing of the steady knowledge, in which the vision of the indwelling truth is more real than the surface appearances. In this steady knowledge, this stilled and purified gaze, the ultimate revelation may arise. As the Gita puts it, here one is awake to something to which others are asleep, and the sage is as one asleep to the bondage of duality. In this way the pupil passes from grief to a peace undisturbed by inner obstacles to realization of the Self as the Self of all.

That one attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which filled from all sides, remains unaltered. [2:70]

P.H.

The greatest proof of the truth of the teachings of the Gita is that you can demonstrate it to yourself by realizing it in your inner being. It gives a spiritual understanding, a new interpretation of life and a way to rise above the world of duality and the pairs of opposites, such as love and hate, joy and grief, heat and cold. An Upanishad says: ‘The Sages, their sins destroyed, their doubts removed, their selves controlled, intent upon the welfare of all beings, obtain the Brahman Nirvana—the highest spiritual state.’

From H P Shastri’s introduction to
Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita

A VISIT TO A FRIEND

I have brought a keepsake for you, O dearest one.
To come to a friend empty-handed is not our practice.
Here are a few gems from various fields
Dug from the deep, deep mine of experience and study;
A few wild flowers picked by the wayside of life's highway;
A few bright feathers dropped by flying birds
In the shady woods of the world;
A sweet and fragrant herb, green and fresh,
Washed by the dew—all, all contained in my wish:
'May you live to see God and help man
On the path of light and love.'

* * *

Everybody's longing is ultimately a quest for Truth. The child's search for pleasure in toys, the philosopher's quest for the un-changing reality both in external nature and internal mind, are finally a search for Truth. The miser's love for gold, the sports-man's pursuit of game, the botanist's hunt for new plants, the diver's leap into the caverns of the ocean—all are ultimately a search for the pearl of Truth, whose beauty, perceived through a serene and virtuous heart, is infinite.

* * *

Walk in the garden of the world
Without plucking a rose,
Without a quarrel with the thorns.
Pass on to Truth ultimate

H.P.S.

Actualization and Fulfilment

From a lecture by Hari Prasad Shastri

We are in this life in order to fulfil ourselves and to actualize our higher potentialities. There is peace hiding in the cave of our soul. There is delight which surpasses all delight, and that delight is serene, not excitement or the fulfilment of desire. We fulfil ourselves when we realize what is already potential in our own being.

Yoga is actualization in daily life of God within and without. God is in the heart of each and everybody. In the Bhagavad Gita, as in other scriptures, the teaching is: 'I abide in the hearts of all'. Oil abides in the seed but to extract it you have to press the seed; the seed must lose its identity. Such is the process of Yoga. It means actualization of God, who is potential in each and everybody, in daily life. It offers you nothing material, but promises that the light of God will be made manifest in your own soul.

The true Yoga and the meditation it offers is a way of life. Its spirit should influence our life throughout the day. It is a life to be pursued through action, thought, feeling and will all the day when you are awake; and when you go to sleep, fill your heart with the purest, holiest thoughts, so that even when you are asleep, those thoughts will be working in your subconscious, trying to create a revolution in your life.

The chief means of Yoga practice are will, memory and concentration. Will is a very great power in our life. If we know how to exercise our will, we can reform our life. We can create light, virtue, goodness within and without. Will is the motive power, the engine that supplies motion to the train of human personality. Let me give you an example of the practice of will in the yogic way. 'I am bliss and infinite. I manifest infinity and serenity.' You say this and you will it. Desires are fetters and are not recommended. Will is recommended. Will is applied by a master, desires are followed by a slave. By means of your will, you actualize the highest in you and in your surroundings, and change the general trend of humanity from error into truth. Will what is best. Will what is highest. Will what is most spiritual.

The second means of Yoga practice is memory. Memory has two phases: the life becomes subject to memory, or memory is subject to life. Life is subject

to memory when we allow our memories to fill our mind without guidance, selection or control, so that our precious mental energy is expended with no set purpose.

The real secret of memory—when memory is subject to life— is to awaken those memories which make life sweet, peaceful, harmonious and creative. What are these memories? I remember a verse of a Persian Sufi which influenced my heart for a long time:

This life is not life.

By life I mean the few moments I have passed

In service of men of God—those steeped in virtue and wisdom.

That is real life—not the life which is passed in pursuit of sensation or excitement, but life is devoted to the company of servants of God.

You will say: ‘Where can we find servants of God?’ Christ is within you. What did St Paul say? ‘It is not I, but Christ who speaks within me.’ We can find servants of God in the pages of the Bible, the Gita, the Upanishads, and in the pages of the Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching, which we have published for this purpose.

Then the third thing which is most important in Yoga, is concentration. You will say: ‘You have not mentioned love. Everywhere they say God is love.’ Do not be misled by these words. The object of love is that it becomes a means of concentration. Love in itself has very little value. Its value is as a force for concentration— and concentration is creative. Unless you love the highest, that is, truth eternal, God, serenity—your love is of very little value. Whether you create in practical life or not, if you concentrate on a holy sage, on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, on your mantram, on your spiritual study, you can create light within you.

Will, memory and concentration—the instruments of the Adhyatma Yoga—are to be practised all the time. In one of his verses the poet saint Surdas says: ‘Every step that I take is towards you. Every thought that I express in my words is your adoration.’ If life becomes like this, it is the life of Yoga. Such a life creates serenity within, light within and without.

To concentrate on one’s relatives and friends is useful, but there is a Sanskrit proverb: ‘All feet are included in the foot of the elephant.’ The foot of the elephant is so big that all the other feet one can think of are included in it.

If you love God and his prophets and sages, if you love the supreme wisdom, you love at the same time to your best capacity, all your friends and relatives. If you know how to manipulate electricity, you need not worship the little lamp; you can create a lamp anywhere. If you think of God, beyond whom there is nothing higher, you love the reality in all. In every object or person we love, in everything we seek, there is nothing but: 'I abide in the hearts of all. Nothing is excluded from Me.' Therefore devotion to this universal principle as our own Self is the chief part of the spiritual Yoga.

Emotions are to be under will. Concentration on the highest is creative. Memory of the ever-achieved is the real memory. Memory is not creative; it is reiteration of what lies buried in your mind in the form of the impressions of past experience. What is the use of memory? By means of the wise use of memory you discover the highest in you. Discovering the highest in you, you remember it all the time.

The most important things in daily life are serenity, equanimity and concentrative devotion. The first thing in life is serenity. 'Those people whose mind is established in equanimity, in serenity, their mind is established in God.' In the Bhagavad Gita the word 'equanimity' is used as an equivalent of God. You cannot be serene if you allow little desires of the world to overpower your mind. You buy a special cake to offer the guest who is going to visit you that day, but if you are negligent, the mice creep into your larder and begin to help themselves to the cake. Our worldly desires are like those mice which raid the cake of serenity and wisdom, and not only eat it but taint it with poison. What will you desire, when all perfection is at your command—when the kingdom of heaven is within you? 'Within' means it is your real self. The life of serenity contains all we need, for in it there arises the abundance of peace, will and wisdom.

Concentration has a great part to play in our life. Be careful what you concentrate your heart on. Each and every desire you concentrate your heart on will be fulfilled either today or tomorrow and may prove a source of suffering. Therefore, will shows mastery, desire shows slavery. If you want to be a master, utilise your will.

Yoga is realization of the ever-achieved. Yoga is not achievement of something new. It is not a grafting of something on your soul. It is not something you do not possess already. Anything which is achieved is subject to loss some

day or other, because it operates in the realm of relativity. Anything functioning in the realm of relativity is subject to achievement and also to loss. Aristotle has said that we live in the world to bring into actuality all the potentialities of the soul. Such potentialities are serenity, creative peace, all expanding light leading to the consciousness of immortality and infinitude of the soul. Immortality means consciousness of infinitude, and infinitude and immortality are spoken of in the Upanishads as synonymous.

If we want to live this Yoga, we have to practise it all the time. During my Himalayan pilgrimages, very often I had to climb on slopes of tremendous height subject to landslides. My porter said to me: 'Sir, take every step very carefully. Look before you place each step, because if you miss one step you fall into the abyss of the river, which is about 5000 feet below.' Therefore the Yoga is to be practised every minute in life—not a second is to be wasted.

What is that—how are you to know that—which is not subject to achievement, of which you have not the least doubt, about which you need neither a Goethe nor Christ to tell you? That is your 'I am' and when 'am' is changed into infinitude, it becomes 'I am bliss and infinite.' Then you are on the way to realize the highest in life.

It is for you to achieve it. No power on earth can confer nirvana on you. You can have the help of God. Shrimad Bhagavat says: 'By His compassion He restrains the darkness in the hearts of all.' Let us meditate on Him who is truth, who is transcendent. But the grace of God is not like the rain which falls from heaven. You have to discover the laws by observance of which you can have that grace, which is already there. God himself is grace and grace is God. You can have that grace if you follow the law, through the right use of concentration, memory and will in service of virtue, truth and light within and without.

If you have followed me in this introduction I am quite sure that you are entering into the eternal life—the life of light and wisdom, the life in which all that is to be fulfilled is fulfilled once and for ever.

Progress in Self-Knowledge

Self-knowledge has many levels of meaning, depending on which aspect of our nature is being considered. Many would agree that it is better to have some understanding of our psychological makeup than risk living in a way that may be based on self-deception. This sort of self-knowledge includes a willingness to pause and reflect about things, to engage in self-examination, and, if necessary, to alter our point of view.

This open and progressive attitude does involve some measure of humility. It is the opposite of the way described by the Chinese sage Chwang Tzu, when he talked of people who go charging off, like an arrow from a crossbow, certain that they are the judges of right and wrong. Such self-knowledge also implies a willingness to learn, to absorb ideas and assimilate instructions, to be a receiver and not just a broadcaster, a pupil more than a teacher. In the learning process, qualities like humility and teachability are regarded as fundamental.

Another phase of self-knowledge, which represents an expansion of this feeling of openness and humility, concerns our sentiments towards humanity at large. A self-centred person, one whose main idea is to satisfy his own cravings, will have little thought for anyone else, unless they are seen as a friend or a threat to his own interests. But a step forward in self-understanding is to appreciate that we are sharing this planet with millions of other human beings, who are not so very different from ourselves. This can lead to the great feeling of empathy, where another's sufferings—whoever they may be—are felt to be not completely separate from our own. In Yoga this attitude is expressed in prayers like the ancient peace prayer, which includes the words: 'May no one suffer pain. May all be happy.' Already we can see that when someone is capable of feeling sympathy, a wider view of self is taking over.

But the range of self-knowledge goes still farther and deeper, and its completion comes through a focused enquiry into the true nature of the Self, and how our Self may be related, on the deepest level, to other selves. It leads to an introduction to the idea that all souls are fundamentally one, and that to know oneself truly is to feel that one's Self is the Self common to all, not limited

by the features and locality of a particular body. This is the realization talked of in the Upanishads, where they speak of a supreme Self, a supreme spiritual principle or essence, and also show how the individual can come to realize this supreme Self as his own. This discovery is said to end all fear, and is associated with perfect joy and fulfilment.

Our progress in self-knowledge is therefore one of expansion of consciousness leading to liberation. We ascend, as it were, a ladder of achievement or insight that reaches from this world of humanity into a realm of peace, harmony and transcendence.

This need for self-knowledge was well appreciated by the great dramatists, like Shakespeare, Chekhov and Molière, who were all students of the human heart. Chekhov can expose self-deception very subtly. In *The Cherry Orchard* there is a young man who declares loftily: 'I'm above love!', but soon after, something upsets him, he rushes out and, somewhat comically, trips on the stairs. Perhaps the idea conveyed is that it is risky to show off one's moral superiority, and if we do, it may be the case that we do not really know ourselves very well.

In the plays of Molière, we have an extreme exposure of the ridiculous side of human nature. His play, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, concerns a man who has made a lot of money, and, somewhat late in life, decides he needs to learn the refined social behaviour displayed by the upper classes. So he hires a collection of tutors, including one to teach him to dance, one to train him in sword fencing, and another to help him to master the elements of music. However, these tutors start quarrelling amongst themselves, and are just about to get into a fight when a fourth tutor turns up—a teacher of philosophy. The old gentleman asks him to restore peace—after all, he is a philosopher. Sure enough, he starts to preach:

Gentlemen, gentlemen! Should a man so lose his self-control? Have you not read the learned treatise by Seneca Concerning the Nature of Anger? Is there anything more base or shameful than this passion, which turns a man into a savage beast? The wise man is above all insults, and only responds with calmness and patience.

Unfortunately, the quarrelling goes on, and it turns out to be the philosopher who falls into a rage and frenziedly attacks the others, so that the scene ends in a mini-riot.

So much for the wisdom of Seneca! The point here, as with Chekhov, is to show, in a light-hearted way, how human beings can deceive themselves, and be wholly unaware of their own inner contradictions.

The teachers of the higher Yoga would add another reason why a deeper level of self-awareness can be a great benefit. It is, that our self-deceptions are supported by strong feelings of identity with something narrow and restricted, and this is a form of bondage. There is a sense in which the man who is angry has become anger; he is identified with anger, he may not even know that he has become angry, and, for that time, he is a slave to the mental condition called anger. Similarly, the man who is self-important has his feeling of self-identity wrapped up in a small part of himself, so that his whole thinking process is based on his imagined superiority over others. The sad fact is, he may not be superior to others at all—it may all be in his mind. Those who do have greater knowledge and ability, often adopt an unassuming attitude, stay open-minded, and thus go on increasing their knowledge. Perhaps the sharpest put-down of this attitude came from the American humourist, Dorothy Parker. When someone said of a certain person: 'She is so kind to her inferiors,' Dorothy commented: 'Does she have any?'

Summing up this skill of the comic dramatists to expose these unconscious excesses of human nature, the writer George Meredith used a famous metaphor. He said that it was as if the spirit of comedy hovered in the air, surveying mankind in a kindly way, but once this watchful spirit noticed that the self-deception had gone too far, it would swoop down, and cause something ridiculous to happen, so that the victim of self-deception might have the chance to see things in a new light. Concerning this hawk-like spirit of comedy, he wrote:

Men's future upon earth does not attract it: their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically

delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible law binding them to one another; whenever they offend sound reason, fear justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually or in the bulk—the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit.

The essence of comedy is that nothing too grim happens, nobody is seriously hurt, and at the end of the day, no tears are shed. Unfortunately, the consequences of human self-deception cannot be confined within this harmless arena. The lack of true self-knowledge, and the lack of the humility and fellow-feeling that goes with it, all too often has tragic consequences, claims many victims, and not least, visits calamity on the self-deceived one himself. This is what happens in the great tragedies of Shakespeare. The central character, say, Othello or King Lear, has no understanding of his own character, and gets it tragically wrong about other people. In both these plays, self-seeking and malevolent individuals are seen as dear friends, while harmless, innocent people, are regarded as vicious enemies. This leads to cruelty, destruction and self-destruction.

All Shakespeare's tragedies vividly show us the appalling consequences of faults of character like jealousy, lust for power, and so on. But King Lear is perhaps the play most concerned with the gaining of self-knowledge. The story, as you know, is about an old king who is about to retire from his kingdom and share it between his three daughters. Lear is depicted as a vain man and before making the gift he invites each of his daughters in turn to declare publicly how much they love him. Two of his daughters are loud and long in their words of worship and adoration; the old man is pleased and gives them their shares. His saintly daughter, Cordelia, refuses to use her tongue in this false way. She simply murmurs to herself: 'What can Cordelia say? Love and be silent.' She has nothing to say. The old man is furious, banishes her from the kingdom, and now divides it between the two daughters, who, he thinks, really love him.

Shortly afterwards, instead of housing their father and his followers, these women strip him of his privileges, and on a stormy night, throw him out to fend for himself. As one of them cunningly observes, her father was a man who had ever but slenderly known himself.

This banishment, and the revelation of the true nature of his daughters' personalities, was Lear's first brutal eye-opener, and showed him what a fool he was in the matter of judging human character. The shock threw him into a kind of madness, but it was a madness lit with flashes of insight. His greatest moment is when, in the storm-shaken night in the open country, he comes across a naked wretch sheltering from the storm in a hovel. For the first time he feels genuine pity for a fellow human being. He realizes the superficiality of his own way of life up to then. He has an insight into the raw facts of human existence, once the artificial differences of civilization, of rich and poor, mighty and powerless, have been stripped away. In fact, even before seeing the naked man, Lear's heart starts to melt, and he cries out:

Poor, naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O I have ta'en
Too little care of this...

Then, when he actually encounters the naked man, who is suffering the impact of the terrible storm, he realizes that this, in a certain sense, is how man is—once the apparently all-important differences of status, indicated by our clothes, have been negated. In a mighty wave of fellow-feeling and identification with these helpless creatures, Lear decides to expose himself to feel what wretches feel. Tearing off his own clothes, he shouts:

Off, off, you lendings....

And so, through losing his senses, so to speak, by following a strange, tragic road, Lear comes to his senses, and learns sympathy and genuine social interest.

The phrase social interest, which can also be called fellow-feeling or social feeling, was one that appealed to another explorer of the human heart, Alfred Adler. Hari Prasad Shastri, the founder of Shanti Sadan, once said that among the psychologists who came into prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century, he thought that Adler's ideas were closer to Yoga than those of Freud. Freud emphasized sex preoccupation as the dominant and often hidden force driving the human psyche. Adler disagreed, and broke away from Freud's circle to develop his own ideas. Almost all these pioneers of western psychology had medical training, and Adler had for a time been Freud's doctor.

Initially, the theories and therapies evolved by these men were meant to deal with conditions of extreme mental abnormality or disturbance. But they came to believe that their insights had a wider validity, and could be applied to the generality of mankind.

Adler held that the main driving force behind human beings was the urge for significance—for superiority over anything that made us feel small, limited, inferior. In terms of the yogic interpretation of human aspirations, it was the fundamental desire to break through limitations and restrictions—indeed to feel, deep down, that we ought not to be subject to any restrictions.

Adler felt that this was the basic, and, one might add, healthy, drive behind all human progress. In science, for instance, one feels disturbed, unhappy, inferior, because of certain unsolved problems, and then strives, according to Adler, to turn this minus state of mind into a plus. The same desire to overcome felt limitations lies behind our urge to acquire knowledge and worldly skill. As the saying goes: 'Knowledge is power'.

Adler also perceived that this same urge for significance or superiority could, through various wrong attitudes developed very early in life, be turned to egocentric ends. In these cases, the significance we seek is not a shared one. It is highly personal and exclusive. In the worst instances, we can begin to feel: 'Mine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.' At the same time, we may carefully avoid making any personal efforts to earn this eminence in real life. It is clear that such egocentric expectations can never be fulfilled in the real world. The one who harbours these delusions meets only frustration and

disappointment, and this in turn leads to further delusive tendencies.

But, like the yogis, Adler thought that our inner life could be controlled and re-directed, so that our urge for significance could be transmuted into a desire for universal well-being. In this way, anything of value we possess is turned away from self-glory, and used as a contribution to the whole, in co-operation with others. Adler's teaching thus had religious undertones, which he did not try to hide. His basic remedy for almost all mental ills was to inculcate ideas based on goodwill and fellow-feeling. He called this *Gemeinschafts-gefühl*, translated as 'Social Feeling'. He linked this idea with the saying from the Bible, 'Love thy neighbour', and was convinced that he had identified a cosmic law. His biographer, Phyllis Bottom, summarising Adler's teaching on this point, writes:

There was a law binding man to the universe, moving always in the same direction, and towards a goal that could never be reached, but which never varied; and as man obeyed this law and co-operated with it, he would develop in a direction that furthered universal welfare—but his co-operation with others was the price he must pay for this development. The egocentric goal must be broken up. Social Interest was the only goal for mankind; and every human being must be trained towards it in childhood, until it became as natural to him as breathing or standing on two feet. (lit. the upright gait)

Anyone familiar with the teachings of Adhyatma Yoga will see in this statement certain similarities with the yoga teachings, and may also have noticed certain differences. First, the similarities: The great law which Adler identified clearly resembles the law of Dharma, the law of universal harmony and righteousness.

An important aspect of this law is to have a genuine regard for the good of all living beings. In Yoga, the law of Dharma is rooted in a religious or spiritual view of the universe, and Hindus call their religion the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal Dharma. From this point of view, the whole universe is regarded as in some sense holy. The yogis hold that the whole universe is a phenomenal manifestation of the Divine Power, and remains guided and sustained by

that Power even now. The Divine Spirit, called the Absolute, is the One Great Reality behind all appearances. The Upanishads refer to this supreme spirit as 'That from whom this whole universe comes forth, in which it abides, and into which it will finally be absorbed.' The sage Shri Dada of Aligarh spoke of this aspect of the divine being when he asked his hearers to remember:

...the Force behind all forces, the source of thought, the animator of the mind of man, the Lord of Life, whose existence the ancient Rishis have intuitively experienced, evidence of which may be inferred from the design and purpose, beauty, regularity and rhythm, everywhere noticeable in nature.

From the yogic standpoint, Adler was right to urge man to come into harmony with this law, and to prescribe social interest as a crucial part of this adjustment. Shri Dada also emphasized this side of human development in his own way. He said that the sovereign remedy to all the ills of life was nearer to us than we might expect.

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...

All constructions which are of any value must begin in the soul of man, where intellect should be the Field Marshal in command of the forces of compassion, collaboration and love.

We remember that Adler spoke of a certain 'development' if man followed this law. But he does not specify exactly how this development will take place or what it will involve. He also seems to think that man is set on an unending quest, that may give satisfaction, but which can never reach fulfilment. You remember that he spoke of a goal that could never be reached.

But in this important matter, Yoga is not vague or speculative. It is perfectly clear. The yogis affirm that the ultimate goal and fulfilment of life can be reached, has been reached by thousands down the ages, and is still available to anyone who is serious about pursuing it.

The yogic explanation of this inner development is that if we can rouse ourselves to reduce our egoism and to cultivate social feeling, expanding our

sympathy to the widest degree, and if we are willing to make active efforts at co-operation, deeper changes do indeed take place in our mind. Hari Prasad Shastri once said that the self-interested intellect is a prison. Through learning to reduce our egoism, the process in Yoga known as purification of the mind begins to take place. The inner world is now no longer a prison, but begins to give hints of new openings. Our consciousness begins to expand. We come to see the world in a new light. We also find a new spaciousness and promise in our own nature.

With our mind thus lightened, we begin to recognize a certain value in the spiritual teachings. These teachings explain how the hidden harmony and unity of life is based on the divine presence. They also tell us that our own deeper nature is divine, and is therefore most precious. Our innermost being is in fact the promised land of peace and freedom. The great goal is not remote from us in time or place, nor is it unattainable. Like a priceless diamond tied up in several handkerchiefs for protection, the peak of life, evolution and fulfilment is hidden in our own hearts, and needs to be unravelled. Our own nature is significant after all, but in a much deeper sense than we may have realized. The wheel of self-understanding has thus turned a full circle. We have moved away from a limited exclusive significance based on 'My glory, my importance' and have arrived at a recognition of the infinite significance of our shared nature as spiritual beings.

This theme will be expanded in the next issue.

A.H.C.

POEM OF MIRA

The key to unlock the gate of the palace was applied,
For desire had been expelled from my mind.
My mind is not a shallow roadside pond—
Who can travel in a puddle?
I have no use even for the Ganges or Yamuna now,
I have reached the sea.
I do not traffic with the servants of the palace,
Nor even with the Prime Minister.
I have nothing to ask from government officials,
I go direct to the royal court
To seek audience of the King in person.
I do not deal in glass or pewter,
Or place loads of iron on my head.
I do not even deal in gold and silver,
Diamonds are the only merchandise I carry.
My good fortune has been aroused from its slumbers,
And I have made acquaintance with supernal joy.
He who has drunk nectar from a silver cup
Will not go back to acrid water.
The Lord granted unto Pipa* his holy sight,
Which is a treasury stacked with gold.
Mira's Lord is the roguish Giridhara.**
Her Lord has appeared before her in person.

* Pipa was a Rajput King who renounced his throne. He is regarded as a pioneer of the Bhakti movement.

** Krishna, 'he who holds up the mountain.'

Translated by A.J.A.

MEDITATION AT SHANTI SADAN

A session led by the Warden

Let us use this precious time to establish ourselves in the peace and harmony which always prevails at the centre of our being whether we are aware of it or not. In order to prepare for meditation, we consciously turn our attention inwards. Not only do we close, so to say, the windows of the outer senses. We also try to slow the current of the thoughts and pictures that pass through our mind. In this way we become aware of a deeper realm within us, a realm of peace and illumination.

At first our mental energy seems to be resistant to our efforts to make it calm and attentive. It is like trying to control the wind. And yet with application, through the kind of practices we shall be doing tonight, the mind can be tranquillized, and—in that tranquillity— transformed. Therefore, we need to be patient and persevering. Our mind is shaped by habits. Install a new habit—consciously, and one that is based on what is highest in us—and our mind will follow our lead, and we will be set on the path of spiritual unfoldment.

Meditation is much more than a technique to calm our mind and give us some peace and rest for a time. For meditation, if developed, will reveal to us the truth about our real nature and leads to perfect peace, freedom and fulfilment. If our desire is strong enough and we truly want to find out more about this deeper realm within us, the forces in our personality will come together in harmony, set on the same goal. We will have the capacity to expand our inner experience and awaken our higher consciousness.

Therefore true meditation is a path to higher knowledge which reveals that our real nature transcends the mind altogether. This is the knowledge that satisfies forever. The great insight revealed in meditative calmness and inwardness of focus is that the source of happiness itself is one's own innermost being—the true Self. Meditation makes it possible for us to approach and identify with this realm of joy. Unlike worldly joys, this self-joy needs nothing outside to produce or sustain it. Its discovery brings lasting fulfilment.

The existence of this supreme capacity within us is the reason why we need to approach meditation with patience and perseverance. For the reward

is immeasurable. Every meditation we do—even if we think it has not gone well—is a step on the way, a contribution to the ultimate self-discovery. Never underestimate the influence of the practice on your inner being. What is truly important is your sincerity and not giving up. In the course of time you will discover that your real being is a free world of peace, love and light. This is not tomorrow's world but the true situation here and now. With this conviction let us turn to our practices.

We sit for a minute or two in calmness and reverence for the deeper Reality which, though unseen by these physical eyes, pervades and underlies everything.

Breathing Practice

Breathe slowly, drawing up the in-breath as if from the navel to the spot between the eyebrows. As you breathe in say to your mind 'peace'. As you breathe out say to your mind 'light'.

Our breathing practice helps us to focus the mind, calm it and connect with the realm of peace and light which is awaiting discovery at the ground of the mind itself. There is something deeper than the mind, free from its limitations, its character, its history. All these ever-changing details are like an overlay—a superimposition—on something that is limitless, ever tranquil, self-illuminated.

Visualization

Visualize any sunrise you may have seen. Imagine the sun is rising higher and higher, its warm rays gradually engulfing the whole of the scene below, including you as observer. Rest in this inner vision, absorbing its peace, power and purity.

Our visualization practice is concerned with light—light dispelling darkness and filling the whole scene. First the sky lightens, then the sun appears. At this stage our eyes can follow its upward path, but then its brightness intensifies and all we can do is contemplate the illuminated landscape rather than the sun itself, which rises higher and higher and its light spreads farther and farther. We do this practice for about five minutes.

Meditation on a Text

OM

I AM THE ESSENCE OF ALL.

I AM THE LIGHT THAT MAKES EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE.

I AM THE REALITY WHICH IS HIDDEN IN ALL BEINGS.

OM

The meditation practice goes beyond the personal and the individual. Individuality, personality, differences are true at a certain level. But this is not the whole truth. There is a deeper reality in us all, and this is not cut off from reality as a whole, from the All. As the pure I am, as essence, we are one with the whole. It is in calmness, in peace, that we gain discernment, and through discernment we recognize the great truth declared in the words: ‘That which is the subtle essence, this whole universe has That as its Self. That is reality. That is Self. That thou art.’

The text affirms our true nature as one with the essence of all. It is the light that reveals all experience—pure consciousness, infinite and the Self of all.

We ourselves may be blessed with a degree of safety and security, but we know there are a countless human beings who do not share this advantage. We also know of the hardship caused not so much by nature as by the thoughts and actions of people themselves, rooted in ignorance and duality.

What we ourselves can do at any time is to generate helpful streams of thoughts based on universal goodwill, peace, light, beauty, purity, non-duality. So let us end our session by generating thoughts of peace and light for the good of all.

SHANTI SADAN NEWS

Subjects covered in this autumn's presentations were: The Complete Life, How to Uplift your Mind, Leap in the Light, Pointers to Inner Peace, The Supreme Secret, To your great Self be True, Out of this World, and The Living Heart of the Upanishads. The programme as a whole expanded on the message of the opening talk: that the path of higher wisdom harmonizes the whole of human nature, channelling our life of action, feeling and thirst for knowledge into the great quest for Self-realization. The lecture 'Out of this World', discussed the range and limits of knowledge, citing the latest scientific accounts of the Solar System; the subject prompted much discussion.

The Tuesday evening meditation sessions are held throughout the year. During November the initial breathing practice was accompanied by the affirmation: 'I, remembering the fundamental 'being' at our source. This was followed by a visualisation of the blue sky, with our thoughts compared to passing clouds that we should 'let pass'. The teaching was consolidated in a suitable meditation text.

At the Columbia Hotel meeting in October, the talk 'From Tranquillity to Transcendence' focused on six sayings that comprise thirteen words: 'All passes. Tranquil endurance. Rise above it. No delusive thoughts. Know thyself. Be!'. The second talk was on 'Living beyond Fear'. Its message may be summarized by quoting from Dr Shastri's Vedanta Light booklet:

'Fear is the only foe to fear. Have endless ambition to acquire freedom through truth, beauty and virtue. Never think of duality, and never harbour feelings of separation... remember that you are the infinite Brahman, ever perfect, immortal and all-pervasive. Meditate on this truth and demonstrate it in daily life.'

Spring 2016 Special Course

Sunday March 13 2016 2-5pm

Columbia Hotel, 95 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3NS

Talk One: Finding a Deeper Happiness

First Guided Meditation Practice

Talk Two: Life's Achievable Goal

Second Guided Meditation Practice

